RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS SOCIETIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY
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Abstract
The purpose of this research study was to find out religious laws related to women rights i.e. spiritual, economical, social, educational, legal and political. For the purpose 06 religious scholars 02 of each religion i.e. Muslim, Christian and Hindu were interviewed. From the references quoted by them and their discussions, it is concluded that women hold almost same status in the religions under consideration but in case of rights variation is present in the religions. Comparatively Islam is more fair and clearer in case of women rights.

Keywords: RIGHTS ; WOMEN ; MUSLIMS ; NON-MUSLIMS ; SOCIETIES; COMPARATIVE STUDY

Introduction
Women play a very vital role in human progress therefore; have a significant place in the society. They are not at all inferior to men. They are capable of sharing all responsibilities of life and are already sharing. Man and woman have been rightly compared to the wheels of the same carriage. The main responsibility of a woman is to preserve the human race. As a mother, her position is unique. She brings up children with extreme care. The first school of a child is the lap of mother. It is quite true that great men had great mothers. Napoleon said:

“Give me good mothers and I will give you a good nation.”

Women are the inherent part of our society and cannot be neglected due to their less power and authority. The role of women in society has changed significantly in the past three decades. Women and girls have many more opportunities and face different challenges. Women who have achieved great stature in government, industry, sports, and the media have become a familiar sight. And yet, it appears that there is no clear public understanding of the realities about women.

An estimated 95-97% of Pakistanis are Muslim, with remaining few percentage points made up of small groups of Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Parsi (Zoroastrians), Buddhists and followers of other faiths. About 75% of the populations are Sunni Muslims, while 20% are Shi’a. Most Pakistani Sunnis belong to the Hanafi branch, or to the Ahle Hadith. Shi’a sects represented include the Ithna Asharia, the Bohra, and Ismailis.

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Every society existing today discriminates in some way against women. People belonging to different religions are living in Pakistan in general and Sindh in particular. Women in almost all societies play same role but enjoy different status or rights.

As per United Nations charter for human rights, “Human rights are rights that every human being has by virtue of his/her human identity”. Human rights are right to life, degraded treatment or punishment, freedom from slavery / forced labor, right of liberty or security of person, freedom of movement, freedom of opinion/expression, right to marry, right to take part in public affairs, vote, be elected and have access to public office, and right to equality (Human Rights by UNO; p-1-2). In simple words rights can be social, educational, economical, legal, political and spiritual.

**Statement of the problem**

It is ultimate reality that women play a vital role in society, without supportive role of women existence life seems to be impossible. Women are playing the role of a wife, mother, sister, and daughter. Their role in all positions is very important and cannot be ignored. But it has been observed that women are not given equal rights in society or they do not enjoy equal rights in the society. Women are treated differently in religions i.e. Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, although the role is same in all religions.

**Research Question**

Following research questions were raised to solve the problem:

1. Are women playing same / equal in all religious societies?
2. Are women treated equally in all religious societies?

**Methodology**

Mixed approach was used during the present research study. Qualitative method was used to analyze the data. The research was based upon descriptive study because it describes the role and rights of women in different religious societies. The population of the study was religious scholars of those religions, which are under consideration.

**Procedure**

The study was conducted on three of the religious societies present in Karachi. Unstructured interviews were conducted to collect data from 06 religious scholars, 02 from each community i.e. Muslims, Christians and Hindus. During interviews, questions related to women rights i.e. spiritual, economical, social, educational, legal, and political were asked from the religious scholars, their verbal and documented responses are elaborated in the discussion session.
Discussion

Spiritual rights

In response to the question related the spiritual rights given to women in each religion are as under:

In Islam women are equally given same rights as mentioned in the Holy Quran, “if any do deeds of righteousness be they male or females and have faith, they will enter heaven, and not the injustice will be done to them”. (Surah Al-Nisa, 4:124)

(Surah al-Sajdah, 32:9) “But He fashioned humans in due proportion and breathed into human something of his spirit” In this verse Almighty God has breathed into humans does not refer to any sort of incarnation of God.

(Surah Al-Imran, 3:195) “For Muslim men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah’s praise. For them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward?”

In Christianity, the early churches apparently followed Jesus’ example. Women were treated as at least near-equals and allowed to hold positions of responsibility. Many women, including Jesus’ mother, Mary, as well as Dorcas, etc were important in the early Christian Church (Acts 1:12-14; Romans 16:1-16). As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For a woman it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (1 Corinthians 14:33-35). We also learn from 1 Corinthians 11:5 that women were allowed to pray and prophesy.

The ancient Hindu philosophical concept of ‘Shakti’ the feminine principle of energy was also a product of this age. This took the form of worship of the female idols or goddesses.

Economical Rights

Islamic law gives more financial security to women than men. During marriage, she is entitled to a marital gift (called Meher) from husband which is entirely hers and she does not have to give this gift to her husband or father and she can do anything lawful with it. (Surah Nisa, 4:34) “Give the women (on marriage) the dower as a free gift”. A Muslim woman has the option of not working to earn her livelihood. The responsibility of maintaining her falls on the shoulders of her father or brother if she is not married, and on her husband or son if she is married. But at the same time she has the right to possess or to own or to dispose of any of her own property in
any way she feels fit, without seeking anyone’s consent whatsoever and irrespective of whether she is single or married. She has right to get her share from her father property.

In Christianity women had been deprived of property rights and independent status by the ancient scriptures. As far as Christian women are concerned the community and church with its strong patriarchal tradition has compelled women to remain subjugated. Socialization starts at the early life of a girl to become submissive and not to assert their rights. Hence, Christian women are in general reluctant to assert or demand their rights.

In Hinduism Arthashastra and Manusamhita are sources about the women’s right to property or ‘Stridhan (literally meaning, property of wife). It is of two types: maintenance (in money or land), and anything else like ornaments given to her by her family, husband, in-laws, relatives and the friends of hers and her husband. This becomes the wife’s personal property and she has exclusive rights over this property (money, land and personal property). Manu further subdivides this into six types – the property given by parents at time of marriage, given by husband’s family when she is going to her husband’s house, given by her husband out of affection, and property given separately by brother, mother and father (Manu IX 194).

Scriptures insist that a mother’s property belongs solely to her daughters (Manu IX 131), in order to preference: unmarried daughter, married but poor daughters, married and rich daughters. When a father died, unmarried daughters had to be given a share in their father’s property, equal to one-fourth from every brother’s share, since it is assumed that the married daughter had been given her share at time of marriage (Manu IX. 118). If the family has no sons, the appointed daughter is the sole inheritor of the property (Manu IX 127).

Social Rights

Islam has given four different statuses to women in society i.e. daughter, wife, mother, and sister. In pre-Islamic society female babies were buried alive at the time birth, but Islam has declared it sin. (Surah Al-Isra, 17:31) “Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin.” Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) decreed that there is no Monasticism in Islam. He further ordained, “Oh you young men whoever is able to marry should marry for this will help him to lower his gaze and guard his modesty” (Al-Bukhari). It is narrated by Anas that the messenger of Allah

3 The Arthashastra is an ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, economic policy and military strategy which identifies its author by names ‘Kautilya’ and Vishnugupta, both names that are traditionally identified with Chankya, who was a scholar at Takshashila and the teacher and guardian of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of Mauryan Empire.

4 The Manusmriti or Laws of Manu is the most important and earliest metrical work of Dharasasra textual tradition of Hinduism.
(PBUH) said, “When a man marries he has completed one half of his religion!” (Surah Nisa, 4:21) “The Holy Quran refers to marriage as a ‘Misaq’ that is a sacred covenant or agreement between husband and wife.” In Islam, obedience, respect and love for parents are next to worship of Allah. It is mentioned in several places in the Holy Quran, (Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. When one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor.” (Surah Al-Isra, 17:23-24) The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said women are ‘shakaat’ of men. Shakaat has two meanings, sisters or halves. Therefore women are sisters of men or women are halves of men that are society made of two halves, one half women and the other half men. “The believing men and believing women are protectors, one of other.” (Surah Al-Tambah, 9:71)

In Christianity, position of wives is mentioned in Ephesians 5:22-24 that wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church and he is the savior of the body, therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. The Holy Bible commands kind and considerate treatment of the parents and condemns those who dishonor them. “If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death” (Lev. 20:9) and “A wise man brings joy to his father but a foolish man despises his mother” (Proverbs, 15:20).

In Hinduism Daughters are given respectable place and are given one forth share in the property of their father. When a lady got married with a man then becomes the wife, the marriage is considered the most sacred tradition in Hinduism. The Manusmriti enjoins, “Let mutual continue until death.” This may be considered the summation of the highest law for husband and wife (Manu Smriti IX 101). In case of death of wife, husband has right to remarriage but female has no right of remarriage, she spent remaining life as widow or go through the tradition of Sati. Though no scripture mandates sati, the Puranas, part of the Hindu Smriti, mention Sati as highly meritorious in several instances. It is in this sphere that Indian thought, with its spiritual view of life, has much to contribute to steady the feet of men and women in East and the West. Motherhood is a spiritual transformation of wifehood. The wife may and does demand and take, but the mother feels it her privilege to give. If woman as wife is socially significant, woman as mother is spiritually glorious. The culture of the Hindu trains him to look upon all

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5 It is/was a tradition in Hinduism the wife of dead man was supposed to be burnt with his dead body. It was ideally performed as an act of immortal love, and was believed to purge the couple of all accumulated sin. It was practiced by the ancient peoples of Scythia, Egypt, Scandinavia and China.
women as forms of the one Divine Mother. The mother is more worthy of reverence than father or teacher. (Manu Smriti II-45)

Educational Rights

The first instruction in the Holy Quran is not to pray or fast or to give Zakkat, but to read. This instruction was to both males and females. Islam gives great deal of importance to education. According to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), “It is obligatory for every Muslim, male or female, to acquire knowledge”. (Al-Bayhaqi)

In Christianity Saint Paul says, “Let your women keep silence in the church: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law, and if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for woman to speak in the church” (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Christians also read and believe in traditions of Judaism and the heart of Judaism is the Torah, the law. However, according to Talmud, “women are exempted from the study of Torah.” Some Jewish Rabbis firmly declared, “Let the words of Torah rather be destroyed by fire than imparted to women’, and whoever teaches his daughter Torah is as though he taught her obscenity.”

In Hinduism Vedic literature praises the birth of a scholarly daughter in these words: “A girl should be brought up and educated with great effort and care.” (Mahanirvana Tantra); and “All forms of knowledge are aspects of thee; and all women throughout the world are thy forms.” (Devi Mahatmya)

Legal Rights

In Islam men and women are treated equally. This law of equality is mentioned in Surah Baqarah, 2: 178-179, “If any man murders a woman, the ‘Hadd’ punishment of Qisas will be applied to him and he will be put to death as a punishment for crimes. Likewise a woman murderer will also be put to earth.”

The Bible teaches that both man and woman were created in God’s image, had a direct relationship with God, and shared jointly the responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Gen 1:26-28). In the Holy Bible, the man and woman were co-participants in the ‘Fall: Adam was no less culpable than Eve (Rom 5:12-21; 1Cor. 15:21-22)

Under ancient Hindu society, a woman was considered to be of low in social status and treated as a dependent with barely any property rights. Under the old Mitakshara Law, on birth, the son acquires a right and interest in family property. According to this school, a son, a grandson, a
greatson constitute a class of coparceners, based on birth in family. No female is a member of the coparcenary in Mitashara Law. Later legislation gave rights to females in inheritance.

**Political Rights**

In Islam both men and women are allowed and should participate in public affairs in the interest of society. “The believing men and women are protectors of one another.” (Surah Al-Taubah 9:71)

In Christianity women political rights are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:3, it is so that but I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Further it is said, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

It is written in Manusmrti (9:2-4) that men must keep their women dependent day and night, and keep under their controls that are attached to sensory objects. Her father guards her in childhood, her husband guards her in youth, and her sons guard her in old age. A woman is never fit for independence.

**Conclusions**

It is concluded from the discussions with the religious scholars from religions under consideration and the references given by them to prove women rights. The conclusions are as under:

1. Women hold same decent status of mother, wife, sister and daughter in all religions i.e. Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism but variation exists in rights bestowed to them because of the religion or the culture which is influenced by the religion.
2. Islamic law is observed to be clearer, patent, comprehensive, ample, fair and reasonable in case of women rights in society.
3. In case of spiritual right women are treated equally as men in all three religions but Islamic law is more focused.
4. Property rights are given to women in Islam and Hinduism but it is found that daughters are not given rights in inheritance as per Christian traditions or in other word Christianity is silent in case of women rights in property.
5. In case of social rights given to women, Islamic cover all status of women, while clarity is missing in Christianity and Hinduism in this regard. Islam has given more honorable status to women as wives, while in Christianity husbands are asked to make their wives
dependents day and night. In Hinduism wife is given no right of life after the death of her husband.

6. Islam and Hinduism has given right of education to women but as per Christian scriptures women are asked to be quite in church and in case need clarification then can ask their husbands at home. It is interpreted that if a lady is not allowed to speak then how can we expect the learning of that lady.

7. Women are equality treated by the religions under discussion scriptures of Islam is clearer and detailed.

8. Islam has right to women to take part in public affairs but Christianity females are asked to be quite and discuss matter only with husbands, while in Hinduism women are made dependents of men.
References

- The Holy Quran
- The Holy Bible (Including Old and New Testaments)
- Manusmarti