

**WOMAN'S SOCIAL RIGHTS IN ISLAM: AN EVALUATION OF
EQUALITY OF RIGHTS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to analyze the status of women in the light of evidence provided by Holy Quran on a Sunnah. Equality of Social rights and status between men and women has remained a source of debate throughout world since many centuries. The history reveals that men have been given prominent position in all the ancient cultures and civilization but Islam has not only condemned such gender based superiority but also rooted out it. Because of the influence of cultural values, norms, traditions and customs inherited from remote past, the Muslims in most of the countries also follow the same pattern and tradition in which man thinks himself superior to women.

Keywords: Quran and Sunnah, Status of Women's, Equality, Rights and Responsibilities, Gender Discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

Quran and Hadith, being the most valid and reliable source of Islamic knowledge and clearly revealed that Allah has never liked the superiority based on gender, blood, race or tribe. Many verses of holy Quran and sayings (Hadith) of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) clearly mention that women are not less than men in any field. The claims that make man superior to women are man-made, fake and false. In Islam, there is no significant difference between men and women regarding their social, educational, economic, political, ethical and legal rights and status.

Men and women are equal in the eyes of Allah. Allah has clearly mentioned in Quran and Hadith that superior among people is one who is more upright and pious regardless of men or women. If a woman is more virtuous and upright than a man, she is superior to a man. The people (men or women), who are honest, trustworthy, truthful, dutiful and fulfill all the obligations of Allah, are superior to others who do not observe the obligations of Allah.

Islam has given more dignity and status to women. Allah has kept paradise under the feet of women. Mothers, sisters, wives are highly respected and honored in Islamic society. The people who disgrace and behave badly with women are called devil in Islam and hell has been made the abode of such cruel people.

Women comprise more than half of the population. The growth, development, training and education of children is the prime responsibility of women. Family is considered as first and foremost institution of socialization and learning. Woman (mother) is known as the first school of children. The women imbue the faith and principles of Islam into their children. In this way women are responsible to lay the foundation of an ideal Islamic Society with the help of their male counterparts. The responsibility of men and women to shape an ideal family and society is complementary. There is no competition between men and women in this regards.

It is only misunderstanding and misperception that men have got more status and rights in the family and society. Allah has created men and women equal. The duties and responsibilities assigned to men and women in the family and in the society do not make anybody superior to other. In an Islamic family and society, men and women enjoy same status and rights.

STATUS OF MEN AND WOMEN

Islam equalizes the rights of the both the men and the women. In Islam neither man is superior to women nor is woman superior to man. Islam has given equal rights to all human beings. Social and legal rights such as health, food, shelter and liberty etc for women are not less than men enjoy in Islamic society. Amini (2006:5) affirms that in Islam, women's social status is equal to men and 'there is no difference between men and women'.

Before Islam the condition of women was very miserable. There was no equality between men and women. The women were treated as animals, slaves and minors in all the ancient cultures and civilizations. There was difference in India, Athens, Roman, Chinese, Jewish and English women regarding their social status and rights. They were considered as minors and kept under the control of men. All the decisions regarding their education, marriage, job, wealth and property were taken by their male members of the family. Mace, David and Vera (1960:233) describe that "In Hindu scriptures, the

description of a good wife is as follows: “a woman whose mind, speech and body are kept in subjection, acquires high renown in this world, and in the next, the same abode with her husband”.

Allen (as cited in Badawi, 1971:4) adds that “Athenian women were always minors, subject to some male – to their father, to their brother, or to some of their male kin. Similarly a Roman wife was described by an historian as: “a babe, a minor, a ward, a person incapable of doing or acting anything according to her own individual taste, a person continually under the tutelage and guardianship of her husband”.

When women had not been given their rights their due rights throughout the world then Islam not only uplifted the social status of women but also brought them equal to men. Islam is the only religion that ensures the equality of rights between men and women. Khan (2008:5) describes that “the Holy Quran, the sacred scripture of Islam, contains hundreds of teachings, which apply both to men and women alike, the moral, spiritual and economic equality of men and women as propagated by Islam is unquestionable”.

Thus, Islam, consider both men and women equal in all fields of life. Even in some case Islam has made it mandatory for men to respect the female members of the family more than male members of the family. Khan, (2008:7) states that: ‘Islam has assigned a position of dignity and honour to woman’.

Quran and Hadith are the most valid and reliable sources of Islam and both sources address male and female equally. In many verses of Holy Quran and saying of Prophet (peace be upon him) both male and female are addressed equally. In Quran and Hadith, the words like “O believes or O mankind” are used rather than male or female separately, making it clear that in the eyes of Allah both men and women are equal. Allah says in Quran: “O Mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is the believer who has *taqwa* (piety and righteousness). Verily, Allah is all-knowing, all-aware” (Al-Quran, 49, 13).

Men and women cover to each other’s naked body and garment to make each other beautiful. They take care of each other’s prosperity, safety, respect, needs and personality. Allah says in Quran “they (women) are dresses for you (men) and you (men) are dresses

for the (Women)” (Al-Quran, 2, 187). Allah makes it clear that woman is created from the body of men. All the women have mass, flesh, blood and body quite similar to men. In a Hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) says that “indeed women are the mirror image of men” (Ibin-Ismaail, 2000). However, Allah says in Quran: “And among His signs is the He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find peace and repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy, Verily, in that are indeed signs for people who reflect” (Al-Quran, 30, 21).

The people who consider women inferior are not considered true believers. Their faith is not strong. The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) in a Hadith says that those persons attain the perfection of faith, who are very kind to their wives (Ibin-Ismaail, 2000).

Considering the rights, Islam does not differentiate between men and women. Amini (2006:6) claims that one ‘will not find a single verse in Quran that degrades woman’. All the basic rights are equal for both men and women. The health, education, shelter, justice, liberty and such other basic rights have equally been given to men and women. All the natural resources are equally available to men and women.

STATUS AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

The social status of women in Islam is not less the men. Khan (2004:4) states that “Islam recognizes all fundamental human rights of women in totality and declares plainly that women, as human being, are equal to men”. Islam has acknowledged all the basic rights of women in Holy Quran. Women have been given Distinct Social, Educational, Political and economical rights in Islam that were not even in other religions.

Saleem (1966:4) points out that there is misconception and misinterpretation of injunctions of Holy Quran and Sunnah about women’s rights in Islam. Khan (2004:2) adds that ‘history tells us that in ancient times women were given second grade citizen status and mistakenly the scholars of the time had approved their inferior position, this false concept had a negative impact on the status of women’. Because of this negative conception and misinterpretation women had suffered and are suffering badly throughout the world. Saleem (1966:4) describes that “many religious scholars argue that

women should be confined to their homes and they should stick to serving the needs of their husbands and rearing the next generation”.

However, Islam emphasizes that both men and women have some origin, rights and status. Allah says in Quran: “It is He (God), who did create you from a single soul and there from did create his mate that he might dwell with her (in love)” (Al-Quran, 7, 89). In another verse of Holy Quran Allah says that: ‘The Creator of heavens and earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves’ (Al-Quran 42, 11).

In Islam, men and women are the fundamental and equal pillars. The status and rights of men and women are equally described in Islam. Men have certain obligation to women and women have certain obligation to men. Neither men nor women are allowed to violet and forfeit each others’ rights. There is a severe punishment for ever body-either man or woman, if he or she violets the rights of other.

EQUITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN REGARDING REPRODUCTION AND SURVIVAL OF MANKIND

There is no significant difference between men and women regarding their birth, reproduction process and survival as a mankind. Boys take birth from the same place from where girl takes birth. There is no difference in the growth and development process of boy and girl. Whatever boy eats and drinks, the girl also eats and drinks the same. The reproduction process and survival of both men and women is not difference in any way throughout the world. Allah says in Quran: “O mankind, we have created you from a male and female, and set you up as nations and tribes so you may recognize (and cooperative with) one another. The noblest among you with God is that one of you who best performs his duty; God is ware, Informed” (Al-Quran, 49, 13). “Mankind, heed you’re Lord who has created you form a single soul, and created its mate from it, and propagated so many men and women from them both. Heed God through whom you hold one another responsible, as well as any ties of kinship. God is watching over you” (Al-Quran, 4, 1).

Islam has made it clear that men and women are the basic pillars of society. If any pillar either man or woman is weak or inferior, the balance of the society will be uneven and there will be no growth and development in the society. The growth and development of society is impossible without equity of pillars in the shape of men and women.

EQUITY OF SPIRITUAL EXCELLENCE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Islam has given equal opportunities to both men and women to acquire spiritual excellence in every walk of life. Allah says in Quran: “We shall let anyone who acts honorably. Whether it is a man or a woman, provided he is a believer, live a happy life and reward them with their earnings for the finest deeds they have been doing” (Al-Quran, 4, 97).

Both men and women can be honest, truthful, trustworthy and pious. Allah rewards man and woman equally for the same work. Allah does not differentiate in the goodness and piousness of both male and female. Allah says in Quran: “So their Lord responded to them: ‘I shall never waste the work of any worker among you, whether it is a man or a woman’, some of you (have sprung) from others” (Al-Quran, 3, 195).

At another place Allah says in Quran: “Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, reverent men and reverent women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, and men who safeguard their private parts and women who safeguard (their) and man who remember God often and women who remember (him) for (all of) them God has prepared forgiveness and a splendid wage” (Al-Quran: 33, 35).

Allah does not make any difference in the work of men and women, Allah rewards equally to both men and women for the same work and worship.

EQUITY OF ACQUIRING EDUCATION BETWEEN MEN & WOMEN

Islam has made it mandatory for both male and female equally to acquire education and knowledge. Educational rights of men and women are equal and more education is compulsory for both of them. Islam does not differentiate the type and level of education and knowledge for men and women. Whatever education is compulsory for men is also compulsory for women. Holy Prophet says in a Hadith that education is necessary for every Muslims – man and woman (Ibin-Ismail 2000).

EQUITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN TO HAVE WEALTH AND PROPERTY

Islam gives equal rights to men and women to earn and hold the wealth and property. Even after marriage whatever the wealth is owned by women remains the wealth of women. Islam does not restrict either men or women to have wealth and property. Allah says in Quran: “Do not envy that God has made some of you excel over others: men should have a portion of whatever they have earned, while women should have a portion of whatever they have earned, Ask God for some of His bounty; God is aware of everything” (Al-Quran, 4, 33).

EQUITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN TO HAVE MARRIAGE

Islam has given equal rights to both male and female to have marriages. There is no significant difference between boys and girls to make decision regarding their marriage. Both are free to choose their life partners according to their own choice. Islam does not approve the marriage of girl without her consent. Allah says in Quran that “do not harass them (women) in order to make life difficult for them” (Al-Quran, 6, 65). In another verse of Holy Quran, Allah says that “treat them (women) kindly” (Al-Quran, 4, 19).

EQUITY BETWEEN HUSBAND (FATHER) AND WIFE (MOTHER)

Wife and husband are the prominent parts of family. No family can flourish without the existence of mother and father. The unification of father and mother gives birth to children. This absolute relationship of man and woman makes the rapid growth and development of the family. The happiness and prosperity of family lies in the mutual respect and equality between man and woman. Children used to give equal respect to mother and father. They do not differentiate between mother and father in terms of dignity and honour. Allah says in Quran that man and woman are dresses for each other (Al-Quran, 2, 187). In another verse of Holy Allah says:

“Among his signs is (the fact) he has created spouses for you from among yourselves so that you may console yourselves with them. He has planted affection and mercy between you, in that are signs for people who things over” (Al- Quran, 30, 21)

Allah has made the couples of mankind and each member of the couple has certain dignity and honour. Islam has made it mandatory to every wife and husband to respect each other. For children, the paradise is kept under the feet of mother and the key of paradise is given to father.

CONCLUSION

There is misconception and misunderstanding that men are superior to women and that men have got more status and rights in Islam. There is a misperception prevalent in our society that men are superior to women. In the eyes of Allah, all the Muslims (men and women) are equal. Islam has routed out the superiority based on gender, blood or race. In Islam, the superior is only one who is upright and pious regardless of one's gender, blood and race. A woman can be superior to a man if she is upright and pious. Similarly, a servant can be superior to boss if he or she is upright and pious.

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