

How Muslim Women Have been Misunderstood by Muslims

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ABSTRAK

Kertas ini membicarakan mengenai masalah wanita dalam masyarakat Islam. Ia menjelaskan adanya konflik antara doktrin Islam mengenai wanita dengan praktis umat Islam dalam mengurus masalah wanita. Islam dinyatakan sebagai agama yang membebaskan wanita dari belenggu cengkaman kaum lelaki dan memberi haknya sebagai manusia. Tetapi dalam waktu yang sama amalan atau praktis setengah masyarakat Islam mengongkong dan menindas wanita. Dan praktis itu dilakukan atas nama agama. Wanita diharamkan untuk keluar rumah dan mengambil bahagian cergas dalam pembangunan negara. Demikian antara beberapa perkara pokok yang dibincangkan dalam kertas ini.

Islam claims to be the earnest champion of woman's rights. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), according to al Bukhari, was so earnest about female education that he directed his followers to educate even their slave girls.¹ This direction is in accordance with the Quranic injunction to "read" or "recite" to examine and ponder over data, to appreciate knowledge and its pursuit. By implication, the direction of the Prophet clearly indicates that the Quranic injunction is addressed to every Muslim, i.e., man and woman. Otherwise, if it were directed only to man, then the Prophet would not dare to give such direction to his followers to educate even their slave girls.

THE ISLAMIC VIEW ON WOMEN

According to the Quran, the Prophet Muhammad was sent in order to educate people and to lead the Muslims to establish human society which is supposed to be based on divine pattern.² Indeed, the establishment of an ideal society as it ought to be implemented by Muslims cannot be achieved without giving a proper education to every person. Islam considers that education is so important for the Muslims. If Muslim Society is to be generated towards its goals the first step which should be taken is to educate the Muslim people. It is because of this reason that the Quran as

well as the Prophet have placed the learned people in Islam in the very highest level status before God.

The Prophet said that:

Education is a sacred duty for every Muslim man and Muslim woman.³

The Prophet implemented what he said even upon his own wife. He asked al Shifā bintī Abd Allah al Qurashīyyah to teach reading and writing to his wife, Hafsaḥ bintī Umar al Khattab.⁴

This example of the Prophet also shows that the process of education and acquiring knowledge is not supposed to end during married life. Married life is not to be taken as an excuse for one not to continue his or her effort of upgrading his education formally and informally. The direction of the Prophet for al Shifā^c to teach Hafsaḥ clearly suggests that the married life is not the end of woman's career.

In the early period of Islam, especially during the time of the Prophet, Muslim women shared with their fellow men their education, upgrading their knowledge by continuously attending the Prophet's lecture at the Mosque of al Madinah. The Mosque of al Madinah was always full of men and women. As a matter of fact, during the time of the Prophet and of the Rashidun Caliphs the Mosque was not merely considered as the place of worship, or "Solah", but more than that, it was the center of socio-political activities of the ummah as well as the center of education. It was reported by al Bukhari, Ahmad, Abu Dawd and al Bazzar that the lecture of the Prophet was attended by men and women at the same time.⁵ It was a common phenomenon of the time that a women could stand up and ask for clarification from the Prophet of a certain problem. This was done without any hesitation and was witnessed by other men companions.

It is true that sometimes the Prophet had special sessions with women, but these special sessions were held for a special and practical reason. In daily life, men had more opportunities and advantages to meet and accompany the Prophet than women did.⁶ Men, therefore, had more advantages for acquiring knowledge from the Prophet. Sometimes the Mosque was quite crowded and the discussion was dominated by men which reduced the chance of women to discuss further with the Prophet. This problem lead women to complain to the Prophet, asking him to have special session for women.⁷ Despite this, women continued to attend the general lecture of the Prophet throughout his life. Indeed, it shows the eagerness of the early Muslim women for seeking and acquiring knowledge. Whenever they heard something which was not clear, they immediately went to the Prophet asking him for its clarification.⁸

This awareness of the important of knowledge and the role of education in society had a tremendous impact on the development of the Muslim Ummah as a whole. By the time the Prophet passed away, the Muslim

people already had many women scholars in various fields of studies which were relevant to that particular time. They dedicated their lives to pursuing Islamic knowledge and shared with their fellow men about the education of the Ummah in general.

With regard to knowledge, Islam does not differentiate between a scholarly work done by man or woman. Woman has full right to study and express her opinion freely, as man has. It is legitimate for a Muslim woman to discuss all religious matter and give her opinion on matters its injunctions are not clear. She is free to exercise her intellectual capacity in giving her own judgement with regard to any social problems which arise in the society. The case of ʿAishah, Umm al Muʿminin, provides the perfect example of women's intellectual freedom. For the Prophet asked the companions to learn something about Islam from ʿAishah.⁹

The result of this equal opportunity of education for man and woman was that the early Islamic Ummah produced many Muslim women scholars in various fields of studies such as Quranic sciences, legal studies, Arabic language and literature, which, indeed, qualified them to give their legal opinion, "fatwa" in Shariah. ʿAishah, Umm al Muʿminin, was the most authoritative in the Quranic and legal studies. Many men received their knowledge from her. She was followed by Umm Salamah and Hafsa, both were also Umm al Muʿminin, then al Shifā, ʿAtikah and Barirah, just to mention a few.¹⁰

Muslim women of the early period were relatively educated in the sense that they could understand Islam and its essence. This was one of the reasons that they were so responsive to all religious and socio-political obligations and responsibilities in which women were supposed to participate in the building up of the Ummah.

On many occasions the Prophet showed his concern about the importance of knowledge and education. One day he came into the Mosque of al Madinah and found that there were two groups of people in the Mosque: one was devoted to remembering God, chanting His name, while the other was gathering together in a circle discussing and listening to the teaching of one learned companion. The Prophet decided to join the latter group and said that he was sent for the purpose of educating and teaching of the people.¹¹

The Prophet always stressed the importance of educating women because woman comprise half of the whole mankind. A society cannot progress if half of its members are illiterate and not educated. Therefore, woman should be educated as men should be. Otherwise, if women were should be educated as men should be. If women were left behind and remained in their state of illiteracy and ignorance, the consequence would be that the whole Ummah would not be able to move towards its advancement. It is impossible that the Ummah will generate properly if half

of its members are ignorant and uneducated and therefore a weak Ummah.

Muslim women at the time of the Prophet had enjoyed their rights as prescribed by the Quran. They had enjoyed their right of education. And because of that they did not hesitate to express their opinion whenever they felt that their rights have been violated. Some of them came to the Prophet complaining that their husbands have mistreated them.

The Muslim women participated in political activities such as the propagation of Islam and involvement in war. Their participation served as a complementary to their fellow men.

One piece of evidence which shows women's direct involvement in political activities was their participation in the pledge of allegiance, "bay'ah", between the Prophet and groups of Muslims. The bay'ah occurred more than one time before its legitimacy was confirmed by the Quran. It has happened in Makkah a long time before the migration, "hijrah".

When the Prophet successfully recaptured Makkah in the day of victory of Makkah, "Fath Makkah," many women came to the Prophet and gave the bay'ah to him. One of them was Hind bint Utbah, the wife of Abu Sufyan who fought in the battle of Uhud with the Makkans. When Hamzah, the Prophet's uncle, was killed as martyr she came to him and opened his stomach with her dagger and took out his heart and tried to eat it, but she was not able to swallow it. Finally she embraced Islam and in Fath Makkah she came to the Prophet to give her bay'ah to the Prophet. The bay'ah took place in al Safa in front of many other male companions of the Prophet. When the Prophet officiated the bay'ah by saying the Muslim women should not commit adultery, she immediately asked the Prophet whether the free woman committed adultery. When the Prophet said that they should not kill their children, she answered the Prophet by saying, "we have reared them until they become young men, but finally you kill all of them"; she was referring to her son who was killed by Muslims in the battle of Badr. In listening to this answer, Umar bin al Khattab who was also present in that event, was laughing at her and the Prophet was smiling. She accepted all the pledges which were mentioned by the Prophet. After the bay'ah she asked the Prophet about her behaviour regarding how she had managed her daily life. She told the Prophet that her husband, Abu Sufyan, although he was rich, he was very selfish. He never gave enough money to support the family, therefore she used to take his money without his knowledge, and she asked if this should be considered stealing and a kind of committing sin. The Prophet told her that she could take his money reasonably enough for her and her children without his knowledge. Abu Sufyan commented later that what was done by him and might be done in this regard was legitimate. In listening to his comment everyone was laughing, including the Prophet himself.¹²

The point here which needs to be made clear is that women were allowed to appear in any assembly and could come in front of the audience witnessed by their fellow men, as was represented by the dialogue between Hind and the Prophet. This historical incident clearly indicates that Muslim women at the time of the Prophet enjoyed the rights of expression freely.

They were not imprisoned inside their homes all the time. Sociologically speaking, it can be assumed that the interaction between man and woman was very normal in the sense that women were not prohibited from appearing in society. They appeared in the assembly, as was indicated by this event.

Al Imam Muslim has reported that a husband has no right to prevent or stop his wife from going to the mosque if she wants to do so. The mosque of al Madinah was always full of men and women. As a matter of fact, during the time of the Prophet and the Rashidun Caliphs the mosque has not merely been considered as the place of worship or "solat", but more than that; it was the center of socio-political activities of the Ummah as well as the center of education. Because the Muslim society at the time of the Prophet relatively could be considered as the simple society, therefore, all socio-political problems were discussed by the Prophet and his companions in the mosque of al Madinah. Indeed, in early Islamic time, Muslim women were very active in most socio-economic and political activities of the Ummah. Some of them were involved in war, nursing the injured on the battle field, and distributing water and food supplies. A'isha, Umm al Mu'minin, al Rabi'ah bint Mua'wwaz and Layla bint Abd al Muttalib were among them. Hammah bint Jahsh was one of the Muslim women who were involved in the well known pledge of allegiance between the Prophet and group of Muslim people of Yathrib which was known as "Bay'ah al Ridwan". While Arwa bint al Muttalib and Umm Shurayk al Quraishiyah were actively involved in propagating Islam.

Muslim women have always shared the burden of their husbands in supporting the family directly or indirectly, although the obligation of supporting the family is supposed to fall exclusively on men. Asma' bint Abu Bakr had always worked far away from her house in order to ease her husband's burden. The story of Asma bint Abu Bakr to some extent indicates Muslim women's participation in the workforce. During the time of the second Caliph, Umar bin al Khattab, the market of al Madinah was full of women traders, a fact which led Umar to appoint a Muslim woman, al Shifa bint Abd. Allah, as the controller of the Market of al Madinah.

There was no total exclusion between man and woman. The Prophet allowed the Muslim women to serve the guest of the family and to eat together with them as it was reported by both al Bukhari and Muslim. Even the Quranic injunction does not prohibit Muslim women to eat together with guest of the family.

If that is the position of normative Islam and the practice of early Muslims, why have Muslim women in most of the Muslim countries been reeling for long centuries under the condition of abject ignorance, of exploitation by men, and of total exclusion from the social, political, economic and cultural life of the Ummah? Why has illiteracy been so dominant among them inspite of the Quranic clear injunction to “read” or “recite”, to examine and ponder over data, to appreciate knowledge and its pursuit? “Fatwas” are still being issued by most ulama or established religious scholars prohibiting women from participation in the workforce.

THE DECLINE OF WOMEN RIGHTS

In some Muslim societies, not only are women prohibited from holding any kind of employment in government, in industry and trade, it is illegal for them even to go outside of their houses without the express authority of their husband or guardians. Most Ulama speak the same language with regard to women, denying their innate human right to acquire knowledge including that minimum requirement of it necessary for the discharge of their religious duties. For many centuries that Muslim women were prohibited by most religious scholars from going to school, even to the purely religious schools such as Dar al Ulum in India. In the case of Al Azhar, it was only in 1961 that Al Azhar did open its door to women by establishing a new exclusive Faculty for them.

However, Malaysia has passed through different experiences. Malay Muslim women have been given the opportunity of acquiring knowledge long time before the country has gained her independence. Many Malay Muslim women have been educated in the Madrasah or religious schools. As a result there were many women religious teachers which were known as “Ustazah” in Malaysia even during the colonial period. As a matter of fact Malaysia has practised co-education for a long time before her independence.

It is because of the high rate of illiteracy and ignorant among the Muslim women in many Muslim countries that Muslim women have not rebelled against their illegitimate dominion by men. There is no doubt that Muslim women, in many cases, are still neglected as members of the society.

The decay of the Muslim Ummah had a tremendous impact on Muslim women. The most obvious one was that Muslim women had been reeling for long centuries under the condition of abject ignorance, of exploitation by men, and of total exclusion from the social, political, economic and cultural life of the Ummah.

Finally, Muslim women were denied their innate human rights to acquire knowledge, including that minimum requirement necessary for the

discharge of their religious duties. This was true despite the fact that the Prophet had said that acquiring knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim man and woman.

The system of segregation and absolute seclusion of man and woman was enforced in most Muslim society especially among upper middle class of the urban groups.

Many of the religious scholars limited the field of education for women to the field of religious knowledge in the restriction sense and to some basic knowledge about hygienic science and home economics. It is irrelevant for women to study other branches of sciences since her function is just to become wife and mother and to stay at home. Studying other branches of sciences other than religious knowledge, i.e. religious creeds and rituals would only be a waste of their time and would possibly lead women to behave as if they were men, or "Istirjal" which is prohibited by Islam.¹⁴

The tendency of many religious scholars in period of the decadence of the Muslim people even until the present time is still towards the imprisonment of women in their houses. By doing so they believe that they have established social-order which absolutely segregates the world of woman in her house while the world of man is the social spectrum of the society.¹⁵ Woman should live inside the four walls of her house since her role is just to become wife and mother.¹⁶

It is also during the period of decline that woman was again considered as the sources of evil, created only for the fulfilment of men's passion and sexual desire.¹⁷

This historical fact is indeed very bitterly admitted by most Muslims because admitting a mistake is not an easy job. It needs lots of courage to do so. But Islam is self-confident. This historical fact has nothing to do with Islam.

It was no doubt the practice of some Muslims, but the practice was not based on the Quranic injunction on the subject matter. It was the result of the fact that those Muslims had lost their real vision about Islam as a result of their weakness.

The political decline of the Muslim Ummah since the fall of Baghdad in the thirteenth century and then followed by the fall of Islamic Kingdom in Spain in the fifteenth Century of Christian era was accompanied by a growing moral and social decay following the assimilation of many practices of the Byzantine and Persian ruling class such as a large harems and concubine. No doubt this moral and social decay had tremendous impact on women's status. The most important impact was the implementation of the system of confining women to their homes and limiting their role to their child-bearing. The system prohibited women from participating in any kind of socio-economics, political and cultural activities of the Ummah. The practice was the result of the adoption of the

custom of Byzantine and Persian ruling class which confined their women to their homes for the purpose of keeping their status as the higher class of the society

According to this custom, it was implied that any woman who participated in the socio-economic and cultural activities of the society could be easily be considered as immoral or at least she would be considered as a women of the lower class.¹⁸ Finally, the veiling system in the sense of confining women to house with total seclusion and absolute segregation of sexes became the social institution of the Ummah. It became the skill for judging the behaviour of the woman. Accordingly, it was installed in a woman to maintain her higher status by being restricted only when she was ready to imprison herself all the time in her home and only seen by husband, Father and brothers. For any woman who did not observe this standard of social values and instead went out of her home and participated in social works such as taking part in voluntary services such as organizing educational classes for promoting the knowledge of people and so forth, the implication was that not only would she be blamed by the society, but her father or her guardians also would be considered as procurer, or "dayyuth".¹⁹

This standard of value became dominant among the ruling and the wealthy people of the urban society in the Middle Eastern and Indo-Pakistani society²⁰ To some extent, this custom did not prevail dominantly among the villagers and the Bedowin women. Relatively, they continued to enjoy their freedom of movement.

Besides their roles as wives and mother they also performed many jobs such as carrying water for cooking and drinking from the public well, collecting firewood, weaving and sometimes herding their cattle. All of these jobs were done by the village women and the Bedowin women in addition to their housework, such as preparing food for the family²¹

The system of total seclusion and absolute segregation of the sexes has never been practiced by the general Muslim of Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, Indonesia and the Muslim of Southern China, the rules about veiling were very generally disregarded. The Malay woman goes abroad with her face uncovered. She takes part in her husband's affairs and exhibit her finery at festivals.²²

Apparently, the absolute seclusion of woman is the result of jealousy or pride and not of any legal injunction, neither is it a custom universally practiced in all Muslim countries. It is recognized and observed by travellers and scholars that Malay Indonesia Muslim women enjoyed their freedom more than their Middle Eastern and Indo-Pakistan Muslim women.

It is obvious that the veiling system in the sense of total seclusion of women and absolute segregation of the sexes was quite undreamt of by the

women of the Prophet's time and by the Rashidun Caliphs. History has proven that in those days the interaction between men and women was not so restricted as was practice in the period of decline. Men and women could talk freely to each other if the circumstances forced them to do so. Apparently, both men and women were able to behave well in front of each other. Both would stand full of honour and modesty. It was a common practice that sometimes when a man and a woman who knew each other when they met on the street, they would stop and talk to one another just as the Prophet and his great companions did.²³ As time progressed, and the Muslim finally were caught by the State of decline, the Ummah inclined towards more rigidity and conservatism which led them not to receive any change in socio-economic, political and cultural development. They tended to preserve what is practiced in the society as it is. No doubt that many of those practice were in contradiction with the Quranic values. Many of them had come into being as the result of the assimilation of foreign cultures.

Al Faruqi has described how the Muslim women's role in most Muslim society deteriorated during the period of decline by pointing out that mostly all women's right had been deprived during the period of decline.²⁴ It was during this period of time that education for women was considered as something which is detested or Makruh. Going out of their houses even with the purpose was illegitimate, or haram, holding any jobs was sinful and deviated from Islam or dalalah. Instead, it was felt that women should be confined to their houses and should not be seen by any man other than their fathers, husbands or brothers. If a woman had to get out with her husband, she was supposed not to wear a nice dress or use perfume. Since everything was supposed to be provided by man for a woman, she was supposed not to claim any civil, political and economic rights. What she was to do, then, was to stay at home to become a wife and mother.

The social prejudice moved to the extreme of considering women as having less intellectual capacity than men. A woman is nothing but an object of man's sexual desire. At the moment a woman goes out of her house to go to some place she has tempted man²⁵ as if every man is just like a hungry lion which cannot control his instinct the moment he sees a meat.

As far as woman's will is concerned, it was believed that she should obey her husband absolutely and accept whatever decision was made by the husband. A husband would divorce his wife for a simple reason or sometimes without any reason at all, and when it happened, the blame was always on the wife. While man could get married at any time, if he had sufficient money, the divorced woman suffered from social prejudice. This has been the description of the deteriorating situation of most Muslim women throughout the centuries of decline.

HOW THE SITUATION IS JUSTIFIED?

According to most established religious scholars and leaders who defend the common practice of the Muslim Society which denies women's civil, economic, political and cultural rights, the action was taken on the basis of taking steps of precaution for avoiding the evil, *Sad al zara'i*. Therefore, these scholars arbitrarily concluded that it is valid to deprive women's rights on this basis.

Women's participation in socio-economic, political and cultural development of this is a sinful act which should be avoided by the Muslim women. Accordingly all these works are the responsibility of man. It is something irrelevant to women's nature to participate in the social spectrum of the ummah. According to this judgement, any interaction between man and woman will necessarily lead to promiscuity. Man is like fire, while woman is like cotton. The moment the cotton is put close to the fire, immediately it will be burned by the fire. The moment man and woman have the opportunity to meet and talk to each other, be it occurs in the office or any working place or in the society, will lead immediately to fornication and adultery. It is on this basis that Islam, according to the interpretation of those religious scholars who prohibit women from being appeared in society, that Islam prohibits woman from participating in the social activities of the ummah. Doing such activities for woman, according to this understanding, necessarily leads to the violation of the commandment of the Quran and therefore committing of sin.²⁵

According to this interpretation the ideal Islamic society is a society which based on absolute segregation of sexes.²⁶ The duty of every Muslim is to maintain this system of total seclusion and absolute segregation of the sexes.

Many of the established religious scholars and religious leaders who claim to be the real representative of the genuine Islamic teaching are in favor of confining women to their houses and not allowing them to participate in the socio-economic, political and cultural development of the ummah. They have given women very limited rights. Ironically, all of them claim that Islam liberated women from being enslaved by men in the sense that Islam raised the women's status as equal to that of man with regard to her nature as a human being. More than that, they also claim Islam gave women the civil and economic rights. But at the end of their analysis, they have come to the conclusion that women's place, however, from the beginning of her life until death, indeed is in her house, *al Mar'atu li al Manzili awwalan wa akhiran*.²⁷

They considered women as merely objects of temptation, *fitnah*, therefore, women's appearance in the society would necessarily lead to social corruption and immorality. All the blame regarding the social

corruption fell on women, as if men were perfect beings who never erred; therefore; man was not to be blame if social corruption happened in the society.

It was this biased judgement that forced women to be confined all the time to the houses and prohibited them from appearing in the social spectrum of the ummah.²⁸ According to this moral standard, any demand about women's rights of participation in socio-economic, political and cultural development of the ummah could be easily considered as the dangerous element which could jeopardize the purity of the Islamic society. All Muslim scholars who have tried to speak about women's rights in Islam have been accused of being influenced by the secularistic society of the Western world. They were also accused of psychologically suffering from inferiority complex, so that they wanted to allow Muslim women to participate in the process of nation-building. This kind of attempt is an evil effort.

As a matter of fact, according to this assumption, all the demand to give women their civil-economic, political and cultural rights are demands which have an evil element behind them. It is the word of truth which is meant to hide the false behind it.²⁹ If this is the conclusion of their analysis, what then, is the meaning of giving civil and economic rights as mentioned at the beginning of their claim?

Obviously, that women's civil and economic rights as they assumed to be given would remain only theory without possible implementation.

Usually the common answer to this question is that Islam is concerned about women and Islam is so kind to women that it has liberated women from all social, political and economic obligations. Women are freed from all these burdens, so what women have to do is just stay at home and do all the housework. It is pointless for women to crowd the world of men outside the house. Women's participation in social affairs will bring more harm than benefits to the society.³⁰ Thus, actualizing the real Islamic society, according to this standard, necessarily needs the effort to imprison all women in their houses. Their appearance in the social life should be always avoided. The only possible condition for women to go out of their houses is the case emergency. Let men alone manage the social affairs of the Ummah.

Indeed, it was due to this assumption that most of the Muslim women in most part of the Muslim world have been realising for long centuries under the condition of object ignorance, of exploitation by men, and of total exclusion from the social, political, economic and cultural life of the Ummah, as if the Quranic clear injunction to 'read' or 'recite', to examine and ponder over data, to appreciate knowledge and its pursuit is meant only for men.³¹

Education for women, has been limited to the reading of the Quran, studying religious knowledge which is concerned about religious duty and

obligation, simple arithmetic, biographies of the pious Muslim of the early Islamic period, child care and home economics. According to them, there is no need for women to study all branches of knowledge which are not related to her role and function as wife and mother.

Studying natural sciences, law, political science, economics, languages, arts and literature and other branches of social sciences and humanities, for women, is considered wasteful and harmful because it might confuse their role and function as women. More than that, all this knowledge are useless for women, since women's place has already been defined to be at home.³² All these statements show how Muslim women have been misunderstood by Muslims. It is due to this prejudice and assumption that for long centuries Muslim women in many Muslim countries have been deprived from the society. Their rights have denied. The rate of illiteracy among the Muslim women in many Muslim countries is still very high. It even reaches as high as 90%. Even at the present time when education for women has been widely spread in most of the Muslim world, fatwas, or legal opinions, are still being issued by some established religious scholars demanding the limitation of the area of study for women.

CONCLUSION

Historical evidence has shown that most of the social restrictions which have been enforced upon Muslim woman for long centuries did not originate from the teaching of Islam. Many of them are, in essence, contrary to the Quranic teachings. It is true that the Quran has prescribed certain regulations regarding the dress of Muslim women that requires special treatment, but the essence of those regulations is to teach Muslim women to maintain their decorum and purity. It does not mean that the Quran totally excluded women from participating in the social affairs of the Ummah. The essence of the regulation does not justify the custom of the Muslims of the some Muslim countries and of the later period which excluded their women from any social activities of the Ummah.

These social restrictions resulted in worsening the conditions of Muslim women in most parts of the Muslim world since the period of decadence. Throughout the centuries of decline, most Muslim woman in most parts of the Middle East, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan were suffering under the conditions of object ignorance, of exploitation by men, and of total exclusion from the social political, economic and cultural life of the Ummah. As a matter of fact, in some parts of the Muslim world this condition remains as it was, especially among the affluent religious group. They have been bounded by the prevailing culture and custom, and that custom has been identified as the Shariah or Islam itself. For this reason

they defended the custom with all their strength. Any effort which could bring about social change would be considered as betraying Islam by using the argument that the Shariah of Islam is for all times and places, and Islam is not changeable.³³ It is on this assumption that the conservatives advocated that no Muslim should speak about social change in trying to change the social value of the society. Since the society has been following that social value for many generations, any attempts to change the situation would be considered as betraying the religion.

The fact that Islam has liberated women has been neglected and left behind or interpreted differently because the source of traditional value which is based on local culture and custom is still strong in the society

It is undeniable fact that Islam has given women; 1) the right of education; 2) the right of ownership; 3) the right of buying and selling property without any interference from her guardians; and 4) the right of holding a job or participating in the workforce of the Ummah as it was shown by Umar, the second caliph, who appointed a woman, al Shifa bintı Abdullah, as the controller of the Market of al-Madinah. But all these rights finally were not executed by women because they were excluded or were not permitted to do so.

However, the new awareness regarding the importance of women's role in the society has arisen. Many Muslims have realized that women constitute approximately half of the Ummah. It is, indeed, a great loss of resources if women were not to participate in nation – building especially in a situation in which Muslim people are dependent for everything on others.

It is undeniable fact that women are an integral part of the society, and have always played a very important role in their lives. The progressiveness of a society depends on the preparation of its women to carry the burden of social responsibility with men. Any advanced society requires the involvement of all members in the workforce. The labour of men alone is not sufficient. And women's participation is based on complementary.

Finally, although some people are trying to preserve the old custom which confines woman to her home all the time, their attempt will not be successful due to the fact that the majority of Muslims are peasants whose women have been working in the fields for long centuries. In addition, the rising tide of Islamic awareness as well as the challenge of the modern times are so strong that they will regenerate the role of women in society

NOTE

1. M. Abd al Baqi Surur: *al Lu'lu' WA AL Marjan Fima utafaqa Fihı al Shaykhamı* (Cairo: AL Halabi n.d. p. 91).
2. The Quran (2) 272.

3. al Asqalani, Ibn Hajar: *al Isabab Fi Tamyizi al Sahabah VIII* (Cairo al Azhar 1977) p.p. 4 – 5.
6. al Turabi, Hassan: *al Mar'ah AL Muslimah* (Khartoum al Nil n.d.) p.p. 19 – 20.
7. al Turabi, p. 20.
8. al Turabi, p.p. 20 – 23.
9. Al Asqalani XII, p.p. 257 – 288.
10. Muhammad Khayyat: *Markazal Mar'ah Fi al Islam* (Cairo: Dar al Ma'arif 1979) p. 108.
11. Al Asqalani, XIII – p.p. 39 – 42.
12. Al Jundi, Abd al Halim: *Nahwa Tqnn Jadid al Mu'amalat wa al 'Uqubat Fi al Fiqh al Islami* (Majlis al A'la L1 al Shu'un al Islami 1973) p. 10.
13. al Asqalani XIII p.p. 165 – 169.
14. al Quran
15. al Baby, a al Khuli: *al Islam wa Qadiyah al Mar'ah al Mu'asirah*. (Beirut: Dar al Quran, 1980) p.p. 270 – 272 – 288.
16. Al Khuli, p. 215
17. Ahmad Muhamad Jamal: *Mukhadarat Fi al Thaqafah al Islamiyah* (Cairo, Dar. al Sha'b, 1975) p.p 150 – 151.
18. Al Hadad, Tahir: *Imra'atuna Fi al Shariah wa al Mujtama* (Tunisia: Dar al Tunisiyah, 1972) p.p. 198 – 203.
19. Muhammad M. Pichthal: *Cultural Side of Islam* (Lahore: Ashraf, 1979) p. 145.
20. Said Hawa: *al Islam II* p.p. 18 – 19 – 20.
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