

Dignity of women with Islamic perspective

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ABSTRACT

Women are as essential as men for the continuation of human life and development of society. Any discrimination based on gender is a grave offense. In Islam both women and men are equal in all aspects of life whether it is education, social, economic and soon. Any study of civilization is incomplete without studying the status and position of women in the society. The main aim of this paper is to study the status or position of women under the Islamic perspective. In this paper focus is based on that how dignity of women is maintained by religious perspective.

Key Words : Islam, Society, Status, Position

INTRODUCTION

“The women are not a garment you wear and undress however you like. They’re honored and have their rights.”

Right from the beginning Islam gave women rights; rights that could not have been imagined by European counterparts. Bold words! Words that have been spoken repeatedly, especially in the last two or three decades by Muslim converts, and Islamic writers, academics and educators across the globe. Women’s rights, responsibilities, and choices have been the subject of books, articles, essays, and lectures. Sadly however, convincing the world that Muslim women are not oppressed by Islam is a message that is just not getting through. Media headlines scream oppression and the words Muslim, women, and oppression seem to have become inextricably linked.

How does Islam look at the issue of women? Well, first of all, we should understand that Muslims unlike, for instance, the Greek philosophers or the French writers after the French revolution, do not feel that their concepts, ideas and beliefs are those of fellow men. But rather they believe that what they are taught, what they believe, what they practice, and all that is tied to this, is part of a divine revelation given to them by God. And so, its truth and veracity is not questionable because of it being revelation from God. The argument is that God knows best that which He created. He created human beings, He is a God of wisdom and a God of all knowledge and so therefore He knows what is best. And He decrees that which is best for humanity, His creatures. Therefore, Muslims try to live by a code of law which is an expression of that belief.

Islamic perspective:

In Islam, a woman has the basic freedom of choice and expression based on recognition of

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her individual personality. Women are encouraged in Islam to contribute their opinions and ideas. There are many traditions of the Prophet which indicate that women would pose questions directly to him and offer their opinions concerning religion, economics and social matters. Initially, women were not considered full human beings. The Quran in describing the origins of human beings tells them, the translation of which would be something like:

“O humanity! Verily we have created you from a single male and a single female, and have made you into tribes and peoples so that you may know one another. Verily the most honorable of you are those who are most pious with God.” (Quran 49:13)

This verse in the Quran teaches that humans come from a single male and a single female. The indication here is that the male and female in terms of their human nature are at an equal level.

Muslim women must acquire the appropriate education to perform this duty in accordance with their own natural talents and interests. While bearing, raising and teaching of children, and providing support to her husband and maintenance of a home are among the first, and very highly regarded, roles for a woman, if she has the skills to work outside the home for the good of the community, she may do, so as long as her family obligations are met. Islam recognizes and fosters the natural differences between men and women despite their equality. Some types of work are more suitable for men and other types for women. This in no way diminishes either's efforts or benefits. God will reward both sexes equally for the value of their work, though, it may not necessarily be the same activity.

Islam is clear in its teachings that God created men and women to be different, with unique roles, functions and skills. In society, where there is a division of labor, each member has different responsibilities. Generally, Islam upholds that women are entrusted with the nurturing role, and men, with the guardian role. Therefore, men are given the right of financial support.

The Quran states: “Men are the maintainers of women because God has made some of them to excel others and because they spend of their wealth (for the support of women).” (Quran 4:34)

This guardianship and greater financial responsibility given to men requires that they provide women with not only monetary support but also physical protection and kind respectful treatment. Muslim women have the privilege to earn money, the right to own property, to enter into legal contracts and to manage all of her assets in any way she pleases. She can run her own business and no one has any claim on her earnings, including her husband.

Islam no doubt gives central focus on familial institutions and it also allows women to participate in outside workplace while following certain etiquettes. Familial institutions occupy a prominent position in Islam because the family is concerned as fundamental unit of Islamic civilization.

As per as Islamic stance on public participation of women is concerned, it is very concrete and clear. Legally, in Islam, the financial responsibility of a family is assigned to man, since men are physically stronger than women, and they can also protect the chastity of women. Although in Islam men are given financial responsibility, but at the same time women are not prevented from participating in shouldering the financial responsibility of family with men. But on a conditional of following Islamic etiquette of dress and social interaction women are allowed to participate in public sphere. Not only has this Islam also offered women legal rights for their own earnings and for their own property. She has all rights to spend her earnings and property the Qurans says:

“Men shall have a benefit from what they earn; women shall have a benefit from what they earn” (Al-Quran 4:32).

In order to protect the dignity and chastity of women Quran has enjoined both men and women to their gaze and cover property to avoid moral and sexual lapses and protect their chastity.

“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty and believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; and they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except their husbands...” (Al-Quran 24:30-31).

As per education rights of women in Islam our beloved prophet said that it is obligatory on every Muslim man and women to acquire knowledge (Sunan Ibn Maajah Vol.1 Hadith 224).

There are number of instances during the period of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the khulafa-e-Rashidin^(R.A) (first four khalifah) which demonstrates the fact that even the blessed wives of prophet (saw) and other blessed women companions participated in some public affairs. To quote few instances.

- Ummal-Mu’^{mi} min Hazrat Ayesha ^(R.A) (the mother of believers) the blessed wife of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) attained the position of Muftiyah (casuist) and provided many religious rulings (fatwa) which have remained guiding principles till date.
- Shifa binti Abdullah was appointed as an inspector judge (muhtassibah) in the market of Madina. She was even encouraged by khalifah Umar^(R.A) to council him as she was recognized as woman of high learning and understanding.
- Umm Ammarah^(R.A) participated in battles of Uhad, hunayn and yamamah.
- Abdurrahman Ibn Awf consulted many women before he recommended Uthman Ibn Affan to be the Caliph. Many such examples can be cited to show the participation of women during this period in social economic and political spheres.

The social role of women requires mixing with men. Islam does not permit any discrimination between men and women, nor does it advocate segregation between them as it may be widely understood because of cultural practices or views. What Islam forbids actually is that a man and a woman cannot stay together in seclusion and privacy (khalwa), if they are not married to each other and a sexual relation between them is possible. But men and women as individual and groups can meet in public. Modesty is required in the outdoor dress of both Muslim women and men. However, there is no specific uniformed dress recommended for a Muslim woman. Purda, ‘abaya, are local fashions preferred by women in different places and may be changed in any time according the change of taste, these designs or fashions should not violate the basic and permanent requirements of an Islamic dress. The Quran underlines such requirements for a woman’s dress in the following verse:

“O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters as well as also all (other) believing women that they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments (when in public): this will be more conducive to being recognized (as decent women) and not annoyed.” (Al Quran 33:59)

Islam allows any dress that fulfills the required modesty for a decent woman, and the creativity of fashion designers has to combine elegance and modesty in a woman’s dresses since one does not negate the other. The attractiveness and respectability of a woman - the same as of a man- are due to one’s personality as a whole, with all intellectual and psychological dimensions, and not to what is exposed of one’s body. It is against the human dignity and equality to focus on the physical attraction of a woman in her social performance with men. In an open society, a fair assessment of the merits of an individual (male or female) should consider the whole personality and one’s commitment to and fulfillment of the moral and social responsibilities toward one another and toward the society as a whole. “And believing men and believing women, that are guardians of each other in enjoying the doing of what is right and forbidding the doing of what is wrong” (Al

Quran 9:71)

As far as non family social rights are concerned, that is as far as rights within society at large outside the circle of family are concerned an individual requires both equal and identical rights. In other words fundamental natural rights are equal and identical to each other. Every member of society has an equal right to benefit from his innate talents, everyone has the right to work, to take part in the race of life, to offer himself for any post or position in society and try to get it in a lawful manner; everyone has the right to demonstrate his personal academic achievements and practical worth.

Of course the same equality in basic natural rights gradually places people in an unequal position as far as acquired rights are concerned; that is to say everyone has the equal right to work and to take part in competition of life but when the question of the result of competition, the standard of work and the level of adequacy is considered, not everyone comes up to the required standard. Some prove themselves more talented and some are found to be less talented. Some are more efficient and some less efficient, some are more capable and some less capable. Some are found to be more learned, more proficient, more skillful, more useful and more efficient than others in the task, and so, naturally, their acquired rights assume an unequal patterning. If we resolved that peoples acquired rights should also be equal like their basic natural rights, our decision could be called nothing but cruel and unjust.

Now, why should all individuals be considered equal in their natural fundamental social rights? The reason is that observation of human beings demonstrates that amongst human individuals no-one is born the ruler or the ruled. No- one has come into this world as a worker, or a craftsman or a professor, or a teacher, or an officer, or a soldier, or a minister. These are the merits and peculiarities which are a part of acquired rights. It means that individuals, by their competence, potential, work and activity, must take them from society, and that society by positive law give them to its individuals.

Conclusion:

In Islam the women has the right to work and enjoy economic freedom. In this study I conclude that both men and women have equal contribution on human development. It is a wrong belief that Islam discriminates women and snatches their rights and freedom but Islam gave equal rights to both men and women. God created both men and women equal in all spheres of life. In Islam the women has a right to work according to their talents and capabilities. They have also a right to earn money for their livelihood. I conclude, that it is a misconception Islam compelled women to wear veil but this is only for maintaining their chastity and modesty. Being a scholar I realized that it is mindset of people who created such misconceptions. In reality equal treatment is very important that Islam teaches us because I learned that women have equal rights as men and it is clear that women are allowed to go and to be what they want.

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