

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF MUSLIM WOMEN COMPANIONS
(SAHABIYYAT) TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:
LESSONS FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM SOCIETIES**

By

Aishatu Abbas¹, Prof. Musa Ahmad Karkarku² and Abubakar Sani, PhD³

¹ Postgraduate (PhD) Student, Department of Islamic Studies,
Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina.

² & ³ Department of Islamic Studies,

Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, P.M.B 2218, Katsina.

Corresponding author's contact: aishatuabbas595gmail.com /+2348065946310

Abstract

It is observed that the role Muslim women have been playing since the early history of Islam has often been enormous. The history is full of stories and accounts of women and the significant roles they played in various generations. The accomplishments of contemporary Muslim women and the role they play rooted from the contributions of the noble women companions, whose pivotal roles in the society are incomparable to the new developments in the modern Muslim world. Though, the Muslim women have been playing roles over the generations, but they were left behind in socio-economic development in northern Nigeria despite the fact that women population is higher than that of men and the number is increasing day by day. There are also certain groups of people that still do not consider women as partners, rather as subordinate. As such, they did not give them the deserved socio-economic status. As Bawa (2019) observed that there were women who excelled in different expertise many years ago. But nowadays, they lack the courage and confidence of their predecessors. Hence, many of them are now living without any gainful economic occupation that is why many of them suffer. The researcher therefore, became attracted and influenced by the role the noble women companions played so as to serve as models to the cotemporary ones. The research used qualitative and observation methods to gather the information and sources were acknowledged where necessary. The scope of this study covers Muslims in the northern Nigerian society. An attempt was made to explain who the noble women were and the roles they played. It also presents various contributions of other Muslim women in the medieval and early modern history and spark further interest and enquiry into women's contribution to scholarship and their participation in economic development in the early Islamic world as well as in the modern time. It is hoped to benefit Muslims in general to realize the role Muslim women have been playing with a view to assist and empower them to emulate from the women companions. It is also hoped to benefit readers and researchers who might be interested to embark on research of this kind or continue from where this one has stopped.

Keywords: *Noble women companions (Sahabiyyat), role, Islamic feminism, contemporary women*

Introduction

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim. Wa Sallallahu ala Sayyidina Muhammad wa ala Alihi wa As'habihi wa Dhurriyyatihi wa man tabi'ahum bi ihsanin ila yaum al-deen.

From the advent of Islam up to the present day, Muslim women have been playing vital roles in shaping the history of Islam. However, their voices have not been adequately documented in the historical narratives especially in the primary sources and thus, were not part of the development of Islamic civilizations. The role of women in any society is enormous, some scholars report that women do participate in various fields of endeavour be it spiritual, social and economic and so on. Whatever role Muslim women played over the centuries, could be linked to the role the noble women companions (*Sahabiyyat*) played during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W). This could serve as models for the contemporary Muslim women. Among the multiple ahadith passed down through Aishah (R.A), Muslims get to know how the Prophet (S.A.W) treated women.

From Aishah's (R.A) ahadith, Muslims get the picture of the Prophet's (S.A.W) behaviour and manners, politeness, active listener, accommodative of all perspectives, including women's protest against violence conducted by men towards their wives. Because of her role, Aishah (R.A) is considered as a feminist by Muslim feminists. Islam was the first to place women respectfully, equally and fairly long before feminists from the west fight for justice for women. The feminists

started speaking about justice for women in the late 18th century before the ideology spread in the 20th century, while Aishah (R.A) had done so 13th centuries earlier. Based on this, it is believed that denying Aishah's role as a feminist inspiration is unhistoric. The fact is that, many of those who fought for women's rights reflected in the Islamic principles have been inspired by Aishah (R.A).

Role and rights of women before the advent of Islam

Kurshid (1969) reports that, the nomadic Bedouin Arab tribes and tribal law sometimes determined women's rights. While in the Christian and Jewish Southern Arabian Peninsula, Christian and Hebrew edicts determined women's rights. Under the customary law existing in Arabia before the coming of Islam, women, as a general rule, had virtually no legal status. Fathers sold their daughters into marriage for a price, the husband could terminate the union at will and women had little or no succession rights. There were also patterns of homicidal abuse of women and girls, including instances of killing female infants as they were considered a liability. The Glorious Qur'an states;

﴿ وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ ﴿٨﴾ بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ ﴿٩﴾ ﴾

And when the female infant shall be questioned. For what sin was she killed? (Q81: 8-9).

The above verse indicates that the Jahiliyyah Arabs used to bury their daughters alive, which could be due to the fear of increase in economic burden and the fear of humiliation frequently caused when girls were

captured by a hostile tribe. They were oppressed, considered inferior and unequal for many people, these are the first words that come to mind when thinking about anything related to women. These stereotypes confused cultural practices fail to recognize that Islam has empowered them with the most progressive rights since the 7th century which no civilization has ever done. Another verse of the Qur'an further states the following in respect of the attitudes of the *Jahiliyyah* Arabs towards women;

﴿ وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ﴿٥٨﴾ بِنَوْرَيْنِ مِنَ الْقَوَارِيرِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ ۚ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ ۗ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾ ﴾

And when the news of the birth of a female child is brought to any of them, his face becomes dark, and is filled with inward grief! He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that whereof he has been informed. Shall he keep her with dishonor or bury her in the earth. Certainly, evil is their decision (Q16:58-59).

Role and rights of women after the advent of Islam

Islam has promoted the condition and status of women and abolished all kinds of maltreatment and relegation posed on women during the dark ages, which no religion or civilization has ever done. It is Islam that prohibits man from marrying unlimited number of women. It promotes woman to the rank of mother, daughter, sister, aunt etc, a whole chapter of the Qur'an 'Surah al-Nisa' is dedicated to them. And quite a number of beautiful relationships between men and

women are explained. Also in other various verses of the Qur'an at different occasions, Allah (S.W.T) gives explanations about the importance and status of women and pointed out clearly how they complement each other as husband and wife. The same thing in the prophetic traditions, the Prophet (S.A.W) also promoted the condition and status of women. An example of the hadith of a man who came to the Prophet (S.A.W) is enough. "He asked him that who deserves his kindness? The Prophet (SAW) replied "your mother". He repeated this three times before he mentions father". Women are also praised alongside with men in the Qur'an as follows:

﴿ إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالسُّجُودَ وَالسُّجُودَاتِ وَالْمُحْسِنِينَ وَالْمُحْسِنَاتِ وَالْمُتَّقِينَ وَالْمُتَّقَاتِ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهَوْنَ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾ ﴾

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women... (Q33:35).

Another interesting example is the hadith that says: "Heaven is beneath the feet of your biological mothers". From the foregone discussions, it is clear that Muslims need not to be told that there is no any sort of promotion better than this. Lawal (2019) reports that Islam frees women from the then injustice, dictatorship and denial of rights to the extent that no woman in the first generation had ever enjoyed. Therefore, with the coming of Islam, people were educated, women were upgraded and they enjoyed rights and privileges. As a result, they excelled and contributed greatly in many endeavours.

Though, Islam has abolished all kinds of maltreatments to women, there are still some elements of the Jahiliyyah practices prevalent in the present time. For example, some Muslims feel sad when the birth of female children takes place in the family. The only difference is that the present Muslims do not bury them alive. In support of the above verse, it was narrated by Al-Mughirah that the Prophet (S.A.W) used to forbid *Qila wa Qaala* (sinful and useless talk like backbiting, or that you talk too much about others, asking too many questions (in disputed religious matters), wasting one's wealth (by extravagance), and to be undutiful to one's mother, and to bury the daughter's alive, and to prevent your favours to others i.e. (not to give the rights of others: such as Zakat and charity) and to beg of men or to ask others for something (except when it is unavoidable). Sahih al-Bukhari, 9/7292, P.395.

It is noted from the above Hadith, that the Prophet (S.A.W) has also emphasized the prohibition of burying female children alive (alongside other prohibitions). Despite all these humiliations and degradations, the women played some roles during the Jahiliyyah period. Al-Sayyid (1414 A.H) reports that, one of the most important roles women played was to give birth to male offspring. They also cooked meals, milked animals, washed clothes, prepared butter and cheese, spun wool and wove fabric for tents. However, some upper class among women in pre-Islamic Arabia usually had more rights than ordinary women and they were usually married into comfortable homes and were sometimes able to own property or

even inherit from relatives. In a number of modern Muslim countries, religion is politicized, including the mandatory wearing of *hijab* (Muslim women cover) in countries like Saudi Arabia. After the coming of the Prophet (S.A.W), Islam has raised the status of women and were treated with honour like their male counterparts.

Who are the Noble women companions (*Sahabiyyat*)?

When we talk of the noble women around the Prophet (S.A.W) what often comes to mind are the prominent historical figures among them. Each of these women had played some roles in the best possible and noblest way to the development of Islam. They excellently maintained necessary balance between males and their female counterparts. They stood as outstanding models in the history of humanity in a way that made them unrivalled right from the time of Prophet Adam (A.S). This important and critical aspect in the life of the Prophet (S.A.W), the message he carried out, the journey of Islam in its first step after the stark darkness in which the entire humanity was living, need to be documented for many reasons.

The noble women companions such as Sumayyah (R.A) who was the first female martyr in the early days of Islam, and Nusaybah (R.A) the female companion who fought valiantly with her family to protect the Prophet (S.A.W) in a battle were some of the examples of women companions who dedicated all they had in the cause of Islam. However, the wives and daughters of the Prophet (S.A.W) known as the *ahlul bayt* (Household

of the Prophet S.A.W) and virtually all Muslim women who happened to be around him have contributed in one way or the other to the spread of Islam. They were also some other female companions who contributed as well. One can hardly find such pioneering women throughout human history with such exemplary attributes as these first female adherents who followed the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) whole heartedly.

Some scholars like Qutb (2017) mentioned mother and suckling mothers of the Prophet (S.A.W) namely; Aminah bint Wahab and Halimah al-Sa'diyah, Barakah al-Habashiyyah and Fatimah bint Asad as certainly the noblest and the most honourable women around the Prophet (S.A.W). This is so because his life was connected to them and they have played significant roles. He probably said this because Aminah bint Wahab has carried the pregnancy of the seal of all the Prophets and the leader of Messengers. Halimah al-Sa'diyyah took care of the Prophet (S.A.W). She came to Makkah in company of some women, hoping to find babies to nurse and succeeded in getting the best among all the babies, the Prophet (S.A.W). She was so blessed with many things as a result of her association with him (S.A.W). After the death of Aminah (R.A), a freed slave of his parents Barakah known as Umm Ayman took the Prophet (S.A.W) back to Makkah. The Prophet (S.A.W) used to say; 'Umm Ayman is my second mother'.

Fatimah bint Asad was a good mother to him and she never discriminates between him and her biological

children. She showed him pleasant motherhood. She continuously played motherhood role to him until he became a youth and could stand on his own. The Prophet (S.A.W) was an embodiment of gratefulness and dutifulness. He buried her in his own garment when she died and he said about her; 'no one took care of me after Abu Talib better than her'. They all showed him great love and affection. All these compensated him for the pain of orphan hood and as an excellent consolation also. Allah (S.W.T.) says;

﴿ أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَىٰ ﴾

Did He not find you an orphan and gave you a refuge? (Q93:6).

Apart from the suckling mothers of the Prophet (S.A.W), there were other women companions who performed distinguished roles in different capacities. Al-Jada (nd) reports that the noble women were the best examples for the contemporary Muslim women to emulate. They were the shining stars in the galaxy of wonders in Islam. They possessed zeal and sacrificed their lives, properties and all what they had, such as family and left their territories, purely for the sake of Allah (S.W.T). They were no doubt the role models in their piety, devotion and commitment to the spread of Islam. There are many admirable women who helped to shape the role that present women strive to play in the society. These are the household of the Prophet (S.A.W), his wives are known as mothers of the believers such as Khadijah, his first wife, Aishah, Hafsa and Zainab (May Allah be pleased with them all).

Qutb also stated that the noble women have pleased Allah (S.W.T) so much so that He sent special greetings to Khadijah (R.A) who was the first person to accept Islam. She was a wealthy woman who had huge commercial holdings in addition to her being beautiful, very famous and pure mannered. She also showed kindness to the weak and poor Muslims, she was very generous to them and was the first mother of the faithful in every sense. She enjoyed an envious status that Aishah (R.A) was strongly jealous of her because the Prophet (S.A.W) frequently spoke of her and always remembered her days with him.

Aishah (R.A) said the Prophet (S.A.W) rarely went out of the house without mentioning Khadijah (R.A) and praising her. She also said; “one day, he spoke of her and I grew very jealous and I told him; was she not an old lady whom Allah (S.W.T) has replaced for you with a better woman? He got angry and said; ‘no, by Allah! Allah did not replace her with any better woman. For she believed in me when people disbelieved, she consoled me with her wealth when people denied me their money and Allah blessed me with children from her while I was denied children from other women”. Aishah (R.A) then said; and I said in my mind, ‘Never shall I speak unfavorably of her again’. The death of Khadijah (R.A) was one of the saddest experiences of the Prophet (S.A.W).

Noble women companions’ contribution to scholarship

Aishah (R.A) was also his wife, mother of the believers, a scholar and

a jurist, a true “feminist” and a defender of women and religion. She had a wonderful retentive memory that the Prophet (S.A.W) urged the Muslim community to learn half of their religion from her. He has repeatedly enjoined men and women to seek for knowledge and emphasized the above verses in the following traditions, he said; “Pursuit of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim male and female”, “Seek for knowledge even if it be in China”. This declaration was very clear and largely implemented by Muslims throughout history and they have echoed many times in his reports. After his death, men and women travelled to learn from her because she was one of the most learned scholars of Islam. She has narrated over two thousand ahadith.

Hafsah bint Umar bin al- Khattab (R.A) was equally a scholar, a companion and a custodian of the compiled copy of the Qur’an. Others in this category include Safiyyah bint Huyayy, Zainab bint Jahsh, Umm Salamah and Umm Habibah bint Abu Sufyan (R.A) among others. His daughters were also among the noble women who deserved special mention; they include Fatimah al-Zahra, Zainab the elder daughter of the Prophet (S.A.W), Umm Kulthum and Ruqayyah. Other women companions who contributed immensely towards the development of Islam include Umm Atiyyah and Umm Imarah (R.A) among others. These women did not confine themselves to the corners of their homes nor occupy themselves with trivial matters, because they were women and thought that they did not

have anything to support the religion, but they strived hard and supported the Prophet (S.A.W) in all respects.

They have roles peculiar to their nature as could be seen from the life of women companions and other pious ones from the early Muslim generations. Thus, recognition of female scholarship, their participation in the academia and economic activities has been encouraged and practiced right from the early days of Islam. For instance, the Prophet (S.A.W) used to teach women from behind the veil and they asked him questions related to their issues and he responded and guided them. Sometimes they used to enquire through his noble wives. Al-Jada (nd) has classified their roles into religious, moral, social, political and economic. He said on religious matters, their first duty was to worship Allah as He commands, as it is the purpose of their creation as the Qur'an declared;

﴿ وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾ ﴾

And I created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Q51:56).

This is irrespective of gender; they are expected to discharge their duties to Allah (S.W.T) like men sometimes with slight differences considering their biological nature. Women also play significant role in the establishment of sound social morals by way of inviting others to do good and shun evil. Indeed, biographies of the wives of the Prophet (S.A.W) are excellent examples of the significance of women in the development of Islam which the present Muslims should emulate.

Moreover, some of the Prophet's household members such as Aishah, Hafsa Umm Salamah and Fatimah (R.A) became famous transmitters of Hadith and key public figures in the early years of Islam. Upon his death, his companions including some of his wives compiled his sayings and actions to assist Muslims understand how to lead pious lives along the model of the Prophet (S.A.W). Because of their unique access to him, they were important figures in hadith transmission, solidifying their historic contributions to Islamic law.

Social role of noble women companions

Desai (2002) has classified the roles Muslim women played into three: their role as wives, mothers and towards the society. These aspects were emphasized by the Prophet (S.A.W) in a Hadith where he says;

'And the best of women are those who are best to their husbands. To each of such women is set down reward equivalent to the reward of one thousand martyrs'.

In seeking for knowledge which is the backbone of everything in life, the Muslim women were not excluded and were even enjoined alongside men to seek for it no matter the distance. The first five verses of the Glorious Qur'an affirm this in the following words;

﴿ اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿٢﴾ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٥﴾ ﴾

﴿ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٣﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٤﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٥﴾ ﴾

Read! Read in the Name of your Lord who created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most

Generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not (Q96:1-5).

Muslim women were active participants in the cohesive functioning of the society. They expressed their opinions freely and their advices were sought. Some of them actively participated in the battlefield and they nursed the Muslim fighters who were wounded. They also traded openly in the market places so much that Umar bin al-Khattab (R.A) appointed Shaffa' bint Abdullah as the administrator of the famous market of Madinah. She was equally very intelligent and learned. Women participated in public affairs, scholarship and teaching. To continue to uphold this tradition, they were also encouraged to participate in improving, serving and leading the different aspects of the community that suit their nature.

Socially, **as wives**, the noble women play significant roles in the homes as married women as they obey their husbands, bear and train their children. Their foremost role is to be married and maintain their matrimonial homes. Therefore, motherhood is one of the distinguished roles restricted to women only. Allah (S.W.T) gives mothers a high status and elevates their position in the family. The Qur'an mentions all the difficulties and sacrifices mothers undergo in bearing children as follows;

﴿ وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَيَّ

وَهْنٍ وَفِصْلَهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ

إِلَى الْمَصِيرِ ﴿١٤﴾

And We enjoined on the person (to be good to his/her parents: in travail upon travail did his/her mother bear his/her and in years twain was his/weaning: (hear the command "Show gratitude to Me and your parents: to Me is (your final) Goal (Q31:14).

It is therefore noted from the above verse, that Muslims are enjoined to treat mothers with love, respect, obedience and be grateful to them. There are other verses of the Qur'an that urge Muslims to be grateful to their parents immediately after being grateful to Allah the Most High. Emphasizing the importance of mothers, Imam al-Nawawi reported that the Prophet (S.A.W) has said; "Heaven lies under the feet of mothers". On another occasion, a man repeatedly asked the Prophet (S.A.W); "Who amongst the people is the worthiest of my good companionship? Each time, the Prophet (S.A.W) replied, "Your mother", When the man asked for the fourth time, he replied, "Your father."

As mothers, they are entrusted with the task of nurturing the children. They build a positive character worthy of emulation right from home. Motherly attention entails being with children closely, breastfeeding them, cleaning the house, preparing meals, washing the clothes, dishes, toilets and training the children. This is a collective responsibility of the two parents as the Prophet (S.A.W) enjoins; "All of you are shepherds and all of you will be asked of your flock". As noble wives, they took very good care of their husbands, respect them and were faithful to them.

According to Malami (2006), apart from the above roles performed by the noble women in their matrimonial homes, there were other roles they played in the society. They enhanced the living condition and moral development of the society. Such as, through teaching and nursing. Some of them engage in economic pursuits within the dictates of Islam. They earn wealth and control it as they wish. Some women became teachers, scholars, warriors and farmers. Others engage in petty trading to earn a living or any kind of business that suit their nature, the same thing with other women of different periods of history.

Noble women participation in economic activities

The right of ownership and business contract for women has been decreed by Islam. According to Islamic law, woman has the right to acquire and dispose of her wealth; own estates or other properties are fully acknowledged. In the early days of Islam, some noble women participated in various economic fields to earn money. Ibn al-Jihaz said that women use to appear publicly in a decent dress and nobody decried that or reproached it. There were women farmers during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W). Sahl bn Sa'ad, a companion of the Prophet (S.A.W) mentioned a woman who had her own farm and use to cultivate dates and barley to feed the companions with it after Friday prayer.

Nadvi, S. A. (1365AH) mentions that Asma' bint Abubakar (R.A) reported that when she was married to Zubayr, they did not have wealth or any property. The Prophet (S.A.W) gave

them some land about two miles away from their home; she use to farm and transport the produce herself. She also mentioned that one day she was coming back with dates on her head; she met the Prophet (S.A.W) together with some people from Madinah. He asked her to ride with him on his camels' back while she was carrying a sack of dates on her head. Umm al-Darda' also worked on the date farm.

Therefore, it is apparent that farming was independently done by women and they transported farm produce. If they had modern trucks, trains and ships, they would have used them rather than carrying the goods on their heads. There were also women companions who engaged in trading, Khadijah (R.A) was a good example. Other women such as Khaulah, Lakhmia, Thaqlah and bint Makrama traded in perfumes. Khaulah once said to the Prophet (SAW); I am a woman who buys and sells things. Then she asked several questions about buying and selling and the Prophet (S.A.W) guided and responded.

Nadvi further states that the wife of Abdullahi bn Mas'ud (R.A) met her expenses by manufacturing and selling handicrafts. Saudah (R.A) the Prophet's wife was an expert in tanning skin and she sold her tanned goods to trading caravans and local men throughout Madinah. She equally sells perfume, which she mixed with the sweat of the Prophet (S.A.W), on enquiry why she mixed her perfume with the sweat of the Prophet (S.A.W), she said the smell lasts long. Zainab bint Jahsh who was married to the Prophet (S.A.W) by Allah's decree, spent the rest of her life

helping the poor and the needy. She was skilled in tanning skins also and piercing pearls which she sold and spent the profits on the poor. She was reported to be the most charitable among the Prophets' wives and was the first one to follow him after his death. Aishah (R.A) termed her as a refugee for widows and orphans.

Sulaiman (2000) stated that in the field of medicine, there were Muslim women surgeons, for instance Rufaidah Aslamiyyah was an expert in medicine and surgery, and she used to tend to the sick and the wounded in the battlefields. He reports that her tent was equipped with surgical and first aid equipment. He reports that when he was injured in the Battle of Trench, the Prophet (S.A.W) transferred him to her tent for medical care. Similarly, Rubayyi bint Mu'awwidh bn Afra' also tend to the wounded and the sick. She transported the dead and supplied water to the thirsty soldiers in many battles. Other women experts in medicine and surgery were Humairah bint Jahsh, Mu'adha, Laila, Umaimah, Umm Zayd and Umm Sulaim and many others. These women would have been trained in nursing and in medical schools to take care of the sick. And if the modern ambulance would have been in existence, they would have been transporting them to the nearest hospitals.

Noble women participation in political activities

Abdullahi (1992) mentions that there were also some women companions who played significant role in the fields of politics and scholarship. For example, the Prophet (S.A.W)

consulted Umm Salamah when he negotiated the treaty of Hudaibiyyah and she also gave a very good advice. Many companions were angry at the weak terms of the treaty; it was Umm Salamah whose counsel helped ease the situation. Fatima bint Qais was a very able and intelligent scholar. When Umar (R.A) died, the selection committee consulted her on the selection of the next caliph. The noble women not only gave their opinion on various problems but also criticized state matters and participated in the evaluation and reckoning of some of the caliph's actions.

It is commonly believed that freedom of speech originated recently from the west, this is no more than a myth. Islam introduced equal rights and freedom of expression for women over fourteen hundred years ago. The incident of (*sadaq*) dowry during the caliphate-ship of Umar (R.A) is well known. When he decided to fix the dowry, an old woman protested that he had no right to decide about it and he agreed. It was reported that Dawud bin Husain, a companion of the Prophet (S.A.W) used to take Qur'anic and regular lessons from Umm Sa'ad Jamilah bint As'ad Ansariyyah, daughter of As'ad bin Rabi' who fought in the battle of Badr and attained martyrdom in the battle of Uhud. Nadwi (2020) stated that, Amrah bint Abdurrahman was one of the prominent women of second generation and was one of those who gave legal opinions which overrode the views of other authorities in Madinah after the companions. She was the first authority to give three legal issues dealing with the prohibition against digging up graves,

the ban on selling unripe fruit and the effect of crop damage on the sale of agricultural produce.

Malami (2006) again reports that in one case, she reversed the decision of her nephew to cut off the hand of a man who stole some iron rings. Her authority was accepted on matters such as business transactions and major punishments (*hudud*). Imam Malik considered her as a legal precedent for details on Hajj. Khansa' bint Amr was equally a woman of great stature and a poetess of a great fame. According to Ibn Athir all poets of fame unanimously agreed that no poetess ever equaled her and the Prophet (S.A.W) appreciated her verses. Umm Ayman, Safiyyah, Muridiyyah etc were also well known poetesses at the time of the Prophet (S.A.W).

Malami further stated that there are many examples of noble women who actively participated in jihad wars during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W). One famous woman companion Nasibah, popularly called Umm Imarah demonstrated courage and fearlessness in the battle of Uhud. She was courageous and a brave fighter. She also participated in the great battle of Uhud for emergency care, supplied water for the soldiers and dressed the wounded. When the Jihad was tense, the soldiers fled to the vicinity of the Prophet (S.A.W), it was Umm Imarah who rushed to protect him and she had also succeeded in killing the unbeliever who killed her son. She was among those who circled and protected the Prophet (S.A.W) against the enemies with her spears and arrows. She gave

cover to the Prophet (S.A.W) with her own body against the on-coming enemy.

Umm Imarah also attended the battles of Hudaibiyyah, Khaybar, Hunayn and pledge of Ridwan with the Prophet (S.A.W). She fought relentlessly with her sword despite the wounds she sustained in the battle of Badr. The Prophet (S.A.W) used to say; "on the day of Uhud whenever I turned right or left, I saw her fighting to protect me". She once asked the Prophet (S.A.W); "I see that men have all the privileges while women are not mentioned in anything". The answer to her question was revealed in verses of the Qur'an; "For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women..." (Q33:33). Nadvi (1365 AH) stated that Umm Hakim, wife of Ikrimah bin Abi Jahl participated in the war against the Romans. Asma' bint Yazid fought and killed nine enemy soldiers in the battle of Uhud.

Umm Sulaim, mother of Anas, went to the battle with a dagger. When the Muslims suffered a partial defeat in the battle of Uhud, there was some confusion in the Muslim camp. Then Safiyya bint Abdulmutallib left Madinah armed with a spear and aroused a sense of shame among those who were returning from the battle. She angrily asked; did you leave the Prophet behind? Nadvi added that Sumayyah was also among the women warriors during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W.) who participated in the Jihad and she fought severely.

She was old but strong and firm in faith. When Abu Jahl noticed her

strength, he threatened and waved his spear in her face but she only smiled. He became annoyed and moved to stab her in the abdomen but it slipped and pierced her in the private parts, killing her. She died as a martyr while Abu Jahl is covered with shame! It should be a pride to all women that the first martyr in Islam was a woman. From the foregone discussion, it is interesting and important to note that there are no instances in Islamic history to show that in early Islam, there were any mixed social, political or religious gatherings despite the fact that these noble women are permitted under certain circumstances to go out for satisfying their necessary needs, which they did it with caution.

Contributions of Muslim women of later generations

Mashi (2015) stated that in the past generation of Muslims, women also played vital roles in educating their children right from home. He mentioned that mothers of the famous four Muslim jurists were scholars of their time. He stated that the wife of the author of Mukhtasar al- Khalil gave a *fatwa* on the position of a person who swallowed gold to prevent his brother from inheriting it. She was contacted to provide solution and she said; *wa wuqira an malin kathura, wa lau bi shahidin wa yaminan*. He added that scholars like Shaikh Usmanu Danfodiyo, Shaikh Abdulqadir al-Jilani, Shaikh Ahmad Tijjani, Shaikh Ibrahim Nyass al-Kaulakhi, Shaikh Dahiru Usman Bauchi and Shaikh Nasiru Kabara Kano among others learnt the Qur'an and other Islamic sciences from their mothers.

He also noted that the Muslim women participated in scholarship and academic pursuit and mentioned that the first existing and still functioning University and a mosque established in 859 AC was founded by a woman - Fatima al- Fihri in Morocco. Which even the Guinness Book of World Records recognized as the oldest continuously operating institution of higher education in the world. Also Nana Asma'u and Khadijah, the daughters of Shaikh Usmanu Danfodiyo were renowned scholars of their time. They contributed a lot towards the development of women education. The Sokoto caliphate literature is full of their vast contributions in the field of scholarship, where Nana Asma'u established the *Yantaru* movement to educate women and children. They wrote and translated many books into different languages such as Arabic, Fulfulde and Hausa.

Similarly, in Morocco, the tradition of women scholars has been encouraged by the government. King Muhammad has enlisted women to become religious guides or *Murshidats* as a means of countering violence and encouraging tolerance. China is also a home to a long tradition of female *Imamah* and scholarship including Henan where about one hundred female *Imamat* continue to preach and provide guidance. In America, the legacy of Muslim women scholars seems to be encouraging. They produced many notable Muslim women in academics. Worldwide, there is growing number of Muslim women at all levels and fields of knowledge.

According to al-Sha'rawi (2005), women also became important figures in mysticism; in fact, one of the most important founders of Sufi thought was Rabi'ah al-Adawiyyah. This 8th century woman from Basra was largely recognized as the first person to express the new-standard Sufi belief in Holy Love. Her poems, dedicated to a mystical union with Allah the Highest, alongside her model as saintly person, have made her one of the most revered Sufis in history. Like al-Adawiyyah, other women in Islamic history have turned to Sufism to give them religious community and authority spiritual strength. This gave rise to scholarly Muslim women like Nana Asma'u and Khadijah daughters of Shaikh Usmanu Danfodiyo, Ruqayyah bint Ibrahim Nyass and Bilkisu Ibrahim Nyass. There are other contemporary scholars like Aisha B. Lemu and Maryam Jamilah who contributed immensely to Islamic scholarship.

From the above, it is evident that there were many incidents in the early days of Islam which show that the noble women were not confined indoors. They did go out to attend necessary outdoor duties. However, one point to be made clear is that those outdoor activities of women were not confined to entertainment or to accumulate wealth, luxuries and material things but only to spread and promote Islam and as a matter of necessity in some instances. They were meant to build the family properly but not to establish equality with men as some people think.

They strongly believe in Allah and His Prophet (S.A.W), their reliance in

Allah (S.W.T) was complete, their attachment to the temporary world was none, their love for Him the Most High was sincere and happiness for them was to be in good relationship with Him. Some roles are better than others but no one climbs the ladder of success without facing difficulty along the way. This should be agreed in every matter of life and we must do so in matters of religion as well. Difficulties are undeniable while women play their role as women, so Muslims must turn to Allah (S.W.T) and remember that life is a bridge to the Hereafter and no one builds a house on a bridge.

Lessons for the contemporary Muslim women

The ease and grace with which the wives of the Prophet (S.A.W) carried out their role as models were something that the present Muslim women should emulate. The noble women achieved the possible highest degree of virtue. All mothers of the believers were of very noble character and conduct and were very active in observing their religious duties as well as politics and businesses. They were so courageous in the battlefield that their services like giving medical aid to the soldiers, nursing the wounded and providing food and water to the thirsty need to be made known to Muslims especially women. They helped to spread the message of Islam and were proved by many of the instances that influenced other non-Muslims to convert to Islam. There are many instances that will interest and encourage the present women to get more knowledge about these great women, with a view to emulate from them so as to contribute meaningfully

to the productive economy and also for self-reliance.

In addition, delving deeply into the role of the noble women, one realizes that they did not define themselves by only one role and were not confined indoors without rendering any support to Islam by just being as women. Their virtues of faithfulness, confidence, generosity, piety, loyalty, persistence, kindness and courage defined these noble women as role models in Islamic society. Their role and contributions to the community are important and distinguished. They also participated fully in the promotion of Islam and societal affairs and build a just society with support, courage, zeal and great faith. Therefore, contemporary Muslim women should emulate from them rather than bow to the expectations and pressures imposed upon them by the society today.

It is observed that one of the diseases of this contemporary age with all its achievements and setbacks, with its scientific breakthrough and cultural defects is that a woman has been turned to a 'doll' or something like a doll in all sense of the word. This is because the advertisement of many products in the mass media, a woman is disgustingly, cheaply and flimsily dragged into it even if the product is just a necktie that men wear. This is in addition to her being used as an instrument of sexual arousal. This is just an example of how some contemporary women have been reduced to a cheap commodity. There are other examples of this and are facilitated through satanic hands.

It is also unfortunate that this horrible disease has crept into the midst of the Muslims under the guise of cultural inter-relation and in total disregard to purity and distinguishing values and among other reasons. It is also astonishing that reawakening Muslims should dedicate a lot of their intellectual and practical efforts to help man develop his intellectual, spiritual and physical qualities while little attention is paid to women issues. This is in spite of their knowledge that the woman is the foundation of the family structure and the indispensable factor in putting the children properly on the right direction. If the family is endowed with a pious, believing, educative, understanding and hardworking woman, it will no doubt produce strong members of Muslim community.

Conclusion

From the above discussions, it is noted that in practice, the noble women were not restricted to house role only at the time of the Prophet (S.A.W) and his companions. For if women were totally forbidden to go out of their houses, men would not have been asked to lower their gaze. If women also do not go out, where is the needed instruction for men and women to follow certain precautions? For example, to lower their gaze, guard their modesty and to put their outer garments over their bosoms when abroad as the Qur'an commands. However, this should be done with cautions as outlined by the Shari'ah. Surah al-Ahzab (Q33:35) addresses; the Muslim men and women, the believing men and women... This indicates that, both

men and women are reassured that they will be judged not by their gender but by the merit of their deeds.

Women were endowed with vast talents, unlimited potentialities for intellectual development; they perform several other roles beyond that. During the time of the Prophet (S.A.W) some women companions became scholars, warriors, medical doctors and mothers through piety, dedication, determination and patience. It is highly imperative to say that the above women received their knowledge from either their husbands or their fathers, relations in their homes as prescribed by the Shari'ah and had applied it positively. The research finds that the lives of these women companions had profound impact not only in their generation, but also on the contemporary Muslim society and even subsequent generations to come. Therefore, there is the need for women to be empowered and be given chance to contribute meaningfully to the nation's economy. Also women entrepreneurs need to be supported with fund and equipment for their various endeavors.

Recommendations

The following recommendations may help improve the life of Muslim women to succeed in building a strong and virile society:

- The government, federal, states and local should empower women so as to contribute meaningfully to the economy, especially in northern Nigeria where the population of women is higher than that of men.

- Muslim scholars should enlighten women on their duties and status. This will help in changing and shaping peoples' view on them.
- Muslim women should stop competing with rather, should be aware that men and women are partners and helpers to each other. They should also try to stand on their status and stop imitating the west.
- Women traders' cooperative societies should be formed, empowered and supported by the government and other able private organizations- NGO and individuals. This will aid in boosting their businesses.
- Women should accept and work in line with modernization, through obtaining and maintaining bank account, accessing soft loans and other supportive government programmes designed for small and medium entrepreneurs.
- Government should also assist in addressing other women problems such as providing easy access to quality education, adequate health care facilities and so on to enhance their productivity.

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