

# THE RIGHTS & DUTIES of Women in Islam

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## **Introduction**

The subject of the rights and duties of women in Islam has often been clouded by controversy, personal opinions and sheer ignorance. Although many scholars have dealt with this subject, there has remained a need to discuss wider aspects of the issue than are often tackled. Maulana Abdul Ghaffar Hasan, a scholar of Hadith and member of the Islamic Ideological Council in Pakistan, originally presented this topic to the Council as a short Urdu paper for discussion. Considering it to be a concise yet useful contribution to the field, I rendered it into English. I am very grateful to my daughter Khola Hasan who not only edited the English version but also contributed to it with her thoughts, thus adding to its substance beautifully.

I hope that this booklet will help to remove some of the misunderstandings, prejudiced opinions and falsehoods, which circulate about the rights, and duties of women in Islam.

The issue of Women in Islam has been the subject of all kinds of controversies, misunderstandings and especially misinformation. This work will discuss and explain this subject according to the precise teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah (sayings, acts, i.e. the traditions) of Allah's Messenger (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him).

To begin with, the most important aspect of the entire issue is the spiritual aspect. The Muslim accepts that the main purpose behind the creation of jinn and mankind was that they should worship Allah (SWT), struggle against the forces of Satan and live their life according to Allah's Commandments in order to achieve eternal bliss in Paradise.

**Dr. Suhaib Hasan**

## Chapter 1

### The Purpose of Creation of Men and Women

The Muslim accepts that the main purpose behind the creation of jinn and mankind was that they should worship Allah (SWT), struggle against the forces of Satan and live their life according to Allah's Commandments in order to achieve eternal bliss in Paradise.

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾

*"And I (Allah) created not the jinn and men except they should worship Me (Alone)." (V. 51:56)*

Also Allah (SWT) said:

﴿بَلِ اللَّهَ فَاعْبُدْ وَكُنْ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ﴾

*"Nay! But worship Allah, and be among the grateful." (V. 39:66)*

At another place He (SWT) said:

﴿قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ﴾

*"Say (O Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him)): 'Verily, I am commanded to worship Allah by obeying Him and doing religious deeds sincerely for His sake only.' (V. 39: 11)*

### Equality of Men and Women as regards Religious Obligations and Retribution

In this spiritual regard, Islam makes no distinction between men and women. Both have a soul, both were created for the same purpose in life, both have a duty to fulfill their religious obligations, both will be judged by the All- Mighty, and both will be rewarded or punished according to their individual actions. Whenever the Quran mentions those fortunate beings who will enter the Gardens of Bliss because of their piety and good deeds, it mentions men and women together.

﴿وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَقِيرًا﴾

*"And whoever does righteous good deeds, male or female, and is a (true) believer (Muslim)], such will enter Paradise and not the least injustice, even to the size of a Naqira (speck on the back of a date stone), will be done to them." (V. 4:124)*

﴿مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً  
وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾ (١٧)

"Whoever works righteousness whether male female while he (or she) is a true believer (of Islamic Monotheism) verily, to him We will give a good life (in this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision), and Weshall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do (i.e., Paradise in the Hereafter)." (V.16: 97)

﴿وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ  
الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلٰوةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكٰوةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ  
أُولَٰئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ﴾ (٧١)

"The believers, men and women, are Auliya ' (helpers, supporters, friends, protectors) of one another; they enjoin (on the people) Al-Ma'ruf (i.e., Islamic Monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do), and forbid (people) from Al-Munkar (i.e., polytheism and disbelief of all kinds, and all that Islam has forbidden); they offer their prayers perfectly (Iqimat-as-Salat), and give the Zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have His Mercy on them. Surely, Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise." (V.9: 71)

﴿إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاتِ  
وَالصَّٰدِقِينَ وَالصَّٰدِقَاتِ وَالصَّٰبِرِينَ وَالصَّٰبِرَاتِ وَالْخٰشِعِينَ وَالْخٰشِعَاتِ  
وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّٰبِغِينَ وَالصَّٰبِغَاتِ وَالْحٰفِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ  
وَالْحٰفِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةً  
وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا﴾ (٣٥)

"Verily, the Muslims (those who submit to Allah in Islam) men and women, the believers men and women (who believe in Islamic Monotheism), the men and the women who are obedient (to Allah), the men and women who are truthful (in their speech and deeds), the men and the women who are patient (in performing all the duties which Allah has ordered and in abstaining from all that Allah has forbidden), the men and the women who are humble (before their Lord Allah), the men and the women who give Sadaqat (i.e., Zakat and alms), the men and the women who observe Saum (fast) (the obligatory fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the optional Nawafil fasting), the men and the women who guard their chastity (from illegal sexual acts) and the men and the women who remember Allah (SWT) much with their hearts and tongues (while sitting, standing, lying, etc.); Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward (i.e., Paradise)." (V. 33:35)

There can thus be no doubt that in the Hereafter, men and women will both be judged, each individual bearing the burden of its own acts, each soul will be punished for its transgressions and each will be rewarded for its obedience to Allah (SWT).

## **Biologically Men and Women are two different sexes but complementary to each other:**

One may well ask that if there is such a complete and comprehensive spiritual equality between the two sexes, why is this identical treatment not found in other rights, duties and privileges. Muslims and especially non-Muslims question why men go out to work while women are encouraged to stay at home, why women have to wear the Hijab (veil), why a brother receives a larger share of inheritance than his sister, why a man can be a ruler but a woman cannot, etc., and they then conclude that Islam treats women as inferior beings. Laws can never be discussed without being explained first, so we must first consider the fundamental Islamic ethos that men and women are two different yet complementary sexes. It is an established medical fact that men and women have different biological compositions and temperaments. Allah the All-Mighty created and knows this biological difference better than we do, and has thus assigned to men and women the roles that each excels in due to its nature. Neither gender is inferior or superior to the other; instead they complement each other like the two halves of a whole. In everyday life we see that society consists of many different kinds of people, all of whom play their particular roles to keep society intact. The farmer and the doctor make different contributions to the society, but both are equally important. Each excels in his own field, and each provides a service for the other. Similarly, men and women are different sexes and play vital roles in their own areas of excellence.

## **Worth of Women in Islam:**

The Prophet's narrations speak of women with praise and respect. He (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) once said:

«إِنَّ الدُّنْيَا كُلَّهَا مَتَاعٌ وَخَيْرُ مَتَاعِ الدُّنْيَا الْمَرْأَةُ الصَّالِحَةُ»

*"The world and all things in it are precious, and the most precious thing in the world is a virtuous woman." (Ahmad and Muslim)*

He (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) also said:

«أَلَا أُخْبِرُكَ بِخَيْرِ مَا يَكْنِزُ الْمَرْءُ؟ الْمَرْأَةُ الصَّالِحَةُ: إِذَا نَظَرَ إِلَيْهَا سَرَّتْهُ، وَإِذَا أَمَرَهَا أَطَاعَتْهُ، وَإِذَا غَابَ عَنْهَا حَفِظَتْهُ»

*"Shall I not inform you about the best treasure a man can have? It is a virtuous woman who pleases him when he looks at her, who obeys him when he commands her, and who guards herself when he is absent from her."*

The Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

«حُبِّبَ إِلَيَّ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا النِّسَاءُ وَالطِّيبُ، وَجُعِلَ قُرَّةُ عَيْنِي فِي الصَّلَاةِ»



*"Made beloved to me from your world are women and perfume, and the coolness of my eyes is in prayer."  
(Ahmad and An-Nasa 'i)*

## **The Honor of Mother in Islam:**

In a famous incident, a man came to the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) and asked:

«يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! أَيُّ النَّاسِ أَحَقُّ مِنِّي بِحُسْنِ الصُّحْبَةِ؟ قَالَ: "أُمُّكَ"، قَالَ: ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ: "ثُمَّ أُمُّكَ" قَالَ: ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ: "ثُمَّ أَبَاكَ"»

*"O Messenger of Allah, who is the person who has the greatest right on me with regards to kindness and attention?" He replied: "Your mother." "Then Who?" He replied: "Your mother." "Then who?" He replied: "Your mother." "Then who?" He replied: "Your father." (Ahmad and Abu Dawud)*

The Qur'an also discusses the immense honor and respect due to both parents, and especially to mother:

﴿وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَلَدَيْهِ حَمَلَتْهُ أُمُّهُ وَهْنًا عَلَى وَهْنٍ وَفِصْلُهُ فِي عَامَيْنِ أَنِ اشْكُرْ لِي وَلِوَلَدِكَ إِلَى الْمَصِيرِ﴾

*"And We have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship, and his weaning is in two years give thanks to Me and to your parents, unto Me is the final destination." (V. 31:14)*

## **The Reward of upbringing Girls:**

In the days when it was a custom to cherish the birth of male children and to bury the female children alive because of shame and poverty, the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) has said:

«مَنْ عَالَ جَارِيتَيْنِ، دَخَلْتُ أَنَا وَهُوَ الْجَنَّةَ كَهَاتَيْنِ، وَأَشَارَ بِأَصْبُعَيْهِ»

*"Whoever looks after two girls till they reach maturity, he and I will enter Paradise together like these two (fingers)." (Muslim and At- Tirmidhi)*

## Chapter 2

### The Home

While men are the physically stronger sex, the woman's biological make-up has made her excel as the homemaker. She alone can be impregnated, carry and deliver the child, and then suckle the baby. Her gentle, caring and self-sacrificing temperament is best suited to bringing up children and looking after the home. To say that she should also earn a living is an unacceptable injustice and implies that everything she does for her home and children is worthless and needs to be supplemented by an outside cover. A woman already has to play in society a great and noble role as mother of a new generation, a role for which no man can claim the honors. It is because of her supreme role as mother that she is entitled to three times the devotion given to the father from the children.

The roles of men and women in the Quran are dealt as:

﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ﴾

*"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders them to guard." (V. 4:34)*

This Divine injunction describes the man as Qawwam (maintainer) and the woman as Qanitah (obedient) and Hafizatunlil-Ghaib (preserver of the secret). The Verse gives two reasons as to why men are described as maintainers.

Firstly, because "Allah (SWT) has made the one of them to excel the other," which means that He has excelled men to be physically stronger and more inclined to have a career outside the home. The history of mankind has always shown that men, from the most primitive to the most technologically minded, have assumed the role of providing food, maintaining law and order in the community, waging war against enemies, and going on expeditions in search of new lands, adventure, food and even hidden treasure. The women have primarily stayed at home to provide a stable environment for the children.

The second reason is that "they spend from their means." It is the man's duty to provide financially for his family, and it is also the man who is required to give a dower to his wife at the time of their marriage. In the castle of his home, the husband is the ruler and the wife is his pillar of support. As in any establishment, there can only be one ruler; a car with two drivers, a country with two kings or an army with two generals would all be in utter chaos and disarray. The husband has thus been put in charge of his home, but this is a responsibility and not a privilege.

### Both Sexes have Rights over each other:

The different roles of the sexes means that never is one sex burdened with all the duties while the other enjoys all the privileges. Instead they both have individual duties and privileges. The Quran says in this regard: