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The Right to Education for Women in Islam

Hak atas Pendidikan bagi Perempuan dalam Islam

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Abstract

General Background: Islam places a high value on knowledge, making education a fundamental right and duty for all, regardless of gender. **Specific Background:** Historically, Muslim women played essential roles as educators and scholars, supported by Islamic teachings that promote learning. **Knowledge Gap:** However, in some Islamic societies today, especially in Afghanistan, women face restricted access to education due to social and political factors, despite Islamic encouragement. **Aims:** This research aims to reaffirm the right of women to education and work within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence and to propose appropriate educational models aligned with Sharia. **Results:** The findings show that Islam permits and, in some cases, obliges women to pursue religious and scientific knowledge, and allows work outside the home when necessary. **Novelty:** By referencing classical and contemporary Islamic sources, the study clarifies misconceptions and offers practical, religiously grounded solutions for women's access to education. **Implications:** This research highlights the need for governments to create separate, safe, and Sharia-compliant educational environments for women, reinforcing their role in nurturing future generations within Islamic societies.

Highlight :

- Education is a right and obligation for women in Islam, grounded in religious texts and scholarly consensus.
- Teaching both religious and natural sciences to women is essential for individual and societal development.
- Women's work outside the home is permissible in cases of necessity, while upholding Islamic principles.

Keywords : Women, Education, Knowledge, Stratum, Work

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INTRODUCTION

it can confidently be said that the acquisition of knowledge and the pursuit of understanding have been universally agreed upon as the central issue and point of convergence for human beliefs since the beginning of humanity. This phenomenon has transcended differences in beliefs, conflicts, races, and colors, uniting humanity around a common goal of self-awareness. Just like a bird requires two wings to fly to the peaks of knowledge and understanding of the unknown, humans also need two essential wings. One of these wings is the pursuit of knowledge, which enables dynamic growth and forging in the crucible of science and wisdom. The path to happiness and salvation can only be traveled through this bridge, and there is no other way. The torchbearer of knowledge, the understanding of God, and the first teacher of humanity, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), says: "Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim." (Ibn Majah, 1422:81)

Problem Statement: The importance and value of higher education, and the creation of opportunities for women in Afghanistan and the Islamic world to pursue it within the framework of Islamic values, is a crucial topic in this research. However, the main issue is that, despite the fundamental need for the education and empowerment of women, no appropriate solutions, in line with Islamic values and accepted within Afghan society, have been provided to address the challenge of the closure of educational institutions. This research aims to explore and prove this issue within the context of Islamic jurisprudence and the ideas of Islamic scholars, based on Islamic values.

Research Questions

Main Question

What is the ruling on the education and work of women in Islamic jurisprudence?

Sub-Questions

- 1.How can a sustainable educational system for women in Afghanistan be established?
- 2.Under what circumstances can women work outside the home?

Background of the Research: After conducting a series of investigations and inquiries in the country, no independent work in the national language has been found specifically addressing the topic of women's education and work. However, in Islamic sources and works regarding the general rights and duties of women, many valuable books have been written. Therefore, some of these works, which in some way relate to the above-mentioned topic, are as follows:

- 1.Imam Bukhari in his Sahih (1379) has dedicated a section under the title "The Imam's Sermon for Women and Their Education," which clearly demonstrates the importance of educating and teaching women.
- 2.Muhammad bin Shami in his book Al-Mar'a (1435) considers the need for women to be educated, especially in religious sciences, an urgent necessity.
- 3.Abdul Qadir Shibah al-Hamdan in his book Rights of Women in Islam (1431) believes that respecting women's rights in all aspects is an essential value of Islamic society.

So far, no credible and well-established work based on authentic Sharia sources has been written in the Islamic world that attempts to justify the deprivation of women and their lack of need for acquiring knowledge, as such an idea directly contradicts the values and teachings of Islam.

The Ruling on Women's Education and Work, Education for women in Islam is an undeniable principle, and it cannot be overlooked. Educating women should be a priority for higher education institutions in Islamic societies. This principle does not mean that if there are no female teachers, male teachers cannot educate women. In this regard, a narration from Ibn Abbas in Sahih Bukhari mentions that the Prophet while accompanied by Bilal, went out and assumed that women were not present in the mosque and had not heard his message. Therefore, he provided them with advice and counsel. (Bukhari, 1422: 31). Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, in his commentary on this hadith, states that this narration implies that it is recommended for the ruler or his representative to provide advice and guidance to women, in addition to their husbands. (Ibn Hajar, 1379: 192).

Therefore, the pursuit of knowledge, its dissemination, and teaching are virtues in which both women and men are equal. For women, engaging in this field, considering Islamic values, is permissible, and in some cases, acquiring knowledge is obligatory. Creating an environment for quality education based on accepted values in society is one of the duties of educational institutions. As previously mentioned, education is a woman's right, and to earn and

attain this right, a woman must go to someone, or someone must come to her, to teach her matters of religion and her belief system correctly, based on the sayings and actions of the human role model, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Human discernment requires that a person's beliefs become firm and steadfast when they acquire knowledge on a subject and reach maturity and certainty in their belief. Otherwise, the belief will be based on ignorance, and no real effect will arise from it. The person may easily lose it, and no effort will be made to preserve it. One of the primary reasons why Islam emphasizes the importance of learning and acquiring knowledge is to strengthen people's beliefs. This is because self-awareness and the knowledge of God, which are considered fundamental in religious teachings, cannot be achieved through ignorance. God cannot be worshipped through ignorance. Finding signs of God's power in the world and within oneself requires insight, and insight cannot be attained without acquiring knowledge. Other examples, which are beyond the scope of this brief discussion, all point to the importance and necessity of education and knowledge for humanity, both women and men.

Given the points mentioned, the question arises: How can we create a healthy environment for women's education and the acquisition of knowledge in today's world while considering Islamic values and the culture of a traditional society? Should we, as some believe, allow women to be educated on any subject in the same way as men, or should anyone be able to teach them? Should the education of women and men be the same in terms of subject and quality, or should there be a difference in their education in a shared environment? These and many other questions must be addressed, and reasonable solutions need to be provided. Therefore, in the following sections, we will discuss the aforementioned topic through several points to provide appropriate solutions:

First Topic - Women's Education

In general, knowledge can be divided into two types: 1) Religious knowledge, and 2) Natural sciences. Now, which of these two types of knowledge should women pursue, provided that the government provides the necessary resources? It is undisputed that religious knowledge takes priority for individuals in an Islamic society. However, to emphasize the importance of educating women in both of these fields, we will briefly elaborate on each:

A - Teaching Sharia Sciences to Women

A woman must learn her religious duties, including the testimony of faith (Shahada), its meaning, its requirements, and everything related to belief and the principles of faith. She must also learn how to perform obligatory acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, Hajj, and Zakat. The government must provide the necessary resources for this education. Similarly, women must learn the specific rules that directly affect their private lives and worship, such as the conditions and requirements for appropriate Islamic dress in different environments, what can or cannot be revealed in front of non-mahram individuals, the proper way of interacting with relatives, and the rights and responsibilities of being a wife.

A woman should strive to deepen her understanding of religious rulings and not limit herself to learning only the obligatory acts. She should aim to reach a level of jurisprudence (fiqh) and awareness in religious matters, as countless women from the early days of Islam to the present have done. This would enable her to become a teacher, an Islamic preacher, a religious scholar, or even a judge in legal matters. Some of the greatest Islamic jurists have acknowledged that, based on the needs of society, women can hold positions in judicial authority, with some even allowing women to take on the role of a judge in cases related to financial matters.

Considering this view, the need for women to acquire advanced religious knowledge is deemed more essential than ever. The fundamental rule for holding a judicial position is that the person must reach the level of *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning). Therefore, the government should establish educational centers and institutions for women that comply with Islamic regulations. (Shibah, 1435: 154-155).

B - Teaching Natural Sciences to Women:

The presence of specialized and professional women in Islamic society, particularly in medical fields where women require these services to avoid visiting male doctors, is considered a communal obligation (Fard Kifayah). This includes fields such as obstetrics and gynecology, surgery—especially emergency surgeries required during childbirth—psychology, blood testing in specialized laboratories, radiology, X-rays, injections, and intravenous drips. Therefore, providing the necessary resources for training women interested in learning medical sciences, and establishing institutions that are responsible for offering such education to women—according to the previously mentioned regulations—is essential. It is also necessary for women to be trained in basic medical knowledge, such as nursing principles, obstetrics and gynecology, wound dressing, the proper use of contraceptives when necessary, providing helpful and accurate health advice on women's health issues, and everything related to the field of medicine and healthcare. (Fatawa al-Hindiya, 1327: 330)

Learning and teaching skills that allow women to earn lawful income is permissible and recommended, as women are not prohibited from engaging in legitimate work in an appropriate manner, and scholars have affirmed this. Imam Ibn Abidin, a famous Hanafi jurist, writes in the margin of his book *Radd al-Muhtar* that it is obligatory for a father to send his daughter to a woman to teach her a craft like embroidery or sewing. (Ibn Abidin, 1412: 612). By

analogy, it can be said that teaching women skills like weaving, pharmaceutical sciences (to become a pharmacist), early childhood education (so that they can work as teachers in kindergartens), and various cooking techniques is also permissible.

However, the government should not invest time or resources in teaching arduous jobs such as mechanics, construction, or similar professions that are not suited to the nature and capabilities of women. The state's involvement in individual affairs, like that of an Imam, must be based on public interest (*maslahah*), and there is no such benefit in these cases. Similarly, teaching activities that contradict religious teachings, such as singing, music, acting in cinema and television, and similar pursuits, have no benefit from a religious standpoint and are therefore impermissible and prohibited in Islamic law. (Shibah, 1435: 134).

Second Topic - Regulations for Women's Education

Education for women should be carried out separately from men at all educational stages. However, in the early stages, and with proper precautions, there are no specific prohibitions before reaching physical maturity. But at older ages, separation between men and women becomes essential, and ultimately, separate educational institutions should be considered for each gender. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure a healthy educational environment and prevent mixing between men and women. This is a legitimate request and their fundamental right. As it has been mentioned, women asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) to designate a day for them so that they could receive religious education from him. When asked why they made this request, they said: "The men have overtaken you and left no time for us. Please assign a day for us so we can meet with you." (Bukhari, 1422: 31). The Prophet (peace be upon him) designated a day for them, where he taught them religious and natural values.

In Sahih Muslim, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "No man should be alone with a woman unless there is a Mahram (a close relative) with her." (Muslim, n.d.: 978). Imam Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) explains this hadith, stating that it is prohibited for men to be alone with a non-mahram woman, but the opposite—women gathering with a man—is permissible. (Nawawi, 1392: 109).

Therefore, if a situation arises where the presence of both men and women in an educational setting or classroom is necessary, and given the need for appropriate subject matter or a shortage of experienced instructors or classrooms, the classroom can be organized in a way that boys sit in the front rows and enter through a designated door, while the girls' seats are arranged behind the boys' seats in an orderly manner, maintaining appropriate distance between the two genders. As mentioned previously, such interaction is only permissible in situations of necessity, and this can be likened to the arrangement of rows for men and women during prayer. Female students attending educational centers should do so while observing proper hijab, which includes full adherence to the concept of modest covering. (Mawsu'ah al-Fiqhiyyah al-Kuwaitiyyah, 1427: 77)

Another solution that can be proposed is the use of media such as radio and television, which broadcast lessons, sermons, and lectures. Through these platforms, knowledge can be shared with others. Additionally, publishing and distributing scientific books on various religious and natural sciences, especially for women and girls who have difficulty accessing education, is another effective means. This use of mass communication tools should be conducted in a clear and organized manner, with scholars and experts carrying out the work. All these initiatives, aimed at spreading knowledge and transferring it to the people, should be managed by the government through a well-planned program.

Third Topic - Women's Work Outside the Home

Women's work, like their education, is one of the important and debated topics among Islamic scholars, especially in today's world where women in most societies, including Islamic communities, are engaged in work outside the home. Since the issue of women's education is somehow related to their work outside the home, it is necessary to discuss this matter in light of the opinions and views of Islamic scholars.

Working for women to earn a lawful livelihood is permissible, but this permissibility should not interfere with their obligatory duties. Obligatory tasks such as managing the upbringing of children, ensuring their proper care, fulfilling the rights of their husbands, and safeguarding the family are more important and emphasized than permissible activities. To fulfill these obligations, which are primarily the responsibility of women, they need free time and often cannot be preoccupied with work outside the home. Thus, the default rule is that women working outside the home is prohibited, and the fundamental reason for this is that women are not responsible for the expenses of life. The financial responsibility for essential expenses lies entirely with the man, and since Islam has not placed such expenses on women (when a man is present), the question of permissibility arises. However, if necessity requires that a woman works outside the home in a permissible manner to meet her living needs, this becomes an exceptional case and is allowed. In fact, necessity makes even forbidden actions permissible, which is a well-established principle in Islamic law, and there is no dispute about this. (Shaybah, 1435: 107)

There are references in the Qur'an and Hadith on this subject, and according to the opinions of scholars, in cases of necessity and need, a woman can work outside the home to earn a lawful living. For example, in the story of

Prophet Musa (Moses) and the daughters of Prophet Shu'ayb (peace be upon them), who had no son and were not able to water their sheep due to their old age, Allah (SWT) says: "And when he came to the water of Midian, he found there a crowd of people watering [their flocks], and he found asid from them two women driving back [their flocks]. He said, 'What is your circumstance?' They said, 'We do not water until the shepherds dispath [their flocks] and our father is a very old man.'" (Qasas :23).

The argument drawn from this verse is that Prophet Shu'ayb (peace be upon him) allowed his daughters to water the sheep outside the house from the well of Midian, as he was unable to do so himself. Because of necessity, it became permissible for him to allow his daughters to perform this task. (Razi, 1420: 587; Al-Asūsī, 1415: 269)

Imam Bukhari in his Sahih narrates a story from Asma' (may Allah be pleased with her), the daughter of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), in which she speaks about the poverty and financial difficulties of her husband, Zubair ibn al-Awwam (may Allah be pleased with him). She mentions how she worked alongside her husband, gathering firewood from distant places, while the Prophet (peace be upon him) was fully aware of her work. This story serves as clear evidence of the permissibility of women working outside the home in times of necessity. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, in his explanation of this narration, states: "It is clear to me that this event and similar ones are related to situations of necessity. Therefore, this ruling does not apply to those who are not in circumstances like Asma's." (Ibn Hajar, 1379: 322)

By analogy with the necessity described in the Qur'an regarding the daughters of Prophet Shu'ayb (peace be upon him), as well as the story of Asma' (may Allah be pleased with her) in the Hadith, any other situation of necessity in which a woman is compelled to work outside the home can likely be analogized to these cases. For instance, if a woman has orphaned children with no guardian and no support from public funds, it would be permissible for her to work with materials she creates at home and sell them outside to earn a lawful livelihood. Such work could include baking bread, weaving wool, or sewing children's and women's clothes to sell in the market. As long as she maintains her Islamic hijab, there is no issue with this type of work.

Debate

To further clarify the subject of this research and its findings, we will discuss and examine two fundamental points: the education and training of women, and the issue of women working outside the home. Despite the varying opinions and views of scholars regarding women's education and the conditions for the permissibility or impermissibility of women working outside the home, what is of utmost importance is the undeniable necessity of education for both men and women in the Islamic world. There is no other religion or belief system that has shown such care for the rights and duties of women and has comprehensively outlined the extent of these rights and privileges as Islam has. Islam is a religion of knowledge and education, with all its teachings and values grounded in acquiring knowledge, reasoning, and understanding. So, how can one criticize a religion that is the torchbearer of light and knowledge? A religion whose beginning is marked by the command to "read" and whose completion is reflected in the perfect blessings and values it offers? A religion in which women hold a high and esteemed position, a position granted to them at a time when humanity was on the brink of destruction, as history attests to the miserable status of women before Islam.

So, how is it that today, the world of disbelief, which has historically been the main cause of women's misery, has risen up against Islam, accusing it of depriving women of their basic rights, when Islam itself has been the savior of both women and humanity? With a bit of reflection and considering the long-standing animosity of the world of disbelief, a sense of conspiracy arises, leading to the conclusion that all the baseless and unfounded objections raised by the enemies of Islam and pseudo-intellectuals are born out of stubbornness and hostile thinking. Islam is a complete religion with a comprehensive and wise program for all matters. Therefore, the education and learning of women is not only not prohibited, but is also emphasized, and to ensure that important goals in education and learning are achieved, a specific framework has been established so that, in accordance with religious regulations and values, Muslim women can benefit from knowledge and wisdom.

The issue of women working outside the home is quite different from that of education and learning. Work outside the home is considered a permissible action, and there is no need for women to engage in such work unless there is an urgent necessity. Without this necessity, it is unnecessary to neglect essential duties and responsibilities that are obligatory. Thus, in cases of necessity and special circumstances, a woman may work outside the home, maintaining her Islamic hijab and religious values, in a lawful and honorable manner.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after the findings of this research, we can state that education for women in Islam is an undeniable principle and cannot be dismissed superficially. Education for women should be a priority in the higher education institutions of Islamic societies. The pursuit of knowledge, its dissemination, and teaching is a virtue in which both women and men are equal. For women, engaging in this field, considering Islamic values, is permissible and, in some necessary cases, even obligatory.

Creating a standardized educational environment based on accepted societal values is one of the duties of educational institutions.

Regarding the education of Islamic jurisprudence for women, some of the great Islamic scholars have considered the position of administration and judicial authority to be absolutely permissible for women, given the needs of society. Meanwhile, some scholars have restricted this permission to cases involving financial disputes. Based on this perspective, the need for women to acquire high-level knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence becomes increasingly essential, as the principle and rule for holding the judicial position is that an individual must attain the level of *Ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning). Therefore, the government should establish educational centers and institutions for women that adhere to Sharia regulations.

In the field of women's natural sciences, we conclude that women's education in medical fields, which are necessary for women to avoid having to visit male doctors, is considered an obligation of sufficiency. Learning and acquiring knowledge that enables women to earn lawful livelihood is permissible and even recommended. Thus, the government should not waste its time training women for arduous jobs like mechanics, construction work, and similar fields, as they do not align with women's natural abilities. Government intervention in individual matters, like the Imam's role, must be based on benefit, and in this case, no such benefit is seen.

Regarding the regulations for women's education, it can be said that women's education should be conducted separately from men at all stages of education. However, at the primary stages, with proper caution, there is no specific prohibition before physical puberty. But at higher ages, the separation of men and women becomes an absolute necessity, and ultimately, separate educational institutions should be provided for each group. The government is responsible for creating a healthy educational environment and preventing the mixing of men and women. This is a legitimate request and their inherent right.

Women's work outside the home is prohibited because the fundamental reason is that women are not responsible for the financial expenses and livelihood. The financial maintenance and living expenses are the complete responsibility of men in essential circumstances. Since Islam has not assigned these expenses to women (when men are present), the issue of permissibility arises in such situations.

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