



Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) The Greatest Torch-bearer of Women's Rights

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Abstract

In the distant past, almost all over the world, the woman was looked upon as a mere non-entity. During the present time, one may be extremely grieved when one sees that woman folk have passed through tremendously tragic circumstances, so much so that there was a time when woman was even denied the status of human being. The Greek, Roman and Hindu cultures refused to give her a respectable position. The industrial revolution in Europe brought the worst possible suffering for woman in the human history. The two world wars brought many other problems like earning of livelihood by women, especially in the cities, as millions of men had died during wars and many of those who survived had become handicapped. In such circumstances, woman folk saw the ray of hope only and only in the last Messenger of Allah, who was their greatest benefactor. This article deals with some important aspects of the status of woman in the eyes of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).

Keywords: Woman, non-entity, human being, cultures, industrial revolution, hope.

Introduction

Although the entire humanity should be grateful for the endless mercies and eternal guidance that the beloved Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) brought upon this world, the womenfolk owe special gratitude to him for striving for a rightful place for them in pre-Islamic pagan society.

At the time of creation of Adam and Eve, God assigned the couple particular roles based on their responsibilities. Nationality, ethnicity or gender was not to be the basis of anyone's superiority:

"O mankind, fear your Lord, Who created you of a single soul and of the same created

his mate; and from that pair spread countless men and women over the earth. Fear from that Allah in Whose name you demand your rights from each other and abstain from violating relations between kinsfolk. Note it well that Allah is watching you very closely"¹.

Gender is not considered a yardstick for success in this world or in the Hereafter: *"Whosoever does the righteous deeds, whether male or female, provided that he is a believer, We shall surely grant him live a pure life in this world. And We will reward such people (in the Hereafter) according to their best deeds"*.²

¹ Al-Quran

² Al-Quran

Before the advent of Islam in 611 AC, the Christians and Jews believed that a woman was the cause of original sin, and source of all evils, and was considered to be the devil's disciple. Other religions and cultures considered women to be salable commodity; and deprived them of all their legitimate, legal and social rights. The Holy Prophet (S A W) helped woman gain her rightful status in the society. Islam absolved women from the blame of original sin by proclaiming:

*"After a time Satan tempted them with that tree to disobey Our command and got them out of the state they were in."*³

As opposed to a perverted vision, the Woman of Islam found a new courage to live respectfully in the society, in her role of a mother, enjoying a status slightly raised above Man's.

Jaahimah, a Companion of the Prophet once said to him: "O Messenger of Allah! I want to go out and fight (in Jihad) and I have come to ask your advice." He said: "Do you have a mother?" He said: "Yes." He said: *"Then stay with her, for Paradise is beneath her feet."*⁴

Today the status of women in Islamic society is being decried in the name of gender equality. While criticizing Islam for discriminatory treatment towards women, this fact is often ignored that Islam had given woman her social, economic, legal and spiritual rights as back as in the 7th century,

while she in the West was able to achieve such rights in the 18th century after a great deal of struggle.

In the 13th and 14th centuries, under Christian societies in the West, women were regarded as species without souls. A chain of events resulted in the appearance of witchcraft⁵, a serious crime alleged to be practiced by women between 14th and 17th centuries. Approximately half a million people, most of them women, were burnt alive after being declared as witches⁶.

Around 800 years before this tragic event had taken place, the Prophet (PBUH) had already reinforced the sanctity of woman by providing her respect as a daughter, sister, wife and mother. It is witnessed and recorded in the world history that the burial ground of thousands of girls, who were torched alive in this *enlightened* world, turned into a platform of women's liberation, resultantly. Even then, through the darkness of woman's suffering the soothing voice of Mohammad (PBUH) could be heard saying that:

*"Woman are counterpart of men"*⁷. *"O, people fear Allah about the women's rights"*⁸; *"O people! Allah has declared haram (illegal) the disrespect of mothers and killing of daughters"*⁹

*"O Allah, bear witness that I have issued a warning concerning (failure to fulfill) the rights of the two weak ones: Orphans and women."*¹⁰

³ Al-Quran

⁴ Sunan an-Nasa'i

⁵ Women Myth & Realities, Mary Nelson

⁶ Ibid,

⁷ Sunan Abi Dawud

⁸ Sahih Bukhari

⁹ Sahih Bukhari

¹⁰ Sunan Ibn Majah

What is more, in order to raise the status and honor of a wife, it was made obligatory for a husband to treat her in a gentle and loving manner. A gracious and respectable attitude towards one's wife was declared to be a yardstick for husband's righteousness. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

*"Of the worldly goods, there is nothing better than a virtuous wife."*¹¹

*"The best among you is he who is best for his family. For my family, I am the best of all of you."*¹²

Those who criticize Islam for giving half share to woman in the inheritance actually overlook the fact that at that time there was no concept of a woman's share to the inheritance and ownership; and that the Western world deprived woman of these rights until the 18th century. The Prophet (PBUH) not only declared a father, brother, husband and son to be the breadwinner for a woman, but also ensured right of ownership from her share in estate and other sources of income. The woman was given a share in inheritance as a mother, wife, sister, daughter, maternal grandmother and granddaughter, paternal grandmother and granddaughter.

In Europe about a century ago, a woman was oppressed in multiple ways with no legal provisions to her relief. Under the British common law, the property of wife at the time of marriage was transferred to her

husband. It was just in 1870 that 'The Married Women's Property Act-1870' was passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom, which allowed married women to be the legal owners of the money they earned and to inherit the property as well.¹³ During these Dark Ages in the West, she was denied the right to earn and spend for her, to inherit and to give her consent in marriage; whereas Islam has always given women the right to own property in kind and cash¹⁴. The importance Islam gives to woman is evident from the fact that many sahabiyaat* authentically narrated Ahadith** from the beloved Prophet (PBUH), with no parallel to his wife Ayesha (RA) who narrated more than two thousand ahadith.¹⁵

In the successive years, countless Muslim women scholars kept enlightening thousands of students about Quran and Hadith in Madinah Munawwarah, Iraq, Koofa and Basra¹⁶. Ulemas (Muslim religious scholars), throughout the Islamic history have duly acknowledged the valuable contribution of women in the field of Islamic education.

The right of girl-child was given an important place just recently in 1995 by Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) and subsequently under Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) and Sustainable Development Goals (STGS); while the holy Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)

¹¹ Sahih Muslim

¹² Jami' Tirmizi,

¹³ <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>,

¹⁴ Umari, Aurat Islami Maushrai Mei

* Muslim women who were present during the life of Prophet Mohammad PBUH

** Ahadith is plural of hadith, meaning 'saying or action of prophet Mohammad PBUH

¹⁵ Farhat Hashmi, Hasool e Ilm aur Khawateen, Al Huda International Welfare Foundation, 2005

¹⁶ Ibid.

had safeguarded a girl child's right to life more than 1400 years ago by declaring the female infanticide as illegal¹⁷ and had ensured her fundamental rights in the manner:

*"If a girl child is born to someone, he neither buries her alive nor treats her with contempt and does not prefer his son over her, Allah will bestow upon him Heaven."*¹⁸

Not only were the rights of women determined, their protection was also guaranteed by enjoining these duties with seeking God's pleasure as a source of earning eternal rewards. Mohammad, (PBUH) said: *"Anybody who has three daughters, to whom he teaches good manners and imparts knowledge and raises them kindheartedly, will certainly earn Heaven."*¹⁹

In Islam, the parents and walis (Guardians) have been made responsible for seeking suitable matches for their daughters/wards. Simultaneously, consent of the girl is mandatory for nikah. The Prophet (PBUH) himself gave the hand of a young woman (whose parents had forced her to marry against her will) to her cousin, thus affirming a girl's right to declare her forced nikah (marriage contract) null and void²⁰, (although she did not use it, saying that her aim was just to let the women know that they had this right in Islam). Can any other society present a better example for raising the status of woman?

Another Example: Islam has given woman the right to seek khula (to dissolve her marriage through court) in case her husband was unable to maintain her economically, was either impotent, cruel, or was disliked by her. Security of life as well as her belongings is ensured, and her sanctity has also been granted protection.

Modesty of behavior and dress has been prescribed for both Muslim men and women. The person questioning the character of a woman through putting false charges of adultery against her is liable to qazaf *. The advice of women in the affairs of the state has its due importance. Women have been made responsible for the development and progress of the society. The moral obligation of "amar -bil- ma'ruf-wa-nahi anil munkir," is social responsibility of both man and woman.

There are some exceptions which Islam has provided as special favors to women. Unfortunately, some non-Muslims or less informed Muslims regard these favors to be discriminatory. Some of these favors given to woman are: exemption from offering prayers in congregation, appearing for legal evidence, and liability of economic sustenance for the family and jihad .These are not discriminations against woman. They are actually some favors granted to facilitate women for their convenience. The women owe it to the Prophet (PBUH) for ascribing a

¹⁷ Sahih Bukhari

¹⁸ Sunan abi Dawood

¹⁹ Sunan abi Dawood

²⁰ Sahih al Bukhari

*Eighty lashes, a punishment set by Quran, if someone accuses a woman for fornication or Adultery and is unable to prove it.

short cut for them to Heaven, as mentioned in this hadith:

*"The woman who offered prayer five times a day, fasted in the holy month of Ramadan, protected her sanctity and obeyed her husband shall enter Heaven."*²¹

Today no Muslim country, or any Islamic society for that matter, completely grants all the rights that were enjoyed by the Arab women in Prophet Mohammad's era. We cannot blame Islam for the misrepresentation or mal-practices by contemporary Muslims. Actually, it is the prime duty of all Muslims in general and Muslim states in particular to adopt policies and actions to remove all kinds of gender discriminations and protect and implement all social, legal, economic and political rights provided to women under the canopy of Islam. The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is the beacon of light and guidance for humanity for all times to come. His teachings were not confined to a particular age, place or culture. Therefore, the status of women, the provision of their rights, the fulfillment of their responsibilities and the basis of man-woman relationship will remain unchanged in the light of Quran and Sunnah for the entire humanity.

The importance of a woman in family life needs to be highlighted by giving her the realization that she can play a very active role in her family and communal life, through her intellectual, educational and social activities. Her contribution as a home-

maker and as a participant in agriculture and livestock sector needs to be acknowledged in national economic development indicators. If she has to perform outside home, then her family and society must provide full cooperation and support in carrying out her conjugal, parental, domestic and professional responsibilities. Family-friendly and women specific areas should be identified for her active participation in economic activity. The laws must facilitate her job structure as a citizen and as a mother. A healthy conducive working environment is required to be provided for facilitating her to play active role in the development of the country. The perpetuation and development of her role as a home maker would certainly strengthen the family, home and society as a whole.

One crucial, unequivocal verse in the Qur'an lays the ground for the concept of equality between men and women with no discrimination on the basis of sex:

*"The believers, men and women, are allies (awliya) of one another. They enjoin the 'common good' (al ma'ruf) and forbid the bad (al munkar), they observe prayers (salat) and give charitable alms (zakat) and obey God and his Prophet"*²²

Munkar refers to all that is rejected by all members of a society - a set of morally unacceptable practices. The term awliya in this verse means alliance, mutual assistance and mutual reinforcement. The above holy verse calls men and women to remain mutually supportive through a spiritual,

²¹ Majmua Al-zawaid wa mamba, alfawaid, Nur al Deen

²² Al-Quran

emotional and companionate alliance. It is a benevolent association that is portrayed in words like Awliya - allies of one another- where one perceives this subliminal closeness between men and women whereby one is part of the other in communion and harmony.

Contemporary women may defend the rights of men, women, and their whole community. They must not only think of their own affairs, rather must also take the rights of the oppressed into consideration. The useless rivalry and separation between men and women must not be provoked. While preserving religious and legal criteria, women must act in the interests of the whole society and all humans and the laws of the land must protect them from abuse and violence. It is critical to improve the state of health, education and well-being of women and men both so that both the genders gain a leadership maturity at the global level.

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