

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man but they are not necessarily identical with them. This difference is understandable because man and woman are different, in their physiological and psychological make-up. With this distinction in mind, there is no room for a Muslim 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.

“Prior to Islam,” write the authors of ‘Cultural Atlas of Islam’, “a woman was regarded by her parents as a threat to family honor and hence worthy of burial alive at infancy. As an adult, she was a sex object that could be bought, sold and inherited. From this position of inferiority and legal incapacity, Islam raised women to a position of influence and prestige in family and society.” Islam gave this oppressed section of humanity, as it did to all other classes and groups, their legitimate place in life. In a world where woman was no more than an object of sexual gratification for men, and at a time when the religious circles argued over whether woman was human or not, with a soul of her own, Islam proclaimed:

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female.” [Al-Qur’an 49:13]

“O Mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single person, created of like nature his mate, from them scattered countless men and women. Fear Allah, through whom you demand your mutual rights and reverence the wombs (that bore you), for Allah ever watches over you.” [Al-Qur’an 4:1]

Men and women are of the same family, and as such have similar rights and duties, and their Lord promises them:

“Never will I waste the work of a worker among you, whether male or female, the one of you being

from the other.” [Al-Qur’an 3:195]

Islam removed some of the false notions about woman. For instance, it refuted the idea that Eve tempted Adam to disobey God, and thus caused his downfall. The Qur’an explicitly says that they both disobeyed and negates the idea that the woman is a source of evil.

Islam elevated the position of woman in society and treated her on an equal footing with man, and in some cases, as a mother for instance, clearly gave her precedence over man. Thus when a man asked the Prophet Muhammed (p)¹: “Who is most entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me?” the Prophet replied, “Your mother.” The man asked, “Who is next?” The Prophet said, “Your mother.” Again the man asked, “Who is next?” The Prophet repeated, “Your mother.” The man asked for a fourth time, “Who is next?” The Prophet then replied, “Your father.”²

On another occasion, when a man came to the Prophet, and expressed his desire to join a military expedition, the Prophet asked him if he had a mother. When he replied that he had, the Prophet advised him, “Stay with her, for Paradise is at her feet.”³

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. Islam gave woman an independent identity and declared that her moral and spiritual gains depend solely on her own performance. Like man, her ultimate failure or success rests on her own beliefs, attitude, behavior and conduct. She is a responsible being in her own right and carries the burden of her moral and spiritual obligations.

Woman 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, Prophet Muhammad (p) 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.

Woman 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 in history that women not only expressed their opinion freely but also argued and participated in serious discussions with the Prophet himself as well as with other Muslim leaders.⁴

Historical records show that women participated in public life with the early Muslims, especially in times of emergencies. They were not shut behind iron bars or considered worthless creatures, 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.⁵

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 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 that 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.

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 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 responsibility of maintaining social and moral values lies on both man and woman. Both must refrain from all deeds and gestures that might stir the passions of people other than their legitimate spouses or cause evil suspicion of their morality. Woman is warned not to display her charms or expose her physical attractions before strangers. The hijab, or the modest covering, which she must put on is one that can protect her person from lustful glances and her personality from demoralization.

¹ (p) here stands for "peace be upon him"

² Reported by Bukhari

³ Reported by Ahmad, Basa'i and Al-Baihaqi

⁴ Al-Qur'an, 58:1-4; 60:10-12

⁵ Al-Qur'an, 2:178; 4:45, 92-93

It is thus clear that the status of woman in Islam is very 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 outweighs the other.

**Interested
in knowing more
about ISLAM?**

Would you like to:

- ✓ visit a local mosque?
- ✓ subscribe to our mailing list?
- ✓ have one-to-one email correspondence?
- ✓ embrace Islam?

Please Contact us at:

1-877-WHY-ISLAM
www.WhyIslam.org



**Islamic Circle of
North America
ICNA**

**P. O. Box 1054
Piscataway, NJ 08855-1054**

LOCAL CONTACT:



1-877-WHY-ISLAM

STATUS OF WOMAN *in Islam*

For women, Islam is a special blessing; and the Prophet of Islam is indeed the greatest single benefactor of womenfolk. Islam has given woman rights and privileges that she has never enjoyed under other religious or constitutional systems. The sacred text of the Glorious Qur'an bears witness to the fact that *woman is, at least, as vital to life as man himself, and that she is not inferior to him.*

www.WhyIslam.org

An ICNA Project