



## **Women Empowerment in The Context of Teachings of Islam**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Concerning the position of women, Annie Besant described it as it is lone in the last twenty years that Europe has recognized the right of women to property, at the same time Islam has sanctioned this right from all times. It is malign to say that Islam advocates that women have no souls (Beasant, 1932). Women's empowerment is a boiling concern that is debated on every platform of the world. Despite these international and national initiatives, the position of women at the grassroots women is considered a burden in the family in various countries of the world. In the context of women's empowerment, the teachings of Islam are evident and clear and these teachings of Islam have paid much focus on the subject of women empowerment. In Islam, much emphasis has been given to the rights and duties of women. In this context, Allah has revealed the entire Sura known as Sura-Al- Nisha Surah number 4. This Sura significantly focuses on the subject of women and their share in the property that their parents leave. In addition to this, there are various verses in the other Suras of the Noble Quran which focus on the rights of women. There are also some authentic narrations of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) mentioned in the various books of Hadith which directly or indirectly emphasize women's empowerment. The present study aims to highlight the notion of women's empowerment in the context of Islamic teachings.

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### **1. Introduction**

The notion of women empowerment is a widespread notion for academicians as well as non-academicians in the current world. Before moving ahead, we must comprehend the meaning of the word empowerment "Authority or power given to someone to do something" (Oxford dictionary). Hence it is manifested from the above definition that assigning the authority to women for their development without any discrimination in society is termed as women empowerment. The real point of women empowerment is the need for time as half of the population is women. If society prevents the development of women, the particular society never becomes prosperous because women are the wheel of progress. (Suguna, and Rani, 2007). Further in the work of Suguna and Rani 2007 titled 'women *empowerment and self-help groups*' listed the core components of empowerment that are mentioned below:

- Women's and men's sense of internal strength and confidence to face life.
- The right to make choices.
- The power to control their own lives within and outside the home.
- The ability to influence the direction of social change towards the creation of more just social and economic orders nationally and internationally.

The same authors also presented the categories of empowerment:

- Economic Empowerment.
- Political Empowerment.
- Social Empowerment.

## **2. Status of Women in Different Civilizations of World**

If we study the status of women in different civilizations, we find a distasteful picture of women. To cite the example of Babylonian civilization if a man performed murder instead of punishing him the wife was convicted to death. In Greek culture, a woman was considered to be the source of evil. Aristotle declared 'the female statue is a deformity.' A Roman Catholic Aquinas believed; a female is a misbegotten male.'

### **2.1. Position of Women in Pre-Islamic Society**

In pre-Islamic Arabian society, there was no concept of women empowerment. Women were considered a huge burden and a sign of shame in society. To stop this disgrace, the inhabitants of that time killed their daughters and buried them alive. This tradition was a favourite in the pre-Islamic society of Macca. During the war times, women were seized by the enemies; the enemies used them for satisfying their sexual desires. Therefore, the condition of the women was very much aching in the tribal society of Macca.

### **2.2. Islam Elevated the Status of Women**

When the last Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born, Arabian society was full of evil crimes with a heap of ignorance and darkness. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) erased these evils with his exemplary character. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) spoke against these wrongdoings and gradually eradicated them from Arabian society. He acts as a great social reformer and unites the fractured Arabian tribes by faith. The doors of these teachings that were presented by the Prophet (PBUH) were open to all without any discrimination who were ready to accept without any compulsion by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Islamic teachings banned the tradition of killing women and uplifted their status. The Quran refers to the woman as a "*Mohsina*" which means a fortress against the Devil. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), told the parents to educate their children, especially their daughters. Another narration of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) regarding the importance of the care of daughters is the Prophet said that "anyone who brings up two daughters with love and affection, also did not support his sons over daughters he shall enter into Jannah". The Quran granted the rights of inheritance to women 1400 years ago before they were given to European women (Khan Aftab, 2017). In the teachings of Islam utmost importance has been offered to protect the honour and dignity of women and these teachings of Islam locked all types of paths and doors that can dishonour women. The development of women is one of the core teachings of the Noble Quran as the Noble Quran has mentioned the models described in the following chapters of the Noble Quran

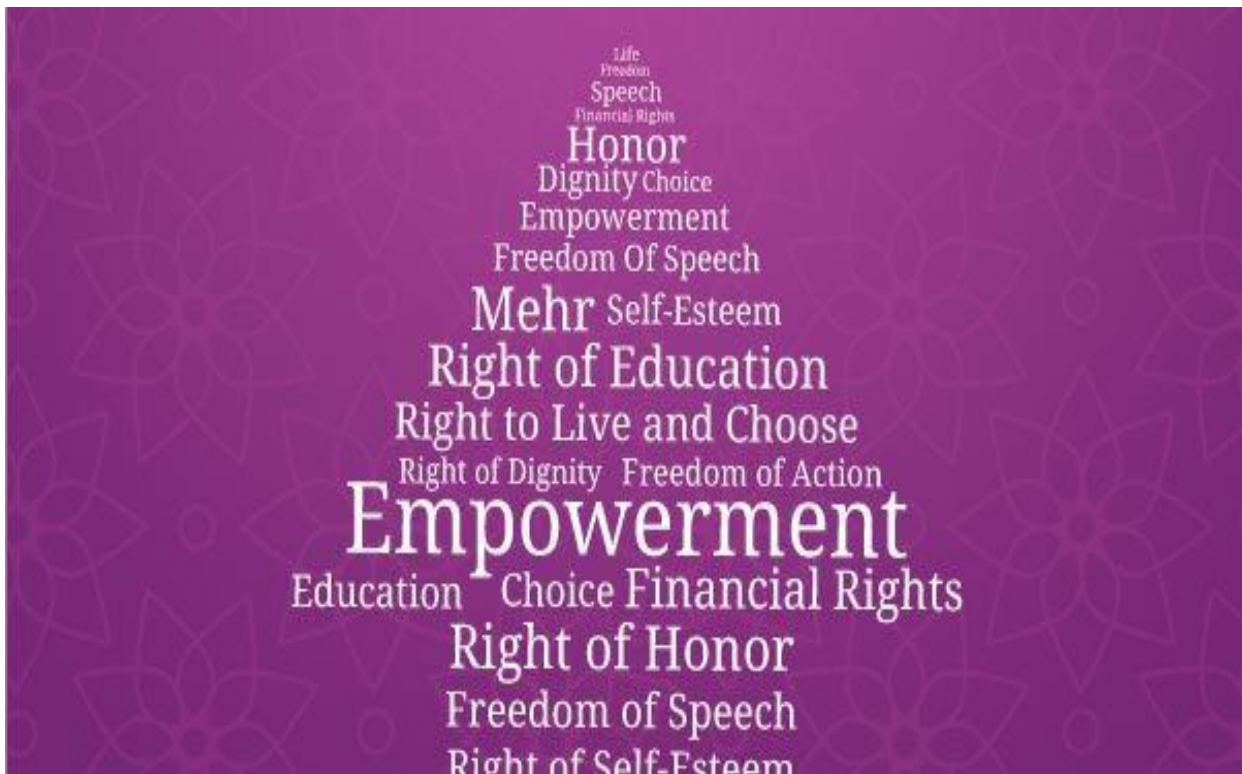
- AL- Nissa chapter 4.
- Al -NUR chapter 24.
- Al- Ahzab chapter 33.
- Al- Hujarat chapter 49.

The enigma is that in the present society, Muslims are very far away from the teachings of the Quran and authentic Sunnah. People have made it a profession of earning money. So, if anybody wants to study the status of women from an Islamic perspective, he/she should not judge according to what Muslims do and what a Muslim society does. But he/she must go to the authentic sources of Islam.

## **3. Women's Rights in Islam**

In the present period, there is pessimistic thinking among some sections of the global population about Muslim women. Most people have blamed Muslims for depriving the rights of Muslim women. However, the truth is Islam was the first religion on the green planet to give the proper rights and protection of respect to women. The rights (Economic,

Political, Educational, and Social) that we witness today in different countries for the development of women are already given by Islam to women, but the problem is these Muslim women are very illiterate and are not aware of the true teachings of Islam.



**Figure 1: The Trailblazer of Women's Rights**

Source: - Amatul Hakeem Islam, the Trailblazer of Women's Rights.

The rights accredited to women in Islam are mainly arranged into four categories.

- Economic rights.
- Educational rights.
- Political rights.
- Social rights.

### 3.1. Economic Rights

During the time of marriage, women receive money known as (Mehar) a form of bride price. It is obligatory for men to give to women. The Quran says in Surah *Nisa* in verse four that *"and give the women their dowries willingly"*. Before her marriage, her father and brother have to fulfil her needs and after Marriage; it is the utmost duty of a husband to look at all types of needs of his wife. The Noble Quran made it compulsory that women have a right to share in a property that is left by their parents. The Noble Quran says that *'for men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much'* (4:7).

Islam has put a financial burden on the shoulders of man. If a woman likes to work, she can work within the circle of Islamic laws. Women can make a career in some critical and famous professions like medicine, and teaching. It is the need of the time of Muslim societies to uplift women. These women should become teachers, doctors, lawyers, and traders. The first wife of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the famous business lady of the Macca.

In the present day, we see the steps by Malaysia for the empowerment of women through Islamic microfinance institutions and in Saudi Arabia, the model of banks only for ladies has empowered a lot of the Muslim women in these respective countries.

### **3.2. Educational Rights**

Today it is a common perception that Islam has not given educational rights to women. This statement is not valid and true in the matter of education. There is a clear cut in the teachings of Islam that seeking knowledge is an absolute duty for both men and women.

If we study the first Verse of the Noble Quran which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at the place of cave Hira in Mecca, the verse is "it was *Iqra*" and "it was about to be read". Hence the first guidance which was revealed by Allah to all humankind talked about education, this is the reason the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said "*it is obligatory for every Muslim to acquire knowledge*" the Prophet of Islam not only said that the search for knowledge is compulsory to every Muslim male and female, but he also noted that educates a man educates an individual and whoever teaches a lady educates the nation (Usman, 2017).

In Islam, we had myriad examples of women 1400 years ago who were great scholars. To cite the example of mother 'Ayesha' R-HA, one of her famous students 'Arwa' R-HA said about 'Ayesha' R-HA, 'I was not seeing any scholar greater than 'Ayesha' in the learning of the Quran, essential duties, in lawful and unlawful things, in literature, in poetry, in Arabic history. The mother 'Ayesha' became the teacher of Sahaba who gained guidance from her. She was also a grand scholar of Mathematics. 'Ayesha' taught 100s of scholars of Islam (Zakir, 2013).

Another great woman in Islamic history was 'Umme- Salama'-HA the most intellectual woman of the time. She was known for her intelligence and was famous for her political wisdom and for taking judgment during crucial and challenging times. The lady was known for her knowledge and understanding of society.

One more intelligent woman was 'Fatima Bint Qays R-HA, a woman of understanding with excellent hospitality skills. When the second caliph of Islam 'Umar' RA died the meeting of the Shura committee was held in Fatima's house because she was a woman of excellent understanding, wise judgment, and expert opinions. The members of the committee thought that it would be appropriate to consult her.

In Islamic history, we found an abundant number of women who have preserved the literature of the Hadith from the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in this direction 'Imam Ahmad' has made a vast list of women that directly transmitted the hadith from the Prophet according to his son Abdullah b Ahmed (160) said I found the list of women in my father's handwriting who have transmitted hadith from the Messenger of Allah and he preceded the names of 103 women. Another scholar Ibn Hajar, a great Islamic scholar, authorized the 50 Islamic books and also wrote the commentary of the 'Sahi Bukhari' ( Fath al-Bari) studied from 53 women, As- 'Sakhawi' had ijzas from 68 women and As- 'Suyuti' studied 33 women.

In the fifth and sixth centuries 'Fathima Bint al -Hasan Ibn Ali - Ad - Daqqaq al - Qushayari was one of the Hadith Scholars; she was also famous in the art of calligraphy. In the seventh century, there was a great lady whose name was Umm Al - Darda a notable jurist and Abdul Malik ibn Marwan was one of her students. Another lady was 'Aisha bint Saad bin Abi Waquas' was also a jurist and scholar, the distinguished teacher of Imam Malik, and the founder of the Malki school of thought of Fiqh.

'Sayyida Nafisa', the daughter of Hassan bin Ali Talib, was also a great teacher of Islamic Jurisprudence and it is reported that her students travelled far distances and one among them was Imam Shafi, the founder of the Shafi school of thought. During the time of Caliph 'Umar ibn Al- Khattab' RA 'Ashifa bint Abdullah' was the first lady appointed by the Caliph as a market inspector and manager. In the ninth century, the 'Fatima Al Fihriya' in Fez, Morocco established the Al- Qarawiyin mosque, the first university in the world still in operation.

During the tenth century, Fatima of Cordoba was a famous librarian who saw 70 public libraries containing 400,000 books and in the eleventh century, the Banafshaa ar

Rumiyya worked for the houseless people in Baghdad and also restored Schools and Bridges. Dr Akram Nadwi writes in his famous book *Al Muhaddithat* (2007) a 40-volume book collection about women Scholars.

*'Initially, I thought there might be about 30 to 40 women, but as the research progressed the accounts kept growing until I realized I had no less than 8000 biographical accounts of Muslim women who played a major role in the preservation and development of the Islamic traditions of knowledge since the time of Prophet (PBUH). The women I encountered were far from mediocre when compared to men and indeed some excelled away beyond their male contemporaries. There were exceptional women who not only participated in society but actively reformed it. Most striking was their caliber for intellectual achievement and the respect and recognition they received for it.'*

### 3.3. Political Rights

Political rights are defined as the rights through which the people participate in the political activities of the state. Under this right people can elect their leaders for holding public offices by using their vote. If we examine the history of different civilizations, women were nowhere in the political scene. *Aristotle* in his famous treatise the *Politics* excluded women from the right to citizenship. In the context of Islam, political rights were granted to women 1400 years ago. In this regard, the Noble Quran Says in Surah *Taubah* verse 71 that *"And the believing men and women are friends of one another. They instruct good and forbid evil and observe prayer and pay Zakat and obey Allah and his messenger. It is those on whom Allah will have mercy. Surely, Allah is Mighty, wise."*

It is evident from the above verse of the Noble Quran that the believing men and women are supporters of one another collectively. During the appointment of *Usman*, the third Caliph of Islam, many women were consulted to show their opinions concerning the selection of this Caliph. Further, no one forgets the role of *Umma Salma*, the wife of the Prophet of Islam during the treaty of (*Hudaibiya*, 6<sup>th</sup> year of migration). It was the peace treaty between the Prophet of Islam and the Pagans of Mecca. One of the sections of this agreement was that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions would go back to Medina without performing the pilgrimage that year. Hence the companions of the Prophet were shocked to lose *Umrah* that year. In this environment, the Prophet told his companions to slaughter the animals and get their heads shaved. But companions were so sad that they delayed the compliance. The prophet (PBUH) of Islam felt it and *"entered the tent and told his accompanying wife 'Umma Salma' about the people's reluctance. She politely advised him to go ahead and perform the act needed to come out of the state of Ihram himself.* The Prophet followed her advice. When the companions saw that they also followed the suit.

Another famous episode happened during the time of *Umar RA* the second Caliph of Islam. When Umar orders the people not to give an excessive amount of Dower (Mahar) at the time of marriage. On listening to this, an ordinary lady stood up and shouted at *Umar*. *Umar* you have no right to arbitrate the subject which Allah has already described in the Quran. When Allah did not put the upper limit on this subject then who is *Umar R.A.* to fix it, then the lady quoted the verse of Surah *Nisa* that:

*"If a husband gives her wife bundles and bundles of wealth as dowry even then he cannot demand anything after divorce".*

On hearing this Caliph of the time withdrew his order and said Umar was wrong she is right. This event undoubtedly shows that even an ordinary lady can participate in lawmaking (Farooq, nd).

In Islam, a woman can also take part in the battlefield. There is a chapter in *Sahih Bukhari* about the participation of women on the battlefield. Many Muslim women played the role of Nurses on the battlefield by providing water and giving first aid to the soldiers. During the battle of *Uhud*, the *Nasiba*, a lady, was among the people who sheltered the Prophet (PBUH) and while doing so, she received numerous wounds and injuries for which the Prophet (PBUH) appreciated and praised her (Yousef, et al 2014).

Recently the Saudi Government under the leadership of the late King Abdullah appointed 30 women to the country's top advisory Shura council and granted them the right to vote for women, which resulted in 130,000 Saudi women casting their vote in Municipal elections (B.B.C, 2015).

### **3.4. Social Rights**

In the modern-day period, the position of women is so pathetic in society that the rising of domestic violence cases against women, honour killing, female feticide, girl trafficking, molestation rape etc. are common issues in the Muslim as well as non-muslim countries. The highest number of casualties are women during the war times the position of women becomes more painful it is estimated that 20,000 to 35,000 were raped during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Tickner, 2011).

Before the influx of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, a matching condition of women in Arab society. It was under the leadership of the Prophet of Islam who entirely eradicated these troubles from the community. The people of Arabian society at that time felt it was a shame when a girl child was born in their houses. The Noble Quran debunks the picture of that time as *'And when one of them is informed of (the birth of) a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief'* (16:58). In the light of the above verse, it is a disliked act in Islam to become sad during the birth of the female child. But regrettably, in the present society, many parents force their sons to divorce their wife if she is giving birth to a girl.

To prohibit, this practice of killing female children from society the Quran says in Surah Al- An'am verse 151 and in Surah Bani-Israel verse 31

*"Kill not your children for fear of poverty. It is Allah who provides for them and you. Surely, the killing is a great sin."*

Islam considered the birth of girls as a blessing of Allah in this regard the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) said *'that anyone who up- brings two daughters with love and affection will be as close to me as two fingers on the day of judgment'* Another narration of Prophet of Islam in this connection are as *"anyone who up-brings two daughters with love and affection and did not favour his sons over daughters, he shall enter into Jannah"*. The Prophet of Islam also said a woman has been blessed whose first child is a daughter. One day a person kissed his son and placed him on his lap, but the person did not do the same for his daughter. The prophet Muhammad objected and said to the person you are doing unjustly and if you want to do justice, you should have kissed your daughter as well and placed her on your other lap.

*'Ayesha'*, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, said whenever *'Fatima'* the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) would enter the house in the presence of his father Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Prophet would stand up and set her in his place. This incident shows the magnitude of care the prophet of Islam for his daughters.

### **3.5. The Marriage is Invalid Without the Consent of The Daughter**

In this regard, the Quran says in Surah Nisa verse 19 that *"O who believes it is not lawful to you to inherit women against their will"*.

One day a lady came to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and said my parents forced me to marry a man against my wishes and the Prophet of Islam said she has an option either to continue or nullify the marriage.

Regarding the wife, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that the most ideal, as regards his faith, is the one whose character is excellent and the best among you are those who treat their wives very well. The prophet also said that women have right over you and remember that you have taken them as your wives, only under Allah's trust and with his permission. Do treat your women well and be kind to them.

The prophet of Islam said, *"Among you, the most respectable is the one who respects women and the most disrespectful is the one who disrespects the women."*

In the last Sermon, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, *'O' people fear Allah in the matter of women, treat them carefully and fairly as Islam teaches you.*

The last Messenger also said, *"It is generous in the character who is good to women, and it is the wicked who insults them."*

#### **4. Conclusion**

Women were recognized as degraded before the influx of Islam as the favourite tradition among some Arabs was to bury their daughters alive, and this tradition was frequent. The rights of inheritance were only for men, and the practice of divorce was common and was active in the hands of the husband.

These all-malicious means were eradicated by Islam and presented a new crystalline system to the whole universe. This is the reason the Quran states Islam as a 'Deen' means a perfect way of life that enlightens human beings from birth to grave and even after grave.

The empowerment of women is one of the heart subjects of Islam as these teachings of Islam empowered women 1400 years ago. The rights that Europe is given today to these women, Islam has granted these rights to women already, and it was the first on the green planet that provides voting rights to women before Europe.

For empowerment, Islam and is not dependent on the new catchwords of Europe-centered feminism of women. These European beget slogans of feminism have corrupted the society of Europe in the name of empowerment, and they made the women commodity and naked in public.

Nowadays some issues are highlighted by some anti-Muslim forces against Islam. According to these forces, Islam has crushed women as they target the Hijab, and many countries have banned this in public places. However, there are solid reasons mentioned in the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) about the provisions of the Hijab for women. The Hijab which these anti-Muslim forces considered a sign of suppression. Nevertheless, if these forces study Islam with pure heart and mind they will find it is not an instrument of suppression or a sign of radicalization but a method to value and preserve respect and dignity of the women in the society and this hijab protects her from the unwanted temptation of gaze.

As far as triple Talaq is concerned, there are clear verses in the Quran and there is a particular chapter in the Quran by the title of Talaq. In these verses of (Al Baqarah chapter two) (An- Nisa chapter 4) and (At-Talaq chapter 65), there are robust methods and practical terms and conditions mentioned before coming into the process of divorce. The instant saying of the words Talaq, Talaq and Talaq is not the way of separation according to the gems of Islam rather than it is un-Islamic. There is a right of Khula that a Muslim women have if she wants to separate herself from the husband.

In Islam, there is the notion of gender justice and equity as sometimes men have given importance and sometimes women have given weight. Today we witness Muslims submerged in the serum of sects that interrupt the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) according to their school of thought. Today people highpoint the query if Islamic teaching is speaking about the empowerment of women then why Muslim women in present Islamic societies are so miserable? The answer to this inquiry is simple: nowadays Muslims follow their group thoughts instead of the Quran and Sunnah. Moreover, a significant number of Muslims are unaware of the core teachings of Islam. Apart from this, Muslims are reading the Quran as a source for the deeds and not for the transformation of the society.

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