

## Women and Society

Islam places a high status on the responsibility of women. Muslim women play a role as the backbone and vital elements in the establishment of a healthy and thriving society.

The Prophet's followers accepted his teachings and brought about a revolution in their social attitude towards women. They no longer considered women as mere chattel, but as an integral part of society. For the first time women were given the right to have a share in inheritance and own their own property. In this new social climate, women realised a greater potential and became highly active members of society. The Prophet (pbuh) was full of praise for virtuous women. He (pbuh) said, "The world and all things in the world are precious but the most precious thing in the world is a virtuous woman."

In Islam, a woman is a completely independent personality. She can make any contract or bequest in her own name. She is entitled to inherit as mother, wife, sister, and daughter. She has perfect liberty to choose her husband. The Shari'ah (Islamic law) regards women as the spiritual equals of men. The main distinction it makes between them is in the physical realm based on the equitable principle of fair division of labour.



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## In Islam, there is absolutely no difference between men and women as far as their relationship to God is concerned, as both are promised the same reward for obedience and the same punishment for disobedience.

The Qur'an says,

"To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith, We shall give a good life and reward them according to the best of their actions."

(QUR'AN 2:228)

The Qur'an, in addressing the believers, emphasises the equality of men and women, saying for example,

"For men and women who are devoted to God – believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, steadfast men and women, humble men and women, charitable men and women, fasting men and women, chaste men and women, men and women who remember God often – God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward."

(QUR'AN 33:35)

Unlike religions that regard women as being possessed of inherent sin and wickedness and men as being possessed of inherent virtue and nobility, Islam regards men and women as being of the same essence created from a single soul. The Qur'an declares,

People, be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it [the same essence] created its mate, and from the pair of them spread countless men and women far and wide; be mindful of God, in whose name

you make requests of one another. Beware of severing the ties of kinship [lit. the womb-relationships]: God is always watching over you.

(AL-QUR'AN 4:1)

### Women and Marriage

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh\*) said, "Women are the twin halves of men." The Qur'an emphasises the essential unity of men and women in a most beautiful simile:

"They are [close] as garments to you, as you are to them."

(QUR'AN 2:187)

The aim of marriage to provide warmth, comfort, protection and to beautify. As the garment does this, so do the spouses to each other.

It is for this reason that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) emphasised the virtue of marriage. He (pbuh) said, "When a man marries, he has completed one half of his religion."

He (pbuh) enjoined matrimony on Muslims by saying: "Marriage is part of my way and whoever keeps away from my way is not from me (i.e. is not my follower)."

The Qur'an also speaks of marriage saying,

"Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquillity: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect."

(QUR'AN 30:21)

### Pre-Islam

The society of pre-Islamic Arabia had an irrational prejudice against their female infants whom they used to bury alive. During life, women were often treated worse than animals. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) wanted to put a stop to all cruelties against women. He (pbuh) opposed the practice of female infanticide and preached kindness towards women. He (pbuh) told the Muslims, "Fear God in respect of women," and, "The best of you are they who are best to their wives."

### Women as Mothers

Women as mothers command great respect in Islam. The Qur'an speaks of the rights of the mother in a number of verses. It enjoins Muslims to show respect to their mothers and serve them well regardless of their religion. The Prophet (pbuh) states emphatically that the rights of the mother are paramount. A man came to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and asked: "O Messenger of God, who is the person who has the greatest right on me with regards to kindness and attention?" He (pbuh) replied, "Your mother." "Then who?" He (pbuh) replied, "Your mother." "Then who?" He (pbuh) replied, "Your mother." "Then who?" He (pbuh) replied, "Your father."

\* (pbuh) 'peace be upon him' is a conventionally honorific phrase that is said after the mention of Prophets names. An extended variant 'peace & blessings be upon him' is a phrase used after mentioning the name of Prophet Muhammad to show respect and honour to him.