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# Women's Rights and Social Status Determined by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)

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**Abstract:** Socially, a woman has a pivotal role in a society. Her position or function in a society is as important as a nucleus has in a living cell. The very first and foremost socialization process of a child starts by a woman (mother). Further, every child becomes a part (good or bad) of a society and performs as he was trained by his/her mother. For this reason, every woman can partially fulfill the demands of a society. In a society, good or bad treatment with women means the transformation of same attitude, behavior and manners into next generations. Women have been empowered socially and legally by Islam. They have been given proper social status and due rights. They have been protected legally from birth to death. Regionally, some bad customs against women have also been adopted by Muslims like: domestic violence, honor killing, Karo Kari and Wani in different areas. This paper is to elaborate the women's rights determined by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). The main objective of this study is, to highlight the distinctions of Islam for women. A descriptive research method has been used for this study.

**Keywords:** Socialization, Empowerment, Religion, Society, Women

**Introduction:** The status of women varies from society to society. In some societies, women are treated like a holy creature but in some societies, they are deprived even of basic human rights. Without a woman, a family or a society cannot be completed. The role of a woman is pious and pivotal in different aspects of life. Also, a man can never survive without the involvement of a woman in his life. She is considered to be the benevolence from Allah almighty according to some people. After birth, in many societies, she is given the status of a respectable daughter and treated like a doll. The same protocol and facilities are entertained to her as a male is provided. Her food, her protection, her education and living place in home is given without any deprivation in a civilized society. No gender discrimination is shown at this stage between male and female babies. At early stage, a girl is given the status of a pious relation in her family. Social training and education are given equally to both males and females by their parents. At this stage mostly parents don't show any discriminatory behavior towards children's training or education. Because, children's social training starts at this level. Even one's social training, physical and mental growth occurs from different angles. But parents play primary role in this process. Parents let them grow and give them an environment in which they can learn skills and manners both for males and females. As explained by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) children's social

training which occurs by parents. "Socialization acts through different channels as the child grows older-first through the parents during infancy and toddlerhood"<sup>1</sup>

Girls in schools, colleges and universities can better perform if they are given required facilities. Their performance has been noted excellent in every field of life as compared to males, in different fields of life. But, somehow, there are some differences between physical as well psychological structure of males and females. A female can be easily captured emotionally as compared to a male. A girl or a woman has to face different situations in different fields of life. According to their physical structure, some kinds of job are not suitable for them. For this reason, there is a division of work for males and females in most societies. A woman can play a key role in a society if she is given a favorable environment. A child's growth starts at a stage when it is in the uterus of his (or her) mother. A mentally and physically sick woman cannot provide a healthy and normal baby for her society. So, for this reason a woman must be given proper care and proper facilities in every condition. After birth the role of a woman in socializing a child cannot be ignored. Societies which have high ratio of literate people give more importance to women and care for them in proper ways. In the societies which have low literacy rate, women are not treated properly as they deserve. In these societies, people abort the female baby even when she is at early stage. Moreover, the act to get a sex-selective baby has been banned legally in most countries. Partially, this cruel act is seen in some societies. Sometime, women are forced to abort a female baby.

In some families, male babies are preferred so, in some cases women are divorced those who cannot give the birth of a male baby. On continuous birth of female babies, many women in different societies have to face very odd situations. "Moral relativism is typically not presupposed in discussions of infanticide, since relativism opens the door to approval of sex-selection abortion and infanticide of baby girls, as practiced in some parts of the world for cultural reasons"<sup>2</sup>. In some societies girls were buried alive as if they were not the part of human being. People of those societies didn't want a female baby and in case of their absence, a female baby was born, they killed without any reason, having just one cause that a woman could be the cause of degradation of their prestige. "In pre-Islam Arabia, it was common place among many to bury their baby daughters alive"<sup>3</sup>. After marriage, women have to face some domestic violence by their husband or by her husband's family. In some societies, divorced and widows are being treated as if they are worthy of hatred and exploitation. In a Hindu society, a widow is forced to burn herself with the body of her late husband. "The idea of sati has long been a central feature in the Western image of India. *Suttee*, as Westerners have often spelled the word, describes the ritual according to which a Hindu wife follows her husband to his death by ascending his pyre with him or ascending one of her own shortly afterward."<sup>4</sup> So, the treatment and behavior with women are different in different societies. Their status and position in a society varies with the variation of culture and social norms.

**Women, Gender Discrimination and Religion:** The term "Gender Discrimination" is usually used in the sense of unequal treatment of women with men in a society. Women of some cultures claim that as compared to men they are being exploited and deprived of the basic rights. In this sense, they don't want to accept the dictation of men. The quantitative

strength of women all over the world is more than that of men. The involvement and participation of women in different walks of life, it may be economical, political, social, health and education related institutions is necessary. But they have to face many social problems like sexual harassment, domestic violence, honor killing and force marriages in different societies. All these types of crimes and deviances are not related to particular region or religion but in every religion and nation such activities are found. “Violent men don’t come from any particular religious or cultural category; one in three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime”<sup>5</sup>.

Gender discrimination and gender inequality is found in every society and also in every religion. It is a natural phenomenon. Not intentional but without planning it is happened in different societies in different forms in different shapes. In some countries, women are free to live their life according to their will, on the other hand, in some societies their responsibilities have been given to men. It all depends on economic situation of a country. Every woman can’t earn for her living being and becomes dependent totally on men. In these societies men hold higher rank as compare to women because they fulfill the basic needs of their women. In these societies, women have been limited to housekeeping and titled housewives. Sometime they have to live worst life like some kinds of slaves. They have to live under the command of men in these societies. They have to face many brutal actions from men and his family especially after marriages. Gender discrimination is there in some societies due to many reasons. This may be due to weak physical structure of women and also may be due to misuse of some religious extensions given to men.

Basically, the inequality between men and women is due to three basic reasons: first women are physically weak as compared to men, second a woman mentally and emotionally can be captured easily by nature. Third one is cultural and social division of tasks and activities. In some cases, on the bases of these reasons women have been deprived of but in developed countries and in literate societies women have been given proper status and rights. In first and second reason of inequalities somebody has no role to resolve them because both have been occurred naturally and these cannot be changed. By structure, women are weak physically and psychologically as compared to men. But where there is rule of law, no exploitation would be seen. Women are being ill-treated in those societies in which literacy rate is very low. Third reason of inequality is most complex and critical. This reason is also affected by some religious beliefs because norms and values are designed according to a religious belief. Even these beliefs can be real or may be some baseless beliefs. It is reality that women are deprived of and exploited by some so-called religious theories. In some cases, they are not treated like human being. They were buried and burnt alive. They had been socially deprived of inheritance right. Second marriage for women in case of widowhood was not allowed in some societies. They have to cremate with their dead husbands as was practiced in Hindu society. “The idea of sati has long been a central feature in the Western image of India. *Suttee*, as Westerners have often spelled the word, describes the ritual according to which a Hindu wife follows her husband to his death by ascending his pyre with him or ascending one of her own shortly afterward.”<sup>6</sup>

**Status of a Woman in a Muslim Society:** The social position and status of women in Islam is admirable. It was the first time in the history of human being that women were treated as an important creature of God. They were given the proper rights, social status and valuable position in a society. Before Islam they were deprived of and exploited even by their close relatives. People used to bury their daughters before the introduction of Islam. A number of other incidents were narrated and quoted in history in which girls, women and widows were badly treated at that time. After the introduction of Islam, women were treated in proper ways. They were given suitable social rights and positions in the form of pious relations. Their birth was declared a special benefit from Allah Almighty. They were given social and legal position in a society according to their physical and mental level. They were counted a pious relation. From birth to death, every woman without any discrimination was dealt with proper way in a Muslim society in every region. Also, there are some Islamic strategies about women those are being misinterpreted. But this is a division of biologically and psychological between men and women. Some activities are approachable for men (physically and mentally) and women cannot perform them. Women are by nature weak biologically in those matters men only can properly handle them. In Islam, this is actually, the division of work not gender discrimination. Some tasks have been given to men and some have been given by Allah.

In some conditions men have been preferred and, in some situations, women have been given higher rank as compared to men. Men are given the tasks of more energy demanding like out-door activities: earning, hunting, fighting, stunting etc. and women are assigned to look after in-door tasks like cooking washing, caring for children and maternal duties, because these are performed by women in proper ways. "Within the social framework, however, Islam to the extent that it is both natural and practical has adopted the division of labor in respect of the sexes, the man's field of activity being basically external to the home, while the woman's is domestic. This division, however, has never been intended as a form of discriminatory treatment."<sup>7</sup> So on the base of biological differences both men and women's tasks are assigned according to their physical standard. We can say men are superior in some matters and women are in some matters. For these reasons men are advised by Holy Prophet (ﷺ) to treat women gently. "Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said: "O Muslims! I advise you to be gentle with women."<sup>8</sup> Islam gives a prominent status to woman as a daughter, sister, wife, mother and valuable member of a society. Both (man and woman) are dependent to each other and cannot survive without this relation. By natural process, both are compelled to live together, for next generation a loving and caring relation is needed for their prosperity. So, to treat women in normal way, it has been focused in Islam.

**Women, Islam and Gender Choice; Saving the Fetus without Gender Discrimination:** In Islam, there is no gender discrimination in any condition or situation. Where men are addressed, women are not ignored. Both are equally treated and given the rights with justice and impartiality. Even in some conditions, women are entertained more as compare to men. But on social level both are given the equal status in a society. As mentioned in Holy Qur'an and practically examples are found in the life of Holy Prophet (ﷺ). "The Qur'an explicitly asserts the fundamental equal worth of male and female believers, as well as the fact that gender relations are intended to be cooperative and mutually enriching."<sup>9</sup>



Before birth and also in the condition of fetus at initial stage without any gender discrimination to abort the pregnancy is declared a social crime and has been given the commandment not to kill the human being. Allah almighty told that he is responsible for his/her expenses and would be responsible for their financial matters. A general order was given in which male or female genders were addressed. A general word “Children” was used for the safety of fetus. “Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty, we shall provide for them and for you. Lo! The slaying of them is great sin.”<sup>10</sup> The abortion in Islam was prohibited even when it has got a shape of human being. In some critical and exceptional cases, it was permitted when there would be some complications for mother. Most Islamic scholars have discouraged the abortion in any case. In Islam it is not permitted to kill an animate. In this matter, no gender (male or female) was preferred but both are given the equal status, position and ranked. So, the safety and security of women has been started before their birth and discrimination was rejected at that level. Both male and female were equally treated at that stage.

**Family Status; Daughter, Sister, Wife and Mother:** It was the first time, after the introduction of Islam female gender was accepted as a human being. Before the Islam there was a custom to kill the female babies and they were buried alive. Islam totally condemned and prevented this brutal killing and declared a big sin and also warned the people that the killers of girls or daughters would be punished. People before Islam used to kill their daughters with pride and to keep their prestigious up. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) wept and felt great sorrow when a person told him the incident of killing of his daughter. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) said, “It was a big sin and punishable action”. At this time, he recited the verse of Holy Qur’ān. “And when the girl-child that was buried alive will be asked for what sin she was killed.”<sup>11</sup> This incident was narrated in different books of Hadith. So, by Islam, women at the stage of childhood were given security and were made distinctive relation of daughter. It was big grant of Allah on women. In childhood and adulthood, stage girls were treated as a pious relation of a sister whom her brothers love and care for her in any condition. She is treated gently and her brothers pay for them like a protective shield for them. In in-door and out-door activities they serve them and fulfill their necessities. After marriage husbands are responsible to fulfill their requirements. They have to provide their wives protection, foods, clothes, status of life partner and other basic needs. This phenomenon creates love and affection between husband and wife as Allah almighty explained. “He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find response in them, and he has put between you affection and mercy.”<sup>12</sup> For husbands, who treat their wives gently were declared the best people of the world. This action was declared an action which caused the perfection of one’s personality. Women when they are mother have been treated in excellent form in Islam. For mothers, their children have been advised to treat them in gentle and with affection. In their old age, their children to say some harsh words were prohibited by Islam. The status of mothers was explained by the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) when a companion asked him about his parental rights on him. The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) told him that his mother had first right as compare to his father and that sentence was three times repeated by The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) first, second and third was the right of mother and forth time father was given.

**Social Rights; Marriage, Divorce and Widowhood:** It is Islam who gave the women selection right of choosing a life partner at the time of marriage without women's willing no marriage agreement can be signed. Even all activities and ceremonies are arranged by parents and other family members but the positive gesture has been required a woman to choose a man as her husband and without her will marriage have been prohibited in Islam. Many marriage agreements were nullified by The Holy Prophet (ﷺ) those were took place without the permission and willingness of women. "The widows should not be married until she has been consulted. Nor should the virgin be married until her permission has been sought."<sup>13</sup> In Islamic society, a woman has legal right to demand divorce from her husband. She can do this if she considers that her husband is unable to fulfill her requirements (physical, economical and legal) and also in the situation of ill treatment with her. In this situation she has right to ask for divorce and if her husband doesn't do that then she can approach to a court to get divorce or to break the marriage agreement. In some situations, Islam gives her a right to demand for divorce even she doesn't like her husband by face or sees other low quality in him. "If a woman feareth ill treatment from her husband, or desertion, it is no sin for them twain if they make terms of peace between themselves."<sup>14</sup> In Islamic history, a widow has been treated in normal ways. For first time, the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) married a woman who was twice widow named "Khadija" with that marriage, widows were upgraded and socially accepted as honorable and respectable women. "Khadija, the daughter of Khuwalid, was a lady of supreme character. She has been twice married to Abu Hala and Atiq Makhzumi, and twice widowed."<sup>15</sup> So no ill treatment or bad image about widows was noted in Islamic society or history. From start to now a day, widows and divorced were treated like normal women in Islamic society they were married and legally given the same rights as have been given to virgins.

**Rights of Inheritance:** Islam has given women the property rights. It was the best way to secure women socially and legally. A woman having no blood relation and being a strange for a man, when she gets marriage to that man, she becomes a legally able to get property rights legally from her husband. In the form of a daughter, her all expenses from birth to marriage have been borne by parents without any compensation. At the time of marriage in the form of gifts and dowry, a heap of necessary things has been given by women's parents according to their economic status. Even after marriage she still holds legal right in their father's property. After marriage their all expenses have been borne by their husbands and in case of divorce and husband's death, they have legal rights in their husband's property. Women for their male children's property in case of death, have due proportions which have been determined by Islam. "If there be women more than two, then theirs is two-thirds of the inheritance and if there be one (only) then the half."<sup>16</sup> In different religions and societies women are given different types of rights. This aspect is ignored in most societies. Women are exploited in giving the proper inheritance rights even in civilized societies. For the first time in the history of human being, Islam and Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) determined the inheritance rights for women. On the death of a close relative, automatically, his property is divided into relatives and in this property, for women, a huge part has been declared. People those who do not care for women's rights will be asked on the Day of Judgment.

*Education and Status in Religious Practices:* There is no discrimination between male and female in Islam about getting education. Education was declared compulsory both for males and females. There was nothing social hurdle or legal prevention to keep women to get education for any kind in Islam. Only some specialization and branches of education have been preferably advised for women in Islamic society according to the social requirements and their physical strength but not a single word was quoted in history that denotes that woman were prevented to get any kind of education. They can study the pure religious, applied sciences, social sciences and social work without any hurdle. "Knowledge seeking is prescribed upon each and every Muslim man and woman."<sup>17</sup> In Islam, there was no gender discrimination in ritual practices. Men were not preferred on women in any case only the sincerity and performance were preferred. Just people on the base of their good performance would be entertained as succeeded those might be women or men.

**Misconceptions; Polygamy, Guardian Ship, Honor Killing, Domestic Violence:** There are many misconceptions which have been highlighted by different non-Islamic scholars who have read Islam critically. About women, some of those are: polygamy, Male Guardian ship, by force Veiling, Domestic violence, *Karo Kari* and Honor Killing. Actually, if we study Islam without prejudice, we can conclude that for all these objections Islam is not responsible. But by so-called Muslims, these were adopted regionally. Actually, these customs have been borrowed by other nations. Polygamy was not invented by Islam, but it was the running system which was managed and limited by Islam. Some restrictions in polygamy were first introduced by Islam. Actually, it was the social compulsion to keep more than one wife for a man due to comparatively high proportion of females than males in a society. It was a kind of social and legal compulsion on men who can afford economically to get responsibility of more than one woman. But Islam legalized it and declared some ethics and laws about polygamy that a man having more than one wife was bounded to treat them with equality and justice. "Then you should take a wife from those other women who are lawful for you."<sup>18</sup> Guardianship was actually responsibility of safety and security of women in Islamic society. It was in the sense of protection of women by their men. In many cases women hold higher degree on men. "And they (women) have rights (over their husbands regards living expenses) Similar (to those of their husbands) over them (as regards obedience and respect) to what is responsible but men have a degree (of responsibility) over them."<sup>19</sup>

Honor killing is usually found in different societies all over the world. Mostly the women are victimized in this practice. It is to achieve some kind of honor or for the makeup of some disrespect. It is being practiced by people all over the world also by so-called Muslims. They feel this action a disrespectful for them so they kill them to maintain their respect. This action is called honor killing. It is not related to some particular cultures or societies. In every society such types of incidents occur but somehow such activities were particularized where lawlessness was there and there are many loopholes in a social setup. "Honor killings are often associated with particular communities the law has a long history of grappling with excusing culpability through reference to cultural, religious, racial and/or ethnic imperatives."<sup>20</sup>



Domestic violence is not encouraged and supported by any world religion. In Islam it was also prohibited. In Islamic society people were advised and given the orders to treat women with affection and love. Males were announced that it was their duty to care for their women in proper ways. They were given the commandment to behave them in a respectful way. A lot of practical examples were found in Islamic history that people's interaction with women was observed as loving and caring. They were advised by Holy Prophet (ﷺ) to "Treat women with kindness."<sup>21</sup> Another point was raised about Islam that it was permitted to its followers to marry the girls who were in their adulthood. This objection was also baseless. Actually, women's virginity varies from region to region. In many societies girls used to marry in early ages. As mentioned in Hindu holy scripture. "The marriage of a girl is to be celebrated after she is seven years old, otherwise it become contrary to the dictated of religion."<sup>22</sup> *Karo Kari* and *Wani* are regional issue in different countries also practiced in Pakistan. These are not related to any specific religion. In Pakistan, in some areas some so-called Muslims also involved such type of activities but Islam is not responsible for all activities of Muslims. This is one of many Un-Islamic activities which have been regionally adopted by some so-called Muslims. Generally, it is adopted in back ward areas where literacy rate and public social and religious awareness is at low level.

**Conclusion:** In Islam, women have been given proper rights and social status. From birth to death, women were given security by Islam. Both (male and female) were given equal status in a society, In Islamic society, Education, physical or mental development, food, clothes, residences and parental affection were equally given to both males and females. Due to biological difference between males and females, some tasks were divided for them according to their physical and psychological strengths. In some cases, women given upper status against men and in some cases, men were given higher status by Islam. This cannot be said gender discrimination but division of work on the base of biological difference. In Pakistan, in some backward area's women are being treated badly. Women have to face domestic violence; honor killing and are sold like material property. But Islam is not responsible for these brutal activities. Regionally, these have been customized. Islam also condemns such like actions very seriously. Same activities like honor killing are being practiced in other countries and societies. But ultimately, in Islam or Islamic society, women are more saved, secure and empowered (socially, legally and economically) as compared to other societies.

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