



Exploring the Issues of Working Women in Pakistani Society: Critical Appraisal in Shāri‘ah Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Women employment is a common issue around the world in the contemporary age. Women engagement in jobs is a practical issue of the modern age and is espoused by almost all the nations and countries globally. In the west, women rights include employment, business, property, and education etc. These rights were recognized after the struggles Of Women Liberation Movement (during late 1960s). On the other hand, In Islāmīc history these rights were acknowledged since the inception of Islām. In the western society, a woman is bound to earn her livelihood as it is not the responsibility of a man to provide her basic needs. However, Islām protects a woman legally for the provision of all her basic necessities as it is the duty of her blood relatives like father, brother, husband, and son to provide these things to her. Even In certain situations, Islām permits a woman to do a job or run a business to earn money but this permission is subjected to some conditions implemented by Islām. Those may be carried out with the permission of her husband or father. Besides employment, a woman should also perform her responsibilities at her home because it is her basic obligation. So she must be careful about her husband and children rights as well. Women must wear hijab outdoors and also avoid mixing with stranger men and should follow other social teachings of Islām. Women have complete freedom to spend her earnings anywhere because it will be her own property. Islāmīc history reveals the truth that many of the wives of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and female companions (RA) carried out trade activities and performed other jobs and thus earned money. They spent it to assist the Prophet's noble cause and to assist their husbands and to care their children. These activities were considered authorized and endorsed by the prophet (PBUH). Pakistani society is facing a lot social issues, debate and problems regarding the

working women. The present study offers a detailed discussion on the topic in the light of the teachings of Islām.

Keywords: *Modernism, Liberation Movement, West, Rights, Society, Islām.*

Introduction

Women around the world are becoming economically stable contributing their countries and nations in different ways. Different figures of the rising rate of women in the workforce are presented, but they make up half of the picture. The other side of the picture, which is slightly undermined, portrays the problems women face at their workplaces. Women are an integral and respectable part of the human society. During “the time of ignorance” there were no significant rights for a woman in the Arabian Peninsula.¹ Acknowledging the status of a woman was not even a privilege to survive in the society. All kinds of glory and virtues were for the men only. In Pakistan labor force participation of women in professional and technical fields is only 22 % where men are 78 %.² Even in the ordinary affairs of life, men used to keep good things to themselves and did not give to women anything. The Qur'an states:

And they (also) say: ‘The (offspring) in the wombs of these cattle is exclusively for our men but forbidden to our women and if that (offspring) is stillborn then they (men and women) all are partners in it.’ Soon He will punish them for their (invented) dogmas. He is indeed Most Wise, All-Knowing.³

This verse reveals that in the time before Islām, not only was the distinction made between women and men in the distribution and transaction of things, but women were also considered relatively inferior to men. Not only that, it was a shame to confess the status of a woman to the right of her life. So they used to get angry at the birth of a girl and bury them alive. The Qur'an reflects the behavior of these people:

When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief! He seeks to hide himself from people due to the (presumed) bad news that is given to him. (He now gets down to thinking) whether he should keep her (alive) despite humiliation and disgrace or bury her (alive) in the earth. See! How wicked is the decision.⁴

In this verse, Āllāh Almighty has stated and condemned this false tradition of ignorance. Likewise, before examining various cultures and societies of the world before Islām, we come to the conclusion that women were much oppressed and deprived of social respect. Women were considered the cause of all evils and were hated in the cultures of Greece, Rome, Iran. The women were considered inferior in

rank. No clear concept of the dignity, respect and status of a woman is seen other than in Islām. Islām prohibited the deprivation of daughters and destroyed this ritual of ignorance, and gave the woman a high place what she actually deserved.

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا﴾⁵

O men, fear your Lord who created you from a single soul, and from it created its match, and spread from the two, many men and women. And fear Āllāh in whose name you ask each other (for your rights), and surely, Āllāh is watchful over you.

The Shari'ah did not primarily impose a duty on the woman to do earning and made men responsible for their livelihood and financial responsibilities; therefore, the expenses of the girls till marriage are attributed to the father and on the husband after marriage. Therefore, if a woman does not suffer any financial crisis, just moving out of her home and working for a job to raise the standard of living and earning is not a preferred or desired practice according to the Šhāri'ah. But if a woman suffers from economic hardship and her husband is unable to take the responsibility or the woman is a widow and it is not possible for her to survive in the house, so in such times of compulsion and hardships, she will be allowed to leave home for work.

In such case when the job is inevitable for the women, then it is with the condition that it should be permissible according to Šhāri'ah. The second essential condition is to abide by the rules of hijab.

In the case of severe need when a woman is to go outdoors, her whole face should be in the veil (even in Islām the face and hands are allowed to leave open, but for a fear of temptation it is necessary to avoid to open them). Especially in the present age, it is in general order that all body of a woman should be veiled properly. Āllāh Says in the Holy Qur'an:

﴿وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى﴾⁶

Stay in your homes and do not display your finery as pagan women used to do in the olden Days of Ignorance.

This is explained in the light of the teachings of Šhāri'ah that women should not wear a garment that makes part of her body prominent. It is explained in a Hadith.

((ونساء كاسيات عاريات مائلات مميلات رؤوسهن كأسنمة البخت المائلة لا يدخلن الجنة ولا يجدن

ريحها.))⁷

There are some women who are wearing clothes (but) they are naked, they will attract the males and they will be inclined to themselves (such women) will never go to paradise nor smell its fragrance.

She should avoid make up, embellishments, and the scent or perfume while going outdoors.

⁸ ((كل عين زانية والمرأة إذا استعطرت فمرت بالمجلس فهي كذا وكذا يعني زانية-))

Every eye is fornication, and when a woman passes by the gathering with a perfume, she is committing adultery.

Late Marriages and Early (Premature age) Marriages:

There are two types of marriage related issues with the women in our society. One is early age (premature) marriage when a girl is married at such a young age that she is not fully aware of the marriage and marital problems which inevitably results in disputes between husband and wife. The second issue is delay in the marriages due to the family rituals or searching for an ideal husband. Still more, usually the working women also get married late. The majority of Pakistani society is unaware of teachings of Islām related to the marriages. In this way, some girls also seem to be victim to this concept.

If we follow the teachings of Islām, we have a very useful guidance: Prophet Hāzrāt Mūhāmmād (PBUH) said:

((إِذَا خَطَبَ إِلَيْكُمْ مَنْ تَرْضَوْنَ دِينَهُ وَخُلُقَهُ فَرَّوْجُوهُ، إِلَّا تَفْعَلُوا تَكُنْ فِتْنَةٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ، وَفَسَادٌ عَرِيضٌ-⁹))

When someone sends you a proposal of marriage, on whom you have trust about his deen (religion) and ethics, you should marry (your girls) with him, if you do not marry, then there will be great corruption in the land.

This is one of the reasons for delays in marriage.

"Sometimes because of the lack of timely decision-making, parents are unable to make timely decisions in regards to their children, eventually becoming upset and parents themselves delaying the marriage."¹⁰

Dowry problems:

One of the major problems of the unmarried working women is the issue of dowry; even sometimes they are forced to collect their dowry by themselves through jobs. The parents want that their daughter should go to her husband's house with maximum dowry so that the rest of her life she does not have to listen to the taunts of her in-laws. Often, parents do not have the capacity to afford such heavy articles for their daughter. The solution to all these problems lies in the example of the Prophet (PBUH), the way he arranged marriage of his beloved daughter Hazrat Fatima.

لما تزوج علي رضي الله عنه فاطمة رضي الله عنها ، قال له رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم : أعطها شيئاً ، قال : ما عندي . قال : فأين درعك الحطميَّة -¹¹

Hazrat Ali (RA) when married to Fatima, then the Prophet Akram asked from Hazrat Ali that, do you have something for the Haq-Mehar. He replied, "I have nothing". The Holy Prophet asked where his iron armor was.

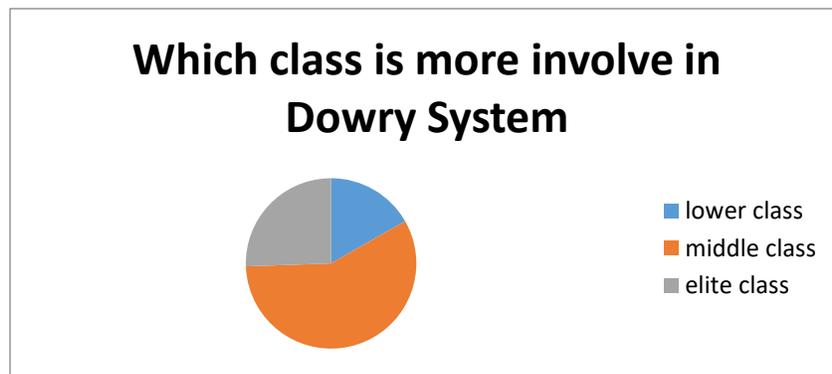
In this way, Prophet Mūhāmmād (PBUH) arranged the marriage of his daughter Fatima. Doing this indicates that Prophet (PBUH) saw only religiosity of his son-in-law and did not ask for son-in-law's business, agricultural land, property. Considering the material things for marriage has become an unfortunate part of our society.

In Pakistan there are mainly three classes according to financial distribution. Table no. 1, illustrated the most implicated class in dowry system. Result showed that the most dominant class who exercising Dowry system is middle class as compared to lower and elite class.

Table-1. Classes involve in Dowry system

Category	Percentage
Lower class	16.7 %
Middle class	57.8 %
Elite class	25.5 %
Total	100%

Source:¹²



Here it is graphical representation of classes involve in dowry system. Above pie chart showed that middle class has the greatest division who are exercising dowry. Lower and elite class has lesser fraction.

The Trend of Violence and Honor Killing:

Because of social attitudes, women face more problems than men regardless of their class. When a girl goes out to work, the first problem is to satisfy the family and seek their consent. The family usually wants the girl to get married as soon as possible and if she manages to get a job then she should get married easily. In some cases, the family may allow the job but when it comes to relatives, the in-laws stipulate that the girl must leave the job after marriage.

There are various forms of violence against working women from their relatives in the name of honor in Pakistani society including beatings, execution, and sometimes acid attacks from any male who wants to marry her forcefully against her will.

Similarly, a report was presented in the Parliament in 2015.

According to the statistics of violence against women contained in a report to parliament by the ministry of law, justice and human rights, there were 860 honor killings (mostly women,) 481 incidents of domestic violence, 90 cases of acid burning, and 344 cases of rape/harassment. That is just the official toll. Less than half of abuse is reported.¹³

The killers always have taken the law in their hands. It was the job of the court to punish him if he was guilty.

According to a narration Hazrat Saad Bin Abbada Said to the Prophet Mūhāmmād (PBUH)

If I see a man with my wife, I will murder him with the sword. When the matter came to the Prophet (PBUH), he said: People! Do you wonder about Saad's honor feelings? By Āllāh! I am more honorable than that, and Āllāh is more honorable than me. It is for this reason that Āllāh has forbidden every outward and inward obscenity. No one can be more honorable than Āllāh.¹⁴

It is important to control all these steps first rather than preventing or reviewing these crimes in the name of honor only. And at this critical point we have to make that decision. What is the reason that we consider love a sacred value in our society, but no one in Pakistan is willing to listen to the name of a stranger or a lover for his sister or daughter? We must clearly choose one of the opposing paths and prepare ourselves for its accessories and consequences. This dichotomous society is causing tragedies on every side.

Travel in Public:

The biggest problem for a working woman is transportation. None of our governments has yet established a public transport system for the people. Men also travel by hanging

on buses and sitting on the bus roof, and for women there are barely two or three seats. The driver shoots the crap out songs loudly; the conductor also harasses. Male travelers also try to climb or descend from the female section or touch while sitting.¹⁵

Female Companions of the Prophet (who were the world's purest women) were ordered that they should walk at a distance from the common lanes on the road. They set a practical example of being so careful that they used to walk along the walls, and in some traditions women were forbidden to walk with the funerals. Imam Nawawi justified this in "Sharah-ul-Muddab" that this condition is to forbid mixing up of women with men that could have led to the pugnacity. Therefore, it is forbidden.¹⁶

According to some hadiths, it is proven that women would go to the mosque for prayer. In the Sahih Bukhari, it is narrated that Sayyida Aisha Siddiqah (RA) said:

((كُنَّ نِسَاءُ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ، يَشْهَدْنَ مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ صَلَاةَ الْفَجْرِ، مُتَلَفَعَاتٍ بِمِرْطَابٍ، ثُمَّ يَنْقَلِبْنَ إِلَى بُيُوتِهِنَّ حِينَ يَقْضَيْنَ الصَّلَاةَ، لَا يَعْرِفُهُنَّ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْعَلَسِ))¹⁷.

Muslim women used to attend the Fajr prayer with Prophet Mūhāmmād (PBUH), wrapped in sheets. When the prayer was over, they returned to their homes and no one could recognize them because of the darkness.

It was allowed for the women to attend congregations on special occasions but it was also told that the best prayer of a woman is that which is offered in the house instead of the mosque. In this regard, it is reported from the Holy Prophet (PBUH) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said:

((لَا تَمْنَعُوا نِسَاءَ كُمْ الْمَسَاجِدَ وَبُيُوتَهُنَّ خَيْرَ لِهِنَّ.))¹⁸

"Don't stop your women from coming to the mosque, but their homes are better for them."

Colleagues Behavior:

When a working woman arrives at her office, her male colleagues may harass her by ogling. Someone speaks meaningful words while another wants to make a joke or kidding. Now the good news is that there has been implemented a law in Pakistan about sexual harassment at Work Place.¹⁹ It is a fact that the rule of men is seen everywhere in this society of men, from the office to the public transport and the police station. Most women who work in restaurants and fast food places say that they often feel scared, because while dealing with gentlemen, they are forced to smile in a professional way. In such cases, it is common for some to take them as easy targets. According to the Islāmic Šhāri'ah, women should not mix with men at all at workplace. If casual contact or interaction with a man is inevitable, then woman should adopt a rather harsh tone instead of an inviting style so that the heart should not produce any kind of distress for males. Āllāh Says:

﴿فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الَّذِي فِي قَلْبِهِ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا﴾²⁰

Do not be complaisant in your speech lest he, in whose heart there is a sickness, may desire (of his mother); but speak honorable words.

Women should not wear ornaments that make a sound.

﴿وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ﴾²¹

And not to stamp their feet on the ground in order that their hidden adornment be known.

Table-2. Experiences of Sexual harassment in Pakistani Women

College	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
Vulgar Remarks	20%	100%	88.8%
Ignore and stay silent	20%	70%	44.4%
Reply Back	-	30%	44.4%
Offer for Lunch/Dinner	-	76.6%	77.8%
Refuse politely	-	12.2%	55.5%
Resigned	-	22.2%	11%
Accepted	-	31.2%	11.2%
Bluntly refused	-	11%	-
	-	-	-

Source:²²

Psychological Issues of Children:

Most working women face considerable difficulty in carrying out their dual responsibilities. An imbalance of work and home life leaves their children ignored. They can't balance their professional and personal lives. Most women do not even pay attention to the education and training of their children, although this is their primary responsibility. This lack of good environment and attention results in bad habits and

poor educational performance. Women should put their little kids to the little chores in the house so that the kids can enjoy. This will create a habit and a sense of responsibility within them for doing their work themselves. Appreciate their small actions, encourage them, and correct them instead of scolding them and making them angry so that they can do so in the future.

Women should complete mother feed for her child for two years.

Āllāh Says:

﴿وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ﴾²³

Mothers will breast feed their babies for two years.

((كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ))²⁴

Each of you is a caretaker and will be asked about his or her responsibility.

At the early stage of a child's training, the mother is closest to him/her. She plays a vital role in the destruction or deterioration and development of a society. So despite being a professional lady, it is the primary responsibility of women to take care of her Children. It is very important for a woman today to protect her children, family, system, rules and regulations from all the western influences. And the message of alternative goodwill is very important to communicate to our generation. Home and children form a basic unit of society. If the grip is strong here then society flourishes and values can be protected. So training children in the light of religious principles and Islāmic ideas is essential. The job or work only cannot be an excuse to get rid of these responsibilities of the working women.

Domestic Clashes:

Domestic life goes into the background for a working woman due to which domestic clashes escalate. Home and family are always in need of a woman's attention. Relationships are like plants and if they are not taken care of, they also die. Due to the lack of time, the social life of the working women is almost gone. Meeting people ends up in missing the essential chores at home. In the race for life, everyone is so busy that there is no time to meet people and to have fun. In today's mechanized era, men and women suffer from psychosis and obsession. When we look into the society, every other person suffers from isolation and depression. Everyone seems to cry for the shortage of time.

According to the Pakistani constitution, like men, women have the right to vote, freedom of expression, religious freedom and other rights which are guaranteed in the Constitution of 1958 and 1973 and any gender discrimination is banned. Articles 26, 25 and 27 of the Constitution do not impose any discrimination on the basis of gender in terms of rights and employment opportunities.²⁵

But whatever is written in the Constitution and the law continue to say, today in Pakistani society, the most commonly held notions regarding women are very much primitive and cheap. Most people think of women as a gender or a Commodity, and they harass and torture women on street corners, workplaces, even within the four walls of the house. I would like to cite the book "Working with Sharks" which contains the true stories of eleven women as to how men them harassed at work.²⁶

Now each institution will have to constitute an inquiry committee which will inquire into the grievances under this Act. This committee will consist of three members, at least one member of which is a woman. Within three days of receiving the complaint, the inquiry committee will inform the accused of the allegations leveled against him, the defendant will be asked to present his defense within seven days. If he does not defend for any good reason, the committee will take unilateral action. The committee will investigate the allegations and submit its findings and recommendations within three days to the competent authority. The committee may recommend the following sentences.

(1) Minor sentences - (a) Reprimand. (B) Withholding promotion and increment for a fixed period. (C) Stopping the eligibility limit. (D) To pay the affected person through salary or other means.

(2) Large sentences - (a) Reduction in rank or time scale. (B) Forced retirement. (C) Termination of employment. (D) Fines.²⁷

Not only Pakistan but women all over the world are facing problems. A survey by the British Thomson Reuters Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation discusses the problems faced by 9500 working women around the world at workplaces.²⁸ In Pakistani society, social evils are increasing as a result of abstaining from religious education. All these problems can be solved if their solution is found in the light of Islāmic teachings.

Conclusion:

This paper talks about the difficulties women face when they are employed because since Pakistan has been created it is heard that our society is "a society of men." We do not know who said it first! But if we look at society, it is all right because men here have a tendency to show their superiority over women whether at home or outside the home. It is commonly said that when a man is capable of earning, it means that the luxuries and amenities step into the house and at least some of the problems will be eliminated. On the contrary, when a woman comes out of the house, the luxuries and facilities do not come, but the difficulties start not for the family but for the woman. The organizations which persuade that a woman must go out of her house and do the work along with the men, is wrong and base, because if her husband earns so much that he can raise a family and their needs are met, so there is no need for a woman to

be away from her household responsibilities. Of course, it is not as difficult for a woman to fight for her survival at home as it is in the world outdoors. In the same way, some men do not allow a woman to work and impose unnecessary restrictions, even when needed. In fact, they are vulnerable and do not want a woman to be their equal. Gender discrimination is increasing in our society. The class factor has also become common placed and has become important in the field of women employment. The stronger the social background, the greater the respect given to them. Women, who try to improve their family living standards from the low, have to go through the traumas which only they know. These traumas come from the executives, managers, or from their fellow colleagues. If a woman is harassed on the way from home to office or in the office, she is also afraid of going to the police to file a complaint as the environment of the police station is even worse and unprofessional than their workplace. And there is always a fear that the police will also start harassing them. The biggest problem is poverty which causes deprivation of even the basic facilities of life. They do not get a clean environment; garbage is dumped around their residential areas, and sewerage chokes and overflows. They are educated but denied the medical treatment facilities. Therefore, we have to consider an overall development of our society along with the women's rights according to the Islāmic Šhāri'ah.

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