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Promoting Women's Economic Participation through the Lens of the Seerah and Islamic Teachings

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ABSTRACT

Women's economic empowerment is a critical component of sustainable development, particularly in Islamic societies where cultural, legal, and socio-economic factors intersect with Islamic principles and values. This study examines the historical role of women in economic activities, the evolution of women's economic rights within Islamic teachings, and contemporary challenges facing women's economic empowerment. It analyzes governmental and non-governmental initiatives aimed at promoting women's economic participation, education, and entrepreneurship within Islamic frameworks. Furthermore, the study explores the importance of education and skill development in enhancing women's economic empowerment, highlighting the correlation between education levels and women's economic participation and decision-making power. Through a multidimensional analysis, it provides insights into successful empowerment programs, challenges, and recommendations for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders to further promote women's economic empowerment within Islamic contexts.

Keywords: *Women's economic empowerment, Islamic societies, education, entrepreneurship, gender equality, empowerment initiatives.*

Introduction

In contemporary societies, the economic empowerment of women has emerged as a pivotal concern, reflecting a global shift towards gender equality and inclusive development. This study delves into the Islamic concept of economic empowerment of women, elucidating its significance within both Islamic principles and the broader global discourse on women's rights and socio-economic development. The Islamic concept of economic empowerment of women encapsulates principles derived from the Qur'an, Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad), and Islamic jurisprudence. It emphasizes the economic



agency, financial independence, and socio-economic rights of women within the framework of Islamic teachings. This study seeks to explore the nuanced understanding of economic empowerment within Islamic theology and its contemporary implications.

Importance of Economic Empowerment of Women in Both Islamic and Global Contexts

The economic empowerment of women holds profound significance within Islamic societies and the global community at large. In Islamic tradition, it aligns with the principles of justice, equity, and the dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender. Furthermore, empowering women economically not only enhances their socio-economic status but also contributes to the overall welfare and prosperity of society. Globally, empowering women economically is recognized as a fundamental driver of sustainable development, poverty alleviation, and social progress. It fosters inclusive growth, promotes gender equality, and unlocks the full potential of human capital.

Thesis Statement Outlining the Scope and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the Islamic concept of economic empowerment of women within contemporary contexts, elucidating its theological foundations, practical implications, and socio-economic outcomes. Through a multidimensional analysis, it seeks to explore the intersections between Islamic principles, gender dynamics, and economic development, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of women's empowerment in both Islamic and global frameworks. The study further intends to offer insights into policy recommendations and practical strategies for promoting women's economic empowerment, fostering sustainable development, and advancing social justice within Islamic societies and beyond.

2: Historical Perspective

Historical Role of Women in Islamic Societies in Economic Activities

In the early days of Islam, women in Islamic societies played significant roles in economic activities, contributing to various sectors such as trade, agriculture, and craftsmanship. Contrary to common misconceptions, women were active participants in economic endeavors and often managed businesses, owned property, and engaged in entrepreneurial ventures. Their involvement in economic activities was not only tolerated but also valued and respected within the Islamic framework.¹

Evolution of Women's Economic Rights within Islamic Teachings

The evolution of women's economic rights within Islamic teachings reflects a progressive trajectory, rooted in the fundamental principles of justice, equity, and compassion. The Qur'an and Hadith provide clear guidelines emphasizing the

economic agency and financial autonomy of women. For instance, Islamic law grants women the right to own and manage property, engage in contractual agreements, and pursue economic activities without undue restrictions.²

Over time, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) has further elucidated and codified women's economic rights, ensuring their protection and empowerment within diverse socio-economic contexts. Scholars have interpreted Islamic principles in ways that promote women's participation in economic life while upholding the integrity of Islamic ethics and values.³

Key Historical Figures or Events that Have Influenced the Economic Empowerment of Women in Islamic Societies

1. Khadijah bint Khuwaylid: The first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Khadijah was a successful businesswoman and a prominent figure in early Islamic history. Her entrepreneurial acumen and financial independence exemplify the empowerment of women in Islamic societies.⁴
2. Fatimah bint Muhammad: The daughter of Prophet Muhammad, Fatimah played a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights within the Islamic community. Her legacy embodies the principles of social justice and gender equality.⁵
3. Umm Salamah: A companion of the Prophet Muhammad, Umm Salamah was known for her wisdom and leadership qualities. She actively participated in economic activities and contributed to the socio-economic development of the Muslim community.⁶

4. The Constitution of Medina (622 CE)

Also known as the Charter of Medina, this document established the foundation for a pluralistic and inclusive society in early Islamic history. It recognized the rights of women, including their economic autonomy and participation in commerce and trade.⁷

During the Islamic Golden Age, spanning from the 8th to the 14th century, Islamic societies witnessed significant advancements in various fields, including economics. Women continued to play vital roles as entrepreneurs, scholars, and patrons of the arts, contributing to the flourishing of Islamic civilization.⁸ These historical figures and events serve as exemplars of women's economic empowerment in Islamic societies, demonstrating the compatibility of Islamic principles with the promotion of gender equality and socio-economic progress. Their legacies continue to inspire contemporary efforts to advance women's rights and economic opportunities within Islamic frameworks.

3: Islamic Principles and Values

The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic teachings, contains numerous verses emphasizing the economic rights and responsibilities of women. Surah An-Nisa (4:32), for example, underscores the principle of equity in financial matters, stating that men and women are entitled to a fair share of wealth and resources. Additionally, Surah At-Tawbah (9:71) highlights the importance of economic participation for both men and women, emphasizing the merit of those who engage in charitable endeavors and economic activities.

Hadiths, the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, further elucidate the economic rights and responsibilities of women. Prophetic traditions emphasize the importance of women's financial autonomy and their right to engage in lawful economic activities. For instance, the Hadith narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar states, "A woman should not be asked why she is selling her goods," highlighting the autonomy and agency granted to women in economic matters.⁹

Concepts such as Zakat, Sadaqah, and Their Impact on Women's Economic Empowerment

Zakat and Sadaqah, forms of charitable giving mandated by Islamic teachings, play a significant role in promoting women's economic empowerment. Zakat, the obligatory almsgiving, serves as a mechanism for wealth redistribution and social justice. Women, as recipients of Zakat, are entitled to receive financial support from the community, thereby mitigating economic disparities and ensuring their well-being.

Sadaqah, voluntary acts of charity, also contribute to women's economic empowerment by providing them with additional resources and opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Through Sadaqah, individuals can support initiatives that benefit women, such as vocational training programs, microfinance initiatives, and education scholarships, thereby enhancing their economic independence and self-sufficiency.¹⁰

Analysis of Islamic Legal Frameworks (Fiqh) Concerning Women's Property Rights, Inheritance Laws, and Business Ownership

Islamic legal frameworks, as derived from Fiqh, encompass comprehensive provisions safeguarding women's property rights, inheritance laws, and business ownership. Women have the right to own, manage, and dispose of property independently, as affirmed by Islamic jurisprudence. Moreover, Islamic law prescribes equitable inheritance laws, ensuring that women receive their rightful share of inheritance alongside male relatives.¹¹

Furthermore, Islamic jurisprudence acknowledges women's capacity to engage in business and entrepreneurial endeavors. Women are permitted to own and operate businesses, enter into contracts, and pursue economic activities without undue

restrictions. Islamic law provides mechanisms to protect women's interests in commercial transactions, ensuring their financial security and autonomy.¹²

Overall, Islamic principles and values uphold the economic rights and responsibilities of women, affirming their dignity, agency, and contribution to socio-economic development. By adhering to Qur'anic teachings, prophetic traditions, and Islamic legal frameworks, societies can foster an environment conducive to women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth.¹³

4: Contemporary Challenges

Despite significant progress in recent decades, women in Islamic societies continue to face numerous socio-economic challenges that hinder their full participation and empowerment. Some of the key challenges include:

1. Gender Discrimination

Women often encounter systemic discrimination and bias in various spheres of life, including employment, education, and access to resources. Discriminatory practices limit women's opportunities for economic advancement and perpetuate socio-economic inequalities.¹⁴

2. Limited Access to Education

In many Islamic societies, women have limited access to quality education, particularly at higher levels. Educational disparities contribute to the marginalization of women in the workforce and hinder their ability to pursue meaningful economic opportunities.¹⁵

3. Unequal Employment Opportunities

Women face barriers to employment, including gender stereotypes, restrictive labor laws, and lack of access to job training and skills development programs. As a result, women are often concentrated in low-paying and informal sectors, limiting their economic prospects and financial independence.¹⁶

4. Lack of Economic Empowerment Programs

Limited availability of economic empowerment programs tailored to the needs of women further exacerbates their vulnerability. The absence of targeted initiatives, such as microfinance schemes, vocational training programs, and entrepreneurship support services, impedes women's ability to access economic opportunities and achieve self-reliance.¹⁷

Cultural and Societal Barriers Hindering Women's Economic Participation and Empowerment

Cultural norms and societal attitudes play a significant role in perpetuating barriers to women's economic participation and empowerment in Islamic societies. These barriers include:

1. Traditional Gender Roles

Prevailing gender norms often assign women primary responsibilities for caregiving and household duties, limiting their ability to engage in economic activities outside the home. Societal expectations regarding women's roles and responsibilities create obstacles to their economic empowerment and mobility.¹⁸

2. Patriarchal Structures

Patriarchal structures within families and communities reinforce unequal power dynamics and restrict women's decision-making authority, particularly regarding financial matters. Limited autonomy and control over resources hinder women's economic independence and agency.¹⁹

3. Social Stigma

Women who challenge traditional gender roles or seek economic independence may face social stigma and backlash from conservative elements within society. Fear of social ostracism or cultural condemnation may deter women from pursuing economic opportunities and asserting their rights.²⁰

Economic Disparities Between Men and Women in Access to Resources, Education, and Employment Opportunities

Economic disparities between men and women persist in Islamic societies, reflecting unequal access to resources, education, and employment opportunities. These disparities are manifested in various forms, including:

1. Wage Gap

Women often earn lower wages than their male counterparts for comparable work, reflecting systemic gender discrimination in the labor market. The wage gap contributes to economic inequality and undermines women's financial security and well-being.²¹

2. Limited Access to Resources

Women face barriers to accessing financial resources, such as credit, land ownership, and capital for entrepreneurial ventures. Unequal access to resources constrains women's economic potential and perpetuates cycles of poverty and dependency.²²

3. Educational Attainment

Gender disparities in educational attainment persist in many Islamic societies, with girls often receiving lower levels of education compared to boys. Limited access to quality education restricts women's opportunities for economic advancement and professional development.²³

Addressing these contemporary challenges requires concerted efforts at the individual, community, and policy levels to promote gender equality, dismantle discriminatory practices, and create an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment. Initiatives focused on education, skills development, legal reforms, and gender-sensitive economic policies are essential for advancing women's rights and fostering inclusive socio-economic development in Islamic societies.

5: Empowerment Initiatives

Overview of Governmental and Non-governmental Initiatives Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment in Islamic Societies

In response to the socio-economic challenges facing women in Islamic societies, both governmental and non-governmental entities have implemented various initiatives aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment. These initiatives encompass a wide range of programs and projects designed to enhance women's access to resources, education, and employment opportunities, as well as to address cultural and societal barriers hindering their economic participation.

Governmental Initiatives:

1. Legal Reforms

Many Islamic countries have undertaken legal reforms to enhance women's economic rights and opportunities. These reforms may include amendments to inheritance laws, property rights legislation, and labor laws to ensure greater gender equality and protection of women's economic interests.²⁴

2. Education and Training Programs

Governments often implement education and training programs targeting women, providing them with skills development opportunities in various sectors such as entrepreneurship, vocational training, and financial literacy. These programs aim to enhance women's employability and economic self-sufficiency.²⁵

3. Access to Finance

Governments may establish financial inclusion initiatives to facilitate women's access to credit, savings, and other financial services. These initiatives may include microfinance programs, women's savings groups, and small business loan schemes tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs.²⁶

Non-governmental Initiatives

1. Women's Rights Advocacy

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and empowerment in Islamic societies. These organizations

conduct awareness campaigns, provide legal assistance, and lobby for policy reforms to address gender-based discrimination and inequalities.²⁷

2. Skill-building Workshops

NGOs often organize skill-building workshops and capacity-building programs for women, focusing on areas such as leadership development, entrepreneurship, and technology training. These initiatives aim to empower women with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the workforce and business ventures.²⁸

3. Community Development Projects

Non-governmental organizations may implement community development projects targeting women in marginalized communities, providing them with access to essential services, infrastructure, and livelihood opportunities. These projects aim to address the root causes of poverty and empower women to improve their socio-economic status.²⁹

6: Women's Entrepreneurship

Examination of the Role of Women in Entrepreneurship within Islamic Contexts

Women's entrepreneurship in Islamic contexts has a rich history and continues to play a significant role in economic development and social empowerment. Traditionally, women in Islamic societies have been active participants in entrepreneurial activities, engaging in various sectors such as trade, agriculture, crafts, and services. The principles of Islamic teachings, including the encouragement of economic participation, the pursuit of halal (permissible) livelihoods, and the promotion of self-reliance, have provided a conducive environment for women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures.³⁰

Moreover, Islamic values such as cooperation (ta'awun), trustworthiness (amanah), and perseverance (sabr) have contributed to the resilience and success of women entrepreneurs in navigating the challenges and opportunities inherent in business ventures. Women entrepreneurs in Islamic contexts often leverage their social networks, family support systems, and cultural capital to establish and grow their enterprises, demonstrating creativity, innovation, and resourcefulness in overcoming barriers.³¹

Factors Influencing Women's Entrepreneurship, including Cultural, Legal, and Economic Factors

Several factors influence women's entrepreneurship in Islamic societies, encompassing cultural, legal, and economic dimensions:

1. Cultural Norms and Gender Roles

Cultural norms and gender roles prevalent in Islamic societies may influence women's access to resources, decision-making power, and opportunities for

entrepreneurship. Societal expectations regarding women's roles as caregivers and homemakers may pose challenges to women's participation in business ventures, requiring efforts to challenge stereotypes and promote gender equality.³²

2. Legal and Regulatory Environment

The legal and regulatory environment plays a crucial role in shaping women's entrepreneurship by providing a framework for business registration, property rights, access to finance, and protection of intellectual property. Ensuring gender-responsive laws and policies that recognize and safeguard women's economic rights is essential for creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs.³³

3. Access to Finance and Resources

Limited access to finance, assets, and resources is a significant barrier to women's entrepreneurship in many Islamic societies. Women entrepreneurs may face challenges in obtaining loans, securing collateral, and accessing markets, requiring innovative approaches such as microfinance, crowdfunding, and peer-to-peer lending to address their financing needs.³⁴

4. Education and Skills Development

Education and skills development are critical determinants of women's entrepreneurial success, enabling them to acquire the knowledge, competencies, and networks necessary to start and sustain businesses. Investments in girls' education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship education can empower women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures and contribute to economic growth.³⁵

7: Education and Skill Development

Importance of Education and Skill Development in Enhancing Women's Economic Empowerment

Education and skill development are foundational pillars of women's economic empowerment, playing a crucial role in enhancing their socio-economic status, increasing their earning potential, and enabling them to participate more effectively in the workforce and decision-making processes. Here are several reasons why education and skill development are essential for women's economic empowerment:

1. Enhanced Employability

Education equips women with the knowledge, skills, and qualifications needed to access a wider range of employment opportunities and pursue higher-paying jobs. By investing in education, women can enhance their employability and competitiveness in the labor market.³⁶

2. Entrepreneurial Success

Education provides women with the necessary entrepreneurial skills, business acumen, and financial literacy to start and manage successful businesses. With access to education and training, women can unlock their entrepreneurial potential and contribute to economic growth through innovation and enterprise.³⁷

3. Income Generation

Education enables women to command higher wages and salaries, leading to increased household income and financial stability. Studies have shown that educated women are more likely to earn higher incomes and contribute to household expenses, which can improve the overall well-being of their families.³⁸

4. Empowerment and Agency

Education fosters women's empowerment by enhancing their self-confidence, decision-making abilities, and autonomy. Educated women are better equipped to advocate for their rights, challenge gender stereotypes, and participate in civic and political processes, thereby exerting greater influence and agency in society.³⁹

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the multifaceted dimensions of women's economic empowerment within Islamic societies, shedding light on key findings, insights, and challenges. Here's a summary of the key points discussed. Women in Islamic societies have a rich history of economic participation, rooted in Islamic principles of equity and justice. Despite historical contributions, women have faced barriers to economic empowerment, including societal norms and legal constraints.

Islamic teachings emphasize the economic rights and responsibilities of women, including their right to property, inheritance, and entrepreneurship. Concepts such as Zakat and Sadaqah promote economic redistribution and social welfare, enhancing women's economic empowerment.

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