

Status of Woman in Family Life: In the light views of ancient civilizations and religions

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Abstract:

Different civilizations and followers of different religions have various approaches towards women. The most pathetic thing is that women are portrayed as suppressed, slave, degraded and worst creature. She is considered as a commodity who is there just to fulfill the needs. They resort to violence as in their perspective she is the root cause of evil. She is considered as an apple of discard. On the contrary Islam gives women their rightful place in the family life based on principles of Justice and equity, which the civilizations of the world are deprived. This article covers this aspect of civilization and religious beliefs in which women are termed as villainous, responsible for all negative things. It also discusses rights given Islam to women.

Key Words: Family life, women, civilizations, religious, commodity, root cause of evil, Apple of discard. Rights of women in Islam.

Ancient and modern developed civilizations have always remained unbalanced regarding woman. The family system depends on woman. Therefore, whenever oppression and brutality against woman were declared as a civilization and they were regarded degraded and subordinate, it proved to be alarm of destruction and deterioration for the whole society. Many so-called devolved nations were destroyed and degraded when they regarded birth of a girl a bad omen, and considered woman cause of calamities and disasters. This is because a life of woman that is based on satisfaction and justice guarantees a successful family, a good society and a prosperous nation. Otherwise, not only woman is exploited but also a family is destroyed.

Therefore, Islam gives the woman rights and protection according to her status, honor and dignity.

In this article we have discussed theories and beliefs of other civilizations and religions which are based on oppression and negative views regarding woman.

On other hand, we have also presented the views of Islam which are based on justice, whereas all modern and ancient civilizations and religions do not have these such views.

Greek civilization and women

Greek civilization is one of the most ancient civilizations people of Greece are the ones whose civilization is the most famous in the world. Their region was the center of civilization. The advanced in sciences, arts and development, and paved the way for various civilizations of the world. Dr. Khali Alawi writes:

“Muslim socialists have begun the mention of the Pre-Islamic social conditions from Greece, because it once had been leader of world in sciences and civilization. Many scientific, political, social, academic and philosophical theories are derived from Greece. It has founded political and social stability”.¹

Despite being a developed civilization and giving the world political and social stability, the Greek civilization presents women as slave. Syed Jalaluddin Umari writes,

“Despite this development they that women had very lowest status; they deemed them to be burden on humanity. They thought that women had no purpose other than serving their family like servant.”²

This shows that according to their views woman only played role of servant or slave-girl, and they were burden on the society. Even their philosophers thought that woman was dishonored and not respected, as the famous philosopher, Socrates, writes,

“There is nothing more mischievous more than women, they are like a poisonous tree which looks beautiful but when a bird eats from it, it dies”.³

The Greek people deprived women of their basic rights, because of which they had no authority in marriage, divorce, legacy, purchase and sale etc. as it appears from the following quote:

“According general point of view of common Greek people, woman had status of a slave to watch out the house and its stuff. There was nearly no difference between her and slaves of her husband. She did not have the right to marry on her choice, rather

people would marry her off to anyone they wanted. She could not obtain divorce, but if she was unable to give birth to children or her husband did not like her, he could divorce her. Her husband could gift her any friend before his death and she had to accept it. She had no authority to sell anything. They considered her worse than Devil. They would be happy on the birth of a boy, and would be sorrowful, if a girl was born.”⁴

Moreover, they regarded her as a movable property, as it is mentioned by Abdul Qayyum Nadwi,

“The Greek would declare woman possession of her husband, and considered her a movable property.”⁵

Roman Civilization and Women

Roman Civilization is also one of the developed civilizations. It rose after Greek Civilization. In their civilization, woman was behaved like a slave. Her personal independence was exploited. She was considered as a slave of her father and husband, and thus was deprived of her rights. Dr. Hafiz Sani Mentions the status of woman in the Roman civilization in the following words,

“Ancient Romans would behave women in same way Hindus did; woman was under the rule of her father, husband or sons. At the time of rise of their civilization, they thought that her feet should not be freed from chains, nor shoes should be removed from her neck. They held the view that when woman gave authority to a man or entered his family by marriage, she would not be able to leave him or get divorced.”⁶

This shows that woman did not have any authority over her personal life; she was slave of man in the society. Man could impose on her rules of his choice whenever he wanted. Sometimes, he would deprive her of laughing, speaking and eating meat. There were special locks which were put on mouths so that they should not speak, as it is mentioned by Moulana Abul Kalam Azad. He says,

“Roman men had prohibited their women from eating meat, laughing, and speaking. Moreover, they had locked their mouths with locks called “morseas”. This was situation of common women, but all of them, whether rich or poor, noble or ignoble, educated or ignorant, were in the same condition”.⁷

This cruel behavior reached its peak when woman was degraded and was used for vulgarity and nudeness, as the following quote depicts the situation,

“A game called Flora was very popular among Romans, because naked women would run in it. There was another custom that man and woman took bath together in the same place. Vulgar and immoral topics were written openly in the Roman Literature. The most popular literature was which had no metaphorical or figurative language.”⁸

Judaism and Woman

Judaism is one of the religions which not only presented beliefs and theories but also has discussed practical issues based on these beliefs in detail. Hence it was expected from this religion that it will express factual views about woman, but it, like other religions, did not give the woman a proper status. Jews would belittle woman and held her responsible for every mistake. They thought about women that they are ones to commit the first mistake of the world, and because of this mistake human beings came down to the earth and an endless chain of sins started.

It is written in the authentic Jewish Encyclopedia,

“The first mistake took place because of encouragement of a wife. Therefore, she has been made subordinate of her husband, and the husband is her ruler. Husband is her owner and she is property of her husband.”⁹

Status that was given to women by Judaism was not different from what was given by other civilizations; in this religion, also, woman was made slave and subordinate of men. Even her basic rights were given to man; she was completely helpless before the authority of men. He could divorce her whenever he wanted.

Chohdri Ghulam Rasool Cheema writes,

“The shari’a of Moses had always made women slaves and subordinates of men.”¹⁰

Christian Sane Arthur writes in his book, “Iran in the era of Sasanis”,

“Status that has been given to woman is not better than that of slaves and subordinates; she can do anything without permission of her husband. The husband can drive her out of home, or divorce her whenever he wants, but she cannot ask for divorce, even though man is full of faults.”¹¹

It means, according to them, if a man has fulfilled his purpose from woman, he can leave her declaring her useless, rather he can get rid of her in a painful way. On the

other hand, if the woman wants to free herself from man because of his immoral behavior or otherwise, she had no right to demand divorce.

Christianity and Woman

Christianity has very strict and extreme Viewpoint about woman. It not only humiliated and degraded her but also declared her guilty against humanity. According to it, woman is root of every evil, cause of sins and source of all human disasters. Chrisom System, who was one of the greatest saints, has portrayed a dangerous image of woman, as he says,

“An evitable evil, a whisper by birth, a dear calamity, a private danger, a robbing attraction, a beautiful disaster”¹²

According to Christianity, man is ruler and women is subordinate, because, in fact, woman was created for him. Therefore, she should serve and obey him. Man was not created for her, hence he has no need to be under her rule.

Chrisom System wrote a letter to Apostle Jonson in the following words,

“Man is not from woman, rather woman is from man and man is not created for woman, rather woman is created for man. Therefore women should keep a sign of slavery on their heads.”¹³

In Christian law tried to keep women in the lowest degree. They had no rights; they had no even over their own earnings. All authorities were held by men. She had no right of divorce or Khula. It seems that Christianity tried its best to keep her degraded and restricted. Woman had no status, in Christian World, other than being a helpless creature and a toy in hands of men.

Hinduism and Women

Hinduism which is proud of its civilization, has left no stone unturned to degrade women. Although some texts of Vedas has discussed honor of the woman, according to it, it is duty of woman to obey the man and to be ruled by him. Hindus, on one hand, practice monogamy. On the other hand, they say that if a man or woman is unable to give birth to a child, the husband can ask his wife to have sexual relationship with another person so that she can have children.

It is written in Rig Veda,

“When the husband is impotent and does not have power, he will say to his wife, O fond of marriage, wish for another man, as you will not be able to bear children with me. In this case, she should have sexual relationship with another person, but she must have courage to remain in the marriage of her husband.”¹⁴

It is cruel to order a woman to have relationship with another person despite being married to one. Such a humiliation of woman is found only in Hinduism.

In Mato Samarti, she has been ordered to keep the man happy. It says,

“If the woman does not keep her husband happy and does not try to fulfill his desires, their family will not increase because of his displeasure. Women should be restricted through Sati. They should be cared by the father in their childhood, by their husbands in their youth and by the sons in their old age, because they cannot be independent.”¹⁵

“In Hinduism there are separate ways of salvation for man and woman; man can get salvation with his deeds and power, but woman cannot achieve salvation without dying for her husband; she cannot get salvation directly from God.”¹⁶

Dying for the husband means Sati (being burned with her dead husband.) in Hinduism she is not only deprived of inheritance, but also she is burned with her husband.

Buddhism and Women

When woman was being victimized by old customs and injustice and she did not have right to give an opinion, Buddha tried to give her equality in such environment and society and made efforts to provide her with honor and dignity. But at the same time, according to Buddhist beliefs and views, woman is an obstacle in religious duties and spiritual progress.

In order to get salvation, it is necessary to avoid woman. Hence Buddhists being believe in monasticism and they say that life that is without marriage and disconnected from society is an exemplary life.

A famous author, Lewis Morris says,

“Although Buddha had included women in group and women could become nuns like men but the main purpose of Buddhism was to keep women away from men. Because monasticism was important for them and not the lust and desires of man.”¹⁷

It has been emphasized in Buddhism that one should be away from women purify oneself, to get salvation and achieve spiritual progress.

Dr. Hafiz Sani has shed light on the Buddhist theory of monasticism in the following words,

“According to the teachings of Buddhist, woman obstructs from performing religious duties. It is necessary to avoid woman in order to get salvation. Woman is a big obstacle in the way of salvation. The same views are found in the teachings of Buddha. He has ordered his followers to terminate their relations with women if they wanted salvation. So he himself practiced this theory and abandoned his beloved daughter and lived in the mountains”.¹⁸

In Buddhism, women have been given equality on one hand. On the other hand, they have confined them in their homes declaring their social life dangerous for the religion. If a religion denies marriage while ordering its followers to keep away from women, it opens way of fornication for people.

Woman in Islam

Reformers of different civilizations and religions have always denied dignity, value, status and importance of woman, and most of them considered woman as an animal. But when the religion of Islam rose, it saved woman from oppression and injustice of other civilizations. Unlike other religions, Islam has given the woman a highest degree, and provided her with dignity in place of insult, love instead of hate and rise in place of fall. Moreover, it has pointed out her rights and has given her same position and identification those of men.

Allah Ta,ala says,

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً

O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife (Hawwa/Eve), and from them both He created many men and women.¹⁹

Right of (Nikah) Marriage

Islam has declared *Nikah* higher than mere enjoyment and fulfillment of one's lust. *Nikah* implies protection of chastity and piety. *Nikah* is an Islamic agreement which makes both husband and wife responsible for giving each other's rights and carrying out their duties.

Allah Ta,ala says,

فَانكُحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ

Then marry (other) women of your choice.²⁰

Islam has allowed not only men to marry women of their choice, but it also given the women choice to marry men of their choice, and ordered the parents/guardians to ask for their permission. Prophet Muhammad sallallahu alaihi wa sallam said:

لَا تُنكحُ الأَيِّمَ حَتَّى تُسْتَأْمَرَ، وَلَا تُنكحُ البِكْرَ حَتَّى تُسْتَأْذَنَ

“A divorcee or widow should not be married without her permission and a virgin girl must not enter wedlock until she approves.”²¹

This hadith shows that Islam has given the woman choice in agreement of *Nikah* in family life.

Right of *Mahr* (Dowry)

The right of dowry which is given to woman by Islam is far better than that given by other religions and societies and it is based on moderation. This has increased the value and status of woman.

Allah Ta,ala says,

فَمَا اسْتَمْتَعْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْهُنَّ فَآتُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً

So with those of whom you have enjoyed sexual relations, give them their *Mahr* as prescribed.²²

Also, they have the right to take less than what is due for them,

Allah Ta,ala says in another verse,

وَآتُوا النِّسَاءَ صَدُقَاتِهِنَّ نِحْلَةً فَإِنْ طِبْنَ لَكُمْ عَنْ شَيْءٍ مِنْهُ نَفْسًا فَكُلُوهُ هَنِيئًا مَرِيئًا

And give to the women (whom you marry) their *Mahr* (obligatory bridal money given by husband to his wife at the time of marriage) with a good heart; but if they, of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take it, and enjoy it without fear of any harm (as Allah has made it lawful).²³

If someone only holds Nikah with a woman and he divorces before he brings her to home, there are two possibilities: 1) if they have appointed a dowry, he will pay half of it. 2) And if they did appoint a dowry, he has to pay according to his financial position.

Right of *Khula*

The main purpose of marriage is that both man and woman should remain in this relation in order to spend a life of chastity and keep this relation forever. However, sometimes they reach a stage where it is necessary and useful to end this relation. Therefore, Islam has given the man right of divorce.

Allah Ta,ala says,

الطَّلَاقُ مَرَّتَانٍ فَإِمْسَاكٌ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٌ بِإِحْسَانٍ

The divorce is twice, after that, either you retain her on reasonable terms or release her with kindness.²⁴

It means if a person has divorced his wife two times, he has the right to keep as a wife, otherwise he should leave her in a good way.

Islam gives the husband the right for Talaq (divorce). Moreover, Islam grants the wife the right to dissolve the marriage through what is known as *Khula*'.

Allah Ta,ala says,

فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا فِيمَا افْتَدَتْ بِهِ

(Then if you fear that they would not be able to keep the limits ordained by Allah, then there is no sin on either of them if she gives (the *Mahr* or the part of it) for her *Al-Khulu* (Divorce)²⁵

Here, Allah Ta,ala has given the woman the choice that if she is not satisfied with her marital life and dislikes her husband for his immoral behavior or for other reasons, Islam has allowed her to pay an amount and get herself freed from him.

Right of Expenses

Islam has declared expenses and residence a basic right of woman, which is the important element of Islamic Law and family life. Even in case of *Rajai Talaq* (Temporary Divorce) Islam holds the husband responsible to pay his wife expenses for her daily needs.

Allah Ta,ala says,

لِيُنْفِقْ ذُو سَعَةٍ مِنْ سَعَتِهِ وَمَنْ قُدِرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقُهُ فَلْيُنْفِقْ مِمَّا آتَاهُ اللَّهُ

Let the rich man spend according to his means; and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him.)²⁶

It means husband should provide his wife with daily expenses and residence, as it is vital part of Islamic law and family life.

Right of Inheritance

One of the family life right is inheritance in which woman deserves a share of men's property. The law of Inheritance applies on blood relation for which it is essential to carry out Nikah (marriage). It means that there are two great and basic reasons for inheritance: Nikah and Blood relation.

The following verse mentions the portion of man or women in case one of spouses dies:

وَلَكُمْ نِصْفُ مَا تَرَكَ أَزْوَاجُكُمْ إِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُنَّ وَلَدٌ فَإِنْ كَانَ لَهُنَّ وَلَدٌ فَلَكُمْ الرُّبْعُ مِمَّا تَرَكَنَّ مِنْ بَعْدِ وَصِيَّةٍ يُوصِينَ بِهَا أَوْ دَيْنٍ

In that which your wives leave, your share is a half if they no child; but if they leave a child, you get a fourth of that which they leave after payment of legacies that they may have bequeathed or debts.²⁷

He says about the share of women,

وَلَهُنَّ الرُّبْعُ مِمَّا تَرَكَنَّ إِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَكُمْ وَلَدٌ فَإِنْ كَانَ لَكُمْ وَلَدٌ فَلَهُنَّ الثُّمُنُ مِمَّا تَرَكَتُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ وَصِيَّةٍ تُوصُونَ بِهَا أَوْ دَيْنٍ

in that which you leave, their (your wives) share is a fourth if you leave no child; but if you leave a child, they get an eighth of that which you leave after payment of legacies that you may have bequeathed or debts.²⁸

According to Quran and Sunnah, women have right of inheritance, but nowadays they are deprived of this right. Some people marry them off to the Holy Quran. Sometimes they are deprived of this right only because they do not belong the tribe or family of their husbands. These acts are practiced in tribal and rural areas. Due to these customs, women seem to be a degraded, oppressed, slave and subordinate, whereas they are not a stained creature, nor are they created as slaves, as is it appears from the practical views of different civilizations and religions that woman is not only a subordinate but also she has no right to live and they have no specific right in family system.

Islam is the only religion which makes followers of all religions and civilizations aware of rights of women, shows them their status and value and gives them right of protection and dignity, because protection of family and society depends on them. Therefore woman has been held responsible for her husband's possessions, house and children. Due to this responsibility given by Islam to woman, it taken care of her dignity, value, status and protection so that family life continues smoothly.

Conclusion

It is can be concluded from this article that both modern theories and ancient developed civilizations and religions have had different views about woman which were unbalanced and based on oppression and exploitation, whereas woman plays a basic role in family life. In other words, rights of protection for woman imply rights of protection for family. Therefore, Islam provides woman with rights which are based on justice, and no civilization or religion is able to present such an example.

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