



IQBAL'S PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT¹

HUMAIRA SHAHBAZ²

ABSTRACT

Diversity is a prominent feature of great thinker poet Dr. Muhammad Iqbal. Interdisciplinary fields of knowledge such as language, literature, history, sociology, economics and sciences etc. are some of the important interdisciplinary areas of Iqbal Studies. Iqbal's first work "*Ilm-ul-Iqtisat*" was about field of Economics. This research is made to study Iqbal's perspective of economic with respect to Women Empowerment as reflected in his life, thoughts and all his works in Persian, Urdu and English. The content analysis of his poetry, essays and letters presents feminist approach of Iqbal towards women's empowerment such as sponsorship laws, inheritance rights, economic autonomy etc. Mostly he is the advocate of principles laid down for the economic empowerment of women in the universal Islamic social system. The indicators listed through this study can be used to measure the level of women's economic empowerment in our existing socio-cultural context and steps can be taken to improve the existing situation with respect to women's role in social development.

Keywords: Economics, Women, Empowerment, Feminism, Iqbal, Islamic law, culture, Society, Indicators

JEL Codes: A1

Economics is the condition of a region or group regarding its material prosperity whereas a definition of Eempowerment is offered as the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights.¹ Thus Economic empowerment of women is an important indicator of overall empowerment of women. According to Jacob Viner, Canadian-born economist, economics is what economists do², it is important to understand what perspectives of economics prevail in a certain socio-cultural context, presented by the economists of that land. Iqbal was not an economist in his core competencies but he had great concern regarding the economic condition on Muslims of his time and he thought of writing a book on the science of economics, which was his first published work, *Ilmul-Iqtisad*. Other than that the poet of East and Islam reflects relentlessly on the existing socio-cultural norms of his land especially within the Muslims of subcontinent. Iqbal considered women as key figures in social development. This study is made to instrument the feminist approach of Iqbal in the existing feminist approaches of that time, with respect to Women's Economic Empowerment and enlist the indicators. Empowered individuals are the unit of empowered society, therefore economic, social, religious, political, cultural, psychological and educational empowerment of both men and women is a hallmark to national development. Economic empowerment, out of all these types of empowerments of an individual is of paramount importance because the economic stability of individuals makes it easy for them to get other forms of empowerments, as they are related to one another.

Man, from the very beginning of humanity, seems to be striving according to his ability and need, which keeps him wandering in search of the best. That is why human needs are related to the human economy. Maulana Mufti Abul Khair Arif Mahmood in his article "Issues of livelihood and Islamic teachings" writes on the situation of chaos due to human beings that man works indiscriminately to fulfil his legitimate and illegitimate desires and starts robbing other human beings of their livelihood".³ Economic Empowerment of every individual of society leads to reduced inequalities amongst the member of a society.

Over the time a number of movements have emerged addressing the various aspects of women empowerment. Socialist feminism focuses to transform basic structural and economic arrangements of society by removing the barriers of

¹ This research is presented as per the implementation activities of HEC funded project NRPU-2020#12404, awarded to Dr. Humaira Shahbaz,

² Principle Investigator, NRPU-2020, Senior Instructor, Persian Department, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan. faculty Persian Department, under progress at ORIC, NUML. hshahbaz@numl.edu.pk

gender, sexuality, class and race and equal sharing of resources. Marxist feminism views women oppression as originating from the right of private property. Capitalism is held responsible for women oppression because women mainly contribute in the production of those goods and services (household, childcare) that have no exchange value. So Marxist feminists work for the dissolution and break up of women's economic dependence upon men. Radical feminism views patriarchy as a "sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege."⁴ In a healthy society, economics should follow morality. Morality should never follow economics. But unfortunately, in capitalistic societies morality has become dependent on economics.⁵ Islamic feminism endorsed the equal rights for women. Cooke (2001, p. 59) states, "Islamic feminism is not a coherent identity, but rather a contingent, contextually determined strategic self-positioning movement." Islam is primarily a cosmopolitan culture that, since its inception, has preached the sort of ethnic and religious tolerance that many Western societies are still trying to achieve, although it has long failed to eradicate certain social and political inequalities based on class, gender, and religion. Islam is practiced differently in the entire Islamic world due to different factors. Therefore the problems faced by Muslim women are different depending on cultural, social, political and economic conditions. Socialist feminists view inequality of women deeply rooted in economic dependency.

Islam, with its vastness, universality, comprehensiveness and integrity, guides all aspects of human life, including economic aspect of life by presenting Islamic rules, ethics and laws. Islam seeks to create economic equality between individuals and society. The principle of Islamic economic policy is that the circulation of wealth should be common throughout society. If it is with only a few people then happiness will come to some people and the rest will be forced to live a miserable life. The more the circulation of capital among the members of the society, the more its value will increase.

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal calls the economic dependence as the prolific mother of all the various forms of vice.⁶ He had great learning experience of the knowledge from east and west. He had lived in west and had closely observed the goods and the ills of that society and actually realised the true essence of Islam as a lifestyle in even better manner after that experience. In a letter to the editor of *Zamindar*, he writes: (translation)

...I am Muslim. I believe that the Qur'an is the best cure for the economic ills of human beings. There is no doubt that the power of capitalism is a kind of curse to the world when it goes beyond moderation, but the way to save the world from its harmful effects is not to remove that power from the economic system. As the Bolsheviks suggest. The Holy Qur'an has the power that Muslims have not studied the economic aspects of Islam, nor would they have known what a great blessing Islam is in this particular sense.⁷

Iqbal had observed the western society very closely. To him the west's struggle for women emancipation is all about economic empowerment of this deprived section of society:

"The so-called "emancipation of the western woman" necessitated by western individualism and the peculiar economic situation produced by an unhealthy competition, is an experiment, in my opinion, likely to fail, not without doing incalculable harm, and creating extremely intricate social problems. Experience has already shown that the economic emancipation of women in the west has not, as was expected, materially extended the production of wealth..... What the larger economic, social and political forces that are now working in the world will bring about, nobody can foretell."⁸

Women in modern times struggled for their emancipation and claimed for 'equality' and 'complete freedom'. Iqbal was aware of the oppressed women in his time and while acknowledging this and understanding the complexity of the problem to some extent. He expresses in *Zarb-e-Kalim*: (translation)

I am also saddened by the oppression of women
Not possible, but to get rid of this difficult contract!⁹

Allama Iqbal was a believer in equality between men and women. Responding to the letter of thanks from Anjuman-e-Khawateen-e-Islam Madras, he said on January 7, 1928, (translation)

"... I do not need to say that in Islam there is absolute equality between men and women. This is what I have understood from the verse of the Holy Qur'an. Some scholars believe in the supremacy of man, the verse which is doubted is well known: According to the Arabic idiom, his interpretation that man has superiority over woman does not seem to be correct... Elsewhere, the Qur'an al-Hakim says, "In many other respects, there is no difference between men and women."¹⁰

Allama Iqbal, was saddened about the injustice done to women in inheritance in society. Iqbal mentioned the words of Turkish poet Ziya: "The foundation of the nation and the state is the family! 'As long as the full wroth of the woman is not realized, national life remains incomplete. The upbringing of the family must correspond with Justice; therefore equality is necessary in three things- in divorce, in separation and in inheritance.'"¹¹ Iqbal replies and explains how Islam has not does any injustice towards the rights of inheritance for girls and women:

"...The share of the daughter is determined not by any inferiority inherent in her, but in view of her economic opportunities, and the place she occupies in the social structure of which she is in a part and parcel. While the daughter, according to Muhammadan Law, is held to be full owner of the property given to her by both the father and the husband the time of her marriage; while further, she absolutely owner her doer-money which may be prompt or deferred according to her own choice, and in lieu of which she can hold procession of the whole of her husband's property till payment, the responsibility of maintaining her throughout her life is wholly of the rule of inheritance from this point of view ,you will find that there is no material difference between the economic position of sons and daughters ,and it is really by this apparent inequality of their legal shares that law secures the equality demanded by the Turkish poet."¹²

Iqbal's philosophy of economics pertaining to women's empowerment is reflected not only in his first ever published prose work, *Ilm-ul-Iqtisad* but in his other writings as well such as speeches, letters, essays etc. In *Ilm-ul-Iqtisad* Iqbal reviewed the economics of population growth and criticized child marriage and polygamy. Iqbal's views on economics show that he supports the active role of women in earning a living. For example, in this regard, this book *Ilmul Iqtisad*: "... In some professions, the artisan's wife and her children also get a chance to lend a hand, but in most cases, the earnings of the woman become equal to that of her husband. (Ilmul iqtisad)"¹³

Iqbal considers women as part of the labour force of a country. According to Iqbal's economic philosophy as described in *Ilmul Iqtisad*, the second component of a nation's labor force is the division of labor. In the early stages of civilization, every human being does all the work himself to meet his personal needs. He is the architect of his own hut and you also make arrows, bows and other tools for prey. But even in this case, to some extent, the principle of division of labor does apply. The woman spins the yarn. Makes clothes to wear and cooks. But men do more work that requires more energy and agility. Gradually the division of labor is no longer based on gender. Rather, it is based on differences of personal ability. Iqbal clearly defines the rules of economics that if division of labour is as per the capacity and capability of the workers that children and women will also be able to take advantage of cottage industry of that country.¹⁴

Iqbal was in the favour of women working to earn their bread and butter, but definitely within the moral and ethical values of region and religion. He share his observation with his friend Molavi Insha Ullah, editor of *Watan*, in a letter: (translation)

"Three Italian women and two men were playing on the deck and dancing and rejoicing. One of the women, aged thirteen or fourteen, was very beautiful. I must honestly admit that her beauty touched me for a while. She started asking for rewards from the passengers and all the effects vanished because in my view, the beauty in which there is no abstinence is worse than the ugliness ".¹⁵

There are many factors besides religion that affect women empowerment including but not limited to the level of economic development. Local and regional culture, which evolves very slowly over time; and law and policies of the government are some of these factors. Unlike in some other societies and religions, Muslim women have property rights, they are entitled to their share in inheritance, they are allowed to participate actively in economic and social activities, and in many situations they have equal rights with their male counterparts. As the nature of productive economic activities has changed over time, largely due to changes in technology, societies have faced questions regarding what women should or should not do regarding work beyond their domestic sphere. The forces that constrain women in the Muslim world are not religion itself, but culture, social norms, laws and simply lack of opportunities due to low levels of economic development.¹⁶

Iqbal was brought up and lived in a culture where women were empowered in different ways culturally. We can find examples of some empowered women in his life. His mother Imam Bibi was a resourceful and pious woman. It was a sign of her abstinence that once Iqbal was still an infant, Imam Bibi realized that her husband, Sheikh Noor Mohammad, was employed to a person whose earnings were illicit. Despite the assurance, when Imam Bibi was not satisfied, she gave up Iqbal's infancy with mother feed so that not a single drop of haram sustenance could become a part of his body. Imam Bibi sold some of her ornaments and bought a goat, the milk of which she gave to Iqbal until

she became convinced of her husband's word. Later, Sheikh Noor Muhammad quit his job. This example shows how an empowered woman took a very important decision in her life with so much ease just because of she was empowered enough of use her valuable belongings.¹⁷

Sardar Begum's Iqbal's second wife did not had much demands from Iqbal, but she used to insist on regular job of Iqbal as advocate so that the household expenses are met efficiently and instead of living in a rented house, they can build their own house. After some time, she saved money from Iqbal's income and sold some of her jewelry to help build their own house.¹⁸ This was the same wife to whom Iqbal in a letter dated 26th August 1931, before going for a Round Table Conference in England had explained clearly the legal rights of her wife and daughter and encouraged her to get her share from Iqbal's property, in case of any mishap while he was traveling.¹⁹

Iqbal expects women to play her role in the financial matters of the family when and where required, to support the husband in time of constraints. Even in a letter to his father, Sheikh Noor Muhammad, Iqbal dated 9 June 1918, suggested that his first wife Karim Bibi should spend either by selling her jewelry presented to her as gift on wedding by her in-laws, on the studies of their son and Iqbal will compensate when he will have enough amount to pay: (translation)

"... What you have written in this letter is absolutely true. The same thing was in my heart. And this is the best answer to her letter. It is better for his mother to spend her silver and gold capital on her education, to spend at least part of what she has taken from my parents, not to spend it on her parents."²⁰

A wife's *Haq Mahr* (a wedding gift), as directed by Islam is women's right and man's obligation to pay at the time of wedding or afterwards as decided by both. In above mention letter to his second wife, para six of the letter describes how Iqbal followed this rule of Islam, which strengths and empowers his wife financially: (Translation)

"I had verbally stated that I have fixed Rs.15000 rupees as your *Haq Mahr* which was not decided at the time of Nikkah (wedding), but now with my own will I am fixing this amount, and writing here for your satisfaction. As per Islamic Shariah this amount is debt on me and you have all the rights to retrieve this amount from my property. According to Shariah, you have the right to occupy all kinds of property until you receive the aforesaid amount."²¹

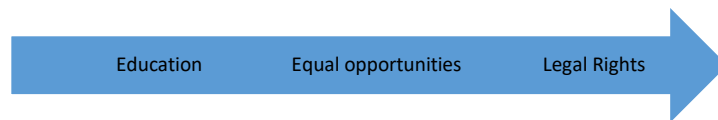
Iqbal used to pay the expenses of his first wife Karim Bibi as well. In a letter dated 13 June 1922, he discusses the matter of *Haq Mahr* of his first wife with his elder brother Sheikh Atta Muahmmad: (Translation).

Some time ago, Aftab's mother wrote a letter to me asking for five year salary to be paid to her in advance but I did not reply. Today this letter has come after many days. She writes that if I cannot pay her in advance, then her *Haq Mahr* should be given. Since this is her Shariah (legal as per Islamic law) right, there can be no excuse for paying it. The documents of *Mahr* will probably be in the house, a copy will be there and one will be with Hafiz Sahib. Before I reply to this letter, I would like to see that document. For that, please send the paper to me via registry for safe delivery.²² Her further writes to his nephew Sheikh Ejaz in a letter dated 15 June 1922, in this regard:

I have written (to family in) Gujrat for the copy of *Haq Mahr* paper. I knew in that they will claim for this and I actually wanted them to claim. Therefore, I did not reply to her first letter in which she asked for a loan of two thousand rupees. I was sure that if the money was not given then she would claim her right.²³

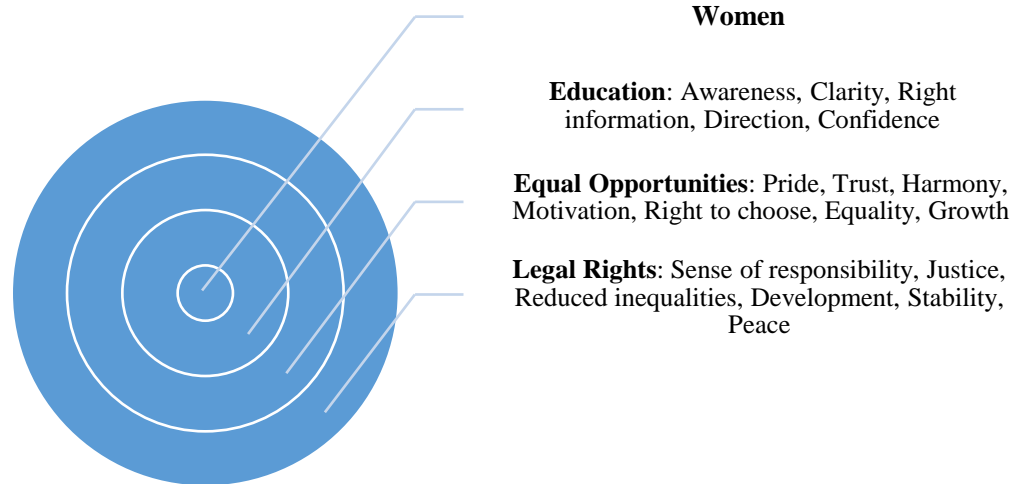
This why Iqbal lays so much emphasis on religious education for girls to know their rights. Education is key to train and empower the individuals, regarding the roles and rights of one another. He considered religious education enough for the girls but he still feel it important that girls should be educated on the subject of "Domestic Economic" in specific, as well:

The woman is the principal depository of the religious idea. In the interests of a continuous national life, therefore, it is extremely necessary to give her, in the first place, a sound religious education. That must, however, be supplemented by a general knowledge of Muslim History, Domestic economy, and Hygiene.²⁴



Figure#1: Indicators of Women Economic Empowerment

Proper education, is the first key indicator towards the economic development of women, followed by the legal opportunities offered to women as their basic right to choose and to make decisions of their life. Legal rights will confirm the chances of economic empowerment of women.



Figure#2: The Ripple Effect of Women's Economic Empowerment

The ripple effect of the indications to empower women economically is shown in above figure. Woman as an educated individual of a society, will be aware of her rights and roles to be played in social development. She will have clarity of mind and right information to be equipped with. This will help her move in right direction with full confidence. As a ripple effect of quality education, the first this indicator of women empowerment, will further move on in an environment full of equal opportunities for men and women. Woman offered with equal opportunities will give her sense of pride in being an active member of society as woman. The trust of family and society in her will bring harmony among the segments of society. The right to choose for an educated woman will give her equal status to decide for her life and contribute in the economic empowerment of herself and the growth in development of society. If an educated woman, provided with equal opportunities to move in her life, is empowered with legal support, the justice will prevail and a maximum of sustainable development goals (SDGs) especially: Reduced Inequalities, No Poverty, Peace and Justice will be achieved.

I. CONCLUSION

Iqbal's view of women's economic empowerment is that of Islamic feminism. Iqbal considered women as key component of work labour force of a country. He believed that women's sovereignty will be truly realized when society's attitudes towards women change, they will be treated with respect and dignity, and justice and equality in all their dealings. To him woman rights are the human rights and a woman as individual of society plays key role in the betterment of social structure and development. An unnatural, inhumane, non-Islamic way of life can bring chaos in social fabrication. Women's economic empowerment is essential for the attainment of basic human rights and the establishment of gender equality. For this, it is important that women do not face obstacles in the decision-making process and access to resources so that men and women can play their part in a fruitful life. Economic stability will enable women to defend themselves in the event of any financial crisis. When people understand their regional perspectives, national leaders and thinkers will consider the issue of women's economic empowerment and create a whole system. Then women will be able to better contribute to the national economic and social growth. Economic empowerment of women is a key to achieve SDGs gender equality and reduced inequalities of United Nations goals as well²⁵.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

Iqbal's perspective of Women's economic empowerment may be included to the national curricula, as a process of indigenization of curriculum, educate the young minds. To empower the women it is very important to have balance between culture and religion of that respective society. In order to maximize the welfare of society, especially Muslim society should implement the law regarding the inheritance, marriage, divorce, etc. which is by all means empowers

