

The Importance of Girl Child and her education in Islam

By Farah

Women and girls have been victims of ruthless power struggles for centuries in all societies and cultures around the world. This hegemony over women has been exercised in the form of Sati, Hitobashira, Karo-Kari and the killing of witches, which are only a few to mention. Sadly, but truly, many societies including some Muslim societies continue to exercise this patriarchy in different forms such as the denial to education, unequal salaries compared to men in workplaces, forced marriages and prostitution, among many others.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ came at a time when the Arab society, like so many patriarchal societies at that time, was rife with abhorrent practices against girls. He preached Islam, liberating women and girls in every walk of life, education being a prime aspect. This article examines the facts about the importance of female education in Islam. It does so through referencing verses of the Quran, Islam's holy book, and hadith, authentic traditions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, along with offering a short glimpse of his wives' level of education.

There are verses in Holy Quran that address humankind to seek knowledge and delve in critical thinking. The emphasis laid in the acquisition of knowledge, in the above verses, surpasses any statement or action denying girls' the right to education. Had these verses only been for men, it would be inconceivable to imagine the extent of progression that the society made in a mere twenty-three years - the entire duration of the revelation of the Quran.

The Quran repetitively reminds people to ponder, think, analyze, thus using their mind power to contemplate and understand, whilst making no distinction between men and women.

Let us now examine some hadith, authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

"Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim."

"He who has a slave-girl and teaches her good manners and improves her education and then manumits and marries her, will get a double reward; and any slave who observes God's right and his master's right will get a double reward."

"If anyone travels on a road in search of knowledge, Allah will cause him to travel on one of the roads of Paradise. The angels will lower their wings in their great pleasure with one who seeks knowledge, the inhabitants of the heavens and the Earth and the fish in the deep waters will ask forgiveness for the learned man. The superiority of the learned man over the devout is like that of the moon, on the night when it is full, over the rest of the stars. The learned are the heirs of the Prophets, and the Prophets leave neither dinar nor dirham, leaving only knowledge, and he who takes it takes an abundant portion."

Three important themes around education are emerging in the above traditions. From the first Hadith we infer that education is not a right but a responsibility on every Muslim, male or female. In the second Hadith, emphasis is laid on the quality of education imparted to the girl slave and the latter part deals with the encouragement to free slaves (Islam denounced and

later abolished slavery). The third Hadith speaks volumes about the superiority of the person who seeks knowledge over the one who does not. The reference here to superiority is to the person who seeks knowledge, man or woman.

We shall now examine information about the intellectual abilities of two wives of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: Sayyeda Khadijah and Sayyeda Aishah.

Khadijah Binte Khuwaylid, the first wife of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, was a wealthy tradeswoman, the richest woman in Mecca at the time, who exported goods as far away as Syria. To manage her large business, she employed several males and to do so then in Arabia, necessitated that you have a high level of understanding and wisdom.

Aishah Binte Abu Bakr, the youngest wife of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, was very talented and possessed an incredible memory. As a Muslim scholar, she is credited with narrating more than two thousand Hadith and was noted for teaching eminent scholars. She had a great love for learning and became known for her intelligence and sharp sense of judgment. Her life also substantiates that a woman can be a scholar, exert influence over men and women and provide them with inspiration and leadership. The example of Aishah in promoting education, particularly education of women in the laws and teachings of Islam, is a hallmark in female education in Islam. Because of the strength of her personality, she was a leader in every field of knowledge, in society and in politics.

Conclusively, the take away message in the article is that Islam promotes education, particularly girls' education. Had it not been so, the world would not have witnessed the transformation of a society plunged in anarchy and hegemony into one enlightened with critical thinkers and scholars, all in the span of twenty-three years.