

Introduction By Sayyid Al-Qazwini

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The delicate issue of women in Islam has been a subject plagued and manipulated by mendacious and misrepresented information. A body of written work has been produced by a variety of literary writers, journalists, theologians, and Muslim scholars regarding Muslim women.

Some writers have genuinely manifested the subject of Muslim women while others whom have no in-depth knowledge about the core of the religion, have used the subject of women in Islam as a forum full of skepticism, exaggeration, and faulty teachings.

It is often stated that Islam displays women to a relative position of a lower human being, and that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh&hf) has been reputed as having been anti-women, but upon an in depth examination of the Qur'an, and the sayings of the Prophet, one finds this to be a disingenuous accusation. The Prophet was greatly aware of women's needs and he fought to respond to them through legislation and practice.

Writers have commonly depicted and based Islam by the misconduct of Muslims, rather than the content and philosophy of its teachings. A U.S. author, critic once wrote, "Part of the glue that holds Muslim men together is the thorough suppression of women." Contrarily, the indigent and the oppressed were the reasons for Islam's coming, women in particular.

Illustrious examples of prejudice, opposition, and appeasement on the subject have been tainted in literary works regarding Muslim women, either written by men with a man's perspective or sometimes by women emotionalizing some delicate issues, such as polygamy, while others having been influenced to conform or redress Qur'anic injunctions that would be considered "politically correct" for their society, such as claiming the Qur'an does not order women to cover.

Muslim scholars have not extensively addressed some of the complex issues of women in Islam, or given its deserved attention. Muslim scholars have been neglectful in researching and analyzing the subject deeply. Many Muslims and non-Muslims alike are not familiar with the formalities of binding social and personal rights and the choices available for Muslim women.

Often time people objectively dwell on the final outcome or verdict affecting Muslim women without being open to understand or review the logical relation that based the action, or the intricate connections of other related circumstances that were its reasoning for the judgment. Often times they are completely dismissed. One needs to genuinely question impartially as to the reasons for the practices regarding Muslim women.

Precluding a matter without subject to examination is undermining the essence of knowledge. One must erase all preconceived ideas about the subject of Muslim women and approach the matter like any other investigated work, open and unbiased. A story is told of a man encountering Prophet Muhammad. Upon conversing with the Prophet, he realized that the man was an argumentative person. The Prophet responded to him by saying, "Ask me as an inquirer not as a debater."

This book was not intended as a debate but rather a discussion to enlighten the elusive subject of Muslim women.

Islam innovated social and individual rights for women, and respectively accredited her as a full partner in life. Islam enabled women to own and dispose of her property without the consent of her father or husband. She is enabled to contract and manage her own business affairs, to earn and manage her own money.

Islam entitled her inheritance as a mother, daughter, sister, and wife. She has the right to deny or accept marriage proposals. Her marriage gift (mahr) is solely for her. She is entitled to vote, which, is considered to be a religious duty, and give her opinion or opposition to issues. Her penalty in civil offense is the same as a man. If she is harmed, she is entitled to compensation justly.

A book on Muslim women was needed. It was an opportunity for me, as a perpetual learner of Islamic knowledge, who has been blessed by Allah, and fortunate to experience the seminary and university (traditional and modern) views of both Eastern and Western societies, to discuss in a dialogue forum the issues surrounding Muslim women.

Before being a Muslim scholar, I am a man, and as a learning man of Islamic knowledge it would be prejudice to confidently state that I completely understand the varying dimensions of what affects or shapes a woman's nature and feelings. Mainly, the rules governing women in Islam directly affects her, and indirectly affects men; thus, sometimes, making us unaware of her personal perspective.

That is why I believe that as a seminary scholar, I am obligated to have a better understanding by personally engaging and discussing in the sensitive issues of women in Islam.

Like the story of the Prophet encountering an argumentative person, I found my co-author the opposite, one that was inquisitive. Sister Fatma Saleh had a thriving trait – the love of discovering and seeking knowledge about her religion. She has a passion to learn and an intuitive perception in discerning matters logically.

She is on a quest to understand and seek explanations or justifications on the perplexing issues surrounding Muslim women with her questions. By contributing her personal comments and inquiries from a woman's perspective, and extensively discussing the issues, I was able to better accommodate and evaluate the sentiments of women in my responses.

Finally, I maintain impartiality in personal judgment throughout the dialogue. I relied and accommodated to the consensus, opinions, and rulings of leading and prominent Muslim scholars.

Adding that I favored neither conforming to flattering Islamic viewpoints, nor to pleasing Western opinion. My concern and priority had been, and always will be, to be truthful and accountable before Allah, on the day that all people shall stand before Him. The truth and answers inevitably lie with Him.

Sayyid Moustafa Al-Qazwini

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