
BEYOND SURFACE NARRATIVES: THE DEEP-ROOTED REVERENCE FOR WOMEN IN ISLAM

Imagine a bedouin, his face contorting in disgust and embarrassment upon hearing the news of the birth of his daughter. He, who treated the women in his family like mere commodities, passing a wife on as inheritance, almost as if she were a possession devoid of feelings or rights. He, whose dark heart would not flinch at the thought of burying his newborn daughters alive, reducing their delicate lives to mere burdens. But then, the unimaginable happens. A change so profound, so intense, that the very same man, just a few years and months later, is overjoyed by the birth of a daughter and just as eagerly, anticipates the next one. This transformed man is now ready to sacrifice his life to protect the women of his family, to go to war for the honor of a single woman, and to ensure that inheritance rightfully reaches his female relatives. What could cause such a drastic, soul-stirring change? What force could awaken such compassion and righteousness in a heart once filled with cruelty and disdain? The answer lies in the profound teachings of Islam and the wisdom of the Prophet ﷺ, whose words and actions turned darkness into light, hate into love, and oppression into justice.

The portrayal of women as oppressed within the context of Islam has become a narrative fraught with emotional weight. It's easy to be swayed by dramatic accounts that paint a bleak picture. Such stories can lead those with wavering faith to doubt and skepticism. But is this portrayal accurate, or a result of manipulation and distortion?

While certain modern movements may posit that absolute equality equates to justice, Islam approaches this differently. It recognizes that in spirituality, all are judged by their actions, and every individual stands equal in the eyes of Allah. Yet, when it comes to societal rules, roles, and responsibilities, men and women have distinct yet complementary roles, accounting for biological and physiological differences between them, emphasizing the harmonious balance necessary for a thriving community. These rights and responsibilities have been given to each gender by Allah, our creator, who is undeniably the All-Knowing and Most Wise. It follows then, that His commands will always be brimming with wisdom and goodness. This is the backdrop against which we should understand all discussions dealing with gender rights and responsibilities.

Respect and Honour for Women in Islam

Islam has consistently bestowed honour upon women, a fact frequently overlooked by skeptics. Consider the Quranic examples of two exemplary women: Āsiyah, the wife of Fir'awn and Maryam, daughter of 'Imrān, both of whom serve as role models for both genders. How could a religion that holds women as role models for men be accused of demeaning them?

In Islam, the position of a mother is unparalleled. Islamic society has never thought that working in an office is of a higher order of importance than bringing up one's children. A mother holds a rank higher than the father in respect to kindness and good treatment, as emphasized by the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ in his teachings.

Furthermore, Islam promotes kindness towards daughters, as demonstrated by the Ḥadīth promising Jannah to a person who takes care of two daughters, treating them with kindness, until they mature—a sentiment expressed during a time when the birth of a female child was viewed with disdain.

Equitable and Compassionate Islamic Jurisprudence

Islamic laws often exhibit leniency and consideration towards women in comparison to men. From permitting women to wear gold and silk to not obligating their participation in communal prayers or military engagements, these rulings showcase a compassionate understanding of women's unique circumstances.

Misconceptions and Misinterpretations

Critics calling for independence from male guardianship and other freedoms tend to overlook the adverse outcomes that arise from straying from divine laws. They disregard the sins and injustices stemming from illicit relationships, abortions, and the false sense of liberation that often causes more harm than empowerment.

Likewise, they misinterpret the wisdom behind laws like inheritance. The claim that women receive half the inheritance of men fails to account for various scenarios in which women may receive equal or more than men, or even inherit where men do not. Objections to the laws of inheritance also disregard the fact that, in Islam, a woman never has the responsibility to provide for herself or anyone else. Men are entirely responsible to earn and provide for themselves and their families.

The contradictions between critics' claims and reality are striking. The condemnation of underage marriages contrasts starkly with the prevalence of unwed pregnancies among young girls. It also raises the question, who decides what is “underage”? Puberty was considered to be the factor that separated a girl from a woman for all of history. The fervent opposition to polygamy overlooks the fact that women themselves choose to become second or third wives. It also ignores the substantial societal benefits that polygamy affords to women and children.

Moreover, erroneous customs that oppress women are mistakenly attributed to Islam. Practices like forced marriage stand in direct contradiction to Islamic teachings, as evident in the authentic Ḥadīth of the Prophet ﷺ.

In Conclusion

The assertion of women's oppression in Islam is a distortion of reality. This is a complex topic that has been convoluted by misunderstanding, bias, and cultural misrepresentation. Islam, in essence, offers a framework that respects, honours, and comprehends women in a manner aligned with their nature and needs. In a world that often objectifies and belittles women, Islam shines as a beacon of dignity and reverence. We need to separate truth from falsehood, gain an understanding of the depth of Islamic teachings, and begin distinguishing between cultural practices and the unadulterated essence of Islam.

True appreciation for the position of women in Islam emerges through a holistic understanding of Islam, society, and human nature as well as by accepting Allah as the All-Knowing. This will aid in dispelling all misconceptions.

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