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Social Issues of Women in Pakistan and Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH

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ABSTRACT

Right from the beginning of human race, women are facing the society differently as men do. In almost every society on earth men are more privileged than women on account of social facilities and rights of different sorts, because of which women generally lack behind in terms of progress and development. And Pakistan is no different in such problems for women. We witness a variety of opinions from all over the world regarding women development and skill enhancement for them but at the end they don't bring the desired results. History witnessed up until the advent of the Prophet PBUH the social problems for women were as such in fact had worsened, but after the Prophet PBUH came, he eradicated all those problems in his 23-year prophet hood. So, the tried, tested and successful solution remains the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH. Be it the educational problem, economical problem or the overall women rights, the Sunnah of Prophet is the solution for them all. But somehow, even after the Prophet PBUH some Muslim societies like Pakistan are facing the very same problems as they were, So, we indicate and find out the problems in implementations and their solutions in this research paper.

Keywords Prophet PBUH, Pakistan, Social Problems, Women Rights.

Introduction



A society cannot find its balance unless there is a scope of equal and unbiased opportunity in every aspect and regard of that society for both the sexes. If there is inequality and injustice in terms of facilities and opportunities among genders, then the results are catastrophic for a society. To avoid this hazardous situation there have to be a permanent and implantable solution for the peace and betterment of the society. When men and women are not treated equally by state and as a trickle-down effect by the society, an imbalance of the society occurs which ruins it's all institutions. Similar is the case with the Pakistani society where discrimination and deprivation of the rights of women is at its peak. We witness huge social problems for women here. Pakistan as a country is considered as an international player, yet this same country is lacking far behind as compared to the other international influencers. Although in Europe and in the US there are different types of social problems for the women but at least the basic rights of women are preserved there. On the contrary, in the Pakistani society which was supposed to provide the best place for women under the blue sky has deprived women of their basic rights which lead to huge uproar and criticism in the UN and international media.

Having talked about the overall situation, there have to be a well proposed solution for the presiding problems, and this solution lies nowhere but in the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH. The Prophet PBUH brought the women from darkness of deprivations to the light of most notable and respectable persons in the society. How can the Muslim and non-Muslim society can benefit from it alike? How betterment can be brought in societies like Pakistan form the Sunnah.

How the Prophet PBUH did it? Why is His Sunnah the only solution? And how will the society in general and Pakistan as a country specifically would succeeded in bringing the positive change and solution to social problems of women would be discussed in detail in the following passages.

Why is the Sunnah of Prophet PBUH the Only Solution?

The society in which the Prophet PBUH opened his eyes was a society completely ruled by men. All the social affairs were performed by men and women were just graded merely as an object. The situation was as bad as some people would even bury their daughters alive. In that kind of a society when the Prophet PBUH was given prophet hood, He turned around the society and gave women the rights the deserved for the first time in human history in the state of medina. Those were the days of dark ages in Europe and the women rights issues and social problems of women were sky high in the western societies. The Prophet PBUH gave women respect, honor, rights and privileges they deserved. He gave women the right of inheritance when before him women could not inherit their fathers. He gave women the right to work and to do business respectfully where before this women's work was only prostitution, dancing or a maid's work in the society. He declared that

heaven lies under the feet of mothers¹ where before that even mothers were not given any respect.

Till date women are facing discriminatory issues in every society of the world. Even in the western society women are over burdened by the extra workloads because they have to cope with maternity issues and then have to work as well. Only a small portion of women manage to find a respectable work, rest majority of women are still treated as sex slaves in the so called developed and progressed western society. They are harassed at work places and are given less pays than men. The ratio of suicides in females is increasing day by day in the western societies because of this situation. So, we find out no matter how liberated the western world might get, they have failed to provide the solutions for the problems of women in the society and still the solution which stands out is following the guidelines and Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH.

No matter how much the Pakistani society has wronged itself, here too the ultimate and only solution remains the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH which is applicable all over the world at one same time. So, we found out why only the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH is the only solution and why not any foreign or western agenda for the Pakistani society as the west is struggling itself in this regard to cope with the presiding problems of women in its society, they also need the ultimate solution of following the Sunnah let alone importing their agendas in our country to mess things up more.

Current Situation and Condition of Women in the Pakistani Society

Honor killings, child marriages, forced marriages, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, beating, mental and physical torcher and inequality are some of the core social problems women are facing in Pakistan. In the gender inequality index, Pakistan's score is 0.536 by 2014 statistics which ranks the country at 121st place out of 157². Whereas the global gender gap value of Pakistan is 0.550 by 2018, ranked second to the poorest in the world at 148th out of 149³.

These statistics shows us an alarming situation in the country in terms of gender discrimination and inequality. A country which was supposed to be following the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH as only the second Muslim state after medina to be made at the name of religion is lacking behind in the basic teachings of the Prophet PBUH. It shows the problem really is in understanding and implementing the Sunnah, the problem is in learning and attaining knowledge of Sunnah and then its right and perfect execution. The given poor conditions in international indexes have brought bad name to the country and have caused many issues for the country in the UN. The country can only progress ahead by fixing this chore issue and the straight path for solving the problem is in the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH.

How the Prophet PBUH Solved Women's Problems in the Arab Society:

Situation of the Arab Society

The Arab society, before the advent of Islam was a nightmare for women. They had no social rights, female infanticide was at its peak, they had no right in inheritance, overall women rights were absolutely zero. Famous Author Leila Ahmed writes: “Women were treated as objects of lust, they were not given any rights in the society, inherited marriages were a routine, slave girls were used for sexual desires and for all the household chores, no right to education, in a nutshell the condition of women in Arab before Islam was no more than that of an animal.”⁴

In that kind of disastrous situation, the Prophet PBUH successfully turned around this same Arab society into the best in the world. He took many steps to fix the chaos for women in the society, some of the steps are following:

Equal Reward and Accountability

The Prophet PBUH enjoined equality in humanity for both men and women. Both were given same and equal opportunities, whatever good shall either of them do would get the same and equal reward for it unlike the pre-Islamic era in where there was no reward for women for their hard work and the accountability would be on similar basis as well.

As it is said in the Quran:

“I will not suffer the work of any of you, whether male or female, to go to waste; each of you is from the other.”⁵

Equal Right to knowledge

The Prophet PBUH said “Education is compulsory for every Muslim male and female.”⁶

As a result of this there were numerous female scholars in the prophetic era and the times to follow including Ayesha R.A wife of the Prophet PBUH who was one of the biggest scholars of religion and Rufaida Al Aslamia⁷ who was the first female surgeon. The Arab was illuminated by the contribution of women in every field of knowledge.

Equal right for Marriage

Women were not given the right to choose a spouse at all in the pre-Islamic era in Arab. In fact, forced marriages were a common practice in the society. But the Prophet PBUH gave women the right to the spouse of their liking or to nullify or reject a marriage if they don't like the proposal. He PBUH said when a girl came to him complaining about disliking of the marriage she has been forced into:

“The girl has the option of remaining in the marriage or nullify it.”⁸

Similarly, the Prophet PBUH also gave the right of separation to women which is called Khula, prior to it women in Arab didn't have the right of separation from their husbands.

Treating the Wives Respectfully

As a social norm and common practice, wives were treated in a very ill and inhumane manner in the Arab society. Beating up the wives and abusing them were considered normal. At that juncture the Prophet PBUH declared what the parameter of goodness is, He PBUH said:

“The best of you are those who are best in treatment to their wives.”⁹

Supreme status of Mothers and Daughters

The Prophet PBUH gave absolute lofty status to mothers and daughters. A person came asking, who among people deserves my best treatment, the Prophet PBUH replied thrice with your mother and once with your father!¹⁰

And the daughters who were buried alive in their childhoods, The Prophet PBUH said about them:

“Whoever Allah has given two daughters and he is kind towards them, they will be a reason for him entering paradise.”¹¹

This way the Prophet PBUH declared daughters a cause and reason of entering paradise which were not even given a chance to live before!

These were some of the steps taken by the Prophet PBUH to uplift the status of women in the Arabian society. These steps were taken for the first time in the history of mankind which brought a permanent and everlasting solution to the social problems of women. This also indicates that for any society no matter where it is in the world, if the social problems of women are to be rectified, the solution and the only way to that is the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH. Particularly for a society like Pakistan in which women are deprived of their rights and at the same time it is a Muslim society. So, it becomes binding for the country to act in accordance with the Sunnah and implement it in all the institutions of the society.

Social problems for women in Pakistan Explained

Out of the numerous social problems that women face in the Pakistani society, those problems which stands out are the problems faced by women at work places and at home. Both are sometimes interlinked with each other and effects women at all levels. The main and basic problems out of those and their solutions from the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH are suggested below.

1. Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to unfair treatment or inequitable difference between distinct groups of people in society in terms of rights, opportunities and status. It goes without saying that gender discrimination is a widespread human rights issue in Pakistan that is badly affecting huge proportion of women in the country. The latest report for gender equality in Pakistan (2018) shows great deal of worrying statistics for the country. According to the report the gender discrimination is at its highest in province of KPK and Balochistan followed by Sindh and then southern

Punjab.¹² The report also emphasizes on great amount of negligence of the government on the subsidizing issue.

Women are discriminated everywhere, at workplaces, markets, home and even at parks and roads. This gender discrimination results even in the deprivation of basic human rights for women. For example, in offices, women are paid less only because of their gender, the pay scale for women in private jobs like schools etc. are way less than even from the prescribed pay scale by the government for labourers.

Solution from the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH

The Prophet PBUH guaranteed and assured that there should be no gender discrimination in the society. The Prophet PBUH emphasized on the fact that men and women are equal in terms of humanity but different on the level of physicality. This resulted in an ideal and well-balanced society. Some of the guidelines from the Sunnah are:

The Prophet PBUH Denounced Gender Discrimination

Both genders in Islam are equal spiritually as both are recipients of the “divine breath” since they are created with the same human and spiritual nature (nafs-in-waahidah). Both genders are dignified and are trustees of Allah on earth as it is said in the Quran:

“Behold your Lord said to the angels: “I will create a vicegerent on earth.” They said “Will you place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy (name)?” He said: “I know what you do not.”¹³

This ideology of spiritual equality was placed thoroughly in the society which brought peace and eradicated the basic gender discriminatory issue for the women. Along with that there were some other discriminatory issues fixed as well through this like the religion of women is complete like men and they are not to be considered less or inferior in terms of religion.

A similar sense must be created in the Pakistani society at all levels, whether at home or at work places. This sense should prevail that men and women are created equally as humans and both are the vicegerents of God on earth. This sense would eliminate the gender discrimination dilemma and would be best for the society. For the given purpose, the Prophet’s PBUH teachings must be added in syllabuses at schools and must be taught as a subject and lesson because acquiring knowledge is greatest way to learn. Furthermore, if any gender discrimination acts are practiced in the society, the government must take appropriate action against them for which legislation in parliament is required.

2. Economic Problems

The denial of inheritance in Pakistan for women is a common practice because of which women face severe financial problems in the society. First they're not allowed to work freely and then the denial of inheritance adds more to misery. According to the laws of country, the West Pakistan Muslim Personal Law also known as Shariat Act 1962 and Muslim Family Law Ordinance of 1961¹⁴, protect the rights of legal heirs. However, there is no specific law in the Constitution that serves to strictly prevent denial of inheritance rights to women.

This leads to a chaotic situation for women where neither they have financial security nor any guarantee of finance in the society, they're completely reliant on men for their expenses and basic needs. This dependent financial condition many times takes women at the verge of poor life lifestyle specially after they're divorced or widowed and they're considered a liability in the society.

Solution from the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH

The Prophet PBUH made sure that the Islamic Shariah recognizes the full property rights of women before and after marriage. A married woman may keep her maiden name.

Greater financial security is assured for women. They are entitled to receive marital gifts, to keep present and future properties and income for their own security. No married woman is required to spend a penny from her property and income on the household. She is entitled to full financial support during marriage and during the waiting period (iddah) in case of divorce. She is also entitled to child support. Generally, a Muslim woman is guaranteed support in all stages of her life, as a daughter, wife, mother, or sister. These additional advantages of women over men are somewhat balanced by the provisions of the inheritance which allow the male, in most cases, to inherit twice as much as the female. This means that the male inherits more but is responsible financially for other females: daughters, wives, mother, and sister, while the female (i.e, a wife) inherits less but can keep it all for investment and financial security without any legal obligation so spend any part of it even for her own sustenance (food, clothing, housing, medication, etc.).

It is said in the Quran:

“For men there is a share from what their parents and close relatives leave, and for women there is a share from what their parents and close relatives leave, be it little or considerable; a definite share.”¹⁵

So, it became binding on the Arab society to give financial security and inheritance to women by acting and implementing the Sunnah of the beloved Prophet PBUH. For the Pakistani society the same roadmap has to be followed, there is a law of

inheritance which is intact in the Pakistani law but the following steps must be taken to strengthen the system overall.

1. Inheritance law should be implemented strictly as mentioned in Sunnah.
2. A denial of inheritance law for women must be made.
3. Financial rights of married/unmarried, divorced/widowed women must be assured strictly by the government in accordance with the Sunnah.

3. Educational Problems

According to the Oslo summit on education and development, Thirty-two percent of primary school age girls are out of school in Pakistan, compared to 21 percent of boys. By grade six, 59 percent of girls are out of school, versus 49 percent of boys. Only 13 percent of girls are still in school by ninth grade. But some areas are much worse than others. In Balochistan, the province with the lowest percentage of educated women, as of 2014-15, 81 percent of women had not completed primary school, compared to 52 percent of men. Seventy-five percent of women had never attended school at all, compared to 40 percent of men. According to this data, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had higher rates of education but similarly huge gender disparities. Sindh and Punjab had higher rates of education and somewhat lower gender disparities, but the gender disparities were still 14 to 21 percent.¹⁶ Talking about higher education, there are only 296,832 students enrolled in degree level education in public sector institutions, and 62% of them are female while 38% are male. Very few (less than 1%) students are in rural institutions. 29,161 students are enrolled in private sector institutions; 4% are female, mostly in urban city centers.¹⁷

These alarming statistics gives us a wakeup call. The international forums are highlighting these educational problems for women in Pakistan for long now. But none of the stake holders of state have ever acted proficiently to fix these problems. A proper system is not there to take young girls from homes to schools and colleges, religious rigidness also plays role at places like KPK and Balochistan, but in reality religion doesn't stops women from education in fact it encourages women to get educated at the highest of levels.

Solution from the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH

The Prophet PBUH said, "Education is compulsory for every Muslim male and female." Making it obligatory for every Muslim, male and female, regardless of their gender to acquire knowledge and to get educated. He PBUH did it practically as well by taking several steps. He PBUH had assigned a special day in a week for women to educate them¹⁸ This shows the importance of women education in the eyes of the Prophet PBUH that he gave his special precious time to women for their education.

Furthermore, He PBUH said,

“Do not stop the slave women of Allah from coming to mosques.”¹⁹

It should be noted that mosques were the epicenters of education at the time of the Prophet PBUH and he allowed women to come to the mosque. It indicates that those people who stops women from taking education taking the plea of religion, how lame and vague their stance is where the Prophet PBUH himself emphasized greatly on the education of women.

These steps of the Prophet PBUH resulted in an educational revolution in the Arab society. Women started to come into the scene with the likes of Ayesha R.A and Umm e Darda R.A who were great scholars of religion and with the likes of Fatima al Fihri, (20) the women who started the first ever functional university in history. Some similar steps with an educational emergency must be taken in Pakistan too, basic education must be free, a strict law must be formed for people who don't send girls to schools, a reasonable stipend must be given as scholarship for deserving students and an overall sense must be given to the society about the importance of female education through advertisements and campaigns.

4. Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment involves unwanted or unwelcome behavior, which can offend, humiliate and intimidate a person while creating a hostile working environment. Normally, women are the sole victims of it and they suffer it in the society while working in offices or at home as housemaids. In Pakistan, until 2010 there was no clear law regarding it, but in 2010 “The Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2010” was passed²⁰ after which a mechanism against sexual harassment and penalties were prescribed. But even then, the cases of harassment haven't decreased, so there got to be a solution to not let that happen at first place. And that solution can only be found in the Sunnah alone.

Solution from the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH

It is said in the Quran, “Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and protect their private parts.”²¹ The first and ultimate solution is to lower the gaze as mentioned in the Quran. It is also said to the women, “And tell the believing women to subdue their eyes, and maintain their chastity. They shall not reveal anyA parts of their bodies, except that which is necessary. They shall cover their chests, and shall not relax this code in the presence of other than their husbands, their fathers, the fathers of their husbands, their sons, the sons of their husbands, their brothers, the sons of their brothers, the sons of their They shall not strike their feet when they walk in order to shake and reveal certain details of their bodies. All of you shall repent to God, O you believers, that you may succeed.”²²

In the given verse, a proper dress code and modestly guidelines are given to women. It should be kept in mind that these are not restrictions but precautions. As in a

medical process there are 3 stages of treating a specific disease, precaution, diagnosis and treatment. Similarly, here as well to treat this disease of harassment which is certainly a disease, the same process should be followed. The patient in both cases if he doesn't take precautions can't blame the doctor by suffering with the disease.

Moreover, a proper segregated system of work should be introduced in Pakistan as it was at the time of the Prophet PBUH, the women were allowed to work but in a gender segregated environment. Even then if harassment happens, strict action should be taken against the culprit.

5. Problems Relating to Marriage and Divorce

In Pakistan, forced marriages, child marriages and honor marriages are a common practice in the society. Similarly, divorce and remarriage are torturous times for women in the society. In the tribal system, women are given in marriages as ransom or dispute settlement. Similarly, when they are divorced, many times they are asked to undergo the torture of Halala to remarry to first husband or to leave the house at once and the woman has nowhere to go. Women are not allowed to express their choice for marriage in rural areas, Similarly, divorced woman is looked down in the society and is considered a bad omen. For this deteriorating condition of women there got to be a proper planned solution instated by the state to end this long suffering for women.

Solution from the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH

The Prophet PBUH categorically said that the woman has the right to choose the spouse of her liking. He PBUH further said, "A marriage done without the consent of the girl is null and void".²³ Similarly, in case of divorce, the woman has the right to remarry and to live a life of honor. The Prophet PBUH himself made an example and he married all but one women who were either divorced or widowed. If the Prophet PBUH has done it, is anyone in the current society more dignified than him that he looks down at it and considers it bad!

In case of divorce, it is said in the Quran, "And if you desire to take a wife instead of a [current] wife and have given her much wealth, do not take back any part of it, would you take it back with slander and blatant sin. And how shall you take it while you have taken pleasure of each other and after they have taken from you a strong pledge (at the time of marriage)."²⁴

Furthermore, the guidelines of divorce are given in great detail in surah al Baqarah which ensures a women's expenses are on her husband until they're separated and the woman should not be asked leave the house before 3 months. It is further mentioned that an arbitration must be carried out between the husband and wife for reconciliation.

In the Pakistani system, the Union Council is formed which has been assigned the duty of reconciliation for 90 days between husband and wife before divorce, but it is absolutely dysfunctional. It is also required that the rights and privileges of women are assured by the court in case of marriage and divorce both. Only that way by strengthening the system would the condition get better.

6. Domestic Violence

According to a study carried out in 2009 by Human Rights Watch, it is estimated that between 20 and 30 percent of women in Pakistan have suffered some form of abuse. An estimated 5000 women are killed per year from domestic violence, with thousands of others maimed or disabled. Women have reported attacks ranging from physical to psychological and sexual abuse from intimate partners. In 1998, of the 1974 reported murders, the majority of victims were killed by family members. A survey carried out by the Thomson Reuters Foundation ranked Pakistan as the third most dangerous country in the world for women, after Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.²⁵

The alarming statistics of domestic violence puts our heads down as a Muslim nation. It brings a huge shame for us as a nation that the weak (physically), sensitive and respectable gender female is under threat at the hands of own family members. It goes rightly against the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH. We should have to seek its solution in the Sunnah itself.

Solution from the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH

The Prophet PBUH said, “The best of men among you are those who are best to their wives, and I am the best person to my wives”.²⁶ As for daughters and mothers, the Prophet PBUH have given glad tidings of paradise for those who are in best of the behaviors with them. The Prophet PBUH never beat his any wife or daughter in his whole life, and if we claim to be his followers we should follow his footsteps and be ashamed of our previous shortcomings in this matter.

7. Rape and Honor Killing

Although the ratio of rapes is lesser in Pakistan as compared to the western world, but Pakistan has the highest number of documented and estimated honor killings per capita of any country in the world; about one-fifth of the world's honor killings are performed in Pakistan (1000 out of the 5000 per year total).²⁷

For a country which is recognized as a Muslim state, these statistics are of grave worry for the people living in the society. As Muslims, we follow the Prophet who is declared as the Prophet of peace by Allah the Almighty, and his Ummah practicing such violence is an antonym for peace and honor itself. Emergency steps must be taken to rectify this shame and ill practice.

Solution from the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH

It is said in the Quran,

“Killing a soul unjustly is as if killing the whole of humanity” Its mentioned in a hadith that a person came to the Prophet PBUH asking permission to rape. The Prophet PBUH said to him would you like somebody raping your mother, daughter or sister? He said I understood Oh messenger of Allah.²⁸ And in another hadith the Prophet PBUH said, “I have ended the laws of the tribes of Jahiliyah.”²⁹

All these proofs make us understand that there is no honor in killing and there is greatest sin in raping. Apart from this, even rapes and killings happened at the time of the Prophet PBUH, but he provided justice in capital punishments for these offenses which ended these crimes from the Arab. A same example has to be followed in Pakistan to end this oppression.

Conclusion

Pakistan is a society which has some grave women right issues. The problems for women varies from place to place and time to time. Most of the rural areas of the country are deficient in any social care for women, they're badly treated and are considered second grade citizens or even lesser. The condition in urban areas is better where the society is more educated and women enjoy their rights to some extent. But even then there are social problems in both the parts of society including gender discrimination, lack of education, financial problems, sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape and honor killing are the few main problems that women face in the Pakistani society.

This situation demands a special attention and a permanent solution. And that solution is found out in the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH in this research paper. It is described and proved why the Sunnah is the only solution. Pakistan as a Muslim society should follow the guidelines of the Prophet PBUH to eradicate these problems both at personal and state levels. The implantable shape of the Sunnah in every aspect and every problem is also described, how the society might get better, how we can end the shame which the UN and other international forms point out every now and then regarding bad conditions for women in the country and how the state should work in accordance with Sunnah to end this misery for women. The Religion which honors and respect women the most why women suffer in its believers, because the believers don't act on the religion.

We find out the only the Sunnah of the Prophet is the ultimate solution for every problem for women in Pakistan. We pray and hope that the state and people realize it and act on for the betterment of the society as a whole. Aameen.

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