Responsibilities of today’s Muslim women for the advancement of Islamic values in the light of Sunnah

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Abstract

Today our society is confronting with the struggle between "old" and "new". Despite development of productive forces capitalism leads to anarchy and materialism in every walk of life and is the genuine cause of our concern. At this crucial hour when society is steeped in barbarism leading our generation towards destruction of social order which is the fundamental principle of Islam for the human progress, the role of Muslim women has been doubled. Under the prevailing situation as they have an important and decisive role in shaping the future of the society. The responsibilities of women in Islamic society are not limited. Its scope is vast and varied. They are the nourisher of the future generation. They can enrich and improve life of a society or they can equally cause its decay and disintegration. Muslim women role in society is sometimes conflicted. Can women effect a change in society or should they be confined to the stereotype roles? How do they make the best out of their situation? In what ways can they contribute to society as an individual or in having relationships? This paper will discuss and highlight the aspects of the Muslim women responsibilities with the changing futures of Islamic society according to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Islam offers Muslim women greater opportunities to extend their fields of activity and take their place alongside men in reforming society. An attempt has been made in this study to identify the role of Muslim women as a social agent for a change.

Keywords: Responsibilities, Today’s Muslim women, Islamic values, light of Sunnah

Introduction

The world is plagued by all sorts of problems – social unrest, political instabilities, mass poverty and destitution, prostitution, homosexuality, homicides, killings, drug addiction, alcoholism, family break-ups, juvenile delinquency, suicides and the so-called Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Aids).

The safeguarding of a social order depends on every individual of that society which freely holding to the same moral doctrine and practices. The foundation of Islam is on individual and collective morality and responsibility, hence introducing a social revolution in the perspective in which it was first revealed.

According to the teachings of the Quran the collective morality has been expressed in such terms as justice, equality, mercy, compassion, brotherhood, solidarity and freedom of choice.

In Islam the position of leader or head of the state have a higher burden or responsibility than others. They are responsible for the application of the moral principle laid down by the Quran and are accountable to Allah for their administration.

Family is a basic institution of the society and according to the teachings of Islam it plays a fundamental role in the making of the Muslim personality. The problems of restoration of equilibrium in a fast changing social order are an acute problem for the Muslim Ummah. The right way for doing so needed to be identified. Women’s role is central to the establishment of a family and the atmosphere that will prevail therein.

Narrated Ibn-e Umar: The Prophet (SAW) said, “All of you are the guardians and are the responsible for your wards. The ruler is a guardian of the nation and the man is a guardian of his family; the woman is a guardian and responsible for her husband’s house and his offspring; and so all of you is guardians and are responsible for your wards.”¹

Islam builds human character and aims at the establishment of a society free from all vices and immoralities. It is an established fact of history and a matter of great pride for Muslim women of today, that women were included in the avant guard of Islamic mission of the Prophet (SAW). In the lives of these virtuous women, there is an exemplary pattern for us to follow. These wise and learned women made a great contribution to the cause of Islamic teachings and helped in the uplift of the society.

Muslim women have enjoyed a rich legacy of excellence in their roles as leaders, professionals, caregivers and activists, and Islamic history is an impressive record of their remarkable contributions as teachers and scholars of sacred text and law.

Muslim Women and the social change

The social system in Islam is geared towards the preservation of the human race and the protection of the society.

¹ Sahih Bukhari: 893
Since the human race consists of men and women, Islam addressed both with its doctrine as well as its laws. It defined the relationship between them, established their rights and their responsibilities and promised each one the reward of paradise for submitting to their Creator.

Family is the basic institution of the society and according to the teachings of Islam it plays a fundamental role in the making of the Muslim personality. The problem of restoration of equilibrium in a fast changing social order is an acute problem for the Muslim Ummah. The right way to address the problem needs to be identified. Women's role is central to the establishment of a family and the atmosphere that will prevail therein. The mother's role in Islam is high in esteem and so majestic and noble that she has been called the "School of Nation". The root word of Ummah is Umm in Arabic which means mother. Allah has given a blessing and trust to mother to nurture, protect, guide and educate the Ummah. The first seed of the knowledge is planted and developed at home under the supervision and loving care of the mother;

Allah has bestowed His blessings by gifted the role of mother to women with the capabilities to achieve, the wisdom of giving and skill to inspire a sense of belonging. Holy Prophet (saw) has said: "Woman is the care-taker of all the members of her husband's family and his children. And for this she will be questioned on the Day of Judgment."²

This Hadith shows that woman's primary duty is to bring up the child as to make him or her model Muslim. High esteem of morals lies in the arm and lap of the mother as today's children are citizens and leaders of tomorrow. Mothers have been exclusively blessed with eminently high status in life –to give birth to Prophet, Imams, Saints – in short Allah's representatives. Behind the foundation of the personality of the child lies mother's training. Thus Islam has certainly assigned the duties of the family to woman, not only this it also prepares her to spend a successful and purposeful life in society. Woman is responsible for the building of further generations of mankind. It is a huge, difficult and responsible job, and any carelessness, negligence or neglect on the part of woman can do irreparable damage to the nation. Thus the destiny of the future generations of man has been put into the hands of woman. The principle Islamic values evolve around the morality which is the basic unit of the Islamic Society and women are the guardians of morality.

Morality helps achieving spiritual excellence with cultural and social change. It is therefore, the duty of Muslim women to illustrate the different stages of moral qualities, so that the men in all stages of development may be able to take advantage of its teachings. It is evident from history that Muslim women greatly benefited society in all areas of life. The pages of history testify that their intellect, foresight and understanding helped society in every field of life and that they fulfilled the duty of guidance and direction (hidayat) of the ummah shoulder-to-shoulder with men. Their thrilling speeches give the courage to the young generation to fight in the cause of Allah. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr writes about Arwa Bint Abdu 1 Muttalib, the aunt of Allah’s Messenger; “after embracing Islam, she helped the Prophet, and incited her son to help and endeavor in upholding his (i.e. the Prophet’s) cause”.³

Women not only tried to keep their own men steadfast and firm in the truth but also endeavored to change things whenever they saw corruption in their community and to establish good and righteous practices.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr writes of Samra’ bint Nuhaiq: “She commanded good and forbade evil while going around in the markets. She had a whip in her hand to do amr bil ma’ruf wa nahi anil munkar and with that whip she punished those who committed any evil or vice (Munkar) and to punish traders who indulged in unfair used to play⁴

In this respect the women of Ummah cared neither for the people’s opinions nor for those of the rulers and their officers. Just as they are devoted to their faith and fight against the enemies of Din, in the same way, they refused to tolerate the depravity and corruption of thought and action of some of those who called themselves Muslims.

Umm-ul-Banin, the wife of Walid, and sister of Omar II, a remarkable woman of the time has a considerable influence over her husband and was always exercised for the good of the people. The lecture she once administered to Hajjaj is landmark in history. He once came to visit Walid and had the confidence to advise him to shake off the influence of the Queen. When Umm-ul-Banin heard this, she asked Walid to send Hajjaj to pay his duties to her. Hajjaj came into the Queen's chamber. He was received with studied neglect, and was allowed to remain waiting for a long time. Umm ul-Banin then entered the hall of audience, accompanied by her maids. His obeisance was acknowledged with reserve; and the Queen questioned him about his advice to the sovereign not to allow her interference in affairs of state. The reply led to a memorable lecture. The royal lady recounted one by one all his misdeeds, and laid open before him how he had induced his masters to cruel deeds, in which the best followers of Faith had been sacrificed, and how he had proved himself the evil genius of her family. Then, after reproaching him for his cowardice, she ordered her attendants to thrust him out.⁵

The above mentioned historical evidence is a clear proof that a Muslim woman cannot keep aloof and unconcerned, like a spectator, with the changing fortunes of the Islamic society, for she has a very close and deep relationship with the progress or decline, reform or corruption of that society. A loss to her society is her loss and gain to her society is her gain.

The efforts of the great personalities of Islam are no doubt a great favor on Ummah. The exemplary efforts and services rendered by the Muhadditheen, Muftissireen, Jurists and Mubaaligheen towards Deen needs no introduction. They have been highly recognized and everyone pays tribute to them. However, it is as usual neglected by the historians that the mothers hand in upbringing on these great sons of Islam is of great value. The mother’s contribution and efforts in molding their personality and character prepared them for the grand and noble task that they later on performed in their life. Hence, we are indebted to these silent mothers and their hidden contribution for the foundational role played by them.

1 Bukhari.
2 Al-Isti’ab fi Asma’ al Ashab. by Ysuf ibn Abd Allah, 978 or 9-1071, . Ibn Abd al-Barr (Aug 31, 2012)
3 al-Isti’ab fi Asma’ al Ashab, by Ysuf ibn Abd Allah, 978 or 9-1071
4 al-Isti’ab fi Asma’ al-ashab, tadhkirah samra’bin Nuhaik [Afzal: p.77]
5 Ameer Ali, Syed, Short History of the Saracens, Al Fareden Printers 25, Darbur Market, Lahore. 1927

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Ustaad (teacher) of renowned and famous Imaam of jurisprudence Imaam Maaliki (Raddhiyallaahu Anhu) was Imaam Rabiatur Rai (RA). He was the renowned Muhaddithof Madinatul Munawwara. His father left for Jihad and he was born in his absence. He returned home after 27 years due to several events occurred one after one.

As he reached his home, he noticed a young man coming out. This was quite disturbing for him and he strictly questioned the stranger regarding his identity. The stranger also got furious and this causes the quarrel between them. When their rising voices overheard by the woman of the house she rushed to the door and immediately recognized her husband. She approached her husband and informed him that the stranger is his offspring who was still to be born at the time when he left 27 years back for jihad. Similarly the son was introduced to the father.

Later on the man asked his wife about the money he left for her that how she spent that amount. She gives advice to him to perform his Salat first at the mosque and then afterward she will give the details of the how she had spent the amount. Upon reaching the mosque he found a large gathering of the people around the Muhaddith giving lessons of Hadith (sayings of the Prophet saw).

Since he was far from the place he did not recognized the teacher (ustaad) but when he approaches closer he was surprised to find the person who was addressing the huge gathering was none other than his own son Imaam Rabiatur Rai (RA) whom he met shortly. He was overwhelmed with joy and upon his return his wife informed him that the money he was inquiring about has been spent in educating his son for making him Muhaddith. Hence the world knows about the great deeni knowledge of Iamaam Rabiatur Rai (RA) but there is no mention or few people know’s of the sacrifice and contribution of his mother in his upbringing.

Mother’s role in upbringing the several other great personalities are worth mention. Among them is also Imam Bukhari (RA). It is a universal fact the mother’s influence on the child is far greater than that of father and that first educational institute is after all the lap of the mother. Therefore it is necessary that the mother should be aware of the role and responsibilities she has to play in nurturing and fostering the child. The proper guidance and application can give birth to Ghazzaalis and Razis again. Hence the role for a woman is to be a good and practical Muslim, therefore it is necessary that the mother should be aware of the task of eradicating the wrongs from the society.

Waking up to the Challenges

Since the colonial time, our Islamic values have been eroded gradually, and its magnitude has been unprecedented during the last two decades. As expected the repercussion have been obvious: our public morality is factually vanished, fraud, cheating, misappropriation and inequities that were not even imaginable only two decades ago are today not only possible but common in practice; corruption and nepotism has crossed all limits and no more consider a crime instead became a way of life. Virtuous are considered to be foolish and youth has become so materialist that they have been emptied of any moral values and accumulate by whatever means as it has become the very essence of their living. If this trend continues then the question is where are we likely to place ourselves in the next decade? Surely we have a responsibility and obligation to address this moral decay and social breakdown, not because our children would be the immediate effectors or the victim but also because we are answerable and accountable before our Lord and creator, to whom we have to ultimately and inevitably return.

Contrary to what has been propagated widely that the Muslim women responsibility ends up at the household. This wrong notion not only propagated widely but also given air of religious support but in reality it has nothing to do with the religion as the Qur’an and the Sunnah are very clear in this regard. To clear any doubt in this context we may need to recall what Almighty Allah has said (Al Qur’an 22:41 and 3:110) on this very vital issue of Amr bil-Ma’ruf wal-Nahy an-l-Munkar. Here the stress has been laid down on enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong and that both Muslim men and women are expected, without any gender distinction to be involved in the important work of promoting good and forbidding evil.

Hence Muslim women on equal footing expected to contribute in the task of uplifting the society on Islamic values from moral degradation and to ensure that justice prevails and to block the spread of evil and corruption. The resources and the way of doing these may differ from culture to culture and from generation to generation. At present for example make use of the Nonprofit or Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Human Rights groups, Mass Media, Electronic Media have turn out to be one of the most effective resources, much more successful than traditional way of preaching, through which public opinion is shaped and society persuaded. Muslim women are no exceptional in this task of eradicating the wrongs from the society.

In today’s contemporary society the latest technology has provided many opportunities and the many resources of achieving this which have all made it convenient for women to take participation no matter if they prefer to perform from comfort and privacy of their homes, hence not letting them to give any excuse. It is a universal fact that men alone cannot bring the desired result in this context. This is why Almighty Allah clearly mentioned men and women while preaching, through which public opinion is shaped and society persuaded. Muslim women responsibility ends up at the household. This wrong notion not only propagated widely but also given air of religious support but in reality it has nothing to do with the religion as the Qur’an and the Sunnah are very clear in this regard. To clear any doubt in this context we may need to recall what Almighty Allah has said (Al Qur’an 22:41 and 3:110) on this very vital issue of Amr bil-Ma’ruf wal-Nahy an-l-Munkar. Here the stress has been laid down on enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong and that both Muslim men and women are expected, without any gender distinction to be involved in the important work of promoting good and forbidding evil.

Conclusion:

The primary function and main field of operation of woman is her home, however, today, in fast growing world where woman are contributing in professional fields, they have an opportunity to expand their intellect and capabilities. They should render their services for the advancement of the Islamic values in the light of the sayings of the Prophets (SAW).

They can perform this task whatever profession they are in, whether they are teacher, doctor, banker, agriculturist, educationist, journalist, poet, writer or scholar etc, they should not forget that they are the architects of civilization.
Currently Muslim women are at crossroad facing two antithetical circumstances: the legacy of past cultural traditions and the outcome of the western secular culture, both of which are far apart from Islamic values. Keeping in view this scenario Muslim women are obliged to certain responsibilities and duties which they should perform i.e. to expand their awareness of the aforementioned state of affairs and deepen their understanding of Islam and the perception of women from the vantage point of Islam. Also to rid themselves from the influence of the flawed traditions and the intrusion of corrupt western secularism and to create circumstances that promotes and portrays the true and real status of Muslim women in consonance with the Islamic values. However the burden of responsibility does not rest upon Muslim women only. All people who have a proper sense of morality share the responsibility to fulfill this task.

The contemporary Muslim woman can become successful at this battle front on the provision that she has the necessary Islamic education and creates in herself the true characteristics of the personality of a Muslim woman. We have in Islamic history the few landmark names which portrays the true characteristics of a Muslim woman enable the today's woman to follow.

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