

STATUS OF WOMAN IN ALLAMA MUHAMMAD IQBAL'S THOUGHT

Dr Ali Raza Tahir

Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy,

University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Email: dralirazatahir@gmail.com

Cell: 0333-4101412

Abstract: Human history is filled with a lot of controversies on women rights. In this respect, there are different approaches in different perspectives throughout the history. Now, the world has been squeezed in a smart phone. Despite the multiple divisions, diversities, and diversions in humankind, the people of all the religions, cultures, societies, and civilizations are related with each other. In these days, there is no island and no one can live in an island. Women rights, gender studies, gender equality, feminism, and anti-feminism etc. are the burning issues in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies. Woman is the nucleus of human society. Allama Dr Muhammad Iqbal is one of the most renowned, valuable, venerated and intellectual Muslim personalities of the 20th century. He was of opinion that both the Eastern and the Western nations have not acknowledged, recognized, and realized the importance of the role of woman in nation building. In his whole prose and poetic work, he described the rights, duties, status and role of a woman in making of humanity. In this article, we have tried to elaborate and evaluate his approach on this; the most important and vital issue.

Key Words: Women Rights, Gender Equality, Islam, Modern West, Humankind, History, Iqbal.

Preamble

Man and woman are the complements of each other. Nature has delegated some specific roles to both man and woman, which are inevitable for the existence and continuation of humankind. Woman is the nucleus of human society and an axis of all human activities. Future of humankind depends upon the determination of the reasonable, suitable, justified, balanced, and prestigious role of a woman in society. Human history is filled with a lot of controversies on women rights. In this respect, there are different approaches in different perspectives throughout the history. Now, the world has been squeezed in a smart phone. Despite the multiple divisions, diversities, and diversions in humankind, the people of all the religions, cultures, societies, and civilizations are related with each other. In these days, there is no island and no one can live in an island. Women rights, gender studies, gender equality, feminism, and anti-feminism etc. are the burning issues in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies.

Woman in Ancient Eastern and Western Civilizations

Before the emergence of Islam there was no respectable and reasonable role of a woman in society. In all ancient civilizations i.e. Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian and Persian, she had been treated worse than animals. All powers, authorities, commands and rights were for male. She was not more than a handmaiden, slave and servant. She had no right, respect, prestige, status, value, opinion and role. She was considered impure. She had been treated as a material entity to which one can sale, purchase, use, or obliterate without any reason. Before Islam, in Arab civilization, the birth of a girl was considered a curse and a cause of deep sorrow and shame for father. Quran depicted this state as follows:

When news is brought to one of them of (the birth of) a female (child) his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain it on (sufferance and) contempt or bury it in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide on! (Al-Quran 16: 58-59).

Movements of Women Rights and Feminism-Historical Background

Although Greek age is known as the age of reason but unfortunately woman had been considered inferior than man. In medieval period there was no freedom of thought, choice and action for an individual. In this age authority was with religious clerics and woman had no value. With

the beginning of the era of renaissance in 1453, the discussions about Human rights also emerged in the West (Wright 1941, 7). Intellectuals and philosophers in this respect contributed a lot. Freedom and equality were the main areas of discussion. The renaissance had broken out with a revolt against religious authorities. Modern West laid her foundation on reason and negated all authorities and standards prior to reason. Further, from Bruno to Freud three major blows snatched the crown of reverence from human being. These three blows were:

- Negation of the Geocentric theory (Bruno 1548-1600)
- Man is an animal only (Darwin 1809-1882)
- Human being is a sick animal (Freud 1856-1939)
(Palmer 1941, 7)

Along with the above mentioned ideological transformations, following grave changes occurred in practical spheres of life:

- Separation of church from state
- Democracy instead of theocracy
- Capitalism as economic system
- Reason as value determinist

With the passage of time science revolutionized the world and became the driving force in all fields. Inventions, discoveries and advancement of science and technology in all fields changed the thought structure, life style, feelings, pleasures, displeasures, emotions, passions, merits, demerits, values, and standards of good and evil. In a healthy society, economics should follow morality. Morality should never follow economics. But unfortunately, in capitalistic societies morality has become dependent on economics. Humankind entered in a new era of material development and enhancement of capital. Leading nations spread the net of industries. The miseries of two world wars had shaken the faith of human being on him. Disasters and calamities of the world wars had absolutely changed the scenario of the world. Philosophers had raised the slogans of identity, self, freedom and equality forcefully (Existentialism). But they were facing another severe problem-the problem of criterion. Question aroused, what would be the criterion of freedom and rights? How would they determine the values? There was no criterion for intellectuals because previously they had rejected every standard prior to reason and sense perception. On the other hand, for them, human being was not a sacred creation. He was either an animal or a sick animal. He had no reverence and special position in this scheme of universe. He was mere a material entity like other material things which had no goal of his life.

Meanwhile, in developed countries economic culture was in the process of transformation from feudalism to capitalism. Industrialists had spread a net of factories in all over the countries. They had the need of low cost labor. So, industrialists high jacked the slogan of women rights. Women were ambitious to get freedom and equality. To fulfill the demands of industrialists and business tycoons, legislations on women rights were done in parliaments. Women gained the rights of freedom and equality. They were free to go out from the houses for work. While industrialists succeeded to get low cost non problematic labor and women fell in a new kind of enslavement. Industrialists encouraged women and child labor. In industries all vacancies were for women. In those days they used to mention in advertisements that male labor was not required. It shows that women labor was how much economic and beneficial for capitalists. Due to the in abundance in production, industrialists had the need of customers and consumers. At second stage they began to use woman in sale, purchase and advertisement with all humiliating ways. No doubt woman got the freedom to go out anywhere with her own will but she fell in an enslavement of a new kind. She had been thrown out of homes. She had been disconnected from families. She had to work maximum hours in offices, factories, clubs, streets, shops, plazas and markets. She had to face lustful looks. She was deprived of care, security, love, affection and feelings. She lost her delicateness and softness. She lost the relation of love, confidence, sacredness and kindness with her husband. Due to the breaking of family bond she was bound to bear all expenditures by herself. (Durant 1995, 142) If she wants to be a mother, nobody will take care of her. If she had a baby then she had no time to love, care, educate, train and groom her baby. She was bound to leave her baby in day care center and to go at her work place at any cost. She became a material thing like other material products which have no passions, emotions, feelings and desires. Her modesty was at stake everywhere. She lost her identity. She had been considered a soulless thing. No doubt western woman got a lot materially but lost a lot spiritually.

Two kinds of Victimization in Eastern and Western Societies

Unfortunately, Eastern societies did not consider a woman a human being (Mutahri 1941, 7). In Eastern societies her birth was a curse. They treated her like a slave and animal. On the other side, Western societies raised the slogans of rights, freedom, and equality but considered her as an inorganic entity which has no soul, will, inner self, values, objectives, noble passions, feelings, emotions, liking, disliking, desires and pleasures. East ignored her as an independent human being, while

West considered her selfless article. In East, she was confined in houses to serve without her own will, desire or demand while in West she was free to move but like animals. Modern Philosophies and ideologies succeeded to realize her that she was not only an animal (Darwinian approach) but a sick animal also. (Freudian view point) She had no higher value. For her, there was no purpose of life. The only pleasure for her was the fulfillment of lust. All the resources had been used to enhance the desires. She was compelled to fulfill her all needs and meet all expenditures by herself. Every field was open for her to work either that was suitable with her personality, modesty and physical structure or not. She had to work to live. It was a deception on the name of freedom and equality. Now she was in a vicious circle; the circle of earning of money and fulfillment of lust.

Consequently, due to the lack of higher values and aim of life, now the woman of West is facing a sever crises-the crises of identity and the crises of self. Now, she is living to earn and consume only. She has no goal of life. In the end she is looser absolutely and capitalists, industrialists, and business men are gainer ultimately. Woman was in prison in ancient civilizations but now she is also in an enslavement of a new kind.

Woman in Iqbal's thought

Iqbal (1877-1938) is one of the most renowned, valuable, venerated and intellectual Muslim personalities of the 20th century. He was a theologian, philosopher, politician, mystic and wisdom poet. He had a firm belief in Islam. The spirit of Quran is in the basis of his thought. He enriched his vision with a thorough study of ancient civilizations, and the advancements of the modern West with deep insight and scholarship. The fountain head of the teachings of Islam is Quran. The exemplary life of the Prophet of Islam is a role model for a Muslim. According to Quran, Almighty Allah has created every creature and everything of this universe according to a plan and a scheme. In this scheme every particle has its goal. Nothing has been created without a purpose. From earth to heaven, particle to desert, flower to garden, planet to galaxy, and from a drop of water to river, every creation has its specific, unique and inevitable role. There are different grades and levels of creation. All existents are interrelated. Nothing has been created vague, and in vain. This universe is not due to a big bang, chemical reactions, or sudden happening. The emergence of human being is not by the process of evolution (Darwin's theory of evolution). He has been created as a rational and conscious being with a specific identity and reverence on

the very first day. Human being is at the highest rank in all existents. The ultimate nature of human being is good. He has been made on the best make. So, he has the highest responsibility and role among all. He has been appointed as vicegerent of Almighty Allah in earth to fulfill His will. The fulfillment of divine will is not possible without the determination of the role of both man and woman. Both man and woman are sacred and reverent. Both have equal opportunity to develop their potentials. Both have to play their specific role in this universe. No one is superior to other. Superiority is only for the doers of good. Human being is not a compelled being. Everyone has a freedom of choice and will. Every subservient would be rewarded and each disobedient would be punished either that is a male or a female. Almighty Allah described a special status and reverence of woman in Quran. Origin of man and woman is same (Al-Quran 4: 1). Eve was not responsible for the deception of Adam by devil. Devil misguided both (Al-Quran 2: 35). Almighty Allah talked with the mother of Moses directly (Quran 28: 7). Christ's mother Marry was at so high rank that Almighty Allah sent her angels on her to reveal His messages (Al-Quran 19:17). Men and women are the protectors of each other (Quran 2: 187). Woman is the source of love, kindness and peace for a man (Al-Quran 30: 21). In the light of the teachings of Islam, Iqbal rejected the approach of ancient Greek philosophers that woman is inferior to man (Russell 1969, 159). He also differed from the standpoint of Bible that in heaven Adam was misguided by Eve (Bible 1916, 108).

He condemned the dishonoring remarks of medieval literature that woman had fermented from sin and had an incarnation of devil. He denied monasticism, according to which, to attain piety and purification, one should keep him away from woman. He extremely negated the views of eastern societies, religions and cultures that women should be detained and confined in homes. He denounced their approach that woman has no role in society.

Iqbal observed also both the Eastern and the Western civilizations of 20th century closely with deep insight. He was an inhabitant of subcontinent. This land was a mixture of different and multiple religions and civilizations. He was an eye witness of the poor status and miseries of the Muslim and non Muslim women of subcontinent. He went Europe in 1905 for higher studies. He lived in London for three years (1905-1907). In these three years, he studied and observed the Western civilization directly. He reached at the conclusion that both the Eastern and the Western nations have not acknowledged, recognized, and realized the importance of the woman. He realized that in both

civilizations (Eastern and Western), woman has no identity, no rights, no prestige, no role, no opinion, and no voice. He says that the woman of the East and the West is facing the same fundamental crisis-the crisis of identity. For Iqbal, this crisis rolls down a society in a spiritual and moral disaster. Neither the East nor the West has recognized her position and role in the scheme of universe. Nature has blessed woman with special traits which are specific with her. No one society has provided woman the favorable atmosphere to nourish, develops, promote and actualize the natural and God gifted potentials. In the East, woman has been victimized on the name of pseudo religions, customs, and traditions. While in the West, she has been sacrificed for the sake of deceptive slogans-slogans of rights, equality, and freedom. All are the tactics to trap her. The East trapped her to enslave and the West trapped her for lust. Both have never realized and acknowledged the gravity of her role. Both societies have exploited her either on the name of honor or for the slogan of equal rights. If in one society she is confined in houses to preserve so-called pseudo religious and cultural values then in other she has been pulled out from homes and has been thrown in hostels, parks, roads, offices, factories, hotels, beaches and clubs on the name of freedom, equality, modernity, rights, and culture. Subcontinent was under British imperialism from 19th to first half of the 20th century. People of Subcontinent were following the ruling elite's values with neck break speed, without realizing the differences of both civilizations. Iqbal comprehended the issue, analyzed the slogans of women rights, and equality, and disclosed their disastrous effects for humankind. He absolutely disapproved western standpoint in respect of women rights, freedom, and equality. According to Iqbal, modern west had laid foundations of her material civilization on the ashes of spiritual and moral values. He considered it a great danger for humankind. He said material development would not be a substitute of deterioration of values, destruction of family system and miseries of broken houses. Deprivation of higher values and absence of goal in life will ruin the coming generations (Iqbal 2005, 167).

Contrary to above approaches Iqbal presented his point of view in respect of women rights and duties in the light of the teachings of the Quran. Reverence and wellbeing of humanity is the ultimate goal of Iqbal's philosophy (Iqbal 1973, 793). For Iqbal, wellbeing of human kind is not possible without the development of the personality of woman in society. To proceed with above approach, Iqbal addressed following three main questions in both his poetic and prose work:

- What is Truth?

- What is Human being?
- What is Universe? (12)

The analysis, description and evaluation of above questions revealed on Iqbal different dimensions and aspects of God, man and universe relationship, development of human personality, basic principles for the development and salvation of humanity, the main crises of the modern age and the importance of the role of woman in the scheme of world. Iqbal reached at the conclusion that in all the ages the crisis of the humankind is due to unawareness in recognition of identity, characteristics, and specific and significant role of woman. For Iqbal, woman is the heart of society and centre of gravity for human activities. In his both poetic and prose work Iqbal described the rights and role of woman as following:

Woman Rights

Iqbal was of opinion; religion was regional or geographic for Egyptians, Greeks and Indians, it was racial for Jews, while it was personal for Christians. However, in Islam, religion is human (Iqbal 1938, 224-225). The teachings of the Prophet of Islam in respect of women rights are remarkable. Both are equally reverent, respected, prestigious, and inevitable in scheme of life. However, both have some significant specific roles. Iqbal emphasizes that according to Quran, every human being has the fundamental right to develop personality. Both have equal right to actualize their potentials and develop their personalities. In this respect, there is no discrimination between man and woman. Distinction is only for a subservient and a pious either that is a man or a woman. (46) The 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' is the magnum opus of Iqbal's philosophical thought. The fourth lecture of this book is under the title; 'The Human Ego-His Freedom and Immortality' (Iqbal 1989, 76). In this lecture Iqbal discussed that man and woman have the equal right to develop their ego without any gender discrimination (146). Similarly in masterpiece of his poetic work; *Secrets of Self and Selflessness* (Iqbal 1973, 81). Iqbal has addressed to both male and female and described the fundamental principles which are helpful in the development of ego. He said both man and woman have been equally blessed with a specific potential; *Ego*. They should develop their Ego. However, both have different fields of actions, duties, liabilities and responsibilities, which are specific with each (Iqbal 2003, 63). Almighty Allah has created every male and female as a free being. In some respects Islam has provided more rights and special privilege to women than men (Iqbal 1904, 56). For a healthy society we must

provide spiritual, educational, marital, economical, and political rights to women (56).

According to the teachings of Islam, the first revelation of Allah to His last Prophet *Muhammad* is about knowledge. The Prophet of Islam himself said that the acquisition of knowledge is a religious duty of every Muslim either that is a man or woman. Iqbal put special emphasis on women education. Only educated women can play a role in the civilization of society and development of nation. The most basic reason of decline of Muslim community is the illiteracy of Muslim women. He said the nation whose one half is uneducated how its development would be possible. If we educate a man it would be the education of an individual but the education of a woman means the education of a family (Iqbal 1904, 52 -57).

Iqbal says that both genders have some specific fundamental roles and duties which nature has allotted to them due to their psychological and physical structure. In the performance of those duties no one can replace other. For example, motherhood is the most basic role to whom only a woman can perform. For Iqbal motherhood is the primary and fundamental duty of a woman and all other duties and roles are secondary. Woman is free to get education in all disciplines and to play her role in all fields but motherhood is the most basic responsibility. Iqbal said, a woman should never accept any role at the cost of motherhood. So that future of an individual, nation and humanity depends upon the role and contribution of mother (Iqbal 1973, 975). Foreheads of the mothers reflect the reasons of decline and rise of the nations (976). The most beautiful, desirable, acceptable, beneficial, prestigious and admirable role of woman for Iqbal is motherhood. Woman is the root and spring of culture and civilization. World is worth living due to women. Colors of life are due to women (Iqbal 2005, 606). All cultural and religious virtues are in two words; mother and wife. The love of mother is the source of patriotism while the love of wife is the source of divine love (Iqbal 1904, 56). Mother has the role of making of humanity. An infant has two basic needs; biological and spiritual. That is only mother who fulfills all needs of a child as a provider, protector, doctor, nurse, teacher, trainer, mentor, administrator, advisor, counselor, motivator, source of inspiration and safeguard (Iqbal 1973, 154). Holy Prophet of Islam said that the paradise of a child is under the feet of his/her mother (149). It describes the reverence and significance of the role of mother. All the dynamism in life and universe is due to mothers (150). Mother develops the characteristics of truth, faithfulness, brotherhood and sacrifice among children (331). Education which

deprives of a mother from her basic responsibilities is more fatal than death (Iqbal 2005, 608). Due to slogans of equality and freedom of western civilization, woman of the West has been deprived of motherhood which is extremely devastating (605). *Javed Nama* is one of the masterpieces of Iqbal's Persian poetic work. It is a long impressive, enchanting and imaginative poem which is full of wisdom. In it Iqbal supposes two women character '*Afrangeen*' and a Damsel of Mars. '*Afrangeen*' is the representative of the material vision of Western civilization. Damsel of Mars is the symbol of a misguided woman of the modern West. Damsel tries to convince the women that all the pains and humiliations of women are due to men. Motherhood is fatal for health, prosperity, and beauty of a woman. So, women should avoid themselves from marriage, family life, and motherhood. Marriage is a trap of men by which they lock up women in golden cages (Iqbal 1973, 641). Iqbal considers all such views a grave danger for the future of humankind and condemns strictly. For him, existence and continuity of human life is due to mothers. The institution of motherhood is the source of development of an individual, family system, society and civilization (657). So, we should educate and train women in such a way that they can fulfill the duty of motherhood. We should keep away our woman from the knowledge which deprives of her from insight. Therefore basically woman's education must be in accordance with her basic role i.e. motherhood.

Considering, then the peculiar nature of our community, the teachings of Islam, and the revelation of physiology and biology on the subject, it is clear that the Muslim women should continue to occupy the position in society which Islam has allotted to her. And position which has been allotted to her must determine the nature of education. I have tried to show above that the solidarity of our community rests on our hold on the religion and culture of Islam. The woman is the principal depository of the religious idea (Iqbal 2003, 62).

He further states in this regard:

In the interests of the continuous life, therefore, it is extremely necessary to give her, in the first place, a sound religious education. That must, be supplemented by a general knowledge of Muslim history, domestic economy, and hygiene. This will enable her to give a degree of intellectual companionship to her husband and successfully to do the duties of motherhood which, in my opinion, is the principle function of the woman. All subjects which have

tendency to de-womanize and to de-*Muslimise* her, must be carefully excluded from her education (63-64).

Here it is important to note that in general Iqbal's approach in respect of knowledge is very comprehensive. In his book 'The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' he says: "The truth is that all search for knowledge is essentially a form of prayer. The scientific observer of Nature is a kind of mystic seeker in the act of prayer" (Iqbal 1989, 73).

For Iqbal, above said limitations and determination in respect of woman's education is only to highlight her fundamental duties and role i.e. motherhood. So, one should comprehend Iqbal's intention that for a woman, education is an instrumental value while the motherhood is an intrinsic value.

Iqbal was not in favor of absolute equality in man and woman. He was of opinion that equality must be on the basis of equity. He criticized the western approach in respect of absolute equality in man and woman which has ruined their family system and bulldozed all spiritual, social, cultural, moral and human values. Iqbal says:

I am not an advocate of absolute equality between man and woman. It appears that nature has allotted different functions to them, and a right performance of these functions is equally indispensable for the health and prosperity of the human family. The so-called "emancipation of the western woman" necessitated by Western individualism, and the peculiar economic situation produced by an unhealthy competition, is an experiment, in my opinion, likely to fail, not without doing incalculable harm, and creating extremely intricate social problems. Nor the higher education of woman is likely to lead to any desirable consequences in so far as the birth rate of a community is concerned. Experience has already shown that the economic emancipation of woman in the West has not, as was expected, materially extended the production of wealth. On the other hand, it has a tendency to break up the psychical life of society (Iqbal 2003, 62-64).

Iqbal advocated that in Islam a woman has all educational, marital, economical, and political rights. Marriage without the consent of female is prohibited. Engaged couples should be allowed to see in presence of their parents. In this way they can understand each other and would be able to know the behavior and manners of each other (Iqbal 1965, 58).

Woman can get the right of divorce for herself at the time of marriage. She has the right to the custody of her children. She can do a business or trade freely and independently. Similarly, she has all political rights; right of vote, and right to be the head of state (Iqbal 1904, 58).

According to Muhammadan Law, a woman has the right to the custody of her children even after divorce. She can trade, contract and litigate in her own name. According to some lawyers, she can even be elected as the Caliph of Islam; she is entitled to maintenance from her husband besides the fixed dowry of secure which she can hold the whole property of her husband....The laws of divorce in Islam are also of great interest. The Muslim woman has equality of divorce with her husband. This, however, is secured in Muhammadan Law by his wife calling upon her husband at the time of marriage to delegate his right of divorce to her, to her father, brother or any stranger. This is technically known as "*tafviz*" that is to say, handing over, or transfer. The reason why this roundabout way of security is adopted, I leave to the lawyers of Europe to understand (Iqbal 2003, 307).

Exemplary Role for a Woman

For Iqbal, the most basic, fundamental and precious role of a woman is motherhood. According to Quran to be a mother, is the highest blessings of Almighty Allah for a woman. The Prophet of Islam held paradise of offspring under the feet of mothers (Maja 3662). Iqbal says that the ideal character for Muslim women and for all women is the exemplary life of the daughter of the Prophet *Fatima al Zahra*. She lived such an exemplary life that Prophet Muhammad conferred her title of 'The chief and the best of all women'. As a daughter and as a spouse, she was a pride of her father and of her husband *Ali* respectively. As a mother, she developed, educated, trained and groomed her sons *Hassan* and *Hussain* as the role models for the followers. Iqbal idealized the role played by the *Fatima al Zahra* as a daughter, wife, mother, manager and organizer therefore; he had a firm belief that western woman could not be the ideal of a Muslim woman. For ultimate success, the Muslim women should follow the ideal life of *Fatima al-Zahra* (Iqbal 1973, 153).

References

- Durant, Will. 1995. *The Pleasures of Philosophy*. Lahore: Service Book Club.
- Iqbal, Javed. 2008. *Khutbaat e Iqbal*. Lahore: Sang e Meel Publications.
- Iqbal, Muhammad. 1963. *Maqalat e Iqbal*. Edited by Syed Abdul Wahid.
- Moeeni. Lahore: Sheikh Muhammad Ashraf Tajir Kutb Kashmiri Bazar.
- . 1973. *Kulyat e Iqbal*. (Farsi) Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons Publishers.
- . 1989. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture.
- . 2003. *Discourses of Iqbal*. Edited by Shahid Hussain Razzaqi. Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan.
- . 2005. *Kulyat e Iqbal*. (Urdu) Lahore: Idara Ahl e qalam, Huma Block, Allama Iqbal Town.
- Maja, Ibn. N.D. *Sunan e Ibn e Maja*. Pakistan: Darussalam Publishers.
- Mutahri, Murtaza. 1993. *Islam me Khawateen k Hoqooq*. Translated by Murtaza Hussain. Pakistan: Dar al Saqafat al Islamia.
- Palmer, Donald. 2019. *Looking at Philosophy: The Unbearable Heaviness of Philosophy Made Lighter*. London: Verso, London.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1969. *A History of Western Philosophy*. London: George Allen Unwin Ltd.
- Wright, William Kelley. 1941. *A History of Modern Western Philosophy*. New York: Macmillan.