

Gender Stereotype in new Afghanistan relating to women's education Vis-Vis Educational rights of Women in Islam

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Abstract- As a traditional society, Afghanistan has always been a hotbed of gender inequality in different aspects; especially in terms of female education. Female education in Afghanistan has witnessed many upheavals all through the history of Afghanistan. Gender stereotyping has been common practice in Afghanistan's history; ultimate silent sufferers in terms of education have been females. Disapprove of girls' education is not from sound religious perspective, but rather a limited and extreme political view and not in accordance with Islamic Principles.

This article aims to examine the gender stereotype in female education in Afghanistan and presents the main obstacles that prevent women or girls from having access to education. The specific objectives are from this study to recognize the Islamic approaches towards girls' education from the viewpoint of Quran, Sunnah and Hadith, to put forth the authentic approach of Islam about girl's education.

Key words: Afghanistan, Education, Gender, Hadits, Quran, stereotypes

1. INTRODUCTION

Female in Afghanistan have been the victims of educational rights violation in Afghanistan since decades. In Three decades civil war and conflicts further aggravated their plight; but after 2001 with the establishment of new Taliban government a ray of hope emerged in their regime with the enactment of Constitution in 2004¹ wherein Article 44 specifically mentioned female's right to education. The government was under obligation to comply with international treaties; including *Third Millennium Development Goals*² and *Education for All*³. These treaties required the government to provide all children with access to primary education.

In August 2021, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan once again. It marked the end of 20 years of relatively democratic governance in Afghanistan. In September 2021, the Taliban announced an interim government and tried to propagate a different image to the international community, claiming that they have changed in terms of their governance approach. Instead of recognizing the role of the women in government and society, the Taliban simply removed the Ministry of Women and replaced it with the Ministry of Amr Bil Maruf⁴, which conducts religious and moral policing.⁵ The Taliban's education minister⁶ questioned the importance of education itself⁷, saying, "No PhD or master's degree is valuable today. You see that the Mullahs and Taliban that are in power have no PhD, masters or

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¹The Constitutional Law of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

² <https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/38384/1/GenderDialogue13.pdf>

³ A world Bank initiative Also see The Revival and development of education in Afghanistan: policy, objectives and strategies ED/EPS/2005/REVIVAL EDUCAT AFGHANI 2003

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000139077.locale=en>

⁴ K. Gannon, "Taliban replace ministry for women with 'virtue' authorities", September 19, 2021 AP NEWS AS accessed from <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-afghanistan-womens-rights-kabul-taliban-eee5a8c73dd5d58acfd008582ef77bb> April 21, 2022

⁵ M. Q. Shah and M. B. Mobasher, "Should the Taliban Be Given Afghanistan's UN Seat?", The Diplomat Nov 2, 2021

⁶ Sheikh Mawlawi Noorulla

⁷ September 2021

even a high school degree, but they are the greatest of all.”⁸ Minister of higher education⁹, made it clear¹⁰ that “The people of Afghanistan will continue their higher education in the light of Sharia law in safety without being in a mixed male and female environment.”¹¹The newly formed Islamic emirates of Afghanistan has asked girls not to return to schools till further announcement¹² prior to this announcement girls were allowed to attend secondary school in 17 provinces including in Kabul, but after the announcement girl’s are not allowed in schools. The ban is directly affecting 1,1 million secondary school girls¹³.

2. STATISTICAL DATA OF GIRL’S EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

As per the Afghanistan Ministry of Education Annual Progress Report in 2020¹⁴, nearly 10 million children are enrolled in schools among them 40% were girls. Number of girls in higher education increased from around 5,000 in 2001 to around 90,000 in 2018.” Some 16% of schools took girls only but there was a lack of women to teach in them, especially in rural areas, and many families wanted their girls to study with female teachers. In 2018, only 36% of secondary school teachers were female and these tended to be concentrated in urban areas. Only one in five girls of upper secondary school age successfully transits to upper secondary school.¹⁵As per UNICEF report¹⁶ 49 per cent of girls in Afghanistan never entered primary school and only 22 per cent move to upper secondary at the appropriate age, compared to 39 per cent of boys¹⁷. Gender inequality in completing primary school is a relatively great problem. School drop-out rates for girls were also high (62% in girls between 13 and 15) as a result of conservative attitudes in the population at large and a range of other issues. In addition, a further 300,000 children who currently access primary school are at risk of dropping out.¹⁸As per Afghanistan Education Equity Profile for Adolescent Girls¹⁹ till 2019 the gender gap in school attendance rates widens from the age of 10 years and crest at age 14, thereby reflecting that adolescent girls face barrier to education. The ratio of girls to boys in school does continue to widen as the numbers for both groups shrink from age 10 to 23. Three times as many boys as girls attend tertiary education at age 19+²⁰.

3. REASONS FOR DENIAL OF FEMALES RIGHT TO EDUCATION

i) Family Disapproval- According to the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17 girls were being prevented from getting education or participating in societal activities, owing to family disapproval²¹. In the 2011 Oxfam Report, more than a quarter of persons interviewed ‘named the lack of a female teacher as a major obstacle to girls’ access to

⁸ As accessed from <https://www.republicworld.com/world-news/rest-of-the-world-news/talibans-new-education-min-says-no-phd-masters-valuable-mullahs-and-taliban-greatest.html>

⁹ Abdul Baqi Haqqani

¹⁰ In August 2021

¹¹ As accessed from https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_afghan-woman-tops-national-university-exam-uncertain-about-future-under-taliban/6210154. August 30,2021 html ;also see Ebadi; A.Ebadi, “Taliban’s Ban on Girls’ Education in Afghanistan” April 1, 2022US Institute of peace as accessed from

<https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/04/talibans-ban-girls-education-afghanistan>,

¹² March 23,2022

¹³ As accessed from <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-back-school-situation-update-april-2022>

¹⁴. <https://moe.gov.af/sites/default/files/2021-04/MoE%20ENGLISH%20Annual%20Progress%20Report1399-2020.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/media/2471/file/afg-report-oocs2018.pdf%20.pdf>

¹⁶ Sept 2021

¹⁷ As accessed from <https://data.unicef.org/resources/how-are-children-progressing-through-school/>

¹⁸ <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/media/2471/file/afg-report-oocs2018.pdf%20.pdf>

¹⁹As accessed from

<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/5491/file/Afghanistan%20E%80%93%20Education%20Equity%20Profile%20for%20Adolescent%20Girls.pdf>

²⁰*Ibid*

²¹ As accessed from <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-living-conditions-survey-2016-17>

education²² Other reasons can be explained in part by a lack of female teachers, especially in rural schools²³. Only 16 per cent of Afghanistan's schools are girls-only, and many of them lack proper sanitation facilities, which further hinder attendance²⁴.

ii) Customary and traditional barriers- There is a traditional value among Pashtuns²⁵ in the southeastern region of the country called "Pashtunwali" and it is the hurdle for the female education. There is a famous Pashtu²⁶ proverb that says; "for a women either the house (kor) or the Grave (gor)". According to the 'Pashtunwali' having female teachers is also a condition that needs to be met in order for the people to send their daughters to school.²⁷Parent's conservative mindset girls morals are perversely affected with formal education and it poisons the society, For generations of peasants, the old objective is maintained whereby girls have to be wives and mothers and boys help the family, so they are kept from education. Forced child marriage is another social problem impeding girls' education²⁸.

iii) Taliban is afraid of educated females-one of the parents on the condition of anonymity revealed in an interview that, "The Taliban are so afraid of women's education," he further added, "If you have an educated mother, her sons won't go to *madrassas* [religious schools] to be brainwashed. Educated women undercut the power of the Taliban, who just want to breed future generations of jihadists."²⁹ Females are also prevented from gaining formal education due to fear of safety. There had been several attacks and threats on part of Afghanistan as well as the threat on educational facilities. During the period of '2007 and 2009, the Taliban and its associates have bombed, burned, or closed down more than 640 schools in Afghanistan, 80% of which were schools for girls.³⁰Taliban feel compelled to control and restrict the female population as much as possible to prevent the public sphere from descending into chaos due to female temptations³¹.

iv) Taliban feels Co-education is in conflict with the principles of Islam

Acting Afghan Higher Education Minister Abdul Baqi Haqqani said "co-education is against Islamic values." He also added that his government does not oppose women's education but rather the concept of men and women studying together³² In the extremists' logic, if the patriarchal social system can control practically every aspect of females' lives, especially in the public space, then the risk of temptations for committing sins in the eyes of God is mitigated.

²² Oxfam Joint Briefing Paper (2011). '*High Stakes: Girls Education in Afghanistan*'. Available at: <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/afghanistan-girls-education-022411.pdf> (Accessed 29 October 2012) p. 5

²³*Id at.* p. 20

²⁴ As accessed from <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education>

²⁵Indigenous people of Pashtunistan

²⁶The official language of Afghanistan

²⁷A.Jamal (2012) *Engaging Men in Gender Justice*2012 Joint World Conference on Social Work and Social Development. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CILzDOUa9jY>

²⁸H. Haqmal "*The education of women in Afghanistan*", Pp-226

<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/4056195/1.pdf>

²⁹Lynne O'Donnell, "*Taliban Reversal on Girls' Education Ignites World's Anger*", Foreign policy Magazine March 29, 2022 as accessed from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/29/taliban-girls-education-ban-reversal-afghanistan-schools/>

³⁰ Shahrani, N. M. (2009). "*Afghanistan's Alternatives for Peace, Governance and Development: Transforming Subjects to Citizens & Rulers to Civil Servants*", The Centre for International Governance Innovation. Retrieved June 6, 2012 from http://cips.uottawa.ca/eng/documents/CIPS_WP_Shahrani_August2009.pdf. Cited in Kissane, C. (2012) '*The Way Forward to Girls Education in Afghanistan*'. Journal of International Women's Studies Vol. 13, No. 4. Pp. 18.

³¹ H.Alvi, "*Islamists' Fear of Females: The Roots of Gynophobia Misogyny among the Taliban and Islamic State*", Jan 7, 2022Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Air University Press

³² Dec 26, 2021 on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lqTB1If0ps> also see Shannon A. Middleton

"*Women's Rights Unveiled: Taliban's Treatment Of Women In Afghanistan*",IND. INT'L &COMP. L. REv. [Vol. 11:2 P-423

As the Islamists' logic goes, failure to do so would result in chaos in the streets, as men would have to face sexual temptations and distractions at every turn.³³in August 2021 Taliban banned co-education³⁴ through a Fatwa³⁵.

4. EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN IN ISLAM

Religion, particularly Islam is cited as a major stumbling block for women's advancement. One of the most important rights granted to women by Islam is the right to education.³⁶Quran³⁷ and Sunnah³⁸ are the basic sources of Islamic law and both stress on gaining knowledge and seeking education. The concept of knowledge in Islam includes wide range of subjects.

The first five verses of chapter al-'Alaq reads: أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ فَأَشْرَقْنَا لَهُ نُورًا وَجَعَلْنَاهُ كَقَرِينٍ فَحَدِّثْ وَأَنْتَ نَكِرٌ أَعْيُنًا وَمَنْ يَشَاءُ يَنْدُبْ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِ الْمَدِينِ فَأَنْتَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدًا فِيهَا وَلَهُ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (Quran 96: 1-5)

Translation:

<https://myislam.org/surah-al-alaq>

(O Beloved!) Read (commencing) with the Name of Allah, Who has created (everything). He created man from a hanging mass (clinging) like a leech (to the mother's womb). Read, and your Lord is Most Generous, Who taught man (reading and writing) by the pen, who (besides that) taught man (all that) which he did not know³⁹.

Thus in Quran Almighty commands to read and acquire knowledge and also to write.

The Prophet (s.m) said, "Acquire knowledge and impart it to the people."⁴⁰ He also said, "Seeking knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim."⁴¹ The history of Islam is stuffed with women who obtained distinguished positions in the fields of hadith sciences, the science of interpretation, jurisprudence, medical science, poetry and calligraphy⁴².

The Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) said:

«طَلِبُوا الْعِلْمَ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ». Meaning- Acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims (both men and women without any discrimination)⁴³. He also said: «أَطِيبُوا الْعِلْمَ وَلَوْ بِالصَّيْنِ».

Meaning- Acquire knowledge even if you may have to go to China for it⁴⁴.

And he even said: "He who has a slave -girl and teaches her good manners and improves her education and then manumits and marries her, will get a double reward."⁴⁵

The wives of the Prophet (s.m) took care of the education of the girls'. The Companions took care of the education of their child. For instance, Sa'd b. Abu Waqqas taught her daughter to write.⁴⁶

The Prophet created a new dynamic method for how to be educated; after victory in battle of Badr the war prisoners were asked to teach Muslim children the skills of reading and writing this will serve as his ransom and he will be set free⁴⁷.

³³Supra note 31

³⁴Najibullah Lalzoy, "No co-education in universities, first FATWA by Taliban", Aug 21, 2021 Khamma Press News Agency <https://www.khaama.com/no-co-education-in-universities-first-fatwa-by-taliban-54645/>

³⁵ A *fatwā* is a legal ruling on a point of Islamic law (sharia) given by a qualified jurist in response to a question posed by a private individual

³⁶Jawad, H.A. (1998). "Islam and Women's Education In: The Rights of Women in Islam", . Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230503311_2

³⁷ Holy Book

³⁸ Practice of Prophet Mohammed (SAW)

³⁹ Dr Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, "Women Rights in Islam", Shaykh-ul-Islam

⁴⁰ Tirmizi, (1980)107

⁴¹ Al-Bukhari, 1987, Hadith, 9

⁴²Supra note 39

⁴³ Narrated by Ibn Maja in al-Sunan, 1:81 §224.

⁴⁴ Narrated by al-Bazzar in al-Musnad, 1:175 §95.

⁴⁵Supra note 43, 1952

⁴⁶ M. Islam, (2016) Importance of Girls' Education as Right: A Legal Study from Islamic Approach. *Beijing Law Review*, 7, 1-11. doi: 10.4236/blr.2016.71001.

⁴⁷Ibn Ishaq, 2004: 741; The History of al-Tabari, 1987: 69-72; Siddiqi, 1989: 87; Doi, 1983: 95; Khan, 2011: 112.

In the history of Islam women obtained distinguished positions in the fields of hadith sciences, the science of interpretation, jurisprudence, medical science, poetry and calligraphy⁴⁸.

Hazrat Khadijah⁴⁹, was a wealthy tradeswoman, the richest woman in Mecca at the time, who exported goods as far away as Syria. To manage her large business, she employed several males and to do so then in Arabia, necessitated that you have a high level of understanding and wisdom⁵⁰.

Hazrat bibi Aisha⁵¹ was noted for teaching eminent scholars⁵². She had a great love for learning and became known for her intelligence and sharp sense of judgment. Her life also substantiates that a woman can be a scholar, exert influence over men and women and provide them with inspiration and leadership⁵³. Rabi'ah⁵⁴, , Umm 'Atiyyah, who taught male scholars Islamic law, and A'isha bint Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas who had many famous male scholars as her pupils⁵⁵. Amrah bint Abdul Rahman was a student of Aisha from the second generation of Islam who related sayings from Umm Salamah and Rafi ibn Khadeej and was considered a legal scholar in the city of Medina⁵⁶. Hafsa bint Sireen was a student of Umm Atiyyah, Anas ibn Malik, and other companions of the Prophet. She was a legal scholar from the second generation of Islam and one of her students, Qatadah, is an important authority in the exegesis of the Quran.⁵⁷

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Gender stereotypes of Afghanistan (Taliban) confuse Islam with cultural practices and fail to recognize that Islam has empowered women with the most progressive rights. In Islam, women are not inferior or unequal to men. There is no verse in the Quran that bestows priority to male education; in fact it is obligatory for both male as well as females to seek education and knowledge. The newly established regime in Afghanistan has banned girl's education in the name of chastity and modesty. The study of the life of the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) also shows that he himself made special arrangements for the education and training of women. Afghan attitude towards female education is a sad reflection of their interpretation of Quran which is not in accordance to Islamic principles. The very fact that the first revelation upon the Holy Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) contained the commandment to 'read' speaks volumes of the emphasis Islam lays on education.

There may be discussion and debate over the content of secular education, the severance of boys and girls in school and class rooms, and other related matters; but banning girls from seeking education is denial of their Islamic and religious right to gain knowledge. These type of harsh decisions often are taken and misunderstood as Islamic teachings by other communities and reflect a negative image of religion. Hence the issue must be sensitized that what Afghan (Taliban) are banning female education and claiming it to be in accordance with Islam is not true rather Islam mandates education to all irrespective of gender be it Male or female.

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