

Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in Islam: A Journey from Oppression to Emancipation

Dr. Saqib Muhammad Khan*
Dr. Muhammad Atif Aslam Rao**

Abstract

It is a well-known fact that the teachings of the Holy Quran did not only relieve womankind from innumerable troubles and the plight of inhuman treatment, but it also elevated their status to the dignity par excellence. Women faced three major challenges in their social lives. Foremost, their position to be regarded at least equally a 'human' like men, the second was the security threat and third was their honour. The Holy Quran, with its comprehensive, all-time effective and benevolent teachings, responded to all their social, moral and spiritual needs and bestowed them all-round equality, protection, and dignity. Indeed, the teachings of the Holy Quran led womankind towards dignity from darkness and oppression. This article includes well elaborated description of all three paradigm related to dignity of women that Holy Quran focusses and the same are the elements that are required to be elevated and redefined in the light of Quranic discourse in order to elevate, protect and maintain the status of women at present age.

Keywords: Quranic discourse, Islam, Dignity, Equality, Status of Women.

*Assistant Professor, Karachi Institute of Technology & Entrepreneurship (KITE).

**Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Learning, University of Karachi, Karachi.

I. Women in Pre-Islamic Arab Society

It is a well-known fact that women occupied an extremely low position in the Pre-Arab society. Despite love songs in praise of the beloved (out of the carnal lust) by the poets, women received no better treatment than the lower animals.

There was no limit to the number of wives a man could own. Moreover, he could maintain illicit relations with any number of other women as well. Prostitution was a licensed and a recognized profession. In fact, women housemaids were forced to earn money for their masters in this debasing manner. Married women were allowed by their husbands to conjugate with others for the sake of offspring. Apart from this, a woman was looked upon as a mere chattel. She was given no share of the legacy of her deceased husband or father. Rather, she was herself inherited as part of the property of the deceased. A son would even get hitched with his stepmother on the death of his father.

The practice of divorce was very inhuman among them. A thousand times could a man divorce his wife and take her back within a prescribed period. Sometimes, he would swear he would not go near her. At times, he would announce that he would conceive her as his mother, therefore leaving her in a state of suspension, being neither wife nor yet divorced. These methods were taken solely to harass the adult female. Furthermore, most obscene languages were used in expressing sex-relations. Tales of love and illicit relationships were narrated loudly and proudly with an utter absence of shame.

This detail is a brief sketch of the condition and treatment of women in pre-Arabs. It is not difficult to judge that this gender was in a state of permanent frustration and lasting despair.

The Holy Qur'an with its effectual impact lifted them up from the depths of lowliness to a position of respect and dignity. It was the influence of the Holy Qur'an that all the cold-blooded brutalities and maltreatment against women terminated, and females were given the most respected position in the society. The Holy Qur'an stands unrivalled in the history of the world for this service to humanity. The Holy Qur'an proclaimed and stressed mainly three segments of women's right; their equality, protection, and dignity.

II. Equality of Woman in Islam

To redress the affliction of the suppressed women and to uplift their passion, spirit, and participation in the society, the Holy Qur'an establishes a sense of all-

round equality of man and women. The verses of the Holy Qur'an categorically state that men and women have the equal status in the Muslim community.

i) Equality in Piety

In the description of pious qualities of the believers, the Holy Qur'an mentions and discusses women parallel with men. This equity is a significant part of the effort put up by the Holy Qur'an for women's rightful position in society. The Holy Qur'an demonstrates a fair and transparent concept that in the association with Almighty Allah, in the Islamic obligations, and in the practical conduct, both genders should be considered to be in the same position.

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَشِيعِينَ وَالْخَشِيعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّامِينَ وَالصَّامَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

“Indeed the Muslim men and Muslim women, and the believing men and the believing women, and the men who obey and the women who obey, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and charitable men and the charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard their chastity, and the men who profusely remember Allah and the women who profusely remember Allah – for all of them, Allah has kept prepared forgiveness and an immense reward.”²

Mufti Ahmad Yaar Khan gives a very brief description of the above verse as:

“In these verses, the Holy Qur'an mentions ten virtues of men with the women. Here, 'Islam' denotes obedience to Allah and His Messenger, by 'Faith', is meant correct beliefs, 'obedience' signifies inner obedience, 'patience' denotes being firm in the obedience of Allah Almighty and opposing inner desires and not to show fear at the time of hardship. The word 'humility' reflects being in Salaah with the entire presence of mind. The other attributes mentioned are self-explanatory.”³

In the above verse, particular mention has been made of the acceptability of the deeds of women to mollify the hearts of women towards Islam and to upright them. The Holy Qur'an makes it clear that the touchstone of acceptance of deeds and their rewards in the sight of Almighty Allah is the righteousness of the deeds and the spirit of obedience to Almighty Allah. In this connection, there is no discrimination between man and woman. Both genders are equally obliged to worship Almighty Allah, and both shall face the same requital. Allah has blessed both males and females with the adequate capacity to obey and worship.

ii) Equality in Good Deeds (virtues)

An absolute equality between men and women echoes in several verses of the Holy Qur'an in multiple views. Particularly, in doing good deeds, the Holy Qur'an makes no differentiation between male and female. Both are equally encouraged and prized for their actions, and an eternal reward is guaranteed without any difference in the both sexes.

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَبِيرًا^٤

“And whoever does some good deeds, be it a man or woman, and is a Muslim, will be admitted to Paradise and they will not be wronged even to the extent of one sesame.”⁵

إِنَّ الْمَصَّدِّقِينَ وَالْمَصَّدِّقَاتِ وَأَقْرَضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا يُضْعَفُ لَهُمْ وَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ كَرِيمٌ^٦

“Indeed the charity-giving men and women, and those who lend an excellent loan to Allah – for them is double, and for them is an honourable reward.”⁷

فَأَسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَمَلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ^٨

“So their Lord accepted their prayer, for I do not waste the efforts of any (righteous) worker, male or female; you are all one among yourselves;”⁹

The three above quoted verses proclaim an absolute equality in the promise of Heaven, in rewards and acceptance of prayers and deeds. No man can assert his superiority in this context. As compared with other religions and civilizations, the

Holy Qur'an stands unparalleled in granting the just and indiscriminate position to women in spiritual and religious affairs.

iii) Equality in the Right of Ownership

Women were denied any right in the past. Notably, their right of ownership was acknowledged very rarely. In fact, they were conceptualised as an article of possession which could be transmitted by inheritance like other possessions. On the other hand, Islam considers that both men and women are honourable and deserve the right of ownership. Islam appreciates a family as the fundamental unit of society and encourages to establish love, affection, and care of the household. It is said in Surah Al-Nisa,

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهٖ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۗ لِلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا ۗ وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبْنَ ۗ^{١٠}
وَسْئَلُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا

“And do not long for things by which Allah has given superiority to some of you over others; for men is the share of what they earn, and for women the share of what they earn; and seek from Allah His munificence; indeed Allah knows everything.”¹¹

As men and women are different in their attributes and physical build, they have different obligations. To consider same positions and jobs for both genders is a complete misunderstanding of the nature of both sexes and their respective roles. Allah Almighty has created man entirely different from a woman. The Lord has bestowed distinctive characteristics to both. The distribution of shares in Islam is intended to enable males and females to release their respective responsibilities. As the qualities and potentials of the both genders are different, their legal shares also vary in respective proportion. This system of shares is according to human nature, and it does not produce any divergence in the definition of equivalence.

As far as discussion of lesser and greater shares of inheritance is concerned, Sayyid Qutb very argumentatively describes in his commentary as:

“A fundamental rule in the Islamic system states that ‘gain is commensurate with duty.’ The man pays a dowry to the woman when he marries her while she pays him no dowry whatsoever. He supports her and their children while she is exempt from such a

duty, even when she has money of her own. A man is required to pay the ransom and compensation for accidental death and injuries caused to others by members of his family while a woman is exempt from all this. Moreover, a man is required to support the insolvent and those who are unable to earn their living in his family, according to their degree of kinship, while the woman is exempt from the duty of mutual family support. When a divorce or separation takes place, the man pays his divorced or estranged wife compensation for breastfeeding his child and for her custody in the same way as he pays her maintenance. As we see, then, the Islamic system is a comprehensive one, which distributes inheritance according to the distribution of liabilities. Since the man bears more responsibilities than the woman, his share of inheritance is greater.”¹²

iv) Equality in Punishments & Penalties

Islam established equality of genders in all spheres whether it is an issue of punishment and penalties or the unceasing blessings of Paradise. The Holy Qur’an presents a balanced system to avoid any biases or social discrimination. It is stated in Surah A-Noor:

الرَّائِيَّةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ
وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلْيَشْهَدْ عَذَابَهُمَا طَائِفَةٌ مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ¹³

“The adulteress and the adulterer – punish each one of them with a hundred lashes; and may you not have pity on them in the religion to Allah, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day; and a group of believers must witness their punishment.”¹⁴

Thus, the above verse testifies that neither the Holy Quran gives relaxation to males in the society, nor any discrimination is made in the penalty between both genders.

v) Equality in Eternal Rewards

Similar to the civil life, when the Holy Qur’an describes eternal rewards, both sexes are ensured the same indiscriminate blessings of the Hereafter,

لِيَدْخُلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَ يُكَفِّرُ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ ۗ وَكَانَ ذَلِكَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا¹⁵

“In order to admit the believing men and believing women into Gardens beneath which rivers flow, in which they will abide, and to relieve them of their misdeeds; and this, in Allah’s sight, is the greatest success.”¹⁶

يَوْمَ تَرَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَسْعَى نُورُهُمْ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ بُشْرَاكُمُ الْيَوْمَ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ¹⁷

“The day when you will see the believing men and believing women, that their light runs before them and on their right – it being said to them, ‘This day, the best tidings for you are the Gardens beneath which rivers flow – abide in it forever; this is the greatest success.’”¹⁸

So, the most efficient trait of the Holy Qur’an towards women is that it gives both man and woman an equal status in all civil rights. A Muslim woman enjoys all her due rights in society. In Islam, a woman is a human being, equal to man in status. She is the other half of the human entity.

III. Protection of a Woman in Islam

It is a well-known fact that the Arabian society treated women less like human beings and more like possessions of men. They treated them like slaves and were always at the disposal of men. They experienced immense humiliation and extreme lack of protection. Perhaps it was one of the primary reasons the Pre-Islamic era was known as the age of *Jahiliya* which means the period of brutality, darkness, and ignorance.

Women could be inherited and moved from home to home depending on the desires and needs of their husband and his family. They were not allowed to make decisions on anything. They had almost no rights and liberty at all. It seems that women were treated no different than pet goats or sheep. Consequently, they had a severe fear of insecurity and the major issue for the women in Arabia society was protection.

The Holy Qur'an provided complete protection and security for women. The Holy Qur'an categorically denounced infanticide to protect their life. Furthermore, all barbarism and cruelty regarding marriage and divorce were ended. In addition, the Holy Qur'an allocated due share for women in inheritance and other rights in social and domestic life.

a) The Practice of Infanticide

In truth, the cruelest practice of then Arabs was to bury their daughters alive. People used to fear that girls would bring them shame if they remained unsuccessful to guard their honour and chastity. Moreover, girls would not fight in the war, nor earned a livelihood. Alternatively, they could be held captive in the never-ending tribal encounters, and this brought shame to the whole tribe. Also, the girls needed to be fed and clothed. Hence, they were considered an economic burden, especially during times of famine. On the other hand, a male offspring was of immense importance because they were seen as superior and likewise as the most fundamental component to be able to fight the severe desert conditions.

These were the reasons people used to bury their daughter by the time they received the news of a female child. The Holy Qur'an mentions this practice and condemns it in the most substantial way.

وَ إِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُمْ بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ بُوْنٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ¹⁹

“And when one among of them receives the glad tidings of a daughter, his face turns black for the day, and he remains seething. Hiding from the people because of the evil of the tidings; 'Will he keep her with disgrace, or bury her beneath the earth? Pay heed! Very evil is the judgement they impose!’”²⁰

From the above verse, we learn that the Arabs would taunt a person in whose house a girl was born because they would regard a girl to be worse than an animal. If the she-camel gave birth to a female offspring, they would not express any reproach or blame, but if a woman gave birth to a daughter, they would utter words of grief and reproach. The infidels of the tribes of Mudir, Khiza'a, and Tameem, would bury their females alive.²¹

Mufti Shafi Usmani, while commenting on the above verse describes the ruling that taking the birth of a female child in the family to be a disaster or disgrace is not permissible under Islam. Unbelievers do this. A Muslim should be happier at the birth of a female child in the family so that it becomes a refutation of the act of the people of the age of ignorance. Hence, taking the birth of a girl to be bad is a detestable custom of the heathen period. Muslims must abstain from it. In fact, they should be pleased and gratified with the promise of Allah against it.²²

Therefore, the Holy Qur'an establishes a belief that a woman is a human being, and humiliating or insulting her is an insult to humanity whom Allah has honoured. To bury a girl alive, as the Arabs did, is to kill half of humankind. To ill-treat, humiliate or disrespect a woman is an aspect of brutality and a sign of disbelief.²³

Hence, the Holy Quran provided life security to women and banned the practice of infanticide for goods. It was, indeed, a fundamental change the Holy Qur'an produced in social conditions as well as in people's minds and feelings. Almighty Allah has given mankind a position of honour. This recognition applies both to man and womanhood. Both have equal status, and God honours both.²⁴

b) The Marriage Threat

Before Islam, men very often had ten or more wives. There was neither any limit on this nor restriction. The Holy Qur'an explicitly states a limit what a Muslim cannot exceed, and this is of having no more than four wives. In addition, it applied an obligation to maintain equality, and just behaviour with all wives or he must limit himself to only one singlewife. In this manner, the Holy Qur'an set restrictions that were not formerly present. The affair was no more left for men to act as they desire. The Holy Qur'an has made polygamy conditional upon fair treatment.

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَّةَ ۖ وَرُبْعَ ۚ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا^{٢٥}

“And if you fear that you will not be just towards orphan girls, marry the women whom you like – two at a time, or three or four; then if you fear that you cannot keep two women equally

then marry only one or the bondwomen you own; this is closer to your not doing injustice.”²⁶

وَلَنْ تَسْتَطِيعُوا أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا بَيْنَ النِّسَاءِ وَلَوْ حَرَصْتُمْ فَلَا تَمِيلُوا كُلَّ الْمِيلِ فَتَدْرُوا كَالْمِغَلَّةِ وَإِنْ تُصْلِحُوا وَتَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُورًا رَحِيمًا²⁷

“And you will never be able to deal equally between women however much you may desire,— therefore do not be totally inclined towards one leaving the other in uncertainty; and if you do good and practice piety, then Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”²⁸

These verses clearly say that if one is afraid that he is unable to maintain justice between his wives, then he should restrict himself to only one wife. In the case of more than one wife, men are ordered not to be entirely inclined towards one wife while ignoring the others. He must observe justice and kindness for every wife equally.

c) Treatment with Wives

Women as wives received very ill treatment in the Arab society. Husbands had the full right to pawn their wives and children, beat them mercilessly and pull their hair without any restriction. Women did not have any parental rights over their children also. Wives were kept within the household just to give birth to children and to produce male offspring. Of course, in these conditions, it was essential to highlight the need for kind treatment with wives. Hence, the Holy Qur’an instructs believers to adopt an attitude of kindness with wives,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَرِثُوا النِّسَاءَ كَرِهًا²⁹ وَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ لِتَذَهَبُوا بِبَعْضِ مَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ بِمُحِسَّةٍ مُبَيِّنَةٍ³⁰ وَعَاشِرُوهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ³¹ فَإِنْ كَرِهْتُمُوهُنَّ فَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُنَّ شَيْئًا³² وَيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا³³

“O People who Believe! It is not lawful for you to forcibly become the women’s heirs; and do not restrain women with the intention of taking away a part of bridal money you gave them, unless they openly commit the shameful; and deal kindly with them; and if you do not like them, so it is possible that you dislike a thing in which Allah has placed abundant good.”³⁰

The shameful custom of the pagans before Islam was that whoever would become heirs of the deceased's wife, along with the wealth, they either get her married wherever they would prefer and not get her married if they were so pleased. The Holy Qur'an denounces this ugly practice. Besides, Allah Almighty, with a very convincing argument instructs gentle treatment to the wives and not to divorce or abandon them. It is very much possible that Allah Almighty has allocated blessings for you from your wife. He may bless you with such worthy children from her about whom you will be pleased and who will prove beneficial to you. In this way, Allah encourages husbands to treat their wives well and do not be hasty to divorce an ill-mannered wife.³¹

Apart from the maltreatment and suppression of rights, there was another shameful custom in Arabia. A ridiculous practice with regard to women in pre-Islamic Arabia was that if a woman's husband died, his son from a previous marriage was entitled to marry his wife if he wanted so.³² The Holy Qur'an condemned and forbade this shameful practice most emphatically:

وَلَا تَنْكِحُوا مَا نَكَحَ آبَاؤُكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ سَلَفَ ۗ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَحِشَةً وَمَقْتًا ۗ وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا³³

“And do not marry the women who were wedded to your fathers, except what has already passed; that is indeed an act of shame and great wrong; and an evil way.”³⁴

There are many moral and logical reasons behind condemning and forbidding this shameful practice. Principally, the position of a mother always stays same. Her dignity and status of a mother do not abolish or end ever. Likewise, marriage with the former wife of one's father makes him feel equal in status to his father. This system does not only end the value and status of the father, but it is naturally unacceptable in any civilized society to reduce or even eliminate the identity of the father. Moreover, it is also natural that a man dislikes the former husband of his wife. Hence, through this obnoxious custom, the son would most likely start to detest his father rather respecting him. Lastly, such inheritance is an affront to the humanity and dignity and honour of both man and woman.

These are the few of the many reasons; such practice is believed to be very detestable. It has been declared as immodest and atrocious, which generates immorality and hatred in the society.³⁵

In order to make a marriage, a happy and honourable bond of love, compassion, respect and care, the Holy Qur'an categorically outlined the limits and forbade to marry any such relation which may pose any question in the dignity of human for goods,

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ أُمَّهَاتُكُمْ وَبَنَاتُكُمْ وَأَخَوَاتُكُمْ وَعَمَّاتُكُمْ وَخَالَاتُكُمْ وَبَنَاتُ الْأَخِ وَبَنَاتُ الْأُخْتِ وَأُمَّهَاتُكُمُ اللَّاتِي أَرْضَعْنَكُمْ وَأَخَوَاتُكُمُ مِنَ الرَّضْعَةِ وَأُمَّهُتِ نِسَائِكُمْ وَرَبِّبَاتِكُمُ اللَّاتِي فِي حُجُورِكُمْ مِّنْ نِّسَائِكُمُ اللَّاتِي دَخَلْتُمْ بِهِنَّ فَإِن لَّمْ يَكُونُوا دَخَلْتُمْ بِهِنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَحَلَائِلُ أَبْنَائِكُمُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ أَصْلَابِكُمْ وَأَن تَجْمَعُوا بَيْنَ الْأُخْتَيْنِ إِلَّا مَا قَدْ سَلَفَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا ۝³⁶

“Forbidden to you are your mothers, and your daughters, and your sisters, and your father’s sisters, and your mother’s sisters, and your brothers’ daughters and your sisters’ daughters, and your foster mothers (who breastfed you), and their daughters (your foster sisters), and your wives’ mothers (mothers-in-law), and your wives’ daughters who are under your protection – born of the women with whom you have cohabited; and if you have not cohabited with them, then it is no sin for you to marry their daughters; and (forbidden are) the wives of your own sons (and foster sons and grandsons) and the keeping of two sisters together in marriage, except what has already passed; indeed Allah is Oft Forgiving, Most Merciful.”³⁷

These instructions do not simply protect the dignity of females in an individual capacity. Rather, it established an overall sanctity of the household and society.

d) Right of Inheritance

In the days of ignorance, there was no share of inheritance for females. However, Almighty Allah made inheritance due to all family lines including women concerning their degree of kinship:

لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ مِمَّا قَلَّ مِنْهُ
أَوْ كَثُرَ ۗ نَصِيبًا مَّفْرُوضًا ۝³⁸

“For men is a share from what the parents and near relatives leave behind, and for women is a share from what the parents

and near relatives leave behind, whether the wealth (inheritance) is small or large; the share is a fixed one.”³⁹

From this verse, we discover that it is the acme of injustice to give the son inheritance and deprive the daughter of her legal right. This practice is against the Divine law. Both are entitled to inherit.⁴⁰

e) Social Security

The Holy Qur’an prescribes a heavy punishment for all those who accuse the chaste women of adultery without providing substantial evidence in support of their accusation. Naturally, if people were allowed to accuse chaste women without definite proof, misuse of the law would become very abundant. Many men could make such accusations of suppressing or scaring the women. Consequently, every woman would feel threatened with false charges. So, to protect the honour of women, the Holy Qur’an outlines a punishment for the false accusation that is almost equal to that of adultery. The Holy Qur’an states:

وَالَّذِينَ يَزْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَاجْلِدُوهُمْ ثَمَانِينَ جَلْدَةً وَلَا تَقْبَلُوا لَهُمْ شَهَادَةً أَبَدًا ۗ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ^{٤١}

“And those who accuse chaste women and do not bring four witnesses to testify – punish them with eighty lashes and do not ever accept their testimony; and it is they who are the wicked.”⁴²

لِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَزْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ الْغُفْلَةَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ لُعْنُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۗ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ^{٤٣}

“Indeed those who accuse the innocent, virtuous, believing women – upon them is a curse in this world and the Hereafter; and for them is a terrible punishment.”⁴⁴

It is instructed to flog 80 stripes to the false accusers, and they are declared as untrustworthy and rejected for any testimony in any case or situation. Likewise, the Holy Qur’an declared them as transgressors. Hence, Almighty Allah prescribed physical, moral and religious punishment to those who might tend to accuse a woman. Also, such devilish people who accuse chaste women are cursed by Almighty Allah. In this way, Holy Qur’an protects women from all social

threats as no one could accuse their chastity and honour which are the only means to abuse them. A Muslim woman in a Muslim community feels very positive and reassured. She leads her life without any fear of being accused of any life-threatening accusation.

History stands witness that women were in a serious state of insecurity. Therefore, Holy Qur'an, quite comprehensively, ensured their security and abolished all life threatening traditions against women. The Holy Qur'an very wisely addressed those affairs of woman's life which were employed against them such as the birth of a female child, marriage, divorce, the right of inheritance and social insecurity. Alternatively, very efficient and practical measures were introduced and enforced to guarantee the all-around protection of women in the society.

IV. Dignity and Respect for Woman in Islam

The Holy Qur'an significantly deals with the dignity of women. Almighty Allah referred and praised those women of history who remained firm in their belief and exhibited unshakeable faith.

وَ صَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا امْرَأَاتٍ فِرْعَوْنَ إِذْ قَالَتْ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَ نَجِّنِي مِّنْ فِرْعَوْنَ وَ عَمَلِهِ وَ نَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ وَ مَرْيَمَ إِذْ نَبَتْ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِنَا وَ صَدَقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ لَهَا مِنَ الثَّوَابِ عِشْرِينَ مِائَةً وَ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ^{٤٥}

“And Allah illustrates an example of the Muslims – the wife of Firaun; when she prayed, “My Lord! Build a house for me near You, in Paradise, and deliver me from Firaun and his works, and rescue me from the unjust people.” And the example of Maryam the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity – We, therefore, breathed into her a Spirit from Ourselves – and she testified for the Words of her Lord and His Books and was among the obedient.”⁴⁶

The above verse refers Asiya bint Mazahim, who was the wife of the Pharaoh, the worst sinner, and claimant of Godhead. She declared faith in Prophet Musa. When the Pharaoh came to know about it, he ordered that she should be tortured severely and tortured to death. Hence, severe punishment was exercised against

her. The Pharaoh tied her hands and feet with four chains and made her stand in the intense heat. According to some reports, her hands and feet were pegged with nails to the ground, and a huge stone was placed on her chest so that she might not be able to proceed.⁴⁷ According to other reports, it was suggested that a huge rock be dropped on her. They had hardly dropped the stone, and she prayed to Allah.⁴⁸ Allah Almighty appointed angels for her, who provided her with cover from the sun and showed her house in Paradise⁴⁹ while looking at this vision her soul departed. When the rock fell on her torso, it was lifeless. Some traditions state that she had been brought up into heaven physically. She will be married to our Holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Paradise.⁵⁰ Allah gave her such a high rank that He showed her charming and delightful house in the Paradise in her lifetime in the world.

Similarly, Hazrat Maryam is also mentioned in a high degree in the Holy Qur'an. She was not the wife of anyone, but her faith and virtuous deeds earned for her a very eminent degree. The Holy Qur'an describes her quality of being devout and obedient. It is said that she was endowed with the perfections of the prophets. Apparently, 'perfection' in this context refers to 'characteristics of Prophethood'. Despite being a woman, she achieved them.⁵¹

These references were meant to highlight the value and dignity of women. The Holy Qur'an, in this way, inculcated respect of women in the minds of mankind. In addition, women in the worldwide are always enlivened by these instances of the Holy Qur'an. They are tremendously encouraged to come forward for Islam.

This is an excellent way to establish the dignity of women in the society. Everyone learned that gender does not matter in terms of piety and goodness. If a woman does a courageous and virtuous deed, she should be praised and rewarded in the similar way as a man could. After these references, women should not be disdained and despised. They are the respectful, dignified and highly rewarded gender of the society.

Hence, Almighty Allah addressed the suppressed and vulnerable gender of the community who were desperate and lost the hope of life in despair such as women in the Arab society. The Holy Qur'an touched on three fundamental spheres of women; all round equality, protection of their self and rights, and the establishment of dignity and respect in the community. By encouraging equal rights, complete security, and respect in the society to the oppressed and

vulnerable women, Islam has brought them out from darkness and oppression towards light and emancipation.

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