
ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN RIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

Women are facing various socio-cultural problems including domestic violence, gender discrimination and un-equal status in all over the world. In developed countries, they have been able to empower, themselves, much better than in the developing countries, where the women are considered inferior to men and thus they are not treated equally. The teaching of Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) gave the women equal social and economic rights. At the end of the nineteenth century most of the South Asian countries recognized women's role for the development and economic growth, although at limited scale but very encouraging seeing that the participation of the women in the all sectors of economy has positive impact on the overall growth of economy of those countries. This paper aims to provide literature on women rights in the light of Islam. It also investigates the women's role before the industrial revolution in the western world.

Keywords: Islamic Perspective; Women participation; Economic and Social Rights; Legal Framework; Gender Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The degree of the respect for women in Islamic ideology can be understood from the notion that heaven lies under the feet of the mother. The teaching of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) paved the path for equal, social and economic rights of women. In fact, the women are playing very important role in all fields of life. Nevertheless, their role and services have not yet been recognized in society, thus they do not enjoy equal status in society. This paper provides an in-depth understanding of women rights in Islam. It also reviews present indicators including property rights, legal rights, and political rights.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Baden, 1998 reported that before the emergence of Islam, the Arabs considered women inferior and treated than badly and their social

status was poor. The men were at liberty in marrying women as many as they could afford; and also a son could marry with his step mother and kill without any cause.

Nasir, 2013, mentioned that during the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and Caliphate times the women enjoyed very important position in the society as they were given choice to carry out their own businesses independently and had full right in the decision making on their own run business. Even the women of those times were getting knowledge and took part in the Jihad. It is only lately especially after Caliphate period the condition of the women became worst in the Muslim societies largely when the Muslims became distant from the teaching of Islam.

Barlas, 2002 suggested that the rights of women are sabotaged and their condition is miserable in some of the communities in the developing world. He proposed that in order to improve the status of women in those societies, it was necessary that women institutions should be established. Then women should be empowered through the provision of jobs, education and skills. In this way, the women would be able to contribute to the budget of their households. Consequently, their status will be improved within their family and community.

Khan, 2006 mentioned that women are restricted to work inside the house for their kids, husband and other family members rather than to play their efficient role outside the house, while that is against the teaching of Islam to restrict women inside their homes. The Islam appreciates and encourages the women to play their positive and constructive role in the society as a mother, wife, daughter, trader and decision maker. The educated and skilled women can reply to that misperception about the restriction of the Muslim women work outside the house by efficiently working in the every area of the community with the males and also mobilize inactive Muslim women into the active fold of the society.

TABLE-1
WOMEN RIGHTS ACROSS THE COUNTRIES BY INCOME GROUP

Measure of Women's Rights	US	High income countries	Upper middle income countries	Lower middle income countries	Low income countries
Property Rights					
Women's access to land.	1	0.92	0.83	0.79	0.30
Women's access to bank loans.	1	0.98	0.92	0.85	0.55
Women's access to property.	1	0.98	0.93	0.89	0.52
Family Law					
Repudiation.	0	0.07	0.12	0.16	0.28
Polygyny.	0	0.11	0.18	0.25	0.67
Parental authority.	1	0.89	0.74	0.75	0.26
Inheritance discrimination.	0	0.12	0.28	0.29	0.67
Rights Related to a Women's own body					
Female genital mutilation.	0	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.32
Violence against women.	0.33	0.35	0.50	0.50	0.66
Freedom of women.	0	0.02	0.09	0.00	0.12
Obligation to wear a veil in public.	0	0.04	0.15	0.15	0.18
Contraceptive prevalence (%).	76.4	70.8	52.9	57.3	28.1
Political Rights					
Median year of suffrage.	1920	1919	1946	1944	1957
Women in parliament (%).	15	21.3	15.1	14.0	13.0
Gender Empowerment Measure.	0.76	0.68	0.54	0.44	0.33

Source: Doepke; Tertilt and Voena, 2011

According to Moghissi (2005), Davary & Tatar (2009), Islam protected the rights of the women from her birth to the grave and the same can be envisaged from the teaching of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Women have the equal opportunity to even have consent in selecting the life partner i.e., husband and her rights such as inheritance in the property of the father, husband are protected.

Even in the ancient Western societies the woman was considered as inferior and treated as slaves that could only meant for doing house hold work. They were far away from the socio-economic benefits in their societies and had no legal right. Almost one hundred years ago the perception of the gender equality involvement in the socio economic and political activities in the Western culture developed. The development of modern thoughts on equality has significantly contributed to the improvement of ethical and moral aspects of Western society (Ries & Stone, 1992).

To sum up in the context of modern era, in many parts of South Asia and the Africa, the gender discrimination with suppressed capabilities and potential is common. The participation of the women in the areas education, health and politics is insufficient. At the end of the 19th century, most of the some South Asian countries has recognized women role for the development and economic growth. Although limited scale, but very encouraging to see that the participation of the women in the all sectors of economy has positive impact on the overall growth of economy of those countries (UNDP, 2008; Coward; Davis & Gold, 2005).

Women in Pakistan: According to population estimates, Pakistan is the sixth largest populated country of the world. The total population of the country is 184.35 million including female 66.5 million and male 64.6. The estimated population 69.87 and 114.48 million people live in the urban and rural areas respectively. 60 percent or estimated 110 million out of the total population is the working class indicates that the country has enough resources but the human capital has not been utilized properly. The contribution of men in work force during the period of 2008-09 to 2010-2011 has decreased from 49.6 percent to 48.6 percent. while the women contribution in the work force of Pakistan has also increase almost 1.4 percent during the same period from 18.5 percent to 19.4 percent. The women account 75.4 percent against the men 36.2 percent in the total work force (Economic Survey of Pakistan 2010-11)

Table 2: Share of Women in the Labour Force (%) in Pakistan 2008-09 to 2010-11 has decreased from 49.6 percent to 48.6 percent. While the women contribution in the work force of Pakistan has also increased almost 1.4 percent during the same period from 18.5 percent to 19.4 percent. The women account 75.4 percent against the men 36.2 percent in the total work force (Economic Survey of Pakistan 2010-11).

TABLE-2
SHARE OF WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE (%) IN PAKISTAN
2008-09 TO 2010-11

Major Industry Division	2008-09			2009-10			2010-11		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Agriculture / Forestry / hunting & Fishing	45.1	37.3	74.0	45.0	36.6	74.9	45.1	36.2	75.4
Manufacturing	13.0	13.3	11.9	13.2	13.9	11.0	13.7	14.5	10.9
Construction	6.6	8.3	0.4	6.7	8.5	0.3	7.0	8.9	0.2
Wholesale & retail trade	16.5	20.5	1.6	16.3	20.2	2.1	16.2	20.4	1.6
Transport/ Storage & Communication	5.2	6.6	0.2	5.2	6.6	0.3	5.1	6.6	0.1
Community/ Social Personal Service &	11.2	11.1	11.6	11.2	11.2	11.2	10.8	10.8	11.5
Others	2.4	2.9	0.3	2.4	3.0	0.2	2.1	2.6	0.3

Source: PBS, 2011

Despite the fact that women account the major share in the population and in the workforce, they have been deprived of the social and economic rights. Although the several programs were initiated by the state and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the status of women has not yet been improved. This fact is indicated by the Table 2.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper explained in detail the social and economic rights in the Islamic perspective. It has been argued in this paper, that the women did not enjoy freedom and socio economic rights before the emergence of Islam as a universal religion. It change the intellectual outlook of the world and word by giving equal rights to men and women and it gave the concept of good and bad in the society. According to the teachings of

Islam, no society can fully flourish without the participation of women in social, economic and political spheres of life.

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