

ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Fundamental aims of Islamic culture include welfare, happiness and progress of human society. Human being was created as the representative of Allah. Both man and woman are required to play an imperative role for the cause of serving humanity in a better way. No progress in the field of culture can be possible unless and until woman plays her divergent role in the society. Islam raised the status of woman to a great extent. She has been given rights to property, rights to take part in economic activities, rights to choose life partner, rights to determine his financial requirements and to overcome these and an honorable social status which was not given by the prior and other contemporary cultures and societies. It is a matter of fact that woman occupied an important place during the Islamic Era and played an active role for the uplift of Society.

In this article, I have tried to bring out the importance of the role of woman for the development of Islamic Culture and improvement of an Islamic Society.

Key words:

Islamic culture; Purpose of creation; Status of women; Right and duties of women; Distinction of Islam

Women in ancient civilization

There had not been a single civilization in ancient world which did not inflict various forms of pains and cruelties to woman. Study of history reveals that that during different era, women had lost their recognition in their respective civilizations.

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Not only had she lost her capabilities but also her freedom. Moreover, she had to lose her worth and status. She was maltreated in each society and every part of the world. As far as her moral and lawful rights concerned, she had fallen to the lowest level. In different nations of the world, she was living her life in miserable and terrible conditions. She was forced to marry and sometimes into adultery. Other became heirs of her wealth irrespective of the intensity of her financial needs. She could not even consider herself the owner of her own life. She was treated as secondary to her husband and father or any male member of her family. Her husband used to become the owner of her wealth even before her death and also became her master. It all happened when the nature was changed. It all happened when nations left the way of God and followed the path of Satan. However, a moderate way, which harmonized with nature, wisdom and human interest, existed there. And this way is Islam which is established by God himself.

Women in Greek civilization:

Despite the fact that Greek civilization was the most modern civilization among the ancient nations, the Greeks considered woman the essential inconveniences and fountain head of all problems. She was cut-off from society. She had only one job to do i.e., to give birth to children. There were many women who were compelled to do adultery. Mothers were also forced to do adultery. Furthermore, sisters were forced to marry against their will. She was looked down upon in the society; she was treated as a servant; she was maltreated. Their concept of woman was faulty⁽¹⁾. Famous writer Demosthenes says, "*Women were used to quench the thirst of sex and men had them as girl friends. They had wives to produce children and girl friend to enjoy their physical contact with them*".⁽²⁾

Women in the Roman civilization:

In Rome, the status of women was not better than her sister in Greek. Roman law deprived the woman of her civil rights; hence, her legal personality was not acknowledged at all. It considered woman a cause of all ills and rid her off all rights⁽³⁾.

Women in the Persian civilization:

The Persian nation was basically a military nation. Man is considered a pillar of the fighting lot, i.e., they have much significance⁽⁴⁾. Therefore, they preferred man to woman, because woman was created for the benefit of others; besides parents. Resultantly, woman, in Persian civilization, also seem to have lost their rights⁽⁵⁾.

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Women in Indian's Civilization:

Women had the status of a slave in Hindu civilization. People lost them in gambling; they did not even consider a woman as human being, so much so Hindu law disgrace woman and recognizes her below bad air, death, hell, poison, snakes and fire, etc. therefore, they made the law that woman could do nothing her own will. She was a property of her father and later on belonged to her husband. Thus it was her utmost responsibility to treat/serve her husband like God. They considered husband a representative of God. If her husband died before her, they used to burn her alive with him. ⁽⁶⁾

Women in Chinese Civilization:

Chinese people disliked girls. Whenever the father got the news of her berth, he used to take her to market to sell. If no one bought her there, he used to leave her in a deserted area, or strangled her to death or throw her in water, or buried her alive. Sometimes, he left her in the open fields so that the cold frost could kill her or predators could eat her. Muslim explorer Ibne Batuta (ابن بطوطة) has mentioned in his travelogue that the Chinese people sold their daughters and did not consider it bad ⁽⁷⁾.

The Chinese recognized women as fool and non-sense. She did not possess any ability to resolve any issue related to her life without the guidance and help of a man. She was a miserable creature and was maltreated. Neither did she have any light nor could she demand any. As soon as she got married, they called her 'Fu', i.e., "obedient" ⁽⁸⁾.

Women in Judaism:

Jews held the woman responsible in evicting Adam from Heaven, so it was one of the reasons for her decline. Satan tricked Adam through her and resultantly man was deceived by Satan. The first thing which tempted human being and took him out of heaven was she. ⁽⁹⁾

In Jewish society, woman was in the possession of their fathers before marriage and fathers had the right to sell them before they were fully mature if they did not have money and were poor. Hence he had full command to marry her when he liked and will of a woman was not taken into account. She was bought at the time of marriage, and dowry was given to her father or brother. Later, she became in the possession of her husband who was her absolute owner. Even Old Testament (توراة) did not raise the status of woman. Torah says, "*Woman introduced the sin in the world and she is the cause of our destruction*" ⁽¹⁰⁾.

It is mentioned in Talmud (تلمود), "when a few praises a non-Jewish woman, they are not to be blamed, for his marriage with her is not valid. They consider a non-Jewish woman an animal and hence can't make any matrimonial contract with them" ⁽¹¹⁾.

Women in Christianity:

In the Old Testament "Eve was responsible for the heinous crime" so this belief was transferred to Christianity. It is mentioned in the New Testament (إنجيل) "Adam did not go astray rather woman went astray and thus this incident happened" ⁽¹²⁾.

Christianity, in its earlier era, tried its level best for the betterment of woman and blessed her with many prizes so that she could be saved from defame, but failed to do so. The opportunities offered by Christianity were very less, and hence could not elevate the status of woman and would not free her from man's ditches. She was neither protected from cruelties, hatred, nor was she given any right. Gospel gives significance to man and not women.

The priests called woman the root-cause and fountain head of all sins, and consider her lawful rotation of between man and woman unsacred which must be avoided. From this, it became common among people that remaining single are better than being married. Saul has said in this connection: "one who marries one's daughter, does a wonderful job, and one who does not get one's daughter married, does a far better job" ⁽¹³⁾.

So it can be summarized as the reality of women in ancient civilizations and religions prior to the Islam as under:

- 1) Lack of humanity, did not value the man, and did not have a role in this life.
- 2) Lack of equality between male and female; for boys as well as girls; between husband and wife as the Arabs and Indians.
- 3) Subordination of women to contempt and humiliation, and forced into menial work, such as prostitution and entertainment for men, as in the most ancient civilizations.
- 4) Did not have anything to do with religion, understanding and application has been prevented from so as to Jews, Christians and others.

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- 5) Depriving them of their personal rights and economic, as is happening to most nations and religions.

Women in Islam:

In the pre-Islamic period, woman had lost all the rights in Arabia. The birth of a girl was considered ominous. They treated her like stayed or buried them alive. Her birth was not an occasion of rejoicing but humiliation⁽¹⁴⁾.

Allah Almighty stated the position of woman in the Holy Quran prior to Islam.

﴿وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ، يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ ، أَلَسَاءٌ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ﴾⁽¹⁵⁾

(Whenever the news of a female child is announced to any one of them, his face darkens and he chokes with inward gloom).

Hence, when one study history, he find woman as surrounded in problems and was exploited, it also exposes the injustice meted out to her. Moreover, there was no system or belief which could have saved woman from cruelties, problems and injustices. However, with the advent of Islam, the distinction between man and woman regarding fundamental human rights was ended. In fact, Islam bestows all those rights on woman that she was deprived of in the pre-Islamic era or Period of Darkness. Islam gives woman all those rights which man enjoys such as legal, social, economic, spiritual rights, etc. In this way, she can play her role in society and she can take part in preaching Islam, resultantly; she can participate and play a constructive role in Islamic civilization.

There are many women who became famous and their names will remain alive in Islamic society, for they played a significant role in education, civilization, literature, art, travelling, self-Independence, Government, religion, and piety, and their influence will also be felt in every walk of life.

RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

The woman in the ancient civilizations that preceded the Islamic civilization was considered an abject creature. She was despised not having the dignity of humanity as is the dignity of the Islamic civilization, which designed her rights, made her a human being; woman began to be called not only half society but an organic whole society under the shadow of Islam. She has her contributions in the formulation of civilization and society. The main components of society and as sister of man, she acquired such rights which she could not gain in any other civilization or religion, in

the past or contemporary society, and these rights gained legitimacy, and humanity. The role of women is not only an extension of the man as some critics consider. We may judge the role of women in building society, reform and its role in the integrity of the family and its role in the upbringing of generations and their role in education and politics, and its role in the advisory and even save the inheritance of the Islamic itself. This is our history of civilization. We must be proud of it and give it right value undiminished.⁽¹⁶⁾

Legitimate (Shariah) Rights of women

In the era of ignorance, women had no rights of inheritance, but it is Islam who conferred the rights of inheritance to women. Likewise, opinion of woman was not considered; but Islam declares it obligatory to seek woman's consent in marriage. Islam equalizes the punishment of adultery between women and men, unlike the laws that the people framed, putting the difference in the crime of adultery. In the same manners, the rights of man and woman are equal. Consequently, men were given the right to divorce and women were also bestowed to take the right of divorce.

Rights of a woman in Islamic Sharia:

Public Rights

- Right of Life
- Right of Liberty
- Right of Education
- Right of Equality

Special Rights

- Rights as a mother,
- Rights as a daughter,
- Rights as a sister,
- Rights as a life-partner (wife)
- Rights as a divorced and widowed
- Rights as a neighbor

Aspects of equality of women in Islam

- Equality in ritual worship (prayer, and the rituals of Hajj & Umrah)
- Equality before the law
- Equality in rights and duties

Some other instances of equality of between man and woman in Islam are:

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- Equality at the origin of creation
- Equality in the field of liability and penalty
- Equality in civil matters
- Equality in the public rights

Human and Civil Rights of Woman:

Islam has also determined human and civil rights of woman as under:

- Right of equality in creation
- Right of equality in succession in domestic affairs.
- Right of equality in human values.
- Equality in responsibility and rewards.
- Equality in rights and duties.
- Equality of life and care in family.
- Equality in the pursuit of knowledge

Social and Marital Rights of Woman:

Among the prominent social rights mandated by Islam to women include:

- Right to choose a life partner
- Right to the dowry and ownership
- Right at the earnings of the spouse
- Right to claim divorce
- Right in the foster⁽¹⁷⁾

Political Rights of Woman:

The political status of Umul-almomineen Hazrat Aisha

(سيدة عائشة) is not hidden to anyone. She is truly a role model for any political leader. For example, when she stood on the side of opponents of Hazrat Ali bin Abi Talib (علي بن ابي طالب) after the martyr of the third Caliph, Hazrat Uthman-bin-Affan (عثمان بن عفان) she led the people on her side in an efficient political way⁽¹⁸⁾. Another, political role model we find in the history is Madam Razia Sultna [1236 – 1240], daughter of Iltutmush. She was the first female Muslim ruler of South Asia. She was a talented, wise, just and generous woman⁽¹⁹⁾.

So we may summarize the political rights of woman in Islam as:

- Right to advise the guardian
- Right to advise the ruler
- Right to denounce the unjust ruler

- Right to shelter
- Right to monitor current events
- Right to claim her political rights and defend them
- Judicial Rights
- Right to pledge allegiance
- Right to participate in Jihad.

Financial and Economic Rights of women

Islam has bestowed a Muslim woman such financial and economical rights, which no other society, culture or religion bestowed to her. Islam has given equal rights to Muslim male and female to possess, mortgage and perform all types of contracts. She has sole right of her possession and men in any relation or in any form cannot interfere her rights. Therefore, a Muslim woman can perform her financial and economic affairs without any hindrance and restriction. She can dispose of her funds with full discretion. She has the right to sell, purchase, lease and entrepreneurship, speculation and other financial contracts as well as donation, charity, devotion and dedication which are performed to seek the will of Almighty Allah.

Most prominent financial rights recognized by Islam for Women are outlined as under:

- Guaranty to the right to work according to Islamic guidelines.
- Economic eligibility.
- The right to alimony, dowry.
- The right to inheritance.
- Right to buy and sell.
- Right to dispose-of
- Right to own property

There are various other manifold rights of woman that are awarded by Islam. One cannot be fully capable to elaborate these rights here. But today, the so called torch bearer of modern civilization want to take woman to the pre-Islamic condition and culture which were the society of stagnant and deprivation. These are intellectually deviated or unaware of the vision of Islam, they consider a woman just a commodity by which woman has become a marketable and they are promoting their trade through the advertisement of women. They reduce the role and importance of women given by Islam and interpret and present the wrong picture of the rights of women given by Islam⁽²⁰⁾.

Checks on the legitimacy of woman's work

Islamic law does not prohibit woman from working, but it sets the limits and controls which suit and benefit the community and its members:

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- The work of woman creates a negative impact on family life
- To match their work to the nature of the female.
- Should not operate in accordance with the forbidden and illegal ways

Work Areas allowed for a Muslim woman

- In the call to Allah Almighty to perform religion duties
- The areas of science and public education
- In telemedicine for the treatment and woman's diseases and pregnancy and childbirth and other.

In the area of household home economics

The Role of Woman in the establishment of Islamic civilization

No other religion but Islam has honored and dignified the role and importance of women. Islam has declared the woman a counterpart of man. Islam says that one is the best who is more compassionate to her family. Muslim woman have given the rights to foster, look after and best upbringing. She is the delight of eyes, fruit of the heart of parents and brothers. When she grows up, she becomes respectable and honorable. She is married with the recitation of the Verses of Almighty Allah and a promise. The abode of her husband is the dearest and safest sanctuary for her. The husband is required to look after her, respect her, and honor her and to solve all her problems. When she gives birth to a child, the husband is ordained to treat her well. Almighty Allah has connected her right with His right and declared her disobedient His own disobedient. When she is a sister, it is ordered to treat and respect her well. When she is aunt, it is equal with mother in respect and reverence. When she is a grandmother and aged one, her status and importance is increased in her sons, grandsons and in all her relative. Neither her opinion is rejected nor denied. When she is away from kith and kin, Islam has ordered to respect her, help her, guide her, not to trouble her and ask the Muslims men to lower their eyes. Muslim society has always considered these rights fully. Owing to which the status and importance of Muslim women has been restored. Whereas the non Muslim society is deprived of such privileges.⁽²⁰⁾

Educational Role of Muslim woman

There is no doubt that the woman plays an important role in the upbringing of the child. Any teacher or anyone else cannot replace them; the teacher can provide the child the outcome of the information and knowledge through which an encyclopedia of knowledge may be prepared, but the effect a woman can give that a teacher or anybody else cannot produce. That is why the Islamic scholars have urged to choose a woman who can play her role to upbringing the child. Moreover, it is

necessary to choose such a woman before marriage. Stressing upon the same point, they says that the upbringing of a child should be before birth by choosing good mothers⁽²¹⁾.

Abu Aswad ad dualee (أبو الأسود الدؤلي) said to his sons: "I did well to you before your birth, in your childhood, in your boyhood". His sons replied: "How good was done to us before we were born"? He said: "I chose best mother for you, due to whom you cannot be ridiculed in the society"⁽²²⁾.

This is one of the parent's first right on their children to choose such mother who are pious, chaste, generous and can up bring their child well. They can resolve their affairs, they can have an eye upon their religious affairs because a child inherits mother's individual, moral and spiritual qualities and these qualities remain in his whole life.

It is necessary for a mother that she should equipped herself with educational and moral weapons to up bring her child.

Physical Training:

This training begins in the womb of woman when she is pregnant. She fully diverts her attention towards her child; she takes care of her nutrition. This exercise keeps going on till the birth of child. The woman is held responsible in Islamic system to foster her child and other necessary affairs of new born baby⁽²³⁾.

Mental Training

The concept of this training is to realize the reality of mental health. This is a fact that a constant check is necessary upon the children to keep them healthy mentally. Neither they should be rebuked too much nor should they be spared. In this way, the children are looked after and they enjoy good health.⁽²⁴⁾

Educational Training:

The mother is considered to be the first training institute of the children. She not only takes care of her kids including physical and mental growth but also the moral and ethical training as well. Narated By Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-'As: The Apostle of Allah (saw) said:

مُرُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَهُمْ أَبْنَاءُ سَعِ سِنِينَ وَاحْتَرِبُوهُمْ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ أَبْنَاءُ عَشْرِ سِنِينَ وَفَرَّقُوا بَيْنَهُمْ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ⁽²⁵⁾

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Command your children to pray when they become seven years old, and beat them for it (prayer) when they become ten years old; and arrange their beds (to sleep) separately.

Mother is the only influencing factor of the children in early five years. She trains them to sit, to eat, to drink and to behave in well mannered way. These habits remain with individual almost throughout their lives.⁽²⁶⁾

CONCLUSION

With the down of Islam the position of Women was considerably enhanced. The ill treated and degraded member of society was raised to a higher status. Islam does not differentiate between man and woman in religious and legal matters. No doubt man and women have different roles to play in society for which they are physically well equipped. Women have played an important role in Muslim society where they trained their children as true Muslim. They trained their children to enjoin virtue and to forbid from doing evil. Women played an important role in defending the shariat and taking part in Jihad. Women have proved to be remarkable teachers of Shasiat and working for the welfare of downtrodden.

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