



The Contemporary Status of Working Women: A Comparative Study of Modern Society and Islamic Teachings

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Abstract

In the recent societies women have entered the professional and social spheres more frequently, so they are redefining the social, economic and personal roles of women. Although this transformation gives women more opportunities to get an education, to work, and to control their finances, it gives rise to complex issues related to family living, emotional health, exploitation, and identity crisis at the same time. The western feminist narrative often promotes perfect equality and total freedom, sometimes at the cost of ignoring biological, emotional and family responsibilities of women. Islam on the other hand, provides an equal and decent paradigm that acknowledges women, their potentials and limits without violating their dignity, family roles and spiritual wellbeing. The paper is a critical assessment of the modern situation of women in the workplace and compares it with the Islamic doctrine based on the Quran and Hadith. The discussion argues that Islam does not bar women in the labour market; it controls this by moral, social and ethical codes that are meant to reconcile individual progress, familial stability and the security of the society.

Keywords: Working Women; Islam and Women; Feminism; Quranic perspective; gender roles; family system; women right; modern society.

Introduction

The place of women in the society has been one of contention, transformation and an ideological challenge in the past. During the contemporary age, the concept of the working woman takes the center stage when it comes to issues of gender equity, economic growth, and societal development. Today, women are physicians, teachers, researchers, business executives, and policy-makers. Western cultures often determine the empowerment of women by the financial and equal standing of both sexes in all aspects of life. Islam, on the other hand, views the role of women holistically and focuses on dignity, responsibility, balancing and safeguarding. This paper explores how Islamic doctrines provide a holistic and humanistic substitute to current capitalist and feminist approaches of women empowerment.

In the modern era, economic productivity and making a name among people in this context paint the narrative of women empowerment. Income, professional status and involvement in the workforce are generally the measures of success, but unpaid domestic work, emotional care giving, and moral responsibility are undervalued. As a result, this ends up being a constant battle between competing demands as many working women strive to achieve performance at work and at the same time as a family member and a social individual. This double pressure has contributed to increased stress and anxiety and confusion of identity among women indicating that economic involvement in itself is not always sure of holistic well-being and inner fulfillment.



The Islamic teachings have a completely different approach to the empowerment of women as they combine both the religious purpose and the presence in the social and economic life. Instead of putting women in the same competition with men, Islam stresses on complementary roles based on equity, justice, and compassion. Women are also considered morally independent and have the right to education, property, and labor, but at the same time they are not to be exploited and over-loaded. The focus on the aspect of balance in work, family life as well as spiritual well-being by Islamic doctrines offer a sustainable model, which attributes women not only to the quality of financial actors, but also to the quality of full human beings whose integrity and emotional stability is a key to harmony in the society.

The Emergence of Working Women in the Contemporary Society

Industrialisation, capitalism and feminism movements have incredibly transformed the role of women all through the 19th and 20th centuries, influencing them to leave their house holds and join the labor market. Despite this change promoting education levels and legal freedoms, a number of unintended effects were also born.

Contemporary working women often have to face:

- The two-fold stress of work and family.
- Exploitation and harassment at workplace.
- Burnout, emotional stress, and anxiety.
- Erosion of familial bonds
- Media objectification and corporate objectification.

Simone de Beauvoir once said: *“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”*

Although this statement seemed powerful, it at the same time removed womanhood as a natural, emotional, and maternal entity, and turned women into economic entities instead of wholesome human beings.

Feminism and its Limitations

It was feminism that aimed to liberate women out of oppression, but in subsequent waves, it tended to spread an unquestionable similarity between men and women thus overlooking both the biological and emotional needs. The fact that women were expected to do all the things that a man could do placed them in impractical anticipations.

Betty Friedan highlighted this contradiction within herself:

“Women are expected to be wives, mothers, and workers all at once—without collapse”

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The Islamic View of Women and Employment

There is no ban on female labour by Islam. Rather, it sets up moral limits that protect the dignity of women, their family life, and their spiritual well-being. Islam acknowledges that women are independent moral beings answerable to Allah as are men. Besides the spiritual equality, Islam has given women a separate legal and social identity where women are entitled to education, property, inheritance and employment within the law.

Allah states the spiritual equality of men and women:

“Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women... Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward”

Islam also gives women the freedom to decide whether or not to work regardless of their economic needs as opposed to the current economic systems that have forced women to work because of financial need. The Islamic system regards work as a service and contribution and not a measure of personal value. Making the role of women in working a subject of a moral and ethical framework, Islam makes sure that professional activity does not ruin emotional health, stability of a family, or spiritual development. This moderation emphasizes the fact that empowerment in Islam is not a matter of intrinsic involvement, but the matter of purposeful choice based on dignity, responsibility and moral accountability.

Right to Work in Islam

As the history shows, women in the early Islamic society had an active role in the economic and social life. Hazrat Khadijah (RA) was a prosperous and admired businesswoman; Hazrat Asma (RA) assisted her husband in work at the agricultural land; and Hazrat Shifa (RA) was put in charge of the market in Madinah. These are instances that testify to practical acceptance of these women in their professional and social activities in Islam. The Prophet ﷺ said, Women are half the twins of men, (Abu Dawood) the hadith confirms equality in value as human beings and moral responsibility and not the roles. This difference highlights the Islamic focus on the value-based equity rather than on complete similarity.

The Prophet (ﷺ) stated:

Women are one and two halves of men.

This Hadith does not instigate equality but equality as value.

Islam and Balance between Work and Family



Islam places the family at the center of social stability. Unlike capitalist systems that prioritize productivity over relationships, Islam emphasizes tranquility and mutual responsibility.

Allah states:

“And among His signs is that He created for you spouses that you may find tranquility in them”

Motherhood is treasured and not undermined. The Prophet (ﷺ) remarked:

“Paradise lies under the feet of mothers”

Caregiving and emotional labour are therefore seen as one of the most desirable acts of worship and not as subordinates. The process of motherhood is very much cherished and the Prophet ﷺ said, Paradise is at the feet of mothers, therefore showing the holiness of care-giving and emotional work. These duties are not considered to be lesser duties in Islam but are merely the tasks of great spiritual and moral significance, and they grant individual fulfillment and moral security to the society. This is a moderation strategy that allows women to engage effectively in the working process and still discharge their most important duties as members of the family.

Protection from Exploitation and Harassment

Islamic rules on modesty and female-male communication and the code of conduct at work are meant to protect women against objectification.

“Tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty.”

These injunctions are like insurance, women are not judged by their looks but by their brains and personality. These teachings, which put stress on the fact that it is not the physical looks of a woman that are making her worthy but her intelligence, character and moral uprightness, serves as a sort of social and moral insurance, and the atmosphere within which a woman is able to work and engage in society without the fear of harassment or false judgment. Islam also guarantees that professional spaces are dignified and thus, women are able to concentrate on improving themselves and giving back to the community instead of having to deal with the threat to their safety, or respect.

Psychological and Emotional Wellbeing

The recent research documents that the stress, anxiety, and depression among employed women are increasing. Spirituality, prayer, and purpose are the ways that Islam uses to deal with mental serenity.

“Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest”

Islam acknowledges the indispensability of emotional health which is not secondary. Besides spiritual practices, Islam also promotes a supportive social and family environment that also contributes to the well being of the mind and emotion. Women are encouraged to ensure that they have balanced lifestyles which comprise of rest, family, and meaningful work to prevent overworking or doing meaningless work. The Prophet ﷺ taught that everyone should be compassionate and nurturing in all their dealings, which is also applied to the establishment of places of work and homes that accommodate the emotional needs of women. Since it incorporates spirituality, community support and actual guidelines, Islam offers comprehensive



guidelines in which women can succeed both professionally and personally, where mental health is maintained as well as social and economic involvement.

So the final reflections of my research are the current discourse of women empowerment though empowering is often inclusive of women holistic needs. The Islam provides an eternal, moderate, and caring system which allows women to work, grow and serve society without losing dignity, family peace, and spiritual peace. Instead of forcing women into strict roles, whether it is the seclusion of the home or the freedom of the women to pursue their careers, Islam gives the freedom of choice based on morality and wisdom. As the modern world is filled with uncertainty and contradictions, the Islamic doctrines bring certainty, balance and true empowerment to the working ladies.

Conclusion

The discourse concludes that the contemporary crisis of the working woman is not rooted in the act of employment itself, but in the structural vacuum of modern secular frameworks that treat women as mere economic units. While Western feminism succeeded in securing legal rights, it inadvertently imposed a "masculine standard" of success, leading to psychological burnout and the fragmentation of the domestic core. This research establishes that the Islamic paradigm offers a superior alternative by replacing "gender competition" with "functional complementarity." Islam's strength lies in its ability to decouple a woman's human worth from her market value, granting her the agency to participate in the workforce within an ethical ambit that prioritizes spiritual sanctity and familial equilibrium. Thus, the way forward lies in adopting a balanced model where professional growth does not necessitate the sacrifice of the innate maternal and social identity, ensuring a society that is economically viable yet morally and emotionally stable.

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