

1. A good Muslim woman, for her part, should always be trustworthy and kind. She should strive to be cheerful and encouraging towards her husband and family, and keep their home free from anything harmful (haram covers all aspects of harm, including bad behaviour, abuse and forbidden foods). Regardless of her skills or intelligence, she is expected to accept her man as the head of her household - she must, therefore, take care to marry a man she can respect, and whose wishes she can carry out with a clear conscience. However, when a man expects his wife to do anything contrary to the will of God - in other words, any nasty, selfish, dishonest or cruel action - she has the right to refuse him. Her husband is not her master; a Muslim woman has only one Master, and that is God. If her husband does not represent God's will in the home, the marriage contract is broken. What should one make of the verse in the Qur'an that allows a man to punish his wife physically? There are important provisos: he may do so only if her ill-will is wrecking the marriage - but then only after he has exhausted all attempts at verbal communication and tried sleeping in a separate bed. However, the Prophet never hit a woman, child or old person, and was emphatic that those who did could hardly regard themselves as the best of Muslims. Moreover, he also stated that a man should never hit "one of God's handmaidens". Nor, it must be said, should wives beat their husbands or become inveterate nags. Finally, there is the issue of giving witness. Although the Qur'an says nothing explicit, other Islamic sources suggest that a woman's testimony in court is worth only half of that of a man. This ruling, however, should be applied only in circumstances where a woman is uneducated and has led a very restricted life: a woman equally qualified to a man will carry the same weight as a witness.

(adapted from *Islam, Culture and Women* by Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood)

2. Sisters and brothers, it is time to wake up to reality. While we often like to boast about the large size of our Ummah, the fact is that we are losing more hearts and minds everyday, due in large part to our silence about human rights abuses, especially those directed towards women. These people will continue to turn to the secular philosophies promoted by those who do take the time to speak out on their behalf: the feminists, socialists, and secularists. Prophet Muhammad, (sallallahu' alaihi wa salaam), was mocked and assaulted because of his strong and courageous stance on the status of women. He came with a message that lifted women up and gave them dignity. Fourteen hundred years later, we have descended back into the dark pit of Jahiliya, and Muslim women around the world find themselves cast into the same slavery that the Prophet, sallallahu' alaihi wa salaam, was sent to liberate them from. It does not make you a "radical feminist" to decry honor killings and volunteer for peaceful campaigns to educate and change laws. Raising your voice against Female Genital Mutilation does not mean you want to "undermine Islam". To the contrary, working against these injustices in the way of Allah is a manifestation of the desire to uplift Islam and the Muslim people. When the Taliban decided to deny education to any girl over a certain age, it is the conservative Muslims, the ones who profess adherence to "Qur'an and Sunnah" that should have spoken the loudest against this. The longer we stay silent, the more people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, will begin to equate "Shari'a" with the oppression of women. We need to stop people who abuse the religion of God and His messenger, Muhammad, sallallahu' alaihi

wa salaam. We need to oppose those who would brutalize women in the name of Qur'an and Sunnah. We need have jealousy for our religion, so that those who would abuse and misuse it realize that they will have no success and no headway under our vigilance.

(adapted from *Women, Shari'a, and Oppression - Where are the Voices of Conservative Muslims?* by Saraji Umm Zaid)

3. I don't understand why, in the West, Muslim women are clumped into one large group and viewed as homogenous clones of one another, while their Christian and Jewish counterparts are rarely ever stereotyped in this way. Many people don't realize, due largely to biased media interpretations, that there are a large variety of Muslim women around the world, from areas such as the Middle East, South Asia, South East Asia, Yugoslavia, Northern Africa, and the Southern parts of the former USSR, just as there are Christian and Jewish women in various countries. For instance, one probably wouldn't classify a Mexican woman with a French woman, though both may be Roman Catholics and hold the same beliefs. In the same way, American Muslim women are different from Pakistani Muslims, who are different from Saudi Muslims. In these three countries, women are accorded different rights and privileges because of the government and customs in the area. For example, many American Muslim women are discriminated against because they cover their heads; Pakistani women have political rights but are often exploited by men; Saudi women have no public role, yet they are "protected" by Saudi men. The negative stereotypes of Muslim women probably arise from this varying treatment of women. The Western media, for some reason, latch on to a few examples of unjust behaviour in the Islamic world, brand Islam as a backwards and "fundamentalist" religion, especially in its treatment of women, and ignore that it was the first religion to accord women equal rights. While Christian and Jewish women were still considered inferior, the originators of sin, and the property of their husbands, Muslim women were being given shares in inheritance, were allowed to choose or refuse prospective husbands, and were considered equal to men in the eyes of God. However, through time, slowly changing customs, and the rise of male-dominated, patriarchal nation-states, Muslim governments began placing restrictions on women who had no grounds in the Qur'an, the Islamic holy book; or the hadith, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. On the other hand, Christian and Jewish women in the West have slowly been awarded rights not called for in the biblical tradition.

(adapted from *Shattering Illusions - Western Conceptions of Muslim Women* by Saimah Ashraf)

EXAMPLE OF A FINAL SUMMARY

Maqsood sees Islamic views about women as needing interpretation. She argues that a good Muslim woman, for her part, should always be trustworthy and kind, and expected to accept her man as the head of her household. However, when a man expects his wife to do anything contrary to the will of God she has the right to refuse him.

Many quote the verse in the Qur'an that allows a man to punish his wife physically. This is misunderstood and there are important provisos including the facts that the Prophet never hit a

woman, child or old person. As regards the issue of giving witness it is applied only in circumstances where a woman is uneducated and has led a very restricted life: a woman equally qualified to a man will carry the same weight as a witness.

Zaid, however, states that we need to wake up to the reality that is our silence about human rights abuses, especially those directed towards women. The Prophet Muhammad was mocked and assaulted because of his strong and courageous stance on the status of women. He came with a message that lifted women up and gave them dignity.

It does not make you a “radical feminist” to decry honor killings and volunteer for peaceful campaigns to educate and change laws. Raising your voice against Female Genital Mutilation does not mean you want to “undermine Islam”. This is simply a desire to uplift Islam.

The longer we stay silent, the more people, both Muslim and non-Muslim, will begin to equate “Shari’a” with the oppression of women. We need to oppose those who would brutalize women in the name of Qur’an and Sunnah.

Ashraf asks us why, in the West, Muslim women are clumped into one large group whereas Christian and Jewish counterparts are rarely ever stereotyped in this way. There are a large variety of Muslim women around the world. In different countries, women are accorded different rights and privileges because of the government and customs in the area. The negative stereotypes of Muslim women probably arise from this varying treatment of women. The Western media, for some reason, latch on to a few examples of unjust behaviour in the Islamic world, however while Christian and Jewish women were still considered inferior, Muslim women were being given shares in inheritance, were allowed to choose or refuse prospective husbands, and were considered equal to men in the eyes of God.

However, it is the rise of male-dominated, patriarchal nation-states that caused Muslim governments to begin placing restrictions on women who had no grounds in the Qur’an, the Islamic holy book; or the hadith, the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

Here are three more resources- this time there is a more specific focus on the issue of gender equality in Islam and relates to both the role and status of women and feminism in Islam (Theme 3D).

1. The Qur’an provides clear-cut evidence that a woman is completely equated with man in the sight of God in terms of her rights and responsibilities. The Qur’an states: ‘... So their Lord accepted their prayers, (saying): I will not suffer to be lost the work of any of you whether male or female. You proceed one from another ...’ (Qur’an 3: 195). Woman according to the Qur’an is not blamed for Adam’s first mistake. Both were jointly wrong in their disobedience to God, both repented, and both were forgiven. (Qur’an 2:36, 7:20 - 24). In one verse in fact (20:121), Adam specifically, was blamed.

In terms of religious obligations, such as the Daily Prayers, Fasting, Poor-due, and Pilgrimage, woman is no different from man. In some cases indeed, woman has certain advantages over man. For example, the woman is exempted from the daily prayers and from fasting during her

menstrual periods and forty days after childbirth. She is also exempted from fasting during her pregnancy and when she is nursing her baby if there is any threat to her health or her baby's. If the missed fasting is obligatory (during the month of Ramadan), she can make up for the missed days whenever she can. She does not have to make up for the prayers missed for any of the above reasons. Although women can and did go into the mosque during the days of the prophet and thereafter attendance on the Friday congregational prayers is optional for them while it is mandatory for men (on Friday).

This is clearly a tender touch of the Islamic teachings for they are considerate of the fact that a woman may be nursing her baby or caring for him, and thus may be unable to go out to the mosque at the time of the prayers. They also take into account the physiological and psychological changes associated with her natural female functions.

(Adapted from *The Status of Women in Islam* by Jamal Badawi)

2. The Qur'an is addressed to all Muslims, and for the most part it does not differentiate between male and female. Man and woman, it says, "were created of a single soul," and are moral equals in the sight of God. Women have the right to divorce, to inherit property, to conduct business and to have access to knowledge. Since women are under all the same obligations and rules of conduct as the men, differences emerge most strongly when it comes to pregnancy, child-bearing and rearing, menstruation and, to a certain extent, clothing. Some of the commands are alien to Western tradition. Requirements of ritual purity may seem to restrict a woman's access to religious life, but are viewed as concessions. During menstruation or postpartum bleeding, she may not pray the ritual salah or touch the Qur'an and she does not have to fast; nor does she need to fast while pregnant or nursing. The veiling of Muslim women is a more complex issue. Certainly, the Qur'an requires them to behave and dress modestly - but these strictures apply equally to men. Only one verse refers to the veiling of women, stating that the Prophet's wives should be behind a hijab when his male guests converse with them. (adapted from *Islam, Culture and Women* by Ruqaiyyah Waris Maqsood)
3. In places such as Medina, where marriage by purchase was the rule, women fared much worse. She could not inherit because she herself was part of her husband's estate to be inherited. In fact, when Islam mandated that sisters and daughters were entitled to a share of inheritance, men of Medina protested against the rule. Mecca had more advanced laws in regards to inheritance, perhaps because it had been influenced by higher civilizations through its commercial contacts with Palestine and Persia, and some Meccans having lived in Roman cities like Gaza. It was in Mecca that Khadija, for instance, led a perfectly independent life as a wealthy widow engaged in a lucrative caravan trade. Her estate included real property because she gave her daughter Zainab a house. It can be concluded then that Meccan women could hold property before Islam. The advent of Islam shifted the focus from the tribe to the individual, balanced by the concept of community and family, and instituted a system in which everyone was equal, regardless of his/her gender, race, age or wealth. Under Islam, it was the moral and religious principles, not tribal affiliations that defined women's rights. Islam acknowledged women as free human beings with full rights of their own. With freedom comes responsibilities and obligations. This

has led some to argue that women were more restricted after Islam vis-a-vis Jahiliyya, which may in fact be true in a few tribes that were not as oppressive to women as others. However, Islam improved the conditions of all women, regardless of which tribe they belonged to. It restored women's dignity and elevated their status, on the whole, to be equal to that of men. (adapted from *Women in Pre-Islamic Arabia* by The Muslim Women's League)