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How to Cite:

Dr. Syed Toqeer Abbas and Dr. Muhammad Riaz. 2024: "Islamic Teachings regarding Minority and Women Rights: A Critical Evaluation of Anwar Sheikh's Allegations". *Al-Mithāq (Research Journal of Islamic Theology)* 3 (01):23-31.

Article History:

Received:
03-02-2024

Accepted:
29-02-2024

Published:
20-03-2024

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Conflict of Interest:

Author(s) declared no conflict of interest

Abstract & Indexing



Publisher



HIRA INSTITUTE
of Social Sciences Research & Development

Islamic Teachings regarding Minority and Women Rights: A Critical Evaluation of Anwar Sheikh's Allegations

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Abstract:

“Human rights” is a burning question in the world right now. The world nations insist on it, but in despite this, it is violated somewhere. This is, in fact, an ideology of freedom to which all human beings are equally entitled. Human needs and rights turn over along with different demesnes and societies with time. Therefore it has been a remonstrative and controversial topic around the world. Although human rights are violated in every nation and nexus of the world, anti-Islamic groups break their neck to discredit it by associating with Islam. Anwar Sheikh is one of the persons who has also criticized Islam in this regard. Though he was raised in a Pakistani Muslim family and got an Islamic education here, European habitat and ecosystem changed his mind. He studied the Hindu religion, particularly the Vedas which affected his thoughts. So, he converted to Hinduism. He composed almost ten writings against Islam and raised strict allegations. This short article presents his objections regarding human rights from the Islamic perspective.

Keywords: *Anwar Sheikh, Human Rights, Hindu teachings, Islamic commandments.*

Anwar Sheikh: A Brief Introduction

Anwar Sheikh was born in the Indian Subcontinent into a Muslim family. His family used to name him *Hājī* because he was born on the day of *Hajj*. His mother had committed a great deal of the *Qur'ān* to memory, and both of his parents were pious Muslims. The younger brother of his grandfather, an *imām* and *mullah*, was the one who initially taught him Arabic. He studied additional Islamic texts, such as *Tafsīr*, Islamic history and Arab culture, in addition to *Bukhārī*, *Muslim* and *Ibn-e-Mājah*. In 1956, he relocated to Wales, UK, in search of a better future and there he wed a British woman. He began to read Islam critically and with depth but his apostasy began when he started to hate it since he did not have a solid theological understanding.¹ He found the Rig Veda while conducting study in Wales, became impressed by it and became a Hindu. He became Anirudh Gyan Sheikh from Muḥammad Anwar Sheikh after converting. There was a tremendous deal of anger in Pakistan when he published his book “Islam: The Arab National Movement” in 1995. Religious academics requested that he be put to death for his disbelief and criticism of Islam.²

Anwar's Views Regarding Minority Rights

People living in modern states are overly aware of their rights in comparison to those living in underdeveloped states. Even though both Rome and Greece placed a strong emphasis on the protection of rights during their heydays, these nations completely

failed to accomplish so. Islam is the religion that guarantees human rights and explains them to everyone, irrespective of social background, nationality or religion. The concept of a just society where minorities of all types can exercise their rights is something that only Islam offers. This is the religion that grants minority's access to trade, money, safety and self-respect, just as it does for Muslims. In a Muslim society, the life of a non-Muslim is equally as valued as that of a Muslim. The guardian of humanity, the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) dismantled all forms of religionism based on race, tribe or language and established a set of human rights values that the rest of the world cannot match.

Minority rights are a subject that is being questioned in the modern world. In this case, the critics targeted Islam without any reason. Among those who seriously criticized Islam is Anwar Sheikh. Regarding minorities within the Islamic state, he writes:

By now, it ought to be clear that a non-Muslim, or more properly a Dhimmi cannot have human rights as understood and practiced in the Western world.³

Research does not support this assertion. All of the essential human rights are available to minorities in Islam. The following are a few examples of the rights the Muslim state has given to minorities:

- **Religious Protection:** Islam asks that everyone's beliefs be respected and prohibits all forms of religious coercion.⁴
- **Life Protection:** Since non-Muslims' lives are just as valuable as those of Muslims, they are all protected under Islamic law.⁵
- **Economic Protection:** All minorities in an Islamic country are endowed with a plethora of commercial and economic rights, which are guaranteed to be preserved, independent of their interactions with Muslims on the financial front.⁶
- **Respect and Honor of Minorities:** Islam strictly prohibits disdaining non-Muslims because they have the same social status as Muslims.
- **Right of Justice:** A non-Muslim has the right to justice under an Islamic state. It is strongly advised by Islam that minorities be granted prompt and appropriate justice in this way.⁷
- **Compliance of Agreements:** Islam strictly commands that all agreements and commitments with non-Muslims be kept and never broken, whether they are political or commercial.⁸
- **Protection of Domestic Life:** Every human has inherent concerns for which he longs for respect. Islam so mandates that everyone's private life be respected, regardless of whether they practice Islam or not.⁹
- **Equality in *Diyat* (Compensation/Blood money):** Islam has given non-Muslims the same rights as Muslims and does not permit any flexibility when it comes to *Diyat*.¹⁰ Under an Islamic state, a non-Muslim enjoys additional rights in addition to those mentioned above. Islam calls on its followers to stand up for these rights. Conversely, we note that the biggest number of human rights breaches are associated with Hinduism. Shudra's condition is worse than a person's. Since he was created from the foot of the god, he must dedicate the rest of his life to serving Brahman, Vaish, and Khashtari. He is incapable of achieving any kind of prominence in society. He is not entitled to the same advantages as others, and he will not accept gifts or religious instructions.¹¹

Freedom of Expression

Anwar has the view that Islam does not support freedom of speech. Islam prohibits non-

Muslims from expressing any kind of opinion. He claims that in Islamic nations, it is illegal for non-Muslims to exercise freedom of expression, one of the most significant human rights. It is forbidden for a non-Muslim to openly advocate for his or her beliefs.¹²

Anwar divides freedom of expression and freedom of religion into two parts. Regarding the first argument, Islam does not follow this in any manner. Everyone has the right to free speech, regardless of whether they practice Islam or not. *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar* also sought advice from non-Muslims. For Anwar, this is the best illustration of Akbar's authority in India. With only nine ministers, three of whom were non-Muslims, Akbar's cabinet and his personality contributed to the stability of his unmatched control over India. His army was led by a Hindu named "Bhagwan Das".¹³ They were given full freedom to voice their opinions, and Akbar exclusively considered their counsel when making judgments. Additionally, every non-Muslim in his court used to be open about sharing his opinions. Numerous other instances of non-Muslims exercising their right to free speech exist.

The second part of the aforementioned remark, which states that Islam does not at all permit minorities to participate in religious missions, is more significant. It also makes two other points. One is to spread one's own beliefs, while the other is to mock and persecute other faiths while pretending to be a preacher of religion. Islam is not a formalism advocate. It is forbidden to disparage or make charges against other religions. In Islam, queries are acceptable based on suspicions but not charges. Islam cannot be mocked, but non-Muslims are completely free to propagate their faith within their religious borders. Recent years have seen a sharp increase in anti-Islamic sentiment, including opposition to free speech. Objectors are blind to the numerous limitations that societies place on them. Anwar's claim that human rights are upheld in Europe is just chaff in the readers' eyes. Muslims are subject to several limitations in Europe and the US. Muslims are unable to call for prayer, deliver the Friday sermon in public or erect the mosque's minaret. Many European states forbid Muslim women from wearing the *ḥijāb*. India follows Europe rather closely. Since cows are worshipped and their sacrifice offends Hindus religiously, Muslims are not allowed to perform it there. Therefore, it is illegal to slaughter it on a legal level.¹⁴

Every religion's beliefs must be respected by others. People are free to act whatever they choose within the parameters of their faith, but it is disrespectful to other religions to act outside of those parameters and attack them. Anwar opposed Islam without reason while failing to see the violation of human rights in India, Kashmir and Europe. Conflicts that Indian Muslims encounter include communal and denominational violence. Experts have observed that Muslims always grieve the most during communal uprisings between Hindus and Muslims in India. Hindus killed hundreds of Muslims during sectarian riots in India between 1961 and 1980, the number of injured is considerably greater. When the *Bābrī Masjid* was destroyed in 1993, the subsequent rioting resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Muslims.¹⁵

The 2020 Delhi riots, which left more than 53 people dead and hundreds injured, including Muslims and Hindus, were started by disagreements over a citizenship bill that many critics viewed as anti-Muslim and a component of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist agenda.¹⁶ A recent act of insolence by BJP spokeswoman Nupur Sharma resulted in religious rioting in India once more, this time with the loss of Muslim lives.¹⁷ Islam allows other religions to express themselves freely but forbids insulting or degrading others.

Women Rights

Anwar has unfairly criticized Islam for granting women rights, even though the fact that Islam is the only faith to do so. Even though social customs vary from one nation

to another, Sharia remains unchanged. In this case, a few allegations raised by Anwar are as under:

Veil Restriction on Women

Talking about veil restriction, Anwar inscribes:

Since a woman is obliged to wear a veil and restricted within her home, and man is appointed her manager with the authority to beat her if she does not obey him, her property rights are just an attractive gimmick: they are a body without a soul, a locomotive engine without steam and a bow without arrows.¹⁸

Anwar said that a woman's substantiality was equivalent to that of a man's slave, who had no worth in society. She is being held captive by a veil. This notion is wholly false. For a woman, discretion does not mean captivity, but rather preserving her honor.¹⁹ Although there are restrictions for men, there are none for women. They can able to participate in all social, economic, and political endeavors. They share the same rights as men and there is no discrimination between them, but because their obligations may differ, their rights may take various forms. The most striking example of this is the early Muslim women who participated in such activities from the start. After the Holy Prophet (ﷺ) passed away, the companions would visit *Ḥaḍrat 'Āisha* to learn. Women often participated in political activities throughout the caliphate. This may be inferred from the fact that the third caliph of Islam, *Ḥaḍrat 'Uthmān*, dispatched *Ḥaḍrat Umm Kulthūm bint 'Alī* on a diplomatic trip to the court of the Queen of Rome during of his caliphate.²⁰ Women's contributions and sacrifices in the Pakistan Movement are many and contributed to the establishment of an Islamic state. The purpose of the man being the woman's head is to serve her, not to use her as a slave to suit his demands. The *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth* both place a great emphasis on the fact that males are accountable for upholding the fundamental rights of women in this respect.²¹ Thus, Anwar's claim that a woman has been held captive in the house is totally fabrication.

Anwar said that Islam had turned a lady into the body of a dead soul. He considers that Muslim women are slaves since he has lived in Europe. In contrast, a woman in Europe is comparable to that of an alluring toy that a guy buys for any price, plays with to amuse himself and then abandons for someone else. This unethical freedom is making sexual crimes more common there. A new law was established in Sweden in 2018 that declares unconsented intercourse as rape even when there are no threats, compulsions, or physical violence present. It joins other European nations where having intercourse against one's will is regarded as rape including the United Kingdom and Germany. As a result, there was an increase in convictions of 75% to 333.²² In a similar vein, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) reported in 2016 that there were 431,840 rape or sensual assault incidents in the United States in 2015. These incidents were not reported to the police.²³

Divorce Right

Anwar's next allegation concerns women's right to divorce. According to him, a man in Islam is free to leave his wife whenever he pleases, but a woman cannot do so. A Muslim may easily and at will dissolve his marriage but a woman will have to do so by going through the legal system which is quite difficult. If she does this without perfect reason, she is subject to God's wrath and the curses of the angels. Her petitions are unlikely to be heard by a male judge in a society where males are accustomed to mocking, demoralizing, and controlling women.²⁴

Anwar gets two outcomes from this digenesis. First, a Muslim woman cannot divorce her husband, and second, the divorce process has become so difficult that a woman cannot be emancipated from a man. First of all, Islam is the only religion in the world to grant women the freedom to divorce while simultaneously creating a formal legal process for doing so and establishing restrictions. In pre-Islamic Judaism, men had extensive authority over divorce. A Jewish male can divorce even over little disagreements, however, no matter how many flaws a guy may have, a woman can never divorce him. Contrarily, marriage is viewed as permanent in Christianity, and the only circumstance in which it can end is death. The Gospel of Matthew states that a man may only divorce a woman via fornication and that a divorced woman cannot remarry since, in Jesus Christ's view, doing so would be equivalent to committing adultery.²⁵ Therefore, how can one think in such a situation that a woman has the right to divorce in Christianity?

Similarly to this, divorce in Hinduism is extremely challenging for both men and women. Despite their hatred for one another, husbands and wives cannot divorce. If a husband is infertile and unable to bear a baby, the wife may still bear children by engaging in sexual activity with her husband's siblings, but she is not permitted to obtain a divorce. This procedure is referred to as "Niyoga" in Hinduism and Satyarth Prakash outlines its steps in detail.²⁶ As for the "Khula" regulation or procedure, it contains strict restrictions and safeguards to prevent women from ruining their lives by engaging in prostitution out of ignorance or turning themselves into sexual objects for other people, as is the case in Europe. In Europe, there is no longer any religious intervention, and people live according to their cultural traditions. Women now have so much freedom in this cultural framework that they may legally wed any male they choose and divorce him whenever they like. The divorce rate in Europe has grown as a result of the unrestricted use of this right to divorce.

Divorce has augmented throughout Europe in the past decade. A research assessed that legal modifications accounted for about 20% increase of the divorce rates in Europe between 1960 and 2002. In 2019, Luxembourg had the maximum divorce rate per 100 marriages followed by Portugal, Finland and Spain. In 2021, the Statistic Research Department (Statistica)²⁷ published a report that records the number of divorces in 2019 in 30 European countries. The table below shows the divorce data in some of these countries, which will give an estimate of the percentage of families that are being destroyed due to divorce in Europe.²⁸

Sr. No	Country Name	Per Marriages	%age
1	Luxembourg	Per 100 marriages	88.9
2	Portugal	----	61.4
3	Finland	----	59.9
4	Spain	----	55.5
5	France	----	55
6	Sweden	----	52.4
7	Belgium	----	52
8	Norway	----	47.8
9	Italy	----	46.4
10	United Kingdom	----	41.2
11	Greece	----	38.3
12	Poland	----	35.6
13	Denmark	----	34.4

In 2015, the highest divorce rates in the UK were documented all beside the sea, with Blackpoll in the highest position which was 42% and in the same area within one year in 2019, around 107,599 divorces were testified. This legal freedom for women has led to the growth of same-sex marriage in the UK and the rate of divorce in these marriages has also increased exponentially. There were 822 divorces among same-sex pairs in 2019, nearly double that in the former year when there were 428 same-sex divorces.²⁹

Equality in Witness

Anwar's next objection is about the woman's witness. He writes:

The laws of inheritance treat one male equal to two females. The law of evidence is even harsher: not only two women equal one man but she may not be allowed to tender evidence where male witnesses are available.³⁰

It is untrue to say that two female witnesses are always equivalent to one male. There is just one passage in the *Qur'ān* which mentions that the testimony of two women is equivalent to that of one male and it has to do with financial matters. One lady's testimony is also admissible in many other affairs. The biggest instance of this in Islamic history is that of *Ḥaḍrat 'Āisha* (May Allah be Pleased with Her), from whom over 2000 *Aḥādīth* have been recounted, all of which are authenticated only by her solitary attestation. This is clear proof that only one female's testimony can be believed. Many Muslim scholars concur that one woman's testimony is sufficient to observe the *Ramḍān* moon. In some situations, which are exclusively concerned with women's issues, just a female witness is needed.

If there is a chance that one person is not there when two men are necessary as witnesses in financial affairs, then two ladies should be brought together so that if one forgets or misunderstands, the other may assist her. This is because the fact that, according to contemporary psychologists, women's mental capacities are less than those of males. According to psychologists, women are more likely than males to suffer from generalized anxiety disorder. Compared to males, they have a 15% higher chance of developing a general anxiety condition. They are 2.5 times more likely than men to suffer from panic disorder. Furthermore, women are twice as likely as men to experience real phobias. Additionally, women are more likely than men to experience a communal anxiety disorder.³¹

Islam contains several examples where a choice was made solely based on the testimony of women. *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar* was giving a speech in the *Masjid-e-Nabawī* when a lady interrupted him and declared that his assertion violated the *Qur'ān*. *Ḥaḍrat 'Umar* just altered his opinion in response to the woman's statement. In Islam, a female is still allowed to testify, but in Hinduism, women cannot witness. According to Manusamarti, many pure women cannot be equal even to a single male in the matter of testimony because of lack of understanding.³² Islam speaks of witness only of two women, while Manusamarti rejects the testimony of numerous women since it is inconsistent with their immature knowledge.

Right of Inheritance

Anwar objects to inheritance after women's testimony. The unit of a female's share is used to define the portion of male and female inheritance. It is not stated that a woman's part is equal to a man's share in half. The female share is used as the base and the unit to calculate all the other shares. It seems as though the unit of the woman's part, which

is a proclamation of her dignity, is the center of the entire system of inheritance distribution.

Even if a woman is earning money, her husband will be responsible for taking care of her since Allah Almighty has made males the providers of women's needs and excused women from this presumption. Men are required to get a larger share of the inheritance to adequately satisfy their family obligations and create a harmonious, stable and financially just society in terms of the quantity and proportion of responsibilities. It appears that while a man's portion has grown as a result of his extra duties, a woman's share has not changed. Men and women are now equally compensated for performing household and social responsibilities.

Female's Status in Hinduism

Anwar objected to Islam but did not touch on the situation of women in Hinduism. Manusamarti asserts that a woman cannot work autonomously without a male, either within or outside the house, whether she is a girl, a young lady or an old woman. She has never been independent in her life. She will be supervised by her father during her early childhood. Her husband will be the supervisor after wedlock and her sons after her husband passes away. A woman will be viewed as having destroyed the honor and reputation of the family if she chooses to be independent by leaving her husband, father or sons. Only within the confines of the house can she assume the role of a housewife.³³ Further, Manusamarti states clearly that whether it is day or night, a woman's life will depend on the males of her family, even in the matter of sensual pleasure, she will not have any authority of her own. Moreover, men who do not fulfill their responsibility in the matter of females have been reprimanded.³⁴

We see that in Hinduism, women are denied inheritance and assets, in contrast to Islamic inheritance law. Expropriation is widespread in Hindu culture. According to Satyarth Prakash, a lady who is childless must bear children with another man in order to inherit her husband's property.³⁵ According to Manusamarti, the children of a Brahmana, a Kshatriya and a Vaisya by a Shudra woman will not be eligible to inherit.³⁶ Regarding inheritance and witness, Anwar did not study detailed Islamic teachings, which is why he objected to Islam. Islam not only confers a woman the right to inherit but also acknowledges her witness in the same way the witness of a man. Thus, given this, if Islam is compared with Hinduism and Europe it has not only immunized women's dignity but also saved families from destruction. Also, behind the moral decay that Europe is suffering from is the same freedom that has brought Europe to this point.

Conclusion

One thing about Islam should always be remembered that the main reason for the rapid spread of Islam is the social system given it which gave a high position to all humanity. The environment and the time in which Islam started was called the age of ignorance because there was no such thing as reason and consciousness in that human society. It was Islam that enriched the Arabs with knowledge, intellect and consciousness, even the shepherds of the Arabs became civilized and cultured of their time. No society can develop without the protection of human rights. Islam protects the rights of not only Muslims but also all human beings and orders severe punishment to its followers in case of repeated disobedience. The objections raised by Anwar Sheikh or other critics of Islam regarding human rights are based on hatred. They did not observe the deep and real results of the Islamic social system established by the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*.

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