

EXEMPLIFYING THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH THE QUR'AN

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ABSTRACT

In the fifth century, the history of women across the world underwent a drastic change with the coming of education and the Qur'an. Women throughout history have not often had a voice to be heard and were neither allowed to work nor able to own a personal business: "Whatever the husband possesses is his property, and whatever the wife possesses becomes property of her husband" (Thompson, 1974: 142). Her husband could invalidate any sale or take back any present she would receive. Hence, no contract would be valid if it were signed or initiated by a woman. It was not until the eighteenth century that women in the West started attaining some rights, with the ideas of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and Sargent Judith Murray (1751-1820) in *On the Equality of the Sexes*. These same rights were given to women in France in 1790 and were incorporated later in Europe. However, with the coming of the Qur'an in 622B.C., and a strong emphasis on education, women in the Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, experienced drastic changes by the procurement of theological rights. As a result, women in the Modern Age are pursuing their careers, are employed and have their own businesses.

Keywords: Business Ownership, Women in Islamic Economy, Qur'an, Women's Rights.

KURAN IŞIĞINDA KADININ YETKİLENDİRİLMESİNE BAZI ÖRNEKLENDİRMELE

ÖZET

15. yy. da Kur'anla birlikte kadınlar için köklü bir değişim başladı. Geçmişte kadınların kendilerini ifade etmelerine, çalışıp bir iş sahibi olmalarına izin verilmiyordu. "Erkeğin sahip olduğu her şey erkeğe ait olduğu gibi, kadının sahip oldukları da yine erkeğe aittir" (Thompson, 1974: 142). Koca, karısının yaptığı herhangi bir alışverişi iptal etme veya ona verilen bir hediye geri iade etme özgürlüğüne sahipti. Bu nedenle, bir kadın tarafından imzalanan hiçbir belgenin herhangi bir hükmü yoktu. Batı'da kadınların bir takım haklar kazanabilmeleri 18. yy'dan önce mümkün olmamıştır. Buna zemin hazırlayan Mary Wollstonecraft'in (1759-1797) yazdığı *Kadın Hakları Savunması* (1792) ve Judith Murray'in (1751-1820) "Cinsiyet Eşitliği" isimli kitaplarıdır. Aynı haklar Fransa'da kadınlara 1790 yılında ancak verilmiş ve daha sonra Avrupa'ya yayılmıştır. Diğer yandan, 622 yılında İslam'ın doğuşuyla ortaya çıkan değişiklikler sayesinde kadınlar birçok hakkı o dönemde kazanmışlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İşletmecilik, İslam Ekonomisinde Kadın, Kuran, Kadın Hakları.

INTRODUCTION

Religion, and Islam in particular, have become one of the most difficult topics to address in recent years. Contemporary culture, whether treated from an anthropological perspective or through theology, psychology or psychoanalysis, evaluates religion with empirical methods. On the one hand, religion is a phenomenon experienced and felt inwardly, most of the time related to the indelible aspects of life. People may consider their religion as a philosophy, a set

of rational principles or mere mysticism. The difficulty increases in the case of Islam, since some Muslims and politicians consider it and present, more than a religion, a purely political, sociological, economic ideology or mere tradition.

This perception or interpretation of Islam transfers either consciously or unconsciously into the culture of each society and is therefore manifested in people. It is essential that women be given the freedom to have options, and go beyond the cultural barriers that were/are imposed on them. Women should be encouraged to take their own decisions and their opinions should be respected without any prejudice. To give more concrete examples, women should have the option to work, marry, have children, or to refrain from doing so, to choose their own profession, to mention a few rights. Women should have the option to be active participants in the public sphere if they wish, but should not be forced to do so either, nor should they be pressured to stay at home. Freedom to make their own choices as individuals is important for the wholeness of every human being. It is through this respect and the gradual education of society, that stereotypes or expectations not only that men have towards women, but also that many women have towards themselves, influenced by the male voice, is likely to cease. In this article, it will be exemplified how the rights of women were empowered with the coming of the Qur'an compared to the rights that women in both, ancient history and the pre-islamic era possessed.

A PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN FROM THE PAST

In the past in different geographical regions of the world, women have largely been prey to what men say or do. Beauvoir indicates in her book *The Second Sex*, the woman has been defined as “the other” (1998). This was the case in Ancient China, when women were referred by a number, as if they were animals or worse. Animals are given a name.

In India, women were thrown into the fire due to tradition. When her husband died, all the women threw themselves into the fire to pass away as well, so they would be with their husband's corpse. When the man died, it was his wife or wives, in most cases, who threw themselves into the fire. In the following quote, there is an example of two of the many cases that emerged in India. The case of two princes of Marava who lived in the eighteenth century is usually referred to as an example. Each prince had more than ten wives. To be specific, one had thirteen and the second prince had seventeen. When the princes died, twenty-nine of the women threw themselves into the fire. One of them did not, for the simple reason that she was pregnant, but once the son was born, she followed the fate of the others. In this region" she was considered a more harmful creature than a cyclone, death, snakes or poison.

In Ancient Rome, the situation of women was not much better. Women were dependent on their father or their husband. Women that were single, were locked in their home to spin a large part of the day, so that society would not view them as committing anything ethically unacceptable. There were some women that were chaperoned by a slave even while they slept. A woman who was economically stable, when she would exit her house, she would have to be accompanied by servants. She could not be alone since she was frowned upon. Women in general, were considered a lower rank than men. Their purpose was to have children. Married

women were dependent on their husband and were considered inferior and therefore had to obey him in every way. The best position for the Roman woman with economic resources, because of her father's inheritance, was to be a widow, since only then, she could dispose of her wealth and be more independent in its decisions. Divorce was an option, however, most of the time it was the males who requested it.

In Ancient Greece, as in other geographic areas, women were viewed only as a means to have children. Aristotle indicated that "woman, in nature, is a half-finished man." Cicero emphasized that "women was created so that men would not have great successes: if she had not been created, men could be deified." In his writings indicated that women were not human beings completely. Consequently, women were by nature somewhat defective in that they could not be trusted, and consequently they were subject to being disgusted, despised or overpowered. The Greek writings indicate that the free woman in many aspects of Greek society did not have a better position than that of slaves and animals.

In what we know today as Mexico, Aztec women, at the time they were born, were marked for their lifetime. The midwives speak to them very differently since the time they were babies, compared to newborn males. To the girls, the midwife told them that the place where they belonged was their house and that their obligation was to prepare food and worship their gods. At the time when the female babies were born, the umbilical cords were buried below their house, as a symbolic act that would mark her physical space for a lifetime.

In order to understand what Islam brought in 622 AD, it is important to have a vision of the circumstances in the pre-Islamic era in the Arabian Peninsula. The society of Arabia was one in which there was no political order or laws in particular, it was a tribal society. Women had no value in society, but were seen as currencies of exchange or objects of pleasure. The men had countless women in their home. When the husband died, the son inherited the wives and slaves from his father, the woman sold herself and had no rights to own property or even contemplate the idea of divorce. Culturally, it was such a shame to have a daughter that she was usually buried alive.

THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

With the coming of the Qur'an in 622B.C., and a strong emphasis on education, women in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, experienced drastic changes by the procurement of theological rights. Thus, the objective of this study is to present the theoretical framework of qualitative research that investigates the status of women among different societies before the coming of the Qur'an and contrasts it with rights of women that were integrated into society due to the Qur'an despite their patriarchal cultural traditions.

Since 662C.E, the Qur'an has offered women the right to be the only guardian of their own possessions without having any interference from their families, including her husband. (Ünal, 2007: 31) It assures that both, men and women, have the right to receive inheritance whether it is land, furniture, money or a property:

For the male heirs is a share out of what parents and near kindred leave behind, and for the female heirs is a share of what parents and near kindred leave behind, whether it (the inheritance) be little or much – a share ordained by God (Translation by Ali Ünal, 2006, Qur'an 4: 7).

The Qur'an states that a mother, a wife, a daughter or a sister has the right to inherit. The Constitution of Medina gave these rights to women in the year 622C.E. The Islamic Law (Shariah) allows women to hold, use and dispose of property, whether tangible or intangible, among other civil liberties such as the right of education and inheritance. Even though in Islamic cultures, the man has traditionally been responsible for providing for the family, the woman though lacking this responsibility has the right to work and manage her own personal business. If she wishes, she can also contribute to the economic sustenance of the household or else is free to make use of her money and possessions however she pleases.

1.1 Theory and Practice: Business Ownership and Women since the time of the Prophet Muhammad

Khadiya – The First Muslim and Wife of the Prophet Muhammad. Khadiya bint Khuwaylid, daughter of Khuwaylid ibn Asad and Fatimah bint Za'idah, came from a prestigious family in Makah. She was one of the wealthiest women and a well-known entrepreneur in the region. There were men that worked for her in other regions of the world: Gassasin, Hira and Damascus. One of these men was Muhammad, who would later become her husband. Khadiya took independent decisions regarding her business, had freedom of thought and speech even after her marriage. By her own conviction, she donated large amounts of her economical resources for the cause of her deen or way of life. She organized dinners, gave to the poor and even passed away due to her delicate condition she had because of malnutrition and hunger. Her goal in life was to assist the needy and participate in the cause.

Aysha, daughter of Um Ruman and Abu Bakr of Mecca, is another example for both men and women of all times. Aisha's contribution to the religious sciences is vast and significant. He excelled in all fields, both in the field of Qur'anic sciences and Tradition of the Prophet, as in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) "(Lamrabet, 2008: 14). She would advise and correct both, men and women in the Islamic Sciences. She was a great teacher and educator. Half of what Muslims know today about Islam is due to her efforts of the memorization of hadith and its teachings.

1.2 Business Ownership and Women in the Middle Ages

The famous philosopher and judge (qadi) born in Islamic Spain, Ibn Rushd, known to the Latin West as Averroes, indicated that women were equal to men in all respects and possessed equal capacities to shine in peace and in war (Jamil, 1987). During the different transitions of the Islamic Caliphate in Muslim Spain and the splendor of the Omeyas, when science and theology were united as one source, also giving birth to the Renaissance, women were the primary caretakers of the sick in hospitals. The first female doctors also practiced in the medical field for the first time in Muslim Spain. Nurses were first hired by the Muslim West as well as doctors in the hospitals, where in other geographical areas in the West, this seemed a utopia. In the fifteenth century, female surgeons were illustrated for the first time in Şerafeddin

Sabuncuoğlu's *Cerrahiyyetu'l Hanniyye* or *Imperial Surgery* (2006), the first and last mayor encyclopedia of the Islamic World. Women were also involved in commercial activities. They were investors, doctors, brokers, lenders, farmers and related positions in the textile industry.

1.3 Business Ownership and Women in the Modern Era

Although the Qur'an supports the right of women to own a business, culture (not religion), in combination with a lack of education, has had an important impact in omitting the practice of the rights that the Qur'an entitles women in regards to business ownership throughout history. Professor and writer of sociology and women's Studies, Valentine M. Moghadam, in her UNESCO article of "The Feminization of Poverty and Women's Human Rights", indicates that the current situation of women in Muslim Countries are result of demographic trends, "cultural" patterns, and political economy" (Moghadam 2005: 2) rather than Islam. The case of Nigeria is a direct result of this cause.

In Northern Nigeria, the right of women to inherit property is denied by certain judges, even though Islam confers them this right. Annelie Moors (1995), discusses that although women were aware of their rights of property ownership, some of them living in urban areas accepted their own share of the estate, but women residing in rural areas, mostly restrained from acquiring their own shares. In Southern Asia, women are suffering from ignorance and poverty and this has a direct impact in their ability and opportunity to own a business.

THE CASE OF TAJIKISTAN: IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATION AND CORE ISLAMIC VALUES

With the help of EuropeAid, Mission East, "has been operating in Tajikistan for over 10 years and during this time has worked with women for the improvement of their socio-economic situation. "The lack of practical application of women's rights and the decline – and subsequent impact of falling literacy rates, non-legalized marriages and loss of property" has resulted in a lack of implementation of the Islamic law (Shariah) of entitling women the right of owning their own business. The article entitled "Policy into Practice: Ensuring Women's Property Ownership through Application of Civil Islamic Codes conveys the following:

Currently, Mission East in partnership with Tajik NGOs 'Munis' and 'Gender Education Center', and close cooperation with government counterparts and communities in Kulyab and Hissar Districts, are launching several activities to ensure 'Women's Property Ownership through application of Civil and Islamic Codes.' ("Policy into Practice: Ensuring Women's Property Ownership through Application of Civil Islamic Codes, 2010: 1).

The application of the Civil and Islamic Codes in Tajikistan has as one its primary objectives, to ensure Women's Property Ownership. Furthermore, education and the application of religious laws are also important highlights in this project:

An increase of knowledge and application of women's property, inheritance and education rights as enshrined in the Tajik Civil Code and the Islamic Family Code; Build the capacity of local civil and religious authorities in matters relating to support of women property owner, local business and social development; Contribute to research in women's lack of

property ownership and subsequent socio-economic impact in Tajikistan” (“Policy into Practice: Ensuring Women’s Property Ownership Through Application of Civil Islamic Codes, 2010: 1).

Through an emphasis in education, and the implementation of the Shariah in Tajikistan, women in this geographical area will be entitled the right of owning their own business, a basic Islamic right, stated in the Qur’an.

CONCLUSION

Business Ownership for Women has undergone various stages throughout history. This phenomenon is directly related to the status of women in different geographical areas such as Africa, the Middle East, Central and South East Asia. All of these societies were influenced by cultural patriarchal ideas. As a result, culture often contradicting Islam itself, has played a greater and more influential role in the lack of business ownership among women in Africa, Central and South East Asia, as Maya Shatzmiller indicates in *Labor in the Medieval Islamic West*, women possessed many rights and were especially active in the public sphere (1997: 400-1).

Even though the Qur’an has helped implement women’s rights in societies across the world, such as being treated as an individual and having the right to work and own a business, the struggle still continues until today due to the influence of patriarchal traditions within the society. The recent example of Tajikistan was a clear proof of the lack of implementation of this basic women’s right: business ownership. With the help of education, the proper interpretation and implementation of Quranic (and not traditional values), women will continue to empower themselves, and to continue to successfully pave the way to become independent.

To sum up, the status of women has undergone drastic changes across the centuries. Even though there is still much work to be done such as erasing stereotypes, educating people, and opening people’s eyes to go beyond the traditional rules of society, the status of women throughout the world have undergone various changes. In general it has favored their position in various spheres of society. Women have attained the right to be respected as an individual, the right to vote and work and have their own business in most countries. Women have also attained the right to marry or not and to have children.

In short, business ownership of women has undergone various changes throughout history. This phenomenon is directly related to the status of women in different geographical areas such as Africa, the Middle East, Central and South East Asia. All of these societies had been influenced by cultural patriarchal ideas. As a result culture, as opposed to Islam, played a greater and more influential role in the lack of business ownership among women in Africa, Central, and South East Asia. Despite their patriarchal cultural influences among various societies, with the help of a strong education, women in the modern age are being respected besides their previous cultural traditions, pursuing their careers, are employed and have their own business.

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