

The Condition of women in different Civilization and Religion before the advent of Islam

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ABSTRACT: People think that Islam plays a key role in the deprivation and subordination of women by limiting her rights and imposed certain restrictions on them. But this is not true as history bears testimony to the fact that before the advent of Islam other religion and civilization consider women as an instrument of the devil. It is evident from the books and research that before Islam, Women were thought of as unequal, inferior and low-level sexual object which run under the remote control of their men. All the codified and non-codified religion were dominated and controlled by men who push women to a subaltern status. If we go back in the history and analysis of different civilization, we found that women were treated as their chattels and sex object. She was deprived of all her rights of inheritance and ownership and was regarded as an embodiment of sin, mischief, and misfortune. In this paper, I will explain the condition of women prior to Islam and how they are treated in different Civilization and Religion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, there has been a misconception and misunderstanding about the status of Women in Islam. Almost all the civilizations and religion before the advent of Islam placed women in the lowest position against men. Women were considered as an instrument of the devil by most of the religion before Islam. Men controlled their lives, liberty, and property. This included in the Arabian civilization which is also known as the age of ignorance, where men have dominated women's lives and properties before Islam. Women were suffered from all worst punishment in Roman society by men like burning her body, tying her to posts and polling her behind speeding horses, the murder of female infant etc. In the Christian religion, women are called the root of all evil and mother of sin. They blame women for all the mischief and wrongdoing. All of this injustice and unfairness were practiced for no other reason than being a woman. Men of all civilization treated women as an inferior and low-level citizen. For them, women are not more than property and object, who has no right except the duty of listening to the order of its owner (men). They are just like a material thing for the enjoyment, pleasure, and entertainment of the man. For example, in Greek culture women were looked at an item and subject to buying and selling in the market. They were viewed as property.¹

II. GREECE

The Greek civilization has been regarded as the most splendid of all the ancient civilizations. In the early stages of Greek civilization, the woman was looked lower in position and was depressed by morally and socially, in facts, they had no legal rights. Greek mythology said that Pandora, an imaginary woman was the root of all human ills and unnecessary and unforeseen trouble, according to the Jews mythology.² The Greek society preceded woman as a subhuman creature whose position was substandard in every way to that of man. For them, man can alone deserve honor and pride. Women in ancient Greece had no legal personhood and had no political and legal rights. Women were assumed only to be a part of *olkos* (household) headed by a male. In their society, citizenship and entitlement to the civil and political right were outlined in relation to the property and to means of life. That why women were not considered full citizen because they had limited rights to the property. Women were viewed as like property here. Their basic and fundamental role was to give birth to children and take care of children and household work. Greek women were remained segregated from the men to reduce the risk of sexual temptation from the non-family members. The Greek people were usually misogynistic. In ancient Greece, abuse and domestic violence were widespread due to the alcohol addiction of men which lead to their uncontrollable anger toward their women.³

Women were always become the victims of men's anger and have no right to fight back against injustice because it was culturally accepted. The life of those women becomes worse who have no children or who are not able to give birth. Sometimes, even pregnant women were beaten so badly that they had to lose their

child, and then again beaten more for losing the baby.⁴ Athens was also called for the cradle of philosophy, anyone could become a poet, politician, and artist here except women. Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher thought that women would bring disorder and evil and were “utterly useless and caused more confusion than the enemy”. He also asserted that women should keep separate from the rest of society. Women were entitled to live in homes to look after the duties in the homes. They were also less educated except home tutorship for basic skills such as spin, weave, cook and some knowledge of money.⁵

The enlightenment brought by Greek civilization did not improve women’s legal position but slightly improved her status in society. Though women were able to become the queen of the Greek homes, her duties were restricted within the four walls where she held a position of authority. Women of Greek nobility observed Purdah as her chastity was precious for the civilization. For maintaining Purdah separate apartments for females were made. Women were not allowed to sit in mixed gathering neither they prominently brought out in the public. Unlike women, men in Greek society were freed from or not subject to any obligation and they were exempted from preserving chastity and modesty, purity of characters and moral uprightness. Further, it was not expected for them to lead a morally clean life. Prostitution was enclosed firmly in the Greek society and the relations of men with the prostitute were not considered improper and unlawful. Gradually, the Greek became overwhelmed by aberrant and sexual practice. With this change, corrupt gained prominent position and their house became the focus of attention of all the classes of the Greek society. This prostitute attracted their philosophers, poets, literary men, historian and servants of art. Another distinct feature of the sexual lawlessness among the Greeks was the prevalence of unnatural act which was welcomed and patronized by religion and morality. Though this practice is not found in the Homer and Hesiod times it spread with the advancement of the civilization. For the pleasure of the body nakedness and indulgence aroused to an extent that transgressing the natural bounds. They began to seek satisfaction in the unnatural ways. Greek consider woman as defilement from devil handiwork.⁶

III. ROME

After the Greek civilization, Roman civilization achieved glory and greatness. But no one denying from the fact that gender violence was prevalent in ancient Rome and it was dangerous to be a woman in Rome. Roman law allowed a man to beat and even permitted to kill his wife for a minor offense. There are numerous historical tales about the Manus marriages that gave the husband right over their wives to beat and kill them for the offenses. The famous mythological stories revealed that the most common victims of gender violence in Rome were non-citizens like slaves and free sex laborers. In order to analysis violence against women in Rome, Here I found two parts of violence- (1) violence against women in Rome in Dynaries; topographical zones and (2) spheres of social class and existential loci. The first part of inquire into public and ideological violence against citizen women in mythology and law. The second part deals with the surveys about the common violence experienced by the non-citizens like slaves and free sex labors These type of violence are brutal, institutional and omnipresent and different in psychology and practice. There are a number of resources treating that there was a culture of violence against women in Rome. There are many terrible stories of violence against women in Rome. It was said that Rome was built on the rape and murdered bodies of women. There were some examples of women like Sabine women, Horatia, Lucretia and Lerginia who were lived under terror and the constant threat of violence.⁷ The culture of violence toward women can be seen in the laws of Rome. According to Roman laws, women were under the mercy of their husbands and at the risk of violence for any minor offenses. There were three type types of marriage law in Rome i.e usus, confarreatio and coempio. All these three marriages came under Manus marriages. Under the Manus marriages, women passed out of the potestas of her father into the hand and power of her husband. According to Manus marriages, woman’s husband had the power of his wife life and death in limited circumstances. There were rare cases of Divorce in Manus marriages. In short, it was impossible for women to obtain a divorce. The women law under Manus was very harsh. Under Manus laws, the status of women was very down and they were the subject to the power of their husbands, who had the power to punish their wives in a vicious manner under socially condoned circumstances. He had the power to put his wife to death for drinking wine and fornication though men were free to have illicit relations with the prostitutes. In the Roman Civilization, women were like non-living things which have no civil, economic, political, social and legal rights and were treated extremely cruelly by the ruling Empire. There was no punishment for men if he could marry as many women as he wanted and he had also the right to keep concubines and for extramarital affairs. The marriage ages of the Roman girl were very low, mostly 12 years or sometimes even younger than 12 years. There was an example of one incident among all child marriages case. A woman named Venturia, who was married at the age of eleven and died at the age of twenty-seven after giving birth to sixth children.⁸ Infanticide was practiced to a great extent. People of Roman used to kill their newborn girl even before they got their names. The most prominent and primary role of Roman women was to get married and to give birth to men’s child. The exploitation and violence against enslaved and non-citizen women laborer in Rome was found in the ordinary course of events and unvarying in nature which was publicly and

legally approved. Slavery was an outrageous institution which abuses female slave and non-citizen women brutally in the ancient Roman world. The Roman laws suggested that slaves could be publicly beaten, tortured and killed for any minor and great offenses, which could occur in the street for the view of all. Sexual violence and abuse were commonplace in the home and in other places. Female slaves were the property of their master and their master could do anything as they wished. If we compared the women of both the Greek civilization and Roman civilization, the Roman women condition was worse than the Greek civilization. After conquered other countries, Romans conquered women and children and turned them into their slaves. The Roman law grants man an absolute right to leave her daughter on the steps of a temple or in anywhere if he did not want his daughter and she would be left to die. He could even torture and killed his wife for working outdoor with her face uncovered or for some minor offenses.⁹

IV. CHRISTIAN

The basic doctrine of Christian was that Woman was the root of all evil and the mother of sin. She was the primary cause of mischief and was responsible for stimulating man towards sin and wrongdoing. She was the source of all human ills and troubles. She was the means of satanic temptation by her beauty and charms and has the quality of seduce. She was the main cause behind all human ills and misfortunes. The Christians believed that the sexual relationship between men and women was objectionable and lousy affairs, even if it was established after the legal marriage. According to Christian Church, celibacy and spinsterhood were the criteria of noble character. They regarded married life as a necessary evil and an obstacle for living a pure religious life. Unmarried people and turning away from marriage became a symbol of sanctity and a sign of moral character. In the Christian religion, to be a pure religious person one was either not to marry or to live separate physically and socially from one's wife. Christian mind was inculcated by the concept that conjugal relationship was a dirty affair for a truly religious people. According to their divine rule, if a married couple shared a bed during the night before a Church festival they were not allowed to participate in it. This communal life sequestered from the world under religious vows adversely affected the relation of love and blood because entire relation was the result of marriage, even the relation of mother and son which were held as sinful and evil. These so-called doctrines were the cause of the downfall status of a woman among Christian. They were looked like a sinful character by the men and their social status was degraded in every way.¹⁰ There were many legal injunctions that were implemented for women under the influence of the Christian Church. Christian women were given limited rights of inheritance, holding and acquiring property and even had no control over her owns earning. In Christian society, divorce was totally prohibited. Both husband and wife were compelled to live together even if they were sick of each other. Even there was no rule of remarriage for the spouses after the death of their partners. According to Christian scholars, remarriage was just a means of satisfying the lust.¹¹

V. JEWS

According to Jews doctrine, menstruating women are extremely unclean and cursed during their menstruation cycle. The Jews believed that menstruating women are impure and unclean. Furthermore, their impurity infects others if they touch anyone and anything of women during their menstruation cycle. If she touches somebody or something at the time of menstruation, that becomes unclean for a day. Women were treated as untouchable and dirty during her regular flow of blood. All her activities which she does during this period called unclean even if she just touch something whether living or non- living becomes unclean and impure with the touch of her.¹²

The old testament of Jewish laws and regulations considers any menstruating Woman as unclean and impure. Moreover, they also believe that her impurities infect other as well. If she touches anyone and anything it becomes unclean for a day: *"When a Woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period last for seven days and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening. Anything she sits on will be unclean. Whoever touches her bed must wash her clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. Whoever touches anything she sits on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. Whether it is the bed or anything she was sitting on, when anyone touches it, he will be unclean till evening."*¹³ For Jews women, this natural period, through which women able to conceive men's child becomes the means of subordination and inferiority. These seven days of every month became the worst day for every Jews women. They were treated like a sinner and were deprived of all the activities and facilities of their day to day life.¹⁴

The role husband in the Jewish tradition towards his wife stems from the conception that he owns her as he owns his slave. The reason behind the double standard in the law of adultery behind the husband's ability to annul his wife's vows as well as for denying the wife any control over her property or her earning is because of this conception. According to the Jewish tradition, when a Jewish woman got married, she completely lost any control over her property and earning to her husband. It is asserted by the Jewish that husband has the full right to his wife's property as a corollary of his possession of her: *"Since once has comes into the possession of*

*the woman does it not follow that he should come under into the possession of her property too?" and since he has acquired the woman should he not acquired also her property?"*¹⁵ The husband in the Jews tradition was like the master of the slavery system. He owns her like he owns his slave and has the full right to manipulate her. Jews society was full of the double standard law of adultery, injustice, and inequality. These laws grant the husband full authority to annul his wife vows. Jews community would assign their daughter share of her father property as a dowry in their marriages. This share and dowry was the main reason behind the unwelcome attitudes of Jews father towards their female child. They became a burden for their father as their father had to take cares them for years and then search a guy for her marriage and have to fulfill all the demand of the bridegroom by providing a large dowry. Thus, the burdens of daughter marriage make a girl in a Jews family a liability not asset. This state of being legally obliged and financial obligation explain the reason why the birth of a daughter was not celebrated in the old Jews society with great happiness. In the Orthodox Jews community, at the time of the marriage of daughter bride father had to present the dowry to the bridegroom as a wedding gift under the term of tenancy. After the marriage, the Bride would lose all the control over her dowry and her husband would act as the controller and practical owner of the dowry. Furthermore, if she too wanted to works after her marriage all her earning had to go to her husband as per law in return for her care which was his responsibility. She could get or find back her property in two cases only: firstly, in the case of divorce groom had to present or handover all the marriage gift got by him at the time of marriage to his bride. Secondly, after the death of her husband, she could regain all her pre-marital property but she had no right to inherit any share from the property of her departed husband. Marriage and orthodoxy law favored men over women. A husband could divorce his wife if he wants to divorce her. He had the right to divorce his wife any time and for any reason without the consent of his wife but a wife could not divorce her husband without the consent of her husband. Thus, the orthodox Jews community continued to view women in a negative way or subordinate class of the society. In their community, women were regarded as a ritually impure and untouchable class for about half of each month for their natural menstruation cycle. They were economically dependent on men. Women generally had no right to hold, control and own property. In fact, they became the property of their husband.¹⁶

VI. ARAB CIVILIZATION

In the Arab society, women faced great injustice and were subjected to unfair treatment and humiliations of all kind. Women had no right to inherit property from their parents, husband and other relatives. According to Arab testament, Inheritance right should only be granted to those who had the talent of horse riding, who could fight, gain war booties and had the responsibility to protect the tribe and territory. In fact, she herself could be inherited as a commodity by the other after the death of her indebted husband. Women were treated like a non-living thing or as a material here. Women were considered the property of men like other property. For example, if a woman's deceased husband had adult sons from his former wife, the oldest among all the sons or brother inherited the wealth of his deceased father including the wife of his father to his household or for their own work without her consent. At that time, there was no right of inheritance for women. They only became the inherited property of their male guardian. A divorced woman or a woman who is separated from her husband was prohibited from remarriage. The Woman had no right to choose their husband or even consent to their own marriage. On the other side, the man had the full freedom and right to marry as many wives as so desired. Furthermore, there was no law and justice system for a woman to restrict man from practicing injustice and unfair to his wife. The harsh practice of female infanticide was popular during the pre-Islamic era. One of the most horrific acts of violence against females at the time was female infanticide. Those who shamed of their daughter birth buried them alive. Arabs families never liked the birth of a female baby. They unwelcomed the birth of a female child into their family. They consider them as an evil and bad omen and hated them so much that, they used to bury their newborn daughter alive or sunk in milk after their birth. When the father of the female baby got the news of her birth, he became extremely sad and depressed. Arab society never wanted to have a female child. For them, female were a burden or a liability and a drain to their resources. They thought that they were required to spend a lot on the grown-up of their daughter in comparison to boys and yet to get nothing in return. Arab hates female to such an extent that they bury them alive soon after their birth. There were many other reasons for burying female babies like some families bury their daughter in their honor as they fear that if the girl may indulge in any shameful practices i.e adultery, fornication or prostitution.¹⁷

Arab civilization was called the poster child of women's oppression by western media. It is the country where we can find all forms of discrimination against women. Here, women were forced to cover their body and heads with black Naqab. Arab women had no right to drive the cars and more legal restrictions are imposed on women's right in the name of Shariah. The patriarchal culture of Arab society also believed that the basic role of women is to maintain the structure of the family and to handle the household work first and therefore of society. In the pagan Arab society, women were suffered from great injustices and faced various kinds of disgrace and humiliation of being a woman. They were like material properties which were disposed of at the impulse of the male guardian. In the pre-Islamic era of Arabia, women were not only discriminated against in legal, social,

political and economic right. They were not even had some of the natural rights like the right to live and eat good food. The life of a female baby in Arabia was upon the hand of their father. Some father used to bury their girl child soon after the birth to free from all burden and problem which according to them come if they upbringing their girl child. And if some girl child were not buried alive by their male guardian, she has to face all the discrimination, injustice and humiliation of being a girl. Their primary role was to get married and bear the men's child and to take care of household work. The segregation of women from public and social sphere made them an invisible citizen of society.¹⁸ Women in Arab civilization throughout history have experienced unlimited discrimination and restriction which deprived them of their freedom and rights. Women were not considered even human being in the pre-Islamic Arab and relegated them to a secondary position. One of the most horrific acts of violence against a female at the time was female. Another monstrous violence against women in pre-Islamic was that a man had the right to kill his wife if he suspected her of having an extramarital affair without any witnesses and evidence and such crime was considered by Arab society a socially acceptable punishment. The patriarchal system of Arab society entails that women cannot gain an education, participate in politics and travel and go for an outing without the permission of her male guardian who could be her father, brother, grandfather, father's brother, husband and son. Both the private domain (marriage, divorce, and custody) and public domain (education and work) of women's rights were restricted by her male guardian. This guardianship system of pre-Islamic Arabia destroyed the legal position of women and made them precarious and powerless. According to Arab society, the general model of education was to instill the Islamic faith to impart the younger generation with knowledge and skill to become useful members in the building of their society. This model preserves the discriminative gender roles which stress that a girl's education target to give her appropriate Islamic education which provides her the necessary set of skills to handle the household work and to become a good wife and fantabulous mother. For them, women duties were only within the four walls of the house. In economic and social development, Arabia women were continued to be victims of marginalization and were faced total ejection from the workplace. They considered the employment and work as an obstacle for family modesty and honor and shameful for the family. Here the right to work and earning was the sole responsibility of men; s only.¹⁹

VII. EGYPT

Egyptian women were also suffered from violence and humiliation from family members and community members. They have constantly faced violence in the form of sexual harassment, exploitation in the workplace, and abuse on the street. One of the popular violence against Egyptian women was female genital mutilation (FGM). About ninety-seven (97%) Egypt women were the victim of female genital mutilation. Female genital mutilation also is known as female genital cutting is the ritual cutting of some or all parts of the female external genitalia which include the clitoral hood, clitoral glann, the inner labia, and the outer labia and the closure of the Vulva. Only a small hole was left for the passage of urine and menstruation and vagina is opened for intercourse and childbirth. This practiced was conducted from the days birth to puberty of girl and beyond in Egypt by a traditional circumciser using a blade. Most of the girls were suffered from female genital mutilation before they reached the age of five. This horrible practice is attempting to control women's sexuality, modesty, beauty and to make them purify. It is usually carried out by women as a source of honor and fear to their daughter and granddaughter social exclusion if they do not practice this custom. This practice and procedure bring tremendous health effects which include recurrent infections, difficulty in urinating and passing of menstrual fluid, development of cysts, chronic pain, inability and complication to get pregnant and childbirth, fatal bleeding etc.²⁰

VIII. CONCLUSION

Thus, it is pointed out that during the course of history, the woman was contemptible and hated in their estimate. As stated above, a woman has been the oppressed section of the society for ages. She has been victimized throughout the world especially in Greece, Roman Civilization and pre-Islamic Arabia and in Christian and Jews religion before Islam. She was sold and purchased like as a commodity in the market and treated worse than animals. Arab regarded woman as a disgrace and insensitive person and buried their daughter alive as soon after their birth. The Christians religious faith regarded women as a source of sin. She did not enjoy social and political right nor even exercise her own free will in any financial deal. She had to live under the charge of her father before her marriage and later after her marriage under the oppressive and rigid rule of her husband and lastly under the care of male offspring.

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