

Gender Roles and Rights: A Study of Social Behaviors and Islamic Teachings

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Abstract

Gender is institutionalized by prevalent social values and cultural traditions in a region. The present study intends to analyze various structural factors that might be proven beneficial or disadvantageous for the two genders (male and female). It is a matter of common observation that when one of the genders occupies dominant positions and receives recognition then usually it is at the expense of the other one. The first section highlights social structural factors related with the differential treatment towards gender and recommends so the situation can be made better by formation and implementation of policies and Islamic law in the country. The second half of the paper discusses various Islamic provisions that enlighten about the gender roles and rights. Multiple examples of women participation in various fields have been excerpted from Islamic history for further elaboration. It is concluded that most of our societal behaviour is in contradiction with Islamic teachings and we being Muslims need to revisit our social practices in the light of the religious guidelines.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Social perceptions, Islamic provisions

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Introduction

Gender and sex are the two concepts which are often used interchangeably, however both vary in their respective connotation. Sex is referred to biological makeup of an individual whereas gender is a socially constructed version of being a male or female. Biological traits are inherent as every child is born with certain genetic disposition and structure of a body. On the other hand, gender denotes socially learned characteristic of male and female; society defines their rights and expects certain roles of each gender. Every society comprises of various social institutions including family, formal education, political organization, workplace, media etc. Religion is a fundamental institution that is to be followed in different social domains; Islam provides explicit guidelines regarding social obligations and rights of each gender. People of Pakistan being in Muslim by majority have adopted some of these into their practice. However, certain social and traditional factors seem to be far more influential than Islamic prescriptions. In connection with this, the present paper focuses on the societal factors and their association with gender construction in a Muslim society such as Pakistan. The second half of the paper will discuss a detailed account of gender in the light of various Islamic provisions.

Gender and Society

The differentiating traits of masculinity and femininity are referred to as gender.² Like other social aspects, gender roles are strongly rooted in the normative structure and value system. The main difference becomes quite

² Kay Deaux, "From individual differences to social categories: Analysis of a decade's research on gender." *American Psychologist* 39, no. 2 (1984): 105.

evident at the time a child (male and female) is born in the family. In South Asian countries, birth of male child is celebrated whereas birth of a female child generally not cherished. In some families it is even mourned; this implies that son is a blessing whereas daughter as a curse. The differential treatment towards boys and girls continue throughout their lives. Both the genders receive various social messages directly or indirectly from their social environment which play crucial role in formation of their gender identity and reinforcing the social values. The underlying reasons beneath this differential treatment is that son is likely to bring social and financial reward to the family as he is considered a successor who carries paternal legacy; moreover, property is passed down from paternal head to the male heir. On the other hand, daughters are expected to leave their parent's house and move to husband's house after marriage - this type of residential arrangement is referred to as patrilocality. As no material rewards are expected from female child therefore, minimum investment is made and often discouraged due to least or no financial returns.³ This fundamental belief lays the foundation of gender disparity.⁴ One common practice is depriving women from their right of inheritance, not considering her will in major life decisions.

Patriarchy and Role of Expectations

Social structure of Pakistani society is typically patriarchal, similar to other South Asian countries. Life of a female revolves around and depends on the male members of the family. Men are head of the

³ Neelambar Hatti and T. V. Sekher. "Vulnerable daughters in a Modernizing Society: From 'Son Preference' to 'Daughter Discrimination' in Rural South India." (2007): 295-324.

⁴ Colin Mason, *A short history of Asia* (Macmillan: International Higher Education, 2014).

households; therefore, they are the ones who decide. Women have to seek permission from men regarding different matters even for trivial ones such as going outside the house for shopping or visiting some friend or relative. One major reason for this is the financial authority of men though that is not always the case. There are instances where women earn and provide economic support to her family yet unable to have independent social life and decision-making power. In many parts of South Asia, properties are transferred from father to male heir (son) and family is supposed to reside with at a man's house.⁵ The patrilineality and patrilocality ensures the cultural dominance of men over their women. Social expectations from women are quite different from men. Women's social role demands obedience and submissiveness whereas men are supposed to be authoritative, assertive and strong as they are the bread winners and have to take care of responsibilities outside the house. The stereotypical roles are inculcated through early socialization by the families and later reinforced through other non-family institutions such as education, media, politics etc. This is also reflected in sports where boys are encouraged to participate in outdoor and physically aggressive sports whereas girls are discouraged to play around once they grow up.⁶ **In**

⁵ Monica Das Gupta, Jiang Zhenghua, Li Bohua, Xie Zhenming, Woojin Chung, and Bae Hwa-Ok. "Why is son preference so persistent in East and South Asia? A cross-country study of China, India and the Republic of Korea." *The Journal of Development Studies* 40, no. 2 (2003): 153-187.

⁶ Ayesha Farooq and Khalil Ahmed, "Gender Differences in Modernization of Leisure: Changing Trends In Sports And Recreation In Rural Punjab." *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies* 13 (2016).

male-dominated societies, women mostly face social barriers and have poor socio-economic status.⁷

Gender and Inheritance Right

Gender remains a key consideration in the property distribution which is being inherited by the siblings.⁸ Equal distribution of property and other material assets have been a major concern in some societies.⁹ According to Western ideology, women should get equal right as of men, they claim Islamic distribution on the basis of gender as unfair.¹⁰ As per Islamic jurisprudence, son gets double the share compared to daughter; Muslims scholars explain the rationale behind this division which is based on roles and responsibilities being assigned to each gender. Man has more financial responsibilities than women in Islamic social system, therefore he has been given more share than her female counterpart.¹¹ Men bear economic burden, therefore are likely to need more assets compared to

7 Poonam Sinha, "Problems and prospects of women entrepreneurship in Uttarakhand." *IOSR Journal of Business and Management* 18, no. 5 (2016): 89-95.

8 Abdullah, Raihanah, Wirdati Mohd Radzi, Fuadah Johari, and Golam Dastagir. "The Islamic legal provisions for women's share in the inheritance system: a reflection on Malaysian Society." *Asian Women* 30, no. 1 (2014): 29-52.

9 Maya Shatzmiller, Women and property rights in al-Andalus and the Maghrib: social pattern and legal disclosure." *Islamic Law and Society* 2, no. 3 (1995):219-257

10Rebecca Barlow and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Women's rights in the Muslim world: Reform or reconstruction." *Third World Quarterly* 27, no.8 (2006):1481-1494.

11 Dangor, Suleman. Historical Perspective, Current Literature and an Opinion Survey among Muslim Women in Contemporary South Africa: A Case Study, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 21, no.1 (2001): 109-129.

women who are not assigned financial responsibility according to Islamic guidelines, this is the main reason for the differential allocation of inherited assets.¹² Feminist approach usually lay emphasis on equality of rights in every domain, however Islamic ideology consider gender along with their roles and functions with corresponding rights and obligations.¹³ Objectionable are the social traditions which deprive women from their due right and unjust division of the property. Women are often marginalized and reframed from claiming their property and financial independence.¹⁴ These women are even discriminated in their homes.¹⁵ A study of Bangladesh reveals that four out of forty women receive their share of inheritance in rural community; this indicates how unjust practices are prevalent in a Muslim society.¹⁶ As in patrilocal structure, females leave their parental house after marriage and she moves to her husband's place; usually brothers hide property documents and conceal

12Imām Jauhari, "Normative Analysis Approach: Status and Rights of a Daughter under Islamic Inheritance Law in Indonesia.", *Journal of Sociology and Criminology* 4, no.2 (2016): 1-6.

13 Iman Hashim, "Reconciling Islam and feminism." *Gender & Development* 7, no. 1 (1999): 7-14.

14Shahnaj Parveen, "Gender Awareness of Rural Women in Bangladesh." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9, no.1 (2007): 253-269.

15AM Sultana Zulkefli NEBM, "Discrimination against women in the developing countries: a comparative study.", *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no.3 (2012): 256-259.

16 Sultana M. Alam, "Socio-cultural dimensions of women's discriminations in rural communities." *Ozean Journal Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2010):32-38

entitlements of sisters so that can never be claimed by her.¹⁷ Moreover, many females who are aware of their share but never claim their right against the will of their brothers as it is likely to have negative implications for the relationship of brother and sister.¹⁸ At times, it becomes a question of family honour; it seems against the social traditions and cultural values. Misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Islamic jurisprudence are also a fundamental reason for such flawed social practices.¹⁹ Furthermore, the people feel more obliged to carry their social traditions than to follow their religious guidelines.

Social Perceptions and Structural Impediments

Gender could be a useful socio-economic variable to analyze the roles, responsibilities, opportunities and constraints for those involved in the development discourse.²⁰ Gender analysis reveals that realities of both male and female are different, furthermore, equal opportunities does not

17 Issa Khan, Abdullah MF Rahman NN, Nor MR, Yusoff MY, "The right of women in property sharing in Bangladesh: Can the Islamic inheritance system eliminate discrimination?" *Springer Plus* 5, 1695 (2016).

18 M. R. I. Sourav, "Unjust Land Right of Women in Bangladesh. International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies 1", no. 3, (2015): 5-13.

19 Noor Mohammad, "Islamic law and women rights in Bangladesh." *Social Sciences* 2, no. 2 (2013): 22-33.

20 Nosheen Farhana, Ali Tanvir, Ahmad Munir, Haq Nawaz Anwar, Ahmad Muhammad and Iqbal Ashraf, "Assessing gender role in decision making regarding socio-economic activities in rural Punjab." *Pakistan Journal of Agricultural Sciences* 46, no. 1 (2009): 73-77.

always imply equal outcomes.²¹ Multiple structural impediments are responsible for the disadvantageous position of women in developing countries such as literacy level, lack of health facilities, patriarchal mind sets, issues of spatial mobility etc. Women are desired to be sensitive, dependent, cooperative, passive, warm, polite and having subordinate status whereas men should be competitive, assertive, proactive and arrogant.²² In families, men are decision makers; their inflated ego and aggressive temperament are conveniently acceptable by the majority in a society.²³ Religious beliefs and their misrepresentation about women are used to keep women suppressed and deprived of their rights. The concept of honour is usually attached with females of the family. This is a commonly found practice in many parts of the underdeveloped countries such as Pakistan; honour killing is one such extreme example. Some change might be appearing in educated middle class families as education ensures future security by enhancing women's capacity to stand for their rights.

Stratification and Intersectionality

Caste and social class intersect with gender; it determines which women to occupy leadership positions; women who belong to upper stratum

21 Zareen F .Naqvi, Lubna Shahnaz and G. M. Arif. "How do women decide to work in Pakistan? [with comments]." *The Pakistan development review* (2002): 495-513.

22 S.A Rahman and J. F. Alamu, "Estimating the level of women Interest in agriculture: An application of logit regression model." *Nigerian Journal of Scientific Research* 4, no. 1 (2003): 45-49.

23 Tazeen S. Ali, Gunilla Krantz, Raisa Gul, Nargis Asad, Eva Johansson, and Ingrid Mogren, "Gender roles and their influence on life prospects for women in urban Karachi, Pakistan: a qualitative study." *Global health action* 4, no. 1 (2011): 7448.

often have family support and cultural capital that enable them to attain formal education and navigate occupational structures.²⁴ Social formation of Pakistan is based on stratification structure means inequitable division based on social class, caste and gender; social space is also organized according to the principles of gender differences. A comparative study of two regions in the subcontinent that are Punjab in Pakistan and Uttar Pradesh in North India also suggest that cultural influences are much stronger in determining gender roles compared to the religious beliefs of the people. It is found that autonomy of women in terms of her role in decision making, spatial mobility, relations with in-laws and husband and control over resources is much constrained.

Equity and Empowerment

Empowerment results in the process that enables a person to know about oneself, what one (he/she) wants, expresses, struggles to achieve, need fulfillment, building confidence, awareness, social mobility, making choices, having control over resources and participation in decision making.²⁵ Customary norms and traditions play significant role in determining the status of women in Pakistan; her position in different domains of life is dependent on her cultural environment. Flagrant deviations from official Islamic law are detrimental to the welfare of women who comprise of almost half of the country's population. ⁴² Education, employment, legal support, political participation, self-

²⁴Louise Morley and Barbara Crossouard, "Women in higher education leadership in South Asia: Rejection, refusal, reluctance, revisioning." (2015).

²⁵Sarwat Rasul, "Empowerment of Pakistani women: perception and reality." NDU Journal, xxviii (2014): 113-124.

reliance, contact with outside world, institution and organizational representation are the areas where attention is needed; unfortunately, gender of a person is emphasized more rather than their capabilities and potential which is obviously a discriminatory act.²⁶ Gender discrimination, occupational segregation on the basis of sex and family responsibilities are the barriers in women progression in any society.²⁷ Eastern and South-east Asian studies show that these barriers make it extremely difficult for women to maintain a healthy balance between work and family responsibilities.²⁸ Equal opportunities, fair division of resources, implementation of Islamic laws, policy making that is supportive of women and redefining the gender roles are the most significant areas that need contemplation.

Gender and Islamic Provisions

Quran and *Ḥadīth* are two basic sources of knowledge and guidance in Islam. These sources present a detailed account of gender with reference to their rights and obligations in different social positions. Differential role allocation carries due significance and has its rationale that needs to be understood according to Islamic prescriptions. In the following section various gender dimensions are being analyzed in the light of Islamic teachings.

26 Sarwat Rasul, "Empowerment of Pakistani women: perception and reality." *NDU Journal*, xxviii (2014): 113-124.

27 Shawana Fazal, Sadaf Naz, "Muhammad Ilyas Khan and David Pedder, "Barriers" and enablers of women's academic careers in Pakistan." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 25, no. 2 (2019): 217-238.

28 Linda K. Johnsrud, "Korean academic women: Multiple roles, multiple challenges." *Higher Education* 30, no. 1 (1995): 17-35.

Childbirth and Upbringing

It is usually considered that less amount should be spent on the birth of a female infant as compared to a male infant as the former is accepted as a less fortunate being. But the Holy Prophet (upon whom been peace and greeting) has foretold the grant of Paradise for parents who would bring up their female offspring with affection. Prophetic traditions speak: "There is no one who has three daughters, or three sisters, and he treats them well, except that he enters paradise."²⁹; "He, who brought up two girls properly till they grew up, he and I would come (together) (very closely) on the Day of Resurrection, and he interlaced his fingers (for explaining the point of nearness between him and that person)."³⁰; "There is no man whose two daughters reach the age of puberty and he treats them kindly for the time they are together, but they will gain him admittance to Paradise."³¹ In the light of these directions, Muslim parents should celebrate birth of either sex without any discrimination. The birth of daughters should be accepted as a mercy for parents. A father is not allowed to be unjust in providing the financial benefits to a son while depriving his daughter.³² The guidance from the Quran and Ḥadīth prove that there should be complete justice among children by parents irrespective of their sex.

Gender, Education

29 Jami` at-Tirmidhī, Chapters on Righteousness and Maintaining Good Relations with Relatives, Ḥadīth, 1912.

30 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, The Book of Virtue, Enjoining Good Manners, and Joining of the Ties of Kinship, Ḥadīth: 2631

31 Ibn Mājah, Sunan, Book of Etiquette, Ḥadīth: 3670

32 See for details: Abū Dāwūd, Sunan, Kitāb al-Ijārah, Chapter, 1330, Ḥadīth: 3542.

Education is one of the fundamental rights of every child irrespective of his/her sex. Parents should feel it obligatory to equip their children with knowledge in any way. The Holy Prophet emphasized on acquiring knowledge. He Says: "Seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim, and he who imparts."³³ ; "Whoever takes a path upon which to obtain knowledge, Allah makes the path to Paradise easy for him."³⁴ For education from abroad, there is no discrimination of male and female. A Hadīth states: "Seek knowledge even if you have to go to China."³⁵ In all such Prophetic sayings, gender of believer is not mentioned that means that it is the duty of both males and females to acquire knowledge. Even the Ḥadīth emphasizing on education from abroad does not differentiate between men and women.

Marriage Decision

It was narrated from 'Ā'ishah that a girl came to her and said: 'My father married me to his brother's son so that he might raise his own status thereby, and I was unwilling.' She said: 'Sit here until the Prophet comes.' Then the Messenger of Al came, and I told him (what she had said). He sent word to her father, calling him, and he left the matter up to her. She said: 'O Messenger of Allah, I accept what my father did, but I wanted to know whether

33 Ibn Mājah , Sunan Ibn Mājah, The Book of Sunnah, Ḥadīth 229

34 Jāmi'at-Tirmidhī, Chapters of Knowledge, Chapter: Virtue of Seeking Knowledge, Ḥadīth: 2646

35 Shihabuddin Umar Ibn Muhammad, 'Awarif al-Ma'arif (Beirūt: Dār al-Kitab al-Arabī,1966), 30. Hujwīrī, Ali Ibn 'Usman, Kasf al-Mahjūb, (tr.) Fazaluddin Ghauhar (Lahore: Ziā-ul-Quran Publication,2006), 57.

women have any say in the matter.³⁶ In the light of this guidance, the right of females in choice of their future husband should not be denied.

Gender and Profession

In Islam, men can adopt any profession according to their choice except which is prohibited. According to *Jābir bīn 'Abdullah* (may God be pleased with them), his maternal aunt was divorced. During her post-divorce waiting period, she went out to collect the fruit from her palm trees. A man saw her and rebuked her. So, she went to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and reported the matter to him. He allowed her to continue this work.³⁷ Going out of home for work is clearly allowed in another Ḥadīth by the same narrator who is reported to have said: "My maternal aunt was divorced by three pronouncements and she went out to cut down fruit from her palm trees. A man met her and forbade her (to go out). So, she went to the Prophet (upon whom be peace and greeting) and mentioned it to him. He said 'Go out, and cut down fruit from your palm trees for perhaps you may give alms or do an act of kindness'."³⁸

Gender and Inheritance Right

After the death of the parents, husbands or other near relatives of women, they are usually deprived of their due share in inheritance (mostly in agricultural land in rural and house, shops, flats, plots and Plazas in urban areas or Bank balance in either case). Unfortunately, it is being exercised mostly in religious families especially *Pīrs, Sajjāda nashīns, sayyeds* and

36Al-Nasā'ī, Sunan al-Nasā'ī, The Book of Marriage, Chapter 36: Father Marrying Off A Virgin When She is Unwilling, Ḥadīth: 3269

37Ibn Mājah, Sunan Ibn Mājah, 'The Chapters on Divorce,' Ḥadīth 2034

38 Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Kitab al-Talaq (Divorce), Chapter 41, Ḥadīth 2297

landlords. Almighty Allah has commanded on the issue of inheritance that "Men shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinsfolk leave behind, whether it be little or much - a share ordained [by God].³⁹ Those who devour possessions of orphan are warned: "Behold, those who sinfully devour the possessions of orphans but fill their bellies with fire: for [in the life to come] they will have to endure a blazing flame!"⁴⁰

Conclusion

It has been deduced from the social and Islamic analysis of gender that there is a huge gap between the religious (Islamic) teachings and social practices. Our social norms strictly define the role of women inside the house. Men are considered responsible for earnings and bearing financial responsibilities. Islamic teachings do hold men responsible for providing economic protection, however it does not discourage or forbade women from working outside their homes for earnings. Inheritance right of women is often denied in the society, although it is strongly recommended in religious guidelines. Education of females is discouraged in many parts of the country whereas it is considered obligatory for both men and women as per Islamic teachings. Moreover, this has been supported by multiple examples of women who contributed in various fields from the Islamic history. These women participated in trade, business, teaching, nursing etc. Social attitudes toward gender roles need to be modified according to Islamic guidelines which support respectable status of women.

³⁹ Al-Nisā' 4:7.

⁴⁰ Al-Nisā' 4:10.