

Islamic Culture and Modernity: A Gender Perspective

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ABSTRACT

As among the major cultures of the world, Islamic culture appears to have one of the most pervasive roles in the contemporary cultural world. The vast and varied spectrum of research work addresses the conflict between the Islamic tradition and modernity. On contrary a congruity between Islam and modernity, one still needs to provide an account of specificity of Islamic tradition. Addressing the issue the great Islamic tradition can play a significant role in modern era i.e.; the role in socio cultural issue especially related to gender inequalities, gender role and responsibilities in contemporary era.

KEY WORDS: *Modernity, Islamic Tradition, Cultural World.*

INTRODUCTION:

Islamic Culture is characterized as a unique way of life. Culture is that complex whole which consist of many elements and divisions, each unit of culture does not work separately or independently but it works together. As defined by E.B.Taylor-“Culture is that complex whole which includes Knowledge, Belief, Art, Morals, Law, Custom and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society”. The influence of culture on social life has been very well realized by the members of the group. As explained by Herskovitz, culture is man-made part of environment.

Islamic Culture put emphasis on gender-equality, it considers women not profane as compared to other ancient cultures. Since As in Christianity, the story of Adam & Eve puts emphasis on the Eve’s fault which led both of them exalted from heaven and put them on earth. Therefore, the culture of Christianity considers women as profane. To attain religious spirituality, one has to abstain oneself from women. In this way Culture put emphasis on second position of women as compared to men in the society. Among the other cultures of the world the status and position of the women is always next to men. In post Vedic culture one can achieve the spiritual and religious higher status in the society only through to abstain himself from women and familial life. In ancient Arab culture there were great dislike for giving birth to a girl child, and often the child was buried alive. Therefore the concept of spirituality and religious life can’t go parallel to familial life.

Islam broke all myths of previous culture and gives women a dignified place in the society. Muslim marriage is described as in term of love and mercy to each other. *QUR’AN DESCRIBES SPOUSES AS GARMENTS FOR ONE ANOTHER (AL QUR’AN 2:187).*

Your wives are your garments and you are theirs, says Allah in Qur'an. Marriage in Islam is the *Sunnah of Prophet* (SAW). Khadija (RA) was the first follower of Islam, was a women and wife of Prophet Mohammad (SAW). Thus, Islamic culture put women on the same pedestal as men and treat them equally.

Islam could be considered as counter to the materialism related to capitalism. As it encourages segregation of sexes and maintain discipline regarding treating men and women differently. As concept of veils in women act as counter to materialistic - culture of capitalist world. RADHA KUMAR (1990) has noted that the Indian Feminist movement experiences itself to the problems and issues related to women in different parts of the world which are some-how related to the issues to tradition and modernity; In the context of ethnicity, religion, community identity and nationalism.

As famous sociologist TALCOTT PARSON said - sociology deals with social actions here individual is not a unit of society rather his role and status is the unit of society.

CHARLES KURZMAN (2002) in course of evaluating the 'Modernist Islam' explained that changes regarding the Muslim community could be observed in the lights of embracing the values of rationality, science, constitutionalism and forms of human equality and subsequently adapting the modern values in Islamic discourse.

DUNKART A. RUSTOW & ROBERT E. WARD (1964) have said that the basic process of modernization is the application of modern science to human affairs. Modernization involves a transformation of social, political, economic and educational organization chiefly based on rational outlook.

The concept of gender inequality and sexual division of labour in the society, have been fiercely debated in almost all spheres of contemporary social system.

According to J.P SINGH (2001) with the rise of women's liberation movement during the past few decades, there is increase in female education and participation of females in political system.

These significant changes could be observed due to spread of media and mass-communication and chiefly through modern outlook. These changes are significant among the women folk of third world countries. As remarked by RITZER (1992) 'all the theories of gender oppression describe women situation as a consequence of direct power relationship between men and women, who have fundamental and concrete interests in controlling using and subjugating and oppressing women effectively implement those interest'. Therefore, the notion of patriarchy related to inequality between the sexes which will responsible further, to gender-oppression is different in its nature and intensity in different social structure in the society.

RIDGEWAY (2011) explained that- persistent gender inequalities in home responsibilities foster gender inequalities in access to money and power outside home. Regarding the notion of gender inequality has diversified impacts in the society.

As far as Islam is concerned it has its root and beginning in the tribal society of Arabs in 7th century A.D. PROPHET MOHAMMAD (P.B.U.H) was the architect of Islam (C.N SHANKAR RAO-2006). He was very much perturbed and decadence in the religious life of Arabs. He plays new values of life and tried to unite them into a community of faith. MOHAMMAD (P.B.U.H) was not the founder rather he was consolidator of Islam.

Muslim believed that PROPHET MOHAMMAD (P.B.U.H) was the last and ablest of all messenger of God. So, Muslims believe in the messenger of God prior to MOHAMMAD such as – JESUS, MOSES, ABRAHAM, SOLOMON and so on.

MOHAMMAD (P.B.U.H) tries to stabilize the nomadic Arabs and their religious life and to chasten their moral life also. Thus a new community came to be known as community of Islam.

Islam is a way of life, it is not a merely a religion but it is something more than that, it is a way of life. It is characterized by ethics and uniting itself both as spiritual and temporal aspects of life. It sorts to regulate not only the individual relationship to God but human relationships in a social setting- as well.

Islam is not merely a religious institution but Islamic law states other institution which governs the society therefore, the two directive forces of Islamic social life are- Monotheism & Islamic law.

The feature of Islam is unique, as governing laws of Islam gives guidance to all human actions i.e.- collective or individualistic, social, political, economic and religious.

As remarked by FRANCIS ROBINSON who represents a different perspective in explaining and understanding the modernization in Muslim societies in his article “ISLAMIC REFORM AND MODERNITIES IN SOUTH ASIA” he explains four things among Muslims that differentiates the renewal process i.e., firstly these entailed an assault on the authority of the past, secondly a new emphasis on human will among Muslims in absence of strong political power. Thirdly, transformation of self in adoption of Islamic practices and lastly, a rationalization of religious belief in contrary to the local customs, superstitions and forms of Sufism (ASIYA ALAM-2014).

Islamic approach is individualistic in nature since the central attention is given to an individual and society afterwards. As it opines that healthy society is possible only when an individual’s potential and efficiency is at its fullest. The social-model as promulgated by Islamic-culture put emphasis on development and preserves humanity as its prime objective.

THE HOLY QURAN- “LET THERE BE NO COMPULSION IN RELIGION”- (QURAN II:V-256).

Muslims believe in the life thereafter death of the whole creation Islam places high premium on leading a righteous and moral life. Muslims believe in the Day of Judgement (*Akhirat*). Any action of the individuals which is intended to cross the moral and ethical

limits as set by Islam is forbidden. The Muslim law is called 'Shariah', which literally means - the road to watering place or path to be followed.

THE HOLY QUR'AN- "WOMEN RIGHTS IN MUSLIM-MARRIAGES- GIVE THE WOMEN (ON MARRIAGE) THEIR DOWER AS AN OBLIGATION (QUR'AN 11:29)

GIVE THEM THEIR DOWRY FOR THE ENJOYMENT YOU HAVE OF THEM AS A DUTY (QUR'AN IV:24)

Marriage is the Sunnah of PROPHET MOHAMMAD (P.B.U.H) i.e., Sex discipline is strictly followed among Islamic community. Marriage is considered universal. Marriages are regarded as- social contract & widowhood is not appreciated.

THE HOLY QUR'AN-INDEED MUSLIM MEN AND WOMEN FOR THERE ALLAH (S.W.T) HAS PREPARED FORGIVENESS AND REWARD (QUR'AN-33:35)

These verses explain the social position of males and females in the society where the deeds of an individual or believer are of prime important, irrespective of gender.

In the eyes of God both men and women will be Judged and rewarded equally for their actions. This elaborates the fact that supremacy of the lord and his bounty for all humans belong to the same strata i.e., social equality as indices of modernity.

"God directed the believers- to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave, no matter if their search took them as far as China. (HADITH MUSLIM & BUKHARI)"

Acquisition of knowledge among the human is considered mandatory. Islam talks about egalitarian education. As Islam describes acquisition of knowledge is obligatory and compulsory upon its believers.

It is also important to point out the economic aspect of Islam in the society. All individual in the society have the right to avail equal opportunities for earning their lively hood in the society. (M.M SIDDIQUE-1999)

Islam put no restriction on individual property so it as opposed under the socialist society. Although Islam avoids lust for wealth therefore 'giving of Alms' (Zakaat) is a necessary tax imposed on the believers, which they have to pay annually.

Islamic fasting has been a part of Muslim tradition for centuries and its benefits extend beyond physical health to spiritual well-being (RAYHAN, 2021)

O YOU BELIEVE! FASTING IS PRESCRIBED FOR YOU AS IT WASPRESCRIBED BEFORE YOU, SO THAT YOU MAY GUARD (AGAINST EVIL). (AL QUR'AN 11:183)

The purpose of Islamic fasting is to attain spiritual purification, self discipline, empathy & compassion and having amazing scientifically proven health benefits for Believers.

During the Ummayed & Abbasid Empires, the tradition of egalitarianism in acquiring knowledge was religiously followed by Muslims, under the patronage of the rulers, great scientific, artistic and literary progress was achieved (PHILIP K. HITTI- 1990).

CONCLUSION:

To quote modernity is not an exclusive possession of anyone ethnic or cultural group, it belongs to humanity as a whole. Islam not only gives importance to religious or theological knowledge rather also gives significant importance to secular branches of knowledge. Modern aspect of society is inclusive of scientific view-point believes in humanistic value and philosophical view point of science on contemporary problems. Thus, Islam provides a roadway to address the contemporary issues of society as a whole.

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