

Chapter– 3

Society, Education and Women in Islam

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SOCIETY, EDUCATION AND WOMEN IN ISLAM

3.1. Meaning and Principles of Islam

The word 'Islam' is derived from the Arabic root 'SLM' that etymologically signifies 'security, peace, submission and obedience'. In the view of religion, the word Islam indicates submission to the will of 'Allah' (the Almighty, all knowing and the most powerful) and obedience to His laws with the end to establish peace through ensuring right way of life. It is revealed in another notion that Islam, to begin with, was much more than a religion, a social revolution. It created, among the followers, what we call today social consciousness towards the weaker sections of the society and sensitized them towards their sufferings (Engineer, 1996:1).

The principal bases on which the Islamic system is founded are (1) a belief in the unity, immateriality, power, mercy and supreme love of the Creator; (2) charity and brotherhood among mankind; (3) subjugation of the passions; (4) the outpouring of a grateful heart to the Giver of all good; (5) accountability for human actions in another existence (Ali, 1965:138). The cult in Islam is also very simple and established on five fundamental principles, viz (i) Professing of *Kalema* (faith) that there is no other God but Allah while Mohammad (PBUH) is His Prophet, (ii) Performance of *Salat* or *Namaz* (prayer), (iii) Arduous accomplishment of *Siyam* or *Roza* (fasting) during the Arabic month of *Ramadan* (iv) Payment of *Zakat* by the riches and (v) Celebration of *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Holy Macca) by them who are able to do so (Abdalati, 1975 and Islahi, 1978).

The dogma of Islam also rests on seven basic convictions, viz (a) Belief in *Allah* (God), (b) Belief in *Farestas* (angels), (c) Belief in the Holy Books (scriptures appeared to the Prophets from Allah), (d) Belief in His *Paigambars* (apostles), (e) Belief in *Kiamot* (destruction of the universe), (f) Belief in *Akhirat* (resurrection after death and the award of paradise or hell on the basis of last judgement), and (g) Belief in *Takdir* or luck that indicates good and evil occur as predestined by *Allah*.

According to the proclamation of Almighty *Allah*, Islam has been introduced as the only religion for the mankind since the beginning of human race in the world. But the preaching of Islam has been completely established through the ultimate Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH), to whom the holiest scripture '*Quran*' is appeared. The Holy *Quran* is considered as the ultimate guide to the believers for ensuring universal and eternal peace. The essence of the ethical principles of Islam is summarized in it where *Allah* Himself declared, "there is no doubt in this book— a guidance to the pious who believe in the Unseen, observe the prayers, and distribute (charity) out of what We have bestowed on them; and who believe in that which We have commissioned thee with, and in that We commissioned others with before thee, and who have assurance in the life to come;— these have received the direction of their Lord" (*Quran*, 2:1-6).

However, generally the followers of Islam are called Muslim, but in real implication Muslim is he who cordially believes the supreme authority of *Allah*, orally admits Him as the Only Creator and Master of the whole universe, completely surrenders to His will and also submits to His divine injunctions.

3.2: Concept of Society in Islam

The ideal society in Islam is called *Umma* that inspires the follower of Islam to agglomerate universally in ensuring their common interests. The *Umma* is therefore, a society in which a number of individuals possessing a common faith and belief come together in harmony with the intention of advancing and moving towards common goal. Its social system is based on equality and justice. The great tradition of Islam is founded on a worldview that is apparently non-hierarchical and historical in ethos. Islam has oriented towards holistic principle of social order. Islamic holism is based on the equality of Muslim *Umma* i.e. the brotherhood and collectivity among the believers. The unity transcends the boundaries of territory and nation. It advocates for one nation of the believers' i.e. the *Millat*. The holistic principle that is the core in the notion of *Umma* and *Millat* has a radical egalitarian connotation. Existence of caste and class and the domination of individual over society or vice versa are alien to the social life in Islam. Islam permits a constructive interaction between the individuals and the society on the basis of social solidarity and mutual responsibility. Islam admits for vast collective social life of man for constituting a society (Mondal, 1997: 46).

Islam is not simply a religion but a complete code of life. It provides a framework for perfect way in every sphere of life and envisages a definite pattern of society that has its own mode of social interactions. As per Islamic notion the multitudes of people who collectively form a society are related to each other, at least in terms of belief and faith. Their equality by birth before God is palpably recognized by Islamic social norms.

Islam never recognizes any social division and distinction on the basis of ethnicity, lineage and occupation rather it regards all human beings to be equal and descendants of common ancestors. Thus there is neither a difference of high and low nor of pure and impure. Islam follows the guidelines that is proclaimed by Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) in his speech on farewell sermons:

"No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab,
 Nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab,
 Nor a white man has any superiority over a black man,
 Nor a black man has superiority over a white man,
 All are children of Adam,
 And Adam was created from clay" (Abdur Razzaq, 1996:5).

Islamic egalitarianism is based on brotherhood, unity, sympathy, sacrifice and cooperation. The Holy *Quran* declares, "Verily this Brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood and Allah Himself is your Lord and Charioteer (*Quran*, 21:92). In principle, Islamic society is egalitarian in orientation. It seeks to establish a kind of egalitarian and unexploitative social order with remarkably tolerant attitude towards other faiths and knowledge in permissible areas. Morality and humanity is the main focus of Islam. It helps in integrating diverse social elements within a single whole for establishing a social system based on justice and setting conflicting groups on the path of competition for virtue. The virtuous living according to Islam includes alleviation of the suffering of others, rendering assistance to the needy, good neighbourliness and maintenance of peace in the society. Hence it appears that Islam emphasizes the need of a universal social order based on collectivity and interaction of all mankind through their interrelations and interactions for virtuous living (Mondal, 1997:47).

The structure of social life in Islam is lofty, sound and comprehensive. Its substantial elements comprise sincere love for human beings, respect for the elders, mercy for the younger, comfort and consolation for the distressed, feeling of brotherhood for the sake of social solidarity etc. According to Islam a Muslim must maintain the following civility in his society: (1) when he meets with another Muslim, he should salute him in prescribed manner i.e. by saying "Aas-Salamo-Alaykum Aur Rahamatullah" means "May the peace of God be upon you". Similarly in return of salute from another Muslim he should reply "Oa-Alaykum-Assalam Aur Rahamatullah" means "May the peace of God be upon you too"; (2) when another Muslim desires help from him, he should assist; (3) when another Muslim seeks advice from him, he should give him advice; (4) when another Muslim falls sick, he should visit and enquire about him; (5) when another Muslim dies, he along with other Muslims should attend his funerals; and (6) when another Muslim sneezes and says, "Al-hamdu-lillah" means "Praise is due to Allah", he should follow the prayer and must say "Yar-hamu-kallah" means "Allah have mercy on you" (Begum, 1992: 64).

Islam conceives universe as a single whole and not compartmentalized into the realms with divergent laws. The basic teaching of Islam is the unity of God and Universe. The unity of God symbolizes the uniformity of the laws in nature. The unity within the diversity is one of the most important goals of Islamic messages. Islam does not intend to impose uniformity of culture in all its details, nor does it seek to break the regional and local traditions as which are considered God's creation and eco-culturally determined. The customary practices are also recognized beyond obligatory performances and taboos as per Islamic dictations.

3.3: Significance of Education in Islam

Islam has opened the door of ongoing education system and research by prescribing universalization of knowledge. It is because, Islam believes that the study of nature is very much important for the welfare of mankind. Islam also encourages free enquiry for promotion of knowledge, including science and technology. It stands totally against static social order and provides mechanism of social change through cultivation of new ideas and knowledge. It admits the importance of knowledge for the growth of consciousness. Teachings of Islam distinctly envisage a rapid and peaceful transformation of human society for elevating the weak and to equalize all. Islam clearly states that a society cannot be developed unless its human resources are properly utilized through cultivation of knowledge. That is why Islam advocates human resources development through lifelong learning and suggests its entire followers irrespective of their sex and position 'to enlighten' and 'to develop' through educational attainment (Mondal, 1997:49).

It is worth mentioning that the first word of Allah as revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is "Ekrah" means "Read". In chapter xcvi of *Al-Quran*, God Himself commanded His Prophet to read in the name of his Lord and Cherisher. This chapter bears testimony of supreme value of learning and science, commenting on which Zamakhshari thus explains the meaning of Quranic words: "God taught human beings that which they did not know, and ... has given to His servants knowledge of that which they did not know. And He has brought them out of darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge, and made them aware of the inestimable blessing of the knowledge of writing,... And without the knowledge of writing no other knowledge could be comprehended ..." (Ali, 1965:361).

Surely Islam considers 'ignorance' the most disgraceful curse and provides a lot of guidelines to get rid of it. Its recommendation with regard to the acquisition of knowledge is evidently referred to all the human beings. According to Islamic prescription, "Acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for all Muslim men and women". Thus rendering 'acquisition of knowledge' into an obligatory duty of followers irrespective of their sex and social position, Islam clearly attaches the highest value of education. In addition, the Prophet preached to his followers: "Acquire knowledge, because he who acquires it in the way of the Lord, performs an act of piety; who speaks of it, praises Him; who seeks it, adores God; who dispenses instructions in it, bestows alms; and who imparts it to its fitting objects, performs an act of devotion to God. Knowledge enables its possessor to distinguish what is forbidden from what is not, it lights the way to heaven; it is our friend in the desert, our society in solitude, our companion when bereft of friends; it guides us to happiness, it sustains us in misery; it is our ornament in the company of friends; it serves as an armour against enemies" (Ali, 1965:360).

The Prophet again preached, "To listen to the instructions of science and learning for one hour is more meritorious than attending the funerals of a thousand martyrs, more meritorious than standing up in prayer for a thousand nights; to the students who goes forth in quest for knowledge, God will allot them high places in the mansions of bliss; the seeker of knowledge will be greeted in Heaven with welcome from the angels; he who favours the learning and the learned, God will favour him in the next world; to listen to the words of the learned, and to instil into the heart the lessons of science, is better than religious exercise; he dies not who gives life to learning" (Ali, 1965:362).

There are several verses in the *Holy Quran* which clearly inspires the entire mankind to be equipped with the light of knowledge and wisdom. Here Allah Himself has been repeatedly described as *Alimun Hakim* or *Alimun Khabir* i.e. 'Knowing and Wise' and 'Knowing and Aware' etc. There is also a prayer in the *Holy Quran*, "My lord, increase me in knowledge" (*Quran*, 20:114). Moreover, the Prophet (PBUH) has commanded his followers, "Go in quest of Knowledge even if found in China". The word used in lieu of 'knowledge' in the above *Quranic* verse as well as *Hadith* is 'ilm'. It is known that this word and its derivatives occur not less than 819 times in the *Holy Quran*. Hence, it is explicit that *ilm* is firmly settled down in this *Holy Scripture* among its few key words. As the *Quran* repeatedly mentions about knowledge of the universe, we can rightly ascertain that the scope of *ilm* is not confined merely in religion. Actually, *ilm* is used in comprehensive sense in Arabic language. It includes all sciences, social as well as physical and natural. And for this reason the Prophet asked for China, which was quite advanced in scientific studies in those days (Engineer, 1996a:1).

The aphorism attributed to the Prophet declares that knowledge is twofold: knowledge of religion and knowledge of bodies. The *Quran* stressed the need of universal education for all human beings. There is nothing in *Quranic* injunctions that is opposed to the pursuit of secular education rather some evidences seem to support it. Time and again the Prophet preached to his followers to seek knowledge as if no other sufferings or sacrifice seemed to him too great than its fulfillment. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also declared that the greatest ornament of a human being is erudition; and the best gift from a father to his sons as well as daughters is nothing but good education and training (Peer, 1991:11-12).

It has been reported that in the battle of Badr led by the Prophet himself, the enemies were captured and the Prophet, instead of penalizing all, released the literate prisoners with a condition that each one of them will teach twelve illiterate Muslims. Further the Prophet advised his followers to acquire knowledge by any means from anyone and anywhere as knowledge and education were lost property of the faithful which indicates that he was not opposed to the acquisition of knowledge even from the unbelievers (Ali, 1950:31). The two maxims of Prophet Muhammad (PUBH) which greatly exercised the minds of the Muslims and are often quoted by Muslim theologians are: "a fragment of knowledge is worth more than a hundred prayers" and "scholar's pen ink is more precious than martyr's blood". These sayings also clearly reveal that the Prophet accorded the highest significance to education. We may, therefore, conclude that neither the *Quran* nor the *Hadith* enjoins upon the Muslims to refrain from acquiring modern education (Peer, 1991:12).

In fact the originality of Islam lies in its perpetual struggle for exploration and its ceaseless quest for learning. It recognizes the need for exploring the vast field of pragma that lies beyond a limited and well-defined area of dogma. This attitude presupposes a vast arena of scientific enquiry beyond the range of a limited area of settled body of knowledge (Siddiqui, 1984). Undoubtedly Islam is the only religion in the world that signifies the values of education so clearly and profoundly. According to Ilse Lichtenstadter (as quoted by Menon, 1981:39), "fundamentally it (Islam) has always considered learning at least a useful accessory to being a good Muslim". As ignorance is the most despicable issue to the followers of Islam, one can convincingly assume that jahiliyya (ignorance) and Islam cannot go together.

3.4: *Notion of Islam towards Female Education*

There is a general stereotype among many scholars that the principles of Islam are responsible for the educational backwardness of the Muslim, especially of Muslim women. It is because they think Islam prohibits secular education and encourages only religious education. They use to spread views that Muslim women are not allowed to go for general education and even for religious education if it is under the system of coeducation. But in fact there is no empirical basis behind it. Because Islam has given highest importance on educational attainment without gender discrimination. It also provides lots of guidelines. According to Islamic prescription, "Acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for all Muslim men and women". For the attainment of education Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) first said, "Seek knowledge even if found in China". Again he said, "The pen ink of a scholar is holier than the blood of a martyr" (Engineer, 1996a:1).

It is reported that Prophet (PBUH) strongly recommended the good education of girls. Abu Bardah Ibn Abi Musa quoted his father as saying that the Prophet (PBUH) had said, "three people will be doubly rewarded by God, anyone from among the people of the scriptures who believes in his own Prophet as well as in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), a slave who endeavours to meet his obligation towards God as well as his master and anyone who has a slave girl and strives to educate her and teach her well and then gives her freedom and marries her" (all the six reporters of tradition). It is worthy of note that women have been attending the general assemblies for learning held by the Prophet. The Prophet also declared, "Whoever nourishes three daughters, educates and trains them, gets them married and afterwards offers a gentle behaviour to them, has his place reserved in heaven" (Romman, 1996:34-37).

Islam rightly thinks that education is a necessary condition which helps women to develop their faculties. In the words of Muhammad Qutb (Qutb, 1964:188), "Acquisition of knowledge was a great duty of woman as of man, for, Islam wanted the womenfolk to develop their rational faculties along with physical ones and thus ascend to higher planes of spiritual existence." Actually the teaching of Islam clearly envisages a rapid and smooth transformation of human society for elevating the weak and equalizes all. It lays emphasis on achievement rather than on ascription, on integration instead of division (Islahi, 1978). The Prophet has strongly commanded his followers to do the following things for their sons and daughters: (1) to inform them the principles of religion, (2) to educate them properly, and (3) to give them in marriage when they reach the proper age. Thus we can sum up that the Prophet of Islam favoured female education in actual practice (Menon, 1981:39).

However, it was so great a pressure put by the Prophet of Islam on all his followers to acquire knowledge that during the first one thousand years of the history of Islam, men as well as women undertook long journeys through many Islamic countries, suffered the inconveniences and troubles of difficult travels, and attended together the lectures of celebrated scholars of the time. And after having gathered the precious store of knowledge from all the available sources, men as well as women scholars delivered lectures to large mixed classes of men and women in reputed public institutions. Students flocked from distant lands to the lectures of some of the women lecturers. Some of these students had already acquired reputation as scholars and some of them attained celebrity at a later stage (Siddiqi, 1971:51-52).

The accounts of these women scholars are contained in the biographical dictionaries of the scholars of various centuries. This branch of Arabic literature is extremely very rich. Thus it is very clear that in the heyday of Islam women in Muslim society like their male counterparts enriched themselves with the persuasion of vast education both religious and secular. As a result they made significant contributions towards the advancement in various branches of scientific knowledge. The scientific achievements of the Muslims from ninth to eleventh centuries had reached so high a stage that it can only be compared to that of the period of Renaissance in Europe. However, because of certain factors, this golden age of Islam was followed by a dark beginning from the twelfth century and lasting right up to the early nineteenth (Peer, 1991:14).

From the brief account of the attitude of Islam towards female education and its history during the first one thousand years and partly after it, it is obvious that Islam placed no obstacles to Muslim women in their way to the fountain of knowledge, rather it encouraged women education in every possible way. The great encouragement given by Islam to women in their educational, cultural and spiritual activities, theoretically as well as practically throughout its history, is undoubtedly an unique step that proves Islam admits no distinction between man and woman in their basic spheres of life. Considering the attitude of Islam towards the female sex with regard to educational, cultural and spiritual attainments, it may be concluded that according to this religion, the womenfolk like their male counterparts are entitled to choose for themselves any career whatever they consider better or easy or interesting for them (Siddiqi, 1971:56-59).

3.5: Plights of Women in Pre-Islamic Arabia

History reveals that in the primitive societies there was equality between men and women. Later on, in the hunting and gathering societies the roles of women became more important that led the women to hold the higher position. This trend continued throughout the world upto the dawn of civilization. But it is one of the curious facts of the social and cultural history that when civilization advanced, its original founder and early promoter, the women, were degraded and debased by those to whom they gave birth, and whom they brought up with great care and affection. As progress of civilization failed to deal properly with the complicated problems originated from advanced agricultural development, the womenfolk lost their dominating character that were borne by them from primitive society.

With the progress of civilization the Arabian women too, lost their dominating character and shortly with the trend became a second class citizen under the domination of man. Of course, at the primitive stage these women dominated their male counterparts by affection, love and altruistic sentiments whereas at the later stage their male counterparts began to dominate them by brutal physical strength. There is no doubt that when men got the opportunity at the advanced stage of civilization, they deprived women of the natural rights and kept them back from education (Siddiqi, 1971: 24).

In Arabia the period before the advent of Islam is called *Jahiliyya* which means 'the period of ignorance'. Many authors maintain that women's status during that time was no better than that of the animals. They had no legal rights; in youth they were as goods and chattels of their father while husbands used to hold lordships on them after marriage (Levy, 1957:91).

During the period of *Jahiliyya* the birth of a daughter was usually looked upon by the Arabs as base disgrace to the family. As a result the position of a newborn girl-child became so horrifying that some Arabs used to bury them alive or otherwise kill them out of fear of disaster on account of the girl-child. Even when a girl was allowed to live, she was forced to be married at an early age of 7 or 8. At the back of this custom was the fear of parents that their daughters might be dishonoured if they were not given in marriage before attaining puberty (Menon, 1981:6).

The Pre-Islamic Arabs generally denied their women from recognizing with minimum respect, worth and dignity. As a result their entire womenfolk were highly neglected in day to day livelihood. These women were not only deprived of their rights of inheritance, rather the male dominated society treated them as chattels to be inherited by the son or by the brother of the deceased inheritor. During that time the situation of women was so affronted that some of the Arabian tribes used their step-mothers as their own wives or sold them to others; some of them mortgaged their wives and some of them made bets on them while gambling. The hiring of wives for a specified period was also commonly in vogue among the Pre-Islamic Arabs (Siddiqi, 1971: 46).

At that time marriage by capture and polygamy were popularly in vogue among the Arabs. As to the number of wives that an Arab could keep, there appears to have been no laws or convention. A wife could be even lent to a guest as a mark of hospitality for which the Arab was well known. The next point of injustice is related to divorce. In the Pre-Islamic Arabian Society, the husband was free to divorce his wife whenever he felt doing so (Menon, 1981:7).

3. 6: Emergence of Islam and Women's Emancipation

Islam as a monotheistic religion arose in Arabia through Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) during the early part of seventh century A.D. This religion is based on various divine prescriptions and injunctions that are recorded in the *Holy Quran*. According to the religion of Islam, the verses of the *Holy Quran* are the messages of Allah (God) for directing mankind towards the right ways of life and rectifying them from all sorts of sins, wrongs and injustice. The verses are revealed to Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) who made its intelligible explanations. The followers of the Holy Prophet recorded such explanations and also his words, deeds and approvals in different volumes named '*Hadiths*'. As a matter of fact, the followers of Islam are mainly guided by these primary sources which comprise well-defined guidelines about all spheres of human activities including social, economic, legal, cultural, spiritual and political system.

Islam emerged and spread in such a time when the people of Arabia were mostly ignorant, uncivilized and barbarians. They were divided into tribes and used to live in a nomadic state of life. As the system of organized state or government was non-existing, they were not ruled by any legal authority though the tribal chiefs had some control over them. They were addicted to drinking, gambling and practised polygamy. In the family or in the society women had no recognized place at all; rather the female infant killing was highly prevalent. In such a situation Islam emerged with the declaration of peace, justice and security, and rapidly spread among the oppressed classes and removed all the prevailing inequalities and tyrannies of men against womenfolk.

At the first step, by promulgating injunctions, the *Quran* stopped the selling and killing of daughters by their fathers under any circumstance. Then it is laid down that the dowry should be paid to the wife and not to anybody else. Moreover, Islam forbade to inherit women and to marry the step-mothers. It also commanded its followers to treat their wives kindly. It gave them half of the share of men without the responsibility of the maintenance of the family which should be borne by men only. It further pointed that by marriage women do not lose their independence. Because what they sell to their husbands in exchange of dowry is not their general freedom but their exclusive use for conjugal purpose. Of course a wife should be loyal to her husband, but in no sense she becomes his slave (Siddiqi, 1971:46)

Actually, the emergence of Islam was neither a marginal event nor even simply one important happening; it was indeed a turning point in the struggle between spiritual belief and materialistic philosophy. It promulgated a lot of injunctions to remove the inequalities and tyrannies prevailing in human societies irrespective of sex, caste, creed or colour (Hossain, 1995:188). Such injunctions and commandants are recorded in the Holy *Quran* and the Prophet of Islam recommended in favour of those by his repeated pleadings.

Thus Islam removed the plights of women of Pre-Islamic Arabia by (1) stressing on the needs of respect and good treatment to a foster mother; (2) making a woman a mistress of her own property in which the husband had no right to interfere without her permission; (3) giving a women rights of claiming divorce on certain grounds; (4) allowing a woman freedom to remarry after divorce or death of husband; and (5) encouraging her to acquire knowledge (Shushtery, 1938:674).

3.7: Roles and Status of Women in Islam

Roles as well as status of women are well stated in Islam. Because, the Holy *Quran* and the *Hadiths* bear the witness of the fact that women are not originated from lower species and therefore, not inferior to men, rather they are as vital to the life and society as men themselves. In fact, in the world's history "Islam is the first religion and first social system which recognized the human status of women, and conferred on them the highest dignity and honour, and granted them equal rights with men in every respect, and abolished all discriminations on the basis of sex. God has clearly defined and guaranteed the rights of women in the Holy *Quran* so that they could no more be subjected to those oppressions or injustices which had been inflicted on them since the beginning of the human species" (Khan, 1990:13).

The role of man and woman is not identical as God has designed their different psycho-physical make up to fulfil His particular purpose of creation. But it doesn't determine ones superiority on other, rather it settles that both man and woman are performing essential roles towards the same end. Hence, in the spirit of Islam, a woman is treated as a fully responsible human being with full independent entity. Islam addresses her directly and does not approach her through the agency of male. According to this religion, "women assume full capacity and liability once they attain maturity and receive the message of Islam. Islam not only endorses the objectives of equality, development and peace for women but strongly advocates and stands for these rights. Its approach towards the achievements of these objectives is not fragmentary rather it is holistic" (Romman, 1996:32). However, as per Islamic notion the deductions on roles and status of women on important issues are as follows:

(a) Gender Equity: Islam recognizes Woman as a full and equal partner of man in the procreation of mankind. The Holy *Quran*, the final and eternal guide of mankind, makes it very clear that man and woman are two physical forms of same soul and there is no original difference between them. God declares in the very opening verse of *Sura-An-Nisa* (women):

"Oh man! Fear your Lord,
 Who created you from a single being,
 And out of it created your mate,
 And out of the two spread many men and women.
 Fear Allah, in Whose name you plead for rights,
 And heed the ties of kinship;
 Surely Allah is ever watchful over you" (Quran, 4:1).

The above divine declaration clearly proves that the whole mankind is the offspring of a single human soul and everyone, man or woman, has the same descent and no one is nobler or meaner by birth. Thus the equality in the creation of man and woman that is highlighted through this announcement has spelled an end to the discrimination against women. It has made it clear that all human beings irrespective of sex are servants of Allah and should, therefore, worship and serve Him. In fact, Islam considers both men and women to be the members of family, their divisions into nations, tribes and families are for a better understanding of each other but not in any way for estrangement. The Holy *Quran* further declares:

"Oh mankind, surely We have created you
 from a male and a female,
 And made you into tribes and families
 so that you may know each other,
 Surely the noblest of you to Allah
 is the most dutiful of you" (Quran 49:13).

Thus Islam strongly refuses to recognize any difference on the basis of sex and therefore, inculcates totally positive feelings for daughters and guides its followers to treat them as fairly as they treat their sons. The Prophet (PBUH) has exhorted Muslims for proper upbringing of daughters paying fullest attention to their physical and mental growth and said, "Whoever is given custody of three daughters and whom he treats generously, this act of his will shield him from the hell fire" (Bukhari as quoted in Romman, 1996:34).

Islam also highly values the being of young girls and strictly forbids casting aspersion on them. The Prophet (PBUH) has commanded Muslims in unequivocal terms, "Do not hate girls. They are comforting and very precious" (Ahmed as quoted in Romman, 1996:34). In fact Islam looks at the equality and development of men and women from the standpoint of the basic purpose of their creation to witness and convey the truth unto mankind. Allah has made declaration, "I created mankind and jinn only to worship me" (Quran, 51:56). In another verse He says:

"Verily, the Muslim men and women,
 And the faithful men and women,
 And the devout men and women,
 And the truthful men and women,
 And the patiently persevering men and women,
 And the humble men and women,
 And the charitable men and women,
 And the fasting men and women,
 And the men and women who preserve their modesty,
 And the men and women who remember God much,
 God has prepared for them pardon
 And great rewards" (Quran 33:35).

The above passages of the Holy Quran reveals that in Islam superiority of one over another does not depend on sex or colour, rank or status, wealth or nationality, but on the careful observance of duties and performance of responsibilities. Actually, Islam accords the individual a high level of esteem and dignity without recognizing any distinction in respect of any race, class, language, sex, colour or creed.

Islam not only treats its faithful women followers equally with men, but sometimes it pays higher dignity on them because of some special reasons. For instances, to determine the position of mother to her sons and daughters, the Prophet of Islam proclaimed, "Paradise lies under the feet of ones mother". To ascertain the dignity of wife the Prophet (PBUH) also mentioned, "The man who is dishonest and not good according to the justification of his wife, will not enter heaven". While talking about the importance of daughters he declared, "Whoever has a daughter and does not give her a mean treatment and does not give preference to his son over the daughter, God will make him enter heaven".

Surely these *Hadiths* indicate that as daughter, as mother, or as wife i.e. in all categories of positions women are held in high esteem. Hence, we can draw the conclusion, "Islam dismissed the notion that man is more honoured for being a man and woman is inferior for being a woman. The above Quranic verses and the statements of the Holy Prophet are the preamble of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Those are divine prescriptions for all times to come that all the sex related discriminatory practices prevalent in the human society are unnatural, baseless, false and absurd" (Romman, 1996:33).

(b) Fundamental Freedom and Right to Work: Islam has given women equal rights and privileges and promoted fundamental freedom for all. It has explicitly granted their equal social participation in all their relationships with men and confirmed complementary roles for both of them. In connection with fundamental freedom, Islam followed the rules of justice with utmost importance. Because, 'Justice' is the main factor that can perfectly establish the fundamental rights for human beings. If the fundamental rights of an individual are ignored, justice will be meaningless.

Actually, fundamental freedom is an outcome of universal human rights which is completely ensured in Islam. Islam admits that Human Rights are not merely political rights as in the case with the Declaration of Rights of the eighteenth century. As Islam is a complete code of life, it deals with human rights of the community as a whole including personal rights, political rights, economic rights, religious rights, cultural rights and so on. The Holy Quran is replete with admonitions against injustice, and exhortations to ensure Justice and Human Rights (Rahman, 1996:11).

The concept of balanced socio-political rights in Islam is based on the foundation of justice that includes equality of human beings, freedom from exploitation, just distribution of property, legal and public guaranties etc. In his farewell sermon, the Prophet of Islam declared:

"Oh men! Your lord is one, your father is one;

You all from Adam and Adam is of clay.

Surely, noblest of you with Allah

is the most dutiful of you.

No Arab has any preference over

any non-Arab except piety" (Rahman, 1996:11-12).

In fact, the status of woman in Islam is something unique, something novel and something distinct and thus has no similarity with any other cultural system. In the family system of Islam, the rights of a woman are legally protected as well as she also enjoys a position of honour and dignity as mother, wife, daughter and sister. Not only she is considered equal but also sometimes it appears that she enjoys greater privileges than a man does. For instance, she has an equal share in man's earning but a man has no share in her earnings or property. She can refuse to feed her children or claim money for it. Doing household work also is not her legal responsibility. She may demand payment for it. And if she does household work happily considering it a matter of moral responsibility, she is only doing a favour to her husband for which the husband should be grateful to her.

Islam envisaged comprehensive social roles of a woman and looks forward to her active participation in matters concerning the society and contributes greatly to almost all walks of life. As a result, a Muslim woman uses to enjoy complete equality with man even in the devotional and spiritual matters. Romman rightly pointed, "Islam assigns a Muslim woman due role to play in discharging collective responsibilities which preserve the essence of the religious society in general. Some special obligations like maintenance of the family, attendance in-group prayers and the levy or mass general conscription for war is too onerous for the ordinary female. Islam has relieved women from attending to these as a matter of original, personal responsibility, if Muslim men can efficiently attend to those. It does not mean that a woman is barred from doing any of these things. She may very well participate in all such activities even when there is no dearth of men to do them" (Romman, 1996:35).

Islam has taken all measures to safeguard the interest of women and allow them to perform religion as men without any restriction. It is known that throughout the period of Prophet's ministry, women used to offer their prayers, even in the early morning and late evening, along with the congregation of Muslims in general. Imam Bukhari's authentic collection reveals that the Prophet of Islam once said, "I like to prolong the prayer but when I hear a child weeping, I make it shorter for I loath to make any inconvenience to the child's mother." Similarly it is narrated in another compilation of authentic traditions, "If your women ask for permission to visit the mosque, do allow them to do so".

During the days of the Prophet, Muslim women did not confine them within the narrow periphery of their homes. At that time they participated in military expeditions like bringing water to the thirsty warriors, treating the wounded, carrying them to safety and sometimes engaging in active warfare. History reveals that the Prophet's own wife Hazrat A'ishah (R) actively participated in many military services.

Apart from this women were found as counsellors who had actively participated in the process of appointing leaders and officers responsible for the public affairs. The account of the 'Shura' process following Hazrat Umar's (R) death firmly establishes this matter. In this respect historian Ibn Katheer narrated, "... then Abdur Rahman bin Auf undertook to consult the people about (the candidates) Uthman-bin-Affan and Ali-bin-Abu Taleb. He was collecting and correlating the general opinions of the Muslims through their leaders. He consulted them singly as well as collectively, privately as well as publicly. He even reached the Muslim ladies in their privacy" (Romman, 1996:37).

(c) MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE: In Islam marriage is a contract, and the consent of both the partners in front of witnesses is required for its accomplishment. Prophet (PBUH) ordered that a woman should not be married but with her own authority and consent. For instance, a girl came to the Prophet (PBUH) and complained that her father had married her to his nephew against her wish, the Prophet (PBUH) gave her the choice of rejecting the marriage. But she said to the Prophet (PBUH), "I endorse what my father did, but I wanted to show women that parents have nothing to do in the matter" (Ibn Majah as stated in Romman, 1996:37).

Islam also views marriage as a strong bond and a serious commitment in the full sense. It is a kind of commitment in which a man (husband) and a woman (wife) find mutual fulfilment and self realization, love and peace, comfort and hope. According to this religion, the general law of matrimonial life is that husband and wife will complement each other and thus live a heavenly life in the world. God has described the wisdom of conjugal bliss in the *Quran* on different occasions for different purposes. In one of the famous passages related to husband and wife God says towards the husbands, "They are a vestment for you, and you are a vestment for them" (*Quran*, 2:187). This is perhaps the most beautiful picture of marital life that God has portrayed. It means just as garments that cover a man or a woman completely and encloses his or her entire body, a husband and a wife also cover each other, that is, a man is entirely meant for a woman and a woman for a man. Both of them should try to serve and please and make every possible concession for each other. All the good qualities that the one partner has the other should value as his or her own, and see that they are not lost.

Despite the said verse in which the philosophy of the noble and affectionate relationship between a husband and a wife has been admirably described, God has allowed divorce as a means of ending the matrimonial relationship and mutual love and compliment. In fact, divorce is sanctioned in Islam as an essential evil. The Prophet of Islam strongly pleaded for not to apply this right as reckless conduct of husband and repeatedly declared that nothing pleased God more than the emancipation of slaves, and nothing more displeased Him than divorce. He also pronounced *talaq* (divorce) to be the most detestable before God of all permitted things, because it prevented conjugal happiness and interfered with the proper bringing up of children (Ali, 1965:243-244).

However, divorce is sanctioned in Islam not as the supremacy of the husband but to protect the conjugal unhappiness and mutual injustice. That is why God says, "When you do divorce women, divorce them at their prescribed periods and calculate (accurately) the number of days prescribed and fear Allah— your lord. And turn them not out of their houses, nor should they themselves go forth, unless they commit an open indecency" (*Quran*, 65:1). On the other hand, divorce is allowed in Islam not as a sole right of the husbands, the wives are also given the right of claiming divorce on logical grounds and after divorce they are also given the freedom of remarry. Moreover, the husband is bound to pay his divorced wife the due amount of *Mehr* (dower) and an acceptable cost of maintenance for the period of her *iddat* (three menstrual cycles/lunar months/till the termination of pregnancy) and he is also liable to take the patriarchal responsibility of the child given birth by the divorced wife if she is enceinte at the time of divorce. Undoubtedly these sanctions contributed for the improvement of women status.

(d) POLYGyny: Polygyny means union of one man with several women. This pre-Islamic institution was sanctioned in Islam under special situations. Though the basic law of Islam does not support polygyny and that is why it is restricted with conditions through *Quranic* injunctions, yet this social evil is extensively in vogue among Muslims till today. In fact, the basic law in the Holy *Quran* is of monogamy, that is, in the very beginning of creation God decreed that one man should unite with only one woman in marriage and form the basic human bond in social relations. This is why He created one Adam and one Eve and married them together to start the human race. He did not create several Eves for one Adam. God Himself declared, "O mankind fear your Lord, Who created you of a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women" (*Quran*, 4:1). Thus it is clearly described in this verse that the fundamental institution of marriage is built between one man and one woman, not between one man and many women (Khan, 1990:16).

The special situation for which polygyny has been sanctioned in Islam is the Battle of Uhud. At that war out of only seven hundred fighters in Medina seventy lost their lives. Therefore this loss was a very considerable loss, and because of it many women were rendered widows and children orphans. It took place in 7 A.H. when the Muslims of Medina were surrounded by dangers on all sides. The Quraysh of Mecca, the tribes of Arabia, the Jews, the Christians and all the polytheists were determined to destroy Medina. The state of Medina was neither powerful enough nor did it possess ample material resources to make suitable arrangements to rid this widows and orphans. But God wanted to rehabilitate them, and wished that they should be absorbed in the society with honour and might get social and financial protection.

So, He (God) issued a number of instructions to the believers, and said, "Give the orphans their property, and do not exchange the corrupt for the good; and devour not their property with your property; surely that is a crime" (Quran, 4:2). Again He declared, "If you fear that you will not act justly towards the orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, or four, (not more); but if you fear that you will not be able to deal equitably and justly with all, then only one, or what your right hands own" (Quran, 4:3). In another verse God says, "And of His signs is that He created for you, of yourselves, mates, that you might repose in them, and He has set between you love and mercy" (Quran, 30:21).

Analyzing the above verses it is very clear that this permission of polygyny was not general, it was allowed under special circumstances and was restricted by two conditions. One is equitable dealing and another is justified behaviour. Actually both the conditions are very difficult in nature and in fact simply impossible for a general man other than a superman to fulfill those properly. Because, a general man can neither ensure justified behaviour nor can distribute equitable love and mercy among several wives; it is against human nature. And the truth is that if a man has more than one wife, it can only destroy his repose, and not build it. Moreover the verse caters not only to the repose of man; it caters equally to the repose of woman. Accordingly, the following questions are raised: (1) How can a wife find repose in a husband who has three additional wives? (2) Can a wife feel love and mercy for such a husband? The answers of the said questions are undoubtedly negative which strongly substantiates that in the real sense polygyny is not honoured and supported by Islam (Khan, 1990:33-38).

(e) RIGHT TO PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE: History bears witness that Islam ensured women's basic right to property by enacting specific legal system and introducing moral obligations. Islam recognizes no distinction whatsoever in this respect between man and woman. The Holy Quran declares, "For men is the benefit of what they earn and for women is the benefit of what they earn. And ask Allah of His grace. Surely Allah is ever knower of all things" (Quran, 4:32). According to Islamic jurisprudence a woman is competent to own property and dispose of it in any manner. The *Shariah* generally allows a fair and equitable role for women in the economic life of family affairs; they can contribute to the support of the family although they are not legally bound to provide maintenance. A woman can share outdoor work with a man to earn a common living (Romman, 1996:37).

Close studies of Islamic Jurisprudence reveals that Islam provides an efficient legal framework for the protection of women's dignity and safeguards them against any sort of exploitation by the men or the society. As the Islamic law vests on a woman all the rights due to her as an independent being, she becomes the absolute and exclusive owner of whatever she earns by her skills or whatever she gets through inheritance or gifts from any source. She does not require to seek leave of her husband to dispose off her property in the manner she deems it. She can sue and be sued in her own name. All this is not by way of favour from the society that can be withdrawn at the whim of any person or any legislature at any time. It is all guaranteed by the Islamic laws that are permanent and beyond the modifying power of any authority on the earth (Wani, 1994:6).

As for the right to inherit, Islam ensures women's right of inheritance at all levels of their lives. According to Quranic injunctions six persons will never be deprived of the rights of inheritance. They are (1) Father, (2) Mother, (3) Husband, (4) Wife, (5) Son and (6) Daughter. As mother a woman is entitled to get one-sixth share of the properties of her deceased son or daughter. As a wife she is entitled to receive one-eighth share of the properties of her deceased husband and in the case she is childless she will get one-fourth. As a daughter her share in the property of her deceased father or mother or parents is equal to the half of each brother. But if she is only one child of her parents she will get half of the entire property. And in the case of two or more daughters where no son at all, the daughters will get two-thirds portion of their parents' property and that will be equally divided among them.

Thus a woman inherits in three capacities, viz as a daughter, as a wife and as a mother. One may point out that Islam has approved woman's right of inheritance partially, because she gets the half of that of her brother. But if we include the other related provisions of Islam into our greater consideration, it becomes clear to us that in respect of right to inherit Islam reserves and protects the full interest of women. For instance, it is the obligation of her father and husband to maintain her while she is unmarried and married respectively. She is not at all obliged to give them anything from her wealth whatever she earns or possesses even when she is rich and they are poor. She has absolute right on her property; neither her father nor her husband can use any part of it unless she gives it to them voluntarily (Engineer, 1993:4).

(F) DOWER AND MAINTENANCE: Dower or *Mehar* is a sum of money that a wife is entitled to receive from her husband in consideration of marriage. In fact, *Mehar* is the sole right of a Muslim wife and she can dispose it in any manner, her husband has no right to inquire about it. As per Quranic injunction, *Mehar* is an essential condition in marriage that must be fulfilled by the groom. *Mehar* may be prompt or deferred and in cash or kinds. In case of prompt *Mehar* the husband is bound to pay the proposed amount to his wife at the time of marriage or when the wife wishes to get it. While the amount of deferred *Mehar* is usually paid by the husband during his lifetime but in case of divorce he has to pay it immediately. Regarding the upper limit of *Mehar* the Quran declared, "Even if you had given one of them (wife) a whole treasure for dower take not the least bit back" (Quran, 4:20).

Actually, *Mehar* is not the value of wife's chastity rather it's a mark of respect towards wife that imposes certain restrictions concerning divorce and polygamy. Ram rightly pointed, "It is generally supposed that the main object of *Mehar* under Mohammedan law is to offer protection to the wife against the arbitrary power of the husband in exercising the power of divorce" (as quoted in Begum, 1992:151). Historically *Mehar* has played an important role in the process of mate selection in all Muslim societies though its amount varied from region to region and country to country. But normally it depends on the social and economic status of the parties (bride's party and groom's party) concerned. It is undoubtedly a significant aspect of women status in Muslim society that supports the statement, "Islamic marriage ... safeguards the right of a wife and attempts to ensure her economic status commensurate with her social standing" (Fyzee, 1964:85).

As for maintenance, Islam provided an efficient legal framework for the protection of women's interest. Till her marriage, on the father has been cast the strict legal duty to look after her and meet all her requirements. And after marriage, her husband is obliged to provide her with secure accommodation (separate house and if not possible a separate room with a separate access so that she is not obliged to stay with her in-laws), cooked food (raw materials would not do), sewn cloths (not a piece of cloth alone) and all other commodities as considered necessary to maintain a woman's livelihood fairly (Engineer, 1993:4). While describing the obligations incumbent upon men towards women, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) declared, "Provide them (the wives) with food and clothing as ye use for yourselves and do not try to find fault with their looks and with the works they do" (as quoted in Nadvi, 1981:386). He again said, "Ye will get reward for all you spend for Allah including the provisions ye provide for your wives". About the significance of maintenance he further propounded, "To pass a night thinking about how to make a living for ones family through legal means is more appreciable to Allah than thousand swords-cuts in the way of Allah" (as quoted in Wani, 1994:7).

Regarding maintenance of wives God Himself declared, "To keep thy wives in kindness or to separate them with good grace" (Quran, 2:229). In fact, the above verse of the Holy Quran does not encourage a Muslim husband to separate his wife to get rid of or escape from his obligation but it ensures that a Muslim wife will not suffer so long for the disability of her husband. The Quran further propounds, "Allah lays not on any soul a burden beyond that which He has given him; Allah brings about ease after difficulty" (Quran, 65:7).

(g) PURDAH PRACTICES: It is generally spoken that Islam forcibly imposed 'Veil' or 'Burkah' on Muslim women. Some scholars propounded the views that such seclusion has limited the movements of mature Muslim girls and women, and due to this they are being debarred from performing their day to day activities and even going to mosque for prayer, and thus they are stigmatized for being women. Roy pointed, "This institution not only debars the women from the world outside their home but it also deprives the Muslim males of the company of the women" (Roy, 1979:XII). But if we cast our eyes on Quranic injunctions regarding Purdah, we find God Himself has declared, "O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters and the believing women that they (when out of doors) should cast their outer garments over (Quran, 33:59). He has again remarked, "And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear coverings over their bosoms. And they should not display (to the restricted persons) their adornment" (Quran, 24:31).

Analysing the above Quranic verses we find that Purdah observance is not so strict as usually mentioned rather it is a dignified way of dressing for the women that glorifies their instinct excellence. Actually the Quran imposes no specific injunction on women for covering their faces but instructs them to throw scarf over their bosoms. Further, it allows the women leaving those parts open which should remain open. Thus it will be seen that what to cover and what not to was based on human opinion. There may be differences in understanding of divine injunction about what should remain open. But it does not indicate that 'Veiling' or 'Burkah' is compulsory for dignified way of dressing.

History of Islam reveals that the Quran or the Prophet did not introduce 'Burkah' or 'Veil'. It was prevalent among some classes in towns before Islam. It does not seem to be originally an Arab institution. It was acquired from Syria and Palestine which were under Roman domination. In their societies 'Veil' was considered as a status symbol for women and was prevalent among the Greeks, the Romans, the Jews and the Assyrians. Later on, when the Muslims conquered those areas 'Veil' appeared to them as an aristocratic custom and a significant part of Muslim women in Arabia accepted it spontaneously. There may be an environmental cause behind it. Because, this sort of dressing is very much helpful in deserts where the people often face unbearable infliction of Simoom. Leila Ahmed in her *Women and Gender in Islam* pointed, "The Muslim conquests of areas in which Veiling was common place among the upper classes, the influx of wealth, the resultant raised status of the Arabs and Muhammad's wives being taken as models probably combined to bring about their general adoption" (as quoted in Engineer, 1997:3).

In fact women are not debarred from moving or working outside their houses for practice of Purdah. Throughout the Prophets rule they used to attend the mosque as well as in battlefield. In the Holy ka'ba in Mecca during Hajj, men as well as women pray together. However, the Muslim women, we learn from early history of Islam, participated in public life and even took part in public debates and discussions. We find many instances of this in *Kitab-al-Aghani*, an excellent record of literary talents of pre and post Islamic eras. A close study of this book, written in several volumes, shows that women were certainly not inhibited from participating in public events rather they freely did so (Engineer, 1997:3-4).

(h) WITNESS AND EVIDENCE: It is generally assumed by the Muslims that a woman is just a half witness according to the Quran and hence two female witnesses are equal to one male witness. The dogma is based on the following verse:

"You who believe! When you deal with each other,
 In transactions involving future obligations
 In a fixed period of time, reduce them in writing.
 Let a scribe write down faithfully as between the parties;
 Let not the scribe refuse to write;
 As God has taught him, so let him write.
 Let him who incurs the liability dictate,
 But let him fear his Lord God,
 And not diminish ought to what he owes.
 If the party liable is mentally deficient,
 Or weak or unable himself to dictate,
 Let his guardian dictate faithfully.
 And get two witnesses out of your own men,
 And if there are not two men, then a man and two women,
 Such as you choose for witnesses,
 So if one of them errs, the other can remind" (Quran, 2:282).

It apparently seems from the above verse that the value of female witness is equal to a half of a man. But if we explain the text on the basis of context followed by the spirit of Islam, it becomes clear to us that the above injunction is absolutely applicable in financial matters involved in business where women were generally lacked in experience. So, in the matters where no financial involvement is evident, there should be no difference in witness value between men and women. Because, the Holy Quran, except the financial transactions nowhere else in matters such as marriage, divorce, hudud (punishment), qisas (retaliation), etc requires two women's testimony in place of one man.

For instance, Quranic verse on divorce requiring two just witnesses (Quran, 65:2). It is interesting to note that here the Quran does not stipulate one man and two women but just two witnesses which also goes on to show that it is not universal requirement but restricted to only financial transactions. The Prophet of Islam also in several occasions established the full value of female witnesses. It is revealed in a hadith from Shahi Bukhari Sharif, "Aqbah bin Harith had married a girl and then a woman came and informed the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that she had suckled both the man and the woman and how can they marry in such an eventuality? Accordingly the Prophet accepted this testimony and dissolved the marriage" (as stated in Engineer, 1996b:4).

Apart from this Maulana Mumtaz Ali Khan also upholds in his *Huquq al-Niswan* that the Quranic verse on women's testimony does not in any way prove the inferiority of women compared to men. He argues that the Quran stipulated the need for two women witnesses in place of one man only to remind the one from committing errors. Another noted jurist of Pakistan, Maulana Umar Ahmad Usmani, has also argued at length in his book *Fiqh-al-Quran Volume III* that in many matters a woman's testimony alone is acceptable without a man. He quotes Imam Shafii's *Kitb-al-Umm* wherein he says that he did not find any jurist he met opposing the contention that in matters like child birth and other matters related to sexual defects of women, only women's testimony is acceptable, not of men (pp. 101-102). He also points out that in matters of hudud and qisas also a woman's testimony can be accepted and he points out the murder case of the third caliph Hazrat Usman whose only witness was his wife Na'ilah and no one else was present at that time to testify the assassins of the third caliph (as stated in Engineer, 1996b:4).

(i) LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATION: A deep-rooted idea is still prevailing among the maximum people of the Muslim society throughout the world that Islam does not support women's leadership and that's why a woman is not competent to be an administrator or a judge or the head of the state. The cause behind this belief is some Quranic verses which are explained by a large number of ulemas and jurists against women's interest. The verses of the Holy Quran that are used to prove women's disability in leadership are: "the men are a degree above the women" (Quran, 2:228) and "the men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made some of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property for the support of women" (Quran, 4:34).

But many renowned Islamic scholars have argued that the above verses should not be explained mere literally rather those need to be explained from the viewpoint of Islamic spirit keeping the main focus on the context. They also denied those explanations which debarred the womenfolk from the right of leading. One of such scholars is Ibn Hazm who refers that God pronounced the above verses to indicate the relation between the husband and wife concerning their family affairs. He also argued that in order to keep up the peace and happiness of the family life, in case of difference of opinions between a husband and a wife, one of them must have the final say in every matter. And this authority cannot be given to anybody but to him who is responsible for maintaining the family and providing all legitimate requirements. To delineate the highest dignity of women, he further argues that Prophet's wives and his daughter Fatima are superior to Abu Bakr and all other companions of the Prophet in religion and in dignity or in rank. So, the above verses do not indicate general superiority of one sex on other (Siddiqi, 1971:48-49).

Since the beginning of civilization, it has been generally asserted by the civilized world that women are inferiors to men physically as well as intellectually. But the latest researches in the social conditions of several peoples have shown that the women of many of them are stronger and better fitted for hard work than their men and in many cases they are intellectually superior to men. The well-known Muslim jurist and philosopher Ibn Rushd also held the opinion that there is no difference between the physical and mental powers of men and women. The difference between them is of degree only. He says that it is the worst social system that does not give women the opportunity to utilize their various capacities (Siddiqi, 1971:62 & 68).

History of Islam reveals that during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet, no question was raised regarding physical or mental disability of women and he allowed the womenfolk to attend almost in every sphere of social life. He himself consulted Khadija about the first revelation when he received it and acted according to her advice. He also acted according to the advice of A'isha when his followers grumbled at his decision about the treaty of Hudaibiya. The Holy Prophet had also permitted Umm Waraqah to lead her entire household in prayer which also included male members (Tabqat-e-Ibn Sa'd Vol.8, p.335 as quoted by Engineer, 1997:3). Even he allowed women to attend in wars. In the battle of Yarmuk many women fought so hard that men fighters felt jealous on them. In a Kharijite battle, a woman also led a troop of two thousand men. History also bears the witness that the Prophet's own wife Hazrat A'isha actively participated in the battle of Uhud. She carried a leather bag full of water to quench the thirst of wounded soldiers (Engineer, 1997a:3 and Siddiqi, 1971:50-51 & 60).

According to Islam, women are free to choose for themselves any carrier that is open to men. Some of the important jurists like Ibn-Jarir al Tarabi and Imam Abu Hanifa have sanctioned the appointment of a woman as a Judge. And in fact there had been several women judges throughout the Islamic history. Several competent scholars like Shaykh Muhammad Abduh are of opinion that women can take part in political activities. They rely upon the verse of the Quran which says that the Muslim men and women are Wali (governor) of one another (Quran, 9:71). Regarding women's appointment in administration, it is seen that even the Caliph Umar appointed Shifa, the daughter of Abdullah, in charge of the affairs of the market (Siddiqi, 1971:57-60).

In fact, Islam did not prescribe any limit in physical as well as spiritual attainment of women. Even if we search the answer of whether any woman was included within the long list of Prophets, we find no proof of disqualification for women. Maulvi Mumtaz Ali Khan has argued, "According to Muslim belief there have been one lakh twenty four thousand Prophets of which not more than thirty have been named. Thus we do not know anything about one lakh twenty three thousand nine hundred and seventy Prophets. One therefore cannot say whether all of them were men or women" (Engineer, 1996c:2). Considering the issue from the viewpoints of the Quran, we find God himself declared about the mother of Prophet Moses, "Behold! We sent to thy mother by inspiration, the message" (Quran, 20:38). He also said about the mother of Prophet Jesus, "And we made the son of Mary and his mother as a sign. We gave them both shelter and high ground" (Quran, 23:50). Again He declared, "And Allah set forth example, to those who believe as wife of Pharaoh" (Quran, 66:11). So, the said women are given special dignity as comparable to the Prophets.

3.8. Observations

From the analysis of the foregoing chapter it is evident that Islam is not only a religion but also a social revolution. It is a complete code of life as it provides a framework for perfect way in every sphere of life. It is based on humanitarian philosophy and its egalitarianism is based on brotherhood, unity, sacrifice and cooperation.

The structure of social life in Islam is lofty, sound and comprehensive. Its substantial elements comprise sincere love for human beings, respect for the elders, mercy for the younger, comfort and consolation for the distressed, feeling of brotherhood for the sake of social solidarity etc. It admits coexistence with any other religion provided that reasons and righteous conduct should support it.

Islam has opened the door of ongoing education system and research by prescribing universalization of knowledge. It admits the importance of knowledge for the growth of consciousness and considers 'ignorance' the most disgraceful curse and provides a lot of guidelines to get rid of it. Its recommendations with regard to the acquisition of knowledge are evidently referred to all the human beings.

According to Islamic dictum, "Acquisition of knowledge is compulsory for all Muslim men and women". There is nothing in *Quranic* injunctions that is opposed to the pursuit of secular education rather some evidences seem to support it. Verily the originality of Islam lies in its endless struggle for exploration and its ceaseless quest for learning. But due to ignorance on Islamic notion many scholars think that the principles of Islam are responsible for the educational backwardness of the Muslim, especially of Muslim women.

Islam rightly thinks that education is a necessary condition that helps women to develop their faculties. There are many examples that confirm that the Prophet of Islam favoured female education in actual practice. Actually, the great encouragement given by Islam to women in their educational, cultural and spiritual activities, theoretically as well as practically throughout its history, is undoubtedly an unique step that proves Islam admits no distinction between man and woman in their basic spheres of life.

In Arabia the period before the advent of Islam is called 'the period of ignorance'. At that time the Arabs generally denied their women from recognizing with minimum respect, worth and dignity. As a result, Arabian women had no legal rights; in youth they were as goods and chattels of their father while husbands used to hold lordships on them after marriage. The situation of the newborn girls was so fatal that some Arabs used to consider them curse and bury them alive or otherwise kill them out of fear of disaster.

In such a situation Islam emerged in Arabia as a monotheistic religion with the declaration of peace, justice and security, and rapidly spread among the oppressed classes and removed all the prevailing inequalities and tyrannies of men against womenfolk. In fact, Islam is the first religion and first social system which recognized the human status of women, and conferred on them the highest dignity and honour, and granted them equal rights with men in every respect, and abolished all discriminations on the basis of sex. Allah has clearly defined and guaranteed the rights of women in the Holy *Quran* so that they could no more be subjected to those oppressions or injustices which had been inflicted on them since the beginning of the human species.

In the spirit of Islam, a woman is treated as a fully responsible human being with full independent entity. Islam not only endorses the objectives of equality, development and peace for women but also strongly advocates and stands for these rights. It further endorses that the whole mankind is the offspring of a single human soul and everyone has the same descent and no one is nobler or meaner by birth. Thus the equality in the creation of man and woman that is highlighted through this announcement has spelled an end to the discrimination against women.

Islam also highly values the being of young girls and strictly forbids casting aspersion on them. Islam not only treats its faithful women followers equally with men, but sometimes it pays higher dignity on them because of some special reasons. To determine the position of mother the Prophet proclaimed, "Paradise lies under the feet of ones mother". While talking about the importance of daughters he further declared, "Whoever has a daughter and does not give her a mean treatment and does not give preference to his son over the daughter, God will make him enter heaven".

The status of woman in Islam is something unique, something novel and something distinct and thus has no similarity with any other cultural system. In the family system of Islam, the rights of a woman are legally protected as well as she also enjoys a position of honour and dignity as mother, wife, daughter and sister. Not only she is considered equal but also sometimes it appears that she enjoys greater privileges than a man does. Islam envisaged comprehensive social roles of a woman and looks forward to her active participation in matters concerning the society and contributes greatly to almost all walks of life.