

A call for change!

Asma, an Omani girl, is like all girls in her age, dreamt of a future that would make her the person she had imagined for years, a famous doctor. She did her best at school and eventually was blessed with a very high grade: "98%". That made her to jump of joy seeing that her dream is about to come true. As soon as the registration for universities had started, and as fast as she would open her mouth, she said, "my first choice, is going to be the COLLEGE OF MEDICINE", feeling proud as a peacock.

As soon as she uttered the last word, her parents responded: "What!!!! Seriously?" "Buuuut...DAD!", with a solemn tone.

Many people still think that women empowerment is merely the catchy popular slogans on social media and it is a simple and easy task. Women empowerment, however, is far beyond this as it is basically one of the sensitive and worthwhile projects. Many have succeeded in portraying that woman empowerment contradicts our religion, traditions, and customs, which, in fact, has no ground, and here we affirm that Islam FIRST, and before anything else, has granted women their full rights and guaranteed them no exceptions. Hence, neither religion, nor do universal ethics stop a Muslim lady from being a doctor.

"You need to become a teacher. Period."

"But, DAD...!!! "I don't like to be..." she countered with a broken-heart, she knew that she had no word over her parents' decision. She gathered whatever energy was left in her and left the room, crying desperately, without even a visible drop in her eyes.

Men have always showed some superiority over women and sought to regulate and control their lives regardless of their ambitions, desires, and personality characteristics. They have successfully convinced themselves that the teaching profession is the best job for a woman and her working in another field is unaccepted, unwanted, and sometimes even disrespected. Our culture has successfully shaped a man's mind-set and conferred legitimacy to their superiority. Accordingly, our societies have cultivated some conventions and myths that perpetuate their dominance and their cultural overwhelming superiority.

How would you respond if you knew that more than half of the female students in your cohort are forced to be teachers? What would you tell about some peoples' mind-sets who still hide their face in shame because their daughter or sister works elsewhere and not at schools. And how would you describe Asma's awful fate making her do what her father wanted to be?

As the months went by, Asma's final results eventually and sadly came about. She was accepted, idealistically, in the College of Education at SQU. An English teacher, just as they planned, dreamt, hoped, and wanted her to be. Not surprisingly, Asma stopped visualizing the old picture of herself with the white labcoat, the stethoscope around her neck, and the beautiful horn-rimmed glasses. She had been going through many arduous and unbearable moments on account of this occurrence. "Being in a strange place, just like a maze, unaware of what you are doing, what you are studying, and where you are going!" she said to herself. Looking down, she thought for a moment and said with a sigh: "Uhh... strengthen me my Lord."

Through my own perspective, Asma was very patient; she would never utter a word complaining, no matter what had happened or might happen. She, indeed, seemed to adjust well. Here is how some girls' dreams usually end. Admittedly, many other similar cases or problems have not been diagnosed sufficiently and have been hidden viciously from the public eye. A considerable number of Omani ladies are in a situation in which they need nothing except to be empowered and to be trusted. The prophet (PBUH) informed us once that "the best among them is actually the one who is best to his wife (family)" (Sahih Bukhari, 2010), which is a crystal clear indication that women in Islam are, and must be, valued and appreciated.

Asma adapted well to her new reality. Studying something out of her interest was no longer a big deal to her. She still held a modicum of hope that she would achieve something in life, something great that she would be always proud of. Years went by; 17 September 2014 was the day for celebrating her fourth year at SQU. She still reminded herself that "you need to make it Asma, hurry on, you will achieve it at all costs, and your future will be beyond the wildest dreams, something will put a smile on your face FOREVER". One year to go and she would graduate and end the story. She kept fighting, sometimes losing hope, often recovering her strength and firmly moving forward, and never backward.

"WHAAAT ??", she said. She remained silent for a while. That was definitely something unexpected something out of the ordinary! It was like a lump that rose up in her throat when she heard what they uttered.

"Asma, your cousin has proposed to you; he is a good man and we are giving you to him. He said that he doesn't want you to work, so he said that you better drop out of the university."

And that was the disaster, the end.

Another group has successfully portrayed that empowering women means taking some of the men's rights, and belittling their responsibilities and obligations. In fact, they forgot the fact that men and women are partners in any successful comprehensive development in life and a woman is basically part of the society and the society needs her.

Here is an explicit call to encourage women and enable them to engage in the community and not to let them live in a world that kills ambitions. It's to take her hand to employ her energy and mobilize her potentials. This is, in fact, not a personal goal, but for the sake of the collective social change. We also emphasize that the unfair dismissal between women empowerment and the revival of nations is based on illogical ground, if it has any ground at all. That is because the positive effects of a nation's revival will be on both men and women. In addition to this, the talk of women's rights urges us to talk about the contemporary Islamic vision of women's rights and position in relation to other communities. This means to stop comparing their situation with that in the pre-Islamic era and with other ancient communities like Romans and Persians.

Having educated well empowered Muslim women is merely a reflection of what Islam calls them to be. We are calling for a change, for the right of the powerful women to be empowered and supported.

29 November 2015 was the day which Asma was supposed to wear that purple graduation robe, to walk with her head up high receiving her certificate, and to take hundreds of pictures for the generations to come, to see their dearest Asma's special day, but unfortunately none of these happened. The door had been shut on her when she wanted to be a doctor, when she wanted to get a job, and when she wanted to SIMPLY pursue her higher education. It had been shut forever. A FATHER AND A HUSBAND could simply write a full long story and erase it all at once and forever.

Our ladies' ambitions have almost vanished, or almost forced to be. However, they are passing down their endless dreams to their generations to come, hoping that their situations will be different, unlike theirs.

We are calling for a change, for Asma's right.

Period.