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Status of Women in Pakistani Society: An analytical study in Islamic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

A woman in various societies is still considered as a second-class citizen and deprived of basic rights enjoyed by the male community. The West has often deemed Islamic woman to be backward in a male-dominated world. Quite the opposite, Islam appeared to be the very first religion officially to grant the woman a status hardly ever known before. The research deals to investigate the status of Pakistani woman in Islamic perspective. The Holy Quran incorporates innumerable instructions & commandments concerned equally to men and women. The research paper tends to break the myth that Pakistani woman is being exploited, an inactive, deserted section of society and captivated in home. The article depicts concise impression of the Islamic perception of modesty, decency, purity and virtue particularly concerning Muslim women.

This research gives a short reflection on the status of Pakistani woman in Islamic perspective in our prevailing situation. It endeavors to wrap not only the religious but also social, as well as academic aspects. The paper dealing with Status of Women in Pakistan thus tries to explore various layers of state and society, their functioning and interplay challenging the stereotypes.

The paper aims to construct a consistent & cumulative picture of Pakistani Muslim women. Campaigns of women empowerment are increasing day by day & highlighted so far but giving it a right sense has not found a big literature yet. This paper is just a little step to highlight the status of Pakistani women in Islamic perspective. Finally, it is concluded that Islam as a religion ensures maximum women's rights. It is our typical social norms, old traditions taken & imported from



other religions and ignorance from the true teachings of Islam, which has made today's Pakistani women susceptible.

Key words: *Islam, women, sacred scripture, stereotypes.*

Introduction

Allah almighty bestowed the sacred and respectable status to woman by His ultimate guidance i.e. Quran and *Sunnah* about 1400 years ago. The prevailing status of Pakistani woman has been influenced by the un-Islamic values & traditions. The practiced traditions are imported from other cultures. There is a very deep influence of the neighboring culture (Hindus) that we have been imprinted during the last (almost) one thousand years living in the same setup & society. Unfortunately, we are not able to sanction basic status to Pakistani woman largely that they deserve because of the lack of understanding of appropriate religious awareness concerning women. The holy book Quran declared:

“And (as for) the believers, both men and women’ they are friends and protectors of one another: they [all] enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto God and His Messenger.”[1]

After partition of the sub-continent, Pakistan came into being for the Muslims that have 97 percent of the population. [2]The state of Pakistani women is often subjected as discussion. In Pakistani society people not only take pride in strictly adhering to Islamic values but are ready to sacrifice all for the glory and sanctity of Islam. Islam has accorded a highly venerated social position to women. Pakistan is an Islamic Republic; mostly rule & regulation in the country is based on Islamic law but the fault is in their implementation. At the same time, there are certain customs and traditions in contrast to Islamic jurisprudence that are in practice generally.

1 Islamic Perception of Woman

Islam accords the rights and privileges of woman in society and does not impose any restrictions that may hamper social growth and development of them. A woman is an equally important member of society in Islam. Islam seeks to bestow confidence, self assurance, safety and respect that smooth the progress of their work within their capacity without wiping out their social status. One thing should be clear that rights and responsibilities of the woman are equal to men but they are not necessarily identical with them. Equality and sameness are two quite different things. This difference is understandable because man and woman are not identical but they are created equal by Allah Almighty.

The status of woman in Islam is quite clear. Islamic basic doctrine; Quran and Hadith depict & witness that woman is as important as man. Woman is not inferior' and lower specie. If we compare the pre-Islamic and post Islamic socio-cultural status of woman, a gradual increase in their position is well noticeable. Islam as a religion has provided ample status and opportunities to woman for establishing as an important part of the society.

The Quranic' concept of equality rests on fixed sexual difference, which enables societies to codify status of Muslim woman. On the one hand, the Quran does not prohibit and confine woman to motherhood exclusively, and designates both man and woman as mutual protectors of each other equal under God [3]. But in reality; today Muslim woman is least empowered in society. Privileges given by Islam mostly denied by their family & society and in some cases even their basic rights have been denied. Human society from ancient times' is male dominated, and even now freedom of thought, expression and faith is denied in several societies [4].

2 Pakistani Woman

Usually it is considered that in Pakistan woman have no rights or privileges. It is a very primary point that their status depends upon their region (they live), their social background & class they belong to. A woman belonging to any one of the four provinces of Pakistan deals with different kinds of issues as compared to the other province. [5] In the same way the status of urban area woman is different from rural areas. Woman belonging to the urban & elites are mostly highly educated and dealing independently within their personal and professional life.[6] While a large female population in rural areas and from the working class have other issues to deal with.

Some Pakistani woman continues complaints isolated from mainstream society and maltreated by the male-oriented set up in Pakistan' mainly the rural woman has to bear intolerable supremacy. Some humiliating practices like *Vani*, Forced Marriage, honor Killing, dowry death, acid attack are also experienced by the Pakistani women. Numerically the woman in Pakistan is almost equal to men. They are equal in potential as man. [7] They can be highly qualified, self-confident professionals or a hesitant farmer working hard with their man-folk. We experience that Pakistani woman spend a large amount of money at marriage ceremonies' earned by their men. Woman spends much more than man in Pakistani society. Some traditions & social culture restraint their dependence to a great degree. However, Pakistan is still the first country in the Muslim world that has elected a female prime minister.

3: Gender Equality in Islamic Perspective

Islam has given guiding principle to ensure the safeguard & chastity and modesty of both man and woman because it is essential to sustain the societies. Allah Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

“He created you from one soul. Then He made from it its mate.”[8]Allah’ the creator of heaven & earth, has made for you from yourselves, mates, and among the cattle, mates; He multiplies you thereby. There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Hearing, the seeing.”[9]

According to Islam both man and woman are created from the same source [10]. Both man and woman enjoy equal respect in the society. If a woman is wrongly accused of fornication or adultery, the culprit will receive the same penalty as would be the case with him/her if a man was accused. Allah, the Dignified, states in the Glorious Qur'an:

“And those who accuse chaste women and then do not produce four witnesses - lash them with eighty lashes and do not accept from them testimony ever after. And those are the defiantly disobedient.”[11] The most complete believer is the best in character, and the best of you is the best to his womenfolk.”[12]



4: Male Dominance / Social Equality

A holy verse of Quran describes men as the *qawwamun*[13]“protectors and maintainers” of woman, but Mulana Maududi uses this verse as a justification for the inherent superiority of man. Generally this verse is misinterpreted to reflect that woman is inferior to man. Likewise, the political and social model promoted by posits that man as the primary providers at the family level and the head of the government at the national level: therefore, woman is charged with a subordinate role as protectors of the domestic sphere. Furthermore the Quran states:

"And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them." [14]

However the level "*Quwam*" is to maintenance and protector refers to the biological difference between the both. In Islam, there are specific guidelines, limitations, responsibilities and obligations for man as well. What makes one valuable and respectable in the eyes of Allah, the Creator of the entire creation; humans & universe, is neither one's prosperity, position, intelligence, physical strength nor beauty, but only one's Allah-consciousness and awareness (*Taqwa*).

In Pakistani society, male members of a family are treated like kings from the very first day of their life. As a result of this training and unfair attitude of the entire society makes them proud and arrogant. They know that they are boys and can do whatever they want by hook or by crook. All such mindsets are the reflection of ignorance and lack of positive environment. Such dominance carried out throughout the life of not only man but also women. Majority of the Pakistani woman acknowledged it as their fate. However, this culture of inequality influences and exists between man and woman. There is more need for stating Islam's position on important issues in a clear way. [15] Allah Almighty says in Qur'an:

"But those wives from whom you fear arrogance first advise them; then if they persist, forsake them in bed; and finally, strike them. But if they obey you once more, seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Glorious and Majestic." [16]

This male dominance' in Pakistani society' sometimes results in abusing and beating "*sinf-i-nazuk*" by the male members of their family as their right. Islam strongly condemns beating and abusing woman. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ always treated his wives with love, affection, and compassion as stated by Hazrat Ayesha (RA) in an authentic tradition. Domestic, social, spiritual, religious, and educational commitments have been compromised to support the male liberation in Pakistani society.

5 Marital Status

In Pakistani society, arranged marriages are normally assembled by the elders of families. It makes a strong bond and provides strength to the female partner as well. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ made this perfectly clear when he said:

"There is no marriage without a guardian, and the ruler is the guardian for those who have no guardian." [17]

Some marriages are conducted forcefully that is mostly the traditional system of "*vata sata*", *vani*, cousin marriages and marriage with Quran etc. All such customs are normally to secure males position; in form of money or in compensation of a murder or to hold the property to the family etc. the situation in cities are remote areas are different.

Islamic law does not make any kind of compulsion for woman to marry anyone without her consent. Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Messenger of God, Muhammadﷺ, and she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her the choice between accepting the marriage and invalidating it.[18] The Prophet Muhammadﷺ said:

“A divorcee or a widow must not be wedded unless she is asked, and gives her approval. And a virgin must not be wedded unless she is consulted.”[19]

This is so because Islam seeks to protect and guard woman’s rights while she signs the marriage agreement.

A woman is recognized by Islam as a full and equal partner of man in procreation of human kind, as father & mother and both are essential for life. Her role is not less than his. By his partnership she has an equal share in every aspect, and undertakes equal responsibilities. To this equal partnership in Islam, the Holy Quran says;

“O mankind, We have created you from a single pair of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you know each other”.[20]

As a scholar who pondered about this verse states: “it is believed that there is no text, old or new that deals with humanity omen from all feature with such remarkable briefness, articulateness, deepness, uniqueness as the divine decree”.[21]

According to Islam, marriage is not only a social contract but it’s the completion of “*eman*” for a Muslim and peace and marries between the both partners. Quran says;

“Allah created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest, peace of mind in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Herein indeed are signs for people who reflect.”[22]

In Islam, Qur’an has introduced fundamental reforms to customary law and introduced rights for women in marriage, divorce, and inheritance. By providing that the wife, not her family, would receive a dowry from the husband, which she could administer as her personal property, the Qur’an made women a legal party to the marriage contract. Some traditions are still in practice in certain areas; bride-prices, polygamy etc. However, the Holy Muhammadﷺ suggested polygamy to give protection to widow sand orphans, in context of a war.

6 Birth of Female Child

Human history reflects that it was a usual tradition that mostly fathers shocked and felt disgusting at the birth of a female child. They considered her an evil sign, curse or a burden. In Pakistani

society this tradition is almost the same even in educated families. Fathers felt embarrassed and unhappy to have a female child. I am an eyewitness of such incidents in the modern city of Lahore, where women threaten to be divorced if they give birth to a girl. Family members even don't visit such females in hospitals. Girls are taken as a curse. While the Holy Quran explains the reaction of such people in the following lines:

“And when one of them is informed of the birth of a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide.”[23]

Some fathers even went to the extent of killing the female child to express their anger and dissatisfaction. As proof, the Holy Quran states:

“And when the girl ‘who was buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed?[24]

Regarding the girls, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

“Whoever has a female child with him or under his guardianship from slavery, and trains her in the best behavior, and teaches her well, and then frees and marries her, will have a double reward.”[25]

In Pakistani society the trends are changing but the number of such families is rare. These humiliating behaviors are just due to lack of Islamic knowledge.

7 Spiritual Ranking

In Pakistani society, a woman has almost equal spiritual rights and practices their religious rituals freely. This spiritual status may be in form of practice; fasting, prayers or *Hajj & Umrah*, etc. she has freedom and it is most likely acts even in the sight of males and entire society as well. In the holy Quran Allah always addresses both man and woman which is the proof of their equality and importance, as it is mentioned:

“Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, for devout men and women, fortune men and women who are patient, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise - For them all has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward.”[26]Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give

them their reward in the Hereafter according to the best of what they used to do.”[27]

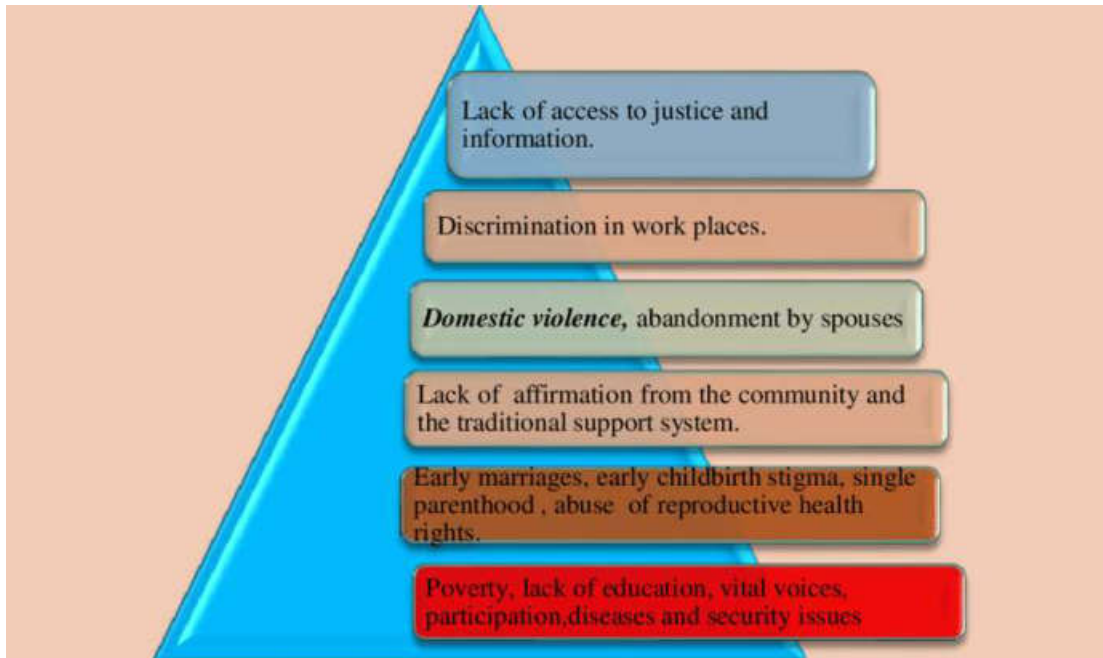


Diagram 1; a few major problems of women

8: Right of Education

Pakistanis believe that education is a fundamental human right.[28] Education is the only way of survival. The female literacy rate is 45% and increasing rapidly. Education is a right of both man and woman in Islam. In fact, it is obligatory for every Muslim whether male or female to obtain education. The Prophet ﷺ evidently guided:

“Seeking knowledge is compulsory for each and every Muslim both men and women.”[29]

9: Safety of Pakistani Woman

Nowadays the most horrible challenge for the contemporary modern world is the issue of safety of woman. It is hardly any day when we don't come to know the case of sexual assault, eve-teasing, domestic violence's, sexual harassments etc. One reason is that now cases reports rather than in the past and secondly media and especially social media is very much faster. However the majority of the cases don't come to be known due to ethical, cultural, social, political or even economic reasons

as well. Woman has been neglected in new and modern ways. Qur'an has depicted it as the duty of man:

“Men are in charge of women by right of what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend for maintenance from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in the husband's absence what Allah would have them guard.”[30]

10: Seeking Employment

Pakistan being a democratic &an Islamic state, the issue of women highlighted, however, there is no decree in Islam which forbids woman from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity for it, especially in positions which fits her nature. Moreover, there is no restriction on benefiting from a woman's exceptional talent in any field. Most women in rural areas have to bear the double burden of domestic work as well as other jobs to earn money. Same is within urban women. Traditions and social customs restraints ‘have hindered women’s independence to a great degree. However, Pakistan is still the first country in the Muslim world that has elected a woman as its prime minister, that too twice. But now-a-day women are very successful in different professions and serve as pilots, armed officers, doctors, and software engineers and directing media houses as well. The most renowned are five sisters that have cleared their CSS exams and serve the nation as deputy commissioners’.

11: Right of Inheritance

In Pakistan’ there is no specific law in the Constitution that serves to strictly prevent denial of inheritance rights to women. Most of the Pakistani woman face the same issue but the situation is even worse in Balochistan. No inheritance for women exists there. There murder their female relatives, do not let them move toward a court to claim their share and force to reject their legal rights. Noor Jaan case is example of it.[31]

Islam restored to woman the right of inheritance. She herself was an object of inheritance in some cultures. Her share is completely hers and no one can make any claim on it, including her father and her husband. The Qur’an introduced rules on inheritance with certain fixed shares being distributed to designated heirs, first to the nearest female relatives and then the nearest male relatives. The holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ gave woman the right to inherit and give away property and to control their own wealth. Quran says; “*Men receive a share of what their parents and relatives leave, and women receive a share of what their parents and relatives leave; be it little or much..a legal share*”[32]. Both man and woman have a share in inheritance.

Qur'an says:

“Allah instructs you concerning your children: for the male, what is equal to the share of two females...”[33]

In Islam, financial responsibilities are placed on the shoulders of men only. For this reason, Allah Almighty does justice with both men and women by giving them that much share in inheritance that would make it possible for both of them to fulfill their subsequent responsibilities. A woman gets fewer shares than a man only because she has no responsibility to look after the financial needs of the household. Despite this, she gets her share. According to Professor William Montgomery Watt, when seen in such historical context, Muhammad “can be seen as a figure who testified on behalf of women’s rights.”

12: Dress Code of Pakistani Woman

Pakistan has its own traditional dress code that mostly people exercised. The Muslim woman who is aware of the rules of “*Hijab*” or “*Chadaar*” likes to cover them with it. According to Goodwin, veiling was “a Persian elitist fashion to distinguish aristocracy from the common masses”[34].

Veiling has been used off and on here. Muslim man and woman acquired the visible symbols of a Muslim identity such as the *hijab* & *Abaya* so that she may not tempt men to seduce and molest her. In order to protect and guard her integrity and dignity, Islam instructs the ladies to cover and hide their physical assets. Islam has bestowed women with respect, purity and integrity. Islam protected her not to become a play toy in men hands or source of entertainment at the risk of his purity. Allah Almighty says:

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to bring down over themselves [part] of their outer garments. That is more suitable that they will be known and not be abused. And ever is Allah Forgiving and Merciful.”[35]

Allah (The Almighty) also said:

“And tell the believing women to reduce some of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which necessarily appears thereof and to wrap their head covers over their chests and not expose their adornment.”[36]

Both men and women are instructed to lower their gazes and dress in a decent and modest fashion to guard their integrity and chastity. In Pakistan these dresses are more common and the latest industries of various brands enhanced the charm of Pakistani dresses in the international market as well. It raised Pakistani women use these traditional dresses as symbols to express identity.[37]

13 The Right of Independent Ownership

Woman was deprived both before Islam and even as late as this century the right of independent ownership. According to Islamic jurisprudence, a woman has the right to have her money, real estate, or hold other properties. She is fully acknowledged whether single or married. She retains her full rights to buy, sell, mortgage or lease any or all her properties. In Pakistani Law, she enjoys this right as well, even before marriage as well after. The Muslim woman is an independent legal that can retains her own name and financial independence .Unlike man; married woman can retain all and any of their wealth and earnings for themselves without having to consult their spouse. [38]

14 Pakistani Laws to Safeguard Women

At the provincial level also, the 18th amendment to the Constitution 2010 granted greater autonomy to the provinces in matters related to the advancement of women along with other issues. But, like other social sectors of Pakistan, the constant problem of policy implementation has also plagued this sector. At official level, the following Laws have been adopted in Pakistan to safeguard women:

- Muslim family Laws Ordinance (MFLO) of 1961
- The West Pakistan Family Courts Act of 1964
- Dowry and Bridal Gifts Restriction Act, 1976
- Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2004
- Protection of Women Act (2006)20, revised the Hudood Ordinance
- Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2010 (on sexual harassment)
- Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace, 2010.
- Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2011
- Criminal Law Act (Second Amendment, 2011), referred as Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act
- Criminal Law Act (Third Amendment, 2011), referred to as Prevention of Anti-Women Practices
- The Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act, 2011
- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection), Act 2012
- National Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2012
- Enforcement of Women Ownership Rights Act 2012
- The Khyber Pakhtun-khwa Elimination of Custom of Ghag Act 2013

The traditional problems that a woman face with regard to violence, health, education, environmental degradation, and legal discrimination, discriminatory cultural and customary practices continue, although they are now much more highlighted in the media than ever before. In addition, the existing laws need to be reviewed. More importantly, adequate implementation of laws is very crucial to provide a safe and secure environment to woman for prospering them self, in a

dogmatic society of Pakistan. And there is need to establish a legal assistance centre for female at National and district level.[39]

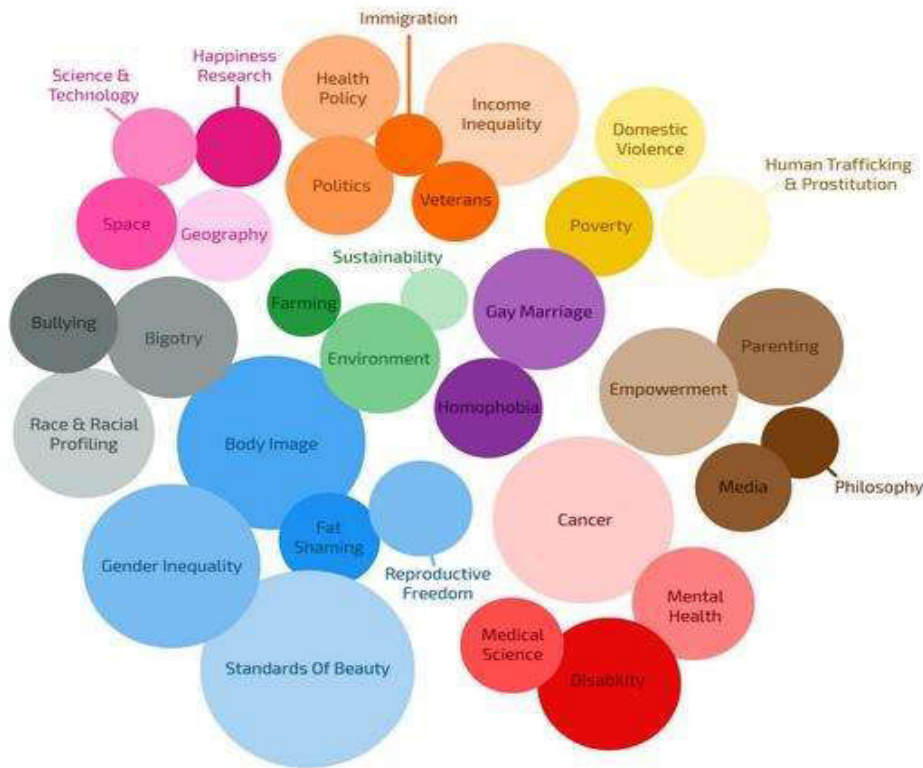


Diagram 2 some major social issues of women

Conclusion

Pakistan came into being with the purpose of Islam, it is very disheartening to see that religious principles are frequently avoided and twisted, especially regarding status of Pakistani women. Incidentally the social evils, against which Prophet Muhammad ﷺ confronted his entire life, are profoundly-fixed in the Pakistani society. Entire humans are equal. Superiority is just based on the grounds of piety, adoration, and righteousness. Sex, race, caste, creed, financial status, etc are just the aspects of introduction. It does not determine the prominence of someone.

Both man and woman are creatures of Allah almighty made for adoration, submission and enslavement. Both have been allocated diverse roles and duties. No one is

superior to the other except on the foundation of morality and decency. Allah the Almighty says:

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous amongst you.”[40]

Furthermore Allah says;

“The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.”[41]

Everyone will ultimately receive their reward for whatever they have done in worldly life. Quran says;

“Never will I allow to be lost the work of any worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another.”[42]

Islam honors and respects woman. It maintains that the achievement of Heaven and Allah’s grace lies in serving and respecting mother. Islam regards daughters as the blessing of Allah and so on. Undoubtedly, in Islam, woman enjoys great status, and receives all their rights.

In the context of Pakistan, the vital problem is Religion has not been able to abolish the centuries old un-Islamic and also inhuman social evils, practiced here. Therefore, tribal, clan, village symbolism has become more dominant and convenient than the faith of Islam. The ill-practices of *Jahiliyyah* are still ongoing in Pakistan. In addition, mass ignorance and the factor of terror & panic are also causes of cruelty against women. They are conditioned to be ignorant not only about legal rights but, also about the "true tenets of Islam". Thus, while discussing the status of women, it becomes very obvious that Pakistan is juggling between repressive customs and borrowed modernization. Because of lack of knowledge the religion has taken up the ‘non-Islamic’ traditions of the land and is justifying such continuance. On the other hand, one can say that like any other postcolonial society modernization has been imposed on Pakistan. Therefore, the constant tussle between the two is taking its charge on the female population.

Recommendations

- Should raises investments in education of children especially girls
- Eliminate wrong value systems and oppression beliefs from the society.
- Education develops skills, knowledge and confidence in women that can help them in achieving opportunities in the economy.

- Fee concession and needy scholarships for girls at school has helped a lot in increasing educated women especially in remote areas
- Vocational training Programs will help in providing better skills and good jobs to women
- The aim of equal distribution of power to them, both men and women should be provided equal economic, social, legal, and political opportunities for their development.
- Women should increase their self-esteem, self- confidence, and understanding of their own potential, appreciate themselves and value their knowledge and skills.
- Women should obtain equal distribution of power and involvement in decision making at home, in society.

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*Status of Women in Pakistani Society:
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- [28]“The Slow Yet Steady Path to Empowerment in Pakistan,” Anita Weiss demonstrates how women’s empowerment groups have historically used education towards expanding women’s rights. During the early nationalist period, the All-India Muslim Ladies Conference and the Anjuman-e-Khawateen-e-Islam emerged as strong advocates for women’s education. Weiss:132
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