

Place of Women in Islam

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The prevailing notion about the place of woman in Islam is that women are deprived of freedom, equal rights and that women are subjected to injustice and oppression. This notion is the result of either complete ignorance about Islam or the biased propaganda of anti Islamic ideology and prejudiced media. Woman was not appreciable in Greek civilization. In Greek mythology an imaginary woman named Pandora was considered to be the source of all evils and problems. Women with loose morals, dancers and prostitutes became centre of attraction for promiscuous men. In the name of art they depicted women in such a way that paves way for unbridled sex. About their religious deity, Aphrodite, it is said that she had affairs with three others other than her husband. If such things were in vogue about the goddesses, it is needless to talk about the common women.

The following excerpt by N. Krishnaswamy, John Verghese and Sunita Mishra, sums up the place of woman in ancient cultures with economy of words:

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) declared that “the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities” and added that “we should look upon the female state, as it was, a deformity, (Generation of animals trans. Peck).....Nietzsche, the German philosopher, is convinced that “woman is the source of all folly and unreason, the siren figure that lures the male philosopher out of his appointed truth seeking path and that “ woman is god’s second mistake”.

Before the advent of Islam in Arabia the position of the fair sex was appalling and deplorable. The infant girls were buried alive, thrown for dogs to eat, pushed down from a mountain peak, drowned in water or slaughtered mercilessly. Islam revolutionized this situation in all aspects of woman’s life. There is a separate chapter in the Quran entitled *Nisa* meaning the women in which all the rights of women in Islamic system of life are discussed.

Provisions for empowerment of women in ethical, moral and legal systems:

i) Freedom:

Right to education is given to woman. Girls have every right to receive education as boys do. “It is obligatory for every man and woman to receive education.” Parents are advised to regard education and training in etiquettes as the best gift for their children. “Of all that a father gives to his children, the best gift is their good education and training” (Hadith i.e. saying of Prophet Muhammed).

ii) Equality:

There is no disparity among boys and girls and men and women. The Quran proclaims: “If any do deeds of righteousness- be they male or female, and have faith, they will enter heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them.” (*The Qur’an*: 4:2) She is respected as the mother, loved as a wife, cared for as a sister and daughter. In a family system she is free from the burden of earning money to fulfil the daily needs of her husband or any other family member. In Islam ‘Women are equal to men in all civil and criminal acts of judiciary.’

iii) Social uplift:

In contrast to the Christian belief that woman is the source of evil and it is she who opened the door for Satan’s entry, Islam frees woman of such accusation. As per Islam, Adam and Eve both are equally responsible for eating the forbidden fruit and Satan simultaneously seduced both. It has been proclaimed that killing a girl child is an abomination.

(*The Qur'an* 17:31) Parents of girls are intrinsically motivated to nurture girl child. Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) assured that the father of two girls would stand close to him in heaven. "He who brought up three daughters or sisters under his (loving) care, and imparted beneficial education and training to them persisting with it until they become independent of him (get happily married) Allah conferred the reward of heaven on him. (Hadith) Islam imposed restrictions on number of women man can marry to four and divorce is the most disliked act for God. As man has liberty to divorce, women were also allowed to seek divorce if they wanted. A woman can liberate herself from the clutches of a husband whom she dislikes, who is cruel, unjust or impotent through 'qula' (divorce from wife's side). The place of mother is regarded high, higher than the place of father. Other teachings of Islam regarding women include: "The better people among you are those who are good in behavior towards their wives, who are kind to wife and children" "Be decent in your behavior towards your wives"(Hadith).

iv) Security:

Security of woman in Islamic system of life is very important. She must not be regarded inferior to a boy in family. "The person to whom a daughter is born and he does not bury her alive ... nor does he look down upon her, nor metes out preferential treatment to boys in comparison to her, Allah will reward him with heaven"(Hadith). The responsibility to provide bread and butter to girl/woman lies with the male guardian. "You should feed her when you eat, and clothe her when you yourself put on clothes. You should not strike her on the face nor curse her. And in case of temporary boycott due to strained relations, it should be limited to the four walls of your house. (Publicity and propaganda are not allowed)"When she travels long (for three days) her husband, father, brother or son must accompany her to facilitate her journey. If a woman is divorced or widowed it is the responsibility of father or brother to provide sustenance to her. Such a woman is allowed to re-marry if she wishes. A girl cannot be married off to anybody without her consent. It is duty of man to protect wife, sister, mother or daughter from an offender who invades the dignity and poses threat to the chastity of woman.

v) Economic empowerment:

As it is not the responsibility of a woman to spend on the daily need of family she has no compulsory expenditure. She receives money in the form of bride price (Mahar) from her husband. She has lawful share in the property of father, husband, brother and other relations. It is true that she inherits a smaller share than her brother. This is so because she is free from the responsibility of providing sustenance to family where as a man has. "From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women whether the property be small or large- a determinate share" (*The Qur'an*:24:30).

vi) Dignity:

Islam pays more attention on the training of women in domestic affairs. Her lap is the first school of a child. "She is the ruler of her husband's homestead" (Hadith). It is said that she is the queen of the household. She may go out to earn money to the needful but in *pardah* i.e. in veil. During prophet Muhammed's time there were women traders and there were instances when women participated in wars to supply water or to nurse the wounded. Even in present day world we see thousands of Muslim women in head scarf and veil working in hospitals, banks, schools colleges and many other suitable working places. Veil is actually a guard, a protective tool for her from the mischievous staring eyes. Tertullian also believed that "women ... (must) keep themselves strictly veiled"Men who sit or stand on streets or crossroads are ordered not to stare at women passing by. "Say to the believing men that they

should lower their gaze and guard ...”(The Qur’an:24:30). This way Islamic system of life gives dignity, respect, protection, natural rights and appropriate place to women.

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