



Women in the holy Qur'an, traditions, and interpretation

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Abstract

There is no difference between man and woman in regards to religion, belief, and the practices in Islam. The five pillars of Islam: belief (declaration of faith), *Salah* (prayer), *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), *Zakah* (alms giving to the needy), *Sawm* (fasting during the month of Ramadan) are considered mandatory for both male and female believers. Islam gave true and due status to women 1400 years ago when there was ignorance and darkness. Islam uplifted the status of the women in a society. In Islam spiritually both men and women are equal. The status of women in Islam is one of the crucial issues and dominant themes in the modern times, which the theologians have been studying. Islam regards men and women as being of the same essence created from a single soul. A woman has a completely independent personality in Islam. In this research paper, an attempt will be made to provide an overview of status of women in Islam in general and then I will focus on the discussion of status of women in Islam by highlighting her spiritual status and social status in the light of relevant Qur'anic text.

Keywords: women status, Islam, spiritual status and social status

1. Introduction

Nowadays, Muslim women are facing problems not because of lack of her rights in Islam but due to the illiterate societies and due to western backed tyrant dictators and non-Islamic governments. Unfortunately there is no Islamic government in the world and any struggle of making such governments is badly crushed. Islam promised women respect, honor and safety before and more than any other religion and civilization. Islam gave women all rights before 15 centuries ago which any one can expect in today's highly modern world. This research paper attempts to provide an overview on the status of women in the Jahiliyah, and traces the true stance of Islam on the status of women in Islam. It also aims at dealing with the spiritual and social status of women in the light of relevant Qur'anic text.

2. The Status of Women during the Jahiliyah Period

The Jahiliyah period was a period of ignorance, a period in which mankind was in a state of intermission of Prophethood. Women of the Jahiliyah period generally lived in oppressed conditions of life. Their status and roles in the society were misconceived by the Jahiliyah Arabs. They were forced to live under the real inclemency of men, who subjected them into hardship, miserable life and affront^[1].

They were virtually denied legal status and social standing^[2]. Women were considered as inferior beings or worthless creatures. For instance, the Jahiliyah Arabs did not value their wives as complete human beings that deserve respect and dignity as required by the Shariah. They were discriminated and degraded to subordinate position, and subjected to mere sex objects and chattels that had no right of possession. Their status was reduced to that of property that had no right to choose husbands of their choice. They were considered as chattels that could be bought at will or sold into marriage for a

price to their guardians. They were barred to inherit but could be inherited^[3]. Widowed and divorced women were not allowed to remarry^[4]. Others were treated as mere household implements that could be possessed, shared and disposed at will without any consideration to their consent. Husbands could terminate the marriage at will, since they had no limitation as to the number of women to marry and the maximum number of divorce. In consequence, women could have connection of illicit sex with as many men as they liked^[5].

In fact, the birth of female child was an unwelcome event. They were considered as evil temptresses that concealed their evil on men and in their beauty. That was why the *Jahiliyah* Arabs maltreated and buried their female children alive in fear of poverty to foreshadow misfortune and bad luck^[6]. Others considered women as the cause of hardship and as the source of the expulsion of Adam (AS) from Paradise to the harsh life on earth^[7].

3. Islam and Women: An Overview

In Islam, the status and right of women are clearly defined in the noble Qur'an and Sunnah. Islam is the only religion that in actual fact raises the status of women. It neither attaches stigma to a woman, nor puts her in disgrace. It restores the dignity and rights of women as full responsible human beings and counterparts of men. While Islam recognizes the biological and psychological differences in the nature and areas of activities and functions between males and females, it also allows women to enjoy same capacity and freedom as men. The difference in sex between male and female is neither a credit nor a drawback. In other words, men and women are the most divinely honored^[8] social beings on earth^[9], who are naturally created from the same source (Q49:13), with equal rights over each other¹⁰ and as equal beings that complement

and support each other in good deeds ^[11]. That is why they are created in the utmost value and in the best mold ^[12]. As such, there is no distinction between men and women as regards to their respective rights ^[13]. The fact that Islam placed men as the head of the household does not mean women are inferior, but because the former supports and provides maintenance to the later from their means ^[14]. But the Shariah provides that women are important as men.

3.1 The Spiritual Status

In this spiritual regard, Islam makes no distinction between men and women. Both have a soul, both were created for the same purpose in life, both have a duty to fulfill their religious obligations, both will be judged by the Al-Mighty, and both will be rewarded or punished according to their individual actions. Whenever the Qur'an mentions those fortunate beings who will enter the Gardens of Bliss because of their piety and good deeds, it mentions men and women together.

a) Men and Women are of Same *Spiritual Human Nature* Allah (SWT) says in the Qur'an

O mankind, fear Your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear God, through whom you ask one another and the wombs. Indeed God is ever over you, an Observer ^[15].

It is He who created you from a single person and made his mate of like nature in order that he might dwell with her (in love). When they are united she bears a light burden and carries it about (unnoticed). When she grows heavy they both pray to Allah their Lord (saying): "If you give us a goodly child we vow we shall (ever) be grateful ^[16]."

b) Men and Women are *Dignified and Trustees of Allah on Earth*

Allah (SWT) says in the Qur'an

We have honored the children of Adam, provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors above a great part of Our Creation ^[17].

c) Woman is not the Cause of the '*Fall of Man*'

Pregnancy and Child birth are not seen as punishments for "eating from the forbidden tree." On the contrary, the Qur'an considers them to be grounds for love and respect due to mothers.

In narrating the story of Adam and Eve, the Qur'an frequently refers to both of them, never singling out Eve for the blame:

O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the garden and enjoy (its good things) as you [both] wish: but approach not this tree or you [both] run into harm and transgression. Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them bringing openly before their minds all their shame that was hidden from them (before): he said "Your Lord only forbade you this tree lest you [both] should become angels or such beings as live forever." And he swore to them both that he was their sincere adviser. So by deceit he brought about their fall: when they tasted of the tree their shame became manifest to them and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies. And their Lord called unto them: "Did I not forbid you

that tree and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?" They said: "Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls: if you forgive us not and bestow not upon us Your mercy we shall certainly be lost." (Allah) said: "Get you [both] down with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood for a time." He said: "Therein shall you [both] live and therein shall you [both] die; and from it shall you [both] be taken out (at last)." O you children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame as well as to be an adornment to you but the raiment of righteousness that is the best. Such are among the signs of Allah that they may receive admonition! O you children of Adam!

Let not Satan seduce you in the same manner as he got your parents out of the garden stripping them of their raiment to expose their shame: for he and his tribe watch you from a position where you cannot see them: We made the evil ones friends (only) to those without faith ^[18].

On the question of pregnancy and childbirth, the Qur'an states: And We have enjoined on the person (to be good) to his/her parents: in travail upon travail did his/her mother bear his/her and in years twain was his/her weaning: (hear the command) "Show gratitude to Me and to your parents: to Me is (your final) Goal ^[19]."

We have enjoined on the person kindness to his/her parents: in pain did his/her mother bear him/her and in paid did she give him/her birth. The carrying of the (child) to his/her weaning is (a period of) thirty months. At length when he/she reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years he/she says "O my Lord! Grant me that I may be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon both my parents and that I may work righteousness such as You may approve; and be gracious to me in my issue. Truly have I turned to You and truly do I bow (to You) in Islam [submission] ^[20]."

3.2 The Social Status

With the advent of Islam, the darkness of that era vanished and Allah enjoined kindness, love and compassion towards girls. Islam prohibited any killings of female children.

a) As a Daughter

The Qur'an effectively ended the cruel pre-Islamic practice of female infanticide (*wa'd*):

When the female (infant) buried alive is questioned for what crime she was killed ^[21].

The Qur'an went further to rebuke the unwelcoming attitudes among some parents upon hearing the news of the birth of a baby girl, instead of a baby boy:

When news is brought to one of them of (the birth of) a female (child) his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain her on (sufferance and) contempt or bury her in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide on! ^[22].

b) As a Wife

1) The dowry

A woman has a right to dowry which should be stated during the marriage contract. It is an essential part of the marriage contract and cannot be conceded by the wife, even if the wife

chooses to do so, until the contract has been concluded. Allah (swt) says:

“And give to the women (whom you marry) their dowry with a good heart. But if they, of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take it and enjoy it without fear of any harm ^[23].”

2) Justice and Equality

If a man has more than one wife, he is required to treat them fairly and justly. He should treat them equally regarding food, drink, dress, residence and time allotted to each. The Prophet (SAAS) said:

“If a man has two wives and favors one of them over the other in fair-treatment, he will come on the Day of Requit with one side tilted.” [Sunan Abu Dawood]

3) Providing for wife and children

A husband is required to provide an appropriate residence and living requirements; such as food, drink, clothing, as well as money to upkeep them, in an amount which is within his means. Allah (SWT) says:

“Let the rich man spend according to his means, and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him. Allah will grant after hardship, ease ^[24].”

In order to encourage Muslims to provide for their family, Islam has regarded this as a charity which a person will be rewarded for. The Prophet (SAAS) said to one of his companions named Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas (RA):

“And indeed whatever you spend, it will be regarded as charity, even a morsel [of food] which you raise to place in your wife's mouth.” [Sahih al-Bukhari]

The wife has the right to take money from her husband without his knowledge if he does not appropriately provide for them. Hind bint 'Utbah said to the Prophet (SAAS):

“O Messenger of Allah (SAAS) indeed Abu Sufyan is miserly, and he does not give me what my child and I can suffice with, except what I take from him without his knowledge.” He said, “Take what suffices you and your child without excess.” [Sahih al-Bukhari]

4) Living compassionately and special relations

This is one of the most important things the Religion has commanded the husband to offer... for a wife is in need of a loving heart and a husband who trifles with her and fulfills her desires. This will also guarantee that his wife does not do blameworthy things. The Prophet (SAAS) said to *Jabir* (RA):

“Have you gotten married O Jabir?” I replied, “Yes.” He said, “A virgin or other than that?” I replied, “Other than that.” He said, “Why did you not marry a young virgin so as to sport with her, and make each other laugh?” [Sahih al-Bukhari]

5) Keeping her secrets

He should keep private (intimate) relationship secrets, and refrain from exposing her secrets, shortcomings and other things he notices or hears from her. The Prophet (SAAS) said: “The worst of people in the sight of Allah, on the Day of Requit, is the man who has relations with his wife and she

has relations with him, and then he divulges her secrets.” [Sahih Muslim]

6) Treating her with kindness

A husband should treat his wife with kindness. He should consult her about mutual everyday matters, provide her with the means of happiness and show to her that he loves her by joking and playing with her. The Prophet (SAAS) said:

“The best and most complete believers are the best of them in character and manners, and the best of you are the best of you towards their wives.” [Sunan Tirmidhi]

3.3 The Political Status

An objective study of Islamic history will uncover evidence of woman's political rights in Islam. Women have always had equal rights as men, of election, nomination to political office, and rights to participate in all public affairs. In both the Qur'an and throughout Islamic history, we find examples of women actively participating in serious debates - even with the Prophet (SAAS) himself ^[25]. During the Caliphate of Umar Ibn al-Khattab (RA), a woman proved to be correct in an argument to which the leader, with humility, declared before an audience: “The woman is right and Umar (RA) is wrong ^[26]. This was of course, to the advantage of the woman.

4. Conclusion

Allah created mankind into men and women as equal partners. He gave to each gender certain roles and responsibilities that requires no interference. This is because; men are not like women and vice versa. No one is allowed to claim the role and honor of another. For instance, the Shariah honors and attaches importance and special role to women, which take into cognizance their nature and ability. The women determine the nature and quality of future generations as home makers and main custodian of fundamental values of society. As such, the development of any society requires the cooperation and effective participation of women with piety and chastity. That is why the laws of Islam relieve them from those excesses of the Jahiliyah which denied them humanity and equality with men. It restored the right of women to sustain the quality of future generation among others. It also equated them with men and gave women special attention to achieve their role. This is because, neglecting or mistreating women means enslaving the future, which ultimately produces weak society. As such, Islam is neither a sexist religion nor oppresses women but a divine religion that preserves men and women on the same footing with equal and special rights. It does not prohibit women from working outside their homes, provided that they have a definite need for it, which shall not affect her original role and primary duty to the family. Therefore, Islam is not against the equality of men and women, but it is against any advocacy that preaches identicalness of their rights. That is why the noble Prophet (SAW) cursed who ever attempts to resemble the opposite gender.

5. References

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 - ⁵ M. Munir, *Islam in History*, Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, India, 2005, p. 19.
 - ⁶ Al-Qur'an, Surah An-Nahl, 16:58-59, Surah Al-Takwir, 81:8-9.
 - ⁷ I.A. Ahmad, *Protection of Women's Rights under the Shariah*, Dakwa Bookstore, Saudi Arabia, 2010, p. 11.
 - ⁸ Al-Qur'an, Surah Bani Israel, 17:70
 - ⁹ K. Murat, *Islam: The Final Divine Religion*, Erkam Publishers, Istanbul, Turkey, 2009, p. 43.
 - ¹⁰ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:228
 - ¹¹ Al-Qur'an, Surah At-Tawbah, 9:71
 - ¹² Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Tin, 95:4
 - ¹³ Al-Qur'an, Surah A'li Imran, 3:195
 - ¹⁴ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:228
 - ¹⁵ Al-Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa, 4:1
 - ¹⁶ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-A'raf, 7:189
 - ¹⁷ Al-Qur'an, Surah Bani Israel, 17:70
 - ¹⁸ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-A'raf, 7:19-27
 - ¹⁹ Al-Qur'an, Surah A'li Imran, 3:14
 - ²⁰ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Ahqaf, 46:15
 - ²¹ Al-Qur'an, Surah 81:8-9
 - ²² Al-Qur'an, Surah An-Nahl, 16:58-59
 - ²³ Al-Quran, Surah An-Nisa,4:4
 - ²⁴ Al-Quran, Surah At-Talaq,65:7
 - ²⁵ Al-Qur'an 58:1-4 and 60:10-12.
 - ²⁶ Dr. Jamal A. Badawi, *The Position of Women in Islam*, UK, Dawah Centre, n.d. p. 11.

End Notes

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- ¹ Al-Qur'an, Surah An-Nahl, 16:58-59, Surah Al-Takwir, 81:8-9.
 - ² B.I. Zakariyyah, *Important Events in the History of Prophet Muhammad (SAW)*, Vol., 1-4. Sherikat Matabi, Khartoum, Sudan, 2011, p. 19.
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