

AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON GENDER ISSUES AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, life has become the survival of the fittest for every individual regardless of gender. The female gender is competing with their male counterparts under the word 'Feminism and Gender Equality'. Nigerian women, most especially the educated and working class are among other women elsewhere advocating for gender equality in human development, which cuts across social, economic, intellectual and political life of man. It is however noted that despite this agitation, the Nigerian women are still wallowing in societal enslavement. Thus, this paper examines the situation of Nigerian women in their bids to survive. The paper delves into the rights of women and gender issues within the Islamic context and the implications this experience might have on the Nigerian women which is, firstly, to restore their divine rights and secondly, to protect their dignity, which Islam as established fourteen centuries ago before the advocate of feminism. The method adopted in this research is basically the use of library as well as phenomenological method. The paper revealed that the Nigerian women are not only maltreated but also misused and mismanaged. The paper concludes by suggesting the application of Islamic guidelines on gender issues and women's rights as an alternative therapy to boost and enhance the status of the Nigerian women.

Key words: Equality, Gender, Islam, Nigeria, Rights, Women

Introduction

Nigeria, as a nation, has the largest population in Africa with about 162.5 million people. Out of the figure, the female gender takes 49%, equivalent to 80.2 million (British Council, 2012). This, according to Ekhaton (2015), means that the women folk half, if not, more than half of the population. However, this figure has not accorded most of the Nigerian women any dignity, growth and development virtually in all facets of their life, social, marital, economic, political, intellectual and spiritual. They are rather experiencing gender discrimination, exploitation, oppression, religion and maltreatment from their male counterparts (Abdulraheem, 2010 and Olubor, 2009).

Despite the constitutional provision of the country on the prohibition of discrimination on the ground of gender, Nigerian women are still wallowing in gloomy injustice, general degradation and social deprivation in terms of natural and fundamental human rights. This issue of gender discrimination against women, which was one of the vices committed against women in the ancient societies like India Rome, Greek and Athens among others (Nazhat and Ahmed, 1969), is now featured in some areas in Nigeria where the women are regarded as nothing but goods and chattels (Akande, 1993). It has, thus become an endemic malady not only on the Nigeria media but also international media outfit.

Based on the above, series of arguments have being brought forward to justify the reasons or causes of this ludicrous attitude on the part of the Nigerian Government as well as the individual citizen. In their own view, Ngwankwe (2002) and Alenika (2010) postulate that the tradition and culture of the female gender determine how they are treated and addressed. Another important reason to this discussion is the socio-religious and politico-economic factors which are mentioned by Ibidapo Obe (2005) as things that will be affecting the implementation of human rights conditionally both in space and time.

It is apposite to mention here that the religious factor is more focused by all and sundry in Nigeria than other factors cited above. And among the religions in the country, Islam has been tagged as a religion that enslaves the women folk by depriving them the rights and opportunities given to men. This, perhaps, is deduced from the lackadaisical attitudes of some Muslims, which, of course, cannot be supported by either the Qur'an or *Sunnah* but from the whims and caprices of such Muslims as well as their individual differences. It is against the background that this paper investigates the situation of the Nigerian women and the rights they are been denied as a result of socio-cultural and religious factors from the Islamic point of view.

In order to achieve this objective, the paper has been divided into various sections such as abstract, introduction, conceptual analysis, and women rights in Nigeria both the past and current struggle, Islamic perspectives on gender issues and women's rights, conclusion and recommendations.

Gender Issues And Women Rights: A Conceptual Definition

It is pertinent to briefly explain some concepts that are essential to this paper in order to bring about proper understanding of these concepts in the way they are used in the discussion. These concepts are: gender, sex, women and right.

GENDER: This word is from either the old French word "gendre", which means "kind, species, character" or the Latin word "genus", which means "race, stock, family, kind, rank and order as well as sex (male or female)" (Etymology Dictionary, 2016).

It later becomes an English word that is used to mean “male or female sex” in the 15th century while as “sex of a human being” in the 20th century. It was formerly used to refer to grammatical categories and has nothing to do with biological usage until 1955 when John Money introduced it into biological term. Hence, gender is a characteristic that differentiates between masculinity and femininity (Money, 1979). It also refers to the social, cultural and psychological characteristics that are peculiar to males and females through social contexts (Lindsey, 2005). According to Richard Udry (1994), gender is the relationship between biological sex and behaviour. Hence, gender equality means the views and opinions that both male and female should be treated the same way without any discrimination and distinction.

SEX: It is from the Latin word “sexus”. This refers to the biological characteristics for distinguishing between male and female (Money, 1979). It is a status which human being is born with and cannot be changed. It is apposite to mention here, in contrary to the submission of Money, that there are phenomena in the world today where people change their sex. In fact, the concept transgender has been used to capture this ugly and satanic trend.

WOMEN: It is the plural of woman. According to Thompson (1995), it is an adult female, the female sex or any average woman. In his own opinion, Ogwu (1992) contends that it means the feminine component of the human species who, apart from serving as a vehicle for nurturing human life, is also a producer, a consumer and an equally endowed agent for fostering a wholesome political, social and economic development in society.

RIGHT: It originates from the Latin word “rectus”, which means “straight, right” (Etymology Dictionary, 2016). According to Osita (1999), it is something to which a person can lay a total claim to or a privilege of doing or saying something. It is also referred to as the entitlement of a person (Finis, 1996). This word “right” has relation with this discussion under the Islamic perspectives of women’s right, so there is need to define it from the Islamic point of view. It is the English of the Arabic word “*haqq*” which, according to Cowan (1994), means “truth”, “rightness”, “claim”, “correctness” or “one’s due”. Hussain (2001) concludes that rights from the Islamic perspective are divine in nature. By this, they cannot be denied or rejected by anybody except with another divine right or rule.

Therefore, women’s rights are the dues and claims that belong to the female sex as a human being. It should be noted that they are parts of the human rights as what belong to a person naturally belongs to another regardless of the class and gender (Abdulraheem, 2010). These rights cut across all areas of human endeavours, except if restricted and conditioned by culture, society, civilization or religion.

Women’s Right In Nigeria: The Past Struggle

The struggle of women to be reckoned with in Nigeria has been in existence since the time immemorial and it continues to the contemporary situation in the country. There is no gain saying the fact that Nigeria had passed through three stages before now; pre-colonial era, colonial era and post-colonial era. The Nigerian women had been experiencing series of marginalization, discrimination and deprivation. For instance, in the pre-colonial period of Nigeria just like in other places all over the world then, the women were subordinates to men as the society then were in favour of the men (John, 1980). They were regarded as mothers of children (Tripp, 2009), beast of burden and carrier of wood and water (Azogu, 1991). In addition, a barren woman in most part of the country was counted as useless and bad fortune and this brought nothing to the woman but disgrace, humiliation and divorce in most cases (Eze, 1984 and Bier, 1968). In the aspect of decision making, before colonialism, the Nigerian women did partake in the administration of the community, especially in the Eastern and Western part of the country (Okeke, 2000). They had rights to own personal property except land and they could involve in any trade to fetch them profit but the husband and children would share from it (Azogu, 1991). Also a man could marry as many women as possible, just like in the Arabian Peninsula before the advent of Islam. The women had no audacity to object and they could not demand for dissolution of their marriage if they were not pleased.

Moreover, the Nigerian women witnessed the same in their struggle for survival with the coming of the colonialists. According to Okeke (2000), women’s rights were disregarded and not respected. Formal Education, which was introduced by the colonialists, was only made opened to the Nigerian men who could only become clerical staff and interpreters for the British Administration. Some Nigerian women were Christianized by the missionaries through the introduction of women education when they discovered that the colonialists had sidelined the women folk educationally (John, 1980). The male counter-parts were skillfully equipped at the expense of the female gender which adversely increased the suffering of the women who were farmers. They were deprived of their rights of making decision. Series of unbearable decisions such as imposition of poll taxes were levied against them by the colonialists in collaboration with their Nigerian allies. This unjust taxation later led to protests in some parts of the countries such as the Aba Women riot of 1926 and 1929 (in the East) and the Abeokuta riot of 1946 (in the West) (Abdulraheem, 2010).

Furthermore, there was an enormous change in the rights of the Nigerian women when the country was liberated from the colonialists in 1960. Through independence, Nigerian was able to make a provision for the fundamental Human rights of individuals in the Constitutional Order in Council of 1960 that metamorphosed into the 1979 and 1999 Nigerian constitutions. In the 1999 constitution, the rights of women were clearly stated and no allowance for any discrimination on the ground of sex, as enshrined in section 15(2) and 42 of the constitution. In her efforts to ensure the protection of women’s rights, Nigeria was said to have ratified not only the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against woman (CEDAW) in 1985, but was also a signatory to the Optional Protocol in 2004 and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of women in Africa in 2005 (United Nation Treaty Collection, 2011 and African Union, 2010). The protocol of the African Union as well as the 1999 Nigerian Constitution guaranteed the Nigeria women the following rights among others:

- a) Right to dignity and integrity,
- b) Right to life,
- c) Right to good environment (section 20),
- d) Right to security of person,
- e) Equal right in marriage and cases of divorce,
- f) Right to participate in politics (section 14) and decision making, and
- g) Right to education (section 18 Of 1999 constitution), health, food security, job opportunity (section 17(3)), equitable share in inheritance, etc.

With the above constitutional rights, the life of the Nigerian women is yet to improve when compared to their counterparts in other countries: African, European and Asian countries.

Situation Of The Nigerian Women: The Current Reality.

First and foremost, it should be noted that the continuous deprivation of women's rights has led to the formation of various women organizations for the emancipation of the Nigeria women from the shackle of discrimination and degradation. The following are some of the contemporary areas where the Nigerian women are been discriminated:

(a) VIOLENCE IN THE HOME:- Many Nigeria women are currently victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence is defined to include physical, sexual, economic, emotional and verbal abuse as well as psychological abuse (OECD, 2015). Based on this definition, it can be concluded that the Nigerian women are undoubtedly maltreated. The 2008 Demographic and Health Survey has recorded that above 18% of women had experienced sexual violence in the past while above 30% of ever-married women had the same experience (Ola and Johnson, 2013). They are even sexually harassed by their husbands as the husbands at times may force them to sex which can be regarded as marital rape if it is outside wedlock. However, this marital rape is legalized indirectly and no penalty against it according to the section 357 of the criminal code which defines rape thus: Any person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without her consent or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or by means of threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm, or by means of false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or in the case of a married woman, by personating her husband, is guilty of an offence which is called rape (NGO Coalition, 2008)

The phrase "unlawful carnal knowledge" is further explained, according section 6 of the criminal code, as carnal connection which takes place otherwise than between husband and wife". This means that the husband cannot be guilty of raping his wife (Ifemeje, 2011), provided there is a valid subsisting marriage between them (Oyelade, 2006).

It is worthy of mention here that sexual assault against women (rape) is contemporarily common in Nigeria and it is hardly reported either to the police for legal action or on media for the people to be aware and fight against it. This is because of the societal shame and stigma attached to it in the country as the woman or girl is considered useless and unworthy to be married by her contemporaries (Ashiru, 2010; Fagbongbe, 2010). Sexual violence against the female gender in Nigeria at times may even involve demanding for sexual favour from her before she can be employed, admitted to a University and passed a course of study among others. Sexual assault is widely spread and common in Nigeria to the extent of a father harassing his own daughter sexually. For instance, there were the cases of a fifty-seven (57) year old father Nwafor Ikoro, (Vanguard News, 2013) and another forty-four (44) year old father, Emmanuel Udoh, (Vanguard News, 2015) who had sexual intercourse with their daughters respectively. Both incidents happened in Lagos, Nigeria.

Besides, some Nigerian women are still being beating by their husbands. It is however disheartening that the country's Penal Code has granted the husband permission to chastise their wives, provided it does not result in grievous and serious injury. Section 55, subsection 10 of the Penal Code, says:

Nothing is an offence which does not amount to the infliction of grievous harm upon a person and which is done by a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife.

(b) ECONOMIC ISSUES:- The country is still having a higher rate of women unemployment. Research has shown that one-third of the 10% Nigerians that secure job every year are women. In the rural areas, record has it that over 70% of their workforce is women while majority of the men own land. Even when the women secure employment, they are paid less than their male counterparts. They even share the financial responsibilities with their husbands.

Moreover, there are some civil service rules that discriminate against the women's right in Nigeria. For instance, Nigerian women are denied the opportunity of being accompanied by their husbands to their place of employment or place of primary assignment as government workers (Ashiru, 2010), while the employed men can be accompanied by their wives. A provision from the civil service rules of Kano and Kaduna States in Nigeria states that:

Any woman civil servant, married or unmarried who is about to undertake a course of training of not more than six months duration shall be called upon to enter into an agreement to refund the whole or part of the cost of the course in the event of her course being interrupted on ground of pregnancy. (Imasogie, 2010:15)

(c) **EDUCATIONAL ISSUES:-** According to the 2008 Demographic Health Survey (DHS), 30% of women between the age of 20 and 29 received no education compared to 13.7% of men without education (DHS, 2008). In the North-West part of the country, over 70% of the women are unable to read and write compared to over 9% in the South-East. Majority of the girls have dropped out of school either because of financial incapability of their parents who can only spend on the male gender which would fetch them returns, or because of sexual harassment on the part of their male teachers in schools with shortage of female teachers. (British Council, 2012).

(d) **HEALTH CHALLENGES:-** The Nigerian women living in the rural areas are exposed to various health violence ranging from poor access to safe hospitals for treating their sickness to maternal mortality, which rate is 1,549 deaths per 100,000 live births. This has brought about series of complications in women diseases such as, miscarriages, long term disabilities, sexually transmitted diseases and chronic ulcer among others. Male doctors are the ones attending to the female genders in most cases even in private health issues due to non-availability or shortage of female specialist doctors.

(e) **POLITICAL ISSUES:-** Decision making in the arms of government in the country is done by men and few women. In the present administration, there are only seven (7) female Senators in the National Assembly out of 109 Senators, while the House of Representative produced fourteen (14) out of 360 members. In the case of ministerial appointment, there are three women out of the thirty-six ministers in the present list of Nigeria. However, they are two-third of the present Directors in the ministry and other Government parasterter. These figures had reduced compared to the last regime of President Goodluck Jonathan.

Generally, the status of Nigerian women and girls is so low that they have become money- making and entertainment objects in the hands of moneymakers and the rich men. They are being molested and kidnapped for millions of naira as ransom. The case of the Chibok girls is the best example in the country for now. This molestation has led to the formation of various women's rights activists to promote women's rights campaigns in Nigeria. One of the contemporary women's rights activists is Josephine Okeiodumakin who protested against the harassment of some women in Lagos. These women were sodomized, stripped naked and abused with pepper because of petty theft. One of these women died in the incident. (Coker, 2014). The following are some of the women's rights group:

- (a) The Federation of Women Lawyers
- (b) Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN)
- (c) Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)
- (d) Baobab for Women's Human Rights
- (e) Women's Rights and Health Project
- (f) Disabled Women Empowerment Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society (DWEMPCOOPS)
- (g) Empowering Women for Excellence Initiative
- (h) Bring back our Girls Campaign Group

Islamic Perspectives On Gender Issues And Women's Rights

Islam, as a religion, gives total and equal attention to gender issues with a special focus on the rights of women. This is because Islam believes that a woman is as important to life as a man and that the female gender is no way inferior to the male gender. This is proclaimed in Q49:13 which reads:

O mankind! Indeed We have created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)

The above quoted verse serves as a proof to the fact that Islam adopts the perspective of gender equality but does not condone the idea of gender equivalency. This can better be understood when it is compared with the perspective of other religions and civilization as well as societies (Abdalati, n.d). Islam affirms that the differences are the natural disposition and formation of both male and female gender, which are not compatible. Thus, there is no equivalency in the physical and psychological nature of man and woman. However, both enjoy and possess rights and bear responsibilities according to their natural distinctions. This means that they are both equal in enjoying rights and bearing responsibilities. In Q4:32, Allah says:

And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned and for women is a share of what they have earned....

Also, in Q2:228 Allah says;

And women have rights similar to those of men over them in kindness. But the men have a degree over them (in responsibility and authority) ...

From the above quoted Qur'anic verses, it can be deduced that both men and women have rights but men have more responsibilities than women in terms of maintenance on the family, which include the maintenance of the women according to Q4:34. This shows that there is distinction between equality and sameness or equivalency. Thus, they are equal but not the same.

There is no gain saying the fact that there is a disparity between men and women and there is no ground for discrimination. Makinde (2007) concludes:

There is no ground to assume that she is less important than him just because her duties are not identically the same as his. Had her status been identical with his, she would have been simply a duplicate of him, which she is not.

It is in the light of Makinde's submission that this paper wants to present some of the attitudes of Islam towards women so as to refute some of the allegations levied against Islam by some writers such as Alemika and Alemika (2005), Ekhaton (2015), etc., in the world generally and Nigeria in particular. The attitudes are hereby better examined under the following points:

(a) **WOMEN AND EDUCATION:-** They are obliged to seek and pursue knowledge that is of benefit either to them or the Muslim society. This is based on the fact that they and their male counter-parts have been endowed with the same intellectual ability which its exploration depends on individual. There were women in the history of Islam that surpassed men in terms of knowledge and vice versa. Some of them are 'Aisha bint Abubakar during the prophetic era, Hafsa bint Sirin, Umm Darda and 'Amrah bint AbdurRahman among others in the second generation of Islam (Bilal, 2007) and many scholars among the early Muslim men learnt from female teachers. In Nigeria, Nana Asmau bint Uthman Dan Fodio, Professor Ruqayah Rufai former Minister of Education during President Goodluck Jonathan's administration as well as Aisha Lemu among others are among Muslim women who possessed sound intellectual ability (Makinde, 2007).

This surprising attitude of these eminent women was based on Qur'anic verses and *ahādīth* of the Prophet such as

(i) Q58:11 which says:

Allah will exalt in rank those from among you who believe and those to whom knowledge is given

(ii) Q39:9:

Say: Are they equal, those who know and those who do not know

(iii) The *Hādīth* of the Prophet which says as recorded by Ibn Majah that:
"Seeking for knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim".

Based on the above, it is crystally clear that Islam is not responsible for the non-challant attitudes of some Muslims in the Northern part of Nigeria, who are kicking against the education of women and girls as well as those that do not allow their daughters to be educated. It is apposite to mention here that there is a need to differentiate between the principles and teachings of Islam and the personal attitudes of some Muslims who are acting in contrary to Islamic teachings.

(b) **WOMEN AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS:-** Islam has granted to women the economic independence and freedom to possess, monitor and manage their own property, buying and selling of goods, investing and donating their wealth, either with or without the permission of their husbands. Their husbands and male relatives are not allowed to tamper with their women's property or wealth without their consent (Al-Qaradawy, 1418 A.H).

By attaining the maturity age, women have total rights to economic wealth, business and gifts. They cannot be forced to spend their wealth on the household maintenance except out of their willingness, volition and pleasure as maintenance of the home is the sole duty and responsibility of the husbands. According to Iqbal (1989), however, these exclusive rights do not grant them the permission to work as subordinates in offices with or under men, display their beauty at shops for market promotion, serve tea for their bosses, dress like men and expose their ornaments in public for money making.

In view of the above, Islamic principles and teachings frown against the toiling of women for survival. The majority of the jobs available for Nigerian women are in line with the description of Iqbal as discussed earlier. Islam affirms the fact that male gender is physically stronger and has larger muscle and bones to face the rigorous nature of getting sustenance, most especially in the countries like Nigeria where poverty absolutely festers. This is why the Qur'an has referred to the male counterparts as *Qawwām* (supporters, pillars, helpers etc.). The fact that some Muslims women are engaging in laborious means of living does not count other Muslim women, who have refused to engage in laborious means of living or Islam, has fanatics or violators of women's rights. The blame of such act is on the men as well as government who are supposed to cater for the women's well-being but are negligence of it.

It should be stated here categorically that there are no textual laws which prevent the women from taking up any work or job except that which is against the fundamental principles of Islam and her rights. They have their rights to be catered and provided for as daughters and wives. It is the responsibility of the parents to look after their daughters' welfare until they are married. They are not to be harassed talkless of being killed as it was done in the pre-Islamic era of Arabs. Islam enjoins love, kindness and compassion towards them by designating special rewards for bringing them up. On this the Prophet said:

He who is involved in the responsibility of nurturing daughters and is generous to them, will have them as fortification for himself against the Hellfire. (Bukhari and Muslim)

(c) **WOMEN AND SOCIAL RIGHTS:-** The social rights of women in Islam are very numerous and interesting. For instance, she has the right to choose her husband; and when a husband is selected for her, she has the rights to accept or reject him. This is in line with the incident that happened during the life time of the Prophet as reported by Abdullah bin Abbas that a virgin girl came to the Prophet and told him that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Prophet gave her the choice to accept the marriage or invalidate it. The girl said: "Surely, I accept this marriage but I want the women to know that parents have no right (to force a husband on them) (Ibn Majah, no. 1873 and Ahmad, no. 2469). In another narration the Prophet said:

A previously-married woman should not be married without consulting her and a virgin should not be married without asking her permission... (Bukhari, no.4741 and Muslim, no. 2543).

It is clear from the above hadith that a woman should not be forced to marry a man she does not love. It should however be noted that the parents or guardian's permission is also important not in terms of selecting for their daughters but as parent responsibility in guiding the affairs of their daughters without which the marriage is invalid if solemnized on flimsy excuse as the Prophet said: "There is no marriage without (the permission of) the *waliy* (i.e. parent or guardian of the lady) (Abu Dawud, no 2085). Furthermore, they have right to divorce when the marriage brings nothing other than problems, thus, separation becomes indispensable.

In addition, there is right to freedom of expression and some other rights such as the right to inherit and not to be inherited as part of the husband's property. In Q4:19, Allah says;

O you who believe, you are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness that you may take away part of their marital gift you have given them except when they are guilty of immorality; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equality. For if you dislike them. Perhaps you dislike a thing and Allah makes therein much good.

From the above Qur'anic quotation, it can be deduced that Islam is against marriage based on inheritance which is a practice in the Western part of Nigeria. This type of marriage takes place when an elder brother dies in a family, then the younger brother will automatically inherit the wife of his brother even if it is against her wish. Thus, Islam does not accept the culture of belief of some areas in Nigeria that regards "the women as property and therefore cannot own property themselves" (Olubor, 2009).

Besides, in Islam, the women are not to be battered as against the submission of Ekhatior (2015) that it is allow in *shari'ah*. The position of Islam is a gentle tap that will not leave a mark, talkless of injury in an extreme case of safe guarding the marriage from collapsing. Even, it was reported that the Prophet forbid slapping the women.

(d) **POLITICAL RIGHTS:-** Islam grants to women the right to participate in public affairs in order to to carry out various duties and responsibilities such as legislative, advisory, executive and judicial (Nadvi, 1990). They have right to be appointed in positions that suite their nature, experience and qualifications especially in issues related to women. The only debatable position among the Islamic Jurists is the head of a state, or nation as majority of the Jurists are of the view that it is not legal for a woman to be the head of a nation while the minority takes it to be legal. However, a closer look at the nature of leadership of State and the nature of women along with Quranic and hadith evidence as well as medical proofs show that the majority opinion is correct and right. (Imam, 2002; Jimoh, 1997 and Suraju, 2013).

It should therefore be noted that the women are allowed, Islamically, to exercise their rights to elect and nominate the leaders of their choice among men. They can also give advice and suggest solutions to societal problems as done by the early Muslims in the case of selecting between Ali bin Talib and Usman bin 'Affan (Al-Turabi, 1991).

Conclusion

Women are human beings. Therefore, their rights are part and parcel of human rights that need to be understood and viewed, not only in the light of human laws but also from the perspective of divine laws so as to appreciate their nature. It has been pointed out that Nigerian women are discriminated against from time immemorial before, during and after colonialism. Each of these periods in Nigerian history was full of historical events supporting the marginalization of women. The series of assaults, discrimination and deprivation Nigeria women underwent and still undergoing have been discussed. Although series of laws protecting women's rights have been enacted and ratified in the country, these rights are still being violated as the laws remained on papers and not implemented. It has been observed that the Nigerian women are being maltreated, misused and mismanaged in their domestic, social, economic, health and intellectual rights.

Having discussed the status of women in Nigeria, as a nation, the position of Islam on women's rights has equally been discussed to refute the accusations levied against Islam and the Muslims in Nigeria, particularly by some writers, that Islam is enslaving women. Thus, Islam has not enslaved the women but liberated them by appreciating their nature and treating them accordingly. It should be clearly stated here that Islam is distinct from the ludicrous attitudes of some Muslims who are violating the *Shari'ah* assigned rights of women. Though it is disheartening that the conduct of some Muslims contradicts the principles and teachings of Islam, research on Islamic teachings should be separated from the Muslim conduct as evidence.

Finally, the paper recommends that the Nigerian women should embrace the application of Islamic guidelines on gender issues and women's rights for their rights to be restored and their dignity to be protected in a divine way. The male gender should

appreciate the nature of their female counter-parts while dealing with them and that everybody counts, whether men or women, in the progress and development of any given society.

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