



GENDER EQUALITY IN ISLAM: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Humaira Mehmood

Research Scholar

Department of Islamic Studies,

Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

Abstract: The social construction of gender involves the separation of social roles and what is considered masculine and feminine. Studies on gender issues tend to place women beyond this nature, returning to the position of women being subjugated again or vice versa. One of the hottest topics in society is gender inequity, which has hereditary roots but entirely non-religious causes. Political, economic, social, and cultural aspects are its root causes. Regarding Islam, its core principles and jurisprudence include gender equality. This research aims to connect the views of Quranic Exegesis and the situation of women in general Islamic discourse by analyzing the hermeneutics of reading the Quran on gender problems. Islam states that everyone is equal regarding status, preference, and dignity, but it also establishes different responsibilities for men and women. For these reasons, this paper further details women's complete equality as human beings. This essay examines the idea of gender equality in Islam in the context of the Quran and the Hadith.

Index Terms: Islam, Women, Equality, Gender

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, male supremacy has been widespread in all cultures, except a few female-dominated societies that have been relatively rare. Women have historically been regarded as subordinate to men. The belief of the disparity of women and men originated from this. Due to perceived differences in power and competency, women are often considered inferior to men. Men should exercise authority over women, exert control over them, and shape their destiny, fulfilling roles as fathers, siblings, or spouses. The argument posits that it is in her best interest to acquiesce to the dominant gender. Restricted to her residence and personal sphere, she was unable to make choices beyond her immediate environment. It was predicted that if she were to become the ruler of a country, it would result in a catastrophic event.¹ Equality and sameness are distinct concepts. Islam acknowledges that there are differences between the rights of men and women, but it does not endorse favouritism or discrimination in favor of males over women. Islam has also upheld the principle of gender equality. Islam does not oppose the equality of men and women, but it does not support the idea that their rights should be equivalent.²

Defining equality can be challenging as it encompasses the notion that all human beings are equal. However, in reality, it is rare to find two individuals who are equal in every aspect of life. There exist variations in preferences, dispositions, abilities, capacities, and perspectives, which cannot be attributed to variations in surroundings or upbringing.³ Islam has a distinct ideology on the relationships and rights of men and women inside the family, which deviates from the norms that were prevalent fourteen centuries ago and does not align with contemporary societal standards. From the Islamic perspective, there is no debate regarding the equality of men and women as individuals, as well as the equivalence of their respective family rights. In Islam, both women and men are considered human beings and are granted equal rights.⁴

2. GENDER EQUALITY: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

The Qur'an does not classify women as a subset of men while addressing its main concepts. Men and women are two distinct classifications within the human race that are seen as equal and possess the same or equivalent capabilities. Both are included in the primary objective of the Book, which is to direct humanity to acknowledge and embrace specific truths. The Qur'an urges every believer, regardless of gender, to align their beliefs with their actions, promising them a significant reward. Therefore, the Qur'an does not make an exception between males and females in terms of their creation, the purpose of the Book, or the rewards it guarantees.⁵ Islam acknowledges the inherent superiority of one partner over the other and states that "men are a degree above women." This approach is based on the premise that there are inherent physical and behavioural distinctions between men and women. It acknowledges and maintains these differences, utilizing them to establish their respective roles and duties within the social structure.⁶

The ongoing discourse in Muslim countries regarding gender equality revolves around two main perspectives: introspection and interaction with external entities. Specifically, this refers to two main aspects: firstly, the careful assessment of Islamic sources as a means of influencing gender dynamics in the future; and secondly, the comprehension of gender-related matters in Muslim countries resulting from their interaction with the Western world and the subsequent impact on the Muslim community. In Islamic legal thinking, there is no singular and comprehensive concept of gender rights. Family laws are derived from various juristic, social, and sexual assumptions and reasoning from earlier eras, which shape the understanding of the nature of relationships between men and women. Subsequent generations regarded these assumptions and beliefs, which represent patriarchal attitudes, as unchangeable and integral to the Shariah. The utilization of the Quranic verses' tone has been employed both to endorse women's submission to men and to advocate for gender equality. John Esposito has reconciled this seeming contradiction by implementing a "hierarchization of Quranic values."⁷

3. GENDER APPROACH IN ISLAM

3.1 Creation of both genders from Nafs e Wahida

“O men! Fear your Lord Who created you from a single being and out of it created its mate; out of the two spread many men and women. Fear Allah in Whose name you plead for rights, and heed the kinship ties. Surely, Allah is ever watchful over you”⁸.

This statement unequivocally asserts that all individuals, regardless of their gender, race, or nationality, are inherently equal in terms of their intrinsic human worth and fundamental entitlements. This equality stems from the fact that all human beings ultimately originate from a common origin.⁹

Inevitably the Quran exhibits a clear and undeniable inclination towards gender equality. There are multiple factors contributing to this phenomenon. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the Quran bestows a position of immense respect upon all of humanity, encompassing both genders. Furthermore, it upholds the notion of gender equality as a standard, stating that biological differences between sexes, as mentioned in the Quran, do not imply unequal status for either gender. It is important to differentiate between biological functions and social functions.¹⁰ As stated in the Quran, women have an equal religious position to males, much like their social standing. It explicitly declares:

“Lo! Men who surrender unto Allah and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey, and women who obey, and men who speak the truth, and women who speak the truth, and men who preserve, and patient men and patient women and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and the charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and men who guard their chastity and women who guard it and men who remember Allah and women who remember Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward.”¹¹

This verse unequivocally establishes that men and women are equal in all aspects that are significant in social engagements. Both individuals have equal access to the route of advancement, and the prize for attaining it is identical for both.¹²

According to the Shari'ah, women are considered to be on the same level as males in terms of spirituality and intelligence. The primary differentiation it establishes between them lies in the tangible domain, grounded on the just principle of an equitable distribution of work. It assigns the most demanding tasks on the male and holds him accountable for supporting the family. The responsibility of managing the household and raising and educating children is assigned to women, as this activity plays a crucial role in constructing a thriving and affluent society. Without a coherent policy, effective administration in the domestic field is unattainable. Due to this rationale, the Shari'ah mandates that a man, in his capacity as the leader of the family, must engage in discussions with his family members and ultimately possess the authority to make final judgments regarding family matters. He must exercise his authority responsibly and refrain from causing harm to his wife. Any violation of this concept carries the potential consequence of losing the divine approval, as the wife is not inferior but rather, as the Prophet stated, the ruler of her household. A genuine believer is expected to provide his wife with this status. Contrary to the enlightened teachings of Islam toward women, the Western discourse on women's liberation or emancipation is, in reality, a covert means of exploiting their bodies, depriving them of their honor, and degrading their souls.¹³

4. CONCLUSION

The Qur'an regards men and women as equals in every aspect. Mankind will truly achieve human dignity when it discusses individuals as human beings, rather than focusing on gender differences. Both men and women have their distinct personalities, and the connection between the two personalities cannot be seen as a means to an end. Each individual's personality is valuable and meaningful in its own right.

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