

## Involvement of Women in Economy: An Explication from the Islamic Perspective

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### Abstract

*Islam provides prescriptions on the specific rights and obligations of men and women in the society. While women in the West still fight for their rights to an equal position until today, Islam provides Muslim women with the rights to be involved in economic activities based on their personal merit and wisdom. This paper aims to highlight the involvement of Muslim women in economic activities from an Islamic perspective. Islam does not limit the task of women to being mothers; Muslim women can involve themselves in other fields such as economics and politics, as long as they adhere to the guidelines put forward by the religion. It cannot be denied that their involvement in the economic sector became one of the development factors of Islamic civilisation since the very beginning of Islam until now. The purpose of their voluntary involvement in the economy was to contribute their skills and expertise as well as to apply their knowledge for the benefit and maslahah of the Muslim society and ummah. The study concludes that out that the involvement of Muslim women in economic activities plays an important role in a country's development process, particularly when the women's labour were in a compatible manner within the limits of shariah.*

**Key-words:** Role, Muslim Women, Economy, Islamic Perspective.

### 1. Introduction

Because men and women are not equal biologically or psychologically, their rights are also different in certain aspects of life (Aisha Lemu, 1992). In Islam, both men and women carry

significant roles: the wife runs a household and the husband works outside their home (Wahiduddin Khan, 1995). The childbearing, breastfeeding, and childcare duties of a woman are the responsibilities that require mental, physical, and psychological strength and endurance. Whereas in helping his wife to perform her duties as a mother, a man is the sustainer and protector. The duties of both men and women are therefore important.

The responsibility of a husband is to ensure that his family performs all the injunctions that Allah has decreed and that they avoid what are prohibited. Whereas the wife's responsibility is to obey her husband as long as his request is not against Islamic teaching (Abdur Rahman, 2000). Such cooperation can help establish balance and harmony within a family unit (Khalif & Adibah, 2009). Man is a leader of a family and the woman is the one who managing the household (Sayyid Qutb, 1997). Both genders have their own unique qualities (Wahiduddin Khan, 1995). Thus, it is very important to understand that justice is to place things in their rightful place by considering its suitability, ability, and *fitrah* to ensure that the appointed one has the ability to carry out the duty (al-Qaradawī, 1996).

The duties of both men and women are assigned according to their natural characteristics (*fitrah*). For women, nevertheless, domestic housework and childcare activities are not the only tasks that they are permitted to do. Women can partake in many other tasks in a society as long as the tasks do not contradict the teachings of Islam. Therefore, while bestowing women with the task of childbearing and raising children is an honour, their tasks are not limited to these duties. Their roles are also significant in other aspects of life as long as the tasks harmonise with their nature and do not contradict Islamic teachings.

Muslim scholars have emphasised woman's rights as human beings, feminine beings, mothers, daughters, wives, and members of the society. Islam considers woman and man as being equal in terms of value and position as a human being. The woman's femininity is also protected by Islam. Woman is protected and given sustenance by her guardian, whether it is her father, husband, son, or brother. Everybody is obligated to treat her kindly especially when she is a mother. A daughter or son, without any discrimination, is a gift from God. The woman also has the right as a wife: dowry, sustenance, and honourable treatment are given to her. She also has a right as a member of the society; for example, both men and women are responsible to enjoin right and forbid evil.

Women are not prevented from being involved in financial dealings and property ownership, thus implying that women are also allowed to own, buy, sell and undertake any financial transaction (Abdul Rahman, n.d.).

## 2. Muslim Women in the Early Time of Islam

In the days of the Messenger of Allah, members of the community interacted with one another in business, manufacturing, agriculture, and farming in search of *halal* sustenance. Some of the female prophet's companions also worked to serve their people. This scenario reflects the importance of women's activities and their role in exercising their rights and responsibilities in a society (Azyyati et al., 2012). Female companions could also be seen serving the society in battles and journeys.

During the prophet's time, women were also involved in business activities. History books record that Sayyidah Khadijah RA, the wife of the Messenger of Allah, hired a caravan or trade troupes consisting of men to carry her loads of goods (Fatimah, 2014). Women in the time of the prophet were also involved in craftmaking (Fatimah, 2014). They were also involved in business, enterprise, and agriculture. Their trading activities in the Medina Market and other markets, particularly, led to the emergence of prominent and successful women traders such as Umm al-Mundhir bint al-Qays as a tamar trader and Asma 'bhaka Makhzamah as a perfume trader. The enterprise field was like a fine craftsmanship which can be done outside of their home. The women were also involved in agricultural activities such as planting seeds and bringing home products for storage, collecting firewood, bringing drinking water from wells, and preparing food for their family. One of the prominent women involved in agriculture was Asma 'bint Abu Bakr, who was the wife of Zubair ibn al-'Awwam, the brother-in-law of the prophet (Fatimah, 2014).

Zaynab bint Jahsy al-Asadiyyah was a woman with hands-on skills in the work of tanning leather and sewing beads. She would spend the money she earned in the way of Allah Almighty. Another woman in Medina was al-Hawlā ' a seller of atar oil. Another woman, Kharqā', had a palm farm and came to see the prophet (PBUH) for advice while he was in *iddah*. The prophet did not forbid her from going out to the fields to pick up dates as goods or for charity purposes. She also worked as a sweeper at the prophet's mosque (Azyyati et al., 2012).

Shifa 'binti' Abdullah learned a lot from the prophet's hadith on religious matters and world. She was very active in her preaching to call people towards Islam. Therefore, she earned the trust of 'Umar bin al-Khattāb who gave her the responsibility of managing the market. This history provides ample evidence that the Muslim community placed its trust on women to conduct community affairs. The contribution of female characters like Shifa 'binti' Abdullah to the society was notable because of her mastery in various fields, which could benefit the community (Azyyati et al., 2012).

In the early days of Islam, women also had opportunities to seek for knowledge. They had a special day for learning about the religious teachings of the Messenger of Allah. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) even emphasised the importance of teaching for women. According to Ibn Hajar, women are not restricted to studying only with their families; they can also study with a Muslim scholar or with a trusted person. This flexibility signifies the country's responsibility of providing education to women in accordance with the shariah rules (Azyyati et al., 2012).

The names of the female companions who had learned from the prophet were recorded in history. Among the women were Aisha, Umm al-Mukminin r.a., Nusaibah binti Ka'ab, Asmā' binti Yazid al-Ansāriyyah, Ummu Darda' (Khiyarah binti Hadrād al-Sulami), etc. Aisha was a woman who had in-depth knowledge and understanding of Islam. She became the reference for various faraidh questions during the early time of Islam. She also memorised many hadiths. Another woman known for her knowledge was Nusaibah bint Ka'ab. She was better known as Umm Athiyah al-Ansariyyah and was one of the experts among the female companions in the field of fiqh. The hadith narrated by her are frequently mentioned in the Kutub al-Sittah (the six main books of the hadith). Another female companion whose knowledge was prominent was Umm Fadhl bint al-Hārith: many of her narrations are embedded in Kutub al-Sittah. In addition, Asmā' binti Yazid al-Ansāriyyah and Ummu Darda' also narrated many hadiths directly from the prophet (PBUH). They were among the female companions who became the references in ascertaining the authenticity of a prophet's hadith (Azyyati et al., 2012).

The field of medicine was also very popular at the time of the prophet (PBUH). Al-Shifā' bint Abdullah al-Qurshiyah was a woman who had religious wisdom and was knowledgeable of the worldly affairs. She was an intelligent woman and a prominent female figure as she accumulated knowledge and faith. Al-Shifā' was good at treating *namlah's* diseases with *ruqyah* and was recognized by the Messenger of Allah (Azyyati et al., 2012).

In the days of the Messenger of Allah, it was found that women were highly regarded in the role they played in their service to the community. They were involved in various fields and skills projects to suit the needs of the community at that time. They acted without disregarding the commands and prohibitions of Islam and made the teachings of the Messenger of Allah as a living standard. Up until the time of the *khūlafa'*, the Muslim women had illuminated and inspired the development of the civilisation of the *ummah* (Azyyati et al., 2012).

### 3. Women in Economy from an Islamic Perspective

According to Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradhawi, a woman's main career is to educate the generation. This task is provided by Allah SWT for women physically and mentally. A woman's job is to take care of a household and make her husband happy, and a happy family is formed through peace, warmth, and love. However, in Islam, such significance does not imply the prohibition of women from working outside their home (Laman Web Pejabat Mufti Wilayah Persekutuan, n.d.).

Ibn. Qayyim Abu c Abd. Allah al-Dimashqi mentions that women are allowed to enter into various occupations, and Islam requires that women's activities and occupations conform to their nature and not violate the Islamic law (Adawiyah & Salasiah, 2012).

Women are allowed to work in various fields as long as they are not in conflict with the Islamic law, and the work must always comply with the ethics of Muslim women. According to Yusuf al-Qadhawi, women are allowed to work but must be bound by a number of conditions; the profession must be allowed by shara', and the women must comply with the ethics of Muslim women. Their career must also not neglect their main obligations. There are several conditions that must be adhered by Muslim women who wish to venture into the field of work, among those conditions are as follows (Adawiyah & Salasiah, 2012):

1. The work they do should be appropriate according to the Islamic law and is not contrary to the nature of the women.
2. Women who go out of to work are obliged to maintain their dignity by maintaining the appropriate manners, morals, and laws while outside the home in order to maintain their dignity.
3. There is no mixing between men and women without boundaries.
4. Working women must first obtain the consent of her father if they are not married, or their husband if they are married.
5. The woman's career must be halal and allowed by the Islamic law. The career also must not drive them towards doing illegal things and cause harm in life.
6. The woman's career does not prevent them from performing obligation to Allah Almighty.
7. The women's career does not prevent them from giving commitments to their household.
8. The women's career is safe from slander.

Women who work outside their home must follow the guidelines outlined by Islam with the aim of channelling every provision they make for gaining benefits and blessings. Indeed, the good

intentions of contributing service to the community in various fields will be considered as *ibadah* if the intention of doing it is because of Allah (Adawiyah & Salasiah, 2012).

Islam defines the basic rights and obligations of men and women in order to ensure a healthy growth of society (Yvonne, n.d.). It cannot be denied that the role of women as a wife, mother, or sister plays an important role in a family institution. However, it is also considered that women play an important role in the development of an economy (Siti Nur Husna et al., 2017). A woman who takes good care of her family is able to raise good citizens with noble characteristics of honesty, intelligence, knowledgeability, diligence, and respectfulness. The result is a competent workforce that can serve the needs of the society and economy. This contribution therefore can be an important way for women to contribute to the development of an economy.

The Islamic history has shown the many types of social works performed by Muslim women, and the scope of their involvement is immense. The formation of the virtuous and perfect personalities of every person, including that of a woman, is able to make significant contribution to the development of the ummah throughout the ages (Abdullah Alwi, n.d.).

Women are a great source of human potential and therefore, their involvement can increase the productivity of the society in various fields. These fields can range from welfare and public service to manufacturing and businesses, or whichever that fits the capabilities and nature of women, as long as they adhere to the conditions of women involvement outside the house as laid down by the shariah (Dasar Wanita Negeri Kelantan, n.d.).

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, women can be involved in many fields, including in economic sector, as long as they follow the rules and regulations as prescribed by Islam. Their roles are not limited to taking care of households because their expertise and skills are important for the development of the society and the country as a whole. Their involvement in an economy can also contribute to the well-being and stability of the *ummah*. Women can complement and support the contribution of men in many fields, particularly in the economy, and their involvement is considered as one of the factors that had brought the glory of Islamic civilisation in the past.

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