

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ISLAMIC WOMEN

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ABSTRACT: Muslim women still encounter discrimination in various domains of their daily life represented by religious teachings such as their right to choose husband, clothing, education and so on. Islamic religion continues to be used as an excuse for such acts of discrimination against Muslim women

KEYWORDS: Discrimination, Muslim Women, Muslim Culture, Women Rights, Islamic Teachings Against Women

INTRODUCTION

Islam is the religion of Muslim community that emphasizes on unconditional obedience to the will of God without question. Muslims refer their God as Allah. Islam therefore is an expression of surrender and obedience to the will of Allah, who is the creator of the universe, creator of the world and continues to sustain it. Muslims have a sacred book known as the Quran that contains the teachings of Prophet Mohamed that were given to Him by Allah. In Islam culture, Muslims have always practiced monotheism that is the worship and believe in only one true God (Allah) (Huda, 2014). Muslims worship Allah in the following ways through praying and providing to the poor and the needy. In addition, Muslims engage in the practice of fasting whereby the able Muslims deny themselves food and share the little more they have with the needy people within the society. Muslims worship their God in mosques where they pray and study scripture. In Islamic culture, the family is the cornerstone of public and private life. Women however, since perhaps as early as the Rashidun period, faced opposition to their involvement and participation in the public sphere. They have been regarded as weak and have been discriminated in almost every aspect of life. Some of the areas which women have been discriminated include; gender roles, female education, legal matters, in marriage, they have been denied freedom of movement and travel, discrimination in politics, religious life and lastly in dressing code.

Gender roles

First, Islamic women are discriminated based on their gender roles. They are determined by the behaviors of either male or female. There also exist social norms, which control the behaviors of either a man or woman in a social or personal relationship. According to Muslims culture, men are superior to the women, women depend on men and therefore they are supposed to be obedient and submissive to their husbands. Like any other culture Man is the head of the family and therefore assumes the role of decision-making, woman on the other hand is supposed to obey and be submissive to the man (Onislam.net, 2014). Man is also the 'bread-winner' and women are child bearers. Women have indeed faced discrimination compared to their male counterparts as men have continued to be seen as superior to women as men have dominated in the fields of religion, politics and in every aspect of Islam culture while women have been left with the household chores and child bearing(Hashmi, 2000).

Education

In addition, women have also faced discrimination in the field of education. In Islamic culture, girls are denied education opportunities. In Muslim nations there has been rise of alarming numbers over the high population of uneducated women population. In employment opportunities, both male and female are permitted to work, but there has been discrimination as men always get the best jobs and women get low paying ones. However, women are only allowed to work if the job she is doing does not interfere with her roles of taking care of the husband and children. They are for example not allowed to engage in jobs which demand long working hours there is very little or no time to spend with children and husband as they leave the house early in the morning and come back late during the night when children and husband are asleep. This interferes with woman's sexual performance as she comes back home very tired and therefore she is not able to satisfy his husband sexually. In addition, the Muslim community also does not allow women to work in an environment that does not respect her rights. Despite women having the right to work, they get cheap jobs compared to the prestigious jobs held by men. Women are also lowly paid compared to those of men (Kasparian, 2009).

Domestic violence

Islam women are subjected to domestic violence (Muslim Women's League, 1995) In Islamic culture women have been victims of domestic violence whereby women have continued to be mistreated by their female counterparts. Domestic violence in Muslim families has been encouraged by some of the Islamic teachings that allow domestic violence against women. These teachings give men permission to discipline or beat their wives if they are disobedience to them. Apparently, women are supposed to be obedient and obey their husbands without question. Muslim community has a legal process, which does not deal with cases related to domestic violence. Consequently, absences of such legal process that can punish domestic violence culprits have perpetuated women beatings.

Marriage

Another area in which women have face discrimination is in marriage. Islamic law allows man to marry more than one wife. Consequently, most Muslim men are polygamous; this has resulted lack of attention and in sometimes divided attention to women as much time is spent with the newly married woman she enjoys sexually and she gets much support financially (Keet, 2014). Muslim men also can marry temporarily; this type of marriage is referred to as marriages of pleasure, where a man is allowed by Islamic culture to marry for some days, week or a month the spouses are given a marriage certificate which automatically expires on the agreed date. In these temporary marriages, a man has to pay some money to a woman or sometimes the family is paid in exchange for a temporary marriage relationship. These temporary marriages are legal in Islamic culture and they have triggered debate as those who practice them makes Islam seem as a religion that allows prostitution.

In Islam, there exists a gender difference whereby Muslim women are not permitted by the Islam culture to be married by non-Muslim. Additionally, a Muslim woman is not allowed to denounce Islamic culture or religion in order to get married by a non-Muslim man. This is because leaving Islam is not allowed and is considered a religious crime which can lead to death as a punishment. Men on the other hand have been allowed to marry non-Muslim women. This has resulted an unequal relationship where women are treated unfairly similar to

slave who must be submissive and obedient to a master .Islam does not allow superiority of women because according to their religion woman is supposed to be obedient and should always be submissive to the husband(keet,2014)

In Islamic law and practice there is unequal treatment among men and women there are separate rights and obligations assigned to both man and woman in married life. In Muslim culture, women have been delegated duties and responsibilities in the home or private affairs while men have their responsibilities in the public life. Women have responsibilities of taking care of the children as well as taking care of the husband. Men however have the responsibility to lead at the family level and also have the responsibility of providing for the family. According to Islamic culture, Man has the right of guardianship and he is the protector of everyone in the family and therefore superior over everybody else at the family level. Women have no right assets owned by man before marriage, as well as those earned by man after the marriage. Assets remain under the man during marriage and in case of a divorce (keet, 2014).

Sexuality

Moreover, Muslim women have again being discriminated in matters of sexuality. (Warner, 2007) sexuality is the sexual habits and desires of a person. In Islam, women are only allowed to have sex after marriage and sex should be with one Muslim man who is her husband. Discrimination is in that the woman's husband is allowed by the Islam culture to marry and have sex with several Muslim women; man is also allowed to have sex with non Muslim women and girls. It's evident that women have been indeed discriminated sexually compared to men. Islam requires women cleanse their bodies by washing with water and recite prayers seeking forgiveness and purification after engaging in sex. According to Muslims culture, a woman is considered impure religiously after sex and during menstruation. There is discrimination against women, as men are not considered impure even after having sex with different women.

It is very clear that women have been greatly discriminated upon as they cannot have sex before marriage, they should have only one husband and they are only allowed to have sex with only their husbands. Women have been denied all these but it's allowed to a Muslim man.

Inclusively in issues of sexuality among Muslim women, women in Islam also suffer female genital mutilation or rather permanent cutting of the genitals in women. In Islam religion and in their Holy book known as Quran, there is no mention of female or male circumcision these are pre-Islamic cultures, female circumcision also known as female genital mutilation came to be part of Islamic culture because Muslims value female purity very much. The main reason according to Muslims why they carry out the practice is to Control women's sexuality (Warner, 2007). Virginity is very important and is valued greatly for marriage .Purity of a woman or girl brings honor to a woman in a community. FGM is defended by Muslim communities because they believe it helps in reducing a woman's sexual desire thus lessening chances and temptations to have extramarital sex and therefore preserving a girl's purity

There is gender discrimination as Muslims men do not undergo any ritual that is aimed at keeping them pure and also preventing them from engaging in extramarital sex. This shows that women are discriminated in that their sexual behaviors are controlled while men are left to do their will and they are never regarded as unclean (Warner, 2007). Muslim communities

have taken several actions, which are aimed at preventing people from using religion to justify the practice of genital mutilation.

Religious life

Muslim women have also been discriminated in religious life (Stacey, 2008) In Islam, men and women have the same relationship to God; they both can receive rewards for good things done and also can receive punishments for their conduct. Women are permitted to be in the places of worship or rather in the mosques. However, women became unclean after sexual interaction with men, therefore they have always avoided going to the mosque because Islam requires them to be cleansed first before appearing in public. The few who go to the mosque worship separately with men as men believe women would distract them during prayer prostrations as they bend over to the ground with their buttocks up while their foreheads touches the floor. Women have been denied the right to become imams (Stacey, 2008) .The role of an imam is that of spiritual leader in the mosque, to lead congregation during prayer. In addition, women cannot all lead prayers in the mosque because of issues of unchastely caused by engaging in sexual behavior. Thus, women have been discriminated also in religious leaderships as they are regarded as unclean.

Clothing

Islam women have no freedom to wear every design of clothing. Evidently, Muslim women are supposed in clothing that does not reveal any part of the body except the face. The husband is the only person who is given permission to see even a small percentage of body parts (Stacey,2013). They cover their heads with a veil (hijab) which is mandatory for Muslim women. Many Islamic countries require all women to veil in public .This practice of covering women in veils and preventing them from being seen in public is known as “ Prudah” (Stacey,2013), .It is a religious and cultural practice whereby women are secluded, commonly among Muslim communities. If a woman does not wear a veil, she is restricted to go in public as this would lead men to engage in sin by coveting ones wife or by provoking them to engage in sexual acts. Thus, women are seen to be discriminated, as men do not cover their faces with veils; men have freedom to put on suits, jeans while women must remain covered in public. The revealing of only the face has highly been associated with terrorism all over the world. As a result, for most young Muslim women, it has been difficult to interact freely with other women from other cultures such as Christianity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, female or women discrimination in Islam is evident in their culture of female infanticide. This is a culture whereby female infant, are buried alive, this culture has constantly been questioned as the infant has committed no crime yet she is killed. Some of the Islamic populations select which babies to keep; female infanticide has lead to abnormal ratio whereby the ratio of boys is higher than that of girls. Thus Muslim women face discrimination from as little as infants do .Also as seen from the above discussion, there have been very many instances showing how Muslim women have continued to be discriminated and have faced opposition from participating in public life. Islam religion has continuously being used by Muslim to justify their reasons for discriminating women in public sphere of life citing that women are unclean because of issues of unchastely caused by sexual

engagement for a woman, they are regarded as unclean after engaging in any sexual practice with men. Thus women have been discriminated also in religious and public leaderships as they are regarded as unclean.

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