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An Analytical Study of Women's Educational, Social and Political Activities in the Early Period of Islam

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Abstract

Woman is an important individual of society. At every turn of human history, she has played a very significant role in collaboration with men for the progress of worldly existence. In the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW), women were very active in every field of life. Life was very simple with fewer problems in the era of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). But now in the 21st century, women's role and position have changed; she has to play many important and sometimes difficult roles in society. In this research paper, a historical study is presented about the educational, social and political activities of women in the early period of Islam, especially in the era of the Holy Prophet (SAW), so that women can set their role and positions accordingly in this changing world.

Keywords: Women, activities, educational, social, political, early period of Islam

Introduction

Before Islam, women were considered the lesser being all over the world. On the other hand, in Arabia, the plight of women was beyond narration, where having daughters was considered a shame to the extent that parents would bury their girls alive out of shame. Moreover, they also had no rights and were treated like slaves in the household and had no say in any matter of their life. With the arrival of Islam, things started to change all over the world in general and Arabia in particular regarding the rights of women. Islam identified women as an equal member of society and gave them their due respect and assigned them roles pertaining to their stature.

The biggest example of the rising status of women can be seen in the Qur'an, where Allah Almighty addresses both men and women alike pertaining to the giving of commandments. An example of which is as follows, where Allah Almighty says:

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا¹

Translation: "The Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the worshipping men and worshipping women, the truthful men and truthful women, the pious men and pious women, the alms-giving men and the alms-giving women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who are chaste and the women who are chaste, the men who remember Allah much and the women who do likewise, Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward for all."

From this verse of the Qur'an, it becomes clear that Allah Almighty has referred to women in the same way as He has referred to men. He has attributed the same qualities of virtuousness and piety to women as He has attributed to men. Therefore, for Allah the Great, women are equal to men, and women must also possess the same level and kind of virtuousness as men must.

Secondly, the attribute of compromise is associated only to women in the world of today with regards to matrimonial relationship. The fact is contrary in Islam, where Islam says that both man and wife have to work towards bettering the relationship, and in this regard, men should also compromise the way women do. In the Qur'an, Allah Almighty says:

وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ فَإِنْ كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَنَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا²

Translation: "Live with them (wives) honorably (with kindness). If you hate them, it may be that you hate a thing and Allah brings through it a great deal of good."

This verse clearly explains that compromise is not only the duty of the wife; rather, a man also has to be patient in a matrimonial relationship and compromise for the better with the other counterpart.

When the Holy Prophet (SAW) laid down the foundation of Islamic society in Madinah, at that time the nature of the role of women was also redefined. Allah Almighty gave to the women the same status which

was given to men. Islam has given acceptable and attractive freedom to women by keeping in view their wishes and happiness at every stage and every demand. Countless examples of women in every field of life are present in the era of Prophethood, through which we can find proof of the active life of women. By taking this era as a role model, we will describe the effective status of women in this changing situation.

This article examines the educational contributions of early Muslim women, their role in Qur'anic studies, Hadith narration, Islamic jurisprudence, literature, poetry, calligraphy, business activities, skilled professions, medical practice, participation in battles, political activities, and the true concept of veil (hijab) in Islam. Each section includes Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions with full diacritical marks, translations, and detailed critical analysis.

Section One: Educational Activities of Women in the Early Period of Islam

1.1 Foundational Principles of Women's Education in Islam

Islam is the religion of knowledge and reason. It emphasizes mankind to acquire knowledge without any distinction of gender. The very first word revealed of the Qur'an was "Iqra" (Read), which is a direct command to seek knowledge. This command was addressed to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), but through him, it is addressed to all Muslims, men and women alike.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) paid equal attention to the training of men as well as women. He always appreciated the person who was eager for learning, and women were also addressed, guided, and answered for any complaint which they suffered. The appreciation of the Holy Prophet (SAW) encouraged women to show eagerness for learning and knowledge, and women also requested the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to allocate a specific day for their training and education, and he did so.

A handsome number of Muslim women became a source of guidance for Muslim society. Even great companions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) approached them for guidance, such as the Mothers of the Believers: Hadrat Aishah, Hadrat Hafsa, and Hadrat Umm Salmah (may Allah be pleased with them). Women had sound opinions and sometimes they differed with the opinion of male scholars. For example, Hadrat Umar (RA) and Hadrat Aisha (RA) differed on a matter pertaining to Islamic law, and he could not convince her, and scholars of different schools of thought accepted her opinion.

أَطْلُبُوا الْعِلْمَ مِنَ الْمَهْدِ إِلَى اللَّحْدِ³

Translation: "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave."

This famous saying, though often cited as a hadith, captures the spirit of Islamic teachings on education. While its chain of transmission is debated, the meaning is consistent with the Qur'anic emphasis on knowledge. The Prophet (SAW) said:

طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ⁴

Translation: "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim."

The scholars have unanimously agreed that the word "Muslim" in this hadith includes both men and women. Imam al-Nawawi states in his commentary that the obligation of seeking knowledge applies equally to both genders, with the only difference being in the specific areas of knowledge that are obligatory for each.

The Prophet (SAW) specifically made arrangements for women's education. Narrated Abu Sa'id al-Khudri:

جَاءَتْ امْرَأَةٌ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَتْ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، ذَهَبَ الرِّجَالُ بِحَدِيثِكَ، فَاجْعَلْ لَنَا مِنْ نَفْسِكَ يَوْمًا نَأْتِيكَ فِيهِ، تُعَلِّمُنَا مِمَّا عَلَّمَكَ اللَّهُ، فَقَالَ: اجْتَمِعْنَ يَوْمَ كَذَا وَكَذَا، فَاجْتَمِعْنَ فَعَلَّمَهُنَّ⁵

Translation: "A woman came to the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, the men have taken all your time for learning. So set aside a day for us from yourself when we can come to you and you can teach us from what Allah has taught you.' He said: 'Gather on such and such a day.' So they gathered, and he taught them."

This hadith is a clear proof that the Prophet (SAW) not only permitted but also organized formal educational sessions for women. This established the precedent that women have the right to acquire religious knowledge directly from scholars. This arrangement also shows that the Prophet (SAW) recognized the need for separate educational arrangements for women when necessary. This has profound implications for contemporary discussions about women's education in Islamic societies.

1.2 Women's Role in Qur'anic Studies

The Qur'an is the source of all human knowledge. Women had the honor to be the first believer of the Qur'an: Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA), who heard the first revelation of Islam and recognized it as the truth. She was the first person to accept Islam and provided unwavering support to the Prophet (SAW) during the most difficult times.

Another notable example is Fatimah bint al-Khattab (RA), the sister of Umar (RA), who changed the course of Umar's life by reciting the Holy Qur'an. When Umar went to kill the Prophet (SAW), he first went to his sister's house and heard the recitation of the Qur'an, which led to his acceptance of Islam.

Umm al-Mu'minin Hafsa (RA) was nominated to protect the Qur'an during the caliphate of Uthman (RA). She had deep-rooted knowledge of Tafsir (exegesis), Hadith, Fiqh (jurisprudence), Islamic law, Adab (literature), poetry, Akhbar (history), and Ansab (genealogy). She was just eighteen years old, yet she had mastery in such difficult matters.

Hadrat Aishah (RA) explained many verses of the Holy Qur'an which confused some great male scholars. Imam al-Zarkashi compiled a book entitled "Al-Ijabah li-irad ma istadrakathu Aishah ala al-Sahabah," in which he collected many instances where Aishah (RA) corrected the understanding of other Companions.

Khawlah bint Tha'labah, because of her request, verses of the Qur'an were revealed about marital discord called Zihar. She also advised Umar (RA) to have fear of Allah and the Hereafter. Her courage in approaching the Prophet (SAW) directly about her marital situation led to divine revelation that changed Islamic law.

Hafsah bint Sirin was a master of the Qur'an and Qira'at (recitation styles) at the age of twelve. She was one of the most renowned Qur'an reciters of her time, and male scholars would learn the correct pronunciation of the Qur'an from her.

Allamah Ibn Kathir said about Aishah bint Ibrahim ibn Siddiq that she was more expert in Qira'at than males. This shows that women were not only permitted but also excelled in the science of Qur'anic recitation.

وَرَتَّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلاً⁶

Translation: "And recite the Qur'an with measured recitation."

The command to recite the Qur'an with proper tajwid applies to both men and women. Women like Hafsah bint Sirin and Aishah bint Ibrahim exemplified this command by mastering the science of recitation and teaching it to others.

1.3 Women's Role in the Science of Hadith and its Narration

Women played an important and active role in Hadith sciences alongside men. A very distinguished name is of Hadrat Aishah (RA), who reported 2,210 Ahadith from the Prophet (SAW). Hadrat Aishah not only narrated Ahadith but also settled difficult matters in understanding them and retrieving Islamic law.

Some scholars have said that she was the source of one-third of Islamic commandments. Her narrations cover a wide range of topics including purification, prayer, fasting, zakah, pilgrimage, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and many other areas of Islamic law.

Imam al-Dhahabi writes: "There are many men who have fabricated Hadith. However, no woman in the history of Islam has been accused of fabrication." This is a remarkable testament to the integrity and truthfulness of female narrators of Hadith. Women have always truthfully conveyed religious knowledge.

نَضَّرَ اللَّهُ أَمْرًا سَمِعَ مِنَّا حَدِيثًا فَحَفِظَهُ حَتَّى يُبَلِّغَهُ⁷

Translation: "May Allah brighten the face of a person who hears a hadith from us, memorizes it, and then conveys it to others."

This hadith of the Prophet (SAW) applies equally to men and women. The reward promised for preserving and transmitting knowledge is available to both genders.

Amrah bint Abd al-Rahman was amongst the greatest female Tabi'in (successors of the Companions). She was a jurist, a mufti, and a Hadith specialist. The great Caliph Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz used to say: "If you want to learn Hadith, go to Amrah."

Imam Zuhri says: "Go to Amrah, she is a vast vessel of Hadith." She was the student of Aishah (RA) and became one of the most authoritative narrators of her time.

History has witnessed that the women who were honored by promoting the Prophet's (SAW) teachings belonged to free and respectable families as well as slaves. This shows that Islamic education was accessible to all women regardless of their social status. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, in his book "Al-Isabah," has compiled the biographies of 1,552 women in the field of Hadith.

مَنْ كَذَبَ عَلَيَّ مُتَعَمِّدًا فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ⁸

Translation: "Whoever lies about me deliberately, let him take his seat in the Fire."

This severe warning motivated both male and female narrators to be extremely careful in transmitting Prophetic traditions. The fact that no woman has been accused of fabrication in the entire history of Islam shows the high level of integrity among female scholars.

Women narrators of Hadith were not limited to the early period. Throughout Islamic history, women have been recognized as authoritative teachers of Hadith. In the 8th century AH, Fatimah bint Ahmad was a teacher of Imam al-Sakhawi. In the 12th century AH, there were numerous female Hadith scholars in Damascus, Cairo, and Medina who taught male students.

1.4 Women's Role in the Field of Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh)

Muslim women have played an important role in the field of Islamic law. The name of Aishah Siddiqah (RA) is very famous and bright in this domain. Great Sahabah approached her to understand the commandments of Hajj, cleanliness, the daily routine of the Prophet (SAW), and inheritance. Allamah Zarkashi compiled a book named "Al-Ijabah li-irad ma istadrakathu Aishah ala al-Sahabah," in which he collected many ahadith in which she had authority of opinion, or she differed with other Companions and rejected their opinion with solid citations, and they had to withdraw their opinion against her logic. She objected to 19 Sahabah, including Umar (RA). One famous example is the issue of whether the Prophet (SAW) performed Umrah after Hijrah. Aishah (RA) corrected Ibn Abbas (RA) on this matter, and he later accepted her correction and said: "I have never ceased to be amazed at Aishah's knowledge." Hadrat Umm Salamah (RA) also guided people in different injunctions. She was known for her wisdom and deep understanding of Islamic teachings. Her advice to the Prophet (SAW) during the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah proved crucial in resolving a critical situation. Asma bint Asad (d. 250 AH) was an expert of the Hanafi school of thought. She taught male and female students and was recognized as an authority in Hanafi jurisprudence. Amat al-Wahid bint Hussain Fatima (d. 377 AH) was known as Faqihah; she was an expert in the Shafi'i school of thought. She taught in the great mosques of Baghdad and had many students.

In the ninth century AH, Fatimah bint Ahmad was a teacher of Imam al-Sakhawi. She was known for her deep understanding of Fiqh and Hadith. Fatimah bint Ahmad bin Yahya (d. 840 AH) was good at jurisprudence. Her husband was also a jurist, and he consulted her in complex matters, and she was the final authority in such differences of opinion. Fatimah bint Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Samarkandi was a student of many teachers and a teacher of many students. She was married to Imam Kasani, author of "Bada'i al-Sana'i." The fatawa of her husband and father were not issued without her signatures. She wrote many books on Islamic jurisprudence. Imam Kasani always consulted her in complex matters.

فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ⁹

Translation: "So ask the people of knowledge if you do not know."

This verse establishes that the people of knowledge (Ahl al-Dhikr) include both men and women. Women scholars throughout Islamic history have been considered part of this honored group.

Section Two: Women's Social and Literary Activities

2.1 Women's Proficiency in Literature and Public Speaking

Women set very sparkling examples of their exposure in the literary field. Umm al-Mu'minin Hadrat Khadijah (RA) uttered soft words to console the Holy Prophet (SAW); those precious words showed the ability of speaking power. She said to the Prophet (SAW):

"Never, by Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and destitute, serve your guests generously, and assist deserving ones."¹⁰

These words demonstrated her eloquence, wisdom, and deep understanding of the Prophet's character. Hadrat Aishah (RA), Hadrat Hafsa (RA), and Hadrat Umm Salamah (RA) were known for their confident and courageous conversations and defended women's integrity on numerous occasions. They were not afraid to speak the truth even when it meant disagreeing with powerful men. Asma bint Yazid bin Sakan al-Ansariyyah was a woman of extraordinary caliber in different aspects. She had a fluent and good exposure of expressing herself in public very well, which is why she was given the title of "Khatibat al-Nisa" (the best speaker amongst women). She came to the Prophet (SAW) and asked about the reward of women for their domestic liabilities and responsibilities. She argued her point with such strong logic and examples of their responsibilities by uttering very suitable words. The Prophet (SAW) was fascinated by her impressive and convincing style and appreciated her by saying:

"Have you ever seen a woman more beautiful in expression than her while asking about religious commandments?"¹¹

These golden and encouraging words will boost women's expressing abilities forever, and Muslim women will always feel pride over it. Asma bint Yazid also participated in the Battle of Yarmuk and encouraged the Muslim soldiers with her powerful speeches. Bakkarat al-Halaliyyah was also good at linguistic abilities, poetry, prose, and the art of speaking in public. She warmed up the morale of soldiers defending Hadrat Ali (RA) in the Battle of Siffin. Her speeches were so effective that they inspired the soldiers to fight with renewed courage. Umm al-Banin bint Abdul Aziz bin Marwan's conversation made Hajjaj speechless. She said: "Regret for a miser; if he had a shirt, he would never wear it; if he had a way, he would never walk on it." Hazimah, the sister of Adiyy ibn Hatim, was a lady of good linguistic exposure, and due to her correct opinion about Muhammad (SAW), Adiyy ibn Hatim embraced Islam. She recognized the truth of the Prophet's message and convinced her brother to accept Islam.

2.2 Women and Poetry

As a great poet, Allama Muhammad Iqbal has said about poetry: "Words have power to fly without wings."¹² Muslim women had this art and were admired for their beautiful thoughts by male critics. Hadrat Aishah (RA) also wrote verses, and she used to quote poetry in her conversation. Urwah bin Zubair said: "I have never seen a person more expert in jurisprudence, medicine, and poetry." Ibn Abd al-Barr also paid homage to her by saying that she had more expertise in three branches of knowledge—jurisprudence, medicine, and poetry—in her times. Her medical knowledge was so advanced that physicians would consult her on difficult cases. Her poetry reflected deep insight and emotional intelligence. Khansa bint Amir bin al-Harith was a Sahabiyyah (female Companion). The Prophet (SAW) praised her poetry and bestowed her the title of "the best of the poets." She is considered one of the greatest Arab poets of all time, male or female. Her elegies for her brothers are among the most famous poems in Arabic literature. Sakinah bint Hussain bin Ali bin Abi Talib was a very respected and renowned lady. She arranged sessions which were attended by great poets, and they got their poetry corrected by

her, and she played the role of arbiter in their differences relating to poetry. Her literary gatherings were attended by the most prominent poets of the time, who respected her judgment on matters of poetry.

الشَّعْرُ كَلَامٌ حَسَنٌ قَبِيحٌ، فَخُذُوا الْحَسَنَ وَدَعُوا الْقَبِيحَ¹³

Translation: "Poetry is speech that can be beautiful or ugly. Take the beautiful and leave the ugly."

The Prophet (SAW) did not condemn poetry altogether but distinguished between good and bad poetry. Muslim women poets like Khansa and others contributed to the beautiful and meaningful poetry that conveyed noble values and sentiments.

2.3 Women and Calligraphy

The pen is the vital source to save knowledge, as Allah Almighty swore by the pen. Muslims paid full attention to this ability. The first female teacher in Islam who taught the wife of the Prophet (SAW), Hafsa (RA), to read and write was a woman.

ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ¹⁴

Translation: "Nun. By the pen and what they write."

This oath at the beginning of Surah al-Qalam highlights the importance of writing and recording knowledge. Women participated in this noble act from the very beginning of Islamic history.

Abidah bint Muhammad al-Jahaniyyah was a famous poetess, a learned lady, and an expert in calligraphy. She was known for the beauty of her handwriting and the precision of her copying of the Qur'an.

Fatimah bint al-Hassan bin Ali bin al-Aqra' modeled her style on Ibn al-Bawwab, the famous calligrapher, and was in turn imitated by calligraphers all over the Islamic world. She became a standard for calligraphic excellence, and later calligraphers would study her work to perfect their own styles.

Section Three: Women's Economic and Professional Activities

3.1 Women's Business Activities

Allah Almighty says in the Qur'an:

وَلَقَدْ مَكَّنَّاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ¹⁵

Translation: "And We have certainly established you on the earth and made for you therein means of livelihood; little are you grateful."

This verse establishes that both men and women have the right to earn a lawful livelihood. In the reign of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), like in other fields of life, women also participated in the economic field according to the need and urgency of the time. By using different proper means of attainment of economy, they tried to have legitimate subsistence.

By this, two important advantages were obtained: first, providing an honorable life for herself and her family in the absence of a guardian or in times of poverty; and second, attainment of a high position by giving charity in the way of Allah through their own economic trade.

In the reign of the Prophet (SAW), women fully participated in trading along with men. In this field, the name of Hadrat Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA) is at the top of the list. She used to do trading through men; she gave capital and shared profit with male partners. Her business acumen was well-known, and she employed the Prophet (SAW) before their marriage because of his reputation for honesty. Hadrat Halah bint Khuwaylid (RA) was the sister of Hadrat Khadijah (RA) and used to do leather trading. She was also a successful businesswoman who managed her own trade. Hadrat Qaylah al-Ansariyyah was a famous trader. She learned the principles and rules of trading from the Holy Prophet (SAW). She asked the Prophet about the rules of commerce, and he gave her detailed guidance, which she then applied in her own business. Perfume selling was an important occupation of women at that time. Malikah Umm Sa'ib once sold perfume to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The Prophet purchased perfume from her, showing that it was permissible to engage in business transactions with women. Hawlah bint Tuwayt was

famous with the name of "al-Atarah" (the perfumer). She used to go door to door to sell perfume. In the present age, this method is called house marketing. This shows that women were actively engaged in direct sales and marketing of their products. Women also used to do agriculture and gardening. They worked in fields and used to take lands on contract as well. The Prophet's wives and other women participated in agricultural activities, especially during the early period in Madinah.

3.2 Skilled Women Workers

The wife of Hazrat Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (RA) used to make handicrafts. She used to sell her handmade things. She asked the Holy Prophet (SAW) for permission to spend on her husband and child. The Holy Prophet said: "If you spend on them, you will get reward." Many women in the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) used to do different work like leather making, thread and cloth making, dyeing, and even running beauty parlors.

الْيَدُ الْعُلْيَا خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْيَدِ السُّفْلَى¹⁶

Translation: "The upper hand (that gives) is better than the lower hand (that receives)."

This hadith encourages self-sufficiency and charity. Women who earn their own money can become the "upper hand" that gives charity to others, which is a praiseworthy position.

3.3 Women as Doctors (Mu'alijat)

Hazrat Rufaydah al-Aslamiyyah was a doctor and surgeon. She used to provide medical treatment to injured people in the period of the Holy Prophet (SAW). She set up a tent in the Prophet's mosque to treat the wounded and sick. She is considered the first female nurse and surgeon in Islam. Hazrat Umm Sulaym (RA), Hazrat Layla al-Faqihah (RA), and Hazrat Hamnah bint Jahsh (RA) were all doctors and used to give medical treatment to injured soldiers and persons. They would accompany the Muslim army during battles and treat the wounded on the battlefield. The Prophet (SAW) recognized the importance of women in the medical field and never discouraged them from acquiring medical knowledge and skills. In fact, he encouraged them by allowing them to treat the sick and wounded.

مَنْ عَالَ مَرِيضًا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا عَالَهُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ¹⁷

Translation: "Whoever attends to a sick person in this world, Allah will attend to him on the Day of Resurrection."

This hadith encourages both men and women to engage in medical care and the treatment of the sick.

3.4 Women's Participation in Battles (Ghazawat)

In times of need, women participated in battles. Dr. Yaseen Mazhar Siddiqui writes that many Muslim women participated in Ghazawat; some deserve to be called soldiers because they performed welfare services along with armed and war services. Hazrat Umm Sulaym (RA) was a freedom fighter in the era of the Holy Prophet (SAW). On the day of Ghazwah Hunayn, Hazrat Umm Sulaym held a sword, and when the Holy Prophet saw her, he smiled. She was not afraid to defend herself and her fellow Muslims when necessary. Hazrat Umm Atiyyah participated in seven Ghazawat with the Holy Prophet (SAW). She would treat the wounded, prepare food for the soldiers, and sometimes even fight when needed.

نِعْمَ الْقَوْمُ أَسْلَمَ مَا أَصَابَهُمْ فَنَزَّ إِلَّا صَارُوا إِلَيَّ¹⁸

Translation: "What an excellent people Aslam are! When fear afflicts them, they come to me."

The Prophet praised the bravery of his Companions, both men and women. Women were not expected to fight as a primary duty, but they were permitted to defend themselves and their community when necessary.

Abdul Haleem Muhammad writes about the political activities of women in the present social perspective: "Ista'mar" (colonialism), which has taken most Islamic countries in its hand, along with the occupation of Jews on Palestine, has declared Jihad compulsory for women. That is why women have participated in freedom movements.

The complexity of modern society and, as a result, the complexity of women's lives, has created many complications and problems. Due to these causes, her participation in local and legislative councils has increased.

Section Four: Women's Political Activities

4.1 Historical Examples of Women's Political Engagement

Some women in Muslim societies have been prominent political actors. Female relatives of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) were particularly important in the early Muslim community because they knew his practice and teachings so well. Aishah (RA), the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), had great political clout and even participated in the Battle of the Camel. Her participation was not due to a desire for power but to seek justice for the murder of Caliph Uthman (RA). While there are differing opinions on her participation, it shows that women in early Islam were not excluded from political affairs. Umm Salamah (RA) was also known for her political wisdom. She advised the Prophet (SAW) during the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah when the Companions were hesitant to follow the Prophet's instructions. Her advice was crucial in resolving the situation. Based on these narrations, we can take the point that all restrictions which were applied to men and women in times of peace regarding meeting and talking with males might be relaxed in times of war. Now if upon the demand of needs and circumstances of the time these restrictions are relaxed, it would not be against the Shariah.

4.2 Collective Participation and its Implications for Modern Times

Hazrat Anas bin Malik narrates that three men came to the houses of Azwaj Mutahharat (the purified wives) to ask about the worship (prayers) of the Holy Prophet (SAW). This shows that women had a public role in educating others about religious matters. The migration to Abyssinia (Habshah) and Madinah are great examples of collective participation of men and women in a society. Women were among the early migrants who left their homes for the sake of their faith. They endured hardship and persecution along with the men.

Besides that, examples of the participation of men and women in seeking knowledge, preaching of religion, jihad, marriage and reception programs, and visiting the sick are proven in the period of the Holy Prophet (SAW). Women were active participants in all aspects of community life within the bounds of Shariah.

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ¹⁹

Translation: "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong."

This verse establishes the principle of mutual cooperation and social responsibility between men and women. It does not restrict women to the private sphere but acknowledges their public role in enjoining good and forbidding evil.

In modern times, many institutions have been established, whether they are related to educational institutions, medical institutions, public services, or government institutions—especially institutions where there is direct contact between men and women, for example, registration of citizens, identity cards, passports, police stations, and traffic police offices. But in older societies, there was no existence of these institutions. The abundance of institutions and the need for persons to work in these institutions demand that women come out of their houses and work with men.

4.3 The Question of Women's Freedom in Contemporary Times

Mazharuddin Siddiqui writes: "One question arises: if the religion of Islam came in the twenty-first century rather than the seventh century, what would be the attitude of Islam about the freedom and rights of women? If a nation makes arrangements for industrial expansion, defense training, and medical aid, in this situation can the women of a country be kept aside? In the present age, we would have to give more freedom than they had in the early time of Islam. In the contemporary age, the need for women's cooperation is on a vast scale than before." This is a profound question that requires careful consideration.

The principles of Islam are eternal, but their application can vary according to time and place. What is essential is to maintain the values of modesty, dignity, and justice while adapting to the legitimate needs of contemporary society.

Section Five: The Concept of Veil (Hijab) and Women's Social Activities

5.1 Hijab Was Not a Hurdle in Women's Social Activities

The veil is often seen in the West as a symbol of Muslim women's subordinate position in society, but its meaning and use vary enormously in Muslim societies. The Qur'an directs both men and women to dress modestly, but the actual interpretation and implementation of this rule varies enormously. There have always been two groups in favor of and against the veil. Some people think it is a hurdle for the freedom of women. But if a woman is in favor of the veil (purdah) and while keeping the veil is successfully doing work in every field of life, it is a reality that after the ruling of hijab, women did not remain cut off from their social and educational activities.

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ²⁰

Translation: "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts...

And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts."

It is important to note that the command to lower the gaze and dress modestly is given first to men, then to women. This indicates that modesty is the responsibility of both genders, not just women.

Today, in a period of immorality and bareness, a Muslim woman can find peace and protection only in the veil. Hijab is a veil for the beautification of women, not a hurdle in the way of their success. Our Shariah wants to build the character of its Ummah on the basis of cleanliness, purity, and halalness.

5.2 Permission for Recreational Activities

Hazrat Aishah (RA) narrates that on Eid day, some people from Abyssinia were playing with swords in the Prophet's mosque. The Holy Prophet (SAW) said: "Do you like to see their play?" I said yes. He stood me behind him. This hadith shows that the Prophet (SAW) permitted women to watch permissible recreational activities. Aishah (RA) was young at that time, and the Prophet allowed her to watch the show even though others wanted to leave. This demonstrates that Islam does not confine women to their homes without any recreation.

5.3 Permission to Stop Evil Deeds

Hazrat Abdullah ibn Umar narrates that some Companions were sitting with the Holy Prophet (SAW), and Hazrat Saad (RA) was one of them eating meat. One of the wives of the Prophet (SAW) said that it was the meat of a lizard. He stopped eating. The Holy Prophet (SAW) said: "Eat; it is halal, but I do not eat it."

This hadith shows that women had the right to object to what they saw as wrong, even in the presence of the Prophet (SAW) and senior Companions. They were not silenced or ignored.

We can assess from all the above-mentioned texts that the Holy Prophet (SAW) gave permission to women to advise even men in situations and times where there was no concept of immorality. Women had a voice, and their opinions were respected and valued.

Findings

After presenting the status and activities of women in the early period of Islam and Islamic teachings, the following findings are clarified and described:

- * **No Gender Discrimination:** There was no gender discrimination and bias in Islamic society. Women were treated as equal partners in the moral and spiritual responsibility of building a just society.
- * **Respect for Women's Education:** Women were respected due to their educational abilities. Their knowledge was valued, and they were recognized as authorities in various fields of Islamic sciences.

- * **Special Arrangements for Women's Education:** A day was specified for women's guidance, which provides a base for special arrangements for female education. The Prophet (SAW) himself made separate arrangements for women's learning.
- * **Learning from Female Teachers:** It was not considered bad to learn from female teachers. Male Companions regularly learned from female scholars like Aishah (RA) and Umm Salamah (RA).
- * **Simplicity of Life:** Life was very simple and trouble-free in the early period of Islam, which allowed women to participate actively in community affairs while fulfilling their domestic responsibilities.
- * **Awareness of Rights:** Women were aware of their rights. They knew what Islam had given them and were not afraid to assert those rights when necessary.
- * **Domestic Role:** Women were performing their basic and natural role at home effectively. They were not neglecting their families while participating in public activities.
- * **Active Participation with Hijab:** Women were active in many social, political, educational, and economic activities while keeping in view all limits and observing hijab. The veil was not an obstacle to their participation.
- * **Work Not Obligatory but Permitted:** Work was not necessary, but where needed, women were permitted to work within the boundaries of Shariah. Economic necessity or the lack of a male provider was considered a valid reason for women to work.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that women in the early period of Islam were active participants in all spheres of life: educational, social, economic, and political. The Qur'an and Sunnah established their rights and dignity over 1,400 years ago when women were considered lesser beings in most parts of the world. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) not only taught these principles but also implemented them in practice, treating women with respect and valuing their contributions. The examples of women like Khadijah (RA), Aishah (RA), Umm Salamah (RA), Fatimah (RA), and many others show that Muslim women were scholars, teachers, businesswomen, nurses, soldiers, and advisors. They were not confined to their homes but participated in building their community. The concept of hijab was not a barrier to their participation. Rather, it provided them with dignity and protection. They were active in public life while maintaining their modesty. In contemporary times, Muslim women face new challenges and opportunities. The principles derived from the early period of Islam can guide them in navigating these challenges. They can participate in all fields of life as long as they do so within the boundaries of Shariah, maintaining their modesty, dignity, and commitment to Islamic values. The complexity of modern society has increased the need for women's participation in various fields. This participation is not only permissible but sometimes necessary for the welfare of the Muslim community. The early Muslim women set an example of how to balance domestic responsibilities with public participation. This balance remains the ideal for Muslim women today.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- * **Educational Institutions:** Islamic educational institutions should develop curricula that highlight the achievements of early Muslim women to serve as role models for contemporary Muslim women.
- * **Women's Empowerment Programs:** Programs designed to empower Muslim women should be grounded in the authentic teachings of Islam, drawing on the examples of the early Muslim women.
- * **Work-Life Balance:** Muslim women should be encouraged to follow the example of early Muslim women in balancing their domestic responsibilities with public participation.

- * **Modest Professional Attire:** Professional dress codes for Muslim women should accommodate the requirements of hijab, recognizing that modesty and professionalism are not contradictory.
- * **Women's Leadership:** The examples of women like Aishah (RA) and Umm Salamah (RA) show that women can hold leadership positions in Islamic society. This should be recognized in contemporary discussions about women's leadership.
- * **Further Research:** More research is needed on the contributions of early Muslim women in various fields. Many women scholars from Islamic history have been largely forgotten and deserve to be studied and remembered.

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