

INSTITUTE OF OBJECTIVE STUDIES

Two-day International Conference
On

“THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MAKING A HUMANE SOCIETY”

On September 23-24, 2017

at Calicut, Kerala (India)

CONCEPT NOTE

There is an urgent need to evaluate present day issues within the concept of unity of God, unity of universe, unity of humankind and inter-dependence of multiple components there in. These components are important and form a part of a bigger whole. It is difficult to visualise the world view of Islam and its contribution to culture and civilization without taking into account the role of women in building up a compassionate and just society. It is evident from scriptures and traditions of the Prophet (PBUH) that woman has a dominant part in the whole scheme and she is created, like man, to perform a complementary role in human survival and civilizational march.

Many prominent ideologues and thinkers, both men and women, have written books or commented on the status and role of women in Islam. In the neo-colonial times the works of Laila Ahmed, Fatema Mernissi, Amina Wadood, Aziza al Hibri, Asma Barlas, Margot Badran and their ilk have been praised for their sober and objective analyses of the status of women during the time of the Prophet. Abdul Halim Abu Shaqqa, the illustrious Egyptian scholar has dealt with the role of women in Islam with academic rigour and passion.

The vital role of women in economic and social development has long been recognised by international agencies. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and 1992 Rio Declaration recognised the need for empowerment of women. The UN Security Council in Resolution 1325 has underlined the importance of women's representation at all levels of social interaction. All these acquire special significance as two-thirds of the global illiterate are women. Gender equity still remains beyond the grasp of many societies. However, slowly women are taking up social responsibilities and duties.

The health and strength of any community in the long term depends crucially on how it educates and utilises woman power. Women's increasing involvement in public life demands more academic attention and study. In societies where women hold proportionate share of leadership positions are proved to be more pro-active and collaborative. They instinctively understand the soft power of influence and persuasion. Social management in our times is moving towards shared and distributive leadership. Today's generation is to respond positively to accommodative and counselling role. Women's non-hierarchical nature and relational skills fit a leadership need in the new world of knowledge-based social organisations and social collectives.

Muslim women in India and abroad also witness economic, social and cultural changes that ensure their greater civil and social rights. Islam, which has liberated women from patriarchal suppression, is playing a constructive role in their lives. University campuses, media and social networks show remarkable upsurge of Muslim women, more articulate and sensitive about their status in Islamic society. In many Muslim countries they are finally taking their place in legislatures, judiciary and media. In India due to changes in Panchayati Raj Act there is perceptible increase in female representation. The success of India's panchayats has been often cited as a marker of a silent, but very effective, democratisation and decentralisation. The local bodies are giving increased attention to better service delivery such as water supply and education. Muslim women play a better role in this change as seen in south Indian states mainly Kerala.

The two- day international conference on the theme "The Role of Women in Making a Humane Society" is planned to highlight these changes as well as to initiate deliberation on the role of women in conflict resolution which is related to social justice, equity and empowerment. The conference will also focus on capacity building among women who should be at the table in peace negotiation and post- conflict reconstruction. So far societies ravaged by civil war have had a greater role of women in reconstructing homes, family life and bringing normalcy, which also included the reinstating of Islam in family life after conflicts ended. They often learn to reach across deep divides to facilitate co-existence and co-operation more quickly than men.

The conference will have the following sessions:

1) Women in the time of the Prophet (PBUH): The session is expected to revisit the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) in the light of modern concepts of gender justice to illustrate that some of the modern regulations in defence of women's rights echo the instructions in the Quran and the life and teachings of the Prophet (PBUH). Special reference is to be made to the monumental work of Abdul Halim Abu Shaqqa, the Egyptian scholar.

2) Women's participation in electoral politics: It will involve detailed discussion as regards the changes in panchayat administration in which women's participation has become mandatory. Are the women still daughters, wives and sisters only, not self-referential human individuals in their own right? A rigorous analytical survey has to be made to show the changes in the administration of local bodies supported by case studies.

3) Role of Muslim women in socio- economic uplift: The session will be devoted to the areas where women's involvement is needed, like literacy programmes, primary and tertiary education, primary health care and sanitation. It will also be an enquiry into the current problems and their solutions.

4) Women and media: The role of media empowering women will be deliberated. Current situation and bias in the media in everything related to Muslim women will also come in for analysis. Both internal and external forces working behind the deliberate misrepresentation of Muslim women are to be analysed. This session will also deliberate over the issues involved in improving the media presence of Muslim women.

5) Education, religious and secular: The existence of girls-only madrasas will be deliberated upon. Do they give a comprehensive and holistic education to girls, or are they just one of the ways used by the society to keep women tied to old world restrictions devoid of real spirit of liberation found in Islam.

6) Status of Women in the Muslim world: This session will be a survey of the conditions of Muslim women in the Muslim world with special reference to Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. An analysis of the attempts at achieving gender justice and equality and the problems faced by social reformers.

7) Women-related laws in Muslim World: The conference also proposes to look at the legal framework of women's rights and their constitutional-legal protection across the Muslim world. Special focus will be there on recent Indian laws enacted to give exclusive protection to women.

Each session will have 4-5 papers and 2-3 scholars as discussants, apart from inaugural and valedictory sessions.