

Women and Values in Islam

Professor Dr. Azizun Nahar Islam





Women and Values in Islam
By Professor Dr. Azizun Nahar Islam
Copyright: BIIT Publications 2022
Published in June 2022

Price: Taka 200.00
Published by
BIIT Publications
38/3 Banglabazar, 2nd Floor (Computer Complex)
Dhaka-1100
Phone: 02-58954256, 01766073321
E-mail: biitpublications@gmail.com

ISBN: 978-984-96731-0-1

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my beloved husband
Professor Kazi Nurul Islam
Department of World Religions and Culture
University of Dhaka
For his inspiration in my academic pursuit.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Preface | V |
| Chapter One Women in Islam | 07 |
| Chapter Two The Family and Marriage in Transition: The Role of Religious Valves | 47 |
| Chapter Three Some Observations on the Islamic Conception of Adl (Justice) | 71 |

PREFACE

The present book titled: “*Women and Values in Islam*” is a compilation of three research papers; namely, “*Women in Islam*”, “*The Family and Marriage in Transition: The Role of Religious Values*” and “*Some Observations on the Islamic Conception of Adl (Justice)*”.

The Italian version of the first paper was published under the title “*LA DONNA NELL’ ISLAM*” in *LA DONNA: MEMORIA E ATTUALITÀ*, Vol. IV, *La donnae nelle altre religioni, Vaticana*, 2001. In this paper there has been an attempt to provide a correct and clear picture of the status of women in Islam. The writings of the historians and the verses of the Holy Qur’ān state a very miserable condition of women in Pre-Muhammadan Arab. Throughout the paper there has been an endeavour to show that Islam recognizes the position of women to the same status as that of men from material as well as spiritual point of view. Some other issues such as marriage, divorce and dress code etc. of women in Islam have also been carefully dealt with. The main objective of the paper has been to remove some misunderstandings about the status of women in Islam.

The second paper was presented at the 21st International Conference on the Unity of Sciences, Washington D.C. in 1997. The theme of the Conference was “Constructing Theories for a Coming Age of Global Family”. In today’s world, the family is facing serious crisis. The increased rate of pre-marital relation, illegitimate child birth, living together without marriage, carelessness about parents and children etc., prove that family as an institution has fallen victim of some chronic diseases and its condition is going from bad to worse. The second paper titled “*The Family and Marriage in Transition: The Role of Religious Values*” is a humble endeavour to show that in order to eradicate this crisis of family, we need to go back to religious values. A civilized world should be modeled and built on a moral order with religious inspirations rather than on technological order with materialistic temptations.

The third paper titled, “Some Observations on the Islamic Conceptions of Adl (Justice)” is my Commonwealth Academic Staff Fellowship Lecture held at the Centre for Islam and Christian-Muslim Relation, Birmingham University, in 1991. Though all Muslim theologians and philosophers throughout the ages have acknowledged the importance of justice, they differ in the question as to what justice is and how it is realized on earth. Some emphasize on revelation and others on reason. Although there have been attempts to synthesize these views, the controversies exist even today. The purpose of the present paper is not to resolve the controversy but to shine new light on Muslim’s understanding of divine justice and rational justice.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciations and gratitude to my respected Professor Dr. Fr. Christian W. Troll for his constant guidance and inspirations during my stay at Birmingham as a Commonwealth Academic Staff Fellow. I am thankful and grateful to Dr. M Abdul Aziz, the Managing Director of BIIT Publications for his special interest in publishing this book. I express my special thanks to Md. Zahirul Hoque Khan and Abdul Kader Zilani for their sincere effort to make this book faultless.

Chapter One

Women in Islam *

In order to understand the status of women in Islam one should first of all know the social position of women before the advent of Islam. But it is a little difficult to determine the exact status of women in Pre- Muhammadan Arabian society.¹ It appears from the early Arab traditions that there were many women who exercised remarkable influences over the family and the tribe. Her opinion counted very much in inter-tribal warfare, and inside the tent her authority was supreme.² At the same time most of the historians are of opinion that in Pre-Muhammadan Arabia women were so much looked down upon that very often the birth of a daughter was regarded as a disgrace and as a matter of shame.³ The Qur'ān refers to the same thing when it states:

And they assign daughters for Allah! Glory to Him! And for themselves what they desire! When the news is brought to one of them of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief! (Q 16: 57-58)⁴

It should be mentioned that some of the pagan Arabs called the angels the daughter of God. In their own life they hated to have

* The Italian version of the present paper was published under the title: LA DONNA NELL' ISLAM IN LADONNA: MEMORIA E ATTULITA, Vol. IV, *La dona nelle altre religion; Vaticana, 2001.*

¹ Muslims believe that the Qur'ān is the final word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by the angel Gabriel over a period of twenty three years beginning in 610 CE and ending with the death of the Prophet in 632 CE.

² cf. Malik Ram Baveja, *Women in Islam*, (The Institute of Indo-Middle East Cultural Studies. Hyderabad, 1960). p. 11.

³ cf. Reufon Levy. *The Social Structure of Islam*, (Cambridge, At the Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 92.

⁴ All the Verses of the Qur'ān have been quoted from *The Holy Qur'ān: English Translation and Commentary*, edited by Presidency of Islamic Researches.

daughters. Among some tribes the female infanticide was commonly practiced. A daughter had no position in the society and the parents ardently yearned for the birth of a son. There were reasons for such an attitude. In Pre- Muhammadan Arabia there were always inter-tribal blood feuds which required male members to defend their tribes. As a result, boys were given precedence over girls. Possibly that is why women were not given any share in inheritance. Again, since they could not participate in fighting they were also denied any share in the booty. Moreover, enemies always aimed at capturing women and taking them prisoners in order to collect heavy ransoms, which usually consisted of goats and camels. Failing this the women were kept as slaves. In either case, women were a great liability for any tribe of Pre- Muhammadan Arabia. However, in case of paying ransom they used to loose money and if they fail or decline to pay the ransom demanded, the honour and chastity of their women were at a stake,

All these conditions had compelled the Arabs to believe that the daughters were distinct drain on their resources. Rightly or wrongly, they came to realize that the girls burdened them as much the boys without there being a source of strength on the battlefield. Moreover, they were a source of embarrassment if they were ever captured by the enemies. To get rid of this, the simplest way was to kill the daughter as soon as she was born or later and this was customarily done by burning the girl alive.

The Qur'ān refers to this state of affairs and states:

With shame does he hide himself from his people, because of the bad news he had! Shall retain it on sufferance and contempt, or burry it in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide all! (Q 16: 59)

About the dark picture of the status of women of the Pre-Muhammadan Arabia, Reuben Levy writes:

Alongside the idea that it is humiliating to beset daughters would seem to have lain the thought that in a society where

marriage by capture was common, girls might be carried off in war to become the wives or concubines of enemies.⁵ How strong the feeling was on this question may be gathered from the commentary on a verse in the *Hamasa*⁶ an anthology that contains much of Pre-Muhammadan Arabic origin which quotes an early saying with effect that the grave is the best bridegroom and that the burial of daughters is demanded by honours.⁷ “A man could inherit father’s widows (i.e., his own step-mother) and either marry her himself or give her in marriage to another.”⁸

The Arabs regarded it as a disgrace to have daughters and to give their daughters in marriage. As a result, the burning of the daughters alive was in practice. Referring this state of affair the Qur’ān questions:

“When the female (infant), buried alive, is questioned for what crime she was killed?” (Q 81: 8-9)

The reference in the above mentioned verse is to the nobles and astrologers who by their preaching and practice led the ignorant people on the path of destruction. Since the girls were considered to be a source of disgrace, the astrologers and some tribal leaders held that they should not be allowed to live.⁹ Though in the heart of their heart they did not approve of it, the people belonging to the lower classes imitated their superiors. As a result, the killing of daughters became prevalent among the Arabs.

Another reason for this inhuman practice was the general poverty of the Arabs. The entire Arabian Peninsula with vast sandy deserts made life very hard for its inhabitants. In those days, it was very difficult for the Arabs as a whole to procure their livelihood and satisfy their

⁵ cf. W. Robertson Smith. *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia*, Cambridge, 1885, p. 279.

⁶ Freylag (ed.). *Hamasa*, Bonn. 1828.

⁷ Reuben Levy, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ cf. Malik Ram Baveja, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

basic needs. Possibly under too much of economic hardship the Arabs started regarding girls to be a drain in their meager income.¹⁰ In some cases child-killing continued partly because the parents were too poor to bring them up and partly because the girls might lead parents into greater poverty. In both cases, they thought that the best way out was to do away with their daughters in infancy. The Qur'ān refers to both these views in the following verse:

Kill not your children for fear of want. We shall provide,
sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of
them is a great sin. (17:31)

It was Islam and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) which dispelled the prevailing idea that women were inferior to men or that the female children deserved any treatment different than male children. About the killing of the girls due to poverty, the Qur'ān asked the people not to be afraid of poverty and not to despair of God's mercy. Islam makes no distinction between a boy and a girl. It is possible, holds the Qur'ān, that a boy whom we are preferring to a girl today, may turn out to be evil and wicked, and the girl whom we consider to be a source of disgrace, may bring us honour and serve us better.

Both the writings of most of the historians and the verses of the Holy Qur'ān state a very miserable condition of women in Pre-Muhammadan Arabia. But for a proper understanding and judgment of the status of women both in Islam and in Pre-Muhammadan Arabia one should remember that possibly it is not absolutely correct to hold that girl-killing was incumbent on every one in Arabia, for if that were so, how could the Arab race have survived? It was definitely true that the birth of a daughter was not regarded as a happy event. But only a few of them went to the extent of killing their own daughters and it was Islam that prohibited the killing of girls permanently.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

A Muslim Women's Position in General

Islam recognizes the position of women to be the same as that of men from a material as well as spiritual point of view.¹¹ It is categorically stated in the Qur'ān that good works bring the same reward, whether the person concerned is male or female:

If any do deeds of righteousness, they are male or female and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done on them (4: 124). “---men have the portion they have earned and women their portion---” (4: 32)

In regard to religious duties, the Qur'ān recognises no distinction between male and female. On the contrary, their obligation towards God and man are similar in many respects, and therefore, their position and status before Him are quite similar. The Qur'ān says:

The Believers, men and women are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, pay *zakat* and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy. Allah is exalted in power and wise. (9: 71)

Revelation which is God's greatest spiritual gift in this world has been granted to men as well as to women:¹²

Behold! The angels said: O Mary, Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee- chosen thee above the women of all nations. O Mary! Worship the Lord devoutly: prostrate thyself and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down. (3: 42-43)

¹¹ “Zakat Means that a Muslim who is in possession of a certain amount of wealth, or more, is required by his religion to spend one fifth of it at the end of every twelve months on the poor, the needy and the wayfarer, and on such other items of charity and good-doing as are prescribed for it by God and the Prophet”. Mohammad Manzoor Nomani, op. cit., p. 26.

¹² Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: with English Translation and Commentary*, (Ahmdiyya Anjuman Ohio, USA, 2002), p 543.

So we sent this inspiration to the mother of Moses: Suckle (thy child), but when thou hast fears about him. Cast him into the river, but fear not nor grieve: for we shall restore him to thee and we shall make him one of our messengers. (28: 7)

According to Islam, women are recognized as on a par with man. She can earn money and own property just as a man can do. The Qur'ān categorically states:

... to men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn" (4:32)

It should be noted here that she has full control over her property and can dispose of it as she desires. Women can inherit property as men can:

From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for man and a share for women, whether property is small or large, a determinate share. (4:7)

It should also be remembered that Islam makes no distinction, between secular duties and religious duties. "According to the teachings of Islam, all duties whether they concern politics, economics or social well-being in general, are in no way different from prayers, fasts and the organisation of social charity. It is, therefore, a plain deduction from the above verse that men and women should be regarded as equal in the field of politics, economics and education, etc., and, consistent with the discharge of their special responsibilities in their particular spheres, they should receive equal rights in all these fields of action."¹³

Islam grants extensive rights of inheritance. Under any circumstance she gets her share of inheritance from her father, husband, offsprings and other near relatives. She is also entitled nuptial money from her husband. All the wealth that she thus receives is her own property. She possesses full legal and moral right over it without any right of

¹³ Muhammad Mazharuddin Siddiqui, *Women in Islam*, The Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1959, p. 18.

interference by her father, husband or any other relative. Again, if she invests her money in business or earns with her own effort, she is the sole owner of the fruits of her labour. Even if she is an earning member of the family, her husband is under obligation to support her. However, wealthy the wife may become, the husband cannot, in any case, escape his responsibility to support her. As a result, the economic position of the women has become so secure in Islam that in cases she is economically better off than her husband.¹⁴

A Muslim Women's Position as a Daughter

When both girls and boys are the offsprings of the same parents, Islam does not treat them differently. It has been stated above that Islam prohibited the killing of girls, a custom that was prevalent before the Prophethood Muhammad. As a moral reformer the Prophet (pbuh) has to his credit to the abolition of the infanticide. In this connection Syed M. H. Zaki writes:

It was the purest humanity with which Muhammad laid his hand with utmost severity of this inhuman practice with a promise to heaven to those who would bring up their girl-children with love and care while threatening with Hell the people who would practice such cold-blooded murders towards their daughters, it was thus that Muhammad became the Redeemer of the fair sex by sweeping of once for all this savage custom from among the Arab.¹⁵

The whole spirit and teachings of the Prophet (pbuh) encouraged the evolution of all legitimate freedom and legitimate equality between men and women. Islam abolished the practice of infanticide and succeeded in establishing its memory quite detestable. It should be mentioned here that while converting women in Islam Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was asked by God to make this condition (among others) that they would not kill their daughters:

¹⁴ Maulana Abul A'la Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam*. (Tr. Al-Ash-Ari), Markazi Maktaba, Delhi. 1974, p. 159.

¹⁵ Syed M.H. Zaidi, *Position of Women under Islam*, (Provincial Library. Calcutta. 1935). p. 25.

Prophet! When believing women come to thee to take the oath of honesty that they will not associate in worship any other thing whatever with Allah, that they will not steal, that they will not commit adultery (or fornication), that they will not kill their children. (60: 12)

In Islam a daughter is as free as a son. As soon as she attains puberty nothing is done or can be done for her without her consent. It is absolutely essential for the validity of her marriage that she gives her consent willingly and without being forced under any kind of pressure. In fact, no marriage in Islam can be valid without the consent of the either partner.

It was Islam and the teachings of the Prophet (pbuh) which dispelled the prevailing idea that women were inferior to men or that female children deserved any treatment different from that meted out to male issues. The Qur'ān asserted the dignity of women by declaring: "They are your garments and you are their garments" (2: 187). In this verse God emphasizes the fact that men and women are each other's garments, i.e. they are for mutual support, mutual comfort, and mutual protection, fitting into each other as a garment fits the body. The above mentioned verse supports the basic equality of woman and men by declaring that each sex complements the other and neither is inferior in status or dignity and beauty. The verse indicates that men and women protect each other from sin and dishonour. It also justifies the fact that women lends dignity and add beauty to the existence of man as man does to that of women.

With a view to contradict the notion that women have no right in the society the Qur'ān makes an unambiguous declaration: "And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable," (2: 228) In the same spirit Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) repeatedly reminded his followers that the female children should be treated exactly in the same manner as male ones. In Pre-Muhammadan Arab society daughters were looked down upon with disfavour and as a kind of economic and social burden. As a result, the male members of the family used to enjoy special kind of favour

and respect which was almost completely denied of those belonging to the female sex. There were tremendous differences in upbringing and treatment of sons and daughters. This was vehemently opposed and challenged by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) who upheld the female rights and insisted on their being treated on an equal footing. Some of the sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) (in this connection) are stated below:

If a daughter is born to a man and he brings her up affectionately, shows her no disrespect and treats her in the same manner as he treats his sons, the Lord will reward him with paradise.

Girls are the models of affection and sympathy and blessing to the family. If a person has one daughter, God will screen him from the fire of the hell owing to his daughter; if he has two daughters, God will admit him to paradise; if he has three daughters, God will exempt him from the obligation of charity and Jihad.¹⁶

¹⁶ The term '*Jihad*' is misunderstood both by the Muslims and non-Muslims. The true meaning of '*Jihad*' has been stated by Mohammad Manzoor Nomani in the following way:

“The believers are required emphatically to do whatever they can towards popularising, defending and keeping alive and flourishing, as the best and the truest way of life. The way of Islam and servility to God they have chosen for themselves. This in Islam, is called '*Jihad*'. It can take many forms depending on the circumstances varying from time to time and place to place.

Suppose, there arises a situation in which it becomes difficult or even dangerous for a person or his family or community to profess Islam and remain true to it. To be a Muslim may become the hardest thing to do in the world. In that case Jihad will be in doing one's best for oneself, one's family or community to stay firmly devoted to Islam. It would certainly, be a most splendid Jihad in those circumstances. Similarly, should Muslims, through their own folly of negligence, start drifting away from the faith, then, at such a time, to devote one's time and energy to their religious revival and reform, too, would constitute a kind of Jihad. To carry the Divine guidance to those that are ignorant of it and to make an earnest effort to persuade them wisely and sympathetically to accept it is yet another form of Jihad.” *What is Islam?*, Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, Lucknow, 1967. pp. 106-107.

If a person has three daughters whom he provides for and brings up, God will surely reward him with paradise.

If a daughter is born to a person and he brings her up, gives her a good education, and trains her in arts of life, I shall myself stand between him and hell-fire.

A person who has female slave in his charge and takes steps to give her a sound education and trains her in arts and culture, and then frees her and marries her, he will be doubly rewarded.¹⁷

If one objectively studies the status of women in Islam one is bound to agree with the fact that as a Muslim daughter she is part of her family and her share in the family does not cease with the tie of marriage. Her going to another household does not mean the severing of all her connection with her parents' house, but is entitled to her share in many things and she has as much right as any son is supposed to have. About the status of women Syed M. H. Zaidi writes, "a woman far from descending to the heirs of the deceased with other properties and far from being goods and chattels of a man, stands on the parallel lines with men enjoying privileges of perfect equality with her rival sex with the exercise of legal function as regards property and other things. According to Islamic law, a woman has a legal right over her own fortune and she can dispose of it as she pleases and she is given further the choice of walking on the way of her desires."¹⁸

¹⁷ All the sayings of Prophet Muhammad here have been quoted from Muhammad Mazherudding Siddiqi's, *Women in Islam*, The Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1959, p. 8.

Maulana Aubul A'la Maududi cites few more sayings of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh): "The man who brought up two daughters so that they attained maturity, will appear at my side on the day of judgments as are my two adjacent fingers". "A man of whom only daughters are born, and he brings them up properly, the same daughters will become a covering for him against Hell."

¹⁸ Maulana Abul A'la Maudidi, *Pardah and the Status of Women in Islam*. (Tr. Al-Ash-Ari). Markazi Maktaba Islami, Dhlhi. 1974. p. 159.