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WOMEN IN ISLAM VS WEST

Introduction :-

Islam has granted women a comprehensive set of rights and responsibilities to ensure justice, respect and dignity. These rights encompass spiritual, social, economic, and political rights that promote equality. The West in contemporary era ^{feminism} advocates for gender equality, bodily autonomy and challenges the patriarchal structure of the society. Both Islam and Western feminism seek to uplift women, though they operate from different frameworks.

Women in Islam

In Islam, women were granted their divine rights more than 1400 years ago, without the struggle seen in other societies. The teachings of Islam as outlined in the Quran and the teachings of Prophet (saw), established women's rights to inheritance, education, and work. These rights were divine and bestowed by Allah meant that they were inherent and no one can take them away. Similarly, women in Islam also hold key responsibilities both in personal lives and within the broader community. These rights and duties reflect divine balance set forth by Islamic teachings.

(I) Women Rights in Islam:-

Following are the rights of women given by Islam:-

(a) Spiritual Equality:-

Islam emphasizes that men and women are equal in the eyes of God. The Quran states that: "Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds" (74:38). The Creator Allah Almighty in surah Al-Iman states: "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." (3:195). This spiritual equality establishes that both men and women are valued in terms of their relation with God.

(b) Right to Education:-

Education is a fundamental right for men and women in Islam. The Prophet (SAW) said, "Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every muslim." Women in early Islam were highly educated, such as Hazrat Aisha (R.A) served as source of knowledge for men and women and spread the teachings of Prophet (SAW) after his death.

(c) Economic Rights:-

Islam gives women the right to own property, engage in business, and inherit in wealth. The Quran explicitly states the shares of inheritance for women in "Surah -Al-Nisa" and grants them economic independence - Women are entitled to their own wealth, free from any obligations

to spend it on household expenses.

(d) Social Rights:-

Women in Islam have the right to choose their spouses, enter into marriage willingly, and seek divorce if necessary. Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Prophet (SAW), she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Prophet (SAW) gave her the choice (between accepting the marriage or invalidating it).

Islam protects women from being forced into marriage, emphasizing the importance of consent.

(e) Political Rights:-

Women in Islam, are encouraged to participate in public and private life. Both in Quran and Islamic history we find examples of women playing significant role in advising influencing Political decisions. During the period of Hazrat Umar (RA), a woman argued with him in the mosque, proved her point and caused him to declare in front of people that a woman is rights and Umar is wrong.

Not mentioned in Quran, but Prophet (SAW) interpreted women ineligible for the position of head of state due to psychological and psychological reasons.

In present context of democratic political system, leadership is based on governance, policy and representation rather than religious or military context. There is no prohibition in Islam against women holding leadership roles, as evidence by historical examples.

(I) Right to Protection and Dignity:-

Islam emphasizes the protection and dignity of women. In his farewell sermon, Prophet (SAW) said, "Treat women kindly, for they are your partners and committed helpers." This shows that women are to be treated with respect and dignity in all aspects of life.

(II) Responsibilities of Women in Islam:-

In Islam, women has responsibilities that align with their rights, creating a balanced structure of duties and privileges.

(a) Responsibilities towards Allah and Faith:-

Like men, women are obligated to observe the five pillars of Islam, including praying, fasting, charity and performing Hajj (if they are able to). The Quran emphasizes equality on this regard, "Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he ~~is~~ (or she) is a true believer, verily to him, We will give a good life and we shall pay them certainly a reward if proportion to the best of what they used to do." (16:97).

In some cases, indeed, women has certain ~~advantages~~ advantages over man. For example, exemptions from daily prayers and fasting during menstrual period or during 40 days after childbirth.

(b) Responsibility towards family :-

- i- **Motherhood and Caregiving.** A woman's role as a mother is considered one of the most exalted positions in Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Paradise lies under the feet of mothers". Mothers are responsible for raising children with strong moral and religious values.
- ii- **Wife's role:** In Islam, a wife is expected to support her husband in creating a peaceful and loving household. They are obliged to stay loyal and chaste to their husbands. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "The best of women is the one who pleases you when you look at her, obeys you when you ask something from her, and guards herself and your property in your absence." These responsibilities are balanced with husband's duties, aiming for a balanced and equitable relationship.

(c) Responsibility in Society:-

Women are encouraged to contribute to their communities and societies at large. They can work, engage in commerce, and participate in social activities. In early Islamic era, women like Hazrat Ayesha and Hazrat Khadija (RA) were active in teaching and trading.

(d) Responsibility in Justice and Integrity:-

Women, like men, are called to uphold justice and integrity in all aspects of life. The Holy Quran mentions, "And the believers, men and women, are protectors of one another; they explain what is right and forbid what is ~~wrong~~ wrong." (9:71)

Women in Contemporary West :-

In the west, women got their educational, political, inheritance and social rights in the mid 19th century after prolonged struggle. In the contemporary era, feminists are challenging traditional structures of patriarchal and demand equality.

In the Muslim and Western world, there are some convergent and divergent points when it comes to women rights.

(I) Areas of Convergence :-

Both Islam and feminist advocate for women's right to education and economic dependence. Islam grants women the rights of participate in society, politics, and decision making, similar to feminists demand for equal political and social participation.

(II) Areas of Divergence :-

However, there are some instances when feminist demands are contradicting Islam -

(a) Gender Roles :-

Islam outlines complementary roles for men and women, with men traditionally seen as providers and women as caregivers - Feminism, on the other hand, pushes for a more fluid approach to gender roles, emphasizing the individual's right to choose their own paths.

(b) Modesty and Dress Codes:-

Islamic practices and teachings emphasize on modesty and prescribe dress codes for women (e.g. the hijab). ~~Femist~~ Feminism advocates for bodily autonomy. It includes one's right to dress as they wish. The approaches to modesty differ in the two perspectives.

(c) Reproductive Rights:-

Feminism advocates for reproductive rights, including access to birth control and abortion. Islam, while allowing for birth control within marriage prohibits abortion except in specific circumstances (to save mother's life etc), reflecting a divergence from feminist views.

Challenges and Possible Reconciliation:-

One of the challenge is the misconception about women's rights, criticizing that Islamic system is patriarchal. Dr. Khalid Abu El Fadl argued that, "The Quran and Prophet's traditions provide a framework for justice and equality between men and women; the problem lies in human interpretation".

There is also a possibility of reconciliation between Islamic teachings and the feminist movements. Scholar Amina Wadud emphasizes on the importance of reinterpreting Islamic teachings according to contemporary concerns by addressing gender justice.

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Conclusion:-

Both feminism and Islam seek to uplift women, though they operate from different frameworks. Islam provides women with rights and responsibilities that ensures their dignity, protection and participation in society. These rights were gifted to women by Allah more than 1400 years ago.

Feminism and west advocates for equality, bodily autonomy and rejects patriarchy. The comparison highlights that while western progress is commendable, Islam's early recognition of rights offers timeless framework for gender justice.