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## WOMEN'S STATUS IN DIVINE SCRIPTURES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ISLAM AND MAINSTREAM WORLD RELIGIONS

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### Abstract:

Each religion defines and upholds women's rights and this comparative study explores the rights and status of women in the holy scriptures of Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity, focusing on how By examining key verses from the Holy Quran, the Vedas, the Torah, and the Bible, this study highlights the unique perspectives and teachings of each faith. Islam, through the Holy Quran, emphasizes the equitable treatment of women, granting them rights to inheritance, education, and independent economic activity. The verse from Surah An-Nisa (4:7) demonstrates Islam's commitment to ensuring women's rights and equality,

"For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much—an obligatory share"<sup>1</sup>.

In contrast, Hinduism's historical practice of Sati, where widows were burned alive on their husband's funeral pyres, reflects a starkly different approach to women's rights. Although modern Hinduism has largely abandoned this practice, its historical prevalence highlights the

significant challenges Hindu women faced. The Vedas, while offering some positive teachings about women, do not explicitly address such practices, underscoring the need for reform in historical contexts. Judaism, through the Torah, presents a balanced view of women's rights and responsibilities. The verse from Proverbs 31:10-31, often referred to as the Eshet Chayil, praises the virtues of a woman of valor, recognizing her contributions to the household and community. It states,

"She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come"<sup>2</sup>.

Christianity, represented by the Bible, offers various perspectives on women's roles. In Galatians 3:28, the Apostle Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"<sup>3</sup>, promoting the idea of spiritual equality between genders.

This study concludes that while each religion has its own unique teachings and historical practices, Islam provides a comprehensive framework for women's rights that is arguably more progressive and equitable compared to the practices observed in historical Hinduism, particularly the custom of Sati. By comparing these religious perspectives, we gain a deeper understanding of the diverse ways in which women's rights are approached and can identify areas for further progress and reform.

**Keywords:** Women's Rights, Religious Scriptures, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Gender Equality, Comparative Religion, Sati Practice and Spiritual Equality

## Introduction

When we talk about our religion in front of the nations, our attitude is apologetic. There may be many reasons for this, but one of the biggest reasons that I understand is that we are half educated.

The reason for this is that there are two parallel streams in our education system which are running side by side but independent of each other, one stream is religious education which is imparted in our Madaris and the other stream is modern education which is imparted in our colleges and universities. It is given Scholars who graduated from Madaris are enlightened by the light of Holy Quran and Sunnah of Prophet (P.B.U.H) and can offer solutions to the problems of the modern world with their knowledge, they do not know that there are problems in the modern world. If a few problems are known, ignorance of the first languages

of the modern world makes them unable to present their solutions. Those gentlemen who are equipped with modern sciences, they are aware of the problems of the modern world, but they do not have an Islamic solution to these problems.

The second reason is that we confuse our religious teachings and our culture. Generally, our civilization and culture, our culture and our traditions are the result of our religion, but sometimes it also happens that we expose our religion to some of our nonsensical traditions and give these traditions the color of religion and practice them. When we are asked about traditions in front of the world, we do not get any answer and our attitude remains apologetic.

Almighty Allah commands us to enter the religion completely. Allah says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَآفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ<sup>4</sup>

"O people of faith! Enter Islam fully and see that you do not follow in the footsteps of devil."

### **The attitude of the world religions towards women before Islam:**

If we want to know what rights were given to women by the authority of the Lord of the Universe, Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa (P.B.U.H), then it is necessary for us to know how the women were treated in this world before the arrival of the Prophet (P.B.U.H). For this, we have to take a look at the history of feminism.

### **The Status of Women in Hinduism:**

Hinduism is one of the oldest religion in the world. In Hindu India women were discriminated. In Hinduism a wife is considered as her husband's slave and her husband is the master.<sup>5</sup> If a woman from a staunch Hindu family becomes a widow, it is better for her to be cremated alive with her dead husband. This ritual is called "Sati".<sup>6</sup> according to Hindu Dharma she should also die.

On the other hand, Islam has ordered a woman that if her husband dies, she should mourn for four months and ten days and after that she may marry anyone if she wants. Almighty Allah says in Holy Quran:

وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا ۖ فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي مَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ<sup>7</sup>

“Those amongst you who die and leave their wives should restrain themselves (from marriage) for four months and ten days. In truth, according to the constitution and Allah is aware of all your actions”

In Hinduism, women are considered a source of shame.<sup>8</sup> Attempts are made to kill the girl at the time of birth. In states like Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan etc., there are boards and posters on which it is written: Spend five hundred rupees and earn five lakh rupees. That is, spend five hundred rupees on medical examination and if you are pregnant with a daughter, then abort the pregnancy and save millions of rupees spent on raising the daughter and later on dowry. According to the report of government hospitals in Tamil Nadu, five out of every ten daughters are killed before birth.<sup>9</sup> A word used as an insult in India. There, special and common people consider this word as abuse. This word is "Sala". Apart from Hinduism, all religions and cultures of the world look at this relationship with respect. In Urdu and Persian languages, he is called "Relative Brother" or so-and-so is my "Sale Sahib". English language speakers also respect this relationship and give it the name Brother in Law . There is only one Hindu nation that uses the word "Sala" as an insult because of the shame of this respectable relationship.

### **The Status of Women in Magusia:**

Before the arrival of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H), Iran and Rome were considered as two superpowers among the nations that inhabited this world. In fiery Iran, the status of women was like a salable commodity. Just like today you can sell your watch or car etc. to anyone, similarly you could sell your wife in ancient Iran.<sup>10</sup> Among fire-worshipping magi, marriage is also done with those relatives with whom marriage is forbidden in all other laws. We find a hint in this direction in the blessed A hadiths. Hazrat Umar (R.A) wrote letters to all his governors which contained the following text:

<sup>11</sup> فرقوا بين كل ذي محرم من المجوس

“The marriages of all the magicians who have married women whose marriage is forbidden in Islamic law should be annulled.”

### **The Women Status in Judaism:**

In the Torat, it is very clear that a woman is a punished creature who has been punished by Allah. It is written in the Torat: "Then he said to the woman, 'I will greatly increase your labor pains.' So children will be born with pain"<sup>12</sup> while the Holy Qur'an describes this pain as the greatness of a woman. Almighty Allah says in Holy Book:

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهَنَا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفِصْلُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنْ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ ۖ إِلَيَّ الْمَصِيرُ<sup>13</sup>

“And we commanded man to be kind to his parents, his mother bore him while pregnant, labored, and nursed him for two years, We admonished him to be grateful to Me and of his parents.”

### **The Status of women in Christianity:**

The Roman Empire was the pioneer of Christianity, in Christianity women are considered the root of evil.<sup>13</sup> Christianity propagates that a woman had a hand in expelling Adam (A.S) from Paradise.<sup>14</sup> While the Holy Quran has clearly stated that Hazrat Hawa (A.S) and Hazrat Adam (A.S) were both seduced by Iblees and both were deceived by him and then both of them begged forgiveness before Almighty Allah and Almighty Allah granted forgiveness. Almighty Allah says:

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ<sup>15</sup>

“Then the devil slipped them both by encouraging this tree, finally took them out of the luxury in which they were”

It is said in Surah Al-A'raf:

وَقَاسَمَهُمَا إِنِّي لَكُمَا لَمِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾ فَدَلَّهُمَا بِعُرْوَةٍ ۖ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفْنَ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَّرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ ۖ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكَ الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلْتُ لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ۚ قَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ<sup>16</sup>

“And Iblees swore in front of both of them that I am the true benefactor of both of you. Then he gradually brought them to his senses by deceiving both of them. Then when both of them tasted the taste of this tree, body of them opened in front of them and they began to cover themselves with the leaves of Paradise and called to their Lord : "Didn't I weep for you in this tree?" By going to? And didn't I tell you that surely Iblees is an open enemy of both of you?

They both said, "O our Lord, have we wronged ourselves? If You do not forgive us and do not show mercy to us, we will surely be among the losers."

Women were denied property rights in the Roman Empire.<sup>17</sup>

In the Christian Roman Empire, like in pagan Iran, women themselves were considered the property of men.<sup>18</sup> A famous sociologist Herbert Speneer his book Sociologist:

In France in the year 586, a symposium took place, the title of which was whether a woman is a soulful creation or does not have a soul. Women been created only to serve men?<sup>19</sup>

After a few days of long debate, all the Christian scholars agreed that she has is not a soul but a she is created only to serve man.<sup>20</sup> In Britain, women were given the right to own and buy property in 1870.<sup>21</sup>

In the United States, the leader of the civilized world at the time, women did not have the right to vote until the 1920. A special amendment to the US Constitution was made in 1920 which gave women the right to vote.<sup>22</sup>

On the contrary, if we study the biography of Holy Prophet (PBUH) then it is known that he (P.B.U.H) pledged allegiance to women.<sup>23</sup> kept them involved in the political process and consulted women on important matters. From the beginning of prophethood to the end of his life, he (P.B.U.H) consulted with the (R.A). The advice of Hazrat Khadijah (R.A), Hazrat Aisha (R.A) and Hazrat Umm-e-Salma (R.A) are the best examples. Immediately after the beginning of the revelation, the personality who comforted and encouraged the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) is Hazrat Khadijah Al-Kubra (R.A).<sup>24</sup>

He (P.B.U.H) said about Hazrat Aisha (R.A), The superiority of Aisha (R.A) over women is like the superiority of Thareed over all foods.<sup>25</sup>

The incident that has been narrated about Hazrat Umm Salama (RA) amazes the human mind. After signing the agreement of Hudaibiyah, the Prophet (P.B.U.H) announced that we are not performing Umrah and that the Companions should remove their Ihram and shave their heads. This news came to the Companions and they did not understand what to do. Even after the command to shave the head, the Companions remained seated in their places. When the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) saw this situation, he (P.B.U.H) came to his tent and mentioned to Hazrat Umm Salama (R.A) that the Sahabah heard his words but did not act. Hazrat Umm-

e-Salama (R.A)) said, O Messenger of Allah (P.B.U.H), please go in front of the Companions and order your barber to shave your head. He (P.B.U.H) followed the advice of Hazrat Umm-e-Salama (R.A) and upon seeing him, all the Companions (R.A) also shaved their heads.<sup>26</sup>

In the US in 2005 the Bureau of Justice released some statistics. According to his research, one-third of the women killed in 2005 were wives who were killed by their husbands due to domestic violence.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, 14,000 women are killed by domestic violence in Russia every year, that is, almost every hour a woman is killed by her husband. These figures are also from the year 2005.<sup>28</sup>

Now let's see what our Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) said about good behavior towards women: About the wife, He (P.B.U.H) said:

خيركم خيركم لأهله وانا خيركم لأبلى<sup>29</sup>

“The best among you is he who is the best in treating his wife well and I am the best among you all in treating my family well.”

He further said that your wives are God's trusts with you, treat them well.<sup>30</sup> He (P.B.U.H) said, some women pressed bad behaviour of husbands. They are not the best of men.<sup>31</sup> He (P.B.U.H) said about mothers:

الزم رجلها فثم الجنة<sup>32</sup>

“Lie at your mother's feet, heaven is there” Regarding daughters, he said that the person who educates and trains his three daughters well and marries them, there is good news of heaven for that person. A person asked, O Messenger of Allah (P.B.U.H)! I have two daughters, can this be good news for me too? He said, yes, this is good news for you too. Another person asked, O Messenger of Allah, I have only one daughter, do I also deserve this good news? He said yes, this is good news for you too.<sup>33</sup>

A woman who used to clean the Prophet's Mosque died, it was night time, the Prophet (P.B.U.H) was resting. The next day, when he inquired about the woman and learned that she had been buried, he visited her grave and prayed for her.<sup>34</sup>

### **Position of Women in Abab before Islam:**

Before Islam, the status of women in the Arabian Peninsula was not different from the rest of the world. Even among the Arabs, the birth of a woman, her existence and her upbringing were considered a source of humiliation and disgrace. Almighty Allah says in Holy Quraan:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ۚ يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ ۚ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ ۗ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ 35

“And when the good news of a daughter is given to one of them, his face becomes dark and sad. He hides from the people on the bad news that was told to him (thinks) whether to let him live despite the humiliation or bury him in the soil? Look how bad are the decisions that they make.”

You have seen this attitude of the nations, which was allowed to women. When Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) came, he told the world what is the position of women. He (P.B.U.H) a great benefactor for humanity in general and for women in particular. The rights of women which were presented to the world by Prophet (P.B.U.H) are some of the prominent rights as follows:

#### **1. Identification:**

With the advent of the Holy Prophet, women got their identity, the world was told that a woman is also a human being, she has a soul, a heart and emotions, she was not created only to serve men, but Allah created men and women, both of them have been created for their lives. Almighty Allah says in Holy Quran:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ 36

“And I did not create the jinn and humans except for the purpose of worshipping”

#### **2. Ownership:**

Thanks to the arrival of Mualim-e-Azam, women were given the right to own property for the first time in human history. Whatever is the property of a woman, whether it is her personal property, whether she has inherited it or through a trade, etc., her husband has no right in this property.



Before Islam, Arabs had no concept of including women in inheritance. Sixteen years after the arrival of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H), on the occasion of the Battle of Uhud, the inheritance orders were revealed. The incident happened that Hazrat Saad bin Rabi' was among the seventy companions who were martyred in the Battle of Uhud . In Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim and Sunan Nasa'i, Hazrat Jabir bin Abdullah says:

Hazrat Saad bin Rabi's wife came to the Messenger of Almighty Allah (P.B.U.H) and said: O Messenger of Almighty Allah (P.B.U.H) these are the two daughters of Saad bin Rabi. All their wealth has been taken and their marriages cannot take place without wealth. The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said: Allah will decide this, then the verse of inheritance was revealed and he (PBUH) sent a message to the uncle of the girls to give two-thirds of the wealth to the girls and give one-eighth to their mother and whatever is left is yours.<sup>37</sup>

### **3. Right to choose husband:**

The Great Teacher and the Benefactor of Humanity (P.B.U.H), has given women the right to marry whomever they want, if they are sane and mature. It is forbidden to marry her without her wish.

The holy saying of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) If a divorced woman or a widow marries, she will give permission as if someone gives an order, while only permission should be taken from a virgin and her silence will also be considered as her permission.<sup>38</sup>

An interesting incident has been narrated in Sunan Nasa-i-Sunan Ibn Majah and Musnad of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal that a woman came to the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) and said:

“My father married me to his nephew just so that he could elevate his low status by marrying me. After hearing this, the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) gave the woman the right to keep the marriage if she wanted and to end it if she wanted. On this the woman said: I allow what my father did, I just wanted to teach women that fathers have no permission or authority to do such things.”<sup>39</sup>

### **4. Right to retain full name after marriage:**

This British system is imposed on us that after marriage, a woman is deprived of her father's name and the father's name is replaced by her husband's name.<sup>40</sup> If a woman gets divorced and remarries, then the name of the second husband should be added. Sometimes she is Mrs.

Chaudhry, sometimes that woman is Mrs. Malik. Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) has given a woman the right to keep her full name, which consists of her name and her father's name, throughout her life. Be it Ummahat al-Mu'minin or other Companions, the names of all are preserved in the name of their father. Aisha bint Abi Bakr(R.A), Hafsa bint Umar (R.A), Zeenat bint Iahash (R.A) and Fatima bint Muhammad (R.A). Similarly, the names of all other Companions are attributed to their fathers, not to their husbands.

### 5. Right to Good Treatment:

Islam has given the right to talk to her with good manners. When her a woman is a mother or a daughter, a sister or a wife, a daughter-in-law or a mother-in-law, all women, whether they are your relatives or not, should be treated with kindness. Almighty Allah says in Holy Quraan:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا ۖ إِنَّمَا يُبَلِّغُنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَيْهِمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا<sup>41</sup>

“And your Lord has decreed that you should worship none but Him alone, and be kind to your parents. Rebuke them and speak to them respectfully”

### 6. Spiritual Right:

Islam has given spiritual rights to women, that is, just as men have the right to worship, go to mosques, offer prayers and listen to sermons, women also have the right to focus on their spiritual training. The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said: Do not ask women from going to Mosghlle of Almighty Allah.<sup>42</sup>

### Conclusion

In the end, I would just like to say that the divine revelation revealed to the Great Teacher (P.B.U.H) in the form of the Holy Quran is the only heavenly book in the world in which a complete Surah is attributed to women. By giving the gift of Surat al-Nisa to this Ummah, Allah has given it such uniqueness that no nation in the world can compete with us regarding, women students in Islam.

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28. National Organization for Women, [www.now.org](http://www.now.org) The National Organization for Women is a women's rights organization registered in the United States. The agency cited the following data from the US Bureau of Justice : In 2005, 1,181 women were murdered by an intimate partner . This is an average of three women every day. Of all the women murdered in the United States, about one-third were killed by an intimate partner .
29. You Tube: One woman killed by domestic violence every hour in Russia
30. Imam Tabrani narrated this hadith with Hasan chain of transmission.
31. Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Nikah, Chapter 80, (English translation) Volume 7, p.
32. Sunan Abu Dawud, hadith number: 2146, Al-Albani has declared this hadith as sahih in Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud (3/403).
33. This hadith has been narrated by Abu Yala and Tabrani.
34. Sunan Ibn Majah, Chapters of Literature, Hadith No.: 3670, p.: 526, Dar al-Salam, Riyadh, 1999
35. Musnad Ahmad, Vol.: 3, p.: 444, Dar Sadr, Beirut, Sun
36. Al -Nahl: 58-59
37. Dhariyat: 56
38. Sunan al-Tirmidhi, Kitab al-Fareez, Hadith No: 3, Volume: 2, Pg: 417, Maktaba al-Maarif, Riyadh
39. Mota Imam Malik, Kitab al-Nikah, Hadith No: 5, Islamic Academy, Lahore, 1402 AH
40. Sunan Nasa'i, Kitab al-Nikah, 36, Ibn Majah: Kitab al-Nikah 12, Musnad Ahmad: 6/126
41. Sahih Muslim, Kitab Al-Janaiz, Chapter Istizaaan Al-Abi, may God's prayers and peace be upon him, Raba Azujal fi Ziyarat Ummah's grave, 3/65

42. Children of Israel: 23

43. Bukhari Juma, 13, Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Salaat, 136, Sunan Abu Dawud, Kitab al-Salat, 52, Sunan Ibn Majah, Case, 2, Sunan al-Darmi, Kitab al-Salat, 57, Musnad Ahmad, Volume: 2, Pages: 16, 26 , 151, Volume: 5, Pages 192, 193, Volume: 6, Page: 29