

**WOMEN EDUCATION AS CATALYSTS FOR ACHIEVING AN IDEAL ISLAMIC SOCIETY**

**By**

**AMINULLAHI MUBARAK**

**INTRODUCTION**

Islam, at a period when the entire universe was in deep ignorance and darkness emphasized the importance of knowledge for mankind, not as a special privilege of a particular class but as an essential and unavoidable need for each and every human being. Islam made it an obligation on Muslim to acquire knowledge as uncompromisable condition to their being true believers in Allah and Islam. It as well goes to the glory of Islam that it was the first religion and civilization to acknowledge a separate and independent human status of woman and impressed upon her that perfection is not attainable for her without knowledge. Acquisition of knowledge was therefore, as great a duty of woman as of man. Islam wanted the woman folk to develop their rational faculties along with their physical ones and thus ascend to higher planes of spiritual existence.

Woman as the life vein of the society, and the custodians of its distinct socio-cultural values, and as the first teachers of all sons and daughters born in the society, ought to be given education which is both biologically and culturally suitable and relevant to their distinct societal roles and their natural dispositions. So as to be able to put the society on an ideal footing as recognized by Islam. This paper is therefore, an attempt to shed light on how women education can be used to a catalysts towards achieving such an ideal society.

**CONCEPT OF EDUCATION**

Education has been conceptualized differently by different people due to different cultural backgrounds and experiences. Hornsby conceived it to be “A process of teaching, training and learning, especially in schools or college to improve knowledge<sup>1</sup>”

Another educationist conceived education in a more elaborate and comprehensive form, “As a set of activities which entails the handing down of the norms of a given society from generation to generation. It involves the transmission of worthwhile values and ideals in form of knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and everything cherished and held in a very high esteem by a given society. These norms, values and ideals are not just acquired: they are also observed and applied under specific contexts determined by the society’s educational aims, goals and objectives. This conception of education is a lifelong process which is realized through a clearly defined contend and method<sup>2</sup>”. This is in relation to the statement of Prophet Muhammad which says...

اطلب العلم من المعهد إلى اللهد

Islam as a comprehensive concept of life and not merely a religion describing the relations between man and his creator holds education in a very high esteem and placed it at topmost level of no equal and rival. Islam is knowledge based religion, hence an ignorant Muslim can never be a good and complete Muslim. It is therefore, becomes pertinent to give first of all an account of the attitude of Islam, with regards to the pursuit of knowledge.

The most important phenomenon after the creation of the first man on earth, Adam (AS) was knowledge which prodigiously revealed his personality. The Almighty Allah, for the significance of it (knowledge) commanded the Angels without exception to prostrate to him (Adam) (Q2: 30 – 34)

It is inspiring to note that the very first revelation that came to Prophet Muhammad, who was born among illiterate people, was a command to read and the praise of pen which is the only means to preserve human knowledge:

“Read in the name of the Lord and cherisher who created,  
Created man, out of a teach-like clot; Read! And thy Lord is  
most Bountiful, He who taught (The use of) the pen, Taught man  
what which he knew not”.

The word “Iqra” (read) which symbolizes learning is linked up with pen to stress that quest for knowledge should be a common property that must be shared among human beings. Islam therefore, promotes the acts of meaningful reading and writing as well as effective listening and speaking which all combined together form the theme of these first revelations. In furtherance of the noble course of education, Islam encourages the acquisition of knowledge based on reasonable observation, empirical study and scientific research. Islam, however, believes that Allah is supreme, He is the source of all knowledge and scientist of scientists. This explains the incessant emphasis of the Glorious Qur’an on the need for the generality of mankind to note, appreciate and reflect on the divine dexterity with which Almighty Allah has created the universe. Allah has invited man in the Glorious Book to study science in different ways. In many verses of the Qur’an He asked people to observe and study or think carefully on different natural objects, like stars, river mountains plants, animals, birds etc. and learn or gather knowledge from them. For instance Allah says:

“Do they not look at the camels, how they are made? And the sky, How it is raised high? And at the mountains, How they are fixed firm? And at the Earth, How it is spread out? (Q 18: 17 – 20)

“It is He who has made the sea subject, that ye may eat thereof flesh that is fresh and tender, And that ye may extract therefrom ornaments to wear; And thus seest the ships therein that plough the waves, that ye may seek (thus) of bounty o Allah And that ye may be grateful. And He has set up on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you; and river and ways; that ye may guide yourselves. (Q 16: 14 – 15)

“Do they not observe the birds above them, spreading their wings And folding them in? None can uphold them Except the most gracious: Truly it is He that watches over all things.

For effective accomplishment of this noble course, Allah of course has adorned man with necessary organs such as ears, eyes, brain etc.

“It is He who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when ye knew nothing; and He gave you learning and sight and intelligence and affections that ye may give thanks (To Allah). (Q 16: 78)

“Commenting on this verse A.Rahman states thus; It is a known fact that all things being equal, all living creatures having ears are able to hear sound and having eyes can see objects. But simple hearing is not sufficient on hearing it is necessary to understand what is being of sound and act accordingly. Similarly simple observation of anything visually is not an observation in the real sense. On seeing or observing a thing, it is necessary to study and do research on such thing to learn or get knowledge from it, and and that will be the observation in the true sense. Allah has asked people to observe natural things in the real sense<sup>3</sup>”.

Analyzing the fundamental principles of Islam in relation to the required knowledge Hamidullahi writes:

The Prophet Muhammad said “Islam is built on five fundamentals: Belief in Allah and messengership of Muhammad; the establishment of the daily obligatory prayers, Ramadan fast, pilgrimage to the sacred city of Islam and the Zakat tax”, it is interesting to note that belief demands the cultivation of the theological sciences. For the prayers must be performed on the occurrence of certain determined natural phenomena. This thereby demands knowledge of the elements of geography and astronomy. Fasting as well requires the understanding of natural phenomena, such as the appearance of crescent, the dawn and the setting of the sun etc.

The pilgrimage in its turn necessitates knowledge of the routes and the means of transportation in order to proceed to Mecca. Payment of the Zakat requires knowledge of mathematics, which is also necessary for calculations for the distribution of the estate of the deceased. He states further “In fact the study of the Qur’an requires first of all a knowledge of the language in which it is compiled (Linguistic Science); its reference to people demand a knowledge of history and geography etc”<sup>4</sup>.

From all indications, it is apparent that Islam is not against advancement in any branch of knowledge, in as much as they are not cultivated to the detriment of the core values of piety and God – consciousness. From the Islamic point of view, Allah is the All-knowing and the root of all branches of knowledge. This accounts for the unprecedented significant contributions Muslims in the past made to world civilization and the legacy left behind in almost all branches of knowledge. In religious and philosophical sciences, legal sciences, history and sociology, geography and topography, astronomy, medical science, chemistry and physics, zoology, mathematics, arts, humanities, social sciences to mention but a few.

However, to conclude this segment, it will not be amiss to quote Siba<sup>c</sup>i thus “The awakening in the field of learning in Europe was the result of that instruction that the Europeans had received from our <sup>c</sup>Ulama and philosophers in Isabella, Cordoba and Granada as their students. At the time our <sup>c</sup>Ulama were dealing in their lectures and in their compilations the scientific facts like the revolution of the earth and its spherical shape and the movement of the heavenly bodies, the minds of the Europeans were filled with lot of nonsensical ideas about these facts. It was here that the movement of rendering into Latin of the Arabic texts started and the books written by our <sup>c</sup>Ulamah were being taught in the European educational institutions<sup>5</sup>. To buttress his statements, he also quoted the confession of a European learned author, Gustav Lebon as saying “for five to six hundred years general books in Arabic language and particularly on various disciplines have been almost the only sources of learning and teaching in the European universities. And we can safely assert that in certain disciplines like medicine the impression of the Arabs are still at work in Europe...<sup>6</sup>”.

### **NATURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN**

It becomes a necessity at this point to give a little account of innate characteristics of women in relation to the peculiar primary roles and function she is divinely saddled with in the family and by extension, the society at large. Thus, this will enable us depict how diligent fulfillment of such function facilitates her contribution to the betterment of human society and the areas of public endeavor where her contribution and participation is vital to the development of individuals in particular and the society at large as well as the instrument needed for the fulfillment of such roles and functions.

“When she was delivered, she said: “O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child!” And Allah knew best what she brought forth. “And is not the male like the female...” (Q3: 36)

The above verse abundantly made it clear that despite the acknowledgement of a perfectly equal status as human beings for both sexes and treating them as equal, entitle to equal rights, Islam does however differentiate between man and woman with regards to their physical, biological and physiological composition and special functions in life. Each is endowed with his or her peculiarities suitable for his or her nature. Their biological, physiological as well as psychological peculiarities are taken cognizance of by Islam in assigning roles to each sex. This is why it is stressed that neither of the sexes should envy the other regarding what Allah has made the other to excel the other. (4: 32)

It is on faithful discharge of these functions that the happiness of the home and that of the society depends.

God has imposed on the woman the great task of childbearing, breastfeeding and looking after her children, this is evidenced by the following Qur'anic verses Q 31: 14 Q 2: 233

These are not tasks which can be fulfilled without careful preparation, physically, psychologically and mentally. It is only just, therefore, that the man should assigned the task of providing the essential needs and the protection required for the woman to fulfill her highly import and duties.

Among the qualities the woman has been giving are tenderness, quick reaction and an instinctive response to the need of children, without the need for much deliberation and reflection. The essential human need of even a single individual are not left to be deliberated upon at leisure. Response to them is made instinctively, so that they may be met more or less involuntarily. There is no external compulsion in this. It is an impulsive reaction, which the woman mostly enjoys despite the fact that it requires sacrifice from her. This is part of God's work, which is always perfect.

These are not superficial qualities. Indeed, they are implanted in the woman's physical, mental and psychological constitution. Some leading scientist believe that they are present in each cell in the woman's constitution, because they are rooted in the first call that multiplies to form the fetus and the child<sup>7</sup>.

This is infact the true character of woman in life. It helps her in the performance of her real functions as well as in the realization of her creative purpose.

#### **ROLES OF WOMEN IN THE SOCIETY AS BELIEVERS**

وما خلقت الجن والإنس

As a creature and servant of Allah, her first duty is to believe in the oneness of God, which is the only means of salvation in the hereafter. The Glorious Qur'an has at more than one place, made it clear that she is independently responsible for herself, her belief, her deeds, and her religious rights before Allah. This signifies that she is solely responsible for the great reward for her virtuous deeds or punishment for her vices.

للرجال رضىب مما اكتسبوا وللنساء... (4: 32)

Among the religious practices, it is incumbent upon women, as also upon men, to celebrate the services, of worship, though with certain concession<sup>8</sup>. There are also social duties, with a view to distribute the national wealth equitably, the means leading to the accumulation of wealth in the hands of the few are forbidden, as in the case of interest and games of chance. A Muslim woman is as much subject to the rules as a man. Lotteries and speculations on racing, etc. are harmful to the economic equilibrium of society, and remain expressly forbidden, for both men and women. Alcoholism is another social evil which every Muslim males and females are duty bound to abstain from. Alcoholic drinks have a particular aspect concerning the women. It is she who nourishes her

baby with her blood, and then with her milk, thus transmitting her health or her ailment to her baby, to the new generation and to the future of humanity<sup>9</sup>.

A very comprehensive duty is that of morality which addresses greatly our mutual relations with our fellow-beings. In its ardent desire to attack the very sources of evil, Islam has imposed, recommended or otherwise encourage certain practices, which astonish us sometimes if we do not take into consideration their profound motives. Looking at the sexual anarchy that prevails in many parts of the world, and which Islam came to check, the need for modesty both in men and women is abundantly clear. However, it is on account of the difference between men and women in nature, temperament, and social life that a great amount of veiling is required for women than for men, especially in the matter of dress. (24L 31)

Islam ordered its male and female adherents to always lower their gazes so as to avoid illicit sexual relations at all cost. This is because the desire to have sexual relations originates with the look that one person gives another, Islam prohibits a person from casting amorous glances towards another. In short, the Qur'an and the Hadith of the messenger of Allah contained all the dos and donts of Islam, the good qualities expected of believing women and the bad acts of which they are warned to abstain. It is therefore, the responsibility of a believing woman to hearken to those rules and regulations of Allah and his messenger.

#### **AS A WIFE AND MOTHER**

Allah has created man and woman to play distinct roles in human society and a woman's biology and physique best suit her, at base for the maternal, roles so necessary in the creation of healthy and happy families. Says doi<sup>10</sup>. Woman is created with an innate predisposition for childbirth, this account for reasons her behaviour is mainly characterized by tenderness, effective bonds, self preservation, protectiveness and self identification with the child. Thus a woman's role in an Islamic society is clearly, at base, to rear children and create a wholesome and happy home. The following verses of the Qur'an lend credence to this fact.

(1) "ومن ابانه ثان خلق لكم من انفسكم ازواجا لتسكنوا إليها"

(2) حملته أمه وهنا على وهن وفصاله في عامين".

A major portion of household task for woman is training the children and nurturing their physical health and safety. This illustrates that the, woman is the first school and first teacher a child attends in life. She lays the foundation and gives shape to the life of the child. Thus the betterment of a society or otherwise which lies in the hands of individuals largely depends on mothers. In other words mothers are foundation layer for betterment of or operation the society. The strong and better the foundation so everything on it. Mothers are therefore, the society builders. An educationist says: "Depriving children of parental care and particularly motherly affection, love and training will invariably produce socially and psychologically imbalanced children who will grow up to be angry with almost everyone and therefore become destroyers rather than builders of the nation. Earning a lot of money, developing the women socially and politically may not necessarily make them honorable and respectable. But producing and training disciplined, well behaved, productive and humane leaders of tomorrow will certainly bring to the mothers National Honors and respect, and indeed much more in the hereafter"<sup>11</sup> verily, the most fundamental single role of the woman and which gives her a sense of pride and honour is to get married, and through that, to build a family. And any other role she played in the society beside that of building a sound, happy and disciplined family is virtually worthless<sup>12</sup>.

#### **AS AN EMPLOYEE**

In our modern times, women's contributions outside their homes are in great demand, with increased education and an expanded job market, many women are finding career opportunities irresistible. The wife's earnings constitutes a significant contribution to average families, to others they raise the family's standard of living. One may not object to a woman engaging in employment as long as she maintains her dignity and behaves within the limits prescribed by Islam. It was narrated that the Prophet's wives and daughters used to engage themselves in gainful employment.

However, there is no decree in Islam which forbids woman from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity for it, especially in positions which fit her nature and in which society needs her most. Examples of these professions are nursing, teaching (especially for children), and medicine. Moreover, there is no restriction on benefiting from woman's exceptional talent in any field provided it is done in conformity with Islam<sup>13</sup>.

Lending support to this point Dauda write "Others basic roles of women in national development include taking up the teaching profession, serving as medical doctors, gynecologists, Dentists and other paramedical staff, as well as social workers etc. These are the however, strictly speaking, developmental roles which are in consonance with the fundamental natural physique, stamina, and are psychologically socially and morally healthy for the women folk".

He states further: in the opposite direction: "There is no doubt that some women have taken up roles such as soldering, police, engineering, surveying, Banking, politics, football, wrestling etc. which are traditionally and even naturally, belonging to men,... However, the inevitable consequence is that they will be over-stretched, psychologically upset, physiologically instable, leading to complete nerve breakdown, dewomanization, socially disconnected, morally bastardized and sexually harassed, raped or exploited by her male senior officers, male colleagues or some other exploiters who have discovered her weaknesses and lack of security"<sup>14</sup>.

#### **AS A DA<sup>CI</sup>YAH (CALLER TO ISLAM)**

The call to or propagation of Islam is a duty incumbent upon knowledgeable Muslim men and women alike

ولتكن منكم أمه يدعون إلى الخير تامرون بالمحروف وتنهون عن المنكر

From the very beginning of Islamic history, Muslim women have played vital roles in the propagation of the Divine message (Islam). Women have been instrumental in the flourishing and spreading of the religion. The process which is called Da<sup>ci</sup>wah in Arabic. The first wife of the Prophet, Khadijah who was very rich spent a lot of her wealth to support the mission of her husband, she stood by him, bore series of hardship and tribulations till she breathed her last. It was narrated that Umayya, daughter of Qais, of the Ghaffar tribe said: "I went to see the Prophet with some women of the Ghaffar tribe, as he was preparing to leave for the Khaybar campaign, we told the Prophet; "we wish to go out with you to treat the wounded and help the Muslims in any way we can. The Prophet replied: "With God's blessing"<sup>15</sup>.

The work of Muslim women in the field of Da<sup>ci</sup>wah strengthens the man's work and expands it into areas where her effectiveness supersedes that of the man, some of the reasons for necessity of women participation in Da<sup>ci</sup>wah is stated thus:

1. Women are more capable than men are in communicating with other women. Women are usually more affected by word, deed and conduct of other woman, more so, than by men, on the other hand, women are more capable of recognizing the peculiarities and problems associated with women's education.
2. Women are freer than men in communicating with other women, either individually for Da<sup>ci</sup>wah activities, or in women's learning and other forums and places of meeting.

3. Many Muslim women who are in need of guidance, education and direction lack the presence of men-folk who can provide this service, therefore, it makes sense that qualified women in the community should do the job.
4. Women can better comprehend the direction in which women's Da'wah work should be geared. They can best discern the order priorities, because they are more familiar with this sphere.
5. The need for of education with women is greater than that with men. They get pregnant, give birth and nurse children. The children are more tied to them than they are to their fathers. Women stay at home with their sons and daughters, and thus can bring them up as they please. If they are not allowed to share in the Da'wah efforts of their husbands, a lot of the much-needed result may not be attained<sup>16</sup>.

Dacwah amongst women therefore, deserves and should get more attention than it does. So far, except in a few instances women have been distanced from the field of Da'wah work due to deficiency in Da'wah capabilities among women as a result of absence of adequate education and the lack of fundamental Islamic knowledge among most women only a few of the wives and daughters of Du'aat (male caller) have any worthwhile Islamic knowledge.

However, it remains incontrovertible that education is the only and major instrument weapon required by Muslim woman to effectively, diligently and adequately discharge those roles of her's if a better and Islamically ideal society is to emerge. An illiterate and apathetic woman cannot possibly counteract the anti-Islamic influences which are harming her children day and night. Only an intelligent, educated and enthusiastic Muslim womanhood can prove equal to the tasks which confront her. This therefore, necessitates a brief show of women education and its essence in Islam.

#### **WOMEN EDUCATION IN ISLAM**

يرفع الله الذين آمنوا منكم والذين اوتوا العلم درجات...

Education therefore, is a fundamental instrument for individual and societal development. For the individual to develop in all facets of his life he needs a sound to develop in all facets of his life he needs a sound education which is not necessarily quantitative but qualitative. This fact is also true for the society or nation. Education in other words, is the basis for the social-political, economic, physical, moral, spiritual, scientific and technological development of both the individual and the society within which he lives<sup>17</sup>.

It was on this basis that Islam stressed the importance of knowledge for mankind when the whole world was lost in ignorance and darkness, not as a special privilege of a particular class but as an essential and unavoidable need for each and every human being. It also goes to the credit of Islam that it was the first religion and civilization to acknowledge a separate and independent human status of woman and impressed upon her that she could not achieve perfection without knowledge. Acquisition of knowledge was as great a duty of woman as of man. طلب العلم

فريضة على Islam wanted the women folk to develop their rational faculties along with their physical ones and thus ascend to higher planes of spiritual existence. Writers and historians have given the names of Muslim woman who were outstanding for their religious, literary and medical knowledge as well as knowledge of arts and literature<sup>18</sup>. The Prophet referring to his wife said: "Take half of your religion from this little red girl". About her, Urwa bu al-Zubair said: I have not seen anyone more learned than Aisha in medicine, poetry, or jurisprudence.

However, Allah, the creator of mankind in His wisdom created the male and female to be both physiologically and psychologically different. Such differences manifested in their natural physique, stamina, temperament and psychological disposition. These innate natural differences in our view should dictate the nature of education they should acquire which will finally determine the type of professional or academic discipline they are to pursue in their future endeavors.

In his expression on women's education, Dauda states: "And any unguided educational training which makes either of the two sexes to pursue a line or discipline which is not in consonance with the natural disposition of the student usually ends up in total confusion resulting in educational, moral and professional disaster. The situation is even most glaring, most devastating and psychologically nerve braking, socially destabilizing, morally upsetting and utterly dehumanizing when women are trained to pursue some disciplines and take up jobs which are not in line with their natural disposition. Invariably, in the final analysis they become enslaved, victims of circumstances, becoming socially and sexually exploited, as well as de-womanized and raped of their primary assignment<sup>19</sup>."

Above all, it is in our view that Islamic education should be made the basis of all educational endeavour. This will go a long way in developing individuals intellectually, morally, and wholly as ideal Muslim personalities, whose perception of life is that they have been created by Allah basically so as to worship Him, and to represent His authority on earth; this therefore, enable them be master this temporary and elusive world and struggle to enjoy Allah's acceptance pleasure and a greater bliss in the hereafter.

The education of women which is undoubtedly positive oriented and is geared towards both personal and societal development in a positive sense, is that type of education which equips the women with all the necessary tools needed for the effective discharge of their own peculiar roles in the service of the nation. And there is no any fundamental role a woman can play in nation building more than the bringing up of socially, psychologically and morally balanced citizens who could help in the advancement of the nation morally politically, socially, economically, scientifically, technologically, militarily etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

There had been in the past two contradictory views concerning women education in Islam. The view of those who support teaching women the Glorious Qur'an and the Islamic religion and nothing more. This is due to their wrong belief that and claim that woman was deficient in intellect and religious and that her deficiency did not favor teaching her sciences. Supporting this view, an Arab poet said: "Women are deficient in intellect and religion: we sex not high opinion in them. For the sake of perfection God has not made one woman a Prophet". This view gives bad opinion of women; but the majority of Muslims do not support it.

The second viewpoint calls for the education of Muslim women. It is the correct view, deriving great strength from being based on prophetic traditions encouraging the education of women. Among them that which we mentioned slave girl, educates her well and teaches her good conduct then frees her and marries her, taught her writing". The view which supported teaching Muslim women's to read.

## **NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. A.S. Hornby, oxford advanced learner's Dictionary, seventh edition, New York, Oxford University press, 2005
2. A.G.A.S. Oladosu, Strategies for meeting the Islamic Education Needs at the tertiary institution in Nigeria, in A. O. Sanni and M,A, Muhibbul transformation in Arabic and



- Islamic studies in Nigeria, Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria, National Association of Teachers and Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS), 1430A.H./2009, pp. 150 – 151
3. A. Rahman, Islam on Science and Technology, New Delhi, Adam Publishers and Distribution, 2007, p. 41
  4. M. Hamidullahi, Introduction to Islam, Lagos, Islamic publication Bureau, 1981, p. 176
  5. Mustafa Saba<sup>c</sup>i, some Glittering aspect the Islamic Civilization Beirut, International Islamic Federation of Student Organisations (W.F.S.), 1984, p. 15
  6. Ibid.
  7. Sayyid Qutb, Fi-Ziala Al-Qur'an, Cairo, Darul-Shruq, 198/1400, vol. III, p. 115
  8. Women are relief of Salat Tawaf, sexual intercourse and some other ritual and pluming their monthly course as evident in Qur'an chapter 2: 228 and some prophetic statements.
  9. M. Hamidullahi, Introduction to Islam, Op.cit... pp. 150 – 151
  10. A.R.I. Doi, women in Shari<sup>c</sup>ah, N.P., N.P., N.D, p. 1
  11. G.A. Badaw, women in Islam, in K. Ahmad (ect), Islam it, meaning and message, London, Islamic Council of Europe 1976, p. 141
  12. Aliyu Dauda, Women's Education its problems and prospects, Kano, manifold publishing company Ltd., 2000, pp. 12 – 13
  13. Aliyu Dauda, Women's Education... Op.cit, p. 13
  14. www.
  15. Aliyu Dauda, Women's Education... Op.cit, p. 9
  16. M.A. Al-Brashi, Education in Islam..., Op.cit, pp. 46 – 54
  17. Ibid, p. 46 – 47
  18. Aliyu Dauda, Women's Education..., Op.cit, pp. 19 – 20