

Women's Rights as Propounded by Fatima Jinnah

KISHWAR SULTANA

During the years (1937–1947) when Pakistan movement was at its peak, Fatima Jinnah's role was nothing less than a beacon of hope for the Muslim women. Though the guidance of her elder brother Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, she herself became a role model not only for the Muslims women of South Asia, but for the women of whole Asian society. Her role as a women leader was even more important when after the death of Quaid-i-Azam in 1948 she became the focal point for aspirations of Pakistani women. It was under very difficult circumstances that she worked for the promotion of women's rights and privileges in Pakistan.

Life of Fatima Jinnah

Fatima Jinnah, younger sister of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was born in 1893¹ of her seven brothers and sisters, she was the closest to the Quaid. Jinnah became guardian upon the death of their father in 1901. Due to her brother's keen interest, and despite strident family opposition, Fatima Jinnah received excellent early education. She joined the Bandra Convent in 1902.² In 1919, she got admitted to the highly competitive university of Calcutta where she attended Dr Ahmad Dental College. After she qualified, Jinnah went along with her idea of opening a dental clinic in Bombay and helped her set it up in 1923.³

Fatima Jinnah initially lived with her brother for about eight years till 1918, when he got married to Rutenbai. Upon Rutenbai's death in February 1929, Fatima wound up her clinic, moved into Jinnah's bungalow and took charge of his house. Thus began the life-long companionship that lasted till Jinnah's death on September 11, 1948.⁴

Kishwar Sultana is Senior Research Fellow at the National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research (NIHCR), Islamabad.

¹Dr Riaz Ahmad, *Madar-i-Millat Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah: A Chronology (1893–1967)*. (NIHCR: Islamabad, 2003), p.1.

²*Ibid.*

³Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah the Creator of Pakistan*. (Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 11.

⁴Fatima Jinnah, *Mera Bhai*. (Lahore: Atish Fishan Publications, 1988), p. 65.

So, Miss Fatima Jinnah lived with her brother for about 28 years, including the last 19 tiring years of his life. The Quaid discussed various problems with her, mostly at the breakfast and dinner table.⁵

Fatima Jinnah not only lived with her brother but also accompanied him on his numerous tours. In 1932, she joined him in London when he remained there after the Second Round Table Conference. Fatima Jinnah was taken as a member of the Working Committee of the Bombay Provincial Muslim League⁶ and worked in that capacity until 1947.

In March 1940, she attended the Lahore Session of the Muslim League.⁷ Fatima Jinnah was convinced that the Hindus intended to subjugate and dominate the Muslim completely. It was primarily due to her initiative that the All India Muslim Women Students Federation was organised in February 1941 at Delhi.⁸

During the transfer of power in 1947, she was an inspiration to Muslim women. She formed the Women's Relief Committee, which, later proved to be the nucleus for the All Pakistan Women's Association.⁹ She also played a significant role in the settlement of refugees in the new state of Pakistan.

Despite her old age, she continued to help social and education institution. During the Quaid's illness, she remained passionately attached to him. After his death, she often issued important statements on important occasions, as a reminder to the nation of the ideals on which Pakistan had been established.

Status of Women

In every society, a woman plays the role of a mother, a sister, a wife and a daughter. In the words of Fatima Jinnah, Motherhood is not an easy task. Mother herself should do the work of her child. In early age, children need love and attention of mother. Life is not only confined to outing and meeting with people. Every work has its own stage. Mother has got whole life for outing. She should concentrate on her children at early stages. The basic training centre of a child is mother. Even in modern era, even if man and woman have equal rights, but the foremost duty of women mother can give a well-groomed child to the society. During her meeting with Surriya Khurshid, Fatima explained, "I always emphasised that we need good mother. Good mothers are our national asset. Women do not care about this fact. Modern women reject it, thinking it out-dated and conservative, and uneducated women do not understand the need of the hour".¹⁰

⁵Agha Hussain Hamadani, *Fatima Jinnah: Hayat-o-Khidmaat*. (NIHCR: 1984), p. 34.

⁶Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan*, Vol. II. (National Publishing House, Ltd., 1970), p. 318.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸Dr Riaz Ahmad, *Madr-i-Millat Mohtarima Fatima Jinnah: A Chronology (1893-1967)*, (NIHCR: Islamabad, 2003), p. 4.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰Surriay Khurshid, *Fatima Jinnah Kay Shab-o-Roze*. (Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons), p. 37.

In the Muslim social setting, a woman is considered a feministic creature of Allah and guided to progress in that capacity.¹¹ We believe, woman has always been deprived and suppressed throughout history. In the past, she was subjected to suppression as woman she was degraded, subjected, enslaved and sexually tortured. According to Madar-i-Millat, "Woman is not weak at all. But in certain matters, nature, society and circumstances have made her weak. But if she wishes and has iron will she could be stronger than man. She sacrifices more than man, she surpasses man by maintaining the highest standard of character, ability which is apparently inaccessible to man in certain matters".¹²

Fatima Jinnah was interested to make women of Pakistan to become independent in financial matters, she desired an end to women's economic dependence on men. Rather both men and women were required by her to jointly share the responsibility of their family with complete understanding with each other.¹³ These ideas are established in the addresses and teachings of Fatima Jinnah. She explained that, "it is necessary for women that they should earn money for themselves. It is the duty of men to take care of women and financially support them. It is most important that men and women should understand the problems of one another. With consultation, she can improve the relations and life style. Women can play an important role as far as mutual understanding and domestic life is concerned. She can change the mood and habits of a man. After spending a tiresome period outside the home, there should be a comfortable environment at home. This is the best characteristics of sensible woman that she should sense the situation and act accordingly.¹⁴ Variety and nature exist as the facts of life. To eliminate this diversity and nature is, in fact, exertion and regimentation, whether employed in the name of equality or any other title. Islam proposes difference at various levels and we accept it. But the Islamic concept is based on justice and objective realities. This does not at all affect the position of man or woman, concerning basic level of responsibility or accountability.¹⁵

Fatima Jinnah was aware of these orientations of Islam in case of women's responsibilities. She believed on essential role of women in the society by which all the walks of life become balanced. Without women's contribution a society cannot be made to play a healthy and balanced role for the development of society.¹⁶ In various platforms of her role as mother, or a sister, or a wife or a daughter women's role in the society is pivotal. She wanted that this kind of women's role should be given due regard by the society so that women can have a honourable place in the

¹¹Dr Jamal A. Badawi, *The Status of Women in Islam*. (World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAM), Riyadh), p. 36.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Website of *jama-e-Islami*.

¹⁶Surriay Khurshid, *Fatima Jinnah kay Shab-o-Roze*. (Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons), p. 80.

society along with the men. In terms of her importance in the society, a woman is more important not only in Pakistani society but in every society. The law of the country should be moulded accordingly so that women are not mistreated or dishonoured in the name of so-called traditions or something else. She once expressed that “if a man is bad, he ruins only himself, but if a woman is bad, she ruins whole family”.¹⁷

¹⁷*Ibid.*