



The True Status of Woman in Islām

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Introduction

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm

In the name of Allāh, the Divinely Compassionate, the Ever-Merciful

I commence the translation of the booklet “*ISLĀM MEIN ‘AURAT KA MAQĀM* (The True Status of Woman in Islām)” by the Late and Great Shaykh Pīr Muḥammad Karam Shāh al-Azharī ﷺ, in the Glorious Name of Almighty Allāh, the One and Only Allāh, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent. May all praise be to Allāh the Lord of the Worlds, and salutations upon His Beloved Messenger Muḥammad ﷺ on whom we invoke the blessings of Almighty Allāh.

It is an honour for me to present this brief but concise piece of work entitled “The True Status of Woman in Islām”. However it may be, it is no original concept of my own, but rather, a small structure on the base of the Urdu booklet known as “Islām Mein ‘Aurat Ka Maqām” which is related to the great Thinker of Islām, Exegete of the Noble Qur’ān, SPiritual Guide of many, and the Benefactor of all the Muslims Shaykh Pīr Muḥammad Karam Shāh Al-Azharī ﷺ whose soul proceeded from this world to the next in April 1998.

May I also clarify that it is due to confining this work to the main subject of the above-mentioned Urdu booklet and its conciseness and that my original objective was its translation, the reader may notice that I have not touched many topics which may have come under the same heading. Nevertheless, I have slightly extended my views to the modern pro-feminist errors, which many of those who reason will agree to, that could jeopardise the world in general, and the West in particular.

I hope this booklet proves beneficial to the reader and helps in erasing any doubts and ambiguities concerning the status of woman in Islām.

May we all pray for the departed soul of the Great Pīr Muḥammad Karam Shāh Al-Azharī ﷺ.



Woman is the twin half of man. She comprises half of the total population of the world. She has roles to play and duties to fulfil in this huge world of ours where she performs the characters of mother, wife and daughter, which ultimately go on to prove her eminence and importance in both the domestic and social dimensions. This is the sole reason for her equality in rights and duties with man. Mind you, these rights and duties are distributed equally, with respect to the natural being of the sexes which is why many of these rights are not the same. The first to declare these rights and duties for the female was the most consummate and elaborate socio-political system of them all – Islām.

Islām appeared as a saviour for the whole creation in general, but let us not forget that humans were the main objective, and as we all know, the human race includes, as well as man, the female gender. Islām bestowed upon woman the right to breathe freely, the right to speak truly, the right to safeguard her rights, the right to prosper and the right to excel. It also advised her to adopt modesty, decency and virtue. It gave examples of pious women such as Maryam (peace be upon her) and the wife (Allāh have mercy on her) of Pharaoh which helped encourage chastity and goodness and elevated the dignity of women who followed suit, creating women of the highest calibre, women like Khadijah (Allāh be pleased with her), ‘Ā’iShāh (Allāh be pleased with her.) and Rābi‘ah al-Baṣriyyah (Allāh have mercy on her).

It was Islām that paved the way for the progress, development and prosperity of women and let us be convinced that its advent was literally the illumination of a beacon for others to follow.



In the following pages, we shall be touching the main areas of oppression that befell woman, the neglect and brutality she faced in her domestic and social environments as a mother, wife and daughter, and how Islām pioneered in restoring her true honour and reputation. We shall finally be concluding with the dangers the Western world is facing due to the unlimited and unbridled rights and privileges it has gifted to women.

The True Status of Woman in Islām

Prior to discussing what status Islām gave woman after its advent, it would be appropriate for us to take a short trip to the past and briefly encounter the situation and problems prevailing then.

Just over fourteen centuries ago, in pre-Islāmic times, woman, virtually, had no existence. She had been extinct for a long time. The simple reason is because she was not considered a part of the society. It was a supremely man's society where woman was heavily burdened with duties but enjoyed almost no rights at all. She was oppressed and neglected in every way. She was to bear and raise children at home and serve her husband like a slave would serve his master. Female children would be buried alive and a widowed mother could lawfully be remarried to her stepsons and foster sons.

Under these traditions where abysmal chaos, anarchy and extreme sexism dominated the scene, divine mercy intervened and Islām jumped in as the hero, the saviour. It elevated the neglected, socially rejected and legally abused woman from the deep and dark abyss of savagery and oppression by raising her status and literally placing blessings upon her head and Paradise under her feet.

Declaration of Equal Rights

1- The Blessed Qur'ān, the Word of Allāh Almighty, revealed to the Last of the Messengers, Muḥammad ﷺ, was the first to declare equal rights for women.

“wa labunna mithlu l-ladbī ‘alayhinna bi-l-ma‘rūf(i)” (2:228)

“And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women.”

There are democracies today that boast themselves champions of equality and on the other hand mudsling at Muslims by saying that Islām does not give equal rights and opportunities to women by restricting them from socially mixing in with men and imposing numerous duties and limitations on them. Let us first get our facts right. Islām does let women work in a decent manner, in a decent atmosphere and adopt a decent profession that suits her nature. Islām does not, however, permit women, and at the same time men, to socialise with the opposite sex due to the fact that it may lead to illicit relations between them, and this is the main problem which could jeopardise the natural family structure. Then again, nature plays a leading role in the determination of rights and duties for each being. The male can never be a mother, biologically, and naturally speaking of course, and neither can the female become a biological father. That is as simple as it can get. Both genders have their own biological compositions, their own set of rights and their own set of duties. The Holy Qur'ān says:

“wa laysa db-dhakarū ka-l-unthā” (3:36)

“The male is not like the female.”

Alexis Carrel, The French Laureate, agrees with this divine verse when he states in “Man, the Unknown” that the differences existing between man and woman are of fundamental nature than is usually realised. Ignorance of these fundamental facts has led promoters of feminism to believe that both sexes should have the same

responsibilities. In reality, woman differs profoundly from man. Every cell of her body bears the mark of her sex.

He goes on to say that because males and females also have differences in the disposition of their nerves and in their mental and emotional talents, therefore women should develop their aptitudes without imitating the males. Partisans of women's liberation aim at a false conception of equality as if that miserable condition meant a precise similarity and identity in upbringing, employment, responsibilities and duties.

It is evident that the biological composition of males and females is very different and therefore their rights and duties are distributed according to these differences. It is not right to give them the same rights in every social aspect but equal rights as Islām does. Remember, equal rights does not mean same rights.

Right of Inheritance

2- Women, before the advent of Islām, had no right of inheritance. Places like Iran, India, Arabia and the whole of Europe were enveloped in a darkness and experiencing a chaos that no woman could hope for a successful protest. Speaking of the obvious, she would be maltreated, abused and tortured if she mentioned any such right.

Islām was the first to grant woman the right to inherit. The Noble Qur'ān says:

"li-rijāli naṣībun mimā taraka l-wālidāni wa-l-aqrabūna, wa-li-n-nisā'i naṣībun mimmā taraka l-wālidāni wa-l-aqrabūna ..." (4:7)

"For men there is a share of which is left by their parents and close relatives; and for women is [also] a share of which is left by their (the women's) parents and close relatives."

Woman, before the advent of Islām, could not inherit, and in fact, on the contrary, she herself would be inherited. She would be considered a part of the inheritance herself, either kept or sold by the male inheritors.

Today, some societies do allow women to inherit but let it be known that this rule was introduced by Islām. It is a right enjoyed by the woman, young or old, implemented since the first days of Islām.

Right to Work for Income

3- Islām does permit woman to work and earn for a living. This right Islām gave to her fourteen centuries ago when the rest of the world had discarded her.

"li-rijāli naseebun mimmā ktasabū, wa-li-n-nisā'i naṣībun mimmā ktasabn(a)" (4:32)

"For the men there is a share [in the wealth] of what they earn, and for women there is a share [in the wealth] of what they (women) earn."

The above verse of the Glorious Qur'an expresses the position of Islām with respect to the occupational working of women. There are, however, some legal conditions and restrictions that must be kept in mind at all times.

Islām does not require women to participate in trade, the vocations and professions unless it is very necessary. As I have mentioned earlier, the biological formations and physiological structures of either sex are very different and therefore they are assigned to play a distinct role in the family. The main role of the woman is to look after her matrimonial home, bear and bring up children in a befitting manner, etc. If she can perform this role perfectly and also work outside the home to supplement her husband's income, she may do so, as long as her work does not ask her to transgress the boundaries drawn by the Islāmic Canon, the Sharī'ah.

These are the three fundamental changes brought about by Islām to raise the status of women in our societies. If Islām had not amended these social precedents, it would have been difficult to reckon that any other social, political or welfare system would have done so because they were inconceivable by the simple human mind.

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Basically, woman has three important roles to play in a society. She is either a mother, a daughter or a wife. None of these roles were respectfully recognised until Islām introduced some very essential changes. In the following, we shall be explaining, very briefly, the predominant customs and practices relating to the immoral exploitation of women with respect to their three roles and how Islām terminated that oppression and blessed women with their due honour and reputation.

1- Daughter

Among many of the tribes of Arabia, it had become an established custom to rid of the newly born daughter as soon as possible. To the father, the birth of a daughter meant the birth of a curse. It would send a wave of rage within the stonehearted father who would immediately bury her alive, watching her screaming and crying helplessly for sympathy and fatherly affection. Many a female child would suffer similar consequences, sooner or later.

When Islām came, the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the guidance of the Mercy for the Universe, the Messenger Muḥammad ﷺ helped eradicate such evil completely. The Merciful Messenger ﷺ promised Paradise to anyone who would bring his daughters up according to Islāmic teachings and then wed them to pious husbands. Other similar teachings in the Glorious Qur'an and in the example of the Final Prophet ﷺ had such a positive impact on social life as a whole that the concept of the so-called 'curse' was morally amended, renamed and up to this day has been known as 'blessing'.

2- Wife

The piteous and miserable condition of the wife is not unknown. She was overworked, underfed and treated worse than an animal. She would breathlessly serve her husband and children, day and night, having very little time for rest. Her toil and moil would hardly be remunerated except for the rags on her back and the bits of food, mostly stale, just enough to keep body and soul in tact.

Her succour appeared in the gift of Islām, which quickly relieved her of this contempt.

“wa ‘āshirū-hunna bi-l-ma‘rūf(i)” (4:19)

“[Oh Believers!] Live with them (your wives) peacefully.”

“hunna libāsun lakum wa-antum libāsun labunn(a)” (2:187)

“They (your wives) are a garment for you and you are a garment for them”

The Beloved Messenger ﷺ is reported to have said:

“khayrukum khayrun bi-ablii wa-anā khayrun bi-abli”

*“The best of you is he who is best [in conduct] with his family,
and I am the best [in conduct] with my family.”*

These are only some of the teachings found in the Book of Allāh Almighty and in the Sunnah of the Beloved Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, which helped reinforce the matrimonial relationship between a man and a woman and helped promote a healthier and more peaceful domestic atmosphere.

3- Mother

Islām honours the mother with the title of “Queen of the Home”, but the situation was not so before Almighty Allāh sent His Final Messenger ﷺ.

The mother would be ill-treated and abused during her matrimonial period by her husband and children, and once widowed, she would often be made part of the inheritance, let alone be only deprived of inheritance. One of her foster sons, stepsons or all of them would be entitled to marry her or cohabit with her. She may even be traded. She was given no eminence at all and was considered nothing more than moveable property that could be bargained at will.

Islām restored this sacred relationship and put it back into the spotlight by declaring through the words of the Holy Prophet ﷺ:

“al-jannatu tahta aqdāmi l-ummahāt(i)”

“Paradise lies under the mothers’ feet.”

There are many such verses and traditions which encourage the Muslims to respect and serve their parents, especially their mothers.

Today, the civilised, developed and modern Western world, we will find ‘old peoples’ homes’, established to shelter those elderly and helpless people who have been rejected and discarded by their unfaithful grown-up children and have no-one to look after them.

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Islām, evidently, had enhanced the status and honour of woman when no other religion or social system had ever pondered over the position of her existence. Islām entitled her to rights she had never experienced before. She was now able to compete with man in every sphere of life and assist in building a healthy and pious social atmosphere. This is what kick-started the ‘progressive society’.

Where man was given the chance to excel in piety and chastity, woman was also encouraged to do likewise, as the Noble Qur’ān says:

“inna l-muslimīna wa-l-muslimāti, wa-l-mu’minīna wa-l-mu’mināti, wa-l-qānitīna wa-l-qānitāti, wa-s-ṣādiqīna wa-s-ṣādiqāti, wa-s-ṣābirīna wa-s-ṣābiraati, wa-l-khāshi’īna wa-l-khāshi’āti, wa-l-mutaṣaddiqīna wa-l-mutaṣaddiqāti, wa-s-ṣā’imīna wa-s-ṣā’imāti, wa-l-ḥāfiẓīna furūjabum wa-l-ḥāfiẓāti, wa-dh-dhākīrīna Allāha kathīran wa-dh-dhākīrāti, a’adda Allāhu labum maghfiratan wa-ajran ‘aẓīma(n)”

The Glorious Qur’ān (33:35)

*“For Muslim men and women,
for believing men and women,
for devout men and women,
for true men and women,
for men and women who are true and constant,
for men and women who humble themselves,
for men and women who give in charity,
for men and women who fast,
for men and women who guard their chastity, and
for men and women who engage much in Allāh’s praise,
for them has Allāh prepared forgiveness and a great reward.”*

This verse testifies that both men and women have been given the opportunity to perform pious deeds and adopt chastity in order to please their Lord Sovereign, Almighty Allāh, and to win for themselves an honourable place in this world and the Hereafter.

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The appearance of Islām meant the honourable and rightful recognition of woman as a human. It meant her entitlement to equal rights and opportunities to play a positive role in the society, to make good use of her talents. Islām blessed her with an inconceivable social status as a mother, wife and daughter. It gives her freedom to do whatever she wills, however, whenever and wherever she wills, subject to the rules, regulations, restrictions and injunctions as enunciated by Islām.

Many Western thinkers still fail to comprehend that unlimited freedom disturbs the natural chastity of the woman. If given unlimited rights or rights unsuitable for her biological physique, the system has every chance of polluting the social environment with uncontrollable corruption and filth. Pornography, prostitution, rape, fornication and homosexuality are only some of the moral diseases plaguing the Western world today.

The world must think again and again and realise that only Islām holds the solutions to today's evils facing mankind. The rights and duties, befitting the natural characteristics of a woman, should not only be handed over to her, but also be kept limited and safeguarded to socially administer our lives and to assure the all-round prosperity and everlasting peace the world needs. It was Islām that pioneered dignity and honour for woman and it is Islām that shall safeguard it.

