

The Human Status of Woman in The Quran

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As what kind of entity does Islam envisage Woman? Does it consider her the equal of man in terms of dignity and the respect accorded to her or is she thought of as belonging to an inferior .species? This is the question which we now wish to answer

The particular philosophy of Islam concerning family rights:

Islam has a particular philosophy concerning the family rights of men and women which is contrary to what has been going on in the last fourteen centuries and with what is actually happening now. Islam does not believe in one kind of right one kind of duty and one kind of punishment for both men and women in every instance. It considers one set of rights and duties and punishments more appropriate for men and one set more appropriate for women. As a result on some occasions Islam has taken a similar position as regards both women and men and on other occasions different positions.

Why is that so and what is its basis? Is. that why Islam also like many other religions has derogatory views concerning women and has considered woman to be of an inferior species or does it have some other reasons and another philosophy?

You may have heard repeatedly in the speeches lectures and writings of the followers of western ideas that they consider Islamic laws concerning dowry maintenance divorce and polygyny and other laws like them as being contemptuous of and insulting to the female sex. In this way they try to create the impression that those provisions only prove that man alone has been favoured.

They say that all the rules and laws in the world before the twentieth century were based upon the notion that man due to his sex is a nobler being than woman and that woman was created simply for the benefit and use of man. Islamic rights also revolve in this same orbit of man's interest and benefit.

They say that Islam is a religion for men that it has not a acknowledged woman to be a complete human being and that it has not ordained laws for her which are necessary for a human being.

Had Islam gauged woman to be a complete human being it would not have provided for polygyny it would not have given the right of divorce to man it would not have made the witnessing of two women equivalent to that of one man it would not have given leadership of

the family to the husband it would not have made a woman's inheritance one half of the inheritance of a man it would not have countenanced that a woman be 'priced' in the name of a dowry it would not have provided for her economic and social independence and it would not have made her a 'pensioner' of man who is obliged to 'keep' her.

From the aforesaid thing they say it is inferred that Islam has humiliating views about woman and has taken her to be just a means to procreating more people and a necessary prerequisite for that. They add that although Islam is a religion of equality and has maintained real equality in other situations in the case of woman and man it did not observe it.

They say that Islam has provided discriminative and preferential rights for men. If it did not have in view discriminative and preferential rights for men it would not have ordained the above laws.

If we resolve the argument of these gentlemen into an Aristotelean logical pattern it would have the following form:

If Islam had considered woman a complete human being it would have ordained equal and similar rights for her but it has not ordained equal and similar rights for her. Therefore it does .not consider a woman a complete human being

Equality or identicalness:

The basis point which is used in these arguments is that the necessary result of men and women's sharing in human dignity and honour is that their rights should be the same and the identical. Now the thing on which philosophically speaking we should put our finger is to determine exactly what is the necessary result of man and woman's sharing in human dignity. Is the necessary conclusion that each of them should have rights equivalent to the other so that there should be no privilege or preference in favour of either of them or is it necessary that the rights of man and woman besides having equivalence and parity should also be exactly the same and that there should be no division what so ever of work and duty. No doubt the sharing of man and woman in human dignity and their equality as human beings demands their having equal human rights but how can there be identicalness of rights?

If we can begin to put aside the imitation and blind following of western philosophy and allow ourselves to think and ponder over the philosophical ideas and opinions which have come to us from them we must see firstly whether identicalness of rights is or is not necessary for equality of rights. Equality is different from identicalness.

Equality means parity and equitable- ness and identicalness means that they are exactly the same. It is possible that a father distribute his wealth equally and equitably among his sons but he may not distribute it identically. For example it is possible that a father has different kinds of

wealth: he may own a commercial firm some agricultural land and also some real estate but due to his having examined his sons and found different talents among them for example he may have found that one of them had a gift for commercial affairs and that the second had ability in agriculture and the third had the capability to manage real estate. When he comes to distribute his wealth amongst his sons in his life-time bearing in mind that he must give equally to his sons in terms of the value of the property and that there should be no preference nor discrimination he bequeaths his wealth according to the talents which he has found in them.

Quantity is different from quality. Equality is different from being exactly the same. What is certain is that Islam has not considered there to be identicalness or exact similarity of rights between men and women but it has never believed in preference and discrimination in favour of men as opposed to women. Islam has also observed the principle of equality between men and women. Islam is not against the equality of men and women but it does not agree with the identicalness of their rights.

The words "equality" and "equality" have earned a kind of sanctity because they embrace the meaning of equivalence and absence of discrimination. These words are attractive and draw respect from listeners specially when these words are joined to the word "rights". "Equality of rights" – how beautiful and sacred is this combination of words! Can there be anyone with a conscience and an innate moral sense who does not reverse these two words? But why is it that we who were once the standard bearers of knowledge philosophy and logic have come to such a position that others want to impose their opinions on us concerning the identicalness of the rights of men and women in the sacred name of equality of rights.

It is exactly like someone who wants to sell boiled beet roots and calls them pears. What is certain is that Islam has not granted the same rights to men and women in everything in the same way as it has not imposed the same duties and punishment on both of them on all occasions. However is the sum total of all the rights that have been established for women less in value than the rights that have been granted to men? Certainly not as we shall prove. Here a second question arises. Why has Islam granted dissimilar rights to men and women in certain instances? Why did it not allow the same rights for both of them? Would it not have been better for the rights of men and women to have been both equal and identical or is it preferable that the rights should be only equal but not the same? To study this point thoroughly it is necessary that we should discuss it in three parts:

1. The view of Islam concerning the human status of woman from the point of view of creation.

2. What is the reason for the differences which exist in the creation of man and woman. Are these differences the cause of there being dissimilarities in their natural rights or not?
3. The basic philosophy behind the differences that exist in Islamic law for men and women which in certain respects place them in different positions. Are these philosophical reasons still justifiable and do they still hold good or not

The status of woman in the world-view of Islam:

As for the first part the holy Qur'an is not only a collection of laws. It does not contain merely a series of dry commands and laws without comment. It contains both laws and history both exhortation and the interpretation of creation and countless other subjects. Just as the Qur'an lays down rules of action in the form of law on some occasions so it also comments upon existence and being. It explains the secrets of the creation of the earth and the sky plants animals and mankind and the secret of life and death greatness and suffering growth and decline wealth and poverty.

The Qur'an is not a treatise on philosophy but it has explicitly expressed its views concerning the three basic topics of philosophy: the universe mankind and society. Not only does the Quran teach its believers laws and not only does it give exhortation and advice but it also endows its followers with a special way of thinking a particular world-view by its interpretation of creation. The foundation of all Islamic commandments concerning social matters for example ownership government family rights and so forth is this same explanation which the Qur'an gives of creation and the things of the world.

One of the matters that have been commented on in the holy Qur'an is the subject of the creation of women and men. The Qur'an was not silent on this matter and did not provide an opportunity for those who talk nonsense to put forth their own philosophies for laws concerning men and women and then to accuse Islam of having a derogatory attitude towards women on the strength of their own theories. Islam has already laid down its views regarding women.

If we want to see what the view of the Qur'an is regarding the creation of woman and man it is necessary to have a look at the question of their creation as it is treated in the Books of other religions. The Qur'an also did not remain silent on this subject. We should see whether the Qur'an considers woman and man to be of one essence or two.

In other words whether woman and man have one nature and essence or two. The Qur'an most explicitly lays down in several ayat (verses) that: We created women from the nature of man and from an essence the same as the essence of man. Concerning the first Adam the Qur'an says: Who created you from one single soul and created from it its mate

(Qur'an 4:1). With regard to all men the Qur'an says in several places: Allah created your mate
from your own kind.

There is no trace in the Qur'an of what is found in some sacred books: that woman was created out of an inferior stock to that of man that they gave woman the status of a parasite and of an inferior or that the mate of the first Adam was created from one of the left-side parts of his body. Besides that in Islam there is no derogatory view about woman as regards her
nature and innate constitution.

Another of the contemptuous views that existed in the past and which have left their undesirable effects in world literature is that woman is the origin of sin and that her existence is the source of sin and temptation. Woman is a small devil. They say in every sin or crime committed by man woman had her hand. According to them man in himself is innocent of any sin: it is woman who drags him towards sin. They say Satan cannot find his way to man's being directly: It is only through woman that he can deceive man. Satan tempts woman and woman tempts man. They say the first Adam who was deceived by Satan and turned out of the Paradise of happiness was deceived through woman. Satan tempted Eve and Eve tempted
Adam.

The Qur'an relates the story of the Paradise of Adam but never says that Satan or a snake tempted Eve and she tempted Adam. Neither does the Quran describe Eve as the main person responsible nor does it exonerate her from the sin. The Qur'an says: O Adam inherent thou and thy wife the Garden and eat of where you will (7:19). Wherever the Qur'an describes the matter of Satan's tempting it uses the pronouns in the form of the dual (i.e. referring to two persons).
It says:

Satan tempted both of them (7:20) So he led them both on by delusion (7:22)

And he swore to both of them "Truly I am for you both a sincere adviser." (7:21)

In this way the Qur'an strongly refutes the misconception which was prevalent at that time and which is still found in certain quarters and among certain people of this world and exonerates the female sex from the accusation that woman is the source of temptation and sin and is half
a devil.

Another contemptuous view which exists concerning woman is in the field of her spiritual ability. They say: "A woman cannot go to Heaven. A woman cannot traverse the spiritual and divine stages of enlightenment. A woman cannot attain proximity to God as can a man." The Qur'an on the other hand has made it explicitly clear in a large number of verses that reward in the life after death and nearness to God to not depend upon sex but upon faith and deeds
whether they be of a woman or a man.

For every great and pious man the Qur'an mentions a great and pious woman alongside him. The wives of Adam and Ibrahim (Abraham) and the mothers of Musa (Moses) and Isa (Jesus) are mentioned with great esteem. Although the Qur'an refers to the wives of Nuh (Noah) and Lut (Lot) as being unworthy of their husbands it does not ignore the wife of Fir'awn (Pharaoh) as a woman of distinction under the control of a detestable man. It can be said that the Qur'an purposely seeks to keep a balance in its histories and the leading role in them is not confirmed to men.

About the mother of Musa the Qur'an says: So we revealed to Moses' mother "Suckle him then when thou fearest for him cast him into the water and do not fear neither sorrow for We shall return him to thee." (28:7)

About Maryam (Mary) the mother of Isa the Qur'an says that she had attained such an elevated spiritual degree that the angels used to visit her in her prayer-niche and converse with her. Sustenance was supplied to her from an invisible source. She had attained so high a position of Divine favour that it completely astounded the prophet of that time and exceeded his own degree. Zakariyya (the prophet) was dumb-founded when he looked upon her.

In the history of Islam itself there are many pious and distinguished women. There can be few men who are able to reach the high status of Khadijah [1] and no men can except the Holy Prophet himself and 'Ali could attain the status of az-Zahra. [2] az-Zahra excelled her sons the Imams and all the prophets as well excepting the Seal of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.a.).

Islam does not make any difference between man and woman in the journey from this world towards al-Haqq (the Truth i.e. towards God). The only difference that Islam makes is in the journey from al-Haqq to this world in returning to mankind and bearing the prophetic message and here it recognizes man as being more suitable.

Another derogatory view that was held was in connection with sexual abstention and the sacredness of being single and celibate. As we know in some religions sexual intercourse is in its essence unclean. According to the followers of these religions only those who live all their life in celibacy can attain the stations of the spirit. One of the world's well-known religious leaders said:

"Root out the tree of marriage with the spade of virginity".

The same religious leaders allow marriage only as one evil to ward off a greater evil. In other words they maintain that as majority of people are unable to endure the hardship of remaining celibate and may lose Self-control and thus become victims of perversion indulging in sexual contact with numerous women it is better that they should marry and not have sexual relations with more than one woman. The root cause of sexual abstention and celibacy is a feeling of

aversion against the female sex. These people consider love of women to be one of the great moral depravities.

Islam has combated fiercely against this superstition. It considers marriage to be sacred and celibacy to be impure. Islam considers love of women to be a part of prophetic morality and says:

“Love of women is of the morality of the prophets.” The last Prophet used to say: “Three things are dear to me: perfume women and prayer.”

Bertrand Russell says: [3] “In all codes of moral conduct there appears a kind of aversion to sexual relations except in Islam. Islam has ordained regulations and limitations with regard to this relationship for social reasons but it has never considered it an abominable and unclean matter.”

Another derogatory opinion held regarding women was that she is only a means for bringing man into existence and that she was created for man.

These ideas can never be found in Islam. Islam most explicitly explains the basis of the final cause it says quite clearly that the earth and the sky the clouds and the winds plants and animals have all been created for man. But it never says that woman was created for man.

Islam says that man and women were each created for the other: They are a vestment for you (man) and you are a vestment for them (Qur'an 2:187). If the Qur'an considered woman to be a means of making men and something created for then it would certainly have kept this fact in view in its laws. As Islam in its explanation of creation does not have this opinion and does not consider woman to be a parasite on man's existence there is no trace or reflection of this idea in its special precepts regarding man and woman.

Another of the derogatory views held in the past was that women were considered an unavoidable and necessary evil. Many men in spite of all the gains and advantages they had derived from women regarded them contemptuously and considered them to be a source of misfortune and misery. The holy Qur'an makes a special mention of the fact that woman is a blessing for man and is a source of solace and comfort for his heart.

Yet another derogatory view was that woman played a very insignificant part in bringing offspring into the world Arabs of the pre-Islamic age and certain other peoples considered women to be only a repository for the sperm of the man which according to them was the real seed of the child and they said that her part was to keep that seed safe and to nourish it. The Qur'an says in several verses that: “You were created from man and woman.” In other verses which are analyzed in the commentaries the final answer has been given in a similar way.

From what has been said above it is clear that both from a philosophical point of view as well

as from its explanation of the nature of creation Islam does not hold any derogatory ideas concerning women; rather it has seen to it that all the above mentioned derogatory views are discarded. Now it is appropriate to examine why there is an absence of identicalness in the rights of men and women

Notes:

[1] Khadijah was the Holy Prophet's first and most dearly beloved wife. She was the first person to believe in his prophethood and she proved a firm support for him in the first difficult years of his mission. (Tr.)

[2] Fatimatu' z-Zahra' was the Holy Prophet's daughter the wife of 'Ali and the mother of the second and third Imams Hasan and Husayn. She is included by the Shi'ah together with the Holy Prophet and the twelve Imams among the fourteen immaculate ones free from sin. (Tr.)

(.[3] Translated from the Persian reference untraced (Tr

The Rights of Women in Islam

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