

Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam (d. 2007) and His Visions and Philosophical Thoughts on Education: An Inductive Approach

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Abstract

Education– no one doubts – essentially represents a strong instrument that is used in the process of executing revivalist projects, but also ensuring a development and advancement of people both at individual and societal level. That is why reformers pay great attention to knowledge which they, more than arguably, any other constituency of people, regard as the most potent weapon that facilitates the success of reform missions. The basic and common belief is that people find themselves in whatever deplorable condition and state of backwardness owing to their neglect of knowledge, which then makes them trapped in the shackles of ignorance. As a result, stressing the value of education and demonstrating this through operational initiatives by way of sensitizing, reawakening, enlightening and orienting people via various methods and approaches commensurate with the existing realities are all considered as steps toward liberating people from the grip of ignorance which has enslaved them until they rise and decisively fight it. This article highlights and appraises the educational views, thoughts and philosophy of Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam (d. 2007), one of Nigeria's most prominent Muslim reformers and most influential scholars. The article relies chiefly on the recorded speeches of the scholar in which he articulated his views during public occasions such as weekly Friday sermons, mosque lessons, public lectures or private study circles, which then circulated among larger Muslim audience. The essay finds out that Ja'far's views on knowledge permeate both religious and Western education which he felt that society must standardize before it develops.

Keywords: education, Ja'far, ideas, philosophies, thoughts, views

One of the most visible features of a developed society is its advancement in education and the attention it pays to it. Backwardness in education often translates into underdevelopment and hardly a nation rises when it is educationally handicapped, and in fact it will remain tied with bedevilling challenges and multifaceted problems. In other words, people find themselves in whatever deplorable condition and state of retrogression owing to their neglect of knowledge and education, which then makes them trapped in the shackles of ignorance and its attendant consequences. It is wholeheartedly believed and

accepted that in the modern world, developed countries are qualified and identified as such due to their advancement in education which is visibly evidenced by their sophistication in areas related to technology, security, politics and governance, medical and health services and other issues related to nation-building. Muslim reformers often portray moral, economic and socio-political challenges which societies face as consequences and by-products of ignorance or at least lack of strong concern toward either Islamic knowledge or Western education, or both. Thus, education in the Muslim tradition transcends the material aspects of it and includes the spiritual which is chiefly part of religious injunctions. Therefore, as Muslims acquire religious knowledge for spiritual and moral purposes, they also ideally pay attention to secular knowledge for reasons of perfecting life and building successful societies. Given that the Muslim world still lags behind in terms of quality education, Muslim reformers and scholars often articulate ways which they think have prospects of salvaging their people in this regard.

Shaykh Ja'far Mahmud Adam (d. 2007) was a famous Nigerian Muslim scholar who, according to one writer, had "attracted millions of followers" (Anonymous, 2012, p. 18). Ja'far was assassinated in April 2007 while leading Muslim faithful in *fajr* (dawn) prayer at his mosque in Kano, and this had opened a new chapter of posthumous attraction to his career to an extent of almost becoming an object of "canonization" as one American scholar suggests (Thurston, 2016, p. 245). Ja'far's career and mission have made great impacts and left an indelible mark on Nigeria's religious and socio-political milieu as well as other parts of the Hausa speaking world. His ideas and views which are contained in his teachings and public addresses enjoy wide circulation in his areas of clerical jurisdiction. The scholar's ideas on education have remained remarkably relevant in the contemporary situations and existing realities of knowledge and educational realms of many third-world countries including Nigeria. This study highlights the views and thoughts of Shaykh Ja'far on education which he articulated in various public platforms during occasions of weekly Friday sermons, mosque lessons, public lectures or private study circles, and thereafter circulated among larger Muslim audience.

The study departs from the existing works on Shaykh Ja'far which focus on aspects of his career (Brigaglia, 2012a) and his biography in broader terms (Labaran, 2008; Mabea, 2008; Rijiyar-Lemo, 2011) or studies that specifically highlight his engagements with Islamic groups and organizations (Brigaglia, 2012b). Although briefly reflecting the preoccupation of an article published jointly by two Nigerian academics on the contribution of Ja'far toward the development of Islamic education in Kano (Nadir & Inda 2016), this article does not focus on the history of Ja'far's career, public platforms, teaching centres, religious loci and missionary sites where he made his assertions. The essay rather attempts to distillate the crude articulations of Ja'far on the theme of education which due to their juristic hints, seem to have universal significance. The article traces and excavates Ja'far's philosophical ideas on

knowledge through his recorded oral speeches and public presentations which were multiply reproduced in different file formats and circulated among Hausa speaking audience in all parts of the world, thanks to the unprecedented proliferation of the internet and social media.

After the introduction, Ja'far's position and vision on knowledge is highlighted, taking into cognizance his broader perception of education and the high regard and value he attached to it. The article further appraises Ja'far's view on Islamic education before it moves to examine his thoughts on Western education. This latter segment includes various levels of education but with additional emphasis on university and tertiary education and issues associated with learning in this advanced atmosphere. Before concluding, an attempt is made to showcase Ja'far's position on women education which may be evidenced not only through the attention he paid on teaching womenfolk but also his strong advocacy for carrying women along in the dissemination of both religious knowledge and western education.

The Vision and Position of Knowledge in Ja'far's Thoughts

Ja'far's broader perception of education encompasses religious knowledge and all its branches as well as Western education and all its significant fields. He viewed the two systems as principally crucial and mutually complementary. Ja'far believed that there is no fundamental contradiction between Islamic education and modern science because the latter itself is a gift bestowed by God upon humanity which people have been pursuing for ages. Although modern science may assist one's understanding and appreciation of cosmological concepts and natural phenomena Ja'far argued, spiritual guidance can only be acquired through revealed knowledge, textual and legal proofs. In the light of certain Qur'anic verses relating past nations who had mysterious technological advancement, Ja'far felt that qualifying science or education as "modern" needs some review since it entails that human advancement as manifested in contemporary knowledge did not exist in the past, ancient centuries (Ja'far, 2006c).

Ja'far upheld that knowledge is a treasure which places its possessor above those who lack it. Knowledge, as Ja'far stressed, promotes people of low social standing and raises their status above the class of elites and devout people (Ja'far, 2003a). Perhaps no articulation of Ja'far has laid bare the position of knowledge in his thought, which by the way, is traced to a Prophetic tradition, than his assertion that seeking for knowledge (including engaging in rigorous research) is more meritorious than getting engrossed in worship and devotion. Ja'far theorized that knowledge is the fundamental pillar of building a society (Ja'far, 2006b) such that a greater percentage of moral and societal reform rests on its success in both Islamic and Western education, and no matter what effort is invested in moral reform, it will be less effective as long as education remains in its dilapidated state and deplorable condition (Ja'far, 2005a). Nothing shall operate in a society without knowledge, and for a nation to prosper it must pay special attention to education. Lack of attention and concern toward education is

a sign of backwardness. Ja'far forecasted that if half of Nigerians are educated, Nigeria would have already passed the stage of its current shadowy development and sorry state of affairs. In Ja'far's view, any nation that refuses to focus on education, is as if it has tied itself with a rope and handed the rope to someone, signifying that it has become enslaved and it will henceforth be at the mercy of someone else's control (2006b). Citing some European countries among former colonial powers with small numbers of people, Ja'far argued that an influence of a society is not enumerated based on its size or human population but based on its strength in scientific knowledge and educational and economic advancement (Ja'far, 2007). He concluded that even if Muslims especially in Nigeria will continue to take lead in politics while they lag behind in terms of education, they will remain backward and underdeveloped (Ja'far, n.d.).

In his philosophy of education, Ja'far preferred that every Muslim should be mindful, focused and committed to the acquisition of religious knowledge and Western education both at formal and informal levels, and that this must be fortified with piety and morality. Ja'far's personal sentiment and passion toward knowledge, which he sometimes shared with the public were that it is a big regrettable loss for a person to spend a whole day without having read at least a page from either a religious book to increase his spirituality and understanding of Islam, or a book on Western knowledge to feed his mental faculty and have more insights on worldly matters (Ja'far, 2004a). A good reader according to Ja'far, is the one who after finishing reading a book, will repeat it two or three times due to its benefits (Ja'far, 2004c). Perhaps another highest indicator to the regard and importance Ja'far accrued to knowledge is his fatwa in which he stated that it is legally permissible for a man to marry a woman and instead of a monetary or any tangibly valuable dowry, he can teach her some subjects like Mathematics, English, etc. in lieu of her bride price (Ja'far, 2005b). Ja'far's basis for this fatwa was his analogical deduction from a Prophetic tradition establishing that Prophet Muhammad had married off a woman to his companion and instructed him to teach her certain Qur'anic chapters as her dowry (Bukhari: 5087 & Muslim:1425). This analogy may seemingly remain subject of juristic disagreement as some scholars may further question the strength of Ja'far's ratiocination with the position and value of sacred Qur'anic chapters on one hand, and secular subjects like Mathematics and English on the other hand. Whatever the case may be, he believed that knowledge, and not necessarily Islamic, is a precious and treasurable asset that can stand at the place of dowry.

Islamic Education

Islam places high premium on the acquisition of religious knowledge because it is only through knowledge that a Muslim can discharge his duties and responsibilities which the Shariah shoulders upon him both in liturgical and mundane parlances. In line with Prophet's teachings, Ja'far upheld that all Muslims (both males and females) have to show concern toward Islamic

knowledge, and even if one does not eventually become a scholar, he must yet have some share of knowledge and enlightenment in some fundamental religious aspects. The most rudimentary religious science a Muslim is required to be conversant with according to Ja'far manifests in the knowledge of Qur'an, Hadith, Tawhid and Fiqh, but also other subsidiary subjects particularly for students who aspire to become scholars in future. Although Fiqh is essential and constitutes about a quarter of the most fundamental aspects of Islamic knowledge in its broader composition, dogmatic adherence and homogenous majoring in it to the detriment of other equally valuable courses should be relaxed (Ja'far, 2003d). In Ja'far's educational philosophy, dissemination of Islamic knowledge at both formal and informal settings must be shouldered by the relevant government institution and the society as a whole. This includes channelling support to traditional Qur'anic schools whose pupils roam streets in northern Nigeria begging for food, a trend that has been a source for concern for years.

Ja'far suggested that Qur'anic education can be upgraded when effort is made to build modern schools where Qur'anic pupils who finish their informal elementary schooling would enrol to pursue their secondary schooling and specialize in Qur'anic studies. One of the best ways to design the schools to keep pace with the contemporary trend in Qur'anic education according to Ja'far, is to enlist the services of expatriates from Arab and Muslim countries like Egypt. In this way, a generation of *mufasssirun* (Qur'anic exegetes) can be raised within a short time while a robust system for modern researches in Qur'anic sciences is set up. Ja'far was against the Nigerian bureaucratic policy that does not recognize non-credentialed Qur'anic teachers who he said should be integrated in government educational schemes so that they are considered statutorily eligible to enjoy salary, allowance or any support from government (Ja'far, 2003d). Instead of parents hiring private tutors to teach their children individually at homes, Ja'far proposed that groups of head of households in Muslim neighbourhoods could join hands to establish community schools where Qur'an and Islamic basic courses would be taught for their children. Ja'far observed that children do not enjoy exposure to rigorous learning process when they are taught individually rather than in a group with other children (Ja'far, 2002a).

In Ja'far's opinion, mosque is an important site which can be utilized to promote the acquisition of Islamic knowledge, which he felt is not to be solely left at individuals' discretions but be institutionalized by authorities. Therefore, he saw a remarkable progress in systematic initiation of regular circles for Qur'anic memorization by relevant educational units at local governments. This can be done by employing a well-grounded Qur'anic memorizer for each mosque in a locality, who would be tasked to train about twenty children and to ensure that they memorize the Qur'an after they return from formal, Western-styled schools (Ja'far n.d). Similarly, Ja'far underlined the significance of conducting frequent religious lessons at mosques and public circles, which he

said should be attended twice a week by every Muslim no matter how busy or lethargic he/she might be. Mosque lessons according to Ja'far are very important in the sense that Muslims of all categories and ages will attend without any feeling of shame, unlike under the roof of classrooms which may not even accommodate an uncontrolled number of attendees. Therefore, mosque lessons should not concentrate only on Islamic jurisprudence but also permeate other areas of *aqidah* (creed), *suluk* (conduct), Islamic ethics, etc. which can be acquired in Hadith and Sirah books like *Riyad Salihin*, *al-Shama'il al-Muhammadiyah*, etc. (Ja'far, 2003d). And this view is upheld and stressed by many scholars who envisage that the reform of a society largely depends on the reform of spirituality through constant dissemination of Islamic knowledge.

Western Education

As Ja'far expressed his views on Islamic knowledge and the measures that can be taken to mainstream and upgrade it, he also articulated his ideas on Western education, a system that was once a subject of ideological controversy which a section of Muslims in Nigeria exploited to prod bloody disturbances in the northern region. Ja'far regarded Western education as an ingredient for perfecting life and societal advancement, which he maintained must receive attention of authorities and people in general. He did not envisage the provision of Western education as a duty that should be left in the hands of government, such that people at community level will not have a stake to make inputs on its sustainability and advancement.

Despite the global campaigns for the necessity of child education through various organizations, schemes and intervention programs like UNESCO, UNICEF, EFA and MDGs, which mostly pump special intervention funds to enhance basic education in the third-world countries, Nigeria still faces serious challenges which involve inadequacy of infrastructural and intellectual resources to cater for its children population. Many Nigerians have almost lost confidence in the efficacy of the learning system available at public primary schools, and for decades parents have resorted to enrolling their children in private schools which have been proliferating at an alarming rate (Agboghoroma, 2017, p. 203). This state of affairs has left many poor parents with an option of either registering their children in government schools, albeit the lack of quality thereof or tasking themselves amid constraints to pay for their children's tuition fees at commercial institutions. Due to the importance of education on one hand, and the lack of its quality in public schools on the other hand, Ja'far did not see anything wrong if parents enrolled their children in commercial schools. He chided parents who would in the process of making their children comfortable, go on to borrow money to buy clothes for their children but could not borrow money to pay for their school fees at private schools (Ja'far, 2007).

However, thousands of other parents, particularly in rural areas have refused to send their children to public schools and preferred to engage them in other activities, street hawking being one of the most notable alternatives

(Adedayo et al., 2021). But out-of-school children, numbering in millions (Olaniyan et al., 2018) still roam about streets and do whatever comes their way, including delinquent pursuits, which have consequences on peace and social stability. Even as Nigerian realities make education seemingly inaccessible to all due to scarcity of learning infrastructure and teaching workforce, Ja'far did not accept that as a valid excuse to deprive children from basic education. He proposed that locals and habitants of a given community where there are no schools must not fold their arms and watch their children grow in ignorance. Rather, they have a duty to organize small makeshift schools and employ tutors who could offer some extramural lessons for their children. He cautioned that no one should pass adolescent age without having enrolled at school (Ja'far, n.d.).

Ja'far challenged that the current 6-3-3-4 system of education where a pupil spends six years at primary school, three years at junior secondary school, another three years at senior secondary school while he spends four years at university was introduced as a result of Western machinations to dwarf education in third-world countries. He did not adequately demonstrate the extent to which the 6-3-3-4 system is defective, but argued that the old system where a student spent five years at secondary school was comparatively speaking sounder, more beneficial and qualitative (Ja'far 2005d). Ja'far did not provide reasons for his assertion, but it is common now to hear Nigerians claim that the old system of education was more effective and qualitative. And it suffices to note that in the past, people were employed as teachers immediately after graduation from secondary schools without necessarily having acquired higher diplomas. Ja'far considered primary and secondary levels as a starting point in one's educational journey, hence his persistent calls for those who pass these levels to proceed to tertiary institutions to obtain diplomas and degrees, despite economic hardship and even if with support of wealthy individuals (Ja'far 2006b). Here, he was encouraging wealthy persons to intervene in the plight of poor parents who often find it difficult to make ends meet much less than afford to take their children to private schools. The same concern also affects orphans who largely suffer because apart from orphanages controlled by government, the society does not generally have strong, effective and durable plans for upkeep of orphans.

Ja'far was making these calls amidst lamentation that not more than 10 percent of those who graduate from secondary schools, particularly in northern Nigeria do further their education at tertiary levels due to several reasons, one of which results from poor performance during final exams. Ja'far suggested that this army of unsuccessful youths are not to be left at their own fate, but rather be engaged in productive ways that would assist them continue schooling or join other meaningful ventures. He postulated that special extramural classes could be opened so that these youths can be retrained and prepared to sit for the exams that they had earlier failed. Those who would perform well and earn scores that would enable them secure admission at tertiary institutions should continue with

their educational pursuits while those who failed again should be transferred to vocational courses and be trained in endeavours like carpentry, plumbing, mechanic work, vulcanization, etc. Ja'far's vision was that those youths who are not eligible to proceed with studies at tertiary institutions can and often do easily fall prey to juvenile pursuits and as such threaten the peace of the society. Therefore, in his view, engaging them in useful vocational training where they may find their talent will not only make them preoccupied but also build their human capacity to become economically independent since they may not fit in white collar professions (Ja'far, n.d.).

Tertiary Education

Tertiary education often appears fascinating to young men and women not only due to intellectual development by engaging in advanced research, but also because it is a gateway to securing an employment, thus having a firm source of self-reliance. Although in Ja'far's vision, nation-building and societal promotion tend to be the supreme purpose for which Western education, especially in higher institutions is pursued, he did not dismiss the seemingly myopic aspiration for employee's personal development. Rather, he suggested ways an employee can perfect his/her job and realize rapid acceleration in his/her service. In his philosophy, climbing bureaucratic ladder is not to mark the peak of one's educational dream, but it should rather be to motivate one to acquire more skills by enrolling in courses at tertiary institutions. The dual benefits in this according to Ja'far are first, one will have additional knowledge and expertise that will boost his professional skills and human capacity which will come to reflect and play out in his bureaucratic undertakings. Secondly, the certificate he obtains will catapult him to higher positions through promotions instead of stagnating at one lower professional cadre. Ja'far envisaged that a wise person employed as a junior staff with a minor qualification like diploma, can within a decade of service rise to a senior position when he uses his free hours to join part-time courses at universities, and can acquire a Master's degree or even PhD (Ja'far n.d.).

Ja'far's persistent outcry over the condition of tertiary education and the multi-layered problems it faces which manifest in the low rate of enrolment in the system, the factors that cause this and other issues associated with the systemic decay and dilapidation of higher institutions altogether point to the importance he attached to tertiary education. He reckoned that there is a strong nexus between academics and politicians in the developed countries, and leaders mostly rely on the outcomes of researches produced in universities and independent research institutes in their policymaking and government decision processes. This, according to him, is the rationale behind the investment of huge funds in education by Western countries. Moreover, to maintain their cultural and political dominance over other parts of the world like the Middle-eastern and African countries, Western countries sponsor scholars to conduct researches in these countries and come up with policy recommendations of how to deal and navigate their relations with the countries. In his opinion, many Western nations

are run in actual sense by educated people among academics and intellectuals whose research outputs guide policymaking exercise (Ja'far, 2004a). In other words, as Ja'far implied, academics and scholars in the developed world have sophisticatedly convenient working conditions and do not face challenges like their peers in Nigeria.

The issue of welfare of lecturers still retards the progress of higher education in Nigeria, and this has been a reason for incessant strikes and closure of tertiary institutions to draw sympathy and attract public attention for their plight (Ogunode et al., 2022, p. 261). At times, lecturers would go on strikes that would last up to a year without reaching tangible solutions. In 2022 for example, lecturers went on strike in February and it lasted up to November. It has been observed that there is no administration that has not witnessed strikes since 1999 when democratic politics returned in Nigeria (Ogunode et al., 2022, p. 260).

Nigerian lecturers embarked on the 2022 strike to press the federal government to implement a negotiation reached by both the union of university lecturers and the government in 2009. The lecturers have been demanding the government to arrest the infrastructural decay facing university education, which if not nipped in the bud, will cripple the system and public universities will be left with no option but to either raise tuition fees to a benchmark that will not be affordable to the majority of Nigerians or allow the system to witness a slow, gradual death typical to the death of primary and secondary education. Primary and secondary education is so deplorable in Nigeria such that only parents who have no other options do resort to sending their children to public schools for basic education. Lecturers and other Nigerians often accuse politicians of showing a brazenly irresponsible attitude toward Nigerian education because they are not in any way affected by whatever situation public schools and universities may find themselves in. Nigerian politicians and elites have mainstreamed the culture of sending their children abroad, and do not in the slightest sense, seem to be perturbed by the poor condition and inconvenient atmosphere of Nigerian education.

In Ja'far's opinion, university serves as a factory that deals with the production of brains and processing of human mental faculty, thus government must not toy with the issue of university. To him, it is not at all economic or managerial miscalculation if a country invests its entire revenues in the reform and advancement of the education sector from bottom to the top. He was against government policy that rewards elected and appointed public officers as well as their retinues of political aides with gratuitous financial favours, arbitrary entitlements and exorbitant emoluments, thus making governance too costly while giving only pittance to lecturers who are the drivers of education at universities. Ja'far argued that lecturers are important people in the society who must be respected and well taken care of by authorities.

A PhD holder in Ja'far's philosophy is a unique asset that is worthier and more valuable to the development of a society than a thousand commoners

(Ja'far, n.d.). He decried that despite this obvious value and importance of university scholars, people themselves tend to ignore them and pay their attention to things from which they derive fun and entertainment rather than intellectual development. To demonstrate his point, Ja'far challenged that if a celebrity among film actors like Rabilu Musa Dan Ibro the well-known late Hausa comedian, for instance, would make presence for a public show at a certain venue at the same time a professor would deliver a lecture somewhere within the same vicinity, the venue of the film actor would certainly record exceedingly larger turnouts than the venue of the professor (Ja'far, 2005d).

If Ja'far had favourably sided with lecturers by in one breath championing the cause of their plight, he would in another breath chide and sound severe against bad and unqualified lecturers who do not discharge their duties diligently. He argued that lecturers who tend to wear fearful and scary countenance such that they seem to appear unapproachable generally do so in order to cover their incompetence and bridge the gap of their lack of pedagogical experience. A good and successful lecturer is he/she who can fully defend and do justice to the course he/she teaches, and can only achieve this if he/she always conducts eclectic researches and prepares him/herself before he/she enters lecture halls. A progressive lecturer according to Ja'far, does not regard the teaching profession as only a mere source of livelihood but a way to build a society to tackle the challenges that it faces, and that he/she can search for a solution for the problem through the course he/she teaches. A successful lecturer, in Ja'far's philosophy, is he/she who considers his/her success in the effort he/she exerts to make students comprehend his/her course with a greater intensity than he/she anticipates his/her monthly salaries. A successful lecturer makes his/her course marketable through his/her erudition and immensity of knowledge which bolster students to always long for his/her appealing and insightful lectures. In Ja'far's opinion, a bad lecturer who is not attentive to his/her duty should not only be relieved from his/her job but should also be forced to pay back the salaries he/she accumulates for work he/she is not committed to (Ja'far, 2006a).

The inactions of lecturers are not limited to lack of commitment in the discharge of their functions, but as Ja'far himself observed, the immoral behaviour of some of them manifests in their interactions with especially their female students. Concern for morality has been one of the reasons that prevent most Muslim parents in Nigeria from allowing their daughters to further their education at universities and tertiary institutions. Both lecturers and male colleagues of female students engage in immoral relationship with female students; lecturers exploit their power to award or reduce grades, which makes it easy for them to influence their female students, while male colleagues resort to other means such as money to attract female colleagues. But a great deal of public attention is directed at evil lecturers who use their position and harass and exploit their female students in a lewd relationship. The phenomenon of "sex for mark" or "sex for grade" is a popular menace which has seen several

cases where lecturers are found guilty of awarding underserved favours of marks grades for female students with whom they have promiscuous relationships. Female students who refuse to succumb to the fiendish desires of their lecturers often run into problems, and are persecuted and punished by their own lecturers, a situation that causes their delay in graduation or complete withdrawal from their studies. Ja'far devised some ways which he believed will be useful in countering this menace which has a corrosive consequence on female education at Nigeria's higher education. He suggested that unions of Muslim students, concerned and morally conscious lecturers whose profession is being misrepresented and a group of focused parents all have significant roles to play in bringing this bad behaviour to a halt. This can be achieved if these persons form a formidable force to checkmate rampant cases of illicit relationships between members of the opposite sex and circumstances that lead to that (Ja'far, 2001b). His conclusion was that lecturers who are supposed to instil discipline and character in their students, but go on to corrupt the morality of their female students should have no business teaching at university (Ja'far, 2003b).

A question that may likely need a further response is what leverage or influence do male colleagues of female students have when they also engage in licentious relationship with their female colleagues? Ja'far's major recommendation for a permanent solution to this situation is creation of separate institutions for males and females, since it is the coeducational system that facilitates regular contacts between male and female students, which at times lead to obscene affairs. Ja'far had a cause in this regard to refer to a proposal which he said the Bush administration had made to segregate boys from girls in schools but to also offer some federal grants to the states that complied and accepted the proposal (Ja'far 2003d, see also Cable & Spradlin, 2008, p. 3).

This measure has been hailed by analysts who have admitted that encouraging single-sex schools offers the promise of benefiting both boys and girls, some of whom do better in such settings (Fletcher, 2002) since there are no distractions from the opposite sex. Apart from single-sex atmosphere of schooling, Ja'far stressed that moral training and building upright character must go hand-in-hand with learning (Ja'far, 2005c). In other words, exhibition of good manners, righteous character, modesty, chastity and general decorum must define the relationship of a female student with her colleagues and everybody she interacts with at school. Wearing indecent dress and behaving immodestly do not, according to Ja'far, constitute the necessary requirement for acquisition of Western education. He argued that there is no rational condition that makes it binding for one to assimilate to the Western lifestyle before he/she can master any Mathematical formula, a linguistic concept in English and other sciences in the Western education system (Ja'far, 2002).

Women Education

A woman according to Ja'far occupies a pivotal position so much so that he said she represents more than half of a human society, or as he further

struggled to argue, she is almost the entire human society (Ja'far, 2004b). That was why he paid great attention to issues that involved women and contributed tremendously toward their moral and intellectual development by organizing special seminars, lectures and sensitization workshops for them. Ja'far emphasised that as a human being, woman is also part of the natural beneficiary of knowledge which should be the basis for her role in a human society (Ja'far, 2003a). Ja'far expounded that women are equal with men in many respects and are expected to discharge their duties and play their commensurate roles in uplifting the society, including the task of extending the message of guidance to others. He further argued that this equality had permeated the task of search and transmission of knowledge. Ja'far mentioned that a number of Muslim scholars including founders of Sunni Islamic legal schools like Imam Malik and Imam Ahmad bin Hambal were taught by women teachers. One scholar Abu Sa'd al-Sam'ani (d. 562 A.H) read under 99 female teachers while al-Hafidh Ibn Asakir (d. 571 A.H) studied with 88 women scholars (Ja'far, 2003a). Ja'far's strategy of citing examples with past Muslim female figures and the successive generations was deliberately done to showcase that the life of Muslim predecessors had provided an apt model for Muslim advancement, which, interestingly, is lucidly reflective of women participation. Therefore, he insisted that women should be carried along in not only the process of acquiring Islamic and Western education, by attending schools and preaching circles, but he also encouraged that they should be mobilized to participate in disseminating and imparting knowledge as well as extending Islamic mission to others.

Ja'far enjoined that a Muslim woman needs to be fully educated in the Islamic sciences first, and then followed by the Western education particularly in fields that are more beneficial to the womenfolk. He extensively discussed the types of knowledge women are supposed to acquire; for instance, he projected that the knowledge of Islamic rulings especially the peculiar ones affecting women as being the most basic knowledge that every Muslim woman must be conversant with. These include rulings related to menstruation, marriage, birth, child upbringing, *iddah* (waiting period after divorce or death of the husband), etc. Although Islamic knowledge always comes to mind once knowledge is mentioned, Ja'far emphasized that Western education is also important and Muslim women are required to participate in its pursuit (Ja'far 2003a).

Ja'far advocated that women should engage in medical and clinical studies and specialize in various fields so that they become medical doctors, nurses, midwives and other health-related practitioners, at least to be able to diagnose their fellow women. He then queried the phenomenon of women enrolling at universities to study and specialize in social and management science courses like banking, accountancy, administration, etc. which according to him were less relevant in solving women-related problems. Ja'far did not categorically prohibit women to engage in non-health related courses whose benefits may hardly transcend the women personally. But yet he observed that

women are by doing so, narrowing down their roles to less beneficial fields. He lamented that the number of female doctors especially those specializing in gynaecology was very low and that there was a pressing need to have female doctors in hospitals and various health institutions. Ja'far remarked that in contrast, the number of female Muslim bankers was so high that they could not be counted. To communicate his message effectively while addressing a women's gathering during a seminar, he asked "*tsakaninku da Allah, matan da suke karatu kuna bukatarsu ne a banki ko kuna bukatarsu a asibiti?*" (in sincere terms, among the females who are studying, do you need them [to work] in bank or do you need them in hospital?). The women crowd yelled in loud voice "*a asibiti!*" (in hospital). Ja'far then stressed that the society needs women in hospital so that they become medical doctors; become nurse; engage in midwifery and other areas; and become teachers at female schools right from secondary up to tertiary institutions, and to have proficient women lecturers. The need toward them in these fields of life endeavour is by far ahead of the need toward them in banking sector, insurance company or to becoming secretaries of some people (Ja'far 2003a).

Ja'far's point is that women should better join educational disciplines that are beneficial to the larger society rather than disciplines whose benefit will be restricted to them alone when they are employed. Women who have focus enrol in courses that will empower them to become professionals in more comprehensively useful areas. Thus, according to him, women who limit themselves to areas such as accountancy, banking and administration generally do so for personal ambition and self-aggrandizement. Nevertheless, Ja'far clarified that social science disciplines like these have their significance, since women can use them in different aspects of public life such as coordination and running of female affairs as well as headship and management of relevant institutions. He was of the view that women can work in non-health related agencies like government ministries which have departments or units that women would come to require bureaucratic services. But despite this, he reiterated that emphasis should always be laid on health-related studies because the demands of women health workers are much higher (Ja'far, 2001b).

Meanwhile, besides the area of priority and useful career choice which seems to be a matter of guidance and counselling, concern for morality and preservation of women chastity as previously highlighted has remained one of the impediments of women's pursuit of higher education. Acknowledging that women at universities and colleges face sexual harassment and exploitation from immoral male colleagues and lecturers, Ja'far maintained that these concerns were not rationalizations to call for non-participation of women in educational pursuits at higher institutions. He challenged that the society should rather organize a strong counterforce that would checkmate and eradicate the moral threats that were rampant on campuses, so that the environments would be friendlier for them to pursue their studies. He warned that the same moral consideration of guarding women chastity should propel Muslims to send

women to tertiary institutions to avoid the problems that would inevitably haunt the Muslims in future such as the necessity for women to be diagnosed by male doctors who can then see their privacy.

Ja'far charged that women should be immensely involved in the teaching career, without restricting their role to teaching only Islamic education but also material sciences for the betterment of their life and the society in general. In this regard, he posited that the "disease" of ignorance that has become a cankerworm among societies would have been countered and tackled if educated women devised some initiatives of imparting their knowledge in form of women adult classes. His basis for this was that teaching is one of the ways for enjoining the doing of good and refraining from doing bad, which is a supreme Islamic injunction. He disagreed with the view of some scholars who, out of moral concerns, projected that Islam does not allow women to play preaching roles especially in public. Ja'far revisited this view, pointing out that Islam encourages women to enlighten and guide their fellow women, and that the sentiment against women preaching was fed by a lack of [advanced and critical] reading of history and consulting the Glorious Qur'an and the Hadith of Allah's Messenger (may Allah's peace be upon him). Here is one verse from the verses of the Qur'an with which we can authoritatively assert the basis for a woman to preach and admonish among her fellow women;

"The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those – Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise (Surat al-Taubah 9:71).

Conclusion

This essay has appraisingly highlighted the vision and philosophical thoughts of Shaykh Ja'far on both Islamic and Western education at formal and informal levels. As the foregoing pages have shown, Ja'far portrayed knowledge as the most useful human treasure which distinguishes Man from animals and other creatures. Ja'far's personal sentiment and passion toward knowledge, which he sometimes shared with the public is that it is a big regrettable loss for a person to spend a whole day without having read at least a page from either a religious book to increase his spirituality and understanding of Islam or a book on Western knowledge to feed his mental faculty and have more insights on worldly matters. A good reader according to him, is the one who after finishing reading a book, will repeat it two or three times due to its benefits.

Ja'far preferred that every Muslim should be mindful, focused and committed to the acquisition of religious knowledge which includes the Qur'an, Tawhid, Fiqh, etc. Moreover, he regarded Western education as indispensable to the growth of human society without which individuals and community as a whole will remain backward and underdeveloped. Above all, the acquisition process of Islamic and Western education must be coalesced and fortified with

piety and morality. The society has a role to make input and upgrade formal and informal education through many ways as according to Ja'far, and people have no excuse to remain ignorant no matter what is their condition. Higher forms of education which are managed largely by government deserve additional care because they represent the peak of the learning process from where agents of societal development are directly produced. In all these processes, women are not to be skipped or left behind as their role is crucial in building human society. Therefore, Ja'far firmly believed that apart from serving in health-related institutions after their graduation from higher institutions, women can also serve as teachers.

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