The empowerment of women: Islamic and western perspectives

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Abstract: In the presence of problems confronting women, several regional, national and international organizations have drawn up action plans for the empowerment of women. In spite of sincere efforts and effective strategies, problems of women continue. This paper argues that these problems are mainly caused by lack of ethical, spiritual and moral foundations in life and society. Improper education of both men and women also contributes to gender injustice. This paper contends that empowerment of women requires proper education of men and women as well as to strengthen the ethical, spiritual and moral foundations in life and society. The article further argues that Islam as the worldview, way of life, and a code of conduct has the potential to provide sound ethical, spiritual and moral foundation as well as proper education to right the wrong done to women.

Keywords: Women, empowerment, Islam, worldview, moral foundation

Introduction

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 by the United Nation's General Assembly is a clear manifestation of the existence of the problems confronting women. Several regional and international organizations have come up with several documents and strategies and action plans to address gender inequalities. The action plans and documents adopted by the UN have been accepted by member countries. Most people consider these action-oriented plans as very important and consequently, the plans and documents are taken as universally approved texts. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1996) has become a symbol of the empowerment of women (Fourth World Conference on Women, 1996: 17). This paper, however, argues that the measures suggested and adopted in Platform for Action are neither universally accepted nor considered by all communities as appropriate for the empowerment of women (Kausar, 2015). Hence, the empowerment documents and strategies require certain fundamental modifications (Kausar, 2016). This paper argues that the emphasis must be focused, to achieve the

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concrete results, on the education of both women and men based on the ethical, spiritual and moral considerations.[1] The dominant discourses and documents on empowerment of women lack these fundamental aspects.[2] As a result of these, they have failed to solve the ever increasing problems of women. The recent statistics of crimes against women show that there is a genuine need to rethink the present debate, documents and strategies for empowerment of women. Instead of depending on one perspective, the UNO must seek help from other perspectives. This paper contends that Islam is capable of contributing significantly in this area. It provides sound foundation to life and society in which both women and men may be treated fairly based on ethics, spirituality and morality. At present Islam is misunderstood by both experts and people in general. This paper presents a proper and a realistic understanding of the issues of empowerment of women. Of necessity, this paper begins by providing an authentic understanding of Islam.

Islam is not merely a religion

Islam is not a mere religion (al-Qur'an, 5: 3; 3: 82, 83, and 84).[3] Some consider it as a religion manufactured by human beings. Therefore, it is subject to evolution towards higher forms. Being a religion it is confined to personal and private life of man. But this kind of understanding is fallacious and false. Murad explains it better which is as follows:

> Islam is not a religion or faith in the Western sense, nor is it linked with their sort of power, politics and state. It cannot be reduced to any of them, though it must include each of them. Even an outside observer, if not some Muslim, can plainly see that: 'It cannot be repeated too often that Islam is 'not merely a religion'. It is a total and unified way of life, both religious and secular; it is a set of beliefs and a way of worship; it is a vast and integrated system of law; it is a culture and a civilization; it is an economic system and a way of doing business; it is a polity and a method of governance; it is a special sort of society and a way of running a family; it prescribes for inheritance and divorce, dress and etiquette, food and personal hygiene. It is a spiritual and human totality, this worldly and other worldly'. Hence, religion and politics are two sides of a single coin in Islam (Murad, 1981: 28).

Furthemore, Al-Attas argues:

> The Western concept of religion does not…come under the category of revealed religion in the strict sense as applicable to Islam. We cannot accept, to mention a scientific example of categorization of some religions, as revealed religions…For us it is for the most part a sophisticated form of culture religions, distinguished only by the fact that

they claims possession of a revealed Book which, though partly true, it nevertheless was not intended nor authorized by that Book to call upon mankind universally in the manner that a revealed religion was called upon to do from the very beginning without need of further 'development' in the religion itself and its sacred laws. A revealed religion as we understand it is complete and perfect in its adequacy for mankind from the very beginning. The Holy Qur'an says that Islam is already made completely and perfect for mankind, and this claim to completion and perfection is substantiated from its very beginning by history. The name Islam was given to the religion from the very beginning just as the name Muslim was given to denote the adherents of the religion from the very start…so Islam…is always relevant, is always adequate, is always 'modern' or new, is always ahead of time because it transcends history…and is not subject to the kind of self-searching 'evolution' and 'development'…Since Islam is the religion which transcends the influences of human 'evolution' and historicity, the values embodied in it are absolute…Islam has its own world view (Al-Attas, 1978: 27-28).

It is neither the result of human thinking nor speculation. It is the worldview which is based on the knowledge of the Creator of the World, Allah (SWT) (al-Qur'an, 5: 3; 2: 131; 2: 213). There is no room for speculation about the origin and purpose of life and the world and everything that exists. This is so because people "have no definite knowledge of it, but merely follow conjecture" (al-Qur'an, 4: 157); "They only follow idle fancies, indulging in conjecture (al-Qur'an, 6: 116); "Many indeed say misleading things without knowledge, driven merely by their desires (al-Qur'an, 6: 119); "Tell them, have you any sure knowledge that you can produce before us? In fact you are only following idle fancies and are merely conjecturing" (al-Qur'an, 6: 148). In fact, there is no element of speculation and conjecture in the constitution of the worldview of Islam like the philosophical or scientific worldviews (Al-Attas, 1996). Islam claims that the worldview it presented is True, Authentic and Real. It is not a religious worldview. It also asserts that it is not a new worldview. It existed since the inception of man on this earth (al-Qur'an, 2: 213). As a universal worldview, it stands for the guidance and wellbeing of people. Its goal is the development of life, society, culture and civilization. It addresses all the people of the world and presents before them a comprehensive, truthful and realistic scheme of life designed by the Creator of man and the world, Allah (SWT), which includes all aspects of life and remains relevant for all times (Mawdudi, 1992; 1975 and 1990, and Siddiqi, 1994). Hence, there is no such thing as modern Islam or traditional Islam. There is nothing such as male Islam or female Islam; male worldview or female worldview. It does not see any reason to name this worldview as traditional

or religious or dogmatic. It is presented in the Qur'an as a truthful, authentic and a realistic worldview. The authenticity and truthfulness of the Qur'an is open for test and examination. The Qur'an invites thinking minds to investigate its claims and see truth and reality. Hence, the use of the terms such as traditional Islam, modern Islam, moderate Islam, conservative Islam, liberal Islam, militant Islam, radical Islam, progressive Islam or political Islam are unrealistic and misleading. They are refuted based on ethical [rational] exercise supported by historical and empirical evidences. Islam as worldview transcends traditional and modern; male-female discrimination; transcends private and public roles and transcends spiritual and material dichotomy. For Islam, life is integral, one single unit. It is ethical, spiritual, and moral.

The worldview and scheme of life in Islam

Islam as the worldview and system of life offers an integrated and holistic scheme of life based on Truth and Reality of life and the World. It is based on Knowledge. It is not the result of human philosophical speculation. It is revealed for the guidance of man by Allah (SWT) Who is the Creator, and Sustainer of life and the world. He possesses un-Limited knowledge, un-limited wisdom and un-limited power. All these claims are presented in the Qur'an with rational arguments, historical narratives and empirical evidences. Based on an ethical discourse, it establishes the Truth and Reality of Allah (SWT) as the Creator and Sustainer of this world. Hence, the unity of Allah, unity of life, unity of knowledge and unity of the purpose of creation become an integral part of this worldview (al Faruqi, 1982; Siddiqui, 1979: 17-34). The purpose of creation of women and men is one and the same – to serve Allah (SWT) by building up life, society, culture and civilization through seeking knowledge and guidance from Allah (SWT) (Mawdudi, 1976).

Based on this Truth and in line with this Reality of Life and the World, Islam presents its scheme of life integrating all aspects into a holistic frame-work. It contends that negligence of Truth and the Truth-based worldview causes chaos and crisis in human life and society. Hence, centered on the recognition of Truth and in line with Reality of Allah (SWT), Islam looks at family as the basic foundation of life, society, culture and civilization wherein all members of family, male and female, are bounded together with a loving and responsible chain of reciprocal duties and rights towards each other. Unlike the modern Western ideologies and philosophies, the focus of the worldview of Islam is on duties rather than rights. Hence, family is defined as a mini-civilization wherein all members get basic education, ethical, spiritual and moral training, and lead a disciplined and civilized life (Ahmad, 1979).

Members of family and society complement one another and serve Allah (SWT). They work together for the well-being of people in society. Islam adopts a moderate but truthful and realistic approach to life and guarantees *justice* to all. Justice becomes central in the scheme of life. Through justice, discipline, law and order are maintained. It does not divide life into conflicting dimensions. It is against exploitation, discrimination and hegemony of individuals, communities and nations (Ahmad, 1979). It considers them a source of chaos and crimes.

Islam perceives *justice* as the goal of culture and civilization. It promotes (to guarantee *justice*, *peace* and *security*) well designed, non-interventionist and civilization-friendly policies at individual, societal, national, and international levels. It empowers each and every member of society. If the present Muslim societies, communities, countries do not reflect these qualities, it is not because of Islam but negligence of Islam on the part of scholars, leaders and people themselves. According to the Qur'an and social law of society, ignorance or negligence of the above mentioned worldview causes many problems especially the inequality and discrimination in society. It also creates chaos and crises, and gives rise to crimes and corruption in societies. The remedy for all these lies in the actualization of the Truth-based and Reality-oriented worldview of Islam in life and society (al-Qur'an, 2: 256-257).

Construction and development of life, family, society, culture and civilization are not possible based on myths, mysteries and dogmas. They require sound foundation of ethics, spirituality and morality based on historical and empirical evidences. According to the worldview of Islam, the development of individual and society require the participation of every member of society, men and women, in the affairs of society. It is expected from all members of society that they will work together as co-vicegerents of Allah (SWT) not as independent and autonomous individuals (Kausar, 2001: 55-78). There is no place for hatred and distrust towards each other. They will have to provide proper education and facilities to each member of society.

Islam encourages people to approach to every problem of life and society wisely and intelligently from an integrated and holistic perspective based on Truth and Reality of the Existence of Allah (SWT). Members of society are expected to stay in their respective families for companionship of one another (Naseef, 1999). For the same reasons, they have to make plans of actions for the protection of the rights of women or of men; the plans have to be family-centred so that all efforts can be made to keep members of family, husband, wife and children together. For this purpose, women, men and children have to be educated properly. A holistic framework for the development of all – men, women and children has to be drafted, adopted and followed (Kauser, 2006). The modern Western type of education is a big hindrance towards this goal of the empowerment of women.

Current educational system must be either replaced or modified based on ethical, spiritual, and moral principles (Lewis, 2006: xii, xiii and xiv).

The empowerment of women

It is necessary to note that the denial of ethical, spiritual and moral aspects of life is the root cause of the denial of rights of individuals and of injustice and discrimination in society (Kausar, 2015: 230-234). Yet, almost all the documents of the United Nations on the rights and empowerment of women such as CEDAW and Platform for Action, neglect this ethical, spiritual and moral foundation of life and society (Kausar, 1999: 62-75). Islam is generalized, viewed as a religion, and considered as a stumbling block in the way of the empowerment of women (Kausar, 2016). No doubt Islam differs not only in its worldview but also on many other issues with the existing dominant paradigm of the modern world. The differences between Islam and other perspectives should be respected and not suspected. The international organizations must be open minded and ready to benefit from all useful sources including Islam which has the capacity to guide humanity on the path of justice, peace, prosperity, security and happiness (Kausar, 2015: 118-171).

It is manifest that the gender perspective dominates the international documents for empowerment of women. It has been posed as a universal perspective on all communities, cultures and civilizations across the world especially, through the Platform for Action. CEDAW and the Platform for Action are referred to all these years as International Documents on Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment (Timothy & Freeman, 2000). UN meetings have been convened every five years, since 1995, to examine the extent to which women's empowerment have taken place in the light of UN documents, CEDAW and the Platform for Action. The member states are contacted at regular intervals to monitor the achievements (Timothy & Freeman, 2000). In spite of all these theoretical and practical efforts, no drastic improvement or empowerment of women has taken place. The reason is the faulty understanding of the term women's empowerment, peace, development, and the elimination of cultural norms. These concepts are clearly spelled out in the following sections.

Women's empowerment and liberation

It seems important to comprehend that Allah (SWT) alone possesses absolute, comprehensive and indivisible power and sovereignty (al-Qur'an, 7: 59, 24: 55, and 57: 25) over the universe. Human beings are His vicegerents (khalifah, representative) and hence it is their duty to govern and regulate the affairs of this world in accordance with the guidance of Allah (SWT) through consultation. Islam has already empowered men and women with a long list of responsibilities

and rights for their development and for the general good and welfare of society as a whole.[4] People have to be educated through ethically, spiritually and morally oriented educational system (Ali, 2014). Seen from this perspective, women's empowerment is not a struggle against the so called class of men, religion or ideology. The denial of women's rights is caused due to lack of proper education. The truthful and realistic empowerment of women from a realistic and truth-based point of view may be guaranteed if they are educated properly. Empowerment of women is the process through which men and women shall be made practically capable to fulfill their responsibilities delegated to them from their Creator Allah (SWT) and finally attain and enjoy the due rights. For this purpose, they need to seek Allah's guidance through a proper educational system. They need to know how to lead a successful life in accordance with purpose of creation. It seems imperative, therefore, that the women's empowerment may be guaranteed if both men and women are educated properly. It seems essential as well that men, more than women, need to be educated properly. It is the men who have either denied the rights of women or misused them. The basic responsibility of men cannot be overlooked at any cost. Ultimately, everyone would be able to contribute towards the development of a healthy civilization for the benefit of humanity.

The empowerment of women as presented in the feminist literature and in the Platform for Action aims at liberating women from Allah (SWT), His guidance and purpose of creation. This definitely is unacceptable.[5] Liberation from Allah (SWT) would result in the loss of ethical, spiritual and moral foundation of life. Life will become materialistic and aimless. The empowerment of women needs to be related to higher goals of life. In the first place, in the absence of any sort of reference to Allah (SWT) and His Guidance, women's empowerment suffers from many human limitations and flaws. Secondly, this sort of empowerment de-humanizes women and reduces them to the level of mere physical existence. It instigates them to launch a fight against men and nature. This kind of development and empowerment provides women a lopsided development, which may guarantee material development and high political positions, but at the same time creates emptiness and meaninglessness in life. Even after attaining material development and political advancement, these empowered men and women remain discontent with their spiritual and moral life. This sort of empowerment fails to guide these so-called empowered women for higher meaning in life as can be observed in modern societies of the east and the west. This accounts for an increase in sexual crimes, sexual harassment and divorce rates etc.

Human beings can enjoy the real peace and happiness through a meaningful life. Life from an ethical point of view demands submission to the guidance revealed from Allah (SWT). If women follow the guidance of their

Creator Allah (SWT) for empowerment, they would find satisfaction, peace and happiness in their life. Men and Women need to work together for this purpose. The restoration, protection, sustenance, maintenance and promotion of the rights of women as endorsed by Allah (SWT) are the duties of men as well. This consistent struggle should be launched in multi-dimensional ways: educational, legal, political, moral, etc. depending on the case while taking seriously the guidance of Allah (SWT). In other words, women's empowerment means the eradication of all sorts of theoretical and practical obstacles in the way of the enjoyment of women's rights and power.

Dignified and proper treatment of women

Islam believes in the dignity, honour and proper treatment of women as human beings, who are created as vicegerents of Allah (SWT) without any discrimination, and who are enjoined to acquire knowledge without any obstacle, and who shall be rewarded or punished in accordance to their deeds without any discernment (al-Qur'an, 4: 1, 51: 56, 9: 71, and 16: 97). However, Islam recognizes the physical and biological differences between men and women. But these differences do not make them inferior and also do not make them identical, rather different. Thus, Islam is very clear about the equal treatment of men and women in the eyes of law acknowledging their natural differences and thus do not mix equality of men and women before law with identity.

In Islam, equal treatment of men and women implies the recognition of the dignified status of women as human beings and vicegerents of Allah (SWT). Recognition of the rights of women, who are spiritually and intellectually same as men, is integral to the worldview of Islam. Women and men are biologically and naturally different from each other but women are guaranteed the same opportunity as men for the attainment and advancement of education. Women are also given the same opportunity as men to participate in socio-economic and political structures while keeping in view the natural, biological differences. Women are paid, recognized, acknowledged and appreciated as intellectually competent by every one based on their qualifications and achievements without any discrimination. They are given a special consideration as "mothers" when compared to men as "fathers". Women are judged like men by Allah (SWT) based on their "piety" without any discrimination. They are rewarded and punished as men in the hereafter based on their respective deeds in this world without any prejudice.

In gender feminism and ipso facto in the document Platform for Action, as referred earlier, the concept of equality is blurred with identity. It is accepted theoretically but denied practically. The feminists, particularly, the liberal, radical and gender, who talk about equality between men and women ignore the natural

and biological differences. This feature of feminism crushes the very purpose and the aims of feminism itself. Feminism originated by few committed and dedicated women activists sincerely and honestly struggled hard to attain all those educational, economic, political and other rights for women as men which were otherwise denied to women in the earlier Western societies. They stood against all kinds of discrimination against women so that women should be able to participate in society, develop their potentials and enjoy equality, peace and development. They never wanted to crush the natural differences between men and women and they never wanted to attack marriage and family as political institutions, nor were they insisting on the promotion of deviant forms of sexuality and sexual orientation.

Quite contrary to this, the Platform for Action, for example, does not reflect the earlier trends of feminism in many ways. It follows that definition of equality which is promoted by the later generation of feminists especially the gender feminists for whom equality does not mean just equal access to opportunities for women as men in social institutions but rather they want women to be the same as men. The fact is, the amalgamation of identity with equality has turned gender feminism into male chauvinism and has given rise to conceptual and ideological tensions within feminists themselves. Their conceptions of peace and development are at odd with the way it is understood in Islam.

Peace

Peace is explained as a condition, in which a human being as an individual or human beings as a collectivity believe in justice, live with justice and work for justice (al-Attas, 1978: 71-90). Justice is defined as putting things in the right and proper places. In other words, peace is recognition of human beings what they are so that they keep themselves in that right and proper position and live and work in that position. Since human beings are vicegerents of Allah (SWT), peace underlies the condition in which human beings are doing justice to themselves by living and working as vicegerents of Allah (SWT). Hence, peace means maintaining justice to them by keeping themselves in the right position as vicegerents of Allah (SWT). Keeping their position as vicegerents entails submission to the guidance of Allah (SWT) in all aspects of life and its promotion through peaceful means. In other words, peace is a condition where justice prevails. In the context of women issues, peace is a condition in which women enjoy rights and justice by performing vicegerency. Performance of vicegerency in the context of women is willing submission of women, and men, to the guidance of Allah (SWT) in all aspects of life. It is the reason that Islam itself is defined as submission to Allah (SWT) and 'peace'. It implies that men and women's willing submission to Allah (SWT), to His guidance in all aspects of

life ensures peace otherwise injustice prevails. Women would get peace only when they follow the status and role assigned to them by Allah (SWT).

The status and role of women as assigned by Islam is very comprehensive and holistic. Islam has given a prominent position to women in family and a dynamic role in society. Hence, women can lead a peaceful life if they follow the guidance of Allah (SWT) because the guidance is presented for them considering their nature and requirements of a peaceful life. Therefore, if women lose their peace of mind, it is not due to Islam, but due to the negligence of Allah's guidance. For instance, women may lose their peace of mind if they tend to follow the culturally constructed biased social norms, the biased writings on women's issues or feminist theories which create a gender-war between men and women or when they are deprived by their family, society or certain individuals or groups and   social structures.

Whereas, peace in Platform for Action is different as it is understood from the gender feminist perspective. It is the condition in which women would attain and enjoy absolute rights and unrestricted freedom in all realms of life including sexual and reproductive. Majority of the feminists and the Platform for Action look at Islam as inimical to women's peace and development. Hence, they do not bother to look into the teachings of Islam. The perspective of the gender feminists and the Platform for Action is diametrically opposite to Islamic position of peace. For Islam, it is clear that men and women can attain and enjoy peace if they follow Allah's guidance in life and society otherwise not. Some of the restrictions and conditions which Islam puts for both men and women in the enjoyment of certain rights especially the sexual and reproductive are considered as necessary for peace and development. Hence, gender feminism and the Platform for Action, the products of liberated minds from Allah SWT and His guidance, suffer from several human limitations. Consequently, fail to understand the nature of men and women. Due to these reasons, although they aspire for peace to women, they take away their peace and cut their life and personalities into bits and pieces.

Development

According to Islam development should be holistic and well-balanced, not lop-sided and imbalanced which means development should entail all aspects of life into an integrated and holistic life (Ahmad, 1994). This is possible only through the willing submission to Allah (SWT) and His guidance. The fundamental concepts of Oneness of Allah (SWT), Oneness of life and Oneness of the purpose of creation work like a shield against all kinds of lop-sidedness, either extreme materialism or extreme asceticism or spiritualism. For instance, Islam   calls for material development based on the ethical [rational], spiritual [purposeful] and moral foundations and thus turns material development into spiritual and moral

development. For this reason, development of women implies a holistic and a well-balanced development. Women are allowed to enjoy economic development while following Allah's guidance and playing their important role in family. If economic development is pursued without guidance of Allah (SWT) and neglects the institution of family, it gives rise to corruption and chaos. Hence, Islam disagrees with it and does not even consider it development in the real sense of the word. The real goal of development is advancement in the performance of Divine vicegerency more efficiently so that people can enjoy peace and tranquillity. Seen from this perspective, development of women implies progress of women towards performance of Divine vicegerency fulfilling their responsibilities and enjoying all rights as endorsed by Allah (SWT). Such a holistic development does not sacrifice the real place and position of women.

Contrary to this, the development as perceived by the gender feminists and the Platform for Action is entirely based on the sixteenth century philosophical background of Renaissance and seventeenth and the eighteenth century philosophy of Enlightenment and its scientific revolution. It is wrongly argued that based on the modern scientific method, knowledge can be attained through human faculties of reason and sense perception without any recourse to Allah (SWT) and His guidance. It is also asserted that the purpose of knowledge is to overpower nature and make man independent of Allah (SWT) and nature. It is expected that the material abundance and political power can help them. This kind of development is lopsided and imbalanced because its entire focus is confined to material and political development at the cost of spiritual and moral values.

Elimination of culturally created social norms

On the way to empowerment of women, culturally created social norms are considered as obstacles. By culturally created social norms or biased cultural norms or ethno-centric social norms, they mean those norms, customs, traditions and habitual practices which are either totally or partially constructed by societies. The socially constructed norms are dominant in many societies. They are unfortunately presented as Islamic norms, traditions, customs and practices. All societies, western and eastern, are suffering from socially and culturally constructed norms on the status and role of women in family and society. However, there is a big difference between what Muslims consider socially or culturally constructed norms and what the gender feminists mean by socially constructed roles. For instance, according to the gender feminists, the roles of wife and mother are taken as socially constructed, whereas, from Islamic point of view, the roles of wife and mother are constructed by Allah (SWT). For instance, marriage is regarded as a sign of Allah (SWT), who put love and mercy between husband and wife for each

other. Woman as a wife is asked by Allah (SWT) to guard her chastity and the belongings of her house even in the absence of her husband. Husband is assigned the major role of maintenance and protection of wife. The relationship between of wife and husband is not based on the domination of husband and subjection of wife. The responsibility of house-chores is shared on the basis of cooperation between husband and wife. These are not the socially constructed norms but integral to a stable family. Hence, the roles of woman as wife, mother, sister and daughter in family and society are respected and promoted. They are not considered as socially constructed roles. They are not against the teachings of Allah (SWT). Wife has certain responsibilities towards her husband and children; in the same way a husband has certain responsibilities for his wife and children. Such is not the case with the gender feminists. According to them, different positions and roles and responsibilities of woman are taken as socially constructed. Wifehood is even measured as a political institution. The same goes with the role of a mother in the family. But in the case of Islam, the reproductive responsibilities for begetting children are not the responsibility of mother alone. They are assigned to both husband and wife. Since women are biologically different from men, pregnancy is the integral part of the body of woman. Pregnancy of wife does not undermine rather improves the position of woman as mother. This truth and reality is not understood properly by gender feminists. Thus, there is an enormous difference between Islamic perspective and gender perspective on how they define socially constructed roles.

Goals of the empowerment of women according to Islam

The joint struggle for the empowerment of women will have to develop such strategies and policies through which the following goals of empowerment must be made achievable. It is not a theoretical issue. It requires practical action-oriented program.

Justice: Women are guaranteed justice without discrimination. Women should be able to enjoy all rights and responsibilities and should be able to attain appropriate position in family and society as ordained by Allah (SWT). The individuals, families, societies and governments are responsible to promote and disseminate justice to women.

Security: Women should feel safe and secure from all kinds of abuses, harassments, exploitations, violence, ill treatments, gender discrimination, oppressions, suppressions and all such problems in family and society. Women should be able to enjoy all opportunities to work for development along with men as co-vicegerents. At the same time, women have to join men to fight against common problems of humanity- illiteracy, hunger, poverty, unhygienic

conditions, poor health, environmental crisis and pollution, arm race and arms proliferation, social, economic and political problems, sense of insecurity and un-peaceful condition of people from local to international level, etc.

Prosperity: Women have to be made to be able to enjoy opportunities for material development and the application of technology for which they have to be equipped with proper knowledge and education. Islam stands for material development. It is subordinated to the higher goals of humanity.

Education: To guarantee the objectives of empowerment, women should be given proper and comprehensive education. The proper understanding of Islam must be the main theme of educational system. The lack of proper understanding of Islam and its practice are in reality the main causes of exploitation of women. Hence, they must have ample opportunities and proper access for the attainment and advancement in education, technology and communication devices.

Happiness: Women should have ample opportunities to lead a happy life while performing responsibilities and enjoying rights as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers in family and society with love, concern and cooperation. At the same time women have to have opportunities to participate in society while seeking the guidance of Allah (SWT). Such an environment would be developed in family and society with the cooperation of both men and women. Women generally suffer from burden of double-work load while they must be able to maintain a balance between family and public life. Both men and women will have to realize that happiness lies in following the guidance of Allah (SWT).

Success Here and Here-After: Women would be empowered in such a way that they would be able to go after the above mentioned goals with all sincerity and honesty with no grudge and enmity against men, with no unhealthy competition with men, but with all good feelings, respect and concern and compassion with all, men, women and children so that they would seek the pleasure of Allah (SWT) and enjoy success here and here-after not only for themselves but others.

Conclusion

The way to achieve the goals of empowerment of women is to educate both men and women. The dissemination of justice, promotion of the cause of humanity through wisdom and peaceful means without any discrimination or compulsion or imposition is not possible without proper education. For this purpose men and women need to realize the fact that Islam as the way of life revealed by Allah (SWT) for the guidance of humanity has to be practiced sincerely. In theory Islam has empowered women with all the necessary and genuine rights but practically those rights are denied. To guarantee the enjoyment of rights by women the formal and informal educational measures have to be developed based on ethical,

spiritual and moral principles. The present leadership needs to realize the importance of ethical, spiritual and moral foundation of life and society. The importance of family as the basic unit of civilization needs to be an integral part of education. Its protection is the basic responsibility of everyone.

Men and women both have to realize that they should go for educational advancement and should also make efforts to contribute their knowledge and potentials to the development of society while participating in various social structures following Allah's guidance. All these measures require the cooperation of both men and women inside and outside the house and family.

All kinds of violence that women have been facing like rape, incest, sexual harassment, prostitution, female trafficking, sex tourism, sex discrimination, denial of rights etc. have been caused due to lack of proper education. This cannot be done through legislation or resolutions alone. An educational and social reform is basic. It requires proper education and training of both men and women. Through educational activities men and women will be alerted to all unethical and immoral attitudes for which they are equally responsible. All kinds of problems which women are facing in families are due to ineffective educational measures which give rise to the despotic and tyrannical attitude of men. In short, society has to make sure that it is freed from all vices so that women can find themselves fully secured and protected from all kinds of gender abuses and gender exploitations.

Women cannot attain their rights which Islam has empowered them with if they remain ignorant. They need to be constantly reminded of their rights as guaranteed by Islam. It does not mean that women should condemn all other perspectives. It simply implies that feminism is ideologically different from Islam because it originates from the eighteenth century philosophy of Enlightenment in the West which is diametrically opposed to the Truth and Reality of men and women as exposed by Islam.

In short, empowering women require developing effective structures, planning, policies and plan of action. This uphill task requires scholars and activists who can work together in spite of their ideological differences. They need to work hard to create consciousness and then plunge into action to realize the dream.

Endnotes

[1] In this paper, ethical means a rigorous rational inquiry and the spiritual means the purposeful creation of universe by a creator for certain definite purpose.

[2] All these documents are generally developed based on the modern Western perspective of life, especially the gender perspective.

³ In this paper, the Qur'anic term *ayat* or *ayaat* are not translated as verse or verses because the Qur'an, contrary to the allegations of the people of Makkah, is not poetry "And we have not taught him (Muhammad, PBUH) poetry, nor is it suitable for him. This is only a Reminder and a plain Qur'an." (36: 69). Hence, we maintain Arabic term *ayat*.

⁴ The Qur'an is empirical evidence to this fact. People, generally, do not refer to the Qur'an because they consider it a religious book which is not true.

⁵ The empowerment activities of the past 20 years are the examples of failures which means that something has gone wrong in these activities.

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