

age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour." (Quran 17:23)

Women in Islam are Precious & Respected

THE VEIL & HIJAAB

Women in Islam are considered to be very precious and beautiful and therefore are respected and honoured. The veil is seen by Muslim women as a liberation rather than oppression as it enables them to be accepted for their mind, personality and spirituality instead of being judged according to their physical attributes. The veil ensures protection rather than exploitation. The exploitation of women and their bodies by men is one of the causes of the increase in crime such as rape, assault and child abuse. It is interesting to note that nuns dress similarly to Muslim women, yet they are viewed as exercising freedom of expression, however Muslim women are thought of as being oppressed and compelled. The respect in which women and their bodies are given in Islam is emphasised by the fact that a man found guilty of rape is punished severely. This indicates the gravity with which Muslims view crimes against women.

ECONOMICS AND THE RIGHT TO WORK

Islam decreed a right which was deprived before it, the right of independent ownership and inheritance. According to Islamic law, a woman's right to her money, real estate or other properties is fully acknowledged. With regard to the woman's right to seek employment it should be stated first that Islam regards her role in society as a mother and a wife as the most sacred and essential one. A mother's place cannot be replaced by maids or baby-sitters. However, Islam does not forbid women from seeking employment, especially in positions which are needed by society e.g. nursing, teaching and medicine. The man in Islam is fully responsible for the maintenance of his wife, his children and in some cases, his needy relatives, especially the females. This responsibility is neither waived nor reduced because of his wife's wealth or because of her access to any personal income gained from work, rent, profit or any other legal means. This variation of financial responsibility between man and woman is reflected in the inheritance rights, she inherits less because her financial responsibility and burden is less.

POLYGAMY

Whenever Islam is mentioned, people talk about the question of four wives. It is important to note that the Quran commands with justice amongst one's wife: "...**Marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then marry only one.**" (Quran 4:03) Thus if men have extra wives they must act justly with their wives, and each wife must be provided for equally. This is in stark contrast with a system where men have many extra-marital affairs and mistresses, everything is hidden and secretive. The women (and children who are born as a result) have very little, if any rights - resulting in destruction of marriages and therefore the family structure. Interestingly many Jews and Christians criticise Islam for polygamy. However, most of the Prophets in the Old Testament had numerous wives. Also Jesus never revoked the Jewish law on polygamy, thus implicitly agreeing with it. In defence of polygamy, it could also be said there are more women in the world than men, therefore it is just a way of ensuring all women can get married. And as married women they can

SOME MUSLIMS GIVE ISLAM A BAD IMAGE by Ascribing Oppressive & Evil Cultural Practices to Islam. So Beware!

CONCLUSION

To understand the status of women in Islam, we need to realise that Islam asserts that although men and women are equal in the sight of God as far as reward and punishment in the Hereafter, however they are inherently different, therefore the laws governing them are different. It is clear that many Muslims (often due to ignorance or cultural fanaticism or both!) treat their wives badly, but this is a flaw of the individual and not the religion. The basic reason why Muslims do anything is because we believe that the Quran is one of God's miracles, the Word of God, in a complete and unadulterated form, and Muhammed is His final Messenger, and as such we follow the divine teachings. Why not find out for yourself and read it? Why not find out more about the Prophet Muhammad? God states: **"And if you are in doubt as to what we have revealed to our servant then produce a chapter like it and call your witnesses or helpers besides God if you are truthful, but if you cannot, and of a surety you cannot, then fear the fire whose fuel is men and stones which is prepared for those who reject faith."** (Quran 2:22)

You owe it to yourself to find out the truth - you can see from these brief words that women are not badly treated by Islam. So maybe Islam is not what you thought it was. Almighty God states: **"You denied my revelations although you knew nothing of them. What was it you were doing?"** (Quran 27:84)

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be maintained financially by their husband and also fulfill their role as a wife and a mother.

WOMEN IN ISLAAM SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

"It is impossible for anyone who studies the life and character of the great Prophet of Arabia who knows how he taught and how he lived, to feel anything but reverence for that mighty Prophet, one of the great Messengers of the Supreme.

And although in what I put to you I shall say many things which may be familiar to many, yet I myself feel whenever I re-read them, a new way of admiration, a new sense of reverence for that mighty Arabian teacher."

Annie Besant, THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF MUHAMMAD, Madras, 1932, p. 4

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WOMEN IN ISLAM

Much has been said about women in Islam but mostly from people who know very little about Islam. Islam liberated women 1400 years ago. Long before the Suffragettes and women's rights' movements came into play, women were given human rights such as inheritance, the right to own property, education, and choose a husband. Islam is the fastest growing way of life in the west and 80% of the converts to Islam in the USA and the majority in the UK are women (The Times newspaper, 9th November 1993). If you know little about women in Islam you may well ask yourself: **"Why do so many 'liberated western' women want to become Muslims?"** This leaflet will briefly discuss some of the reasons why.

PREVIOUS INJUSTICES TO WOMEN

Eve is viewed in the Old Testament of the Bible as an evil temptress responsible for the fall of Adam and hence responsible for the 'original sin' (Genesis 2:4-3:24). The Bible states: **"No wickedness comes anywhere near the wickedness of a woman. . . Sin began with a woman and thanks to her we all must die."** (Ecclesiastes 25:19,24). Much of the oppression of women that took place for centuries was built upon this false premise that women are inherently evil and misguided.

Late 19th century English Common Law stated that a woman's possessions belonged to her husband. Only in 1887 were women allowed to own property. Cambridge and Oxford Universities gave equal rights to education for women in 1964. Compare the above to the status and rights of women in Islam that were given to them more than 1400 years ago.

THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT

In Islam there is absolutely no difference between men and women as far as their relationship to Almighty God is concerned, as both are promised reward for good conduct and punishment for evil conduct. Almighty God states in the Quran that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad fourteen hundred years ago: **"Muslim men and women, believing men and women, devout men and women, truthful men and women who are patient and constant, men and women who humble themselves, men and women who give in charity, men and women who fast, men and women who guard their chastity, and men and women who engage much in God's remembrance - for them God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward."** (Quran 33:35)

THE SOCIAL ASPECT

At the time of the emergence of Islam it was socially accepted by the Arabs and most societies to treat women poorly and to favour males. In fact first born females were often killed due to the shame that it would bring upon the families. Even in these times, many cultures frowned upon female children and even abort the child in the womb purely on the basis of gender. Islam completely forbids these notions and actively encourages parents to show good treatment to and cultivation of daughters, and God makes that as a cause for entry of good parents into Paradise. Islam made it a part of faith to treat women well. The Prophet

Muhammad taught, **"The most perfect amongst believers in faith is the best in conduct. And the best of you is the best to his women-folk."** The Prophet Muhammad himself had daughters, amongst them was Fatima, about whom he would say, **"Whatever hurts my Fatima hurts me."** He also said, **"God has perfected four women: Mary the mother of Jesus, Asiyah the believing wife of the Pharaoh, Khadeejah the daughter of Khuwailid and Fatima the daughter of Muhammad."** These sayings and many more place in the heart of a true believer honour and reverence for believing women and to regard women in importance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Islam requires that girls are treated kindly and justly and greatly encourages educating them. The Prophet said: **"Seeking of knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim."** The order to seek knowledge and be educated is aimed equally at both sexes. Many societies see it as shameful to educate females, even some Muslim communities frown upon women being educated. This is wrong and opposes the Quranic texts and the Prophetic tradition. The wife of the Prophet, Aisha was renowned for her intelligence and Islamic knowledge. Her student Urwah said, **"I did not see a greater scholar than Aisha in the learning of Quran, obligatory duties, lawful and unlawful matters, poetry, literature, Arab history and genealogy."** The great theologian Nawawi said about another female disciple, Safiyyah: **"She was the most intellectual among the learned women."** Umm Salamah, a wife of the Prophet had at least thirty two great scholars who learned Prophetic traditions from her and then narrated them on her authority. A great scholar Marwan used to say: **"Why should we turn to others when the wives of the Messenger are among us?"** The list of learned women in Islam is endless. It shows that women were not kept illiterate and ignorant but were fully encouraged to participate in the process of learning Islam and its scholarship for the purpose of being the first teachers to their children. There were instances to show that some women challenged great scholars of their times if they said something which was against the rights granted to women by the Quran and Sunnah. Muslim women do not only acquire knowledge but also combine it with the high moral qualities that Islam seeks to imbue in the future mothers of mankind.

Muslims should be in a position of knowledge with respect to their religion which will inevitably ward off doubts that are spread against Islam and its position towards women.

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

Here are just a few facts about women's rights in Islam established over fourteen centuries ago:

- Islam condemned pre-Islamic practices degrading and oppressing women
- Islam gave women the right of inheritance and the right of individual independent ownership unhampered by father, husband, brother, son or anyone else
- Islam gave women the right to accept or reject a marriage proposal free from pressure; forced marriages are not from Islam
- Islam does not require a woman to change her name at marriage nor give up her wealth
- Islam protects the family and condemns the betrayal of marital fidelity. It recognizes only one type of family: husband and wife united by an authentic marriage contract

- Islam enjoins sound morality in thinking, behavior and appearance. Dress fashions and social patterns that reduce the woman to a sex object and exploit her as such are not acceptable to Islam. A woman is judged on the basis of her piety and excellence of character

- The observance of chastity and moral standards is equally demanded by Islam from both men and women. **"Women are the twins of men"** is a saying of prophet Muhammad

- The mother has a great right to be shown kindness, goodness and obedience

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Marriage in Islam is seen not only to perpetuate human life but is also a source of emotional well being and spiritual harmony. The Quran emphasizes this essential unity of man and woman in a most beautiful similitude: **"They (your wives) are your garment and you are a garment for them."** (Quran 2:187) Just as a garment hides our nakedness, a husband and wife, by entering into the relationship of marriage, secure each other's chastity. The garment gives comfort to the body; similarly the husband gives comfort to his wife and vice versa. The garment is grace, beauty, and embellishment of the body, so too are wives to their husbands as their husbands are to them.

The basis of the marriage is love and mercy as God mentioned in the Quran: **"And among His signs is this that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect."** (Quran 30:21)

Instead of being forced to marry against their will, Muslim women are allowed to play an active part in choosing their husbands. And do not (as many people believe) have to marry anyone against their will. Indeed a marriage against the will of the girl is invalid in Islamic Law. Many Muslims who follow cultures and traditions oppose this Islamic right of women to refuse a proposal, but that should not be attributed to Islam but rather to cultures alien to Islam.

The status of being an individual partner in marriage is emphasised by the fact the woman keeps her maiden name after marriage. This is the opposite of what occurs in the West, which itself is based on the Greco-Roman culture, where women took the name of the husband, because the woman was considered the property of the man. Divorce is allowed in Islam if necessity dictates. However Islam commands that the rights of both parties are respected and one does not go beyond bounds.

THE MOTHER

Islam recognises the sacrifices parents (especially the mother) makes in bringing up children. The mother thus has a very honoured position in Islam. The Prophet advised a man who asked: **"O Messenger of God, who among the people is most worthy of my good company?"** The Prophet said, **"Your mother"**. The man said, **"Then who else?"** The Prophet said, **"Your mother"**. The man asked, **"Then who else?"** So the Prophet replied again, **"Your mother"**. Then the man asked, **"Then who else?"** The Prophet said, **"Your father"**. This shows that the mother is given three times the likes of kindness and good treatment as the father. Kindness to both parents is considered in Islam to be from the most noble of deeds. Almighty God stated: **"And Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old**