

## Islam for Women, Role of her individuality? Reehana Yaseen

### Abstract

The status of woman in Islam constitutes no problem. The attitude of the Qur'an and the early Muslims bear witness to the fact that woman is, at least, as vital to life as man himself, and that she is not inferior to him nor is she one of the lower species. Had it not been for the impact of foreign cultures and alien influences, this question would have never arisen among the Muslims. The status of woman was taken for granted to be equal to that of man. It was a matter of course, a matter of fact, and no one, then, considered it as a problem at all. In order to understand what Islam has established for woman, there is no need to deplore her plight in the pre-Islamic era or in the modern world of today. Islam has given woman rights and privileges which she has never enjoyed under other religious or constitutional systems. This can be understood when the matter is studied as a whole in a comparative manner, rather than partially.

**Key words;** Veil, Khalifa, Decree, Faith, Libertinism, Hazrat.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

. The rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man but they are not necessarily identical with them. Equality and sameness are two quite different things. This difference is understandable because man and woman are not identical but they are created equals. With this distinction in mind, there is no problem. It is almost impossible to find even two identical men or women. This distinction between equality and sameness is of paramount importance.

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Equality is desirable, just, fair; but sameness is not. People are not created identical but they are created equals. With this distinction in mind, there is no room to imagine that woman is inferior to man. There is no ground to assume that she is less important than he just because her rights 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. The fact that Islam gives her equal rights but not identical shows that it takes her into due consideration, acknowledges her, and recognizes her independent personality. It is not the tone of Islam that brands woman as the product of the devil or the seed of evil. Nor does the Qur'an place man as the dominant lord of woman who has no choice but to surrender to his dominance. Nor was it Islam that introduced the question of whether or not woman has any soul in her. Never in the history of Islam has any Muslim doubted the human status of woman or her possession of soul and other fine spiritual qualities. Unlike other popular beliefs, Islam does not blame Hazrati Hawa(A.S) alone for the First Sin. The Qur'an makes it very clear that both Hazrati Adam(A.S) and Hazrati Hawa(A.S) were tempted; that they both sinned; that Allah's pardon was granted to both after their repentance; and that Allah addressed them jointly. . In fact the Qur'an gives the impression that Hazrati Adam(A.S) was more to blame for that First Sin from which emerged prejudice against woman and suspicion of her deeds. But Islam does not justify such prejudice or suspicion because both Hazrati Adam(A.S) and Hazrati Hawa(A.S) were equally in error, and if we are to blame Hazrati Hawa(A.S) we should blame Hazrati Adam(A.S) as much or even more. The status of woman in Islam is something unique, something novel, and something that has no similarity in any other system. If we look to the Eastern Communist world or to the democratic nations, we find that woman is not really in a happy position. Her status is not enviable. She has to work so hard to live, and sometimes she may be doing the same job that a man does but her wage is less than his. She enjoys a kind of liberty which in some cases amounts to libertinism. To get to where she is nowadays, woman struggled hard for decades and centuries. To gain the right of learning and the freedom of work and earning, she had to offer painful sacrifices and give up many of her natural rights. To establish her status as a human being possessing a soul, she paid heavily. Yet in spite of all these

costly sacrifices and painful struggles, she has not acquired what Islam has established by a Divine decree for the Muslim woman. The rights of woman of modern times were not granted voluntarily or out of kindness to the female. Modern woman reached her present position by force, and not through natural processes or mutual consent or Divine teachings. She had to force her way, and various circumstances came to her aid. Shortage of manpower during wars, pressure of economic needs and requirements of industrial developments forced woman to get out of her home - to work, to learn, to struggle for her livelihood, to appear as an equal to man, to run her race in the course of life side by side with him. She was forced by circumstances and in turn she forced herself through and acquired her new status. Whether all women were pleased with these circumstances being on their side, and whether they are happy and satisfied with the results of this course is a different matter. But the fact remains that whatever rights modern woman enjoys fall short of those of her Muslim counterpart.

## **2.WOMEN IN ISLAM**

What Islam has established for woman is that which suits her nature, gives her full security and protects her against disgraceful circumstances and uncertain channels of life. We do not need here to elaborate on the status of modern woman and the risks she runs to make her living or establish herself. We do not even need to explore the miseries and setbacks that encircle her as a result of the so-called rights of woman. Nor do we intend to manipulate the situation of many unhappy homes which break because of the very "freedom" and "rights" of which modern woman is proud. Most women today exercise the right of freedom to go out independently, to work and earn, and to pretend to be equal to man, but this, sadly enough, is at the expense of their families. This all known and obvious. What is not known is the status of woman in Islam. Woman is recognized by Islam as a full and equal partner of man in the procreation of humankind. He is the father; she is the mother, and both are essential for life. Her role is not less vital than his. By this partnership she has an equal share in every aspect; she is entitled to equal rights; she

undertakes equal responsibilities, and in her there are as many qualities and as much humanity as there are in her partner. To this equal partnership in the reproduction of human kind God says:

O mankind! Verily we have created you're from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other... (Qur'an, 49:13; cf. 4:1).

She is equal to man in bearing personal and common responsibilities and in receiving rewards for her deeds. She is acknowledged as an independent personality, in possession of human qualities and worthy of spiritual aspirations. Her human nature is neither inferior to nor deviant from that of man. Both are members of one another. God says:

And their Lord has accepted (their prayers) and answered them (saying): 'Never will I cause to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female; you are members, one of another... .

She is equal to man in the pursuit of education and knowledge. When Islam enjoins the seeking of knowledge upon Muslims, it makes no distinction between man and woman. Almost fourteen centuries ago, Muhammad(S.A.W) declared that the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim male and female. This declaration was very clear and was implemented by Muslims throughout history. She is entitled to freedom of expression as much as man is. Her sound opinions are taken into consideration and cannot be disregarded just because she happens to belong to the female sex. It is reported in the Qur'an and history that woman not only expressed her opinion freely but also argued and participated in serious discussions with the Prophet(S.A.W) himself as well as with other Muslim leaders (Qur'an, 58:1-4; 60:10-12). Besides there were occasions when Muslim women expressed their views on legislative matters of public interest, and stood in opposition to the Khalifahs, who then accepted the sound arguments of these women. A specific example took place during the Caliphate of Umar Ibn al-Khattab.

### **3. HISTORICAL STUDY OF WOMEN IN ISLAM**

Historical records show that women participated in public life with the early Muslims, especially in times of emergencies. Women used to accompany the Muslim armies engaged in battles to nurse the wounded, prepare supplies, and serve the warriors, and so on. They were not shut behind iron bars or considered worthless creatures and deprived of souls. Islam grants woman equal rights to contract, to enterprise, to earn and possess independently. Her life, her property, her honor are as sacred as those of man. If she commits any offense, her penalty is no less or more than of man's in a similar case. If she is wronged or harmed, she gets due compensations equal to what a man in her position would get. Islam does not state these rights in a statistical form and then relax. It has taken all measures to safeguard them and put them into practice as integral articles of Faith. It never tolerates those who are inclined to prejudice against woman or discrimination between man and woman. Time and again, the Qur'an reproaches those who used to believe woman to be inferior to man. Apart from recognition of woman as an independent human being acknowledged as equally essential for the survival of humanity, Islam has given her a share of inheritance. Before Islam, she was not only deprived of that share but was herself considered as property to be inherited by man. Out of that transferable property Islam made an heir, acknowledging the inherent human qualities in woman. Whether she is a wife or mother, a sister or daughter, she receives a certain share of the deceased kin's property, a share which depends on her degree of relationship to the deceased and the number of heirs. This share is hers, and no one can take it away or disinherit her. Even if the deceased wishes to deprive her by making a will to other relations or in favor of any other cause, the Law will not allow him to do so. Any proprietor is permitted to make his will within the limit of one-third of his property, so he may not affect the rights of his heirs, men and women. In the case of inheritance, the question of quality and sameness is fully applicable. In principle, both man and woman are equally entitled to inherit the property of the deceased relations but the portions they get may vary. In some

instances man receives two shares whereas woman gets one only. This is no sign of giving preference or supremacy to man over woman. The reasons why man gets more in these particular instances may be classified as follows:

First man is the person solely responsible for the complete maintenance of his wife, his family and any other needy relations. It is his duty by Law to assume all financial responsibilities and maintain his dependents adequately. It is also his duty to contribute financially to all good causes in his society. All financial burdens are borne by him alone. Secondly, in contrast, woman has no financial responsibilities whatsoever except very little of her personal expenses, the high luxurious things that she likes to have. She is financially secure and provided for. If she is a wife, her husband is the provider; if she is a mother, it is the son; if she is a daughter, it is the father; if she is a sister; it is the brother, and so on. If she has no relations on whom she can depend, then there is no question of inheritance because there is nothing to inherit and there is no one to bequeath anything to her. However, she will not be left to starve; maintenance of such a woman is the responsibility of the society as a whole, the state. She may be given aid or a job to earn her living, and whatever money she makes will be hers. She is not responsible for the maintenance of anybody else besides herself. If there is a man in her position, he would still be responsible for his family and possibly any of his relations who need his help. So, in the hardest situation her financial responsibility is limited, while his is unlimited. Thirdly, when a woman gets less than a man does, she is not actually deprived of anything that she has worked for. The property inherited is not the result of her earning or her endeavors. It is something coming to them from a neutral source, something additional or extra. It is something that neither man nor woman struggled for. It is a sort of aid, and any aid has to be distributed according to the urgent needs and responsibilities especially when the distribution is regulated by the Law of Allah. Now, we have a male heir, on one side, burdened with all kinds of financial responsibilities and liabilities.

We have, on the other side, a female heir with no financial responsibilities at all or at most with very little of it. In between we have some property and aid to redistribute by way of inheritance. If we deprive the female completely, it would be unjust to her because she is related to the deceased. Likewise, if we always give her a share equal to the man's, it would be unjust to him. So, instead of doing injustice to either side, Islam gives the man a larger portion of the inherited property to help him to meet his family needs and social responsibilities. At the same time, Islam has not forgotten her altogether, but has given her a portion to satisfy her very personal needs. In fact, Islam in this respect is being more kind to her than to him. Here we can say that when taken as a whole the rights of woman are equal to those of man although not necessarily identical (see Qur'an, 4:11-14, 176). In some instances of bearing witness to certain civil contracts, two men are required or one man and two women. Again, this is no indication of the woman being inferior to man. It is a measure of securing the rights of the contracting parties, because woman as a rule is not so experienced in practical life as man. This lack of experience may cause a loss to any party in a given contract. So the Law requires that at least two women should bear witness with one man. If a woman of the witness forgets something, the other one would remind her. Or if she makes an error, due to lack of experience, the other would help to correct her. This is a precautionary measure to guarantee honest transactions and proper dealings between people. In fact, it gives woman a role to play in civil life and helps to establish justice. At any rate, lack of experience in civil life does not necessarily mean that a woman is inferior to man in her status. Every human being lacks one thing or another, yet no one questions their human status. Woman enjoys certain privileges of which man is deprived. She is exempt from some religious duties, i.e., prayers and fasting, in her regular periods and at times of confinement. She is exempt from all financial liabilities. As a mother, she enjoys more recognition and higher honor in the sight of God. The Prophet (S.A.W) acknowledged this honor when he (S.A.W) declared that Paradise is under the feet of the mothers. She is entitled to three-fourths of the son's love and kindness with

one-fourth left for their father. As a wife she is entitled to demand of her prospective husband a suitable dowry that will be her own. She is entitled to complete provision and total maintenance by the husband. She does not have to work or share with her husband the family expenses. She is free to retain, after marriage, whatever she possessed before it, and the husband has no right whatsoever to any of her belongings. As a daughter or sister she is entitled to security and provision by the father and brother respectively. That is her privilege. If she wishes to work or be self-supporting and participate in handling the family responsibilities, she is quite free to do so, provided her integrity and honor are safeguarded. The standing of woman in prayers behind man does not indicate in any sense that she is inferior to him. Woman, as already mentioned, is exempt from attending congregational prayers which are obligatory on man. But if she does attend she stands in separate lines made up of women exclusively. This is a regulation of discipline in prayers, and not a classification of importance. In men's rows the head of state stands shoulder to shoulder to the pauper. Men of the highest ranks in society stand in prayer side by side with other men of the lowest ranks. The order of lines in prayers is introduced to help everyone to concentrate in his meditation. It is very important because Muslim prayers are not simply chanting or the sing-a-song type. They involve actions, motions, standing, bowing, prostration, etc. So if men mix with women in the same lines, it is possible that something disturbing or distracting may happen. The mind will become occupied by something alien to prayer and derailed from the clear path of mediation. The result will be a loss of the purpose of prayers, besides an offense of adultery committed by the eye, because the eye-by looking at forbidden things - can be guilty of adultery as much as the heart itself. Moreover, no Muslim man or woman is allowed during prayers to touch the body of another person of the opposite sex. If men and women stand side by side in prayer they cannot avoid touching each other. Furthermore, when a woman is praying in front of a man or beside him, it is very likely that any part of her dressed body may become uncovered after a certain motion of bowing or prostrating.



The man's eye may happen to be looking at the uncovered part, with the result that she will be embarrassed and he will be exposed to distraction or possibly evil thoughts. So, to avoid any embarrassment and distraction to help concentrate on meditation and pure thoughts, to maintain harmony and order among worshippers, to fulfill the true purposes of prayers, Islam has ordained the organization of rows, whereby men stand in front lines, and women behind the children. Anyone with some knowledge of the nature and purpose of Muslim prayer can readily understand the wisdom of organizing the lines of worshippers in this manner. The Muslim woman is always associated with an old tradition known as the "veil". It is Islamic that the woman should beautify herself with the veil of honor, dignity, chastity, purity and integrity. She should refrain from all deeds and gestures that might stir the passions of people other than her legitimate husband or cause evil suspicion of her morality. She is warned not to display her charms or expose her physical attractions before strangers. The veil which she must put on is one that can save her soul from weakness, her mind from indulgence, her eyes from lustful looks, and her personality from demoralization. Islam is most concerned with the integrity of woman, with the safeguarding of her morals and morale and with the protection of her character and personality .

#### **4.CONCLUSION**

By now it is clear that the status of woman in Islam is unprecedentedly high and realistically suitable to her nature. Her rights and duties are equal to those of man but not necessarily or absolutely identical with them. If she is deprived of one thing in some aspect, she is fully compensated for it with more things in many other aspects. The fact that she belongs to the female sex has no bearing on her human status or independent personality, and it is no basis for justification of prejudice against her or injustice to her person. Islam gives her as much as is required of her. Her rights match beautifully with her duties. The balance between rights and

duties is maintained, and no side overweighs the other. The whole status of woman is given clearly in the Qur'anic verse which may be translated as follows:

And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but man have a degree (of advantage as in some cases of inheritance) over them .This degree is not a title of supremacy or an authorization of dominance over her. It is to correspond with the extra responsibilities of man and give him some compensation for his unlimited liabilities. The above mentioned verse is always interpreted in the light of another .It is these extra responsibilities that give man a degree over woman in some economic aspects. It is not a higher degree in humanity or in character. Nor is it a dominance of one over the other or suppression of one by the other. It is a distribution of Allah's abundance according to the needs of the nature of which Allah is the Maker. And He knows best what is good for woman and what is good for man. Allah is absolutely true when He declares:

*O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who created you  
From a single person, and created of like nature his mate,  
And from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and  
Women (4:1).*

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