

Islam and the Position of Women

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The West's vociferous partisans of Women's Lib. have no idea of the revolutionary leap forward in women's position which Islam brought about. In the days of Islam's first appearance the position of women was that of chattels of the men - little above the domesticated animals. Yet the West, for all their vaunted freedom, have added nothing to what Islam gave to women, except liberty for increased corruption and licentiousness. Islam prohibits debauchery, laxity,

vulgarity, debasement and demoralisation. Is that to hinder women's upward advance?

Islam regards both man and woman as created by God to rise to the full stature of the perfect human. This is in stern contrast with those versions of the Heavenly Book which Jews and Christians have tampered with and published as reading: "Amongst every thousand men appears one beloved of God: but amongst all the women in the world there is not to be found one who is included in God's grace and favour." (My quotation is from page 519 of "Islamic and Arab Civilisation", an authoritative work to which due respect must be paid.)

Islam proclaims that in God's eyes there is no difference between man and woman. Each is a precious soul. In His eyes all that makes people stand out from one another is their excelling in virtue, piety reverence, spiritual and ethical qualities. It is open to both men and women to achieve that type of excellence. At Doomsday each soul will be judged, regardless of sex, according to the fruits of their actions, by the above criteria. As it is written in Sura XXVII: Nahl - "Bee". "Whosoever hath faith and performs decorous actions, man or woman, I decree as their destiny a life that will be satisfied and will win that soul a reward better than the good deeds they have done." Compare Sura XXVIII: Qasas-"The Narration" (verse 84): "To whosoever does good, the reward is better than the deed."

Islam regards men and women as complementary to each other. As it is written in Sura III: Aali-Imran - "Imran's Family" (verse 195): "Their Lord hath accepted their prayer and answered: 'Never will I suffer the work of any one of you, male or female, to be lost. Ye are complementary to each other'."

Many women possess such personal excellences and intelligence that they attain great heights of true humanity and happiness. Many men, alas, fall to the lowest depths because they flout reason and abandon themselves to their passions.

It is related that on one occasion the Second Caliph, Omar, said from the pulpit in the presence of a large crowd: "I will fine any man who gives his bride 500 darhams or more as dowry. He

shall be made to give the same amount as that by which his dowry exceeds the Mahr-as-Sunna (traditional dowry) to the public treasury." At this a woman who was at the foot of the pulpit cried out in a loud voice her objection to Omar's statement saying: "Your proclamation contradicts God's law. for does not the Sura IV: Nisa'a - 'The Women', say (verse 20): 'But if you decide to take one wife in place of another, even if you have given the wife you put away a talent of gold as her marriage portion, take not the least bit of it back.'? How can you, then, in contradiction of the Divine Law which has stated that it is permissible to give more than the legal minimum marriage portion, make your proclamation?" Omar could not deny the impeachment and withdrew his proposition saying: "It was a man who erred and a woman who uttered the truth."

Contrast with this the tragic depression of women in pre-Islamic Arabia. What a height of dignity has been conferred by Islam on the female sex to enable one of them to lift up her voice in public rebuke to a Caliph and cause him to reverse his own public utterance! Islam took from men the right to own women. It instituted equality of human souls, with due regard to differences of male and female constitutions.

In the 19th century religious leaders of France, after long discussions, decided: "woman is a human being, but made to serve man." It was not until recent years that women in European lands had any rights to own property. In England it was not till about AD 1850 that women were counted in the national population census. It was in 1882 that a British law, unprecedented in the country's history, for the first time granted women the right to decide how their own earnings should be spent, instead of handing them over direct to their husbands immediately. Until then, even the clothes on their back had been their husband's property. Henry VIII had in his day even forbidden women to study the Bible when the first English translations began to appear.

Fourteen centuries ago Islam had decreed women's total financial independence, their right to own and dispose of property without the surveillance or control of any man, to conduct business, trade and all the transactions concerning their profit and loss, including the execution of deeds of gift, without having to check with anyone. As it is written in the Sura IV Nisa'a-"The Women" verse 33: "In no wise covet gifts bestowed by God seemingly more freely on some than on others. Whatsoever a man earns is his own. Whatsoever a woman earns is her own.

Pray to God for the bounty of His Providence for He knows all things."

Besides property rights Islam bestowed dignity, liberty and freedom on women. This is not least true in the matter of marriage. Marriage is the most important and sensitive step in a woman's life. Islam did everything to secure her in it, and to enable her to consider the financial

as well as all the other matters concerning the situation before she accepted him in wedlock. Thus the rights and privileges which European women extorted after bringing forceful pressure to bear on the societies in which they lived, and only recently achieved, Islam bestowed upon all women voluntarily without any form of revolt or pressure many centuries back. Indeed there is no moment of a woman's life, and no problem she is likely to face, for which Islam has not made beneficent and wise provision.

It is true that today far too many women are condemned in the East to an unsatisfactory way of life. But this is not due to Islam's regulations. It is due to the neglect of religious precept in political, social and financial institutions.

Poverty is one important reason for the bad conditions under which Eastern women have to live. A few are too rich; but the majority far too poor, victims of hunger and wretchedness. The resultant weakness has deprived people of the strength to rise up and insist on a change in their environment, for the sake of their families and children. Nor have the women the power in such a situation to make use of their legal rights and to take the men to court for the violence and tyranny of their behaviour. Women fear the difficulties of having to live without a male companion in a man's world.

The same economic needs cause a diminution in morals and in human affections. Violence and injustice replace moral values.

Although Islamic lands are amongst the worst sufferers from these modern disasters, it is not Islam itself but the deliberate neglect and abandonment of Islamic principles by Muslims and their leaders which has brought these tragedies upon us. For Islam is the very acme of the counterforces to poverty and injustice, and insists that wealth must be fairly divided amongst people of all classes, declaring that it is wrong for people to have to live under the torture of indigence and its pressure on hearts and souls, not least those of women and children.

Have we not men wise and just enough to eradicate these wrongs? To cure the bitterness which they produce? To re-enact sound Islamic measures? To restore respect for the dictates of piety and reverence for God and men? Should not that same Islam which once rescued woman from degrading depression, now raise her again by instituting a new society?

What is the situation in the West? Women have fallen victims to the bestial passions to which men have abandoned themselves under the influence of subversive propaganda of all kinds, in which the massmedia, particularly cinema and TV, and the advertisements that disgrace the hoardings of our great cities, play so tragically fateful a part.

Nowadays a woman's good reputation and dignity does not come, as it used to, from her possession of moral excellences, education and knowledge. Too often women of piety and

learning are left in obscurity. Respect, reputation go too much with the name of "artiste" which some women arrogate to themselves. They perform no useful function in society. They do not help the men forward. The name "artiste" seems to cover a multitude of sins of incontinence and debauchery, which are the very opposite of that virtue and chastity in which the honour of women once resided. How many earn a shameful living as "models"?

An American sociologist writes that the modern stripteaser can earn a million dollars a year: a fellow who is able to knock out another man with one blow of his fist gets half a million: a man who has spent a lifetime in the service of his fellows, in his white hairs finds hardly enough to live on.

Professor Albert Connolly writes: "In 1919 England's women fought for the right to be elected to Parliament, and in their battle went to prison and suffered physically in fearless vindication of their sex. What use are their grandchildren making of the privileges gained for them by these courageous women pioneers? And what would their grandmothers think of them? Maybe they are actually turning in their graves at seeing the liberties they fought for perverted to shameless licence. This last half century has taught us that the liberation of women is not enough. Besides all their other sacrifices for their cause, women seem also to have connived at the sacrifice of the respect and the ancient realities, the moral dignity and the devotion to mankind's uplift which in former days brought honour to the name of 'woman' and 'mother'."

.(Quoted from "The Enlightened Thinkers' Magazine", No. 829