Chapter I

INTRODUCTION
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INTRODUCTION

God! there is no God but He - the Ever Living, the Self-subsistant. Slumber seizeth Him not nor sleep; His it is what so ever is in the heavens and what so ever is in the earth; Who is He that can intercede with Him but with His permission; He knoweth what is before them and what is behind them, while they cannot comprehend any thing out of His knowledge save that which He willeth. His Throne extendeth over the Heavens and the earth, and the preservations of them, both, tireth Him not and He is the Most High and Most Great.

(S.2, A.255)

The choice of the researcher in reproducing 'Ayat-al-Kursi' before stepping into the main stream of the project, is to show how any Muslim can do such things in life on this temporary abode excepting what Allah has ordained upon him, knowing full well that after his soul departs he has to reappear before Him to give Him account of all his deeds. Human beings, as we are all, have our failings, and, it is 'Allah' and 'Allah' alone, who can forgive us for them. Naturally, this should be governing idea of all our deeds, whether they are related to religious, economic and social matters, if at all, we establish our claims as a true Muslim.
Every action of an individual or of the members of the Muslim community which is against the sayings of the Holy Quran or the Holy Prophet (SWA) must therefore be based on simple ignorance. It is this ignorance which is responsible for the enormity of the social canker eating into the heart, and poisoning the life blood of nations in modern time. Perhaps, it would not be incorrect to say, that this ignorance spreads a sense of Godless materialism covered with a thin veneer of religion which has created a society full of insanity and valuelessness which symbolizes the modern human society.

The crisis of human values

The crisis of human values to-day has resulted in confusion and chaos to the extent that the people of modern generation are failing in making decision about the real purpose of their life. They fail to differentiate between good and bad, right and wrong, and between just and unjust. Such self deception and misperception are the principal determinants causing loss of personality, independent thinking, sense of rightful appraisal, and a meaningful appreciation of religious and spiritual ideals.

In order to overcome such a state of chaos and confusion people of the world have to make themselves free from the lustful world which binds the human spirit into the castle of corruption and the filth. We, perhaps, can achieve
this end by cleaning ourselves from within and refining our thinking both in practice and thought.

In the process of recovery and restoring lost moral and spiritual heritage, people of today need courage, dignity and honesty, a sense of rightful judgement, and at the top of all an undiluted faith in Allah. Paradoxically, in its fast movement towards materialism and modernization, the human society has left behind two cherished elements of humanity, namely the spiritual and moral values, and the family structure. The efforts of the society to ignore these two important components of civilization, unluckily, was not because of the simplicity and ignorance, but because of its deliberate, craftily designed cleverness.

The moral values and the family structure were in fact considered as two forceful barriers in the path of material growth of the society. The family structure, particularly, embodied with moral values and social bindings were considered as the potential components posing strong limitations in exploiting the weaker section of the society, including women. Moral values do not and cannot grow in vacuum, nor the social norms be practiced in isolation. It is an organized family structure committed to certain well defined value system and religious obligation which transmits religious thoughts, ideals and moral values to children. It is the combination of a few families which forms a society
where these moral values are practiced. The society in turn, after a logical modification and re-evaluation transmits them to the new generation. Such a circular process of evaluation and re-evaluations continuous right from the beginning of human civilization. The investigator has full faith that it would remain functional up to the end of this living world. A concerted effort was therefore made to break this circular development of culture and society. Unluckily the wicked society could be successful in achieving their goals. New definition have been evolved in order to make the modern civilization more attractive.

A review of the position of women of the modern society and of the past will reveal, that women have been the central object of exploitation and distortions in society through ages. While during pre-historic period they were exiled, tortured, burnt alive, victimized, sold like a consumable commodity in the open market, buried alive, and were systematically denied of most of the human rights. Ironically, such treatment with women community, was not confined to one place, time or country. History tells us that such inhuman treatments with women folk were prevalent and developed with the development of the present civilisation. Strangely, it appears, that all men throughout this planet were united at one point, that is, "Use and misuse your women community". The only visible distinction, however, lies in the style of exploitation which certainly differed from one
community to another, from one place to another, from one country to another, and from one century to another century. The modern society, however, continued exploiting its women folk but in a different style. Today, this weaker section of the society is being exploited in the name of modernisation, freedom and equality.

In order to collapse the family structure and to dilute the moral and social values, the modern society has brain-washed women to believe that, staying within her natural parameter, she will always remain inferior to man. On the other extreme, the cruel design of exploitation has forced women to come out of her femininity characteristics. Today, she feels proud in working shoulder to shoulder with people, who represent in-hospitable, merciless and un-compromising world of materialism. Her charm and feminine beauty, which were once meant to keep the family together, are now employed in the service of materialism.

Because of the unrestricted social interaction at parties and workplaces, the sexes have dropped their natural inhibition. Gradually women have lost this feminine modesty and character. She has given up a sense of honour in pre-material virginity and the pride in her chastity, sexual infidelity, and permissiveness.
The research topic which has been selected for this project is directly related to the social status of women in Islam. Precisely, therefore, the title of this project is "Social status of women in Islam".

By the term social status the researcher means the status or rank of a member (women) of a particular society in relation to their interaction and interdependence with other members (men) of the community.

Rationale of the study

The story of women’s freedom and her liberty, is one of the most attractive and burning issues which is being discussed over the last several years in the western and eastern circles of this planet. Not only the eastern and western world are involved in this subject but even the Islamic countries are also faced with this controversy. Different societies are showing positive as well as negative views in this regard. The issues of freedom and equality of rights of women are occasionally extended to such a length that most often it has crossed sensational limits. Confusions regarding the freedom, equality of rights, and the social status of women in general, may some times becomes dangerous and repulsive.

Unfortunately, in this discussion or actions the name of Islam is also dragged in, and various interpretations of
the Islamic view point are made to convince the opponent. It is wrongly understood that Islam is totally opposed to liberty or progress of women. There is a false propaganda against Islam that in Islam women are treated as captive in the hand of men'. She is denied of all rights and special privileges.

In order to support and justify these false allegations towards women the people who are jealous of Islamic ideals and thoughts, propagate that in Islam, women do not have equal right in parents' property or in the selection of her husband. It is also said, that they do not have any say in the determination of their destiny. According to them 'a muslim women is deprived of education' and 'is required to confine herself within the four walls of her house with her eyes and ears closed'. People of other community have developed a wrong concept about muslim women and think that the religion of Islam keeps their women completely detached from the society.

It is claimed, that women in Islam, are always dependent upon the male members of her family and can not take any decision independently. She has to live the life of a miserable creature, who has wider role to play in the human society. She is a helpless, captive, forced to live and die without enjoying any human right, and dignity. These were the few factors based on misunderstanding and misconception about women.
Islam which compelled the investigator to highlight the facts about the importance of women in Islam and her status and role for the development of the human society.

Purpose of the Study

Even today i.e. the last quarter of the twentieth century, presents almost the same picture of the position of women in an accelerated form. We know, that in most of the European countries, in U.S.A., U.S.S.R., China and in many eastern countries, women in general, enjoy freedom of thought and action. They move freely in the society. Work with men shoulder to shoulder, almost in all walks of life. They participate in literary and cultural activities and have considerable representation in many professions. In their effort to get recognition and to win equal participation in various walks of they make every effort to be presentable in outer world. the only difference, however, between the women of the present century and the past lies in the fact, that previously the representation of women was confined to a very small selected groups of people and community, but now it is general and common to all, irrespective of any caste, race and community. The question, however, proposed, to be answered in this research, is that, whether the women of present country are better as compared to their counterparts, in previous centuries.
Delimitation

The main object of this project has been delimited to answer the following questions in a systematic order.

1. Whether the real position of woman in a family or society has been identified in Islam?
2. Whether equal status of men and women were ever granted and practiced?
3. Could any religion before Islam recognised the real place of women in family or society and could they define their role as a mother, wife, sister, and daughter?
4. Could women folk ever enjoyed prestige, respect and honour as it has been provided under Islamic laws?

Seemingly, the women of today, in pursuance of freedom and liberty, has lost her real position in the family, as such she has defeated the real purpose of her very existence. She has gained a social status comparable to man at the cost of her duties as mother, her responsibilities as a wife and her role as a sister and daughter. Suffice is to say that women of today are in reality the exhibits, in the hands of the crafty man, who uses them according to his need, lust, will and necessity. In search of false freedom, liberty and equality, they have put at stake, the charm of their body and soul. They have surpassed all limits and boundaries of sanctity, sanity and honour.
The above facts helped the researcher to derive the following inferences.

1. It may be inferred that the exploitation of woman has been a systematic venture and a continuous phenomenon of human society.

2. That women through ages have been considered inferior to man, who has virtually dominated the human society.

3. That the dominance of man over woman has never allowed the women to understand their real position in the family and society consequently they were deprived of the real pleasure of woman-hood.

4. It may be inferred although human mind has worked under the sub-ordination of one or the other type of religious beliefs, ironically, no religion could acknowledge the real status of women in their real perspective, nor the followers could visualise the real purpose of her existence.

5. Unfortunately, even during the post-Islamic period no radical change in the attitude of society towards women exploitation could be visible, perhaps because the infra-structure of society presented by Islam, could hardly be accepted and understood by its followers.

6. Islam is the only religion which has not recognised the individual and social status of women but has also acknowledged, in specific terms, her position equal to men.
These inferences, however, provide valid thought-provoking materials to the investigator to critically examine the status of women in family and the society in the context of Quranic laws and the sayings of the Prophet of Islam (S.W.A.).

Objectives of the study

Based on the assumptions and the inference presented above it seems necessary to examine, carefully the position and status of women as it has been presented in Islam. The objective of this research study may therefore, be identified as under;

1. The position of women in human society, in general, and in the Arabian Peninsula in particular, during pre-Islamic period.

2. To investigate the position of women as it was recognised in Judaism and Christianity, and its impact on Arabian Society.

3. The contribution of Islam for the well being of women in the society and recognition of her status as mother, wife, daughter and as an individual.

4. A study of the status of women as existed during the life time of the Prophet of Islam (S.W.A.).
5. Relevant references from the Holy Quran and Ahadith in support of women's rights and duties in her various capacities with special reference to:

(a) Responsibility of parents towards their daughters,
(b) The importance of birth of female child in a Muslim family.
(c) The sanctity and significance of marriage institution,
(d) Freedom in choosing husband and
(e) The right of women in parent’s property and divorce etc.

In order to fulfill the objectives of the study an investigation into the position of women in our society is not only justified but is also essential. The investigator is of the opinion that such an investigation will be helpful in restoring the lost prestige and honour of women community, and would also be helpful in removing many misunderstanding about the rights and duties of women.

There are old and repeated allegations against Islam for several centuries that (i) Islam has actually lowered the status of women because they get half share from their parents property as compared to the male members of the family. (ii) It is also alleged that by recommending the plurality of wife and polygamy Islam has degraded the status in the society. (iii) It is also alleged that it has made the divorce an easy task for men which can be used as a weapon
against women's authority. (iv) Similarly it is also alleged that by making securi Sioxi (Purda) compulsory for women Islam has actually isolated them from the human society. These and many other allegations have been levelled against Islam from time immemorial. Unfortunately, because of the paucity of sound religious education, our innocent youths are becoming an easy victim of false propaganda against Islam. Consequently, they are deliberately being driven away from religious thoughts and practices. The youths of today love to live in an imaginary world of false pleasure rather than in a world of reality. Family values and social norms are no more important to them. The new social and economic order, the growing urge for material gains, and the wild race towards earning one's livelihood have changed the general attitude of boys and girls towards life and religion. Such a changing attitude of young men and women towards Islam accelerates the responsibility of researchers to help this generation recognise the facts of life and enlighten their minds with true Islamic deals.

Surely, these innocent youths deserve a sound training of mind and character, on the lines shown by the Holy Quran and by the Holy Prophet of Islam (SWA) so that they could take correct decision about their life style and might choose a right path. These and many other similar factors have been the cause which compelled the investigator to
pickup this subject of vital importance as her research topic. In order to make the topic interesting and understandable deliberate effort has been made to project the continuity in the historical development of the status of women in the society and in the family from the pre-Islamic period to the modern time. Similarly, issues and problems of vital importance have been discussed and presented in the same sequence, at and when they had happened. In addition to the continuity and sequence, the horizontal integrity between the chapters have also been maintained. Relevant references from Ahadith and Holy Quran have also been presented in support of the discussions where ever it was found necessary.

The present study has been conducted on historical as well as on survey method of research design. Hence the sources of investigation are confined to the Holy Quran, authentic Tafsirs, authentic religious books, magazines and other relevant literature which were available to the investigator. Original sources such as the Holy Quran and the authentic Ahadith of the Holy Prophet (SWA) and the Holy Imams have been taken into account. Necessary verses from the Holy Quran and Ahadith have also been presented where ever they were found necessary. For the convenience and for a systematic presentation of the research materials the study has been presented in the following chapters.
Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Under this title the importance and the significance of social and individual status of women has been presented. The chapter also specifies the objectives and the purpose of this study. The need and the rationale of such an study in the context of value crisis experienced by the people of the modern society has been examined in an orderly and systematic style. This chapter also gives an idea of the design of the study and the presentations of the project in different chapters.

Chapter II
HISTORICAL REVIEW

In this chapter the developmental history of the status of women during pre-Islamic period has been depicted. The areas covered in this chapter are related to the legal position of women in society, her status as wife, mother and daughter as they were practiced before the advent of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and in other neighbouring countries. In context of the study this chapter becomes more important because it deals with the status of women in their historical perspective. It also depicts the real picture of women during pre-Islamic period.
Chapter-III

THE ERA OF ENLIGHTENMENT

As the title shows this chapters deals with the position of women after the advent of Islam. The main body of this chapter consists of various commands revealed in the Holy Quran, regarding the actual position of women in Islam. The sayings and the practices of the Holy Prophet (SWA) to maintain social and individual status of women have also been presented in this chapter. An effort has also been made to examine the validity and genuineness of the charges, which have been raised against muslim women from various sections of society. While dealing with these objections, convincing arguments have been given duly supported by the verses from the Holy Quran and authentic Ahadith. As such, this chapter forms the main body of this research study.

Chapter - IV

THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

This chapter deals with the significance and the importance of marriage institution in Islam. The reforms which were introduced by Islam in making this institution a sacred and honourable matrimonial agency have been explained at length. The topics such as, the importance of dower, condition of divorce, justification about polygamy, have also been covered in this chapter.
Chapter - V

EDUCATION AND INHERITANCE

This chapter deals with two most important and crucial topics regarding the social status of women in Islam.

The first part deals with the importance of education in Islam. It has convincingly been explained that Islam did not discriminate between the male and female members of the society so far the acquisition of knowledge and education is concerned.

The second part deals with the importance of inheritance in Islam and the social significance of right of women in parents property.

Chapter - VI

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter a comprehensive summary of the finding has been systematically presented. An effort has also been made to give a critical appraisal of the objections labelled against Islam by the different organizations. A careful and convincing explanation of these objections has also been given with due authenticity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A comprehensive bibliography of the original sources, Books, Ahadith periodicals, magazines and booklets, which have been consulted in this study has been presented at the end of each chapter.