

Refuting Misconceptions about **Women** in Islam



Some Misconceptions
about **WOMEN**
in ISLAM



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Man as the Head of the Household

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In fact, to understand this Quranic verse, you should see another one, related to the issue in question. It reveals the wisdom behind this concept.

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This verse implies that it is a man's duty to support his wife, and not the reverse, but this, in no way, makes him superior to her.

In fact, the rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man but they are not necessarily identical. Since men and women are not created identical, they have different physical and emotional qualities, jobs and privileges. This does not mean that women are inferior.

On the contrary, women are considered crucial members of society in Islam since they are assigned the job of bringing up future generations. People today tend to look down at housewives but, in fact, raising children is one of the most important and difficult tasks. The way a mother brings up her child determines the way he will behave in the future. This duty, which requires patience, love, understanding and wisdom was significantly assigned to women in Islam because her nature suits this job.

Allaah The Exalted, in His Wisdom, has assigned a role for each member of the family so that there would be no arguments concerning who should do what. If a sailboat has two leaders, each will want to follow a path, leading ultimately to chaos and even a crash. In the same manner, how many times have your parents fought over some decision because each had their own point of view and wanted to apply it? This is precisely why it is preferable to have one leader for each household. However, this does not give the leader the right to be a dictator, or to neglect the role of his companion. This does not make him superior to other members of his family. It just gives him a larger duty.

Inheritance

Some people claim that Islam is unjust towards women because it entitles them to inherit half of what men get. In fact, those people only know one side of the truth.

First, the principle of women inheriting half the money is only applicable in 45 percent of the cases. In the other 55 percent, women inherit the same amount or sometimes even more. For example, a mother and a father each inherit the sixth of their son's property when they are not the only inheritors.

In addition, the laws of inheritance in Islam are proportional to the duties of spending. Indeed, a man in Islam has the responsibility of supporting his family, his brother's children (when his brother dies), his parents (when they retire and do not have an income), his children from his previous marriage (if he has them) and his household, including his wife and children. A woman, on the other hand, does not bear this responsibility. She has the freedom to use the money she collects from her dowry or work as she pleases.

You might object here, saying that women today are working and helping their husbands pay the expenses, which entitles them to share equality with men. In fact, you should know that women's economic assistance to their husbands, which has become the norm today, is only an answer to the females' wishes. Islam does not oblige women to spend on their households. It is a free choice many women have themselves taken today to feel more liberated, so it does not entitle them to a bigger portion of the inheritance.

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Polygyny

Polygyny is one of the most questioned principles that Islam grants men and women. Indeed, many people wrongfully accuse Islam of injustice because it allows a man to have up to four wives. Nevertheless, like every instruction in the Quran, polygyny has a reason. You see, Islam is a practical religion that acknowledges the needs and temptations of human beings and provides laws that deal with them, thus preserving harmony and morality.

- Polygyny might be the solution for a couple if the wife is barren, the husband wants children of his own and the option of separation does not appeal to both parties.
- If a woman is chronically ill and is unable to perform her marital duties. Polygyny may also be the solution when the couple does not want divorce.
- Polygyny is the religion's answer to cases where some men have excessive sexual needs that cannot be fulfilled by one wife. This in no way means that men should abuse this right and use it whenever they fancy a woman. It is rather a chance Islam has provided to prevent men from committing adultery. Many people who condemn polygyny cheat on their wives, calling this phenomenon a «swift affair.» Islam, at least, has offered the second woman the option of being called «a wife» rather than «a mistress», especially in some countries where women remarkably outnumber men.
- Polygyny may settle the problem of an increased number of unmarried women, especially during wars.

However, polygyny has some limits and conditions to be met. Indeed, the Quran instructs the man to be fair with his wives on all levels, including treatment, money, house, etc. The only level where the man may have an uneven stance is the level of the feelings that he cannot control:

Allaah Says (what means):

{You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire, so do not incline too much to one of them [by giving her more of your time and provision] so as to leave the other hanging [i.e. neither divorced nor married]. And if you do justice, and do all that is right and fear Allaah by keeping away from all that is wrong, then Allaah is Ever-Forgiving and All-Merciful.} [Quran 4:129]

Finally, it is worth knowing that Islam gives a woman the right to refuse polygyny for her husband by setting it as a condition during the marriage procedures. If this condition is set, then the woman is granted divorce if her husband marries another while he is still married to her.

You might ask, why could not there be polyandry (a woman having more than one husband)? The answer is simple. Islam did not allow it because Allaah is All-Aware that it will create a problem of kinship. This means that the child may not know who is actually his father (it could be anyone of the four husbands). In addition to the psychological damage it may cause, this problem also complicates the issue of inheritance. Even birds and animals do not allow polyandry.

Divorce

Islam considers marriage a basis for the Islamic family, since it develops bonds of love and caring and a secure atmosphere for the growth and progress of the human race. This, in turn, produces a sound society. This is why the Prophet taught us in a narration, that although classified 'weak', has a valid and important meaning. He said:»The most detestable of all lawful things in the sight of Allaah is divorce.» However, this does not mean that divorce is prohibited. On the contrary, it can sometimes be the best alternative. Divorce is a right for both women and men if their problems cannot be solved. Two French legislators, Planoil and Ripert, have said: «Divorce is a mischief. However, it is a measure that cannot be avoided for the welfare of the community, because it is the only remedy for another harm which may be more dangerous, i.e. murder.»

The above statement applies to cases where the husband and wife have lost their love for each other and where harmony in the marriage is over. Indeed, any other alternative will make them unhappy and will affect their children in the long run.

In these cases, Islam advises the couple to try to reconcile their differences in the presence of some immediate relatives belonging to both sides. If they are unable to do so, they are instructed to seek counseling through a third party, such as friends or other relatives. If there is still no solution, then they should seek a solution through a judge.

The judge will advise the couple to be patient and think of the children. However, if the problem remains unsolved, the family life becomes unbearable and the children are affected, then divorce becomes the only alternative, to enable them to have other spouses.

When it is inescapable, divorce is neither harmful to men nor to women. It is also definitely not unjust to women.

First, the couple must seek divorce in an amicable way. They are instructed to separate without hard feelings towards each other. They should keep a minimum of understanding that will secure the children's situation after the divorce.

The Quran says (what means): {Divorce is twice. Then [after that], either keep [her] in an acceptable manner or release [her] with good treatment. And it is not lawful for you to take anything of what you have given them unless both fear that they will not be able to keep [within] the limits of Allaah, and then there is no blame upon either of them concerning that by which she ransoms herself. These are the limits of Allaah, so do not transgress them. And whoever transgresses the limits of Allaah -- it is those who are the wrongdoers [i.e. the unjust].} [Quran 2: 229]

In Islam, the woman is not neglected after the divorce. Indeed husbands are instructed to provide housing to the divorced wife until her waiting period is completed, as in the saying of Allaah (which means): {Lodge them (During their waiting period (referring to wives whose divorce has been pronounced) [in a section] of where you dwell out of your means and do not harm them in order to oppress them (so that they would be forced to leave or to ransom themselves). And if they should be pregnant, then spend on them until they give birth. And if they breastfeed for you, then give them their payment and confer among yourselves in the acceptable way; but if you are in discord, then there may breastfeed for him [i.e. the father] another woman.} [Quran: 65:6]

Finally, although it is true that only men are allowed to pronounce divorce, yet a woman has the right to ask for a divorce, which is called 'Khul'. In this case, she has to return the dowry given by the husband, so that he utters the divorce.

Attestations

In Islam, one male witness equals two females: The Quran says (what means): {And get two witnesses out of your men. If there are not two men, then a man and two women such as you choose [maybe in place of two men as the witnesses]; so that if one of the women errs, the other one will remind her...} [Quran 2:282]

Here again, many people tend to denounce Islamic principles as unjust to women. They tend to interpret this requirement as proof of men's superiority over women. Again, this assumption is not true. In fact, various psychological and biological studies conducted on the psyche and hormonal functions of women, have proved that men generally tend to react more rationally and less emotionally, than women.

In cases of crime, for example, torn bodies and pouring blood are more likely to spur an emotional reaction among women than among men. This reaction is alone capable of distorting the female's perception and/or memory.

On the other hand, men are also bound by rules concerning their testimony. For instance, they must not be parents, friends or enemies of the accused. Can we then conclude that, if it was the case for women, that male parents and friends of the accused must be considered inferior too? Of course, they are not.

Finally, one should note that there are matters where a woman is the only witness required. These are related to areas where women are the experts, for example, in issues of breast feeding, bringing up children and the question of kinship (who is her child's father).

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The Veil

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Just think: What does a black (Hijaab) veil evoke in your mind? Certainly not the image it is meant to evoke -- religious commitment and peaceful, deep-rooted faith. How many times have you seen a veiled young girl and said: «Haraam! Poor thing! She has not seen the world yet...» Is all this just a coincidence?

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When Islam ordered women to wear the veil, it did it to privilege her, not constrain her:

Allaah Says (what means): {O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw upon them their over-garments. That is more appropriate so that they may be recognized and not molested.} [Quran 33: 59]

The above verses show that Islam aims to protect women from being considered sexual objects. It instructs women to uncover their faces in front of their husband, close relatives whom she cannot marry (Mahaarim) and other women. In front of strangers, she must conceal everything but her face and hands.

Why does one need to show a semi-clad woman in a car's advertisement? Why do we not see a veiled woman? In the first case, because the advertisers are trying to sell the image of the woman with the car. Unconsciously, you buy the car wishing it will provide you with such a «babe.» In the second case, the woman has refused to be treated as an object for trade and has worn the veil, a sign of dignity rather than humiliation.

Some misconceptions about women in Islam -I

Islam gave women rights and privileges at a time when only barbaric manners and values dominated.

Yet, some people argue that Islam has alienated women in some domains. In fact, this belief is a misconception. People who say so, may have read about it in a magazine or seen it on TV. A quick examination of the issues judged as unjust to women will certainly correct the misunderstanding.

Man as the head of the household:

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Some misconceptions about women in Islam – II

Divorce

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