

# Women's position in pre-islam

Business



The pre-Islamic Arab society was demonstrated by ethnic and social associations with strong patriarchal establishments. During the pre-Islamic period women had lost most of her privileges and civil liberties as it did not recognize their eccentricity (Mondal 18). During this period women of Arabia were in a state of conquest either to their nearest male kin's or to father, brother, husband and son whose rights over them was viewed as their rights over any other material goods.

Mondal says that “ the birth of the daughter was usually looked down upon by Arabs as disgrace to the family” (19). During the pre-Islamic period, the tradition of female infanticide was also common. Mondal says that if the girl was allowed to live, she was forced to be married at an early age of 7 or 8 years (19). The tradition of girl child marriage was for the reason that the parents had apprehension that their daughters might be desecrated if they were not given in marriage before they attained their teenage years.

Marriage by incarceration, purchase and contact existed during the Arabs during this period. The number of wives that an Arab could keep had not been guided by any laws and rules (Mondal 19).

As a result a woman was seen as a kind of chattel. In the pre-Islamic period, women could be presented to a guest as a mark of generosity. In the pre-Islamic period the husbands were free to divorce their wives whenever they felt to do so although there was no a joint right for the wife (Mondal 19).

Women during the pre-Islamic time did not have any material goods rights, because they themselves were seen as property. Keddie says that “ women in the pre-Islamic period had low status that they were basically bought,

sold, and stolen and that female infanticide (denounced in the Quran) was common” (54).

Keddie continues to say that most women were more secluded from participating in public affairs (54). The use of covering by women was not known in pre-Islamic Arabia. Mondal says that “ the nomadic tribal groups could not afford to have the encumbrances of veil for their women, but sedentary groups both in Mecca and Medina had the custom of veiling of women in Pre-Islamic Arabia” (19). In the pre-Islamic period, there was some substantiation of the existence of matriarchal form of society. Shah says that “ women were treated as objects of sale; they were fully exploited by their fathers and could be sold in marriage to the highest bidder” (27). The husband during the pre-Islamic period was entitled to end the contract of marriage on any juncture and any notion.

Shah further noted that pre-Islamic period robbed the Arabian woman of her ancient freedom (27). Men relied on the poetry and proverbs of the days of jahiliya (Age of Ignorance) to show that an ideal Arab woman was a personification of reticence, resilience, virtue and beauty and that man honored and respected her. The Prophet (Muhammad) lifetime During the Prophet Muhammad period, Mondal says that the Islam advanced the position of women in many areas. The religio-social reforms instituted by Prophet Muhammad effected a huge and marked improvement in the position of women (Mondal 19). The Prophet Muhammad and his disclosures as reported in the Quran had a great role in world history and in founding a major world religion.

Keddie says that " more contentious is the role of the Quran in changing the position of women" (19). Keddie says that the idea that Muhammad and the Quran brought a great favorable change in the position of women is endorsed by a number of scholars but has been challenged by others. In addition, Keddie says that during Prophet Muhammad's period the position of women improved. This is because of the several revelations such as identical moral admonitions addressed to both men and women. At the same time the later legalistic revelations contained more regulations that distinguished male and female behavior some of which were directed only at Muhammad's wives but came to be applied to women generally.

During this period, the gender-reformism of the Quran notes that it censures the practice of female infanticide. Keddie says that " in this period male dowry was supposed to go to women, not to her male relative, and sanctions women's ownership and control of property and that women should take over half of what men got" (19). Individuals who stress the gender-reformist view of the Quran say that the decline of women's place after the initial Islamic period was due to strange and local patriarchal accretions, not to what was in the Quran. Keddie (19) noted that emphasis on the words of the Quran as a major determinant in the position of women overemphasizing its objective role in determining this position is reflected in the tendency of later Muslims to appeal to elucidation of the Quran as the basis of their views of this question. During the Prophet Muhammad period he established changes in all spheres of Arab society.

The reforms are associated with the rights of women. Shah says that in the context of changes regarding women, only those rights of women (58). One <https://assignbuster.com/womens-position-in-pre-islam/>

of Muhammad's major aims was to improve the underprivileged role of the woman, and thus much of the legal material to be found in the Qur'anic verses concerns the very genuine effort to improve place of the woman. Nashat and Tucker says that during Prophet Muhammad period, the Quran law of heritage provided women with a share of their parents, husbands, siblings and children estates (44). The period outlined many aspects of women's rights and responsibilities.

These include aspects such as women's lawful right to inheritance from parents, spouse, children and siblings was implied, and the right of women to have and marshal of their own property were recognized. Prophet Mohammad did not call for spectacular changes in women's position, but by defining their rights and responsibilities he recognized important assurances for women that would become more important to them in the future (Nashat and Tucker 44). The positive Qur'anic outlook was armored by Muhammad's treatment of women. Nashat and Tucker noted that " the prophet's personal experience as father of several girls could only have deepened his awareness of the insecurity of women's position in Arabian society" (44). For example, Prophet Muhammad sought the permission of his daughters before their marriage.

This is because for the first time he also required that the mahr or bridal gift be given to the bride instead of to the father or male guardian (Nashat and Tucker 44). Nashat and Tucker say that Muhammad refused the substitute of two female relatives by men, since this custom depressed each woman of getting her mahr (44). In this context, he ruled that a woman did not need her husband's permission to administer her own property, while the husband

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needed her permission to use her assets (Nashat and Tucker 44). Nashat and Tucker asserted that during Muhammad's lifetime women participated in communal religious activities. Their participation is attested to by the large number of women who transmitted hadiths (statements relating the prophet's actions and sayings). Nashat and Tucker further say that "women also played a major role in collecting the Quran" (44).

Some remembered and acquired their own collections of the Quran.

Muhammad's wives played the major role in two activities, but they were not the only women to do so. In addition, women attended the mosque and participated in religious festivals, they listened to Muhammad's public preaching's (Nashat and Tucker 44). Like men, during this period women prayed over the dead and went on pilgrimage. The Abbasid Era The relative autonomy of women and their participation in some of the central affairs of the early Muslim community became rigorously restricted during the Abbasid era (Armajani 55).

Armajani notes that during the Abbasid period women were obvious for their nonappearance from all areas of the Muslim community most important activities (55). Armajani determined that in the records relating to his period there was a marked decline in accounts pertaining to the activity of women in warfare and religious life (55). Armajani further says that "there are also scant descriptions of them as participants in or key contributors to the cultural life and productions of their society" (55). During Abbasid's period, women of the privileged and bourgeois classes lived out their lives in isolation, guarded by eunuchs if affluent. Armajani says that the institutions

which were to play prominent roles in restraining women during this and subsequent periods were polygamy, concubinage and seclusion (55).

The texts which were produced during the Abbasid period reflect the marginalized role which women played at that time. It was noted that women were nearly absent from these texts. Nashat and Tucker say that with the coming of the Abbasids, the seclusion of women and the veil turn out to be official policy (49). This change was signalled when the caliph Mansour (754-775) commanded the building of separate bridge for women over the Euphrates in his new capital Baghdad. The shift from the freer way of life of the Prophets days to greater seclusion and veiling can be better understood in the context of the general adoption of the cultural traditions of the subjugated population by the Arabian novices (Nashat and Tucker 49). The high status granted to women by the Quranic reforms which existed during the early Islamic period did not last for long.

Jawad says that some Islamic customs reappeared, especially during the Abbasid period (24). Various social attitudes penetrated Islamic culture from subjugated peoples and were assimilated as norms and then identified with Islam. As a result the status of Muslim women started to decline. Jawad continues to say that “ the decline in status of women was accelerated by catastrophic historical events such as Mongol and Turkish invasions and the ensuing decline of the Islamic civilization” (24). The ambience which brought about these conditions served to demoralize the position of Muslim women who became less and less part of social life in general. During the Abbasid period women were ignored and treated as sex objects, assumed heavy

veiling and were restricted to their small circle of women folks with no contact outside their homes.

They were prevented from contributing in the public life of the community and barred from public worship in the mosque. In addition, Jawad says that the worst deprivation of all was the refutation of their right to receive education (24). According to Jawad, it was but that basic awareness of the spiritual rites and memorizing part of the Quran was enough for women (24). As a result while girls were welcome to all religious instruction especially in the lower grades, they were prevented from having further knowledge and education (Jawad 24). What are the Implications of that for Muslim Women Today? According to Mondal the role and status of Muslim woman is not well stated in the verdicts of Islam because of the changes brought during the Abbasid period. As a result of the Abbasid period, Muslim women are considered as inferior to men; and in some countries they are not important to the life and society as men.

Mondal further says that because of the Abbasid era, Islam does not fully recognize the vital position of women in society and does not give women the highest dignity and honour. (20). God has clearly defined and guaranteed the rights of Muslim women in Holy Quran so that they could no more be subjected to those wrongs, injustices and oppressions which had been inflicted to them since the beginning of human species (Mondal 20). As a result of the Abbasid's era, Muslim women are not given enough rights and privileges to own property in some countries. The Abbasid era brought the perception that the rights and responsibilities of a woman are not equal to those of man and that they should not be identical in any way. Mondal says <https://assignbuster.com/womens-position-in-pre-islam/>



that in spirit of Abbasid, a woman should not be treated as a fully responsible human being with full independent entity (20).

In conclusion, it has been noted that the Abbasid era did not endorse the objectives of equality, development and peace for Muslim women today and does not strongly advocate and stand for their rights. This has over the time brought negative effects such as discrimination on Muslim women today in some countries. The negative impressions painted on women during the Abbasid period reflects the marginalized role which women are going through nowadays. The fragmentary rather than holistic approach used during the Abbasid period has also led to the decline of the status of Muslim women in some communities today.