

## COMPARISON OF WOMEN FROM DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper attempts to discuss the Status of Women in the Greek World, in Ancient Egyptian Civilization, Indian Civilization, Hindu Scriptures. The Status of Women in Judaism, Post Biblical Judaism, women's status in Christianity, and Women's status in Islamic religion and how Islam recognized women, then recommendation and conclusion.*

### INTRODUCTION

Human being originated from one ancestor and has a common nature. Allah (SWT) created people differently with different ideas, cultures and attitudes. He created man and woman differently, but they are all the same in Allah's sight except those who are more faithful. Allah says:

*O humanity, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you into nation and tribes that you may know one another. Undoubtedly the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. (Qur'an 49:13)*

Islam gives women equal rights to possess legally as it shows man because the resources of nature are made by Allah and are equally open for them in this regard.

Allah says:

*And provided you therein with means for the fulfillment of your life. (Qur'an 7:10)*

This paper intends to highlight the status of women from different religious perspectives. Islam has taken so much care of a woman and has elevated her class to a human being, contrary to Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism. Some non-Muslim cultures even debated whether a woman has a soul or not. (Abdullahi. *Islam in Focus. op cit, p.184*).

Women have disallowed inheritance from the property of their parents, relatives and husband.

### Status of Women in the Greek World

In Ancient Greek and Rome, Athenian women were always subjected to control by males. Their consent in marriage was not generally necessary. In ancient Roman law, a woman was entirely

dependent. If married, she and her property under the control of her husband. The wife was the purchased property of her husband. She could not hold any civil or public office. She could not be a witness, a tutor, or a curator; she could not adopt or make a will or be involved in a contract. After her husband's death, her sons or in-laws, especially brother's in-law, have legal rights over her (*A.I.Zakariyya . women's shield in Islam . Ya-Byangs publishing, Jos, Plateau state. 2009 P2.*). Women's status in archaic Greek is that women's most crucial role in archaic Spartan was bearing children. For this reason, women were to be fed equal ration, educated and trained in athletics. Women were able to marry at a later age than in other city-states and therefore faced less danger of death in pregnancy and childbirth.(T.M. Elizabeth, the status of women in Greek, Roman and Jews society,<http://www.womenpriest.org/classic/tetcow/asp> 1980, p.9)

Towards the end of the seventh century, many women in Spartan had become quite wealthy. They reduced the population by refusing to bear many children. In the law code of Gortyn, their women had the right to own, control, and inherit property. A certain percentage of what a woman produced through her work belongs to her. A woman retained half her properties (*Women's shield in Islam, P.2*). Women were continually challenging the patriarchal ideal of male dominance and superiority.

### **Status of Woman in Ancient Egyptian Civilization**

Society in the ancient world was patriarchal. There, however, a few exceptions. In the third millennium B.C, the Sumerians accorded women an almost equal position to that of men. Women were, for example, able to own and control the use of the property. They were educated and legally able to take more than one husband. In the second millennium, Egyptian women's status was high, and their legal rights were equal. Throughout the three millennium, B.C Marriage was monogamous and commonly by mutual consent. Women had equal rights in inheritance. Because of this, right many women became wealthy and, through their wealth, acquire Political power. A few women even rule as Pharaohs. (*Women's shield in Islam, P.1*).

In the west of Egypt, women were educated, free and almost equal in status with men. Greek and Roman societies were between the two extremes. In both, there was a tension of opposites: a patriarchal ideal of the silent and obedient wife, working in seclusion within the home, and reality of historical women who owned and property and exercised political roles in societies. (*The Status of Women in Greek, Roman and Jewish society P 5*).

### **Status of Women in Indian Civilization**

In Indian civilization, a woman was in a state of subjection and dependence on her protectors, to say her father, before marriage or her husband. She was excluded from inheritance, which means the family's real estate goes to the males only. (*S.O Rabiou (nd) Sharia and the Right of Women. P., 2*).

Encyclopedia Britannica stated the status of Indian women: In India, subjection was a cardinal principle. Day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of dependence,

say manu. The rule of inheritance was agnatic, that is, descent through males to the exclusion of females. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica. 11<sup>th</sup> ed., 1991. Volume 28, P 782*).

### **Status of Women In Hindu Scriptures**

Hindu marriage was indissoluble. Neither adultery nor prostitution, nor degeneration could ever dissolve a Hindu marriage. What to say in life even after the death of the husband, widows could claim separation. ( N.Afza and A.Khurshid.Position of Woman In Islam(A Comparative studies) P.16 ). The description of a good wife is as follows: "Woman whose mind, speech and body are kept in the subject, acquires high renown in this world, and in the next the same abode as her husband." ( .A B.Jamal. Status of Woman in Islam. Department of Education and training. U.S.A. 1980).

Women met a similar fate in Hinduism, and the doctrine of Niyog is a brutal insult to pure womanhood. It must excite the indignation of all those who desire the progress of morality and many honest thinkers even from among the Hindus. It shocks one to hear the advocate of Niyog telling men that in the absence of a male offspring, the wife should pollute herself with a stranger to give birth to a son happily. No chaste woman would ever bear such insult. ( *N.Afza and A.khurshid. the position of women in Islam, p.15*).

Ancient Hindus, for example, Asura form of marriage was nothing but a kind of sale of the daughter by the father, and they never inherited any property. Professor Indra, in her book: Status of Women in Mahabharata, writes. According to Manu: A woman must never seek independence and must never do anything according to her mere pleasure (*women's position in Islam p.17* ).

### **The Status of Women in Judaism**

In the Encyclopaedia Biblical, a woman in Judaism was regarded as man's property; his right to divorce her follows as a matter of curses. The right was held only by the man (S.O. Rabi'u, Muslim women in contemporary world. P..2). A woman achieves some measure of social status by becoming the mother of a son. Inheritance passed from father to son. Men could initiate divorce at will. Women were bound in marital fidelity. ( *M. T. Elisabeth, Women's status in Greek, Roman and Jewish society p.13*).

According to Hebrew Scriptures, the woman is under an eternal divine curse:

"Of the Woman came the beginning sin, and through her, we all die, is a belief, which holds poor woman responsible, for all the Wickedness of man, hence, her degradation in Jewish society, where she was considered not as a creature worthy of honour but as one who could be subjected to any amount of insult, and reduced to the position of a mere chattel in the house ( *The position of women in Islam {A comparative study },p.18*).

A woman is, however, excluded from the religious office of priest in Israel. According to the Torah, women were impure during times of menstruation and childbirth. They were impure twice as long at the birth of a daughter as after a son's birth. Any contact with a woman at such time rendered a man ritually unclean. Also, they were to contaminate any object they touched.

Ritual purity was of primary importance in the Jewish tradition of priesthood and temple cult. (M.T. Elisabeth. *The Status of Women in Greek, Roman and Jewish Society*, p.13).

### **Status of Women in Post Biblical Judaism**

In the early rabbinic period, Judaism stood in a constant struggle to preserve its identity against the influence of secular Hellenistic culture; women were generally portrayed as temptresses and evil sex objects. Men were advised to avoid all possible contact with women. Women were not permitted to receive any education. They could not recite the prayers at meals. Women were barred from studying the Torah. Male children were the only children who were veiled as preferable to female children. Every morning each Jewish man prayed in thanks, giving God that he had been created a man and not a woman. ( *The Status of Women in Greek, Roman and Jewish Society*, p.15). There were different opinions concerning the position of women among the various Jewish sects. The essence of the literature of Qumran is quite hostile towards both sexes. It was a celebrated community that was nominated by priests. There was no real place for women either theologically or in the reality of its existence in the desert wilderness of Judea. Women were, however, still segregated and silent during worship. ( *The Status of Women in Greek, Roman and Jewish Society*, p.15).

### **Status of Women in Christianity**

In Christianity, women were degraded and described by the early Church fathers as the gateway to Hell, as the mother of all ills, and that she would be ashamed of every thought that she was a woman. ( *The Position of women in Islam (A comparative study)*. p., 21).

The whole structure of the Christian creed is based on the doctrine of original sin for which Christianity holds woman responsible, "The woman whom thou give to me she gave me of the tree and I did eat (Gen. III, 12)". Even first committed then sin and caused the fall of Adam. Thus actually, she was responsible for the sins of humanity, and God had to send His "only begotten son, Jesus Christ, to be crucified and to wash off the sins of humanity with his blood!

Saint Paul, who was the real founder of Christianity as it is understood and believed by the Christians, regarded women as temptresses. He laid the entire blame for the fall of man and the genesis of sin on a woman. (In the New Testament of the Bible) ( *The Position of women in Islam (A comparative study)*. p.18 ). "Let women learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over me; she keeps silent, for Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and become a transgressor." 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:11-14. ( *Holy bible*, The old and New Testament, published by the Bible societies 1971 P:195). "says ST. Tertullian to women, that each of you is an Eve, on this; you are the Devil's gateway; you are unsealed of that tree; you are the first deserter of the Divine law; you are she who persuaded him when the Devil was not courageous enough to attack you, destroyed so quickly God's image in man. On account of your desert that is death, even the son of God had to die. ( *The Position of Women in Islam a comparative stud*, p.24)

"Says ST Gregory Thaumaturgus, "I sought for chastity proper to them, and I found it among none. And, verily, a person may find one man chaste among a thousand, but among woman never".

St. John Chrysostom regards woman as a necessary evil, a desirable calamity, a dead fascinator, and a painted ill. In the eyes of St Clement of Alexandria, nothing disgraceful is proper for man, who is endowed with reason; much less for woman, to whom it brings shame to reflect of what nature she is" (*The Position of Women in Islam a comparative study*.,24).

As the early fathers might be called, the Christian Church's builders all vied in their denunciation of women. She was described as "the organ of the Devil" the foundation of the arms of Devil, whose voice is the hissing of the serpent," "a scorpion ever ready to sting, and the lance of the demon, "an instrument which the devil uses to gain possession of our souls," the gate of the Devil," the road of iniquity, the sting of the peace, an essential of Hell, the enemy of peace. Land of the wild beasts the most dangerous" by Bernard St Anthony, St. Bonaventure, St. Cyprian, St Jerome and St John.

Damascene, respectively. Says, "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man for this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the Angels'. (1 Corinthians 118,10).( *U.Aziz-US-Samad, Islam and Christianity. p., 79*).

Having seen how women had been treated and exploited by different religions, women work so hard to live in other religions, and sometimes she will be doing the same job that a man does. We have seen how Christianity takes women; we will now go to the Islamic religion and see what it has for the womenfolk.

### **Status of Women in Islam**

In Islam, Allah sent a messenger Prophet to convey His message to humanity amid the darkness. It's only the religion of Islam that upgrades women's status to be the same as men. The woman is as vital to life as man himself, and that she is not inferior to him, nor is she one of the lower species. Islam has given women rights and privileges that she never enjoyed under other religions or constitutional systems.(*H. Abdullatib, Islam in Focus,p.184*).

Therefore, Islam established for women that suits her nature gives her full circumstances and uncertain life channels. The Qur'an clears women of the responsibility for the fall of Adam and vindicates her honour and dignity. It raises the status of a woman to make her man's equal. For the first time in history, women were given the same rights as tmenby Islam. ( *H. Abdullatib, Islam in Focus,p.180*).

*And they (Woman) have rights similar to those of men over Them just a manner (. Qur'an 2:228).*

Islam removed the stigma of "wickedness" and "Impurity" that the worlds' religions had placed upon a woman. Man and woman, it proclaimed, had both come from the same essence and therefore, if a woman could be said to be wicked, a man should also be regarded as such, or if the

man had a single spark of nobility in him, the woman also should have it, "Women" declare Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) are the twin- halves of men."

*O Mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord who created you from a single soul, and it created its mate from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and woman. Be careful of duty towards Allah in who you claim (your rights) of one another, and towards the wombs (that bore you). Lo Allah hath been a watcher over you. (Qur'an 4:1)*

Allah says:

*And Allah hath given you wives of your kind (Qur'an 16:72).*

Islam denounced Christian fathers' assertion that women did not possess a soul and would remain a sexless being in future life. (N. Afza and K.Ahmad, *The Position of Women in Islam*).

Allah says:

*Whoever doeth right, whether male or female, and is a believer, him (or her) verily we shall quicken with a good life, and we shall pay them a recompense in proportion to the best of what they used to do (. Qur'an 16:89).*

It is not Islam's tone that brands women as the Devil's product or the seed of evil. Nor does the Qur'an place man as the dominant Lord of woman who has no choice but to surrender to his dominance. Nor was it Islam that introduced whether or not a woman has any soul in her. Never in Islam's history has any Muslim doubted the human status or her possession of a soul and other fine spiritual qualities.

Unlike different popular beliefs, Islam does not blame Eve alone for the first sin. The Qur'an makes it very clear that both Adam and Even were tempted, that they sinned, that God's pardon was granted to both after their repentance, and that God addressed them jointly.

But Satan caused them (both) to deflect from that place and expelled them from the (happy) state in which they were (Q.2.35-36 and 7.19,27,20; 117-123). The Qur'an gives the impression that Adam was more to blame for that first sin from which emerged prejudice against woman and suspicion of her deeds. But Islam does not justify such discrimination because both Adam and Eve were equally in error, and if we are to blame Eve, we should blame Adam as much or even more. (H. Abdullahi, *Islam in Focus. p., 185*).

*They are your garments, and ye are their garments. (Qur'an 11:187)*

In contrast to the view of Christianity, "Neither was man created for the women. Nor the woman for the man. "Islam Proclaimed:

Islam regard woman spiritually equal to a man as had been shown before. It also regards her intellectually equal. The only difference it makes is in physical conditions, and this difference is based on hard facts. It believes in the principle of the division of labour. It allows the strenuous work and the rough out-door life to man and makes him responsible for maintaining the family. It regards homes as the first concern of women. It allows the work of managing the home and of upbringing and training of children to a woman.

In a Muslim family, as far as honour is concerned, Islam has ordered one to honour the mother more than the father, the sister more than the brother and the daughter more than the son. But, as regards administration, that is, in the case of the husband and wife, the final authority is vested on the husband who is also held responsible for looking after the comfort of the wife, and who cannot use his power for causing any injury to her, except at the risk of losing the favours of Allah, because the wife is not his subordinate but in the words of Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) "the queen of her house" the Qur'an says.

*They (Woman) have rights like those of men against them, though men are above them. Allah is Almighty, all-knowing.*  
(Qur'an, 2:228).

To Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the woman was not an organ of the Devil" but - Muhsanah – a fortress against Satan. He gave the most Honourable position to mothers when he said, "Paradise lies under the feet of the mother" (*The Position of women in Islam. A Comparative Study p.24*).

Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, enjoined the acquisition of knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim man and Woman ( *Ibn Majah Sunanu. Vol. I Hadith NO 224.*).

The marital union of man and woman had been viewed with disapproval and regarded as derogatory to a man in certain religions. But Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, laid it down once and for all:

Marriage is part of my way and whoever dislikes my way is not from me (i.e., is not my follower. ( *Sahih Bukhari P:2 Hadith No 1 Volume 7*).

When a man has married, he has completed one half of his religion. (Baihaqi). ((Khurshid. *The position of women in Islam A comparative study P:24*).

Allah says:

*And of his (God's) signs is this: He created for your help mates from (among) your Selves that you might find solace in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy." ( Qur'an 30:21)*

He taught us with nobility towards them, for they are our mothers, daughters, and aunts. The Prophet, said:-

*The world and everything in the world is precious, but the most precious thing is a virtuous woman ( Ibn Majah, Vol II. Hadith No: 1467 P:69.).*

In other religions, women do not enjoy status as women because some see them as a necessary evil. Some say that they don't have a soul, are the gateway to Hell, and some regard

them as man's property inherited after his death. Before the advent of Islam, women were in miserable conditions.

The birth of a daughter in a family was not the occasion for rejoicing. In Islam, a woman is an independent personality. She can be educated. She can enter into business. She is entitled to inherit, as mother, wife, sister, and daughter, unknown in any other religion, not something inherited, Allah (S.W.T) said.

*There is a share for men and a share for women from what is left by parents and those nearest related, whether the property by small, large, a determinate share.'*

And Allah also said.

*Allah commands you as regarding your (Children's) inheritance; to the male, a portion equal to that of two females, if (there are a) only daughter, two or more, their share is two-thirds of the inheritance, if only one, her share is a half (Qur'an: 4:11)*

In the religion of Islam, a woman is given the liberty to choose her husband. The Prophet (S.A.W) instructed men concerning women in his farewell address provided at the time of his last pilgrimage to Makah. Fear Allah in dealing with your women because you have taken them in your trust.

## **CONCLUSION**

Conclusively Islam gives Women status that no religion in the world has given her. Islam considers her as a human with equal status with any man; Women are the family centers, the primary custodians of cultural, social and fundamental values of the society. No society or community can develop fully without their co-operation, understanding and effective participation. The Qur'an gives women rights similar to that of men. She can inherit, buy, and sell; if she is wronged or harmed, she is entitled to compensation just like a man. The equality of women and men is an essential characteristic of a Quranic society. The claim of the non- Muslim critics that Islam denigrates women are denied emphatically by the Qur'an Allah said:

*One Day you shall see the believing men and the believing women, now their light runs forward before them and by their right hands. (Their greeting will be): Good News for you this Day! Garden beneath which flow rivers! To dwell therein forever! This is indeed the highest Achievement. ((Qur'an 57:12).*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

We recommended more research on the status of women in an attempt to highlight the position of women in other religion and to bring peaceful and lovely couples into societies under the leadership of Man. Man in Islam is fully responsible for maintaining his wife, children, and some



needy relatives, especially females. This responsibility is neither waived nor reduced because of his wife's wealth or because of her access to any personal income gained from work, rent profit, or any other legal means.

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