

ENLIGHTENING MUSLIM WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION WITH SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

DR. DARAKHSHAN ANJUM

Abstract: The role of Muslim women in the Islamic world is one that is prone to much discussion. Islam defines politics as taking care of the affairs of ummah. Islamic history provides precedents of roles for women. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate in what way Muslim women played role in politics in past and what role can be played by them in present and future. In historic times also Muslim women have played many roles in politics, leadership and community. Movement for Muslim women to seek role in national leadership have increased rapidly in present. Qur'an dedicates numerous verses to Muslim women and their roles, duties and rights. The aim of this paper is to highlight in what ways Muslim women can act for the betterment of society.

Keywords: Muslim women, Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, government

Introduction: The Holy Qur'an says, "And the believers, both men and women, they are friends and protectors of one another: they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and His apostle. (9:71)

This verse provides us a food for thought. That Islam has given equal rights to both men and women and there is equal liberty for women to play an important role in governance. The discussion of Muslim women and their role is important because it is an area about which there are many misconceptions like Islam does not permit women to participate in public life as she is required to restrict herself to the domestic chores and she is deprived of political, economic and educational rights. They are considered inferior and unimportant in comparison to man in Muslim society. But contrary to that Islam has given both rights and equality to women. Women could take part in social, political and military affairs also. In Islam women are given every consideration. Men and women are complementary to each other and not competitive in the society. Family is the basic unit of the society and if supporting the family is the main responsibility of woman, man has also been given the legal responsibilities of providing provision, support, safety and educating his wife and children. The prophet said: "The most perfect Muslim in the matter of faith is one who has excellent behavior; and the best among you are those who behave best towards their wives." (Tirmidhi)

While woman has greater responsibility of a family and providing support to her husband. Bearing, rearing, teaching and training of children are among the first and foremost respected roles of a woman. She is encouraged to carry out all the duties with devotion and enthusiasm. The following hadith remind her of reward and merits attached to undertaking her primary duties.

'A woman came to ask the Prophet (blessing and peace of Allah be with him) about some matter and when he had dealt with it, he asked her, Do you have a husband? She said 'yes' He asked 'How are you with him" she said, I never fall short in my duties, except for what which is beyond me. He said 'pay attention to how you treat him, for he is your paradise and Hell." (Sahih Bukhari)

Abu Huraira narrated the Prophet (blessing and peace of Allah be with him) said. "The righteous among the women of Quraish are those who are kind to their young ones and who look after their husband's property." (Sahih Bukhari)

Taking into consideration the importance of the institution of family, the Holy Qur'an through its numerous verses gave a new shape of this institution by declaring the family as the most respectable unit of the society. All other social developments are in fact subservient to it. But role of women in Islam is not limited to family, they also play important role in social development. In the creed of Islam every woman is as much responsible and accountable for her deeds as a man. She is acknowledged as an independent personality, in possession of human qualities and worthy of spiritual aspirations. Her human nature is neither inferior to nor deviant from that of man.⁽¹⁾ Allah says- "And their Lord has accepted (their prayers) and answered them (saying): 'Never will I cause to be lost the work of you, be he male or female; you are members, one of another (3:195)

To fulfill the duties both man and woman are required to take an active role in society. Muslim women are the part of society; hence they have a key role to play in the social development. Political involvement of both men and women in order to take care of the affairs of the society is meant to fulfill one's obligation in one society. Involvement in the political system can take many forms, from voting in election, holding the positions in government, a

judge or even being a head of the state. Allah has created woman with the same intellect, manner, feelings and emotions etc. as a man so they can feel problems that exists in society and world at large. As a matter of principle women have every right to develop their intellectual faculties and the community, on the other hand, they are permitted to take advantage of their progress and advancement according to the requirement of the time and society. She can even occupy the position as head of the state if need arises. As state should be headed by most capable person and feminine or masculine is irrelevant in this regard. The administrator of the Islamic state must be those, whose whole life is devoted to the observance and enforcement of Islam law. A study of history makes it clear that Muslim woman in the early Islamic period not only enjoyed freedom but they also played important role in social development and political activities.

At the time of Prophet (blessing and peace of Allah be with him) when the leaders of Yathrib (Madinah) sent a party of Bani Khazraj to pledge their allegiance to him. This group consisted of sixty two men and two women who pledge allegiance; the pledge of Aqabah is well known to have had both spiritual and political implications. The pledge was not only a declaration of accepting Islam but was promise of political support and military protection⁽²⁾ The leader of an Islamic state is confirmed by the people through a process known as bayat, a symbolic contract between the leader and the people, where in the leader promises to obey Islamic law and the people, in exchange their allegiance. In bayat was the process of election of a leader. In early Islamic period woman were included in the bayat. History shows that men and women equally take bayat with Prophet, voting and choosing him and other political leaders of early periods and also take part in many other political activities. The Quran addresses the issue of women giving the bayat to Prophet Muhammad and Allah tells Muhammad to accept the pledge of the women. "O Prophet! Whenever believing women come unto thee to pledge their allegiance to thee----then accept their pledge of allegiance." (60:12)

Abdur Rahman bin Auf consulted many women before he recommended Uthman bin Affan to be the Caliph. In Islam, community decisions must be made through a process of consultation. The Quran describes the qualification of true believers as- "And who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation." (42:38)

"And consult with them upon the conduct of affairs" (3:159)

The glorious Quran is the first book which has asserted government by consent and consultation in the history of political philosophy. These verses refer to the entire community. Therefore the legislative

assembly must be representative of the entire community including women and men. Islamic history provides ample evidence that Prophet Muhammad (blessing and peace of Allah be with him) and Caliph took advice and consulted with women in political decisions. At the time of hudabiyah when the companions were reluctant to obey his order to slaughter their sacrificial animals and change their pilgrim attires-he sought the advice of his wife Umm Salma. Her view was: if the Prophet himself would slaughter his animal first then companions would definitely obey him and understand the certainty of his order. Her advice prevented disunity among the Muslims after the treaty of hudabiyah and her opinion prevailed over that of many men.⁽³⁾

Shafa bin Abudllah was an intelligent woman skilled in politics and respected for her wisdom. Prior to conversion to Islam, she used to administer medical treatment to patients. After conversion to Islam, she asked the Prophet Muhammad if she could continue and he encouraged her to do so. Shafa's skill was not limited to teaching and medicine exclusively, Caliph Umar Ibn Khattab, highly valued Shafa's opinion and consulted with her.⁽⁴⁾ Umar also followed the advice of his daughter Hafsah in affairs of state.⁽⁵⁾ Hazrat Uthman discussed things with Umm Habiba widow of Muhammad.⁽⁶⁾ Hazarat Umar appointed Al Shafa bin Abdullah and Samra bin Nuhayak as officer to check corruption in the market of Medinah and Mecca respectively.⁽⁷⁾ It should serve as a powerful narrative in opposition to those who misunderstood women's engaged in governance as shameful and improper.

The Holy Quran says: 'O ye who believer, stand firmly for justice as witness to God, even as against yourself or (your) parents or (your) kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: For God can best protect both.(4:13)

This shows that entire Muslim community as such was to be held responsible for the administration of justice. Hazrat Ayesha's life represents a powerful model for Muslim women's excellence in scholarship, political engagement and even military leadership. She excelled in public speaking, commanded an army in the battle field and instructed both man and woman in Islamic jurisprudence.

Women were not considered worthless even in battles. They used to accompany Muslim armies engaged in battles to nurse the wounded, prepare supplies and serve the worriers. Umm Umarah is credited with being the first female Muslim soldier during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (blessing and peace of Allah be with him). She fought in the battle of Uhud, Hunain, Yamana and Hudabiyah. During the battle of Uhud, the Prophet Muhammad's archers deserted their posts. In response, Umarah

Physically defended him with her sword. In a famous tradition Prophet Muhammad is recorded as saying that when he turned to his left, he saw Umarah, when he turned to his right, he saw Umarah: She in fact sustained a deep wound to her shoulder as a result of combat in that battle. ⁽⁸⁾ Ramlah Umm Salim, Umme Ammara and Hazrat Aysha, Rubayiji bint Muawid helped supply water to the soldiers and nursed the wounded in the battle of Uhud and Khyber. The first martyr in Islam was a women, Sumaya bin Khabbat. Sumaya was tortured and killed in the early period of Islam ⁽⁹⁾ and her sacrifice is well known to Muslims and undermines misconception of women as weak beings. Umm Warqa bin Abdullah, an Ansari woman who was well versed in the Quran, was instructed by Prophet Muhammad to lead ahl dariha (ahl dariha means the people of her home) which consisted of both men and women, in prayer. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Umm Waraqa wishes to be known as martyr so she asked to Prophet Muhammad to allow her to participate in the battle of badr, so that she could take care of the wounded; from the time on Prophet Muhammad referred her as 'the female martyr. Asma bint Umais was woman who travelled by sea and immigrated to Abyssinia when the Muslims were being persecuted in Mecca. Umm Hani bint Abi Talib was granted such an important status on the occasion of the victory of Mecca that according to a declaration made by prophet (blessing and peace of Allah be with him) whosever were granted asylum by her were to be accepted as such by the whole community. ⁽¹¹⁾

Women not only participated in serious discussion with Prophet and other Muslim leaders of the period but also argued and take stand for their own rights. Once when Caliph Umar wanted to limit the amount of dower (mahr), most Muslim agreed with him but an old woman declared her disagreement, referring Surah Nisa and said "who are you to reduce the amount which Allah has said to give a lot"? Hazrat Umar immediately admitted his mistake and said 'the lady is right and Umar is wrong'. ⁽¹²⁾

The contributions of these women to the Muslim community are undeniable and provide a culturally authentic paradigm for Muslim women seeking a role in political, judicial and religious sphere. The present condition of Indian society demands that women too should share responsibility of politics amongst with men. To avail of this socio-political responsibility awareness among women is needed as leadership has always been associated with knowledge. It is the duty of every Muslim to first himself /herself acquire religious education and knowledge and perform his/her duties and responsibilities. It is desirable and necessary that there should be enough members of Muslim women in governance to raise issue related to the women. No society will be able to underpin the foundation of a strong civilization, if it has made itself deprived from the presence, participation and activities of half its potentially capable population in the public sphere.

References:

1. Hammudah Abdalati, *Islam in Focus*, American trust publications, Washington, 1975, P.186.
2. www.khilafah.com
3. Dr. (Mufti) M. Mukarram, *Human rights in ISLAM*, Anmol Publication pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, P.214.
4. Dr.Gabor Korvin, *women's leadership through the history of Islam*, Hamdard Islamicus volxxii no 3.1999, Karachi Pakistan, p.24.
5. Naseem Ahmad, *Women in Islam*, A.P.H Publishing, New Delhi,2003.vol I p.260
6. Dr. Gabor Korvin op.cit. p. 24.
7. NaseemAhmad op. cit p. 261.
8. Asghar Ali Engineer (ed), *Islam women and gender justice*, Gyan Publising house, New Delhi, 2013, p.19.
9. Afsar Bano, *Status of Women in Islamic Society*, Anmol Publication, New Delhi,2003 vol I p. 244
10. Asghar Ali Engineer, *Rights of Women in Islam*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 2008.p.212.
11. N.M. Shaikh, *Women in Muslim Society*, Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, 1991, p. 20.
12. Afsar Bano op. cit. p. 243.

Dr. Darakhshan Anjum/ Post Doctoral Fellow/ Dept. of Islamic Studies/ A.M.U. Aligarh/