

Empowerment of Muslim Women: A Myth Or Reality

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Abstract: Education has been recognized as one of the most important tools of empowerment. It develops the personality and rationality of individuals, qualifies them to fulfil certain economic, political and cultural functions and thereby improves socio-economic status. Economic empowerment includes poverty eradication and income generation and social empowerment includes education, health and nutrition etc. Apart from these parameters other aspects which determine women's empowerment are mobility, self esteem and choice of career. In the case of Muslim women the state of empowerment is still not clear hence a study about their actual status is required. In many cases we find a number of myths related to their rights being propagated by various extremist groups (both Hindu and Muslim). It is by and large observed that while the outsiders carry a very biased view of Muslim women and are generally not aware of the reality, Muslim women also tend to not realize their actual status. Most of them are not clear about the rights given to them by Islam as a religion as well as the Indian constitution. The present paper highlights the status of Muslim women in context of the Quaran and Hadith about their rights and duties.

Keywords: Empowerment, Education, Literacy status, Gender disparities, Right and duties

I. INTRODUCTION:

The term "Women empowerment" has become very much part of our lives. Dependent women are not empowered women. If women think just that being highly educated and employed they are empowered, it is a myth. Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power. Education is an essential means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the development process. Sustainable development is only possible when women and men enjoy equal opportunities to reach their potential. The issues of women and Islam among masses have for quite some time attracted the interest of the intellectual and politicians. But much of this interest is caught up in misconception Religion is seen to be the primary force influencing every aspect of their lives. They are still viewed as being out of the world where every move of their life is controlled by men and religious dogmas issued from time to time by various religious leaders and scholars. The spotlight is always on the role of religion in their life. It is normally believed that they are strictly controlled by Muslim personal law.

II. DEFINITION OF THE TERMS:

- **EMPOWERMENT:** Empowerment here means to have authority of opinion making and decision taking. And also empowerment is a process to change the distribution of power between men and women, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions of society.
- **MUSLIM:** Muslim is a term for a follower of Islam. It does not denote a fixed or secured status, nor is it merely a cultural identity to be distinguished from other identities. Rather it is process of submitting or drawing near to God.
- **EDUCATION:** Education is taken here as a liberating force which enables an individual to work towards self growth.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To examine the concept of empowerment.
- To study the Text of Holy Quran that encourages the education and well-being of women and the favourable comments regarding the education and status of women.
- To focus the rights of women in Islam.
- To understand women's problem and to find solution for it.

IV. METHODOLOGY:

This study is basically based on the review of information collected from secondary sources i.e. published books, reports, research works, journals and news papers. Some information is also collected through internet browsing.

V. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The finding will enable to view Muslim women in real perspective and thus help in understanding women's problem and to find solution for it. The study also takes important position in terms of reforms it can bring in educational practices and system. The finding will have cues to change the curriculum, teaching practices and overall educational philosophy. Exploring the meaning of empowerment in context of Muslim women will also help in acknowledging the challenges faced. The finding will help to resolve the conflicting scenario of educational concept for Muslim women.

VI. IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN EDUCATION:

"Education for all" is one of the major tasks being carried out by the Indian government but still we have the lowest female literacy rate in Asia. India is working but the pace is slow as we haven't achieved what we should have achieved a long time ago. Education liberates women from ignorance, increase self-esteem and helps them take control over their own lives and guide the progress of their families. Women are the backbone of a society. They are as equally important as men are. The role of women cannot be denied in any society or culture. Women must be educated for a healthy and a happy life. An educated woman can be a better human being, successful mother and a responsible citizen. Educating women will unquestionably increase the living standard both at and outside home. An educated woman will force her kids to study further and wish them to live a better life than hers. Napoleon once said, "Give me educated mothers and I will give you educated nations." On the other hand, women are most vulnerable to trafficking when they are under educated and poor, says the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP). A woman has to play three roles in the course of her life. Each of these roles expects some duties from her. It is only with the help of education that she would be able to do them successfully. The first duty is to be a good daughter. Second duty is to be a good wife and third duty is to be a good mother. Education teaches a woman what she should do to be good daughter, good wife and a good mother. An educated lady is good friend, a clever nurse and a useful adviser to her husband.

VII. STATUS OF EDUCATION AS HIGHLIGHTED IN QURAN AND HADITH:

According Islam said, "A mother's lap is the first school for child." There is no priority for men over women in relation to the right to education. Both are equally encouraged to acquire education. Indeed, all the Quranic verses which relate to education and which advocate the acquisition of knowledge were directed to both men and women alike. The Prophet said: "seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim (male and female)". This includes knowledge of the Quran and the Hadith as well as other knowledge. Muslim women must acquire the appropriate education to perform her duty in accordance with their own natural talents and interests. To seek knowledge is a sacred duty in Islam, The first word revealed of the Quran was "Iqra" which mean "Read" and Seek knowledge! Educate yourselves! Be educated. There is a general stereotype that the principles of Islam are responsible for educational backwardness of the Muslims. But there is no empirical basis of such a stereotype. Actually Islam does not stand against the acquisition of knowledge and education among its believers. Islam has given proper emphasis on attainment of education and has provided many guidelines for it. Islam has broader meaning of education. According to Islamic prescriptions acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for all men and women. It states that "go in quest of knowledge to as distant as a place as China". About fourteen centuries ago Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared that "the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim male and female". In the view of Islam, a society cannot flourish, unless its human resources are properly utilized through education (Abdalati, 1975). The Islam says to develop harmony, equilibrium and balance by utilizing the knowledge. Still Muslims are at the bottom of educational level.

VIII. STATUS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM:

The Muslims in India as well as in other part of world never differentiate their social and religious life. Many scholars (Brijbushan 1980; Banamusa 1995; Kazi 1999) write that true Islam means equality between male and female and that Muslim women's oppression is due to patriarchal misinterpretation of Islam. Jawad (1998) also writes that Islam emphasises both that women differ from men and that they are equal to men. He further writes that in Quran and in Hadith literature, there are various statements concerning women in particular which makes clear pronouncement in favour of equal rights for both man and woman. Islam is the only religion and a way of life which presents a very balanced image about women and recognizes the importance of women with a place of respect and reverse to women in human society. It gives sample of consideration to her natural delicateness and has assigned her the duties that are suited to her physical strength. The Islamic ideology- **Sariah** and **Hadith** allow women participating in day to day life activities by declaring the education as the basic fundamental obligation for every woman and man to give essential knowledge, according to the requirement. Prophet Mohammad himself induced women to learn weaving, that shows the women should be trained in handcrafts and home industries, such as tailoring, embroidery, weaving, small industries, business conduct.

Also, Islam has recognized the polygamy, divorce, inheritance, testimony and blood money etc. and explains the sphere of activities of a woman and her participation in various section of social life and thereby basic right in positive trend given to her by Islam.

The Quran states- "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah (the God) has given the one more strength than other and supported them from their means."

According to the French scholar **Dr. Gustawali**- "Islam has brought a comprehensive development in the cultural and social position of women. The Quranic laws of inheritance are more in favour of women compared to the laws of Europe and others."

An eminent Indian author **Milan Ram**- “The people who are followers of the religions should acknowledge the excellence of Islamic **Sariah**. If it so, then the superiority of Islamic ideology will be raised to level which will be beyond imagination. In fact, what Islam presents is the accurate solution of all the problems.” According to the Quran :

- Human are created in best of form
- Men and women as friend to each other
- Veil (*Hijab*) is for both Men and Women
- Women to be taken care as a glass product
- Paradise lies beneath her (mother) feet
- Daughter as a shield to protect from hell fire
- Spouses as garment to each other

IX. RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM:

Islam has granted numerous rights to women including property rights and Mehr which no other religion has given. Some rights given to her several centuries ago have not been given to her even in the modern system of law. Men and women are equal in Islam the inequality is created by society and not by religion. Islam provides full protection to the rights of woman. The rights Granted to her by Islamic Shariat cannot be taken away by any one (Qureshi 2003). Women are allowed to play an effective and helpful role in the Islamic Society. Shariat allows them to form their own organisation for the uplift of the society. Though such organization did not exist during the time of Holy Prophet (PBUH) but the women used to get together during those days and put before the Holy Prophet (PBUH) the problems which they faced and the Prophet listened to them. Now the circumstances are different the Muslim women have to face various difficulties all over the world. Therefore, they can form their own organizations to solve the problems concerning women and children and they can do a lot for their upliftment. Quran while permitting polygamy laid strict conditions that a man may take another wife only if he can treat all his wives equally. According to Islamic law, man in Islam is fully responsible for the maintenance of his wife, his children especially the females (Ahmed 2003). Islam has not barred women from economic activities; rather it has given permission while imposing on her a few appropriate limitations. She can participate in economic activities and can take interest and contribute her abilities in different fields of life while keeping into consideration her condition, social environment and her own interest. Islamic shariat recognises the full property rights of women before and after marriage.

X. EDUCATION AND THE MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA

Education is an indispensable means for helping the Muslim women out of their economic misery because economic dependency is the major factor contributing to the low status of Muslim women. After independence women's education made considerable progress in India. The number of girl's schools and colleges increased. Muslim girls going to schools and colleges also increased slowly but steadily. Muslim parents are becoming anxious to educate their daughters along with their sons. Village girls are going to schools while in towns many of them are seeking higher education. Still Muslim women are changing very gradually, sometimes; the change is painfully slow, because for a long time Muslim women have remained secluded and have lived the life of submission, so most of them dislike the idea of change. Participation of Muslim girls in educational activities has been studied by Hassan and Menon (2004) who found that very few Muslim women in India are in high profile jobs. The study reveals that less than 15% of Muslim women report themselves to be working. Generally, Muslim women are self-employed or engaged in home-based labour. This leads to a huge dropout of Muslim girls from schools. The Sachar Committee Report (2006) also reflects the same feeling that parents feel that education is not important for girls. Even if girls are enrolled, they are withdrawn at an early age to marry them off. This leads to a higher dropout rate among Muslim girls. At the all India level Muslim women are three times behind their Hindu sisters. The attainment of higher education among girls is a rare phenomenon even in the urban areas. The studies done in the field of Muslim women revealed that the lack of good quality schools and hostel facilities for girls, poor quality of teacher are believed to be some of the important factors responsible for the low level of educational attainment among Muslims women. It is worthwhile to say that Muslim women has a strong desire and enthusiasm for education, but hurdles like low access to schools in the vicinity, poverty, financial constraints and discrimination faced at school prevent them from continuing education.

XI. PRESENT LITERACY RATE OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN INDIA:

It is unanimously agreed that illiteracy is one of the major contributors to poverty in any socio-religious community. Muslim society is changing slowly in India and now days providing education to their daughters and taking benefits of different educational policies of government. The latest Census data also shed light on the growth of literacy rate among various religious communities. Muslims who showed lowest literacy rate of 59% in 2001, recorded biggest increase and reached 69% in 2011. Although still short of the national average of 73% and still the lowest among all religious communities, the gap is closing. Jain continues to have the highest literacy rate of 95% followed by Christian at 85%. All communities are showing a much higher rate of growth of female literacy. But still the Male literacy rate is 82.14% and Female literacy rate is 65.46%.

XII. CONCLUSION:

Education is important for everyone, but it especially significant for women's Empowerment. Muslim women are not aware of their self identity and esteem in the pressure of family matter. Permissive poverty of people along with traditional beliefs and orthodoxy for women folk is solely responsible for such immense deplorable condition of Muslim women. Women are conscious about family welfare but still they are to depend on husband because in most of the cases they are out of the access to money. The study shows different views on Muslim women. One opinion says that Islam imposes many restrictions on its women and gives higher status to the men and concentrates power in the hands of men. Islam and Islamic law have nothing to do with present

disadvantaged status of Muslim women. The second view is that Islam and Islamic law have nothing to do with present disadvantaged status of Muslim women. This view stresses that the status of Muslim women is similar to that of in other caste women in the country, the most important reason being poverty and illiteracy. The third view is that Islamic law treats both men and women as equals but unfortunately the Islamic scholars and religious leaders are misinterpreting the Islamic law giving the men power over the women. But now Purdah system is no more hindrance in women's education and employment but they have to wear proper dresses while going out of home. In villages women work in the field without purdah. Muslim women live according their religion as their day to day life is influenced by their religion They play a very insignificant role in family decision making and are instructed to live in purdah always but it was observed that this is undergoing change especially among the educated and economically sound families. This change is very slow though.

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