

ISLAM AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

The prevailing idea of a women's place in Islam is that women are deprived of freedom of equality. This is result of either ignorance about Islam or the biased propaganda of anti-Islamic ideology and a prejudiced media. Before the advent of Islam in Arabia, the position of the fair sex was appalling. Girls were sometimes killed as soon as they were born. The infant girls were buried alive. A men could marry and abandon or divorce a woman any number of times, the number of wives was unlimited. It is the aim of this paper to explain in details how Islam emancipated woman in all respect.

Keywords: *Islam, Women Empowerment, Islamic ideology and Nurturing*

Introduction

It is the western world that brought out the concept of empowerment of women. Therefore, those aspects of women empowerment must reflect the ideology of the west. In most cases, women empowerment in the western world is restricted to promotion of materials gain through economic (physical) empowerment only. According to the western world, women are to be empowered economically through upgrading and uplifting the standard of living of women, by giving them more economic power to satisfy or attain higher level of satisfaction (utility) in their consumption pattern better than before. This will lead them to consume more and more of what they have been consuming before and even engage in the consumption of they were not consuming in the past. Thus, there is upliftment in the standard of living, getting out of poverty, no matter how little it may be.

In order to give them this economic power, women should be given all the available opportunities to get that economic power (money), so that they consume all what they want to consume. This economic power can be given to them through education, skill acquisition, capacity building, training in various professional trades, occupations and much enlightenment. Acquiring all these activities will allow women to engage in all kinds of professions and business activities, which men engage. In some instances, they will even be able to compete with men in various and different professions and occupations. Now, if women acquire education, skill acquisition, capacity building, training in various professional trades, occupations and various enlightenments, they will either be employed by public or private organizations. And, will consequently, earn salary or allowances, so that they will be able to buy and consume more and more of western commodities. This will give the west more money and economic power. Thus, indirectly empowering the west, instead of women and they claimed.

The aim of this write up is to show how women were empowered in the Sokoto Caliphate, which was in the same manner upon which Islam as a religion wanted women to be empowered. The paper will therefore show how women were empowered both materially and spiritually, meaning that a women will be shown how she can empower herself in this world and the hereafter. To achieve this objective, the paper will be divided in to four sections with this introductory section being the first. The second section will explain the meaning of women empowerment in Islam. The third section will show women were empowered in the Sokoto Caliphate, and the fourth and last section will conclude the study.

Women Empowerment in Islam

Islam is the only religion in the sight of Allah. He told us in His glorious book, Al-Qur'an that he did not create humans and demons, but to worship him alone. Thus, both humans and demons are expected to look for the way to worship Allah properly and in the way he wanted them to worship Him. This guidance could only be found in the message sent to them. The message had already been brought to them through Allah's messenger, Muhammad (SAW) 1434 years ago in the Glorious Qur'an and traditions of the messenger. Subsequently, consensus of sincere Muslim scholars was also recognized as a very important source of guidance for mankind. Man is recognized by Allah as the most superior of all His creatures. Thus, man is expected to be Allah's

vicegerent on earth. Man is also expected to obey the dos and don'ts of Allah. This is for the smooth running of man's life, for his self satisfaction, and for the reward he is expected to reap in the Day of Judgment. And, any failure to obey Allah's wish will lead to catastrophes in this world and severe punishment in the hereafter.

Man is given power by Allah, and makes him to be the most powerful of all His creatures. To the extent of giving man an opportunity to conquer the world (earth) and the heaven. Within the powers of man, women are in most cases considered to be inferior to man, due to their weakness in both their mental and physical abilities, when compared to man. However, spiritually, both men and women are recognized to have equal share in the rewards and punishments. Nevertheless, both men and women were commanded by Allah to empower themselves by seeking a very good life in this world as well as the hereafter. But, they are to prefer next world than this world in all circumstances. In essence, humans are required to empower themselves not only in this world, but including the hereafter. No doubt, Islam is not against women's participation or involvement in economic, business or professional trades and activities. In fact, they are strongly encouraged to do so. However, these are to be carried out in accordance with the rules and regulations as specified by Allah in His Glorious book, al-Qur'an and the traditions of his noble Prophet, Muhammad (SAW). However, empowerment in Islam is considered to be an all-round developmental phenomenon in humans. In short, it refers to the uplifting or upgrading of one's social, political, educational, physical, emotional, spiritual and economic status. We therefore need to understand that it is meant to uplift and upgrade the body and spirit of man and woman.

And, the body of either man or woman comprises of the physical as well as the spiritual parts. There is no doubt that one cannot do without the other. They thus, complement each other. This therefore, shows that to empower the physical part without empowering the spiritual part is an incomplete empowerment. Likewise to empower the spiritual part without empowering the physical part is also a weak empowerment. Therefore, this shows that we must empower both the physical and the spiritual part simultaneously, if we need to strike a proper balance and have a complete women empowerment. Physical empowerment can be achieved when an individual uplift or upgrade the satisfaction, which he derived from what he consumed or the services that he got. This in economics is referred to as utility. The spiritual empowerment on the other hand, can be achieved when an individual uplift or upgrade his satisfaction on his obedience to Allah's laws and orders. This as well includes his level and amount of devotion in his worship of Allah. It also has to do with one's ability to do away with sins, injustice and commitment of various atrocities. It also includes his level of commitment in the commanding of people to do what is good and to run away from all evils.

The consequence of lack of economic empowerment is that an individual will remain stagnant in his all round physical development. Therefore, his standard of living will remain where it was, without any development on any aspect of his physical self. And, the consequence of lack of spiritual empowerment is a situation where one finds himself in troubles, emotional disturbances, moral disorders and lack of peace of mind. Worries, uncertainties, state of confusions and spiritual imbalance are the other features of spiritual stagnancy. Conclusively, we can see that we need both physical and spiritual empowerment in Islam in order to have a proper empowerment of any individual or society. If empowerment is carried out on the physical part only, it is incomplete. The same is also applicable if empowerment is restricted to the spiritual aspect only. We thus, need both the two for a proper and complete empowerment.

Women Empowerment in the Sokoto Caliphate

At the time of the Noble Prophet, Muhammad (SAW) many women engaged in business or economic activities. The same case applied to women here in the Sokoto Caliphate. And, it has been shown that many of them proved to be very successful in their businesses or professions. There were even some of them who were able to assist their husbands in solving some of the family's financial problems hoping for their rewards in the hereafter. And, a woman for instance, in the then society of Sokoto Caliphate can engage in many professions, occupations and trades. Nothing, perhaps, motivated and encouraged women to realize and play significant role in the progress and development of the Sokoto Caliphate than Muhammad Bello's call on them to realize their role and give their own contribution to the betterment of the then society. The call is contained in his book titled, *'An-Nasiha al-Wad'ida*. In fact, it made them lead a righteous life. In this book, Muhammad Bello expresses his fear over the evil of materialism, which is seriously penetrating into the hearts of Muslims, especially women, and consequently affects the society in totality.

Muhammad Bello then went further to appeal to Muslims women to give their help so as to defeat the potential evil and destroy the stem of social decay. In essence, Muhammad Bello was seriously emphasizing on the ideals, which all Muslim women should aim at achieving. He also guided them towards the models that they should try to emulate and ultimately show them that there was practically no limit to the spiritual, moral and intellectual heights they could attain if they made the necessary efforts. He also reminded them that their role in uplifting the society was very crucial. In any society, it is women that lead it into joy, comfort, and luxury. The Prophet (SAW) as well as Muhammad Bello feared this situation of engaging in pleasures and luxury for the people.

Muhammad Bello also tried to draw the attention of women to remember the time when riches began to flow in Madinah. The wives of the Prophet (SAW) then requested for more comfort for themselves, Allah rebuked them and gave them a choice of either this world or the hereafter, upon which they always preferred the hereafter. In essence, Muhammad Bello wanted women to seek for their own livelihood, and to request and insist on being given only lawful and wholesome resources from their husbands. This implied that they should reject from their husbands, 'properties looted from the public treasury, or seized from the poor, or acquired by swindling, fraud and trickery'. Muhammad Bello goes on to say that, "one of the principal duties of a married woman in Islam is that of protecting her husband's property." His position with regards to women is therefore, very clear, 'women can play a useful role without necessarily going out to mingle with men.

Women in the Caliphate as far as Muhammad Bello was concerned should be deeply devoted to Allah, mount their saddles in *Jihad*, and orient their children towards the noble cause and endear them to martyrdom. He cited an example with various women, among them include Asiyah, the wife of the legendary Pharaoh of Egypt, whose believe in one God exceeded any women of her time, and the great Maryam, the mother of Prophet Isah (AS) whose spiritual devotion was far beyond any woman. Muhammad Bello also cited some women, whom were his contemporaries such as Aishah bt. Muhammad, a wife of his father, Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo who exerted herself in acquiring lawful earnings, and spent her resources in the cause of Allah. He also cited his own mother Hauwa bt. Adam, whom he described as the one who ate only from her lawful earnings or from the sweat of her brows.

All the above call was made in order to show women in the Caliphate to pay serious attention to their spiritual development and as well not to forget their portion of this world by active participation in various economic and business ventures. Women throughout the Caliphate answered this call in one way or another. For instance, it was this society that produced women that are of high caliber in their educational attainment and high level of spiritual development. Nana Asma'u and her sister Maryam was among such women. Women have also answered the call for their economic empowerment by actively participation in various economic ventures. The following brief account will show and testify the assertion that women participated in their economic empowerment in various economic activities in the Caliphate, and it will show the various sectors of the economy, which they penetrated into. Women in the Sokoto Caliphate were the main caretakers of the family. Most women remain at homes performing their productive and nurturing functions. They brought up their children, performed household chores, and took care of the sick, the disable and the elderly in the family.

On farms and fields, women also engaged in farming and rearing of animals domestically. It was also the responsibility of women to process the grain, which must be done prior to sale or consumption. It was also women who used to feed and milk cows at home. They stored and fermented the milk and separated cream from milk. Even when cows, sheep and camels were taken to the grazing fields, the younger ones remain at home. Birds such as hens, ducks guinea fowls, etc were also kept at home. All these were under the care of women. Another economic sector where women provided their contribution, which is closely related to the agricultural sector, is the food and catering industry. Their services in this industry were not limited to the production of food for family consumption. They also processed and cooked different types and varieties of food for sale outside the family. Women also used groundnuts to produce many different items for both family consumption and for sale. In fact, many other products were utilized for both domestic and commercial purposes.

Suggestions

1. There were many ingredients which women used in preparing the soup or stew among which the most important was the sauce. The making of local sauce was one of the pre-occupied occupations of women throughout the Caliphate.
2. Women in the Sokoto Caliphate used to participate fully in the manufacturing and production of detergents and toilet soaps for family consumption and commercial purposes. They also engaged in hair dressing and plaiting, which was also carried out at home or for commercial purposes.
3. Apart from participation in the manufacture of various goods for everyday use, Women were also skillful in the production of leather goods. Some of these products were exclusively for man's use such as the leather pillow, which is known as *Titimi*.
4. Women played a very important role in the textile industry. Spinning was a female preserve and the making of cotton thread was women's monopoly.

Conclusion

Women empowerment is not new in the Islamic world. It is only the terminology that is a western invention. There is however, a great difference that occurs in the way Islam defined and applied the term with the way the western world defined and applied it. In the western world women empowerment is in most cases limited to worldly gains, but in Islam it encompasses both the worldly gains as well as man's salvation in the hereafter. It was the Islamic perspective, which the Sokoto Caliphate considered as the most beneficial, and which was implemented, in the then society. In setting the standard behavior, the daughters of Shehu Danfodiyo had to keep themselves upright and so they used to shun materialism. They also constantly advised and emphasize on simple lifestyle, which would be strictly in conformity with Islam.

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