

Status of Woman in Islam

Content taken from Friday Khutbahs by Shaykh Ahmed Abdul Mujeeb, translated by Muhammad Owais Jafrey.

Part I

Women are half of the humanity. They are the cause of our very being and constitute the essential and integral part of our society. The world would have been barren without them. Allah (SWT) has endowed them with unique qualities like **affection, tenderness, emotions and grace**. Be it a mother, sister, daughter, or wife, their contribution to our life is immense and cannot be substituted. Her nature, a blessing out and out, has been misunderstood as her weakness by those who lack to perceive her destined role in the family and society. Those responsible for such a misunderstanding have failed to determine her status in the community and have disputed about her role. While some considering her a social need have advocated that there is no difference between man and woman. This flawed outlook has deprived woman of her femininity. Former societies considered her a burden for her being incapable of riding a horse, handling a sword or participating in plunder and loot. Against all such distorted views, Islam is the only religion which has given woman the status in accordance to her nature and determined her rights and duties according to the chemistry of her personality. Islam gave woman that **dignity** which no other ideology or faith has ever given.

Let us travel back into history to trace how a woman was treated in pre-Islamic society. A certain ritual was performed by the son, not by the daughter for the salvation of parents in Hinduism, which is indicative of woman's inferior status. She had no share in inheritance, had no right to seek divorce, and was considered an item of property. In another faith group, woman is considered dirty for 7 days after the birth of a son and 15 days after the birth of a daughter, and she has the right to inherit only if there is no male heir. In another faith group, she was given a still lower status because it was the fault of Eve/ Ha'u'wwa, (AS) and not of Adam (AS) that the first couple had to be ejected from Paradise and all succeeding generations of man from Adam on continue to carry the burden of that first sin attributed only to Eve.

It was under these circumstances that Prophet (SAW) raised woman's status to a height which was never given to her before. She was **empowered to lead a dignified life and commanded respect and honor**. A woman's passes through three main phases in her life: First she is some one's daughter, then she becomes a wife, and then she becomes a mother. Islam's bestows upon her a special importance and dignity in all three spheres.

In the pre-Islamic period, daughters were buried alive. Islam condemned such a crime in the strongest terms. Prophet (SAW) defined it as a great virtue to look after daughters. He (SAW) said that **he, who has two daughters and takes care of them in a befitting manner, he and I will be in paradise like this.**" (He (SAW) joined his two fingers to emphasize the point.) In one of the traditions the number of daughter is given as 3. One companion asked: "Yaa Rasul Allah, what if a person has only one daughter?" He (SAW) replied: "He will earn the same reward." People used to get sad and depressed on the birth of a daughter before Islam. The Holy Qur'an says in verse 17 of *Surah Zukhruf*:

"When one of them is given news of the birth of a daughter, such as he so readily ascribes to the Lord of Mercy, his face grows dark and his filled with gloom..."

Prophet (SAW) showed an exemplary treatment of love and affection for his daughters. When asked as to who was loved most by Prophet (SAW), *Ummul Momineen Aa'yasha (RAnha)* replied that it was *Fatima (RAnha)*. When his illustrious daughter *Fatima (RAnha)* used to visit our beloved Prophet (SAW) used to greet her by standing, kissing her forehead and having her sit in his place. She (RAnha) was the last to be visited when Prophet (SAW) used to go on journey and first to be visited when he (SAW) returned from it. He (SAW) **considered the father as responsible to support the daughter until she is married. Father's support is supposed to continue in case she becomes a widow or is divorced**, but in the case of a son, father has the option to support him until his adulthood. Finding a suitable match for the girl is also the duty of parents. In Islam daughters are **entitled to inheritance** like sons.

An exemplary dispute out of love arose between *Ali* (RA), *Jafar* (RA) and *Zaid bin Harisa* (RA) about the guardianship of *Hamza's* daughter *Umama* (RAnha). This happened soon after the conquest of Makkah. *Ali* said that she was his uncle's daughter, *Jafar* (RA) claimed that she was not only his uncle's daughter, but her aunt was also his wife, where as *Zaid* (RA) said that her father was tied to him by the strong bonds of Islamic brotherhood. Prophet (SAW) gave his verdict in favor of *Jafar* (RA) because according to Prophet (SAW) aunt i.e. mother's sister is equal to mother in terms of status.

Prophet (SAW) has advised **husbands to treat their wives with great respect, kindness and love**. His (SAW)'s life clearly sets an example as to how a husband should treat his wife. The importance of an ideal behavior towards wife is highlighted by the fact that Prophet (SAW) mentioned her rights also in his last sermon. He (SAW) said: **"The best among you is he, who has best manners, and the one who is good mannered is he, who is good and nice to his wife."** He (SAW) further said: "I am the best among you in treating the members of my household." He (SAW) entrusted all responsibilities with regards to wife to her husband. According to Islamic *Shariah*, wife's needs of livelihood including food, drink, dress, treatment, medication, and accommodation, fulfillment of all personal and domestic needs are the responsibility of her husband. Verse 19 of *Surah Nisa* says:

"You who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will, nor you should treat your wives harshly, hoping to take back some of the bride-gift you gave them, unless they are guilty of something clearly outrageous. Live with them in accordance with what is fair and kind: if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something in which Allah has put much good."

In the light of this verse, one has to treat his wife very kindly and respectfully. Prophet (SAW) was extremely considerate and kind towards his family members. Once in a light mood, Prophet (SAW) told his wife *Ummul Momineen Aa'yeshah* (RAnah): "I know when you are happy or unhappy with me. While unhappy you say: "I swear by the *Rab of Ibrahim*, and while happy, you swear as by the *Rab of Muhammad*." *Ummul Momineen* smiled and replied: "This is simply limited to verbal expression; you in fact are very close to my heart at all times." That doesn't show only his ideal relations with his wife, but a thorough understanding of her mood and disposition.

Much discussion is going on these days about women's rights; I will discuss more on the subject in the next Friday's *Khutbah*.

Part II

Continuing on last Friday's theme, let us talk further about the status of woman in Islam. It is dealt in depth by the Holy Qur'an. In the context of woman as wife, it mandates that the husband should address her with respect in accordance with her defined status. *Imaam Abu Bakr Hassas Raazi* (RehMA) explaining the Qur'anic mandate says: "Extending respect to her according to her defined status means giving her due in **"Mahr"/alimony**, and all **provisions for leading a befitting conjugal life within affordable means** of the husband. She shouldn't be subjected to indifference and discriminatory attitude." [Ahkaam-ul-Qur'an. Vol. 3, pg. 47]

In his last sermon Prophet (SAW) had drawn attention to woman's rights and the social/family etiquettes pertaining to her. He (SAW) had said that the wife's rights on husband include sharing food and clothing etc., on equal and fair level. In the pre-Islamic days of ignorance/ *jaahilliya*, husbands used to slap their wife across the face and used to talk with her harshly and abusively. Prophet (SAW) strongly and strictly condemned such an uncivilized behavior. He (SAW) warned that if need arises to separate her from the bed as a correctional measure, than she should not be ejected from the home. [Ibn-e-Majah].

One should remember though that the husband should impartially and fairly examine his own attitude before taking any correctional measure for his wife. Scrutiny may reveal that he may himself need a correctional measure instead of his wife. Both may be wrong at times. **Issues need to be resolved by accommodation of each other's views and not by argumentation.**

Social/family etiquettes require that the husband should provide support with an open heart and be not stingy in dealings with his wife. In a case where a husband shows miserliness in spite of the fact that he can afford more, the wife

then has a right to take more from husband's income without his permission for the fulfillment of her needs. *Hindah* (RAnha), the wife of *Abu Sufiyaa* (RA) submitted a complaint about her husband to Prophet (SAW). She said: "Yaa Rasul Allah, my husband is a stingy person and gives me less than the needed expenses. Is it permissible for me to take from his wealth without his permission?" Prophet (SAW) advised her and said: "Yes, you can take as much as is necessary to suffice for you and your child."

Islam has not only awarded rights to a woman to meet her parents and other relatives permissible to meet under *Shari'ah*/jurisprudence, but decreed it as an act worthy of reward. In the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, it was customary for a husband to swear for not associating with his wife. Islam strictly forbade such an oppressive custom. If a husband remains disassociated with his wife for four months, it is then considered a legitimate reason for separation. According to Islamic jurisprudence, such a separation is called "*Eeela'a*".

Yet another uncivilized custom which prevailed before Islam was called "*Zihaar*". Under such a custom, husband likened his wife to that of his mother or sister, an oppressive practice to devoid the wife from her conjugal rights. Islam strongly condemned such a custom and decreed that if some commits "*Zihaar*", then he cannot approach his wife until he pays *Kaffarah*, i.e. expiation from such a sin by observing fast for sixty days, and if it is not possible for some legitimate reason, then he should feed sixty hungry and poor people.

The ranking of the status after sister and daughter is that of the mother. Though Islam regards taking care of daughter/daughters as a guarantee for Paradise, and kind treatment of the wife as charity and worship, yet the **status of the mother** is more sanctimonious than other relations. Mention of kind attitude towards parents comes soon after the mention of *Tawheed*/Oneness of Allah (SWT) in the Holy Qur'an. Verse 83 of *Surah Baqarah* says:

"Remember when we took a pledge from the children of Isra'eel: **'Worship none but Allah: be good to your parents and kinsfolk...'**"

Verse 23-24 of *Surah Bani Isra'eel* reads:

"Your Lord has commanded that you should worship none but Him, and that you be kind to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, say no word that shows impatience with them, and do not be harsh with them, but speak to them respectfully and lower your wing in humility towards them in kindness and say, 'Lord have mercy on them, just as they cared for me when I was little.'"

Mother is especially mentioned among parents in verse 14 of *Surah Luqmaan*:

"We have commanded people to be good to their parents: their mothers carried them, with strain upon strain, and it takes two years to wean them. Give thanks to Me and your parents – all will return to me."

Once a companion came to Prophet (SAW) and submitted: "Yaa Rasul Allah, who deserves the kind attitude most?" Prophet (SAW) advised: "**Mother**". The companion asked again and again and got the same answer. When he asked the fourth time, Prophet (SAW) said: "Father." [Bukhari]

Prophet (SAW) said that **Paradise lies beneath the feet of the mother**. Once a companion sought Prophet (SAW)'s permission to participate in the Jihaad. Prophet (SAW) asked if his mother was still living? Getting the answer in the affirmative, Prophet (SAW) advised him to look after and attend to his mother as Paradise is close to her feet. [Ibne Majah, Nisa'ee]

Once Prophet (SAW) mentioned four major sins and the disobedience of the mother topped the list, and he (SAW) added that Allah (SWT) has defined the disobedience of the mother as *Haraam*/forbidden. Hence Islam mandates that unless the mother asks for something against the dictates of religion, she should always be obeyed. Prophet (SAW) said that **obedience to parents is a must unless there is a clash between their demands and the command of Allah (SWT)**. The Creator is to be obeyed and not the created.

Once a companion embraced Islam, but his mother did not. She asked her son: “How does your Prophet treat his mother?” He replied: “Prophet (SAW) commands to treat the mother with respect and kindness.” But the mother went on hunger strike and insisted her son to give up Islam. The son came to Prophet (SAW) and submitted to him his dilemma. Prophet (SAW) advised him that it was equally important to adhere to his Faith and feeding the mother. The companion had to listen to mother’s taunts and harsh language, yet he continued to attend to his mother with respect and kindness and remained steadfast on Islam at the same time.

Unlike other religions, Islam has bestowed upon woman a distinct status. **She is equal to man in getting rewards by Allah (SWT) for her virtues like man.** As I mentioned last week, unlike other Faiths, Eve is not solely held responsible for Allah’s disobedience, but *Adam* is equally accountable for the act, which caused the couple’s ejection from Paradise. Verses 120-121 of *Surah Ta’Ha* says:

“But *Shaitan* whispered to Adam, saying, ‘Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and power that never decays? And they both ate from it....’”

In matters of property, woman has the **right of ownership like man and has total control of handling** it as she wants. She has to pay *Zakah* on her wealth like man. Woman was deprived of her property rights after the death of her husband before Islam, which is strongly condemned in verse 19 of *Surah Nisa* in these words:

“You who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will, nor should you treat your wives harshly, hoping to take back some of the bride-gift you gave them, unless they are guilty of something clearly outrageous. Live with them in accordance with what is fair and kind: if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something in which Allah has put much good.”

The wife has **total and absolute right over his Mahr/alimony**, and its use is only allowed for her husband if she willingly and happily permits it. Verse 4 of *Surah Nisa* says:

“Give women their **bridal gift** upon marriage, though if they are happy to give up some of it for you, you may enjoy it with a clear conscience.”

During the *Khilafah* of *Sayyidina Umar Farooq* (RA), people were leaning towards an excessive amount for Mahr/alimony. He (RA) wanted to check this trend by limiting it to a certain amount. A lady checked him in a public gathering and told him that he had no right to limit the amount as the Holy Qur’an does not set any limit on it. *Sayyidina Umar* (RA) was never hesitant to accept the truth so he corrected himself and exclaimed: “A man made a mistake, and a woman reached the right conclusion. Every person of *Madinah* is a better jurist than *Umar*.” [Tafseer ibn-e-Kaseer]

Prophet (SAW) had granted the right of assembly to women. The lady companions of Prophet (SAW) submitted to him: “Yaa Rasul Allah, men always get the opportunity to be present in your august assembly, please spare some time for us too.” Prophet (SAW) agreed and selected a day during the week for their assembly. Prophet (SAW) provided answers to their questions and addressed their issues. Such an example entitles women for a purposeful get together to enrich their life with knowledge and wisdom.

Part III

Since Islam is life’s complete code of conduct, hence it has provided a framework for a highly civilized life, defined and laid down principles of building a high moral character, and has outlined values for a **successful married life**. It has clearly defined and determined the line of action for both, the husband and wife for a balanced and pleasant family life. Each has been given equal rights and has assigned **equal responsibilities in the respective area of performance** for each life partner. However, it has given man additional responsibilities in accordance to his superior role in the family unit. Responsibilities assigned to woman are very important and in fact crucial as on her role depends, the success or failure of the family and social life. A responsible and noble woman is required to cooperate with her husband in building an exemplary family atmosphere by protecting her own **purity and dignity, respect and honor** of her family, by

safeguarding its assets, and by training and raising children on healthy and positive lines. Islam views man as guardian of woman, who provides support as a senior partner to his junior partner in life. Verse 34 of *Surah Nisa* says:

“Husbands should take care of their wives with [the bounties] Allah has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their own money. Righteous wives are devout and guard what Allah would have them guard in their husbands’ absence.”

Woman is responsible for running the domestic and household affairs, while earning the livelihood and financial support is man’s responsibility. Raising children is woman’s right as well as her duty, while man is required to earn the livelihood and serve the cause of *Deen* and its propagation beyond the walls of his home. Verse 41 of *Surah Tawbah* says:

“So go out, no matter whether you are lightly or heavily armed, and struggle in Allah’s way with your possessions and with your persons: this is better for you, if you only knew.”

Woman has been advised to make her home as the main focus and center of her activities. By being the religion of mercy and compassion, Islam has liberated woman from those responsibilities which only man can shoulder.

Equality of man and woman as commonly misunderstood. Islam has commanded and mandated **equal justice** with their respective role. Justice does not mean equality. It means the assignment of responsibilities which are most **suitable and appropriate** to each of them keeping their weaknesses and strength in view. Every one is aware of the **biological and emotional differences** between man and woman. Each of them is unique in the scheme of Allah’s creation. Allah (SWT) in His ultimate wisdom has given man and woman **individual characteristics**. There are young, old, literate, illiterate, rich and poor people in the society, and it will betray common sense to expect them fulfill any given responsibility with equal efficiency to produce the same result. That is why Islam has based assignment of responsibilities on the basis of justice peculiar to the gender and not equality.

Islam has laid utmost importance on **education** and the acquisition of knowledge in our individual and social life. No one can understand religion and practice it without necessary knowledge. The very first revelation mentions knowledge. There are many traditions of our beloved Prophet (SAW) about knowledge and its importance. He (SAW) has emphasized the importance of giving **education even to the house maid**. One can imagine how important knowledge and education should be for mothers and daughters. Woman has the right to acquire knowledge like man. **Sayyidina Aa’yesha (RANha) is one of those seven “muhaddisaat” who has expertise in the knowledge of traditions and is privileged to record and narrate 2210 traditions** of Prophet (SAW). *Hafsa* and *Umme Salma* (RA) have also related many traditions, and these were considered as jurists among Prophet (SAW)’s companions. *Imaam Zuhri* (RehMA) writes that *Aayesha* (RA)’s knowledge is more than the knowledge of all *Ummahaat-ul-Momineen* plus all other women put together. [Tabqaat-e-Saad. Vol. 2 p. 375].

Aayesha (RA)’s scholarship can be determined by the fact that she used to check, test and evaluate the knowledge of major companions of Prophet (SAW). She had the **distinct ability not only in jurisprudence but writing the Fatawa**/judicial decrees. She (RA) used to give judicial decrees during the *khilafah* of *Umar Farooq* (RA), and *Usman* (RA), and major companions of Prophet (SAW) used to submit their questions to her. *Hafsa* (RA), *Umme Salma*, and *Umme Atiya* have also given *Fatwaas*/judicial decrees and the scholars unanimously agree that **woman can be a Mufti** i.e. can issue a judicial decree. She is empowered and can fulfill the responsibility of *Ifta*, and give a judicial verdict. *Umme Waraqa* (RA), an *Ansari* companion from Madina had memorized the Holy Qur’an by heart. If opportunities are available, woman can and should acquire medical education so that women may not be forced to see and consult non-*mehram*, (people whom she is not permitted to see face to face) for consultation and treatment. *Hisham bin Urwah* (RA) said that he had not seen any one more expert in the knowledge of medicine as *Aayesha* (RANha). When asked how did she get such an expertise in the knowledge about medicines and treatment? She replied that she used to memorize the prescriptions and formulas of the physicians who used to visit Prophet (SAW), when he was unwell during the last days of his life. [Musnad Ahamd]

Women were encouraged and supported to learn and practice the nursing skills. They were of immense help in the times of war in looking after the injured and providing first aid to the wounded. They were also given their due share in the booty and were rewarded for their services in the battle field.

Women were also encouraged to receive education in the arts of writing and calligraphy. This can apply to modern day computer and communication skills. It is said that

Hafsa (RAnha) knew writing, which was a merit in those days, when most of the men were not educated and had writing skills. In modern times if it becomes necessary to earn a living to supplement her family income, a woman can support her husband and family by working, but it must be within the bounds of *Shari'ah*.

It must be remembered that women can actively participate and join men in the day to day work necessitated by modern times, but they have to fulfill all required conditions of *Shari'ah*, i.e. the Islamic legal code. Any woman, who needs to go out for work, has to seek consent from her husband or guardian to undertake any responsibility beyond her home. This conjugal right has been given to the husband by *Shari'ah*. Violation of this clause becomes the cause of Allah's displeasure, unless repentance is made and the right conduct is adopted.

The important condition for her is that when she leaves her home to assume work outside, she must be **properly dressed**. The dress code and conduct of *Ummahaat-ul-Momineen* (Mothers of the *Momineen*) has set an example for Muslim women. Verse 59 of *Surah Al-Ahzaab* says:

“Prophet (SAW), tell your wives, your daughters, and women believers to make their outer garments hang low over them so as to be recognized and not insulted: Allah is most forgiving and merciful.”

Imaam Abu Bakr Jassaas Raazi (RehMA) explaining this verse says that women in this verse are commanded to **guard their face against the indecent looks** of the vulgar people. [Ahkaam-ul-Qur'an]

My dear brothers and sisters: It is the responsibility of parents, especially mothers to educate their sons and daughters about the Islamic dress code. After reaching adulthood, boys are not supposed to wear shorts ever before their mothers and sisters. **Dress of woman shouldn't be tight to show the contours of her body, and it should always be loose, not exposing her bosom and parts of her body.** All scholars of the Holy Qur'an like *Haafiz Ibn-e-Kathir*, *Qurtubi*, *Al-Tabari* and many others have explained in detail and interpreted the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet (SAW) about women's dress. There are societies championing the cause of women's freedom, but displaying parts of her body on the billboards and posters for advertisements. She has become a commercial item to promote sale of merchandize, and it runs contrary to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and that of our beloved Prophet (SAW). Prophet (SAW) once said that if a person does not have *Haya* / **modesty**, then he can do anything.

The first and foremost educational institution which a person naturally enrolls in is the guardianship of his or her mother, and the future character and personality of a child depends on the quality of early education. Please pay attention and see that secular education and Islamic education go hand in hand for building character and personality. Please see that Islamic dress code is not abused in your family. The word “Kufr” has many shades of meaning. It is not disbelief in the Oneness of Allah and His Messenger, but it means to do contrary to what Allah and His Messenger command, and oppose them doing what is forbidden.

May Allah enable us to realize the importance of the gift of life and the countless blessings we have been bestowed with and utilize our time prudently and wisely and the way it pleases Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAW). Aameen!

Note:

SWT = Subhanahu Wa Ta'Ala

SAW = Sallallahu Alaihe Wasallam

AS = AlehisSalam

RA = Radhiyallahu anhu

RAnha= Radhiyallahu anha