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**THE SOCIAL ROLE OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY: CONTEMPORARY LIMITATIONS
AND THEIR SOLUTION**

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Abstract: This article delves into the pivotal role of Muslim women in the advancement of society. Acknowledged as the primary architects of human development, women have, throughout history, rendered significant contributions, ranging from nurturing families and communities to assuming leadership roles at the national level. The narrative highlights exemplary instances of Muslim women who have played pivotal roles in the construction and configuration of societies, engaging across diverse domains such as education, healthcare, politics, business, as peacemakers, and in the realms of science and technology. Their profound strength, resilience, and unyielding determination have not only inspired multiple generations but continue to resonate powerfully in contemporary times. Within this discourse, the article contextualizes its examination and assumptions by drawing upon the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. It offers a succinct contemplation on the present-day roles of Islamic women in society, the challenges they confront, and proposes viable solutions.

Keywords: Muslim women, contribution, generation, society, household.

INTRODUCTION

Women play a pivotal role in society, serving as agents of progress and development across familial, communal, and national spheres. Their capacity to nurture and influence the next generation empowers them to enact positive change within society. Women are active participants in diverse domains including education, healthcare, social welfare, economics, and politics, where they assume roles as leaders, entrepreneurs, educators, and activists, thereby contributing to sustainable development.

Recognizing the intrinsic value of women in society entails providing them with equitable opportunities, rights, and respect. Women possess remarkable multitasking abilities, adeptly balancing familial responsibilities with career pursuits and educational endeavors. By fostering an environment of equality and support, women are poised to achieve remarkable feats and make substantial contributions to society, thereby fostering a more inclusive and egalitarian societal landscape.

In Islamic society, women are esteemed as esteemed individuals capable of nurturing the foundations of familial and societal well-being. Their indispensable role in the family unit underscores their significance in shaping the fabric of society. Islamic teachings emphasize gender equality, affirming the shared social responsibilities of men and women. Thus, both genders are afforded equal opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the advancement and prosperity of society.

Allah has mentioned in the Surah An-Nisa -124

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ
نَقِيرًا¹

“But those who do well—whether male or female—and have faith will enter Paradise and will never be wronged even as much as the speck on a date stone”.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said:

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ مَسْلَمَةَ، عَنْ مَالِكٍ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ دِينَارٍ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُمَرَ، أَنَّ
رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " أَلَا كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ فَالْأَمِيرُ الَّذِي
عَلَى النَّاسِ رَاعٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْهُمْ وَالرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْهُمْ وَالْمَرْأَةُ
رَاعِيَةٌ عَلَى بَيْتِ بَعْلِهَا وَوَلَدِهِ وَهِيَ مَسْئُولَةٌ عَنْهُمْ وَالْعَبْدُ رَاعٍ عَلَى مَالِ سَيِّدِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْهُ
فَكُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ "

“Indeed each of you is a shepherd and each of you will be questioned regarding his flock. The commander who is in authority over people is responsible and he will be questioned regarding his responsibility. The man is responsible over the inhabitants of his house and he is the one who will be questioned about them. The wife is responsible in her husband’s house and she will be

questioned about it. The servant is responsible for his master's property, and he will be questioned about it. Indeed each of you is a shepherd and each of you will be questioned about his flock."²

The disparity between conventional education and Islamic tarbiyah is stark, with the latter encompassing a much broader spectrum of development. Tarbiyah, rooted in Islamic teachings, extends beyond mere academic instruction, encompassing moral, spiritual, and ethical growth. It is a profound responsibility incumbent upon every individual entrusted with the care and guidance of others—akin to a shepherd tending to their flock, as elucidated by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

"The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:"

"من أصبح ولا يهتم بامور المسلمين فليس بمسلم"³

(One who spends the night and does not worry about the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim).

In 2019, following a meticulous analysis of Islamic sources, Sheikh al-Tayeb, the esteemed Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, advocated for a comprehensive approach to addressing women's issues. In a statement shared on Twitter, "Women represent half of society. If we don't care for them it's like walking on one foot only."⁴

Ibn al-Qayyim writes:

"وَالْمَرْأَةُ الْعَدْلُ كَالرَّجُلِ فِي الصِّدْقِ وَالْأَمَانَةِ وَالِدَيَانَةِ إِلَّا أَنَّهَا لَمَّا خِيفَ عَلَيْهَا السَّهُوُ وَالنِّسْيَانُ قَوِيَتْ بِمِثْلِهَا وَذَلِكَ قَدْ يَجْعَلُهَا أَقْوَى مِنْ الرَّجُلِ الْوَاحِدِ أَوْ مِثْلَهُ"⁵

"The woman is equal to the man in honesty, trust, and piety; otherwise, whenever it is feared that she will forget or misremember, she is strengthened with another like herself. That makes them stronger than a single man or the likes of him."

There is consensus that women should be encouraged to actively participate in various spheres of society within the framework of Islamic principles. It is indeed remarkable to witness the exponential growth in the number of educated individuals in society when both men and women are provided with equal opportunities for education. Moreover, the active involvement of women in teaching roles significantly contributes to the enrichment of the teaching profession and boosts the overall number of educators in society. It is imperative to acknowledge that there exists no disparity between men and women in their capabilities to engage in diverse activities such as construction, economics, planning, business, and family matters. Each individual, regardless of gender, possesses unique talents and abilities and has a crucial role to play in contributing to the betterment of society. We must all recognize and fulfill our responsibilities towards society.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exemplified the utmost respect and honor for women, advocating for their rights and dignifying their roles in society. He elevated the status of women by emphasizing their significance as mothers, referring to them as integral parts of humanity and essential contributors to the upbringing and development of future generations. It is disheartening to witness the deviation from the Prophet's teachings, with Muslim women today facing challenges and marginalization. However, throughout history, Muslim women have played instrumental roles in the sustainable development of society, contributing significantly across various fields including education, healthcare, social welfare, and economic development. Despite facing adversities, their resilience and determination have been unwavering, making positive impacts within their communities.

Women, especially as mothers, serve as the primary educators and role models for their children, imparting essential values that shape the future of society. Their contributions should be duly recognized and valued, particularly as they nurture and raise the next generation of leaders and change-makers. Furthermore, it is crucial for women to actively engage in matters concerning Muslims and Islam, as well as global challenges. We must collectively address societal issues and fulfill our Islamic duty to contribute towards the betterment of humanity.

Survey of Literature:

The discourse surrounding the social role of Muslim women in fostering sustainable development has garnered significant attention within academic circles, particularly in specific paradigms where Western academia has made notable contributions. This discourse is enriched by a diverse array of scholarly literature, with Wendy Harcourt's seminal work, "Feminist Perspectives on Sustainable Development," serving as a noteworthy cornerstone. Harcourt's book presents a comprehensive analysis of sustainable development through a feminist lens, advocating for an intersectional and inclusive approach that considers various dimensions of identity, including gender, race, class, and more. The conclusion of her book underscores the imperative of recognizing and amplifying women's contributions to sustainable development, emphasizing the need to empower women to play more active roles in decision-making processes.

Moreover, Harcourt's work advocates for a holistic approach to development that prioritizes the well-being of both people and the planet over narrow economic metrics. She argues that achieving sustainable development requires transformative change at all levels of society, and posits that feminist perspectives are crucial in driving this process forward. Overall, Harcourt's book serves as a seminal contribution to the academic literature on the social role of Muslim women in sustainable development, highlighting the importance of feminist perspectives in shaping inclusive and transformative

approaches to development that prioritize equity, justice, and environmental sustainability.⁶

The World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, a comprehensive report issued by the United Nations every five years, serves as a pivotal instrument in evaluating progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women on a global scale. The most recent iteration of this seminal report, published in 2014, focused specifically on women's economic empowerment, shedding light on the multifaceted challenges and opportunities encountered by women in accessing economic opportunities. One of the key highlights of the report was its emphasis on the structural barriers that hinder women's access to economic opportunities, thereby perpetuating gender disparities in economic participation and outcomes. The report underscored the urgent need for policies and programs aimed at dismantling these barriers and creating an enabling environment that fosters women's economic empowerment. Furthermore, the report stressed the importance of investing in women's education, health, and skills development as critical components of efforts to promote women's economic empowerment. By enhancing women's access to quality education, healthcare, and skill-building opportunities, the report argued, societies can unlock the full potential of women as agents of economic growth and sustainable development. Moreover, the report called for the elimination of discriminatory laws and practices that impede women's economic empowerment, advocating for legal and policy reforms that uphold women's rights and promote gender equality. Additionally, the report underscored the importance of enhancing women's participation in decision-making processes, both at the local and national levels, as a means of ensuring that their voices are heard and their perspectives are taken into account in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs.

Overall, the World Survey on the Role of Women in Development highlighted the indispensable role that women play in sustainable development and called for greater efforts to ensure that their contributions are recognized, valued, and fully leveraged towards achieving inclusive and equitable development outcomes. Through its comprehensive analysis and policy recommendations, the report served as a catalyst for action, inspiring stakeholders at all levels to redouble their efforts in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide.⁷

This paper emphasizes the importance of agricultural education for achieving food security and empowering women. The integrated model of rural development is the most effective approach to sustainable development. Strategies for agricultural education to empower women require a concerted effort. A massive campaign is recommended to promote these strategies and effective vocational guidance. Good education, like agricultural education, has a positive impact on overall well-being.⁸

Women in developing countries bear a disproportionate burden of the adverse impacts of environmental degradation and poverty, primarily due to the entrenched gender division of labor and structural disadvantages they face in accessing natural resources. This gendered disparity exacerbates their vulnerability to the detrimental effects of environmental crises and economic hardship, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization. Feminist perspectives have emerged as potent catalysts for challenging traditional development paradigms and advancing alternative models that prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment. These perspectives critique the patriarchal systems that underpin environmental degradation and economic inequality, advocating for transformative approaches that center the agency and rights of women.

At the national and international levels, there is a growing recognition of the need to integrate a gender perspective into environmental and development policies to foster sustainable development. This gendered lens acknowledges the differential impacts of environmental policies on women and men and seeks to address the underlying structural inequalities that perpetuate gender disparities. Women's environmental organizations play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development agendas, leveraging their grassroots networks and expertise to advocate for gender-sensitive policies and initiatives. By championing gender-sensitive planning processes that prioritize the needs and perspectives of women, these organizations contribute to more inclusive and effective strategies for environmental conservation and socio-economic development. In conclusion, addressing the gendered dimensions of environmental degradation and poverty is essential for promoting sustainable development in developing countries. Feminist perspectives offer valuable insights and alternative models that prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment, while the integration of a gender perspective into environmental and development policies is crucial for fostering inclusive and equitable outcomes. Women's environmental organizations serve as key actors in these efforts, advocating for gender-sensitive planning and policies that advance the rights and well-being of women while promoting environmental sustainability.⁹

Sustainable development harmonizes human needs with environmental preservation and socio-economic advancement. Islam underscores gender equality and women have made strides across sectors. Yet, societal gender disparities persist, necessitating an Islamic approach for women's empowerment. Women are pivotal in family management, child-rearing, and instilling ethical values, vital for societal fortification. Realizing the 17 sustainable development goals mandates inclusive participation of both genders and equitable opportunities for women across socio-economic spheres.¹⁰

In the past two decades, social science research concerning women in Muslim societies has witnessed remarkable expansion. This scholarship acknowledges the diverse backgrounds and challenges faced by these women, rejecting oversimplified narratives regarding the influence of Islam on their lives. Intriguingly, Muslim women are increasingly aligning with global trends and exhibiting similarities with their non-Muslim counterparts. They are experiencing improved access to education and healthcare, delaying marriage, and opting for smaller families. Moreover, they are narrowing the gap in labor force participation rates compared to non-Muslim women. Politically, Muslim women are uniting to address marginalization and other forms of gender-based discrimination, signaling a concerted effort to challenge systemic inequalities.¹¹

This thesis delves into the status of Muslim Egyptian women within broader Muslim societies, examining the role of the ulama. Through field research conducted in Cairo and Qena involving 233 participants from diverse backgrounds, it emerged that women possess a profound understanding of their rights as granted by Islam. The media plays a pivotal role in disseminating knowledge about prevailing laws. Recommendations are offered to foster sustainable enhancements in women's rights in Egypt, emphasizing the imperative of women's empowerment. Reference is made to Muhammad Cabdill, a 19th-century Egyptian reformer who championed education as a means to combat ignorance and foreign domination. Despite advancements in women's education and their social, political, and economic standing, the gender literacy gap persists, rendering women more susceptible to manipulation and exploitation. The thesis puts forth recommendations to promote women's empowerment at both individual and societal levels, recognizing the need for comprehensive approaches to address systemic inequalities.¹²

History of Muslim Women's Work in the Development of Society

Women as great businesswomen and traders:

A notable exemplar is Khadijah (RA), the esteemed first wife of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), renowned for her wealth, success, and independence as a prominent businesswoman in Mecca. Engaging in lucrative trade ventures, she exported goods nationally and internationally, overseeing a workforce of men. Khadijah (RA) epitomized astute business acumen, demonstrating a profound understanding of commerce and enjoying the freedom to pursue an active and influential professional life.¹³

Zaynab bint Jahsh (RA), another esteemed wife of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), was renowned for her skilled craftsmanship, particularly in leatherwork. Engaged in the meticulous process of skinning, gutting, drying, and sewing leather garments, she marketed her creations at the bazaar and allocated her earnings towards charitable endeavors, aiding the less fortunate. Echoing this

commitment to gender equality, Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed, president of the UAE Gender Balance Council, underscores that gender parity has been a foundational principle of the UAE since its inception. Rooted in the visionary beliefs of the late Sheikh Zayed, this commitment emphasizes the pivotal role of women as equal partners in driving sustainable development.”¹⁴

Economic development stands as a domain where Muslim women have made notable strides, showcasing remarkable progress through ventures in business, entrepreneurship, and cooperatives. These endeavors have not only fostered job creation but also significantly contributed to overall economic growth. Additionally, Muslim women have played an active role in advocating for microfinance and financial inclusion, thereby facilitating access to credit and financial services for small business owners and entrepreneurs.

In the realm of education, the exemplary contributions of Aishah Binte Abu Bakr (RA), the youngest wife of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), are particularly noteworthy. Renowned for her exceptional talent in teaching Hadith to scholars, she possessed an extraordinary memory and a comprehensive understanding of Hadith, having narrated over two thousand Hadith. Aishah's (RA) intellectual prowess, sound judgment, and swift decision-making serve as a testament to the potential of women to excel as scholars, leaders, and sources of inspiration. Despite the increasing number of women earning college and graduate degrees, gender disparities persist, with women often being channeled into less lucrative fields early in their careers. Men continue to dominate executive positions, with a significant disparity evident in Fortune 500 CEOs. This gender gap underscores the ongoing challenges faced by women in achieving equitable representation and advancement in various professional spheres.¹⁵

Muhammadi Begum (also known as Sayyidah Muhammadi Begum; 22 May 1878 – 2 November 1908) was a Sunni Muslim scholar, Urdu writer, and a champion of women's education. She co-founded the Islamic weekly magazine *Tehzeeb-e-Niswan* and served as its inaugural editor, making her the first woman to edit an Urdu magazine. She was married to Sayyid Mumtaz Ali Deobandi.¹⁶

Healthcare stands as another domain where Muslim women have left indelible marks through their significant contributions. Dating back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), women have played pivotal roles in the field of medicine. Rufaida al-Aslamia, born in 620 AD, is widely regarded as one of the earliest known female nurses and surgeons. She established mobile caravans to provide healthcare services to her community during both wartime and peacetime, demonstrating her commitment to serving the poor and needy. Additionally, she trained many companions of the Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) in clinical skills. Another notable figure from this era is Al-Shifa bint Abdullah, also

known as Layla, who earned the title of "the healer" due to her exceptional medical abilities. She served as a public administrator and oversaw public health and safety in Basra, Iraq. This tradition of female nurses and surgeons persisted through the centuries, with notable figures like Serefeddin Sabuncuoglu, a renowned Turkish surgeon from the 16th and 17th centuries, leaving a lasting impact in the field of surgery through his seminal work "Kitabul Cerrahiye-i Ilhaniye."¹⁷

Muslim women have founded hospitals, clinics, and health centers, ensuring healthcare access for marginalized communities. They also play a crucial role in raising health awareness, promoting hygiene, and improving sanitation, contributing significantly to disease prevention and control efforts.

Women as Warriors, Negotiators, and Peacemakers:

Islamic history is replete with examples of brave Muslim women who exhibited remarkable courage and leadership in various capacities, including as warriors, negotiators, and peacemakers. These women actively participated in wars, confronted invading armies, mediated conflicts, and facilitated reconciliation between adversaries. Aisha, the wife of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), notably led the Battle of Camel and successfully negotiated a peace treaty. Similarly, during the Battle of Uhud, Nusaybah bint Ka'ab exemplified the role of women in defending their society by protecting the Prophet (ﷺ). Additionally, historical accounts, such as those recorded by Ibn Qunfudh of Morocco, highlight instances where women like Lala Aziza of Seksawa played pivotal roles in negotiating peace agreements and resolving conflicts between rival factions. These examples underscore the significant contributions and agency of Muslim women in promoting peace, justice, and harmony within their communities.¹⁸

After the assassination of the fourth Caliph Ali, 16 women traveled to the capital of the Muslim world, Damascus, to demand justice. Known as wafidat, or delegates, the women, who were present at the Battle of Siffin in 657, went to Caliph Mu'awiyah to demand their rights and exercise their freedoms.¹⁹

Women as Political Leaders and Public Servants:

Women have held political and leadership roles since the inception of Islam. The Holy Quran (27:28) highlights the Queen of Sheba's wisdom and authority, praising her consultative approach in governance. Additionally, Dhayfa Khatun, wife of Salahuddin's son, served as regent of Syria (d.1242), showcasing women's historical involvement in political leadership positions within Islamic societies.²⁰

Razia Sultana ruled Delhi (d.1240); and Nana Asma'u was the poet princess of Nigeria (d.1864).²¹ Throughout history, Muslim women have demonstrated successful and just rule. In the modern era, numerous women have assumed leadership roles in the Muslim world. In 2019, Sheikh al-Tayeb,

Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, emphasized the importance of addressing women's issues, stating on Twitter, "Women represent half of society. If we don't care for them it's like walking on one foot only."²² Muslim nations with women presidents or prime ministers encompass Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Senegal, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Mali, Northern Cyprus, Mauritius, and Singapore. Tanzania joined the list with Samia Suluhu's inauguration as its first woman president on March 19, 2021.

Promoting Healthier and Happier Families:

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has discovered that women typically allocate a greater portion of their earnings towards their families and communities compared to men. With increased control over resources, women prioritize investments in their families, leading to a rise in expenditures on nutritious and high-quality food. This emphasis on healthier food choices underscores the positive impact of women's empowerment on family well-being and community development.²³

Women in Science and Technology Muslim women:

Muslim women, akin to men, have made significant contributions to various sciences including physics, engineering, mathematics, and astronomy. Notably, Sutayta al-Mahamili, a tenth-century mathematician from Baghdad, exemplifies this legacy of intellectual prowess and achievement.²⁴ Lubna of Córdoba's mathematical prowess and innovative solutions to equations earned praise from Ibn Kathir and acknowledgment from mathematicians worldwide. Besides mathematics, she excelled in various fields and served as the secretary to Caliph Al-Hakam II of Córdoba, showcasing her multifaceted talents. In contemporary Muslim-majority nations like the UAE, women continue to drive advancements in knowledge, science, and technology. For instance, the chairperson of the United Arab Emirates Space Agency (UAESA), a key player in Mars exploration, is a woman who has also held the position of Minister of State for Science.²⁵ At UAESA, women make up 80% of the scientific team.²⁶

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ ۗ لِلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَتَبْنَا لِلنِّسَاءِ ۗ وَاللِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَتَبْنَا لِلرِّجَالِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ عَلِيمٌ ۙ
 ۙ مِمَّا كَتَبْنَا لِلرِّجَالِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ عَلِيمٌ ۙ

: “And in no wise covet those things in which Allah Hath bestowed His gifts More freely on some of you than on others: To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn: But ask Allah of His bounty. For Allah hath full knowledge of all things.”²⁷

In Surah Nisa, the Holy Quran specifically declares a woman's economic rights, such as her rights of inheritance, earning, and engaging in economic activities outside of the home, and states

The Role of Women in Society Nowadays

In contemporary society, the role of women holds paramount significance across various domains including households, communities, politics, and administration. Contrasting starkly with medieval times when women were confined to domestic spheres, contemporary women actively engage in diverse societal activities. Formerly restricted to household chores, women now participate comprehensively in societal affairs. This transformation signifies a significant empowerment of women, allowing their involvement in various spheres of society. Today, women's participation spans across all facets of societal life, symbolizing a monumental shift from the limitations imposed on them in ancient and medieval times.

Role in the Household:

Women serve as the backbone of households, undertaking a wide array of tasks ranging from cleaning and cooking to childcare and household management. They play a pivotal role in nurturing families, ensuring the well-being of children, and even preparing meals for their husbands' workdays. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that women typically invest a larger portion of their earnings in their families and communities compared to men. With greater control over resources, women prioritize spending on nutritious and high-quality foods, thereby promoting healthier and happier families. This emphasis on family well-being underscores the significant impact of women's contributions within households and communities, highlighting their invaluable role in fostering social and familial prosperity.²⁸

Role in the Society and Administration:

The role of women in society is not just essential but also an absolute necessity. In our country, the principle of gender equality is advocated, emphasizing the crucial contributions of women towards addressing societal needs and advocating for the concerns faced by the populace. Women actively participate in utilizing public utilities and fulfilling civic duties, collaborating with men to achieve better outcomes. Furthermore, women's gainful employment serves as a vital tool in reducing poverty within their families and communities. Studies indicate that women's involvement in the workforce contributes significantly to poverty reduction. For many women, especially those who are divorced or widowed, employment is not merely a choice but a means of fulfilling their responsibilities towards their children and others. This is particularly evident in post-conflict regions like Afghanistan, where women, having lost their husbands to years of war, must work to support their families. Women's roles in administration demand skill and competence. Occupying key positions of power, women exercise their judgment to make informed decisions. They contribute to policy formulation and implementation,

significantly impacting society. In administrative spheres, women play a vital role in shaping policies that affect the broader community.

Role in Politics:

In contemporary times, women actively participate in the country's political landscape. Reservations have been implemented for women in both the parliament and local-level panchayats, underscoring the significance of their role in society. Notably, Pakistan is among the 40 Muslim countries with women serving as presidents or prime ministers. Benazir Bhutto, inheriting leadership of the PPP after a military coup toppled her father's government, became the first female prime minister of a Muslim nation in 1988. Despite returning to Pakistan in 2007 following an extended exile, she tragically succumbed to a suicide attack, highlighting the challenges faced by women in political leadership roles.²⁹ Benazir Bhutto said:-

"I dream ...of a world where we can commit our social resources to the development of human life and not to its destruction".³⁰

Role in technology:

Arfa Abdul Karim Randhawa, born into an ethnic Punjabi family in Ram Diwali, Faisalabad District, Punjab, Pakistan, was a Pakistani student and computer prodigy. In 2004, she became the youngest Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP), earning recognition in the Guinness Book of World Records for her remarkable achievement.³¹ Arfa retained the title until 2008 and represented Pakistan at international platforms like the "TechEd Developers Conference". In 2005, she was bestowed with Pakistan's highest literary honor, the "Presidential Pride of Performance", by General Pervez Musharraf. Additionally, Lahore's "Arfa Software Technology Park" is dedicated to her memory, serving as a tribute to her remarkable contributions in the field of technology.³² At the age of 10, Arfa was invited by Bill Gates to visit Microsoft's headquarters in the United States.³³ She died in 2012, aged 16, from a cardiac arrest.

Arfa Karim said:-

"If you want to do something big in your life, you must remember that shyness is only the mind. If you think shy, you act shy. If you think confident you act confident. Therefore never let shyness conquer your mind."

Role in education:-

The role of women in education is paramount for the sustainable development of society. Education, recognized as a fundamental human right, serves as a cornerstone for fostering economic growth, alleviating poverty, and enhancing health outcomes. When women are educated, they assume multifaceted roles within society as teachers, researchers, policymakers, and

education advocates. As educators, they play a pivotal role in transmitting knowledge and skills to future generations, thereby influencing the trajectory of their communities. Additionally, educated women serve as inspirational figures for young girls, encouraging them to pursue education and challenge prevailing gender norms. Furthermore, women's education yields broader societal benefits, including healthier families, increased household incomes, and improved living standards. Educated women are more likely to engage in decision-making processes, advocate for their rights, and confront societal barriers impeding their advancement. One notable exemplar of women's leadership in Pakistan is Fatima Jinnah, revered as the Mother of the Nation.-

“Woman occupies an exceedingly important place in the world. Given her capabilities, nature has assigned vast duties to her. If you failed in them, you will not only harm your individual-self but also severely hurt your collective life”.³⁴

The government of Pakistan has initiated targeted efforts to enhance women's empowerment, exemplified by the National Policy of Development and Empowerment introduced in 2002. This policy aimed at bolstering women's economic, social, and political empowerment. Furthermore, the allocation of reserved seats for women in the Senate and the National and Provincial Assemblies has been augmented. Despite these strides, women in Pakistan continue to face unequal power dynamics and limited autonomy in decision-making processes concerning their lives.³⁵ Despite comprising nearly half of the population, women in Pakistan experience a significant lack of empowerment, placing the country among the lowest globally in this regard. Enhancing women's empowerment has the potential to elevate societal well-being. However, there exists a scarcity of literature explicitly defining and analyzing the determinants of women's empowerment in Pakistan. To address this gap, we have adopted Mahmud et al.'s framework, which views women's empowerment as a multifaceted and evolving process. Pakistan is a signatory to several international human rights treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These treaties underscore the obligation of member states, including Pakistan, to protect women's rights and provide guidelines for sustainable development.³⁶

There are addressable problems and limitation Muslim women are facing and solutions:

- i. Limited Access to Education: In many Muslim-majority countries, there exists a significant gender gap in education, with girls often receiving less access to schooling compared to boys. Cultural norms and societal expectations often prioritize boys' education over girls',

leading to fewer opportunities for girls to pursue higher education. This gender disparity in education perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits the personal and professional growth of women.³⁷

Promoting education for girls and women is crucial in addressing this challenge. Governments and NGOs can implement policies and initiatives aimed at increasing access to education for girls, providing scholarships and financial assistance, building schools in rural areas, and addressing cultural barriers that hinder girls' education.

- ii. **Lack of Job Opportunities:** Muslim women often face discrimination in the workplace, leading to limited job opportunities and lower pay compared to their male counterparts. Societal expectations and cultural norms often dictate that women should prioritize family responsibilities over their careers, resulting in their underrepresentation in the workforce.³⁸

Creating more job opportunities for women and implementing policies that promote gender diversity in the workforce are essential steps in addressing this issue. Additionally, ensuring equal pay and benefits for men and women in the same roles can help reduce gender disparities in the workplace.³⁹

- iii. **Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence is a pervasive issue affecting Muslim women worldwide. Cultural and societal norms often perpetuate the normalization of domestic violence, leading to underreporting and lack of support for victims. Women who experience domestic violence face physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, impacting their well-being and autonomy.⁴⁰

Addressing domestic violence requires a multifaceted approach involving awareness campaigns, legal reforms, and support services for victims. Governments and organizations can provide shelters, counseling services, and legal aid to support survivors of domestic violence and hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.⁴¹

- iv. **Lack of Representation:** Muslim women are often underrepresented in politics, media, and public spheres, limiting their ability to voice concerns and influence decision-making processes. Cultural and societal barriers, as well as discriminatory practices, contribute to the marginalization of women in these domains.⁴²

Promoting gender equality in all spheres of society is essential in addressing this challenge. Encouraging women to participate in politics, media, and public discourse, as well as implementing policies that ensure equal representation, can help amplify the voices of Muslim women and address their unique concerns.⁴³

Addressing the challenges faced by Muslim women requires comprehensive strategies that address cultural, societal, and institutional barriers. Promoting education, creating job opportunities, combating domestic

violence, and advocating for equal representation are essential steps in empowering Muslim women and fostering their meaningful participation in society.

Conclusion:

Throughout history, women have been integral in the construction and development of societies worldwide. Their multifaceted contributions, ranging from nurturing families to actively participating in community affairs, underscore their indispensable role in societal progress. Thus, dismissing or neglecting the significance of women in present-day society would be shortsighted. Women are not merely companions to men; rather, they are architects of familial, societal, and national structures. Their involvement is intrinsic to the fabric of society, as they are instrumental in fostering social upliftment and advancement. Disregarding the pivotal role of women not only undermines their invaluable contributions but also hampers societal progress. Denying women equal opportunities and representation results in the loss of diverse perspectives and talents, ultimately hindering societal growth and perpetuating gender-based monopolies. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of women in society. Furthermore, investing in women's education is paramount for sustainable societal development. By providing women with equal access to quality education, we empower them to actively engage in shaping their communities and fostering progress. Addressing the challenges faced by Muslim women, such as limited access to education and job opportunities, requires comprehensive strategies that promote gender equality and provide support and resources to overcome barriers. In conclusion, recognizing and appreciating the role of women in society is essential for creating a more just and equitable world. By ensuring equal representation and amplifying women's voices, we can harness their full potential and work towards building inclusive societies where every individual, regardless of gender, can thrive and contribute meaningfully.

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