

Women Empowerment and Social Development: Recent Trend and Islamic Approach

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Abstract

The issues of women's development in contemporary world have received viable importance with women emerging out of their stereotype roles and responsibilities. Since 19th century, most of the nations including Bangladesh have been taking viable policies and programs for emancipating women from intense backwardness. It is needless to say that all these initiatives are backed by secular and feministic approaches that are revitalized by the steps taken in CEDAW and World Women's Conferences. However, the policy measures issued from these conferences have some conflicting outlook in respect of religious creed particularly Islamic views. Controversies and antagonism are noticed among the policy makers regarding Islamic codes of women's participation in development activities. An attempt has been taken in this article to diagnosis these controversies and to recommend remedies focusing Islamic credo. An analytical focus has also been made to develop a theoretical construct depending on approaches proposed by Shariah and to see how these approaches are able to facilitate women in sustainable betterment both in this world and the after world.

Keywords: Women's development, Islamic perspective, CEDAW, Women's participation, Shariah.

INTRODUCTION

Through the century, women remain confined within the four walls of home as the sex delegated reproductive agent since their emergence. They have been facing severe discrimination in social, economic and political arenas and exploiting by patriarchal dominance (Bhandari, M. P., 2023). In underdeveloped and developed nations, including Bangladesh such trends are strongly prevailed (Kumari et al., 2024). Along with its, poverty and illiteracy held down their position and prevent them to emerge as a potent force of development. During the last two decades, different approaches as the

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reaction of modernization and dependency theories are emerged for making equal the marginal status of women. Gender and Development (GAD), as an alternative approach developed by Socialists feminists' thinkers in the early 1980s has comprehensive focus on defining specific gender roles to different sexes. All these approaches have positive focus in making considerable progress for women in building human capabilities but for a long run, the impact of these approaches on mainstreaming thinking has been limited. At the beginning of the 21st century, due to the emergence of urbanization, modern educational facilities, high per capita income, emphasizing in generating employment and changing social norms, women status are marginally geared up in welfare states and societies (Ma & Yin, 2024). Rural economic transformation and household consumption structure: an empirical study in the context of urbanization. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 15(4), 18286-18302. Bangladesh, as a welfare state, has been emphasizing more in reducing gender gap in all sectors through mainstreaming women into national development (Khan et al., 2023). For this, different initiatives in all sectors have been taken and implemented by the government of Bangladesh (Alam et al., 2025).

Another paradigm, developed centuries ago, which offers a holistic perspective looking all aspects of women's life and assigning equal (not identical) gender roles depending on the peculiarities of sexes is yet to be included in broad framework of theories of women and development. Thinkers by passed it carefully blaming outdated to the demand of age. Lack of initiative and negligence to generalize this approach, intention to avoid it as fundamental or idealistic and misinterpretation in some cases to prove it outmoded. But the major policy measures proposed by thinkers and specialists for women development are not so longer different than the content of Islamic approach. Rather, it is emerged and framed under a broad perspective of an ideology, and its development is not affected by any intellectual or social resurrection or change. So, it has sustainable quality than other approach. Women's roles, responsibilities, rights are diligently and scientifically defined to avoid role conflict and acceptable performance of each sexes. In this paper an attempt is made to highlight and streamline the focuses of those areas where Islam emphasizes women's roles as development catalyst to build up a sustainable theoretical construct.

Objectives of the study are given below;

1. To review the underlying approaches of women development and policies regarding participation and developmental role of women taken in CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and Women's World Conferences especially in Beijing Conferences.

2. To examine the viability of Islamic approaches enabling women to participate and sustaining them in contributing nation development efforts.

3. To search a theory-building approach towards women's role as development catalyst for arresting misleading and disequilibrium construct about the role of women.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the secondary data particularly the literature embodied Shariatic rules and non Shariatic approaches, policies and their analytical premises regarding women's roles in economic and development activities. The declarations of divine Shariah in the context of women's role in development and various policy conferences on the present subject have been of great help to conduct this research. It is worth mentioning here that the Qur'an and Hadiths are used in this study as original and primary source of data. Other relevant literatures are also studied and examined carefully to develop the concluding remarks in this respect.

Operational Definitions of Key Concepts

Women: It is actually two smaller words, woe and man put together to signify that women brought woe (misery, grief, sorrow, etc) to man since according to Biblical teaching. The Greek Orthodox Church denied that woman had a soul and at the Council of Macon, a Bishop vehemently asserted that a woman did not belong to the human species (Kamal, 2009). According to the Oxford Dictionary, female is the opposite of male sex that can give birth.

Women, from Islamic view point: Islam clears that man and women are two physical forms of same souls. Allah declares in the Sura An-Nisa:

O mankind! reverence your guardians-Lord, Who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women- fear Allah, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights) and (reverence) the

wombs (that bore you) : for Allah watches over you. (Al Qur'an 4:1). (Ali, 1983).

This declaration says in plain meaning that all human beings' whatever sex or race or nationality stand on a footing of equality, as they all ultimately come from a single source.

Development catalyst: Development catalysts are the engineers and providers of any development activities or programs with a view to constructing and upgrade the status and conditions of respective sectors and unit of social organizations including state. In specific term, actors are men, women, boys and girls, young and old. The social organizations and fields of development are of, however, family, sectoral bodies of different social, administrative and business organizations and education, health, economy, agriculture, food security and family nutrition etc.

Nation Building: Nation building means construction actions for nation involved all development institutions and agents start from the fundamental social unit family. The primary concern of this nation building task is to constitute a group of citizens who are act as human capital and resource both in terms of strong personality with values and efficiency. After that, human capital is to be equipped with advanced technology, learning and training and resources for achieving developmental and sectoral goals for the same purpose.

Islamic Credo: Credo means a set of beliefs which constitutes and directs path in taking any action oriented measures for achieving defined objectives. Islamic credo refers also a broad framework contains a set of beliefs or principles which sensitizes trustees to execute divine plan and policies assigned by the supreme sovereign power, Allah in reaching the pre defined goal.

FINDINGS

Section 1: Focus on Major Approaches and Policy Measures Regarding Women's Role

Approaches are being developed to clarify the path how women can be integrated in the development process. However, the approaches and policy measures taken so long by modern thinkers are reviewed now. The

development approaches emerged up to the present time may be placed into a bracket entitled WID to GAD. Among other approaches, Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) are widely accepted and practiced in all over the world.

WID Approach: WID as a first approach was conceptualized in the 1970 and its underlying issue is that women are an untapped resource which can contribute to the national development discourse (Amin, 2006).

It reaffirms that women have a significant role to play in social and economic development, both nationally and globally. However, this approach to correct the imbalances has proved inadequate, and often women researchers and activists tried to understand ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the situation and emerged with a deeper theoretical understanding and some analytical tools. The tune is reflected in many writings, particularly in those concerned with gender issues (Boserup, 1970).

Welfare Approach: Since the 1950s, diverse approaches have been made. During the 1950s and 60s modernization and industrialization had little focus on women. However, during this period several relief programs were initiated in Europe following the havoc created by World War II. Women were identified as the main beneficiaries. The approach is termed the Welfare Approach. Women were given relief in their familial roles of mother, wife, and daughter. The significant point to note in this approach is that reproductive role is considered the most important role for women. It also looks at women as passive recipients, the lowest level of participation in development efforts (Duza & Hamida, 1993).

Anti-Poverty Approach: The new approach to women focused on poverty as the main ‘culprit’ creating problems for women. The Anti-Poverty approach kept itself at a safe distance from interfering with the prevailing gender ideology which glorified women’s subordinations. This approach met many of the practical gender needs of women by increasing women’s income. Since this approach did not advocate strategic gender needs, women’s involvement in economic resources, income, and employment increased their workload and worsened their overall situation due to the absent of autonomy. Women worked hard but remained invisible in national statistics (Duza & Hamida, 1993).

Equity Approach: WID group asserted that women are active participants in development discourse, though often they unacknowledged. The resulted

impact of such reaction, they identified the central issue of ‘women’s subordination’ as the key hole to their problem which became the centre of the Equity approach. The underlying logic in this approach is that women beneficiaries have lost ground to men in the development process. Therefore, in a process of redistribution, man have to share in a manner that entails women from all socio-economic classes gaining and men from all socio-economic classes losing, through positive discrimination policy if necessary’. Somehow this approach was identified with western exported feminism to developing countries. Many planners and activists felt antipathy toward this approach. Some quipped, to take “feminism to a woman who has no water, no food, and no home is to talk nonsense” (Duza & Hamida, 1993).

Efficiency Approach: Emphasis is put in this approach on development rather than on women assuming that greater and better participation of women in the development process would reduce gender inequality. Loaded with wide criticism, the efficiency approach is gaining popularity in developing countries as it can utilize women’s labor with minimum cost to restore growth rates. Women in this approach can meet only their practical gender needs at high cost of unpaid labor and/ or longer working hours (Duza & Hamida, 1993).

Empowerment Approach: This approach emerged in 1975 and accelerated during 1980. Empowerment approach has been interpreted as liberation from the position of women. It is the freedom to make choices, to decide for themselves their role in life and society without being bound by classic stereotype role images. It is self-reliance which enables them to be independent of both their own families and their husband’s families in times of crises such as divorce, widowhood and abandonment (Hamid, 1996). Empowerment approach focuses on women’s participation in decision making at the household, community, state and regional levels. It identifies the reason of women’s oppressions is of colonial and neo- colonial reasons, not only as the reason of men (Kamal, 2003).

Gender and Development (GAD): A GAD approach seeks to impress upon women’s subordination, and it focuses on ‘the social construction of gender’ tries to see development through the relationships between men and women. It stresses on the critical issue of unequal relations of power between men and women that prevents women’s full participation and prevents equitable development. With the goal of equitable and sustainable development the GAD approach tries to empower women. This approach also identifies and

distinguishes between women's practical and strategic needs (Duza & Hamida, 1993).

International conventions and events: Over the past 40 years, World Conferences on women, held in Mexico City, Copenhagen, Nairobi and Beijing have all highlighted at international level and the various outstanding issues related to the improvement of the status of women. From each of these global Conference has identified women as a more powerful and crucial role-agent in sustainable development and protecting the environment. It is also emphasized in these conferences that the human rights of women as an inalienable, integral and indivisible, so, human rights and health, material care and family planning facilities, and of access to education and information, as essential to the exercise by women of their fundamental rights (Mahtab, 2007).

CEDAW: The Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (*CEDAW*) is a Women's Bill of Rights addressing discrimination against women in all spheres of life. Women's human rights were accepted as "inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights" that "should form an integral part of UN human rights activities". Bangladesh has ratified the Convention with some reservations. Government does not consider as binding upon itself the provisions of Articles 2, 13(a) and 16.1(c) and (f) as they are conflicting with Shariah. Later, the government has withdrawn reservations about some provisions of CEDAW, relating to personal rights such as family benefits and guardianship of children. The withdrawn reservations of Bangladesh pertain to Article 13(a) and Article 16(1) (b) of the convention and reservation is now limited to Article 2 and 16.1(c) only (Mahtab, 2007).

CEDAW undoubtedly is an excellent innovation to protect women's legal rights by arresting all kinds of discrimination against them. It highly emphasizes on equal treatment for women in all spheres as human being and reaffirms equal rights of women. Showing respect Islamic sentiment, Government ratified it with some reservations. But recently reservation is withdrawn on some articles which are completely conflicting with Shariah.

Truly, CEDAW advocates and affirms women's rights to ensure equality in society, but it cannot be considered as the first Women's Bill of Rights. Before that, fourteen hundred years ago, a bill contained a comprehensive focus on women's roles as social engineer and, rights as client were proclaimed under a full fledged ideology named Islam. In this bill, women are

not only treated as human being only, also regarded as vicegerents to fulfill her assignments and enjoy her prescribed share in terms of rights and status in all strati of society. All these decrees are affirmed through the supreme law book the *Holy Qur'an, Hadith* and lastly, it reaffirmed with the speech of *farewell pilgrimage*. *Shariah* upholds justice to treat women as agents of social construct and makes equal her rights and roles based on the peculiarities of human nature and capabilities both intellectual and physiological under the broader preview of an ideology, Islam.

Such effort in *Islam* is called equity not equality in terms. Since, *Allah* has made man and woman as two distinct sexes and their duties and roles are also in accordance with their capabilities and limitations to a considerable extent. So, roles and rights would not be possible to equal but equity can only be achieved. From holistic and rationalistic view, CEDAW has manifested conflict with the concept of equality in Islam. Besides, withdrawn of reservations pertaining Article 13(a) and Article 16(1) (b) of the convention by the government of Bangladesh is also conflicting to *Shariah* decrees. The concept of equality is posited in the affairs of human dignity and honour. No doubt the sharing of man and women in human dignity and demands of honour as human beings are equal in the eyes of Allah depends on his performance but how can there be identical of all rights? From an ideological point of view, rights may be equal (equity in true sense) but will not to be identical. It is not necessary for equality of rights irrespective of sexes. Whether we do so then it is called identicalness of rights, not equality of rights. Because equality is different from identicalness. Equality means 'parity and equitableness' whereas identicalness means that 'they are exactly the same'. It is possible that a father distributes his wealth equally and equitably among his sons, but he may not distribute it identically. Because the father has different kinds of wealth and may his sons are educated and skilled with different talents and specialized knowledge. So, when he comes to distribute his wealth amongst his sons in terms of the value of the property and that there should be no preference or discrimination, he bequeaths his wealth according to the talents which he has found in them. (Mutaharri, 1991) Islam has never believed in preference and discrimination in favour of man as opposed to women. Islam has also observed the principle of equality between man and women. Islam is not against the equality of men and women, but it does not agree with the identicalness of their rights. So, equality focus would be justified then when it is considered from very natural emergence and configuration of two sexes.

Approaches and policy measures taken so far as are mainly centered on value free and emerged on any context of social inequity or injustice or events or oppressions against women. So, these approaches and policies are issued as a reaction to inequities of contemporary society. Besides, all these movements and agendas have emphasized on redistributive justice and access of women over the wealth and decision-making process in all strata of society without ascertaining and fixing actual path to achieve the goal. In fact, thinkers and policy planners have done a mistake repeatedly in throwing and launching the programs for women which is that their failure to make differentiation between ‘Equality’ (equity in true sense) and ‘identicalness’ as the broader perspective of goal achievement.

Section 2: Some Evidence of Women’s roles as Playing the Role of Development Catalysts at prophetic (sm) and khelaphat era

Since, there is no decree in Islam which forbids women from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity for it, so a set of evidence in this respect from authentic source of history especially during the regime of *Prophet (sm)* and righteous Caliphs are noted here.

Evidence 1: Woman as policy reverser

The second *Caliph Umar (RA)* noticed that people were paying extravagant amounts of *Mahr* (the marriage gift which is paid to the bride) and proposed to place a ceiling of 400 dirham confiscated and given to the public treasury. A woman immediately objected to this pronouncement from the back of the mosque, saying, “*You have no right to do this!*” When asked why, she quoted a verse from the ***Qur’an*** which says even if a man gives his bride a ton of gold, he may not take it back from her ‘.... except by oppression and injustice....’ thus she argued, since Allah permitted a rich bridegroom to bestow a large marriage gift on her bride, a mere *Chaliph* cannot legislate otherwise without contravening the teachings of the ***Qur’an***. There was no public outcry in the mosque because the woman had challenged *Umar*. Indeed, *Umar (RA)* said, “*The Women is right, and the Umar is wrong*” He also reproached his own lack of knowledge and said, “Everyone is more understanding than you *Umar*” (Hasan, 2006). Thus, a policy made by the Head of the State was reversed by an ordinary woman on constitutional ground.

Evidence 2: Woman as public official

Ibn Abdul Bakor in his book *Al-Istiab* has stated about a woman Sahabi, Hazrat Shifa, that Hazrat Umar (RA) entrusted her with some responsibilities of market management, called as *Hisbah*. Of course, the Muslim women used to put on long sheets of cloth (chador) over their normal dress as prescribed in the *Qur'an* (Hannan, 1980).

Evidence 3: Woman as entrepreneurs and traders

The trading activities of *Khadija (RA)* are well known. Although she did not actually go out with the caravans of goods, she was a woman who in full control of her own wealth and business. *Ibn Saad* in his *Tabqut* has reported that one woman Sahabi, *Asma bint-e-Muharrama (RA)* used to trade of 'Atar' (a kind of scent). *Ibn Saad* has also reported that another woman Sahabi, *Umar binteTabiza* used to go to market and purchased necessities of her husband (Hannan, 1980).

Evidence 4: Woman as worker in agro-field

During the Prophetic era, women used to help their husbands in agriculture. *Hazrat Asma bint-e-Abu Baker*, wife of *Hazrat Zubair (RA)*, used to work in the field with her husband, two miles away from home (Hannan, 1980). A woman came to *Allah's Messenger (PBUH)* once and complaining that one of man forbade her from working on her farm. He (*PBUH*) said: "Go work your date palms; for perhaps you might give some charity or do acts of righteousness" (Haq & Parvin, 2006).

Evidence 5: Woman as handiwork

Sowda (RA), wife of the *Prophet (PBUH)* was a skilled craftswoman and she used to impart training to others who were involved in her craft business. Once, the *Prophet (PBUH)* said to *Sowda (RA)*, "There is no doubt that you can go out of home if necessity arises" (Siddiqui & Shad, 1981).

Evidence 6: Woman as active participant in war

This is historically true that during the Prophet's life, women participated publicly in the religious life, took the oath of allegiance, and fought in the wars. The most important woman in the Prophet's lifetime was his wife *Khadijah (R)*. When *Prophet (PBUH)* conquered a city, he took an oath from both men and women to make the conquest complete. This is also an

indication that the Prophet gave some weight and importance to women alongside the men. On another dimension, it was astonishing to see that many women participated in *Prophet's* wars, some even fought in the first line (as *Nusaybah bint ka'b* or the *Ansari sahabiyyah*) who fought near the *Prophet* and defended him with her sword, others served as nurses or provided food and water to the fighters. There are also numerous reports in the books of *Hadith* and with the ***Prophet (PBUH)*** that women went to see Prophet (sm) on behalf of their tribes, and the Prophet always accepted their authority as representatives (Sarker, 2006).

Evidence 7: Women as development catalysts in Contemporary Muslim Worlds

Women in Saudi Arabia, today, are vigorously pursuing professional careers, and seeking to become active members of the society. Saudi women have proven their ability to handle responsibilities with great success, whether though their principal duty as mother, or as professionals. We look forward to women acquiring a major role in a way that will promote the interests of this nation based on *Shariah* (Begum, 2008). On March 10 of last year, Saudi businesswomen participated in the Second conference of Arab Businesswomen in Cairo. In recent years, several Saudi women have become legal advisors, dealing specifically with women's issues, and economic analysts, giving advice to women interested in investment (Internet, Saudia Arabia Spring 2009 Magazine).

Women in Islamic Republic of Iran have been vested with the constitutional right to get elected or appointed to the highest political and administrative offices of the land except the office of presidency. In 1987, the high council of the Cultural Revolution set up the Women's Social and Cultural Council charged with studying the legal, social and economic problems of women. Although in 1992, the directive of this council still emphasized the importance of family roles and rules out certain occupations and professions as religiously inappropriate, it also encouraged the integration of women in the labor force and attention to their interests and needs (Internet, The Contending Discourses in on Women in Iran). In Iran, 6% women are members of the faculty of the universities and 22% of them are Associate professors. 13% of the Journalists are women. In cinema and TV, more than 2,700 women are engaged (Khatun, 2001).

Section 3: Searching a Theory-Build up Approach to Activate the Developmental Role of Women

3:1- Islamic Approach in sensitizing the role of women as mother and in domestic arena:

Islam is a religion of nature and what is prohibited by religion? Answer is that, which is detrimental towards uprising and sustaining for mankind, Islam puts its restrictions there. This common philosophy may be materialized in respect of women's roles and responsibilities. Obviously, it is beyond explanation that as half of the nation's population, women have a crucial role in developing the country's economic, social and all other affairs. But the question is that how women will play this role?

Before taking any attempt to make productive the role of women as development catalyst, the first role of women as mother should highly be prioritized because they are the sole provider of quality citizens. Seeking employment of women, whenever there is a necessity arises for it, there is not any text in Islam which prohibits them to refrain from seeking such. But emphasis should be given to the job natures especially which do not affect her nature and instinctive role as motherhood and the needs of society as a whole. Islam regards women's role in the society as a mother and a wife as the most sacred and essential one. Neither maids nor baby –sister can possibly take the mother's place as the educator of an upright, complex free, and carefully reared child. Such noble and vital role, which largely shapes the future of nations, cannot be regarded as "idleness."

Family is a foundation of multi-faceted development construction of our society. Women are the key actor of this unit for developing society. Islam protects and enshrines this role of women with legal proclamation. From Islamic viewpoint, women enjoy a position of dignity and honor as mother, wife, daughter and sister. Not only she is considered equal (not identical) but sometimes it appears that she enjoys greater privileges than men. For instance, she has an equal share in man's earnings, but man has no share in her earnings and property. Doing household works, is not obligatory for woman rather she has right to demand payment for doing household activities including feeding milk her children from her husband. Whether she does not do so and performs domestic activities along with self-motivation, considering it a matter of moral responsibility. She is only doing a favor to

her husband for which he should be grateful to her (Mahmud & Maksuda, 1998).

So, it may be claimed that performing the domestic affairs including feeding milk her children and playing the role as tutor for children, women are cooperating her husband as to save domestic net expenditures. So, women, as housewife influence immensely the household economic development from this viewpoint. She saves the cost of baby foods, maids and tutors and thereby adds economic solvency for family. Islam has provisioned to recognize the contribution of women in household affairs by calculating these with economic value and there by glorified their developmental role in the history.

3:2- Islamic Approach prohibiting slavery to fashion:

Now-a-days, the products of cosmetics and fashion industries provide unique services for women. Especially, they are more interested in using foreign brand rather than our local products which has no return in our economy or any material as well as immaterial development as because of unproductive sector. Many women spend most of their income on cosmetics, creams, lotions and getting services of beautician in parlor to become more beautiful. It is hard to believe that more than 33 billion dollars are spent yearly on cosmetics and weightless programs alone, not to mention another 11 billion dollars are spent on perfume. Though these numbers are West alone, but it is assumed from this figure that women have indeed become slaves to this all-consuming industry. There are millions of women's who go even further extreme by having cosmetic surgery done. According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), there were over 5.7 million cosmetic surgical procedures done in the year 2008 (Cosmetic Surgery Statistics <https://surgery.org/stats2009/2010stats.pdf>). It's a real tragedy that women feel they need to have an operation and go through all that pain and turmoil just to become "more beautiful" or "more acceptable physical beauty".

Most of the women even feel uncomfortable leaving the house without makeup on. Fashion worlds make women "slaves to cosmetics". In fact, the fashion and makeup industry can only survive by exploiting women and making them completely dependent, enslaved. For example, nail polish, one of the items of beautifying women's nail through coloring with different colors as necessity of makeup matching. Making easier this process, cosmetic industries produce new products named 'remover'. Fashion conscious women use this remover while she feels coloring her nails with another new one and

replacing the old, which is already used recent earlier for ensuring makeup matching from head to toes. Cosmetic producers enjoy to produce more new items while notice women's spontaneous participation in fashion world. Unfortunately, they do not think that it has no reproduce value in respect of their physical, spiritual, economic and social development. It is needless to say that such attitudinal tendency of women certainly the effort to wastage of money, social peace, sprit and beauty of conjugal life.

Islam opens chance for women to avoid expenses involving fashion world which certainly leads a path to save the unproductive cost in development sector. Such identical path of **Shariah** leads women towards development by two ways; one is discouragement and prohibition of getting limitless and uncovered make up with various fashion items while going to outside home. Needless to say, such uncovered exhibition of women's physical beauty leads sexual anarchy in society which ultimately destroys the moral and spiritual development of young generation.

Islam prescribes in this context wearing '*Hijab*'—the dress code of Islam, using to cover physical beauty and there by enshrines the essences of beauty of women. *Hijab* is an Arabic word, which literally means to cover or conceal and is used to describe the dress code of a *Muslim* woman. Many feels that *Hijab* is oppressive dress for women, but that's only because they do not properly understand it. *Hijab* is actually a beautiful gift given to women to protect themselves from the ills that haunt society today. When a woman leaves her tight, fashionable clothes and dons the modest clothing and headgear that characterize most *Muslim* women, they feel a rejuvenated sense of freedom. Why? Because they no longer worry about how others judge their appearance.

As noted from observation of an American Muslim woman, one can easily realize how *Hijab* magnitudes the statuses of *Muslim* women as engineering social construct. She opined, "When I am dressed in my *Hijab*, I expect that when people look at me, they do not view me as a sex symbol, but rather as a woman who has decided that her body is not public material for the world to see. When I need to leave the house, I do not have to waste half an hour in deciding what to wear that will make me most attractive. Nor do I spend another hour fixing my hair and makeup. So, I look my best, because I really do not care how others view my appearanc. I do not want to be judged by my exterior. I do not have to worry on finding the right outfit that will be most flattering to my figure, or that exact shade of lipstick, which will be most

complementary to my skin tones. Thus I free up a lot of time that would have otherwise been uselessly spent very superficially. Time that I can put to much better use! (Kamal, 2009)

In another way, *Islam* discourages over- expense due to getting materialistic happiness as well as beautifies physical appearance rather meeting up basic needs of all and developing inner worth of human being. *Allah* proclaims none but he who leads a simple life will get the affection of Him. It is also the sayings of *Prophet (sm)* that he who wastes (money and other material-immaterial wealth) will be a brother of Satan (evil doer). Thus, Islam teaches women to refrain from unnecessary expenses due to getting beautify herself which in turns increase only unproductive cost in economy.

Islam does value beauty, but everything has its time and place. For example, a husband and wife are equally required to beautify themselves for each other to enhance and improve their relationship. For women, their husbands are the most important men in their lives, and if they spent as much time dressing up and trying to please their husbands as they do for other males' marriages would be a lot more successful in all society. Of course, this goes equally for men as well. When a husband and wife try their utmost to please one another rather than all of society, what a loving and beautiful relationship they will have! Thus, Islam does not prohibit women from dressing up and looking beautiful, but only when it is done for their husbands, who after all should be the only male opinion that is important in a women's life (Kamal, 2009).

3:3- Islamic Approach of Women's Participation in Outer world Development Activities:

At present time, Governments of developing nations including Bangladesh are highlighting the economic role of women as a vital part of labor force in rising and equalizing contribution both male and female in gross national income. Government thinks that keeping women aloof from outer world economic participation, as representatives of half of the population, country's development will be completely difficult. Feminist movement sensitized this trend in the name of financial movement by urging them to leave their homes and work outside along with men.

Ironically speaking, the *Shariah*, as a revealed knowledge unambiguously delineated all codes encompassing every aspect of human society and its representatives both sexes. *Shariah* declares clearly the roles, responsibilities, status and shares of male and female as the key actors of social development.

Shariah has done nothing more rather reveals role allocation only based on sex peculiarities and open system approach facilitating the benefits of moderation, change or alteration to the human society while contingent demands. It means the role allocation that is done for getting maximum equity depending on their sex difference is not exclusive and rigid. It may be changed depending on time, space and overall conditional requirements as specified by *Shariah*. Development thinkers generalize *Shariah* as rigid and backward-looking in respect of women's role in development. It's not true. There are so much evidence in the history of Islam where women played unparalleled role in different perspectives of nation building while necessity emerged. Development starts from the arena of family that is the basic source of providing quality generations to nation and *Shariah* acknowledges her roles in family with economic valuation.

Contemporary women specialists and thinkers treat and activate women beyond their natural and instinctive capacities i.e cognitive and physiological attributes. Moreover, their lot of performance in the domestic sphere is not recognized with economic value. Non- recognition of household work shows almost half the population as unemployed and inactive. The fact that the Labor Force Survey (LFS) of 1989-95 counts 77% of all women over ten years old as housewives and economically inactive reflects this discriminatory attitude. A survey conducted by the USAID shows that economic valuation of women's unpaid household work would add 4 billion dollars to the net global income. In the developing world, some efforts have been undertaken to evaluate women's household work. In India, and Pakistan, the housewives contribution to the GDP is nearly 49% and 20%-40% growth of national income respectively (Parveen, 1995). In Bangladesh, no effort has yet to be taken to evaluate household work at the national level.

However, since economic activity is designed in terms of exchange value, the activities mentioned above generally remain outside the scope of recognized economic activities. Now it is an urgent need to redefine the concept of economic activities where women's contribution in family arena gets visibility and thereby measurement status with economic value. After that, thinkers should ascertain whether women have enough time, physical response and need to come out home for participating economic activities or not.

Islam realizes and understands women's nature. In Islam, a husband has no right in forcing his wife to work in order to bring in more income. In fact, he

is 100% responsible for all her expenses, and even if she were to work, he has no right to a cent of her income. Even if a wife makes more money than her husband, he is still required by Islamic law to provide her and spend out of his pocket for her food and dress and whatever else she need. Muslim women are indeed very fortunate. In spite of that, Islam has kept chance for getting involved in outside economic activities depending on contextual factors under *Shariah* codes.

Qur'anic command of mutual consultation (*Shura*) has to be followed by *Muslim* while facing peculiarities beyond the codes regarding role allocation of male-female for sacking greater interest of living necessities. *Shariah* assigns duties both for husband and wife in upbringing their children's physical and mental growth as well as enlighten by giving education. It is also the responsibility of both of caring domestic affairs while and when necessary. Exclusively, while women fall in maternity role and unable to work outside the home, husband is liable for providing maintenance cost being a 'Kawwam' for their wife. Begum (2008) opined that due to two factors- supply and demand space and need of women's participation in outer world activities are emerged. According to her, 'Earning is not compulsory for women to run their family, again their employment has not yet been prohibited by *Shariah* due to many socio- economic reasons, so, due to unfavorable condition of the society, women may demand job. On the other hand, different organizations demand women employees. Women employment in an organization depends on its goals, objectives and nature'. Demand factor is stimulated by economic factor, social factor and religious factor. Recently, women are involving themselves in many odd jobs in different organizations including NGOs because of financial need and utilizing their educational qualifications where compliance of *Shariah* is quite difficult due to nature of job and unfavorable job environment.

Excepting economic reason, social factors are also responsible for employment of women outside their homes. For example, some parents feel tired to take the responsibility of their sons having low income. They want to get relief engaging their sons with educated working women so that both of them can take their responsibilities together. Again, some parents have no male child. So, they want to educate their female child as getting earning source who will give financial supports them in future. Such types of peculiarities are found in our society while women's participation in

economic activities stands for emergency requirements for sustaining and building a dynamic society.

Religious factor has also positive focus on women's participation. Women's participation in professional work is essential to perform all sorts of *Fard-e-Qifayia* types of work. Moreover, efforts of the men to perform their economic responsibility to family as well as other responsibility to the society have failed to overcome all social odd. Therefore, educated women are employed to meet the instant demand of society.

Islamic decree in respect of women's participation in economic activities is tried to make clear in the above-mentioned analysis. Islam is a religion of humanity. So, provision to overcome any hardship of human being is legally approved under the boundary of Islam. "Every woman has right to develop her talents and to work within the rules of Islam. *Ayesha (R)*, the **Prophet's (PUBH)** wife was a judge at various times, a political activist and, after the demise of **Prophet (PBUH)**, the interpreter of his teachings (Sohrab, 1999). So, considering the following issues, authority should take measures to design and implement the framework of women's involvement in development activities if sustainable approach is desired to be developed in this perspective.

Firstly, priority should be given on male employment over female except in case of some helpless female candidates. Because male official addresses the financial problem of a family with members like father, mother, brothers, sisters etc., whether an employment to a female officials adds to the financial strength of her family as in most cases her husband also earns. It is true that there are women who cannot maintain themselves under the male shelter. Such cases should be dealt with by the state's own responsibility. It means government should implement programs to take off their awkward financial status. After doing that priority of male employment over female can be an acceptable approach.

Secondly, for improving the quality service sector, merit based employment should get priority over 'quota'. Ensuring equal participation in economic activities through practicing quota has no rational ground in *Shariah*. Such western concept of equality is reiterated again in the CEDAW which is conflicting with the concept of equality in Islam. In this relation, 'age bar' or 'age limit' can be relaxed or withdrawn since the need for a job of a woman can be fabricated in different stages of her life.

Thirdly, Islamic approach entertaining women's participation in job market is encouraged by Islam but some codes of Islam for this purpose have to be practiced by the authority. For example, conducive working environment for female employees included separate sitting room, prayer room, toilet facilities, dining room and transport facilities etc. has to be confirmed.

Fourthly, another important code of *Shariah* is dress code. Primarily, there is a code both for male and female in *Shariah*. It firstly demarcated the parts of human body both male and female which are to be covered by sober clothes and in case of female, covering parts are extended to a degree because of concealing her beauty which produces attraction and enchantment, and which ultimately helps to extend the sexual anarchy. In the Holy ***Qur'an Allah (SWT)*** has given order to Muslim women, which must be followed by them, whenever they go out of their home, they should fully cover their bodies with a long piece of cloth. This recognizes women's participation in the economic activities of society. *Ayesha (RA)* stated, "*Jainab (RA)* was the most generous amongst us. Because she used to work herself and give charity" (Siddiqui & Shad, 1981). There is no restriction on benefiting women's exceptional talent in any field. Even for the position of judge, where there may be a doubt about women's fitness for the post due to her more emotional nature. Early Muslim scholars *Abu –Hanifa* and *At- Tabary* holding there is nothing wrong with it (Islam, 2006).

Anyway, a misleading conception prevailed in development literature regarding religious focus on women's roles as development catalyst. They blame religion especially Islamic codes of employment for women both inside and outside the home. Islam presents a value laden model for the said purpose. Actual reason in making marginalization of women's economic and developmental roles in development is 'patriarchy' which is strengthened with misinterpretation, distortion, biased explanation and knowledge gap of *Shariah*. Sociologists observe that patriarchal discourse constitutes separate spheres of men and women. It determines inferior position for women and superior position for men; it declares men's knowledge and replaces women's voice by men's voice (Amin, 2006). Due to the strong influence and dominance of patriarchal values, a girl child from childhood, is socialized into the context of a subordinate position to men in society and for this, parents do not feel encouraged to spend equal money for treatment, education and other maintenance. Moreover, decision making power and economic control even women's inheritance right is manipulated by the male partner as because of

male dependency along with patriarchy. Islamic values in this respect are totally reverse. Islam does not differentiate between male and female child in providing basic needs and fulfillments. In domestic affairs and also in the affairs outside the home, women have given chance to counsel with her male partner and male partner is also said to pay attention to his wife's opinion and considering before taking decision. He is responsible to give women her defined share of property spontaneously. Actually, Islamic approach offers a positive outlook to activate women's role which is conducive to development.

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, women have been greatly oppressed in almost every civilization. In fact, even the term "women" is derogatory. So, there was a real need for a movement to emancipate and elevate women. A woman's role in society, as envisioned by Islam, is manifold. Islam looks forward to her active participation in matters concerning the society and contributing greatly to almost all walks of life.

Islam presents a full fledged approach for women permitting involvement in economic and development activities both home and outside the home. This approach is equipped with the concept of divine *Shariah* encompassing every aspect of women's life conducive for total well-being of society which begins firstly by highly emphasizing the role of women as mother--- core agent of nation building. The Islamic approach is not feminism neither patriarchal in nature. Its development is enshrined with need and priority basis both for women individually and collectively for society. It gets holistic view within an ideology. Its emergence is not dependent on any societal change or occurrence or any action or reaction of historical events as like as the approaches prevailed at present time for defining women's roles and responsibilities. These non- Islamic approaches follow an alternative course of action, time, event, reasons of being emergence and after consuming a particular course of time each approach lost its effectiveness which resulted impact of the next one coming into being to overcome the limitations of earlier. Still these trends of emergence of approaches are going on. It may be defined as the contingency efforts to build up theoretical construct. Islam also emphasizes this along with prioritizing the concept of social justice and equity and keeping unchanged the core values and major policy measures of the ideology. So, it needs no overall change with any effect of any reaction. Whether any need has emerged due to changing demands of the society, there

is also provision of bringing about changes highlighting the major policy document – the ***Holy Qur'an*** and the Hadithes and emphasis also be given in importation of input for developing approaches on indigenous sources including Muslim worlds replacing of western conceptualization scheme.

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