



A Gender Equality and Women's Employment

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Abstract

Gender equality gives men and women equal access to all cultural, social, and economic facilities so that the rights of neither sex are suppressed or exploited. The present study takes a scientific look at the issue of employment from the viewpoint of Islam. After a critical reviewing the viewpoints of sociologists and feminists, we demonstrate that the employment of women, subject to certain criteria, could be the right decision. These criteria include a congruity between the job and feminine characteristics, wearing hijāb, chastity with no commingling of men and women at work, and compliance between the woman's job, the rights of her husband, and her motherhood responsibilities. These criteria conform with the terms and conditions that indicate gender equality in women's employment from an Islamic viewpoint. In line with gender equality, this paper also suggests a part-time employment model for women.

Keywords: Gender, justice, women's employment, Islam, family, feminism, sociologists

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Introduction

Gender equality is not only a moral concept but a more vague idea than straightforward equality, especially when we see that the notion of gender equality is a new point of focus with a short history. The notion is especially linked with that of women's employment and has been the concern of relevant discussions since the Industrial Revolution, when factories came into existence and women began to migrate from their homes to work environments, both large and small. While the root traditions of religion and society encourage women to protect the pillars of the family, the new norms of the modern world promote their increased presence in society and active roles in the field of employment. The two standards cannot be easily balanced, particularly when one of them seems incompatible with the other. The employment of men is considered normal and necessary, while women's employment has faced many challenges, and manifests differently in different communities. Many people believe that the employment of women is contrary to social ethics, while others believe that when women go outside the home it provides them with conditions to compete against men, particularly in places where there is no full employment. However, some say that jobs for women take work from men. Some claim that working women neglect their marital responsibilities and that this is a factor in the increasing number of divorces, or that they pay less attention to their maternal duties, which would damage future generations. (Sārūkhānī, 1370 SH, 859)

Some questions can be raised here. What is meant by gender equality? Are instances of gender equality the same throughout society? How does gender equality affect women's employment? In general, is the employment of women in work outside the home admissible and justifiable, as well as in accordance with gender equality? Is there any contradiction between a woman's role as wife and mother and the working woman in Islamic culture? Despite there being plenty of facilities such as housekeepers, kindergartens, and childcare centers, is it right that a young mother should go out to work? Does gender equality in women's employment mean equality between men and women in terms of utilizing the opportunities and facilities for employment? In the current study, after reviewing some available literature, we will discuss the topic mainly from the viewpoint of Islam.

Conceptual Analysis

Justice

Justice refers to objectivity, fairness, and arranging everything in its order, a standard that opposes both intemperance and tyranny. (Mu'īn, 1371 SH, 6/2282)

According to Plato, justice signifies a correspondence with nature and the virtues; it is a balance between wisdom, wrath, and pleasure in the human being. Within society, he believes that justice refers to parity. In other words, each individual within society should be delegated a status according to his or her specific class: the philosopher-kings, soldiers, and civilians. Aristotle sees justice as dealing with people according to their equality or inequality. This means the distribution of roles and facilities according to merit and aptitude. (Bayāt, et al. 1381 SH, 375-376) Imām 'Alī has said: *'Justice puts things in their proper place,'* (Imām 'Alī, 1379 SH, Ḥadīth 437) and sees justice as a universal principle for all people which is higher and nobler than forgiveness. This definition has been accepted by Muslim intellectuals. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, n.d., 12/331)

Therefore, despite the views held by modernists like Karl Marx, who believed social justice is equality and parity, Islamic thought does not see justice in this way, nor is the modern view congruent with the lexical root of justice.

Gender

In women's literature, the word 'gender' usually refers to the cultural or social differences between men and women, whereas the word 'sex' tends to refer to biological differences. (Bustān, 1388 SH, 3) In psychology, the 'sex-role' is a set of individual behaviors and tendencies that are in line with a man or woman's 'sexuality.' In other words, the sex role stems from typical behaviors of a boy or girl and includes instances like habits, conventions, clothing, and the choice of toys and games. Certain others have a broader definition of the sex role as 'that which is compatible with masculine or feminine characteristics within the context of a culture.' Therefore, gender equality could be defined as an improved and just gender proportion between women and men for access to all cultural, social, and economic facilities in

accordance with their feminine or masculine qualities, with no compulsion or exclusion imposed upon them.

Employment

The term 'occupation' in the Persian language means 'the attention given to one's work,' 'what one is engaged in or works in,' 'the work with which one is busy' (Dehkhuda, 1373 SH, 2/2226) or 'the work of keeping busy with entertainment and problems.' (Mu'in, 1371 SH, 1/280) Occupation is defined as follows: 'Labour can be defined as duties which require mental or physical endeavor aimed at producing goods or services to meet human needs. A job or occupation is one in which one works for a wage or regular pay. In all cultures, the various occupations are the basis of the economic system, and involve institutions dealing with the production and distribution of goods and services.' (Giddens, n.d., p. 517)

Labor is one of the main factors of production, and consists of utilizing mental or manual power for regular pay. In everyday language, it is generally used to refer to the manual work performed by laborers. In economic theory, it is the human effort or activity to achieve production. As a factor of production, labor is differentiated from raw materials, resources, and management, and is the effort exerted by laborers at work. In other words, the term 'labor' covers all people who work for a living, who are defined as 'the working population over a certain age.' (Farhang, 1366 SH, 652) Labor is an economic factor of production that 'includes mental, manual, professional and non-professional activities to produce wealth.' (Murīdī and Nawrūzī. 1373 SH, 574) Employment usually has a status defined by the authorities and the statistical and economic situation of a country and is defined by certain characteristics. For example, the Iranian Centre for Statistics defines 'employees' as follows: 'All individuals of the age of ten and above who have been occupied with a job for seven days prior to the visit of the census agents... All those during this period who have worked (on average) for eight hours a day or more are considered to be employed.' (Ibid, 52) Therefore, as a common definition, occupation refers to full-time jobs with a wage that is mainly outside the home.

The term 'women' applies to females of three specific groups:

married women, women in charge of a family, and single women. The present study includes all three groups in terms of women's employment.

Women's Employment in the Modern World

The Industrial Revolution in Europe caused domestic work to be replaced by work in factories. Fundamental changes appeared in the concept and forms of work, with men being employed for heavier work, and women who had formerly earned an income from spinning at home also employed in the new factories. Since then, through higher levels of education, women have found positions in various other occupations.

For centuries before the rise of Islam until the middle of the 12th century A.H., women played a major role in the household throughout Iranian society (i.e., urban, rural, and tribal), and their activities were mainly limited to the home. Even outside the home, their activities were in fact a continuation of their role in the home. (Jārullāhī, 1372 SH, 257-258) From the mid-12th century to the 14th century (18th to 20th C.E.), several changes occurred in the socio-economic structure of the country, due to increased relations between Iran and the industrialized Western nations. This caused changes in the lives and status of women in the capital and the other major cities of Iran. Yet no changes appeared in the social status of rural and tribal women, for they were far removed from Western values. Some of the activities in which women were involved were working in textile factories, carpet weaving, and fisheries. Political posts were limited, and only women of noble rank could occupy them. Women were otherwise usually responsible for jobs inside the home, such as childcare, cleaning, cooking, and so forth. (Ibid. 260-263) During the 14th century (20th AD), with the availability of public education, women's employment outside the home grew more. The census in Iran carried out in 1976 shows that 13.7 percent of women were working, compared with 86.3 percent of men. (Ibid, 266) A similar pattern still exists throughout most of society, with women's employment limited.

However, according to the latest international statistics, the labor force in the developed countries consists of half the entire population, out of which 40 percent are women above the age of 15.

These figures are different in developing countries, where the workforce consists of about 40-50 percent of the population, out of which about 20 to 40 percent are women. (Safirī, 1380 SH, 733-734) Nonetheless, the economic participation of women is increasing overall in the modern age, especially in developed countries.

However, there are differences between men and women in terms of the occupation percentage and the type of work they do. Even in developed countries, women tend to be occupied in clerical jobs, work at home without payment, sales and services, technical and professional jobs, parliamentary and chief executive positions, and lower-level administration, respectively. In developing countries, women are generally occupied with housework without payment, sales, services, clerical jobs, technical and professional jobs, management, and chief executive positions, respectively. The large number of those who do housework without payment and the low percentage in high-level jobs clearly show the difference between men and women. Therefore, it can be concluded that whether in industrialized or developing countries, the presence of women in certain types of jobs is limited, and their participation in high-level jobs and decision-making is very rare, while they are more active in low-level jobs, services, and clerical positions. (Ibid, 744-748)

Viewpoints and Theories

Sociologists point out the division of labor and the variety of jobs (there are 20,000 separate jobs listed in the U.K.) as the most important features distinguishing today's industrialized societies from traditional societies in terms of labor. (Giddens, n.d, 518) Adam Smith and Frederick Taylor stated that the division of labor and organized industrial production has had a pervasive influence on the current types of available work. According to Marx, the division of labor alienates people from their work and reduces it to a dull and dreary routine. (Ibid, 552)

Anthony Giddens believes that although housework comes to almost a third of the total annual production in today's economy, the wageless work of women in the home is disregarded to a large extent. Before urbanization, most women were doing various tasks in addition to working at home, tasks which were often closely related to those of men, and the home would be like a

unique production unit. With the development of workplaces separate from the home, production became separated from consumption, and thus the housewife became a consumer whose work outside the home became neglected. Between the two World Wars, the number of housewives reached a climax when the majority of married women did not go out to work, although it was usual for single women to do so. During both World Wars, women were encouraged to work in place of the men who had joined the armed forces. After the First World War, women were dismissed, but after the end of World War II, some were kept on, and thenceforth the growth of women's employment was closely related to the development of service jobs. The work available to women in the job market was on the whole unstable and paid low wages, with improper working conditions and little opportunity for promotion, such as waitressing, the retail trade, cleaning, etc. Women have also focused more than men on part-time jobs (90 percent of female workers work part-time in the UK). (Ibid, 546)

Although Durkheim's attention to work ethics, Marx's criticism of the division of labor in the industrialized society, and the emphasis on an expository understanding of workers in the sociology of employment are of importance, it must be admitted that none of these three approaches address important issues such as the balance between the genders, between ethnic groups, or the significance of balancing activity in the workplace and the home, and so forth. (Safiri, 1380 SH, 756)

With the expansion of jobs and the division of labor in industrialized society, is it possible to explain the status of women in a different way? Perhaps sex-role has something to do with it. Parsons believes that the family is a part of the whole society and it is based on the separation of the sex roles. The separation of roles and the expertise of each helps maintain the unity of the family and is a foundation for the social adaptation of children. The head of the family and breadwinner is the man, and the woman is the housewife. The economic role of the man is the most important basis for determining family rights and establishing the man's role in society, and housework is the basic activity of the woman upon whom family life hinges. Parsons believes that the separation of the sex roles plays an important part in the development of a child's character: the boy resembles his father and the girl resembles her

mother. The employment of the woman, in addition to unsteady her emotional position in the family, leads to disorder and incongruity within the family due to the competition between her and her husband. (Ritzer, 1377 SH, 466) However, this issue is less visible if the woman works part-time.

All feminists from the first wave of liberals to the Marxist feminists, socialists, and radicals of the second wave agree that gender discrimination against women should be abolished, and believe it to be a problem that stems from traditional patriarchal beliefs. (Qiytānchī, 1381 SH, 186) In addition, Marxist feminists, socialists, and radicals were not so satisfied with the first liberal wave of feminism as set out in the works of Betty Friedan. For a long time, liberal feminists emphasized the recognition of the individuality of women as the only insoluble social issue, but have neglected the inequality of the woman's role in the family and reproduction. (Ibid, 189-190) Feminist sociology opposes the superiority of men which institutionalizes the inequality of women. The most significant feature of feminism is the notion that women are inferior and that this should be questioned and opposed. In general, feminists emphasize the following points regarding women's employment:

a) The segregation of labor based on gender, where jobs are labeled as masculine or feminine, is affected by society and has nothing to do with natural differences.

b) The role of the man as breadwinner and the woman as child-carer has no justifiable basis, and both men and women should be considered equally responsible for providing their families with housekeeping and childcare requirements.

c) Housekeeping is work without payment, whereas it should be considered like any other work. Housekeeping is hard and overbearing (on average 77 hours a week), and the belief that housewives are weak stems from the fact that housekeeping is invisible to the public, and done with no material expectation and often with love. Radical feminists believe that men benefit from this work freely done by women in the home, and are thus heavily supportive of the notion of a gender-based division of labour, and oppose any regulation for equality in employment opportunities. Marxist feminists consider free housekeeping by women profitable to the capitalist system, and radical feminists believe

that the main beneficiaries are men. Feministic studies on female workers in factories (Anna Pollert, 1981) indicate that women's first consideration about work is that done in the home. In addition, other studies, such as that of Oakley (1974), show that employment has a fundamental role in the lives of employed women, but that the women are expected to adapt to the situation.

d) To justify differences between men and women in terms of salary, it is said that men do more specialized tasks than women, but feminists like Phillips and Taylor (1980) and Coyle (1984) claim that expertise is crafted by society.

e) Feministic studies (Coyle, 1984) oppose the traditional viewpoint that the main characteristics of the woman are those of housewife and mother, and say that women gravitate to this basic role at home. Feminists believe that occupational identity and work play an important role in the lives of many women and that the money they make is necessary.

f) Women are placed mainly in feminine jobs (clothing, nursing, secretarial, and accountancy) and second-tier jobs (including low-income and unsafe non-professional jobs that have little or no training opportunities or promotions). Marxist feminists like Bruegel (1979) claim that family ideology and the gender-based division of labor within the family make women obliged to do housework, which is therefore congruent with the requirements of the capitalist system for part-time workers with low incomes. Radical feminists believe that patriarchy represents a system in which men rule women and exploit them, which demonstrates the most fundamental form of mastery and sufferance. This means that the domestic contribution of women is influenced by the mastery and exploitation of men and that it is advantageous for men to keep women in the home to meet their requirements. Socialist feminists such as Hartmann (1978) believe that capitalism and patriarchy affect each other at all levels of society. For example, a gender-based division of labor and claiming for a family wage can be understood only by considering the combination of capitalism and patriarchy, since both systems take advantage of this condition. (Abbott and Wallace, 1380 SH, 172-206)

A Critique of the Theories

4-1: The attention given by feminists to the value of housework

is appreciated and accepted. It seems that if women's housework were properly considered, then the employment of women would have a new and better status. Sociologists like Giddens also emphasize the importance of free housework within the economy. (Giddens, n.d, 196)

4-2: Certain shortcomings of the feminists stem from their philosophical and anthropological principles regarding women. Feminists consider the concept and nature of 'woman' to be merely the cultural construct of a patriarchal culture. However, this is a conflation of culture and the physiology of women and completely disrupts their mental, psychological, and cultural situation. For example, pregnancy, giving birth, and breastfeeding are not distinct from the mental, psychological, and cultural situation of the woman. Therefore, it is unacceptable for Simon Dubois to say that no one is born a woman, but becomes a woman, (Bāqirī, 1382 SH, 92-97) since the biological and physiological differences between men and women are undeniable:

A difference in chromosomes (XX and XY), the reproductive system, hormones, the nervous system, and brain structure (in terms of weight, a dissimilarity of the hypothalamus, and a difference in brain hemispheres in terms of spatial and language functions) are sources of other differences in functions and abilities. (Guyton, 1372 SH, 2/784-815; Dubois and Pirron, 1366 SH, 107; Kaplan and Sadock, 1368 SH, 3/18; Ganjī, 1369 SH, 148) Other biological differences are also noticeable, such as physical strength, muscle structure, vision (women have a wider angle of vision, while men are more farsighted), hearing (men distinguish the direction of sound better, and women distinguish the treble clef better), touch (female skin is more delicate and more sensitive to pain and pressure) and dexterity (women are more nimble than men in delicate tasks). (Khudā Raḥīmī, et al., 1378 SH, 134-334; Hunt, 1377 SH, 110-111)

Studies have shown numerous psychological differences between men and women which cannot be simply an outcome of education and background, and include differences in terms of gender identity (independence, competition, and individuality among boys, and sincerity, emotional relationships, and care and dependence among girls). Women are more curious, more jealous, and have less confidence than men, whereas aggression is more

common among men. Women are more emotional than men and express emotions differently. There is a difference in terms of mental and learning abilities, and the speed and levels of physiological and psychological growth. (Ganjī, 1369 SH, 210-211; Hunt, 1377 SH, 39-40; Mişbāh et al, 1374 SH, 1/498, 2/24) Therefore, the roles of breadwinner for the man and childcare for the woman are somehow congruent with their biological and other natural characteristics.

4-3: A gender-based division of labor is also a natural selection that has occurred throughout history, and signs of it can be seen in anthropological studies of earlier societies. A study by Murdock describes the economic activities of men and women as follows:

In 75 percent of all the 224 tribes studied across the world, men have been doing work such as shepherding, fishing, cutting trees, trapping, mining, hunting, fighting, etc. However, women have been doing jobs like grinding seeds, bringing water, cooking, chopping wood, sewing, pottery, etc. (Berk, 1985, 1/322)

4-4: Almost up until 1969, the theory of gender division was accepted in the social sciences, and sociologists like Durkheim and Parsons considered that a gender-based division of labor played an important part in the mutual relationships between men and women by increasing cooperation as well as efficiency in the home and society. They believed that this kind of division was an effect of genetic differences between men and women. (Rosenbaum, 1367 SH, 85)

The Woman's Right to Employment

The Right to Employment

When we consider the narratives, certain Quranic verses, and the current lifestyle of Muslims, it is obvious that a woman's right to employment is recognized in Islam. The certification of ownership rights to women requires them to show evidence of their employment and the legitimacy of their income, as in the following: "*To men belongs a share of what they have earned, and to women a share of what they have earned.*" (Quran 4:32)

We may conclude from phrases such as '*and seek of Allah's bounty*' (Quran 62:10) and '*He brought you forth from the earth and made it your habitation.*' (Quran 11:61) that these verses

encourage men and women in general to work and cultivate the earth. In addition, the Holy Quran mentions the story of Jethro and the two women who were tending flocks. (Quran 28:23) Also, according to certain narratives, Muslim women were working in jobs like trade, handicrafts, weaving, cosmetics, home services, real estate, perfumery, sheep herding, tailoring, and so forth during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, and were not obstructed therefrom. (Majlisī, 1404 AH, 16/9, 24/264; al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī. n.d, 12/174, 93-95) They were only barred from decadent work, such as ‘prostitution and singing in ceremonies full of sin.’ (Ibid, vol. 12, 62-65; 84-85)

Furthermore, according to Islamic doctrine, labor includes all profitable activities that are of mental, spiritual, ethical, and economic benefit to both society and the individual. Islam exalts the material value of labor, so much so that it considers lawful work the only requirement of lawful ownership: "*that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for.*" (Quran 53:39)

All financial contracts, profits, and interests are based on the notion of labor and that everybody earns the product of their own labor. (Niyākī, 1361 SH, 1/701) Even the spiritual value of labor is exalted as jihād for the sake of God. (Kulaynī, 1365 SH, 5/88.) Therefore, according to the primary principles of Islam, lawful work is not only permitted for both men and women, but also recommended, and bodes well for the excellence of ‘seeking lawful money,’ (cf. Majlisī, 1404 AH, 103/18) ‘business by oneself’ (cf. Muḥammadi Riyshahrī, 1363 SH, 8/385-388) and ‘the importance of trade.’ (Ibid, 1/518) There are also discussions where ‘halal provision, industry, lawful jobs ... all apply to men and women.’ (Ibid, 23/6)

However, this general overview might be unlawful or objectionable under particular circumstances, such as if there is a commixture of non-maḥram, flaunting, or the neglect of family responsibilities, etc. On the other hand, it is preferable if the wife can help her husband (al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, n.d, 14/14, 24) without interrupting her own duties, and in some cases, there is no choice but to work to supply the family with their needs.

General Principles of Employment

From the Islamic point of view, employment does not merely

entail economic goals but is considered part of a general social system that is accountable for the spiritual, moral, and religious goals of the individual and society. In order to be elevated and perfected, the principles and criteria for employment are generally defined, with rules for the employment of women that take into consideration the strength of and economy and the family. There are writings concerning the lawful income from work, (Ibid, n.d, 12/42-43) and the kind of work that is permissible (Ibid, n.d, 12/chapter 1) (occupations such as buying and selling dead bodies, pork, intoxicating liquor, etc. are considered unlawful), as well as Qur'anic verses on the unlawfulness of usury (Quran 2:275), the unlawfulness of gambling (Quran 5:90), and the unlawfulness of using other people's property without their consent. (Quran 2:188; 4:29) Other criteria such as occupations that cause oppression or corruption, or which advocate wrongdoing, or any extortion involving money, food, drink, marriage, or ownership, are considered unlawful from an Islamic perspective and are unacceptable. (Muḥammadī Riyshahrī, 1363 SH, 8/376-385)

Favorable principles that are mentioned include: *'Seeking help in life through prayer and the worship of God, attending to the affairs of life after death, moderation in worldly desires, accepting one's destiny and being content with one's livelihood...,'* (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, n.d, 12/1-51)

Criteria for the Employment of Women

The following criteria conform to the Islamic point of view:

Appropriate Work For Feminine Characteristics

Considering the biological and psychological differences between men and women and the delicate nature of feminine characteristics, women's work should conform to the feminine nature. Imām ʿAlī has stated: *'Do not impose work upon women which is not compatible with their nature [exceeding their limits and ability], as women are like spring flowers, unlike champions and surly rulers.'* (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, n.d, 14/120; Imām ʿAlī, 1379 SH, Letter 31)

And this is the Quranic explanation of accepted social interaction:

" O you who have faith! ...Consort with them in an honorable manner; and should you dislike them, maybe you dislike something while Allah invests it with an abundant good." (Quran 4:19)

Although related to family matters, this easily applies to propriety and compatibility. (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, n.d., 4/255; Javādi Āmoli, 1371 SH, 369-270)

‘Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī interprets the verse as follows: *‘God Almighty says in his book that all people, men or women, are members of one community and are equally needed for the formation of society. This does not contradict the fact that each of these two groups has its own special characteristics, such as men having strength and power and women having smoothness and affection. This is due to the fact that man's nature needs both strength and mercy for its social and evolutionary journey...’* (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, n.d., 4/256) Therefore, jobs that are not compatible with female characteristics are unacceptable for women.

Observing the Ḥijāb, Chastity and Segregation

Attention to the ḥijāb and women's clothing is an essential feature of Islam. (Quran 24:31, 33:53, and 33:59) In addition to wearing the ḥijāb while present in society, it is necessary to be aware of one's chastity, how one looks at people, and how one talks and behaves. (Quran 24:31 and 33:30-35) Women are also warned not to mix with men who are strangers: *‘Are you not ashamed and jealous that your wives go to the marketplace and see strangers there? Be particularly cautious of them being in solitary places with men.’* (al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, n.d, 14/174-175)

Therefore, jobs that necessitate the removal of the ḥijāb and inattention to chastity, encourage association with men, or being alone in places with strangers do not conform to Islamic doctrine. In the story of Jethro's daughters and their meeting with Moses, refraining from association with men and observing chastity is delicately pointed out, because Jethro's daughters walked behind Moses, and they would not give water to the sheep until the men were done with their work. (Quran 28:23, 25)

Compatibility between the Wife's Job and the Husband's Rights

This criterion applies specifically to married women and does not include single girls and widows. The husband's supervision of

the family, the necessity for the woman to be sexually submissive to the husband, obedience to the husband and not leaving the house without his permission are among the rights of the husband. This is why taking good care of the husband by the wife is stated in narrations such as the following: *'The jihād of a woman is to afford pleasant company to her husband.'* (Majlisī, 1404 AH, 10/99, 18/107)

Therefore, the woman's work, whether inside or outside the home, should not conflict with his rights: *"Men are the managers of women, because of the advantage Allah has granted some of them over others, and by virtue of their spending out of their wealth. Righteous women are obedient and watchful in the absence [of their husbands] in guarding what Allah has enjoined [them] to guard."* (Quran 4:34)

Imām Bāqir states the due right of the husband owed to him by his wife as follows: *"A woman went to the Prophet Muḥammad and asked him about the right owed to a husband by his wife. The Prophet said: 'It calls for his wife's obedience and her not giving alms from the house without his permission, refraining from recommended fasting, not rejecting him even while riding a camel, and not leaving his house without his permission, and if she so does, the angels in the heavens and on earth, and the angels of wrath and generosity, will curse her until she returns.'"* (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, n.d., 14/112) There are several other narrations on this topic. (Ibid, Chapter 79, 111)

Giving comfort is an important goal in marriage from the Islamic point of view: *"And of His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them, and He ordained affection and mercy between you. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect."* (Quran 30:21) (Zamakhsharī, 1407 AH, 3/472; Rashīd Riḍā, 1303 SH, 9/518; Ṭabāṭabāʾī, n.d., 16/166; al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, n.d., 14/2)

"It is He who created you from a single soul, and made from it its mate, that he might find comfort with her..." (Quran 7:189) One might consider the compatibility of the woman's job with a relaxed home atmosphere to be among the rights of the husband and the family. Although comforting has not been mentioned as a right or a religious duty, it would be part of the ideal family pattern based on the Islamic philosophy of marriage.

Compatibility of the Woman's Job with Her Maternal Duties

This criterion does not apply to single girls but in most other cases. Survival and reproduction are important functions of marriage and the formation of a family. (al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī. n.d, 14/3, 33) One of the secrets of family happiness lies in having a child, (Ibid., n.d, 15/95-96) and it is the woman who undertakes the most fundamental part of this function during pregnancy, breast-feeding and the early years of taking care of and training a child. Therefore, a woman's job should not conflict with her maternal duties. Nowadays, matters like childbirth leave, child-care leave, and the ban on dismissal due to pregnancy are recognized not only in domestic law but internationally as well. We can therefore conclude that maternal duties are neither negligible nor reducible and that a mother's employment conditions must conform to her maternal duties. Motherhood and maternal duties are highly regarded in Islam. We are told how the heart of Moses' mother became empty of everything save the thought of her child (Quran 28:10), and that she could not bear being separated from him until God returned him to her and she was happy (Quran 28:11-13). The mother of Mary, the mother of Jesus, raises her daughter so correctly that she is well received by the Lord (Quran 3:37), and becomes the chosen mother of Jesus Christ (Quran 3:42-45). In addition to encouraging children to appreciate and thank their mothers, a high rank is accorded to motherhood in the narrations, where we learn that heaven grows under the feet of the mothers, for it was said by the Prophet Muḥammad that 'Heaven is beneath the feet of the mothers.' (Muḥammadī Riyshahrī, 1363 SH, 10/712) From an Islamic viewpoint, the mother's role is appraised so highly that it is irreplaceable, contrary to the feministic approach.

The following is quoted from Imām Ṣādiq: Umm Salmah [the Prophet's wife] told the Prophet: *'You the messenger of God, men get all good things, so what remains for the poor women?'* The Prophet said: *'This is not right, as a pregnant woman is like the one who spends his days fasting, and nights praying, and fighting for God. Therefore, when she gives birth to her child she is greatly rewarded, but it is not recognized by the people as they are incapable of understanding its greatness. And when she feeds her baby she is granted a reward for each suck of the baby which is*

equal to that of freeing one of the grandchildren of Ismā'il. And when she is done with her feeding, a great angel taps on her side saying: "Resume your tasks, since all your sins are pardoned."' (al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī. n.d, 15/175)

Considering the priority given to a mother for caring for her child until the age of seven¹, it is clear that the mother must have the time and opportunity to do this, and any outside employment should not interfere with this crucial task. From an Islamic perspective, the pre-eminence of breast-feeding the baby (Ibid, 15/175-188) and of the mother's affection (Ibid, 191-192) over other tasks is formally accepted, but in cases when it is preferable, the child may be left in a nanny's care with the parents' consent (Quran 2:233).

The Ideal Pattern For Women's Employment in Islam

There are a few points to be considered to present an ideal pattern for women's employment from an Islamic perspective. Firstly, the religious instructions must be comprehensively taken into account, in such a way that the pattern of women's employment is in total harmony with all other aspects of the Islamic social system.

Secondly, certain moral, educational, and psychological themes related to instruction and employment must be taken into account, in addition to matters related to religious jurisprudence.

Thirdly, attention should be given to the character and way of life of the religious authorities, since they are the intended exemplars of Islam and are considered the ideal pattern to follow.

Fourthly, priority should be given to what is right for the family in a social context, with attention given to everyone concerned.

Results and Suggestions

Taking into consideration the topics discussed above, the following points can be stated as part of an ideal pattern for women's employment in harmony with the justice accorded to both sexes:

Appropriate Education for Women

Taking the necessity of education (both general and specific)

1 . Some religious jurisprudents have suggested that this is favorable. See Khū'ī, 1420 A.H, 2/285; Sīstānī, 1416 A.H, 3/120.

into consideration, the required sciences, skills, and capabilities for employment must be provided for women according to society's needs and in line with feminine characteristics. Therefore, the female gender must be taken into account in an ideal employment pattern. This should be done across a broad spectrum to include the different talents and interests of the individuals concerned, and to guide them through the necessary training following these differences. It is essential to investigate precisely the types of jobs and the time required for their training through the available information and the media to gradually prepare the ground for women to freely come to an informed choice. Life skills and housekeeping are taken into account in the necessary training for women as future wives and mothers. Being a good wife and mother, and properly managing the house and family, requires particular knowledge, skills, and capabilities which must be considered in the general training of girls. Other careers that should be followed by men are those unsuitable for females, or are rejected for religious restrictions, their rough nature, or because they are culturally unsuitable for women, such as firefighting, working in mines, etc.

The Particular Importance of Housekeeping

Housekeeping has a special place because of its varied impact on the economy of both the family and society and the large amount of time spent at home (about 70 hours each week). There are also unseen effects with repercussions on others, especially children, affecting things such as their education, psychology, growth, and integrity. Contrary to what commonly happens in capitalistic systems, it must be regarded as a job in itself¹. In fact, a stipend should be awarded by the state to those housewives who do not have any other job². This would not only strengthen family ties and reduce the demand for the large number of low-paid, menial jobs

1 . Housekeeping is currently regarded as being effectively unemployed.

2 . This was suggested at the 288th session of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution concerning Article 1 of the policies on women's employment in the Islamic Republic of Iran as follows: 'Considering the sanctity of the mother's role in the training of the future generation as well as the management of the house, and by referring to the significance of the role of women in the process of cultural growth and economic development, the spiritual and material value of the role of the women in the family as well as the work they do at home must be taken into consideration.'

offered to women but also be more compatible with religious teachings. Indeed, sections of the Islamic teachings clearly suggest and encourage a job division between men and women, and this can be observed in the lives of certain religious figures. When Fāṭimah (the Prophet's daughter) and Imām 'Alī went to visit the prophet Muḥammad and asked him to divide the house chores between them, the Prophet said: 'Let Fāṭimah do the work inside the house and 'Alī take care of those outside.' Then Fāṭimah said: 'God knows how happy I am to know that I am not responsible for the work outside the home.' (Ibid, 14/123; Majlisī, 1404 AH, 43/81) Since this is a role model established by religious figures, although not compulsory, it is definitely an important exemplar of an ideal pattern for the employment of women (al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, n.d, 12/39; Majlisī, 1404 AH, 16/238; 104/132) The division of labor¹ often found in the narrations is quite practical, (al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, n.d, 14/174-176, 16/344; Majlisī, 1404 AH, 103/258-261) and in some of them it is stated that a woman can ask to be paid for breast-feeding her baby! (al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī. n.d, 15/178-179) We should also note that the economic independence of women has always been important in Islam, and that, apart from their essential role (obedience to the husband), women have a right to be paid and rewarded for other tasks they carry out at home. However, if it were seen as a general rule done merely for the sake of the husband, the spiritual aspect would be weakened. Therefore, it would be better for the state to acknowledge it and culturally re-educate the people in this respect.

Part-time Employment

It would be useful to use a part-time employment pattern for women's jobs in cases where the presence of the woman at home is necessary. Part-time employment could to some extent reduce the consequences of conflicting roles, stress and psychological pressure, and a weakening of emotional values within the family that can arise through married women being in full-time employment. Although most of these consequences might not directly concern young, single working women, they may contribute to a delay in getting married and false feelings of

1. This division of labour does not, of course, exempt men from working at home, as can be seen by the example of religious authorities who share the household chores.

independence. This would justify a part-time employment pattern, and studies have shown that full-time employment outside the home does not suit feminine characteristics, and can lead to serious problems over a longer period. Women in charge of single-parent families are also advised to follow this pattern due to their combined roles at home and work. Meanwhile, the government should pay the equivalent of a full-time working salary to women in charge of families based on the general regulations for women's employment, to assist with these types of families. Also, the part-time employment pattern could be used for nonessential jobs in the transitional period before an ideal pattern of employment for women can be launched. In fact, the notion of 'gender equality' hinders women by encouraging them to carry the dual burden of housekeeping and full-time employment.

Strict Laws to Prevent Abuse

Considering the importance from an Islamic point of view of protecting and improving a woman's spirituality and character, any employment she takes should not detract from this. Therefore, it is necessary to protect women from sexual, moral, and psychological abuse by enforcing strict laws. In this way, the government would prevent abusers who take advantage of the presence of women in the work environment.

Special Facilities for Working Women

Considering the importance of family strength and the constructive role of women in this respect, certain facilities are required for working wives and mothers (in essential jobs), including reduced working hours, paid leave for child-bearing, retirement benefits after fewer years of service, job security, and access to social security if unemployed, sick or unable to work.

Support in Special Jobs for Women

Jobs such as farming, cattle-raising, and handicrafts are an important part of the economy and the independence of rural communities, and women clearly participate in these to a large degree. Therefore, support for women working in such occupations is essential. Since this kind of work is necessary, it is important to plan for the improvement of hygiene and environmental conditions, training, social welfare, and a

reduction in the working hours of village women who also have the burden of housekeeping.

Avoiding Western Values in Women's Employment

Islamic criteria should be strictly adhered to as developmental indices and patterns. The Western models that currently prevail within Islamic society are mainly based on socio-economic factors and job equality. A multilateral development program based on Islamic values and concern for the family and culture must be planned in a manner that ensures the solidity, interdependence, and growth of the family both morally and spiritually. This calls for a different look at the status of the family, as well as the identity, lifestyle model, and changing values of women in employment.

Conclusion

The concept of gender equality underscores the importance of equal opportunities and access for men and women to societal, cultural, and economic resources while respecting their distinct characteristics and roles. Through a comprehensive review of sociological and feminist perspectives, this study has examined women's employment within the framework of Islamic teachings. The analysis highlights that, while Islam recognizes the right of women to work and contribute meaningfully to society, it also prescribes criteria to ensure that their employment aligns with their natural roles and societal responsibilities.

Key criteria, such as congruity between the job and women's unique characteristics, adherence to *hijāb* and chastity, avoidance of unrestricted interaction between men and women in the workplace, and balancing their professional responsibilities with those of motherhood and marital obligations, are emphasized. These stipulations reflect a nuanced perspective on gender equality that accounts for the physical, emotional, and social dimensions of human interaction, advocating a balanced approach to women's employment.

Furthermore, this study proposes a part-time employment model tailored to the needs of women, ensuring a harmonious integration of their roles in the professional and domestic spheres. This model aligns with both Islamic principles and the broader

goals of gender equality, providing practical solutions for women to fulfill their multifaceted roles without compromising their rights or societal contributions. Therefore, gender equality in women's employment, as framed within the Islamic worldview, promotes dignity, equity, and respect for the unique roles of both genders, thereby fostering a balanced and just society.

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