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ISLAMIC Studies

CSS-2019

Q. Examine the social, political, and economic status of women in Islam?

Answer

1. Introduction

Islam elevated the status of women which was unparalleled in pre-Islamic Arabia and remains absent in many societies even today. Maulana Abu A'la Maududi in his book, *Purdah and The Status of Woman in Islam*, discussed the status of women in society. He mentions that in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, women were treated as commodities, with no individual rights, no political rights, and no concept of inheritance. In pre-Islamic Arabia, female infanticide was a common practice. However, Islam introduced the concept of gender justice

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by providing social, economic, and political rights on the basis of equality and justice.

2. Examining The Social Status of Women in Islam

a) Women's Status as Mothers

Islam highly elevates and emphasises the role and status of women as mothers. Their status is of respect and honour. Dr. Hamidullah in his book, Introduction to Islam explains that motherhood is not considered as a mere biological role but a revered position in Islam. A man asked The Prophet (PBUH), who among people was the most deserving of his ^{good} companionship. The Prophet (PBUH) replied,

"Your mother." He repeated it three times before saying "Your Father."
(Sahih al-Bukhari)

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Thus, Islam indicated a balanced nature of familial responsibilities where men were seen as protectors and women are viewed as central to nurturing and moral upbringing of future generations.

b) Status of Women in Marriage

The Quran states:

Try to add the Arabic of quranic ayats

"And do not coerce your women into marriage if they desire to live in chastity."
(24:33)

First add the description of the heading and then add the reference

Marriage in Islam is a sacred contract (Nikah) and women have been provided the right to accept or reject a marriage proposal. This signifies that women retain their rights and individuality within marriage. The above-mentioned verse protects their consent by refuting the concept of forced marriages. Khushid Ahmed in

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his book, *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*, emphasises that the concept of *maḥr* provided to women is because Islam views women as "active decision-makers" rather than "passive participants".

c) The Women's Right to Dowry

Women are entitled to receive *Maḥr* from their husbands as a token of respect, commitment, and acceptance of their exclusive right to property. Khurshid Ahmed analyses *Maḥr* in his book, *Islam: Its Meaning and Message*, by viewing the institution of *Maḥr* as Islam's view of treating women with dignity and respect within their marital relationship.

d) Social Standing of Women in Islam

Islam retained the dignity of women in society by first emphasising the principle of equality.

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The Quran states:

"O mankind, Fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women."
(4:1)

Through this verse, Islam upholds fundamental equality of men and women by mentioning that both genders are created from the same essence. This refutes any notion of gender superiority. In addition, Allah banned the practice of female infanticide. The Quran states:

"وَإِذَا مَرَأَةٌ أَنْتَنِي
بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قَتَلْتِ (9)"
(81:8-9)

Rather, Islam emphasised the status of women socially and emphasised their protection.

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The Quran states:

"وَأَشْرَوْهُنَّ بِالْبُرُوفِ"
(4:19)

3. Examining the Political Status of Women in Islam

9) Permission to Participate in Societal Leadership

If a woman meets the necessary qualifications, she is allowed to assume roles of leadership in public life. Hazrat Aisha (R.A), The Prophet's (PBUH) wife, was a renowned scholar and political figure in early Islamic history. At multiple times, political leaders sought consultation from her. John L. Esposito in his book, Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives, highlights that the Islamic framework provides ample space for women to engage in political life.

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b) Women's Role in Governance and Administration

During the period of the second rightly caliphate, Umar ibn al-Khattab (R.A), Shifa bint Abdullah was appointed as the market inspector which demonstrates Islam's acceptance of women involvement in administration.

c) Women's Right to Consultation in Governance

The concept of consultation (Shura) applies to both men and women in Islam. The Quran states:

"And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is (determined by) consultation among themselves...."
(42:38)

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This verse highlights the importance of consultation in decision-making.

d) Women's Political Freedom of Expression in Islam

Islam has not restricted women's freedom of expression as she has been granted equal rights of opinion like men. During the life of Prophet (PBUH), Hazrat Khadija (RA) played a crucial political active role during the boycott of Shaib-e-Abi Talib, demonstrating women's early participation in political movements. After the Tragedy of Karbala, Hazrat Zainab Kubra (RA), the granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), stood in the court of Yazid, condemning actions and injustice committed against her family. These examples indicate the political freedom Islam grants to women and provides them with the status of equal political actors.

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4. Examining The Economic Status of Women in Islam

a) The Right to Inheritance

Before Islam, women were deprived of the right to inheritance. The Quran explicitly granted women a share of inheritance providing them with financial security and independence by stating:

"O believers! It is now permissible for you

"For women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much - an obligatory share." (4:7)

This verse provides women with right to inheritance which demonstrates that Islam took a forward thinking

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stance on gender justice. This right not only elevates women status but also promotes an equitable society.

b) Right to Engage in Business

Islam, provides permission of women to work and engage in business. Hazrat Khadija (RA), was an influential business woman. Moreover, women if they wish can keep their earnings and have total right over them without any obligation to share the earning with their husbands. This provides women, financial security in Islam.

c) Right to Receive Dowry (Mahr)

In Islam, women are entitled to receive Mahr (dowry) which is a mandatory gift that becomes solely her personal property. The concept of Mahr emphasizes that Islam provides economic independence and right of

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property to women.

5. Conclusion

Islam provides women a high status with rights to ensure their dignity, autonomy, and equal participation within the social, political, and economic spheres of life. Islam recognizes the unique role and status of women all on the basis of equality. The best principle in status in all three spheres is equality in complementary roles with men and women living in parity, as the Quran in this regard states:

"من لبايس لکم و انتم لبايس
من

(2:187)

Good attempt!!