

Introduction

"And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and guard their private parts and do not display their adornment save what is apparent of it; and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms..." (Holy Qur'an, 24:31).

Islam recorded a great turning point in the history of woman which has no rival to this day. Through it, she regained her honour and rights of which she had been deprived for centuries under the burdens of unjust views of the pre-Islamic era of Ignorance (*Jahiliyah*). Islam restored her full rights to lead a noble life under the shadow of a glorious civilized system.

For the first time in history, woman was able to enjoy her lofty human rights, according to Islamic laws and legislation. Injustices was removed from her and she could live as a human being having dignity, honour and rank equal to man. This right was to be practised within the limits of the Almighty Allah Who gave woman capabilities and prepared for her a natural opportunity to participate in the building of life, glory, establishing truth and spreading good.

This concept may remain as mere hopes and dreams to some people if it is not supported by the terms of the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet and his infallible descendents (*Ahlul-Bait*) (peace and blessings of Allah be with them all).

The society of *Jahiliyah* insisted on considering woman as a target for curses, a focal point for evil thoughts of the devil, or comparing her to an animal created in the form of a human being. Once the Holy Qur'an was came, it declared the falsity of these opinions which contradicted truth and reality.

It emphasized strongly that man and woman are twins gathered from one source and essence.

"Oh people! Be careful of (your duty to) your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from these two, men numerous and women;..." (Holy Qur'an, 4: 1).

"He it is Who created you from a single being, and of the same (kind) did He make his mate, that

he might incline to her;..." (Holy Qur'an, 7:189).

"And Allah has made wives for you from among your selves, and has given you sons and grandchildren from your wives,..." (Holy Qur'an, 16:72).

After declaring clearly the place of woman in life and human existence, the Holy Qur'an attacks strongly the custom of burying one's daughter alive (*wa'id*)¹.

"And when the female baby buried (alive) is asked, for what sin she was killed,..." (Holy Qur'an, 81:8-9)

It also ended the age in which woman was prevented from marriage unless she paid a ransom to redeem herself or to be unjustly inherited after her death.

"O you who believe! it is not lawful for you that you should take women as heritage against (their will), and do not straiten them in order that you may take part of what you have given them, ..." (Holy Qur'an, 4:19).

It also removed their abasement and mistreatment by men.

Thus the Holy Qur'an placed more emphasis on dealing with them kindly:

"...and treat them kindly; then if you hate them, it may be that you dislike a thing while Allah has placed abundant good in it." (Holy Qur'an, 4:19).

In the past, poverty led some people to kill their children, the female particularly enduring such burdens, so the Holy Qur'an removed this (away from her):

"...and do not slay your children for (fear of) poverty; We provide for you and for them;..." (Holy Qur'an, 6:151).

Islam declares that the foundation of honouring does not depend upon manhood but on righteous deeds and faith (in Allah). Whoever does an act achieves its results whether it be a man or a woman:

"Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the almsgiving men and the almsgiving women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember, Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward." (Holy Qur'an, 33:35).

Islam also insists that the believers are guardians of each other. They spread goodness among themselves and bid to what is right and forbid what is wrong and evil.

"And (as for) the believing men and the believing women, they are guardians of each other. they enjoin good and forbid evil and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate (zakat) and obey Allah and His Messenger; (as for) these, Allah will show mercy to them;..."(Holy Qur'an, 9:71).

Islam is firm in clarifying the nature of the relation between man and woman in the framework of marriage.

"...they are an apparel for you and you are an apparel for them..."(Holy Qur'an, 2: 187).

"And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion;..."(Holy Qur'an, 30:21).

Besides making laws for the rights of a woman, indeed the Holy Legislation clearly brings attention to the necessity of honouring, taking care of her and giving her, her full rights.

The Prophet of Allah, Muhammad (s.a.w.) says:

*"None would respect women except the magnanimous ones, and none would insult them except the ignoble ones."*²

*"Treaty our children equally concerning gifts (offers), so if I were obliging, surely I would prefer women."*³

*"I do not think that a man gets better in faith without loving women better."*⁴

In addition, there are many other holy texts which call for placing woman in her natural position in the life of society.

Islam also gave other importance to woman. It shaped for her a special dress in order to keep her dignity and preserve her personality against loss and corruption. Islam achieved for woman, through *hijab* (Islamic dress), two main things:

First, it kept her ideological role while performing her legislative responsibility by presenting the needed services for the society, progress and Islamic message and also her active participation in the course of life around her according to the legislative limits which Islam made clear.

Second, it protected the purity of woman and closed the way to any action which might exploit and lead her to fall into the marshes of vices; or change her to an instrument used to melt the society around her – as happened in Modern Europe. In addition to what *hijab* achieves of modesty and maintenance for woman and Islam aspires for lowering the gaze and forbidding the wanton mixing with non-*mahram* men and women and other principles, we will see to what extent Islam strives towards protecting man and woman, and the whole society, against the spread of vice, and a foolish and useless life.

Regarding these principles and decrees, the Almighty Allah says:

"Say to the believing men that they cast down their gaze and guard their private parts; that is

purer for them; surely Allah is Aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they cast down their gaze and guard their private parts and not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sisters' sons' or their women' or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants void of sexual stimulant, or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn (repentant) to Allah all of you, oh believers! so that you may be successful." (Holy Qur'an, 24: 30-31).

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds and may peace and blessings of Allah be with Muhammad and his holy family.

Al-Balagh Foundation

Vocabulary Used In The Research

1. **Woman's veil in pre-Islamic era (Jahiliyah):** It means to prevent a woman from participating in public life and denying her rights.
2. **Islamic Hijab:** Islamic mode of dressing which covers the whole body of a woman with the exception of her face and hands.
3. **Mahram:** It means the relatives of a man or woman with whom marriage is forbidden like one's parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, grandparents, grandchildren and in laws.
4. **Ajnabi or ajnabiyah** (their plurals are *ajanib* and *ajnabiyat*): They are those other than the above-defined categories with whom marriage is allowed, for example cousins or other relations and strangers. Or they are those with whom there is no legal obstacle for marriage.

1. Wa'id in Arabic means to bury girl children alive, Arabs, during the pre-Islamic era of Jahiliyah, practised this custom and used different ways to do it, Once Islam came, it abolished this heinous practise and prevented them from doing it forever.

2. Islam wa al-mar'ah (Islam and Women). Saeed Afghani quoting from Tirmidhi.

3. Ibid., Jami' al-Saghir.

4. Man la yahdroho al-Faqih, Sheikh Saduq, vol. 3, chap. 103, Hub al-Nisa'.