

# The eminence Islam attaches to women

God's commandments about the status of women and the relations between men and women, which have been revealed to us through the Qur'an, consist of full justice. In this regard, Islam suggests equality of rights, responsibilities and duties between the two genders. Islam is based on sympathy, tolerance and respect for human beings, and does not discriminate against women in this matter. On the contrary, Islam gives women great social value, freedom and comfort.

In the Qur'an God tells us that the tasks and responsibilities of women are the same as those of men. While performing these tasks and responsibilities men and women must help and support each other:



**The men and women of the believers are friends of one another. They command what is right and forbid what is wrong, and establish prayer and pay alms, and obey Allah and His Messenger. They are the people on whom Allah will have mercy. Allah is Almighty, All Wise. (Qur'an, 9:71)**

God emphasizes that believers will be rewarded in the same manner according to their deeds, regardless of their gender:

**Their Lord responds to them: 'I will not let the deeds of any doer among you go to waste, male or female - you are both the same in that respect... (Qur'an, 3:195)**

**Anyone who acts rightly, male or female, being a believer, We will give them a good life and We will recompense them according to the best of what they did. (Qur'an, 16:97)**

In another verse, Muslim men and women are considered together, and it is stressed that both have the same responsibility and status in God's sight:

**Men and women who are Muslims, men and women who are believers, men and women who are obedient, men and women who are truthful, men and women who are steadfast, men and women who are humble, men and women who give alms, men and women who fast, men and women who guard their private parts, men and women who remember Allah much: Allah has prepared forgiveness for them and an immense reward. (Qur'an, 33:35)**

In the Qur'an there are many more verses stating that men and women are exactly equal in terms of their tasks and responsibilities and their rewards or punishments in return. There are a few differences in social issues, but these are for the comfort and protection of women. The commands of the Qur'an regard the congenital differences between the two genders resulting from their creation, and suggest a system maintaining equal justice for men and women in this light.

Many rules and commandments exist in the Qur'an regarding the protection of women's rights on marriage. Marriage is based on the free will of both parties; the husband has to provide economic support for his wife (4:4); the husband has to look after his ex-wife after divorce (65:6).



## The Islamic Emancipation of Women

In fact, Islam brought with it a great emancipation for women, who were severely persecuted in the pagan era. Prof. Bernard Lewis, known as one of the greatest Western experts on the history of Islam and the Middle East, makes the following comment:

In general, **the advent of Islam brought an enormous improvement in the position of women in ancient Arabia, endowing them with property and some other rights**, and giving them a measure of protection against ill treatment by their husbands or owners. The killing of female infants, sanctioned by custom in Pagan Arabia, was outlawed by Islam. But the position of women remained poor, and worsened when, in this as in so many other respects, the original message of Islam lost its impetus and was modified under the influence of pre-existing attitudes and customs. [i]

Karen Armstrong, another Western expert on Islam, makes the following comment:

We must remember what life had been like for women in the pre-Islamic period when female infanticide was the norm and when women had no rights at all. Like slaves, women were treated as an inferior species, who had no legal existence. In such a primitive world, **what Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) achieved for women was extraordinary**. The very idea that a woman could be witness or could inherit anything at all in her own right was astonishing. [ii]

In fact, during the many centuries that followed Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), women of the Islamic societies had a much higher social position than the women of Christendom. Karen Armstrong emphasizes that, during the Middle Ages;

... the Muslims were horrified to see the way Western Christians treated their women in the Crusader states, and Christian scholars denounced Islam for giving too much power to menials like slaves and women. [iii]

Anna King, a modern Muslim woman and a convert - or, better to say, a revert - to Islam, explains the Islamic emancipation of women as follows:

Islam gave women the right to buy and sell on their own, own businesses and express her views politically, also encouraged women to study and learn Islamic knowledge, breaking a ban which several beliefs had stipulated, which forbid women to acquire any religious knowledge or touch religious texts... It also abolished the practice of marrying a woman without her consent.

The tendencies to see women as "an inferior species" who has no right for education and that must be totally secluded from the society arose much later in the Islamic world, as a result of deviations from the right Qur'anic path.

Thus, the mentality that despises women, excludes them from society and regards them as second class citizens has no place in Islam.

In fact, devout women are depicted as good examples for mankind in the Qur'an. One is Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Another is the wife of the Egyptian Pharaoh who, despite her husband's wickedness, is also described as an ideal Muslim. (see, 66:11-12) The Qur'an also describes very gentle conversations between the Prophet Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (27:42-44), and between Moses and two young ladies (28:23-26), which symbolize the civilized social relationship between the two genders.

Therefore, it is impossible for a Muslim to have a bigoted approach to women. In a society where true Islamic morals are practiced, immense respect and sympathy will be shown to women, and it will be ensured that they can live in comfort.

The fundamental rule in Qur'anic exegesis is ensuring that the derived meaning is in conformity with the integrity of the Qur'an. When this is considered, it is seen that all the rules mentioned to us by Allah regarding women form a social structure allowing them to live in the most comfortable and happiest way. In a society where all the moral values mentioned by Islam are practiced comprehensively, the social position of women becomes even more exalted than in societies that we today regard as modern.



[i] Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1995, p. 210

[ii] Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad A Biography of The Prophet*, Harper Collins Publisher, USA, 1992, p.191

[iii ]Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad A Biography of The Prophet*, Harper Collins Publisher, USA, 1992, p.199

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