



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM: A VINDICATION

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#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2016

Received in revised form

03<sup>rd</sup> September, 2016

Accepted 09<sup>th</sup> October, 2016

Published online 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2016

#### ABSTRACT

Almighty Allah has made this universe of which earth is best creation of Allah, because human beings are living on it Allah has created all men and women and has given equal rights. The Islamic laws recognize the full property rights of woman before and after marriage. Over 1400 years ago Islam gave woman rights women in the west have only recently began to enjoy.

#### Key words:

Creation,  
Human Beings,  
Rights,  
Women,  
Marriage.

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Citation: Sartaj Manzoor Parray and Gh Mustafa Mir, 2016. "Rights of women in Islam: A vindication", *International Journal of Current Research*, 8, (11), 42561-42564.

## INTRODUCTION

*"The most perfect of the believers are those who are best in character and behaviour, and those who are best to their family and their wives". (Ahmad\_736, 7396)*

One of the most provocative issues, in the modern times almost, in all the societies of the world is the issue of women. The feminine, feminist and feminism are the terms, which have caught the attention of the huge scholarship and feminism as such, has emerged as one of the powerful discourses. To question, what is being called, patriarchy and to say 'no' to the marginalization on the basis of gender, is the engagement of all the feminisms since their dawn in the last decade of eighteenth century.

### Status of Woman: A Comparative Study

Religion as an institution is the main focus to be considered as a responsible system under which gender discrimination has evolved. If on the one hand the secular feminists assess religion and feminism as incompatible but, on the other hand, this may not be an exaggeration that it was only the era of the

Great Prophet (pbuh) that championed the cause of women and has always voiced to give her the status and role, she has to perform in building a constructive society. It is because of the bias of the western discourses that a lot of fuss has been created and the issue of women and Islam is being seen with full suspicion. In the western scholarship, the movements like Women's Movement of 1960 or proceeding to this the path-breaking feminist movement anticipated itself by *The Vindication of Rights of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft and further strengthened by Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labour* (1911), Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) and Fredrick Engels's *The Origin of Family* (1884) comparatively are novel for this cause as they cannot beat the fourteenth century old authentic sources of Islam, i.e., Quran, Traditions of Prophet (pbuh) and Lives of His companions whereby woman occupies a high status as bestowed on her by Allah (SWT). Spiritually speaking, she has an equal role to play or the equal obligations to uphold as. Quran has a separate chapter called *Surah Nisa*. *Nisa* in Arabic means women. In this Chapter mainly, Allah puts forth some doctrines without any kind of gender discrimination. In verse 124 Allah says,

*'If any of you do deeds of righteousness, whether it be male or a female and has faith, they shall surely enter Paradise and not the least injustice shall be done to them'.*

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According to Tabari, Hazrat Umme Salama said: "I had asked the Prophet (pbuh), 'why the Quran did not speak about us as it did of men,'" and what was my surprise one afternoon when I was combing my hair, to hear his (the Prophet's pbuh) voice from the pulpit. I hastily did up my hair and ran to one of the apartments from where I could hear well. I pressed my ear to the wall and here is what the Prophet (pbuh) said! "O People! Allah has said in his Book' and then he recited the verse 35 of Sura Ahzab (33:35) where there is a beautiful account given which clarifies the notion that men and women are treated quite equally in terms of spiritual matters. The verse means,

*'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 patient and constant, For men and women who humble themselves, For men and women who give in charity, For men and women who fast (and deny themselves), For men and women who guard their chastity, and For men and women who engage much in God's praise—For them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward.'*

This, very ardently shows that in the matter of spirituality and morality men and women has the same role and the same duty in Islam. In the Bible, it is mentioned that the Eve alone is responsible for the downfall of humanity and it is because of her, that the whole humanity is born in sin. In the Genesis, Chapter 3, Verse no. 16, where it said, 'Unto the woman you shall bear in conception and in sorrow shall you give birth and your desire shall be of your husband and he shall rule over you'.

The inference is here is that pregnancy and child birth is to degrade the women and the labour pain is a kind of punishment for women on behalf of mother Eve. Where in Surah Araf Chhapter 7, Verse No.19 to 27, in the Holy Quran, Adam and Eve (pbut) are addressed, more than a dozen of times. Both disobeyed God, both asked for forgiveness, both repented, and both were forgiven. While in Quran pregnancy and child birth have uplifted the women. In Chapter 4 called Surah Nisa, Verse No.1, Allah (SWT) says,

*'Respect the womb that bore you'.*

The Prophet (pbuh) said:

*"The woman who dies in pregnancy or childbirth is a martyr".*

So, Islam has uplifted a woman for her pregnancy not degraded. In most of the societies of the world women were merely treated as objects and commodities possessed and dominated by men. Women were treated just as kitchen queens and the objects of sex. The western literatures, more particularly of the modern age do highlight this issue as many writers have emerged, who blatantly voiced against the problems faced by women. Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* is a good example. Also Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of Writes of Women* (1792) voices her dilemma as,

*"...taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre...Implying that without this damaging ideology, which encourages young women to focus their attention on beauty and outward accomplishments, they could achieve much more. Wives could be the rational "companions" of their husbands."* But when we observe keenly in the Holy Quran Islam sets a position for a woman as a wife which West has claimed only

now. In Islam, marriage is considered as a *misaq*, a *sacred agreement*, a *sacred contract* as mentioned in Surah Nisa, Ch.4, Verse No.21.

Islam never treats a woman like a doll of '*A Doll's House*', she is not considered as a housewife instead, a woman is considered as a homemaker. The relationship of husband and wife in Islam is not like that of a master and a slave but it is based on total equality. As for as leadership in a family is concerned a man does have a higher degree but not any kind of superiority over women as clearly mentioned in Surah Nisa, Ch. 5, Verse No.34:

*'The men are the protectors and maintainers of the women, for Allah (SWT) has given one of them more strength than the other and they give them their means'.*

Allah (SWT) has used the word, '*Kawwam*' which according to the commentary of Ibn-Kathir means one degree higher in responsibility, not a higher degree in superiority. Men are no doubt physically stronger than women to shoulder this higher degree of responsibility but rest; they are equal to their female counterparts.

Fatima Mernessi an Arab feminist has as also given a similar explanation of the man being higher in a degree on the basis of responsibility not on the basis of inferiority. She builds a comparison between Christian and Muslim theory of instincts whereby Christians are torn between two poles of good and evil, flesh and spirit, emotion and reason. She says that in western culture woman is inferior to man because of the biological setup while as in Islam the assumption is that woman is considered to be more powerful as sexual drive is concerned, thus the legal sexual institutions are at their best to maintain a balance. Islam has protected the dignity of a wife in such a manner that if a man not likes his wife still he has to treat her kindly and with equity as, in *Surah Nisa*, Ch.4, Verse No.19, Allah (SWT) says,

*'Treat your wives on a footing of equity and kindness even if you dislike her for*

*you may be disliking a thing for which Allah has made good for you'.*

History bears witness that before the advent of Islam if on the one hand the women enjoyed an esteemed status in the nobility but on the other hand their conditions were wretched and pathetic. They were treated as chattels, female infanticide was in vogue. Islam repudiates female infanticide rather, Prophet (pbuh) has given glad tidings to those parents who bring up the female child properly as in '*Ahmed*', The Prophet (may peace be upon him) says,

*'Anyone who brings up two daughters properly and takes good care and brings them up with love and affection, they will enter Paradise.'*

In Babylonian civilization, woman used to get death penalty on behalf of his husband's killing someone. For Greeks woman was a cause of evil and misfortune and in Egyptian civilization she was a sign of devil in some parts of Eastern Europe and also in India a woman was burnt alive or killed with her husband on his death. Islam has repudiated all these evil systems concerning The Daughter of Eve and has rendered her as a companion of man to establish a complete and pure social

setup. Quran has depicted her as a '*Mohsina*' means fortress against evil not an object of evil. As regarding a mother there is a beautiful golden tradition of Prophet (pbuh) present in *Ibn-Maja* which means,

*'Paradise lies under the feet of the mother'*.

As far as Education is concerned Islam lays immense stress on acquiring knowledge equally for men and women as a tradition goes,

*'To acquire knowledge is obligatory for every man and woman'*

Moreover, the era of Prophet (pbuh) is evident itself whereby we can infer that it was because of the atmosphere created by the endeavors of Prophet (pbuh) and his companions that a passion and zeal was imposed in women also to acquire knowledge as it is mentioned in Sahih Bukhari that once women asked Prophet (pbuh), 'You are usually surrounded by men why do not you give us one particular day so that we too can ask you questions'. For this Prophet (pbuh) not only sanctioned for this but, also assigned duty to some of his companions to educate women. Islam never prohibits a woman to get proper education but to maintain and to safeguard her dignity the only requirement Islam puts forth is *Hijab*, that is she should be properly dressed. Otherwise a Muslim Society does need women as doctors, teachers and etc.

If we analyze the era of Prophet (pbuh) we find that a great number of women were well versed in different fields of education even then, when almost the entire world was steeped in ignorance. The best example is Hazrat Aisha (r.a.) as she has 2210 narrations to her credit. Once Prophet (pbuh) said, "*Half the knowledge of my revelation should be acquired from all of my companions and the other half from Aisha.*" Not only in terms of religion but she had a profound knowledge of other different areas as mentioned by Urwah-Ibn-Zubair,

*'I have not seen a greater scholar than Aisha in the field of learning of the Qur'an, in obligatory duties, in lawful and unlawful matters, in literature and poetry, in Arab history'*.

She had also knowledge of medicine as she used to learn from the discussions which Prophet (pbuh) had with the foreign delegates. She also knew mathematics well.

People used to consult her for the matters of inheritance and its accounts. Another example besides Hazrat Aisha there were several other women scholars like Hazrat Umm e Salma (may Allah be pleased with her), the wife of Prophet (pbuh) who according to Ibn Hajar (r.a) has taught 32 scholars. It will be worth noticeable here that, there were some women who had expertise in medicine and surgery like *Rafidah Aslamiya*, *Umme Muta*, *Umme Kabsh*. *Rafidah Aslamiya* had a nursing home next to Masjid e Nabvi (SAW). Mary Wollstonecraft proclaims in her *Vindication* also, but only when Islam has already taken care of that. She says, "*Women might certainly study the art of healing, and be physicians as well as nurses. And midwifery, decency seems to allot to them they might, also, study politics. Business of various kinds, they might likewise pursue...*"

As regards the question of co-education which Mary Wollstonecraft also voices of, Islam does not favour such setup. It is better to have separate institutions. According to a survey conducted in England it has been observed that the

separate institutions are showing brighter results, as per academics is concerned, than the co-educational institutions. In the co-educational setup students are inclined towards each other. Their attention gets deviated as observed many a time in America and even in India that students indulge in negative activities rather paying due attention to their studies. Islam doesn't support the intermingling of sexes in any institution.

Islam also takes care of woman economically as well. Woman has a definite share in her father's property. Also, in marriage she is at the receiving end as it is compulsory for a husband to give her dower called 'Meher' to his wife as, mentioned in *Surah Nisa*, Verse 4,

*'And give the women their dower as free gift'*

A While on the other hand man is forbidden to demand any kind of dowry from her wife. Under the Islamic code of conduct woman is privileged with equal legal and political rights also. Islam in all circumstances protects the chastity and dignity of a woman. If in an Islamic State a woman is blamed of adultery by a man and couldn't produce four witnesses, that man will be given eighty lashes. A woman in an Islamic State could even interfere in the legal matters evident by an incident during Hazrat Umar (r.a.) reign whereby a woman openly challenged Umar (r.a.) when he was discussing with his companions about setting a limit on the 'Meher' convenient to every man, that woman claimed that in *Surah Nisa* Ch.4, Verse No.20 Allah says,

*'You can even give a heap of treasure, a heap of gold in 'Meher', when Qur'an puts no limit on 'Meher', who is Umar to put a limit (may Allah be pleased with him).'*' Hazrat Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) he said on this occasion,

*'Umar is wrong and the lady is right'*.

Such are the reservations in Islam. Islam also gives a woman the right to vote as women also accepted Prophet (pbuh) as their head of the state through the legal practice of taking, what is called in Islam, '*Bai'ah*', apart from accepting him the last messenger.

## Conclusion

To conclude, in the history of civilizations the status, women enjoy in Islam right from its pristine age of Prophet Mohammad (pbuh), remains unparalleled. Women in western societies did have obtained Socio-economic and Lego-political rights, through the consistent feministic discourses but it is also quite obvious that they have gone to extremes. A woman in west is robbed of her dignity, family life and she has rendered herself an enjoyable object of sex. What was there, rather unknowingly in the ancient societies, is now knowingly in western societies. Western feminism provides only a material view of the status of a woman devoid of any spirituality and which has rendered a certain position to women whereby all the moral and spiritual degradation is possible, Islam in its essence has given them their natural rights which are due to them.

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