

WOMEN IN ISLAM (PART 2 OF 2)

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The Social Aspect of Women in Islam

A) As a Daughter:

(1) The Quran ended the cruel practice of female infanticide, which was before Islam. God has said:

***“And when the girl (who was) buried alive is asked, for what sin she was killed.”
(Quran 81:8-9)***

(2) The Quran went further to rebuke the unwelcoming attitude of some parents upon hearing the news of the birth of a baby girl, instead of a baby boy. God has said:

“And when one of them is informed of (the birth of) a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Certainly, evil is what they decide.” (Quran 16:58-59)

(3) Parents are duty-bound to support and show kindness and justice to their daughters. The Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said: **“Whosoever supports two daughters until they mature, he and I will come on the Day of Judgment as this (and he pointed with his fingers held together).”**

(4) A crucial aspect in the upbringing of daughters that greatly influences their future is education. Education is not only a right but a responsibility for all males and females. The Prophet Muhammad said: **“Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim.”** The word “Muslim” here is inclusive of both males and females.

(5) Islam neither requires nor encourages female circumcision. And while it is maybe practiced by some Muslims in certain parts of Africa, it is also practiced by other

peoples, including Christians, in those places, a reflection merely of the local customs and practices there.

B) As a Wife:

(1) Marriage in Islam is based on mutual peace, love, and compassion, and not just the mere satisfying of human sexual desire. Among the most impressive verses in the Quran about marriage is the following:

“And of His signs is: that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought.” (Quran 30:21, see also 42:11 and 2:228)

(2) The female has the right to accept or reject marriage proposals. According to the Islamic Law, women cannot be forced to marry anyone without their consent.

(3) The husband is responsible for the maintenance, protection, and overall leadership of the family, within the framework of consultation (see the Quran 2:233) and kindness (see the Quran 4:19). The mutuality and complementary nature of the role of husband and wife does not mean subservience by either party to the other. The Prophet Muhammad instructed Muslims regarding women: **“I commend you to be good to women.”** And **“The best among you are those who are best to their wives.”** The Quran urges husbands to be kind and considerate to their wives, even if a wife falls out of favor with her husband or disinclination for her arises within him:

“...And live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them, perhaps you dislike a thing and God makes therein much good.” (Quran 4:19)

It also outlawed the Arabian practice before Islam whereby the stepson of the deceased father was allowed to take possession of his father's widow(s) (inherit them) as if they were part of the estate of the deceased (see the Quran 4:19).

(4) Should marital disputes arise, the Quran encourages couples to resolve them privately in a spirit of fairness and goodness. Indeed, the Quran outlines an enlightened step and wise approach for the husband and wife to resolve persistent conflict in their marital life. In the event that dispute cannot be resolved equitably between husband and wife, the Quran prescribes mediation between the parties through family intervention on behalf of both spouses (see the Quran 4:35).

(5) Divorce is a last resort, permissible but not encouraged, for the Quran esteems the preservation of faith and the individual's right -male and female alike- to felicity. Forms of marriage dissolution include an enactment based upon mutual agreement, the husband's initiative, the wife's initiative (if part of her marital contract), the court's decision on a wife's initiative (for a legitimate reason), and the wife's initiative without a cause, provided that she returns her marital gift to her husband. When the continuation

of the marriage relationship is impossible for any reason, men are still taught to seek a gracious end for it. The Quran states about such cases:

“And when you divorce women and they have fulfilled their term (i.e. waiting period), either keep them in kindness or release them in kindness, and do not keep them, intending harm, to transgress (against them).” (Quran 2:231, see also 2:229 and 33:49)

(6) Associating polygyny with Islam, as if it was introduced by it or is the norm according to its teachings, is one of the most persistent myths perpetuated in Western literature and media. Polygyny existed in almost all nations and was even sanctioned by Judaism and Christianity until recent centuries. Islam did not outlaw polygyny, as did many peoples and religious communities; rather, it regulated and restricted it. It is not required but simply permitted with conditions (see the Quran 4:3). Spirit of law, including timing of revelation, is to deal with individual and collective contingencies that may arise from time to time (e.g. imbalances between the number of males and females created by wars) and to provide a moral, practical, and humane solution for the problems of widows and orphans.

C) As a Mother:

(1) The Quran elevates kindness to parents (especially mothers) to a status second to the worship of God:

“Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If one of them or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect, or scold them, but say a generous word to them. And act humbly to them in mercy, and say, ‘My Lord, have mercy on them, since they cared for me when I was small.’” (Quran 17:23-24, see also 31:14, 46:15, and 29:8)

(2) Naturally, the Prophet Muhammad specified this behavior for his followers, rendering to mothers an unequalled status in human relationships. A man came to the Prophet Muhammad and said, “O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship?” The Prophet said: “**Your mother.**” The man said, “Then who?” The Prophet said: “**Then your mother.**” The man further asked, “Then who?” The Prophet said: “**Then your mother.**” The man asked again, “Then who?” The Prophet said: “**Then your father.**”

D) As a Sister in Faith (In General):

(1) According to the Prophet Muhammad’s sayings: “**women are but shaqa’iq (twin halves or sisters) of men.**” This saying is a profound statement that directly relates to the issue of human equality between the genders. If the first meaning of the Arabic word shaqa’iq, “twin halves,” is adopted, it means that the male is worth one half (of society), while the female is worth the other half. If the second meaning, “sisters,” is adopted, it implies the same.

(2) The Prophet Muhammad taught kindness, care, and respect toward women in general: **“I commend you to be good to women.”** It is significant that such instruction of the Prophet was among his final instructions and reminders in the farewell pilgrimage address given shortly before his passing away.

(3) Modesty and social interaction: The parameters of proper modesty for males and females (dress and behavior) are based on revelatory sources (the Quran and prophetic sayings) and, as such, are regarded by believing men and women as divinely-based guidelines with legitimate aims and divine wisdom behind them. They are not male-imposed or socially imposed restrictions. It is interesting to know that even the Bible encourages women to cover their head: “If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.” (1 Corinthians 11:6).

The Legal and Political Aspect of Women in Islam

(1) Equality before the Law: Both genders are entitled to equality before the Law and courts of Law. Justice is genderless (see the Quran 5:38, 24:2, and 5:45). Women do possess an independent legal entity in financial and other matters.

(2) Participation in Social and Political Life: The general rule in social and political life is participation and collaboration of males and females in public affairs (see the Quran 9:71). There is sufficient historical evidence of participation by Muslim women in the choice of rulers, in public issues, in Law making, in administrative positions, in scholarship and teaching, and even in the battlefield. Such involvement in social and political affairs was conducted without the participants’ losing sight of the complementary priorities of both genders and without violating Islamic guidelines of modesty and virtue.

Conclusion

The status which non-Muslim women reached during the present era was not achieved due to the kindness of men or due to natural progress. It was rather achieved through a long struggle and sacrifice on woman’s part and only when society needed her contribution and work, more especially during the two world wars, and due to the escalation of technological change. While in Islam such compassionate and dignified status was decreed, not because it reflects the environment of the seventh century, nor under the threat or pressure of women and their organizations, but rather because of its intrinsic truthfulness.

If this indicates anything, it would demonstrate the Divine origin of the Quran and the truthfulness of the message of Islam, which, unlike human philosophies and ideologies, was far from proceeding from its human environment; a message which established such humane principles that neither grew obsolete during the course of time, nor can become obsolete in the future. After all, this is the message of the All-Wise and All-

Knowing God whose wisdom and knowledge are far beyond the ultimate in human thought and progress.

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