Can Women Participate In Jihaad?

Allaah (swt) has made Jihaad an obligation upon the Muslim men; however the issue as to whether women may participate in Jihaad requires clarification.

The Muslim women during the time of Rasool-Ullaah (saw) witnessed the men engaging in Jihaad, physically fighting the kuffaar and they saw their willingness to sacrifice their lives for the sake Allaah (saw).

Abu Hurayrah (ra) narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (saw) said: "I swear by the One in whose hand my soul is, I wish that I would fight for the sake of Allaah (i.e. Jihaad) and get martyred, then return and fight again and get martyred, then return and fight again and get martyred." [Al-Bukhaari & Muslim]

Hence it is not surprising that the women too longed to achieve martyrdom.

This desire to earn the great rewards that Allaah (saw) bestows upon the Mujaahideen was demonstrated by one of The Mother of the Believers, Umm Salamah (ra), when she took part in the battle of Khaybar. She said "I wish that Allaah had made jihaad obligatory for us as He did for men, and that we would receive the same reward." However Allaah (swt) revealed the following aayah, "And wish not for things in which Allaah has made some of you to excel others. For men there is reward for what they have earned, (and likewise) for women there is reward for what they have earned, and ask Allaah of His Bounty. Surely, Allaah is All-Knower of everything." [EMQ 4: 32]

It is also narrated by 'Aa-ishah (ra) that she asked Rasool-Ullaah (saw): "O Allaah's Apostle! We consider Jihaad as the best deed. Should we not fight in Allaah's Cause?" He said, "The best Jihaad (for women) is Hajj-Mabroor (i.e. Hajj which is done according to the Prophet's tradition and is accepted by Allaah)." [Al-Bukhaari]

These narrations indicate that there is no Jihaad of Qitaal i.e. fighting for the women except in certain circumstances, namely defensive situations.

If the wife of a Mujaahid stays at home and looks after the affairs of her husband, she receives the same reward as him. Asmaa bint Yazeed (ra) asked Rasool-Ullaah (saw) on behalf of the women, "When they (men) go for Jihaad, we are left at home to protect their property and look after the family. Are we not also equally deserving of reward from Allaah?" Rasool-Ullaah (saw) replied: 'Please go and tell the ladies whom you represent that by doing your duty by your husbands in a pleasant manner, keeping in mind what will make him happy, and following them faithfully, you will please Allaah (swt) greatly and He will give you the same reward as has been promised to the men.'

An excellent example is Sohaila, the wife of Farrookh, who returning from Jihaad after 30 years, discovered that his wife had spent all the funds (30,000 deenaars) that he had left her before leaving, on their son Rabi'ah ibn 'Abdur-Rahmaan's, education. He became one of the top seven scholars in al-Madeenah al-Munawwarah. Among Sheikh Rabi'ah's students were Imaam Maalik, Imaam Sufyaan ath-Thawree and Imaam Layth bin Sa'd.

However it is also well documented that Rasool-Ullaah (saw) always took one of his wives with him to the battlefield. Narrated by 'Aa-ishah (ra): "Whenever the Prophet intended to proceed on a journey, he used to draw lots amongst his wives and would take the one upon whom the lot fell. Once, before setting out for Jihaad, he drew lots amongst us and the lot came to me; so I went with the Prophet; and that happened after the revelation of the verse of Hijab (i.e. veiling)." [Al-Bukhaari]

In al-Bukhaari it has also been narrated on the authority of Yazeed bin Humzuh that Najda wrote to Ibn 'Abbaas (ra) inquiring about five things, two of which were regarding women and Jihaad. Najda wrote: "...Tell me whether the Messenger of Allaah (saw) took women to participate with him in Jihaad; (if he did), whether he allotted them a regular share from the booty..."

Ibn Abbaas (ra) wrote in his reply: "...You have written asking me whether the Messenger of Allaah (saw) took women with him to participate in Jihaad. He did take them to the battle and sometimes he fought along with them. They would treat the wounded and were given a reward from the booty, but he did not assign any regular share for them..."

The Mothers of the Believers (ra) and the wives of the companions (ra) did not set out to the battlefield with the intention to physically fight the kuffaar but went to carry out the roles Allaah (swt) and His Messenger (saw) had assigned to them.

Role of Women in the Battlefield

There are many evidences contained within the books of ahaadeeth outlining the duties that the courageous Muslim women carried out in the battlefield during the time of Rasool-Ullaah (saw), some of which are given below.

Nursing the wounded

Narraed by Abu Hazim, Sahl bin Sa'd was asked about the wounds of Allaah's Apostle (saw). He said: "Faatimah, the daughter of Allaah's Apostle used to wash the wounds, and 'Ali ibn Abee Taalib used to pour water from a shield. When Faatimah saw that the water aggravated the bleeding, she took a piece of a mat, burnt it, and inserted its ashes into the wound so that the blood was congealed (and bleeding stopped). His canine tooth was broken on that day, and face was wounded, and his helmet was broken on his head." [Al-Bukhaari]

Providing water for the thirsty

Narraed by an-Rabee' bint Mu'auwidh (ra): "We used to take part in holy battles with the Prophet by providing the people with water and serving them and bringing the killed and the wounded back to Madeenah." [Al-Bukhaari]

Preparing food for the Mujaahideen

Narraed by Anas (ra): "On the day (of the battle) of Uhud when (some) people retreated and left the Prophet, I saw 'Aa-ishah bint Abee Bakr and Umm Sulaym, with their robes tucked up so that the bangles around their ankles were visible hurrying with their water skins (in another narration it is said, "carrying the water skins on their backs"). Then they would pour the water in the mouths of the people, and return to fill the water skins again and came back to pour water in the mouths of the people again." [Al-Bukhaari]
meat into pieces and put it in an earthenware (cooking) pot, and returned to Allaah’s Apostle. My wife said, “Do not disgrace me in front of Allaah’s Apostle and those who are with him.” So I went to him and said to him secretly, “O Allaah’s Apostle! I have slaughtered a she-animal of ours, and we have ground a Sa of barley which was with us. So please come, you and another person along with you.” The Prophet raised his voice and said, “O people of the trench! Jaabir has prepared a meal, so let us go.” Allaah’s Apostle said to me, “Don’t put down your earthenware meat-pot (from the fireplace) or bake your dough till I come.” So I came (to my house) and Allaah’s Apostle came too, proceeding before the people. When I came to my wife, she said, “May Allaah do so-and-so to you.” I said, “I have told the Prophet of what you said.” Then she brought out to him (i.e. the Prophet) the dough and he spat in it and invoked Allaah’s Blessings in it. Then he proceeded towards our earthenware meat-pot and spat in it and invoked for Allaah’s Blessings in it. Then he said (to my wife). Call a lady-baker to bake along with you and keep on taking out scoops from your earthenware meat-pot, and do not put it down from its fireplace.” They were one-thousand (who took their meals), and by Allaah they all ate, and when they left the food and went away, our earthenware pot was still bubbling (full of meat) as if it had not decreased, and our dough was still being baked as if nothing had been taken from it.” [Al-Bukhaari]

Handing weapons to the Mujaahideen

Narrated by Umm Ziyaad (ra) “In the Khaybar campaign, myself and five other women reached the battlefield. Prophet Muhammad (saw), having learnt this, sent for us. He (saw) said with anger, ‘Who permitted you to come over here? Who brought you to this place?’ We said, ‘O Nabie of Allaah (swt)! We know knitting and we have some medicines with us. We shall help the Mujaahideen by supplying them with arrows, by attending to them when they are sick, and by preparing food for them.’ Prophet Muhammad (saw) permitted us to stay.” [Abu Daawood]

Encouraging the Mujaahideen to stand firm

During the battle of Uhud, Safiyyah bint Abdul Muttalib (ra), the aunt of the Prophet (saw), stood up and waved a lance in the enemies faces saying, “Are you trying to defeat the Prophet?, may Allaah bless him and grant him peace.”

And also during the Battle of Uhud, when Nusaybah bint Ka’b’s son Abdullaah was severely wounded, she bandaged his wound and commanded him “Go and fight the people my son.” Upon hearing this The Prophet Muhammad (saw) smiled and said “Who can endure what you can endure, Umm ‘Umarah!”

The Jihaad of Today

Today we are living in the absence of the Khilaafah (Islamic state), therefore Muslims are not in a position to wage offensive Jihaad in order to extend the borders of the Khilaafah. The Jihaad of today exists in the occupied lands (Daar ul-Ghasab) where our dear Muslim brothers and sisters are in a situation where they have no choice but to fight defensive Jihaad. Therefore, women must also participate in physical fighting when placed in a defensive position since it is an obligation upon a woman to defend her honour, life, family, land, property, wealth and Deen. The daughter or wife would not require the permission of neither her parents nor her husband in this case.

She may do whatever it takes to defend herself, if she finds herself in such a position, as our sisters in Daar ul-Ghasab do today (e.g. Palestine, Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kashmir etc.). Similarly, Muslim women throughout history have at some point, found them selves in a defensive situation, such as Nusaybah (ra) and Umm Sulaym (ra) during the battles of Uhud and Hunayn respectively. Those women who find themselves outside of the area in which the fighting is taking place, have an obligation to support the Jihaad verbally and financially.