

MLU-10.1 Rights of Women in Islam

There are two categories of women rights:

- Equal Rights
- Special Rights

Equality of Men and Woman in Islam, and their complementary nature to one another

In one sense, equality between men and women is possible and reasonable because they are both human, with similar souls, brains, hearts, lungs, limbs, etc. In another sense, equality between men and women is impossible and an absurdity due to their natural differences in physical, mental, emotional and psychological qualities, inclinations and abilities. Between these two we must tread to illuminate how they are equal, and how they are complimentary.

Allah (SWT) says in the Quran:

"And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them." (2:228).

If total equality between all members of the same gender is impossible due to natural differences in strengths and other qualities, regardless of whether the gender is masculine or feminine, then it is definitely impossible between the two genders. Allah (SWT) says in the Glorious Qur'an:

(And of everything We have created pairs, that you may remember (the Grace of Allah (SWT)). [51:49]

Another verse states:

He (Allah (SWT)) it is who did create you from a single soul and therefrom did create his mate, that he might dwell with her (in love) (7:189)

Even atoms exhibit this dual quality with inter-related and complementary roles played by the positive and negative particles and ions, yet each is an integral part of the whole system of the so called binary basis of all life. Most living beings have male and female sexes for reproduction. As the science of biology teaches us, all mammals have similar traits in their

molecular and glandular structures that determine differences in gender. These basic physical, psychological and sexual traits have their definite effects on other spheres of life.

It is natural for a man to need and find fulfillment with a woman and for a woman with a man, since they are created one from the other and for one another. They both are inseparably bound to each other. Neither can they find fulfillment except when in the company of the other as legal and honorable mate and spouse, as Allah (SWT) says in the Qur'an, mentioned in the two verses cited in the preface:

(O Mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you in the Sight of Allah (SWT) is the believer who has Taqwa (piety and righteousness). Verily, Allah (SWT) is All-Knowing, All-Aware.)[49:13]

In many instances Islam treats women as equals to men.

In Islam, men and women are considered equal in their spiritual worth and value, while acknowledging their inherent biological differences. Islam teaches that both men and women possess equal potential for righteousness and are equally accountable to Allah (SWT) for their actions.

However, it is important to note that equality does not mean identical roles or responsibilities. Islam promotes complementary roles between men and women, each fulfilling their unique functions within society and the family unit.

Special Right

Following are some special rights given to women in Islam.

1) Equality in Basic Humanity

Both the male and the female are equal in terms of their humanity. Islam does not categorize women, for instance, as the source of evil in the world for some & original sin that caused Adam (AS) to be dismissed from Paradise, or to be the cause of evil in the world by setting loose a Pandora's box of vices, as some other religious doctrines and fables teach.

Allah (SWT), states in the Glorious Qur'an:

“O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam), and from him (Adam) He created his wife (Eve), and from them both He created many men and women...” [4:1]

Allah (SWT) also states in the Glorious Qur'an:

“Does man think that he will be left neglected without being punished or rewarded for the obligatory duties enjoined by his Lord (Allah (SWT)) on him? Was he not a mixed male and female discharge of semen pouring forth? Then he became a clot; then (Allah (SWT)) shaped and fashioned (him) in due proportion, and made him into two sexes, male and female. Is He not able to raise to life those who are dead?”[75:36-40]

Allah (SWT) illustrated in the verses that He created both sexes from one single source. There is no difference between the two sexes in terms of qualifications in humanity, and each complements the other as the two genders of the species. Islam has abolished and abrogated all the previous unjust laws that demoted women as inferior in quality and nature. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

Verily, women are the twin halves of men. [Abu Dawood #234, Tirmidhi #113 & others]

2) Equality in Religious Obligations

Equal religious duties and rituals are required from both women and men. Testimony of Faith (Shahaadah), Prayer (Salah), Obligatory Charity (Zakah), Fasting (Saum), and Pilgrimage (Hajj) are equally required of both genders. In some cases the requirements are a bit easier on women to alleviate their special cases of hardship. For instance, in consideration of her health and physical condition, menstruating women or a woman in the state of postnatal bleeding and recuperation are absolved from the duty of prayers and fasting. She is required to make up the days of fasting missed due to menses and postnatal bleeding, but not her prayers, as that would be too burdensome.

3) Equality in Rewards and Punishments

Both males and females have similar rewards for obedience and penalties for disobedience in this world and the Hereafter. As stated by Allah (SWT) in the Glorious Qur'an:

“Whoever does righteous acts, whether male or female, while he is a believer, verily, to him We will give a good life, and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do.”[16:97]

4) Equality in Preservation of Honor and Nobility

Women have the same moral obligations and are entitled to the same general rights as men in guarding chastity, integrity and personal honor and respect, etc. No double standards are allowed. For instance, those who falsely accuse a chaste woman of adultery or fornication are publicly punished, just as if a man is slandered. Allah (SWT), states in the Qur'an:

“And those who accuse chaste women, and produce not four witnesses, flog them with eighty lashes, and reject their testimony forever. Indeed, they are those who are disobedient to Allah (SWT).”[24:4]

Jabir ibn Abdullah reported: The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said,

“Fear Allah (SWT) regarding women. Verily, you have taken them as a trust from Allah (SWT), and intercourse has been made lawful by the word of Allah (SWT). Your rights over them are that they do not let anyone in the house you dislike. If they do so, you may strike them without violence. Their rights over you are that you provide for them and clothe them in a reasonable manner.”(Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

5) Equality in Financial Dealings and Property Ownership

Women are equally qualified and allowed to engage in financial dealings and property ownership. According to Islamic law women can own, buy, sell and undertake any financial transaction without the need for guardianship, and without any restrictions or limitations - a situation unheard of in many societies until modern times.

In Quran Allah (SWT) says:

“For men there is a share in what their parents and close relatives leave, and for women there is a share in what their parents and close relatives leave—whether it is little or much. These are `obligatory shares” (4:7)

7) Equality in Education and Cultivation

Islam entitles women to the same rights as men in terms of education and cultivation. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, as reported and authenticated by the scholars of prophetic traditions:

Seeking knowledge is compulsory for each and every Muslim (i.e. both male and female). [Ibn Majah #224 al-Baihaqi and verified]

Another hadith stated:

“Some women requested the Prophet (peace and blessings upon him) to fix a day for them as the men were taking all his time [to learn]. Upon this, he appointed for them, a day [every week], for religious lessons and injunctions.” (Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī)

Both men and women are equally encouraged to seek knowledge.

Great female Muslim Scholars existed at and around the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Some were from his family and others were his companions or their daughters. Prominent amongst them was Hazrat Aisha (RA), the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through whom a quarter of the Islamic law has been transmitted.

Muslim scholars collectively agreed that the word Muslim when used in revealed scriptures includes both male and female, as we indicated in parenthesis. Thus, Islam entitles women to the same right of education in order to understand the religious and social obligations, and obligated them both to raise their children in the best manner, in accordance with the right Islamic guidance. Of course women have certain obligations in bringing up their children that are commensurate to their abilities and men have complementary obligations to finance, protect and maintain according to their added responsibilities in the family unit.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

Whoever takes care of two girls until they reach puberty, he and I will come on the Day of Resurrection like this.” The Messenger of Allah (SWT) (peace be upon him) then joined his fingers to illustrate this. [Muslim #2631]

About female slave girls, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

Whoever has a female child with him (under his guardianship from slavery), and trains her in the best behavior, and teaches her well, and then frees and marries her, will have a double reward. [Bukhari #97 & Muslim #154]

How are women treated in Islam?

In Islam, women are treated with respect and equality. They are considered as equal partners in society and have important roles in nurturing and guiding the future generations. Islam recognizes the significance of women’s contributions and emphasizes their rights to education, property ownership, and participation in political affairs.

Women are valued and cherished as sisters of men, and their relationship with their husbands is described as a mutual support system where both parties are like garments for each other, symbolizing love, protection, and intimacy. Islam promotes the fair and just treatment of women, rejecting any form of discrimination or mistreatment based on gender.

Role of Women in Islam

In Islam, women play important roles in various aspects of life. Their contributions are not only acknowledged but also highly esteemed.

Women in Islam hold a revered and dignified status, enjoying equal spiritual and social rights alongside men. They are granted the right to education, inheritance, and participation in societal affairs. The family unit, where women are central figures in nurturing children and maintaining household harmony, is regarded as a key part of their contribution to society.

Islam emphasizes mutual respect and fairness between genders. Women are entitled to economic independence, owning and managing property, and even participating in leadership roles within

their communities. Numerous hadiths stress kindness towards women, highlighting their value in all aspects of life, including marriage, family, and society.

- Women in Islam have the same spiritual obligations and opportunities as men. They are encouraged to seek knowledge, worship Allah (SWT), and engage in acts of charity and righteousness. Women have the freedom to practice their faith, participate in religious gatherings and rituals, and seek spiritual guidance.
- Women play a crucial role in the family unit. They are seen as the foundation of the household and are responsible for nurturing and raising children. Islam emphasizes the importance of a harmonious family life, where both parents have shared responsibilities in providing their children love, care, and discipline.
- Islamic teachings promote education for both men and women. Women have the right to seek knowledge in various fields, including religious studies, sciences, arts, and literature. Islam encourages women to be intellectually curious, seek education throughout their lives, and contribute their knowledge and skills to society.
- Islam acknowledges women's economic capabilities and allows them to engage in business and financial transactions. Women have the right to own and manage property, run businesses, and earn their income. They can contribute to the economic well-being of their families and play an active role in societal development.
- Women in Islam are urged to actively engage in their communities, making meaningful contributions to social welfare and displaying acts of kindness and compassion towards others. They possess the right to express their opinions, have a say in decision-making, and champion fairness and equality for all.
- While there may be cultural variations, Islam recognizes the potential for women to hold positions of leadership and influence in various spheres. Women can serve as scholars, teachers, counselors, and mentors, guiding and inspiring others with their knowledge and wisdom. They also have the opportunity to contribute to public life and serve in leadership roles that benefit the community.

References:

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