THE CONCEPT OF GENDER'S EQUALITY IN MODERN FEMINISM AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN WOMEN'S UPGRADATION

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Abstract:

Women have to face gender discrimination, in every society, with some variations. In some characters, they are dealt as a Devi, but on the other hand, in some conditions, they are deprived of even their basic rights. Many anti women activities are found, in remote areas of different countries. In reactions, they are struggling to achieve their basic rights. For this purpose, nowadays, a lot of movements are functional to advocate them on different plate forms. In Islam, women have been empowered socially, morally and legally. They have been given proper social positions and due rights. They are protected legally from their birth to death. First time, in the history of human being, Islam determined as well as specified the due rights for women to compliment them in every walk of life. After studying the available data and noticing that the practical steps of Islam, to make women empowered need to be highlighted. The main objective of this study is, "To elaborate the demand of equality by modern feminists and women's status determined by Islam". The basic research question of this study is, "How women are treated, in an Islamic society? A descriptive research method has been used for this study.

Keywords: Social Status, Feminism, Domestic Violence, Honor Killing, legal Rights

1. Introduction

It is a bitter reality of our planet that a woman having basic role in a society is not enjoying her deserved rights. Female genders or women are being exploited in different ways all over the world. Their social status, legal rights and prestige in a society, have not been determined properly. In some areas, they are treated like a pious creature but in some remote areas of some countries (where there is lack of social awareness, not access of mass media or people are illitrate), they are brutally dealt or killed without any legal reason. They are not equally treated as males are dealt, in some societies. "Although varying degrees of gender discrimination exist in almost all countries, it is more widespread in collectivist LDCs (Less Developed Countries), where restrictions are imposed on women to deprive them from

certain liberties."[1] This discriminatory behavior of a society or some people is because of a number of reasons, first: it is due to women's physical and psychological weakness, second: may be their natural differences from men and third: is the division of labors (some specific tasks only done by men properly and some are by women). For these reasons, women are facing a lot of discriminationary attitude even in an educated as well as a civilized society.

This unequal, unfair or unjustly treatment with women is causing revolutionary resistances, all over the world. Women have started (individually and collectively) demands for their basic rights. From approximately 18th century to nowadays, in different shapes, they are trying to get their social, legal and basic rights. "Feminism" is an approach in which, the voice of women are raised by people (males and females) and objectives behind their struggle are "to grant them proper rights". "It is important to note that the term feminism has been in use since the time of the French Revolution of 1789."[2] The basic demand in their slogans has been seen, that they should be treated in such a way as men are entertained. They should not be exploited by men or society in any way. In their movements, they wanted to relinquish all kinds of discriminatory activities on different platforms, socially, politically and ideologically. On 8th March (international women's day) in their protesting rallies, they demanded for their basic social rights and gender equality. Their basic efforts were to waive the discrimination in educational, professional and interpersonal opportunities in every walk of life. Consequently, in countries, gender discrimination has been declared as an illegal or unsocial activity. "Discrimination against women is considered illegal in almost all countries in which governments have signed international and regional treaties and conventions regarding the protection of human rights including women's rights."[3] The level of discriminatory behaviour is quite different with the variation of region, culture and basic beliefs. In some societies, the birth of female babies is not liked. Parents, when they are told by a doctor that their upcoming baby would be female, they abort it at its initial stage. In India, this practice is on

[1] Adel SZ Abadeer, *Norms and Gender Discrimination in the Arab World*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 10.

[2] Doris H. Gray, *Beyond Feminism and Islamism*, (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013), 31.

[3] Adel SZ Abadeer, *Norms and Gender Discrimination in the Arab World*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 13.

peak. On the other hand (selective) male babies are liked and comparatively preferred. "According to studies on female feticide, urban and upper income groups, who have access to medical facilities; utilize these to practice their preference for the desired sex of their child. The sharper decline in the urban birth sex ratio at the all-India level, as in many other states is."[4]

In some societies, females are deprived of even their basic rights. For this reason, not only women but also men of some societies are with them in their struggles to get their basic rights. Women or men who are in the favour of women's social equality or raising their voices for women's basic rights are called feminists. A lot of feminist movements are functional all over the world to raise this point that women should be given their proper rights. They should be treated equally as men are being treated in a society. Under the umbrella of "feminism" people have achieved varieties of goals, in different societies. In which social, liberal, socialist, radical, cultural and intersectional feminism are renowned all over the world. The basic point of all their activities is to get women's basic rights and to waive the discriminatory behavior of people. Somehow, the nature of gender equality which they are demanding is not appropriate logically, morally as well as psychologically.

2. The Nature of Gender Equality in Modern Feminism

To get basic rights of every man or women is a natural phenomenon. If women are not being treated properly or not enjoying their basic rights then their demand, to get their due rights is, valid, genuine and noticable. But their rights are as different from males, as their role is, in this world. Their demand to give absolutely equality to men cannot be logically fulfilled in any society. Among men or male genders, basic rights are not equally granted to every person even in a progressive society then to give women equality as men are given, is not possible practically. "A 'difference approach' to gender equality emphasizes that women and men are different (either through nature, nurture or both) and have different experiences and interests. It argues that gender equality should acknowledge and build upon these differences rather than attempt to ignore or erase them."[5] A man or a woman can be given the proper social, legal or basic rights according to his (or her) nature of job, performance, social status, beneficial level for a society and so on. A female doctor will be given more rights or higher status

[4] Tulsi Patel, *Sex-Selective Abortion in India*, 1st ed., (New Delhi: Sage Publication Pvt, 2007), 96.

[5] Beatrice Halsaa, Sasha Rose Neil and Sevil Sumer, *Religion, Gender and Citizenship*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan Publications, 2016), 58.

in a society as compare to a male cobbler. A male scientist will be more entertained as compared to a farmer in a same society. This is not gender discrimination but this is a division of rights according to one's worthy performance.

The demand for basic rights by women is genuine but with men, equality, in every field of life, is not possible. A man can do better those tasks which demand more physical labors as compared to others. For example: for chivalry purposes, a woman can play an eminent role in a society and can sacrifice a lot for her society. But her performance can't be compared to a man. Practivally, a female can't get the level of fitness as a man can achieve. So the performance of women in a battle field cannot be equal to that of men. So according to their physical or psychological standard, they can be given due status and deserved positions. In women's rallies on 8th March, some of their demands were absolutely unnatural and illogical. Their demand for absolutely equal treatment was not appealable or practically existable. A man or a woman without any discrimination can be given the rights, facilities and rewards according to their personal performance or services for their societies. Under the cover of these rallies, some illogical slogans were chanted by these women. "Qirat Mirza, one of the organizers of the *Aurat* March, went on to explain some of the slogans having received the most backlashes and invigorating the crowd. Some of them made the most rounds on social media, namely, "*Mera Jism Meri Marzi*", and 2018's "*Apna Khana Khud Garam Karo*", which achieved overnight fame."[6] This was rejected by women of different societies those who also expressed their views in *Haya* march on the day of international woman day (March 8, 2020). Against women's *Azadi* March on this day, female students of *Jamia Hafsa* also arranged an anti *Azadi* march named *Haya* March. "The *Haya* March of *Lal Masjid* affiliated *Jamia Hafsa* students had culminated at the National Press Club, which was the starting point of the *Aurat Azadi* March."[7] The female students were in majority as compared to the participants of *Aurat Azadi* March. They rejected all their thinking, point of views and demand of absolute equality. These students were volunteers and have not been dictated by anyone.

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[6] *Aurat March 2020: In celebration of womanhood, and demands of gender equality***,** *Aurat March 2020: Towards women empowerment and gender equality*, last modified, https://www.dialoguepakistan.com/aurat-march-2020-towards-women-empowerment-and-gender-equality/ accessed on October 24, 2020.

[7] Women's day events held despite threats, The newspaper's Staff Reporter/ 09 March, 2020. dawn.com/news/1539435. (accessed on October 23, 2020)

So the demand of basic rights by women is valid but the nature of equality which they demand is not accepable. Practically, it can't be existed in a society. Only where women's performance is better should be encouraged or facilitated more and where men's performance is better, then they are deserved to be preferred. Nature can't be ignored in any condition. If a man does an outdoor job and he is feeding 5 females (at home) then in such societies, equality of gender can't be discussed. Here, that man would be appreciated. If a woman is doing job and feeding 5 male children (at home), here, that woman would be appreciated and rewardable.

3. Role of Islam in Upgrading Women

For first time, in the history of human being, Islam granted female gender (women) proper social as well as legal rights. Before this, they were not treated like human being. They were accepted as a pious creature and given a valuable position in an Islamic society. From birth to death, every woman was honored as a pious relation of daughter, sister, wife, mother and grand-mother. Before the introduction of Islam, women used to ignore in every walk of life. Many dreadful incidents have been noted, in which women were brutally dealt in Arabic peninsula. "Women suffered in the pagan Arab society great injustices and were exposed to diverse kinds of humiliations prior to the mission of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). They were treated like material property to be disposed of at the whim of the male guardian. They were not entitled to inherit from their parents or husbands."[8] Islamic way of women treatment is quite different as compared to other religions or societies. In Islam, women have been given not only basic but also deserved rights. They have been granted according to their physical as well as psychological standard. Islamic strategies about women are according to their differences (biological as well as psychological). Islam emphasizes on division of labor, it cannot be said a discrimination. Some tasks are assigned to men and some are for women. Every policy of Islam about women, is according to their nature and approach (physically and mentally). Some difficult tasks have been assigned to men because they have more physical strength and power as compared to women. Women, by

[8] Abdul-Rehman AL-Sheha, Trans. Abu Salman Deya ud-Deen, *Women in Islam &Refutation of some common Misconception*, 16. Retrieved on April 20, 2019 from www.islamland.org

nature, having emotional and biological weak, have been assigned some different (easy) tasks as compared to men. In some conditions, men are preferred and in some situation, women have been honored. "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."[9]

To treat women with kindness and affection, has been advised in Islam. To discourage, violence or physical torture, every male follower of Islam has been ordered, to treat women in a gentle way. Practically, a single incident of domestic violence or physical torture has not been quoted in the history of Islam. But love, affection and caring for women by Muslims have been quoted by different scholars. The Holy Prophet's (PBUH) attitude about women is a role model for all His followers. He practically proved this excellent treatment and also ordered men to treat women in kind ways. One of good qualities of a man is that his treatment is praiseworthy with his family members as well as with his wife. In many *Hadiths*, such kind of treatment has been advised by Holy Prophet (PBUH). "Abu Huraira (R.A) narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "O Muslims! I advise you to be gentle with women."[10] Further, women's social and legal security and specific grants of Islam bestowed to only female gender in whole their life can be discussed with the help of following points.

3.1 Islam and Feminine Security

Islam saves a female, at her early age when she is in the form of a fetus. In many societies, male gender is preferred and females are aborted. This gender discrimination varies from society to society. Before Islam, girls were buried alive and killed after their birth. Islam not only condemned strongly but made strict legislation to make girls or female fetus saved and prevented this inhuman activity. For this purpose, only if mother's condition

[9] Maulana Wahid al din Khan, *Women between Islam and Western Society*, (New Delhi: The Islamic Centre, 1994), 250.

[10] Al-Imam Ibn e Kathir, Trans. Muhammad Mustapha Geme'ah, *Stories of Prophets*, (Riyadh: Darussalam Publication), 11.

is critical and there is not other option then abortion is permitted. This abottion can be only before the completion of 120 days of pregnancy and no specific gender is discussed, it may be male as well as female. For this action, only mother's critical condition is preferred not a single clue is noted in which male or female baby is preferred. No gender discrimination has been shown at this stage. Generally, it was ordered in Holy *Qur'ān* that don't kill a child in any condition. "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."[11] In the shape of fetus, to waive the discrimination, every kind of fetus (male or female) has been saved. "The abortion of a formed fetus, that is, after 120 days, is considered a criminal offense and prohibited by all Islamic legal schools. Exceptions to this prohibition, however, include situations where the mother's life is in danger, where the pregnancy is harming an already suckling child, or where the fetus is expected to be deformed."[12]

Birth of girls or being a father of a girl, was not liked by Arabs before the introduction of Islam. People used to feel insult those who had a female baby or a girl (daughter) in their houses. A lot of incidents have been noted in which girls were brutally dealt or killed at their early ages. "In pre-Islam Arabia, it was common place among many to bury their baby daughters alive."[13] Islam prevented this bad custom and made safety for females or girls. Females were declared mercy of Allah for her parents. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) wept and felt great sorrow when a person told Him the incident of the killing of his daughter. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) 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."[14] In many societies, the culture to get just male babies is getting popular day by day. In some societies, to get first baby male, is also being customized. In those societies, female babies at their initial stages are aborted after their scanning or confirming by doctors. Some doctors, hospitals and clinics are being run illegally which are operating only such kinds of abortions after getting an amount of money from parents. This

[11]Muhammad Marmaduke Pikthal, *The Meanings of the Glorious Qur'ān*, 7th ed., (London: Islamic Dawa Centre International, 2017), 87.

[12]Daniel C. Maguire, *Sacred Rights*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 121.

[13]Burying Baby girl Alive, Retrieved from http://www.naseeb.com/journals/burying-baby-girls-alive-the-crime-of-169462 accessed on July 12, 2019.

[14]Justice Mufti Taqi Usmani, *Qur'an e Karim*, 996. Retrieved on April 20, 2019 from www.nodrehidayat.org

inhuman activity has no roots of any religion but regionally, this is still working in some civilized nations. "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."[15]

3.2 Social Status Determined by Islam

In an Islamic society, girls are treated like a pious creature. In their early ages, a father earns for their and fulfills their all necessities. Their basic needs are accomplished by her parents. A woman doesn't need to earn something for her living being. A male is responsible for her to feed her in this age. Even at this stage, a male boy is demanded to work or some tasks are assigned but females are not given any task at this level. The relation of a father and daughter has been declared a pious relation in Islam. A relation between brother and sister is considered a loving and caring relation. A brother is like a protection shield for his sisters in an Islamic society. Both are equally treated, equally given the facilities of educations or schoolings. Marriage between a male and female caused a relation of love and affection. In which, men have been given the tasks to serve the women financially as well as morally. Allah explained this policy. "He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find response in them, and he has put between you affection and mercy."[16] The mutual understanding of a man and woman makes a good relation for whole their lives. The kind treatment of men with women creates a peaceful environment in a family. This treatment transfers a number of good habits into their children. A big difference has been seen, in the characters of children related to a family in which mothers are dealt politely, and children of a broken family. For those people who deal their wives with kindness have been said the most perfect men socially. Allah said this quality in Holy *Qur'ān,* "The most perfect man of religion is one who excels in character. The best among you is he who gives the best treatment to his womenfolk."[17]

When a woman becomes a mother, her status enhanced. Her children are advised to deal their parents in a kind and with affection. Especially in their old ages, their children are ordered to speak with them in a gentle way.

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[15] Christopher Kaczor, *The Ethics of Abortion*, (London: Rout ledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2011), 33.

[16] Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Mohsin Khan, *The Noble Qur'ān*, (Madinah: King Fahd Complex), 542.

[17] Maulana Wahid al din Khan, *Women between Islam and Western Society*, (New Delhi: The Islamic Centre, 1994), 246.

To speak a harsh word in any condition is not allowed. For their respect and kind treatment, Allah said in Holy *Qur'ān,* "Thy Lord hath decreed, that ye worship none save him, and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them to attain old age with thee, say not "Fie" unto them nor repulse them, but speak unto them a gracious word."[18] Only in Islamic societies or in the teachings of Islam, a woman holds authority to choose her life partner (husband). Without her permission or opinion, she can't me married. Many examples are there in which the Holy Prophet (PBUH) nullified the marriages which were arranged without bridal's permission. Widows were given the rights to select their life partners by their own choices. Somebody even a father or guardian of a girl or woman (virgin, divorced or widow) cannot marry them without their permission or after knowing their wills. If a marriage, without the permission or a girl or against the will of a woman will be held, it can be cancelled according to Islamic *Shari'ah*. "The widows should not be married until she has been consulted. Nor should the virgin be married until her permission has been sought."[19]

3.3 Legal Rights given by Islam

To make women socially secured and empowered, women have been given property rights. A complete setup of transformation of property has been determined for women. Such setup was not introduced before Islam. Only in Islam, a complete schedule has been revealed. A due part of property has been declared for women from their close relatives. A woman has a particular part in the property of her father, husband and even in her children. "If there be women more than two, then theirs is two-thirds of the inheritance and if there be one (only) then the half. And to his parents a sixth of the inheritance, if he have a son; and if he have no son and his parents are his heirs, then to his mother appertaineth the third; and if he have brethren, then to his mother appertaineth the sixth."[20] At the time of marriage, women by their parents, get a heap of gifts. According to the status of parents a lot of useable things are granted to their girls. After marriage, if a woman feels that her husband doesn't fulfill her basic rights or by face, she doesn't like him, she has right to demand for divorce from her husband and in case if he denies. then she can go to court and demand for *Khula* (Separation). It is her

[18]Muhammad Marmaduke Pikthal, *The Meanings of the Glorious Qur'ān*, 7th Ed, (London: Islamic Dawa Centre International, 2017), 86.

[19] Nicholas Awde, *Women in Islam*, 1st Ed, (London: Rout ledge Publications, 2013), 70.

[20]Muhammad Marmaduke Pikthal, *The Meanings of the Glorious Qur'ān*, 7th Ed, (London: Islamic Dawa Centre International, 2017), 23-24.

legal right which has been given by Islam. "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. Peace is better. But greed hath been made present in the minds (of men). If ye do well and keep from evil, Lo! Allah is ever informed of what ye do."[21] A divorced woman or a widow can remarriage and can live a normal life as a virgin. For first time, in the history of human being, widows were given the proper social and legal positions in an Islamic society. They were not only permitted to remarriage but they were married by virgin Males. The first wife of The Holy Prophet (PBUH) was a twice widow. "*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."[22]

3.4 Division of Labor not Gender Difference in Islam

Islam has not shown a single gesture of gender discrimination. But it deals both males and females according to their nature. Somehow, in an Islamic society, the concept of division of labor is found. For male genders, some kinds of tasks have been assigned and for female genders, according to their biological differences and physical powers, some tasks have been assigned. These are not in the category of discrimination or exploitation but these are for the facility of both these genders. In some societies, people (Muslims) who exploit women in different ways are found also. In Pakistan, such kinds of activities are adopted by people. These activities are not recommended by Islam but regionally, they have adopted by so-called Muslims to keep women under their servitude. *Karo kari* (honor killing) is one of them in which women or girls are killed by their close relatives on their acts which cause their families insult or degradation. A sorrowful incident has been occurred in which Qandeel Baloch was killed by her brother on sharing her nude pictures on social media. "Waseem confessed to strangling Ms Baloch, 26, in July 2016. At the time, he said it was because the star had brought shame on the family."[23] Islam doesn't advise such kinds of killings in any condition. Vani (a child marriage custom in tribal areas of Pakistan) is another anti women activity in which a girl or woman is sold or given to other's servitude or sometimes married to end a family dispute or

[21]Ibid., 29.

[22]Dar Rah Haq's Board of Writers, trans. N Tauwheedi, *A Glance at the Life of Holy Prophet of Islam*, (New York: Mostazfan Foundation), 14.

[23] Qandeel Baloch Murdered, *Qandeel Baloch: Brother of murdered social media star jailed*, Last Modifed, October 26, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-49848384

to compensate a murder of their opponents. These people, under the cover of some regional customs and sometimes by misusing some so called religious beliefs, exploit women in different ways. They, to keep their supremacy on women or keep them under their servitude suppress them in different ways. Islam is not responsible for their activities. They sometimes, beat their women and sometimes deprive them their basic rights. "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."[24]

Conclusion

Feminists are on rights when they raise their voice for women's basic rights but they are wrong when they just blame a religion. Every religion is to facilitate a man or woman without any discrimination. Their concept of gender equality is also illogical. They don't confess the biological and psychological differences between males and females. They are not in the favor of division of labor although it is a natural phenomenon. Islam doesn't allow a man to do an anti-women activity. On the basis of gender's biological or psychological differences, Islam divides some tasks for men and some for women. Men are physical strong as compared to women so it assigns males some tasks which they can perform easily and also according to the women's nature, it assigns some specific tasks. From birth to death, Islam doesn't show any gender discrimination to degrade women or to suppress females. Islam, first time, in the history of human being gave proper social, legal and moral rights to women. Before Islam, they were deprived as well as exploited in different ways. Islam closed all those doors and upgraded the women in every walk of life. In Pakistan, some anti-women activities have been adopted by so-called Muslims. But Islam is not responsible for these activities. These activities have been condemned in Islamic *Shari'ah*. Islam is not responsible for all activities done by Muslims. A lot of actities have been adoted by Muslims by the strong influences of regional culture or due to lack of information about Islamic *Shari'ah*.

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[24] Lauri S. Friedman, *Women's Rights,* (London: Green haven Press, 2010), 60.