

Women, Islam and Pakistan

A Comparative approach to understand the
contemporary women rights debate in Pakistan

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Abstract:

This paper puts forward the problems faced by women based on ecclesiastical laws specifically in Pakistan and aims to shed light on the contemporary debate between feminism and Islam. As we have entered the 21st century where women have accomplished a lot in every field, the women in the Muslim world continue to struggle for an autonomous identity. The root of this denounced status of women is seemingly found in the basic teachings of Islam. However, this paper argues that the subjugation of women could be a result of patriarchal interpretations of the Islamic teachings and not Islam itself. Moreover, this paper tries to bridge the gap between general principles of feminism and Islamic rights of women by providing an introduction to the contemporary debate between western feminism and Islamic feminism and taking in account the detailed status of women in Pakistan, historically and contemporarily.

Hypothesis:

To understand the rights of Muslim women the role of religion cannot be ignored and Islam as a religion does not treat women as inferior to men; it is the patriarchal interpretations which do so as Fatima Mernissi has stated: “The manipulation of sacred text has always been a structural characteristic of the practice of power in Muslim societies”.

At the same time rights of Muslim women cannot be viewed under the same light as rights western women because the demand for freedom from western feminists is not harmonious to the call of liberation of Muslim women.

Literature Review:

William Montgomery Watt’s paper “Women in the Earliest Islam” (1991) has suggested that early Islam was at all points concerned with providing women their rights in all areas whereas patriarchal interpretations such that of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in his book “Women between Islam and Western Society” (2001) promote that basic biological difference compels women to lead a prosperous life inside the closed doors of the house while the men work outside because nature has created men to be a stronger sex and woman to be a weaker one, however, acknowledging the fact that there are rights given to women in Islam. Contrary to that some notable western people (Sarah Wollaston 2013; Annie V. Sommer and Samuel M. Zwemer 1907; Donna Arzt 1990; Donald Trump 2015) argue that Islam does not treat women as equal to men and that Muslim Women do not have any freedom to lead their life. For the counter argument in this research paper the works of leading Islamic scholars and Muslim feminists like Dr. Amina Wadud, Aziza Yahya Hibri, Dr. Ali Shariati, Fatima Mernissi, Ziba Mir Husseini, Muhammad Hashim Kamali, Dr. Murad Wilfried Hoffman and others have been consulted. Their contribution to the subject matter led to the conclusion that over the time period of fourteen hundred years, Islamic scripture has been a subject to corruption because of numerous prevailing interpretations and these interpretations because of their male-bias nature have contributed to the subjugation of women and therefore to provide women their rights their remains a need of re-interpreting the sources of Islamic jurisprudence.

Methodology:

Design: This particular research is a Cross-Sectional study which exploring the status of women given to them by their religion in comparison to that given to them by the society they live in. It is a qualitative exploratory study which aims to understand how different interpretations of the sacred texts of Islam impact the exercising of women rights in the contemporary Muslim world. Secondary sources such as journal articles, books, academic research papers and newspaper are conferred with, wherever required.