

## Introduction

There are a number of issues surrounding women which are mentioned in the Qur'an and which are subject of much debate. It is not unusual to see people from the "antifundamentalist camp" obtain a copy of an English translation of the Qur'an, read through it, and pounce upon certain references as ammunition to use against Islam and Muslims. With little, if any, knowledge of Arabic, of the historical and social context in which the Qur'an was revealed, the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) or of Islam as a way of life, they think that they have found the loose thread which will unravel the whole religion!

When we look at the historical context in which how women were treated, the new order brought by Islam appears revolutionary. Prior to Islam, females in Arabia were devalued: if they weren't murdered in infancy, they could expect a life of humiliation, being used and abused by men as "playthings", (as the new form of oppression of 'the pornography industry') and/or trapped in miserable marriages. Morals were lax, to say the least. Islam made it quite clear that men had the responsibility to protect women (wives, daughters, etc.) from the predatory approaches of outsiders, whilst also maintaining them, i.e. providing them with food, shelter, clothing, education, etc. The woman, in turn, whilst enjoying security, had the responsibility of guarding her own chastity and morals. In this new, safer, climate, it was easier for her to do so; this also facilitated the preservation of lineage which is so important in the Islamic scheme of things.

Women were very much sidelined, and denied any significant role or opportunity for advancement in the intellectual and spiritual spheres. The early church, for example, spent a considerable amount of time making up its mind as to whether women actually possessed a soul.

A number of Ahadith indicate that daughters were to be cherished, educated and supported until they reached the age of maturity: the reward for doing this was to be no less than Paradise. Another Hadith quotes the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, as saying: "Do not hate your daughters; I am also the father of (several) daughters." In fact, the changes brought by Islam in this satirical comment: "After the Prophethood of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, there are girls and girls everywhere!"

### **Are men and women equal in God's judgment?**

Many Westerners think that Islam is very prejudiced and oppressive towards women. In the Islam of today as practiced by most traditional sectarian Muslims, this is very true. However, in true Islam (Submission), as revealed in the Qur'an, nothing could be further from the truth.

God treats men and women as spiritual equals, Qur'an 3:195 tells us:

*"Their Lord responded to them: "I never fail to reward any worker amongst you for any work you do, be you MALE OR FEMALE, YOU ARE EQUAL TO ONE ANOTHER....."*

Many Muslim countries who claim to follow Islam are treating women as second class citizens, and some of these women accept this situation thinking this is what Islam is advocating. As mentioned previously, God, in the Qur'an made a complete spiritual equality between men and women, See 3:195.

Most of the degradation, humiliation and poor treatment of women in these Muslim Countries come from the desertion of the Qur'an, and refutation of the word of God.

The total respect and rights guaranteed by God for the Muslim women cannot be taken away by a lie written in another man-made book. While God made men and women spiritually equal as seen in 3:195

However, what God revealed in the Qur'an is very different. The spiritual equality between men and women is reiterated in 4:124, as follows:

*"As for those who lead a righteous life, male or female. While believing, they enter Paradise; without the slightest injustice"*

and again in 16:97:

*"Anyone who works righteousness, male or female, while believing, we will surely grant them a happy life in this world, and we will surely pay them their full recompense for their righteous works."*

and yet again in 40:40, *"Whoever commits a sin is requited for just that, and whoever works righteousness - male or female - while believing, these will enter Paradise wherein they receive provisions without any limits."*

I believe it is time to go back to the Qur'an, and believe God, before a day comes when the messenger will complain to God, that the Muslims deserted the Qur'an, 25:30

### **Manu Law**

The law of Manu in India recognised no rights for the woman independent of her father, her husband or in the event that her father and husband were no longer alive, her sons.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, if she had neither father, husband, nor son present with her, she has to remain under guardianship of some relative of her husband's, and she was given no freedom to dispose of her own affairs under any circumstances whatsoever. However, even crueller than the denial of her right to life independent of that of her husband, since she was literally doomed to die with him, that is, by being burnt to death by the same flames in which her husband was being cremated. This ancient custom continued to be practiced from the earliest eras of Brahman civilisation until the 19th Century AD.<sup>2</sup>

### **Women are humans?**

Aristotle for example, in his writings argued that women were not full human beings and that the nature of women were not that of a full human person. Saint Thomas of Aquinas in his writings proposed that women were the trap of Satan. The issue of Adam and Eve added a dimension to the earlier Greek ideas of Aristotle; women were the cause of the downfall of man and therefore were Satan's trap and should be looked at with caution and weariness because they caused the first downfall of humanity and all thus evil precedes from women.

One of the first books written upon this subject was the "Vindication for the Rights of Women" by Mary Walsenecraft which appeared in the 1800's. Thereafter the tradition of women receiving certain rights came. The first of these were basically legal rights, because until 1800's women were not able to own property and were not able to dispose of their wealth as men did. It is very well known that the first laws that allowed women to own property, or inherit, in the United States or in Europe appeared only in the last couple of decades of the 1900's. In the United States for example, women were not allowed to vote until the Constitution added the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

### **Women's rights in Islam!**

In Islam women have the right to keep her own family name, and not have it replaced with the husband's as practised in the West, where historically under Roman law women lost their identity upon marriage and became a possession of the husband, signified by the family name change.

Muslim women have the privilege to earn money, to hold property in her name, or to dispose of her property without the consent of her husband, to enter legal contracts and to manage all of her assets in any way she pleases- a privilege only recently being enjoyed by western women since the last century. She can run her own business and no one has any claim on her earnings, including her husband. She has the right to inherit from her relatives, right to vote, to hold important positions in government. 'Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) the wife of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) acted as an advisor to the Caliphs (Muslim ruler), she was also a Commander of an army at one point – all this took place in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, and was made by Islamic teachings, and after 14 centuries we yet to see such example emulated elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> The Law of Manu, IV- reads, "Her father protects her in childhood, her husband protects her in youth and her sons protect her in old age; a woman is never fit for independence."

<sup>2</sup> This practice (known as "Suttee" or "Sati") was outlawed by the British in 1829, not long after the Indian reformer, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, waged a campaign against it.

The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) honoured women with the description of 'the queen of her house', and this is the position a Muslim women enjoys in practice, and not just in words.

In this scientific age we can explore the significance of this legislation. A great deal has been discovered since the early days of Islâm. And each day of advancement brings about a better understanding of the last and final revelation from the Creator, Allah, to the creation of humankind.

Our problem is that we tend to go to extremes when dealing with social and intellectual issues. We are rarely guided upon the middle way which represent one of the general and most prominent features of Islamic theology and commandments.

This is strikingly clear in this issue as well as all other issues related to contemporary Muslim women.

**The Westernised type** who want to impose Western traditions, which include decadence and lack of values - especially religious, and deviation from normal nature. In addition to staying away from the rightly guided path, that Allah has sent prophets and holy books to show to the people and call them to abide by.

They want the Muslim woman to follow the habits of Western women, inch by inch and step by step as was visualized in the hadith of the Prophet: "Even if she enters the lizard's hole she follows her even it was twisted and narrow and smelled bad." Nevertheless, if the Western woman enters it, the Muslim woman follows suit. Or in other word, a new kind of amicability that some tried to propagate that was known as "Amicability of the lizard's hole".

#### **The difference**

Islam creates competition spiritually and not physically. As we all know that men and women are both physically different, the knees, hips, shoulder blade and the basic bodily structure of both men and women are different.

#### **The problem**

It is problematic when the Qur'an is studied without jurisprudence (Fiqh) and without understanding. Let us look at the interpretation of Ibn Abbas, whom the Prophet made supplication for that; '*O Allah give him understanding of the religion and teach him how to interpret the Qur'an*'. When Ibn Abbas was asked about this verse he said; 'It is the degree of giving up your rights, men have a degree in that'. Now men are told by Allah to give all of your rights to them but do not demand all of your rights from them. Ibn Abbas is he who said, 'I love to prepare myself by hygiene and presentation in the same way I love my wife to do that for me'. The point of Ibn Abbas is that 'I like to do for my wife what I like her to do for me'.

Ibn Abbas also said that; 'When push comes to shove, it's me who gets pushed'.

The following narrative may offer food for thought for all concerned:

'Umar ibn Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) said that a man came to his house to complain about his wife. On reaching the door of his house, he hears 'Umar's (may Allah be pleased with him) wife shouting at him and reviling him. Seeing this, he was about to go back, thinking that 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) himself was in the same position and, therefore, could hardly suggest any solution for this problem. 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) saw the man turn back, so called him and enquired about the purpose of his visit. He said that he had come with a complaint against his wife, but turned back on seeing the Caliph in the same position. 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) told him that he tolerated the excesses of his wife for she had certain rights against him. he said, "Is it not true that she prepares food for me, washes clothes for me and suckles my children, thus saving me the expense of employing a cook, a washerman and a nurse, though she is not legally obliged in any way to do any of these things? Besides, I enjoy peace of mind because of her and am kept away from indecent acts on account of her. I therefore tolerate all her excesses on account of these benefits. It is right that you should also adopt the same attitude."<sup>3</sup>

Try doing the job of the wife; and there is a disadvantage in the material but an advantage in the spiritual and we prefer the spiritual over the material.

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<sup>3</sup> The Muslim Women's handbook. Page 44

So we find that women get the reward of jihad; and there are men who sit and expect their wives to get them a cup of tea. If they knew the reward they would be making her tea because of the reward of jihad.

A further explanation of the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon may be located in the primordial female tendency to nurture. Consistently through the pre-modern world, women were primarily involved in care for the young, the sick, and the elderly. As the feminist writer Carol Gilligan observes, 'women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care.' Girls are 'more person-oriented', while boys tend to be more 'object-oriented.'

The West view Muslim women whom wear the hijab as being oppressed. Only that their idea of oppression is not the same as our idea. We believe it is not the same as our idea. We believe it is due to men's weakness that the hijab was given, in order to protect women.

I will explain some of the common questions asked about women in Islam. If you read the chapters in this book Insha'Allah, the uncertain questions in your mind will become clear. I pray to Allah (The Exalted) that He opens our minds and hearts and gives us a better understanding of Islam.