

POSITION OF A WOMAN IN ISLAM

1. The position of a woman in Islam is unique with no similarity with any other systems. From the material as well as the spiritual point of view, Islam recognizes the position of a woman to be the same as that of man.
2. In Islam, a woman has been given rights and privileges which she has never enjoyed under other religious or constitutional systems.

POSITION OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS AND RELIGIONS

3. A close observation of the status women had in the pre-Islamic civilizations and religions would be a good introduction to highlighting Islam's rather respective view of women.
4. Reviewing examples and textual evidences from the thought of ancient civilizations and religions, and the behavior of their followers, and comparing them to the sound Islamic approach of social thought and behavior, must present anyone who seeks truth with fair findings.
5. Over the succession of nations, women suffered many an injustice that denied them even the most basic human rights and put them, in most times, in a lower position in terms of training and ranking.
6. The Sumerian, Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations in Mesopotamia treated women with contempt and held their opinion to be simply irrelevant. The Hammurabi law would blame women for assumed wrongdoings they did not actually commit, and unlike in the case of killing a man, no one may lose his life if he takes a woman's.
7. The Manu law in India considered women as inheritable properties who had no right to education; for women's task was to provide pleasure and lust for men. Even worse, a woman's life should end with the death of her husband, as habits had that a woman shall be burnt with her dead husband at the stake.
8. As for the Chinese civilization, women were considered a bad omen and a byword for misery, which prevented them from going out of their home or looking to people in the face.
9. In the Greek tradition, Women were portrayed as stained creatures, described by Hesiod as having "*a dog's mind and a thievish disposition*".

The Greek orator Demosthenes once said: "*We keep prostitutes for pleasure, we keep mistresses for the day to day needs of the body, we keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our homes.*"

10. The Romans considered the woman as an unclean animal that shall be banned from entering temples, and thus disqualified from entering paradise. They viewed her femininity as one reason for her legal incompetence.

11. The Torah holds Eve responsible for tempting Adam, as we read in the Genesis, Chapter 3, Adam saying: *“The woman whom God gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”*
12. The wife was considered as an integral part of her husband's properties, so she shall concede on her human and material rights.
13. The Children of Israel used to sacrifice girls to please Molech. In the Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 32, it reads: *“and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech which I commanded them not”*.
14. In pre-Islamic times, the Arabs attached less importance to the person of a woman. She was taken as a mere property of her husband and herself would not own any property nor carry out transactions in her own name.
15. The Arabs were ashamed of having female births, and burying girls alive was widespread. They believed that they were a sign of poverty and misfortune.
16. Still in Pre-Islamic, a woman had no right to inheritance but instead she was inherited by even her far distant relatives.
17. In other parts of the world, a woman was taken as a product of the devil. Man was placed as the dominant lord of the woman who had no choice but to surrender to his dominance. A question was always asked as to whether or not a woman has a soul in her.
18. In the Eastern communist world or the Capitalist countries, a woman is in no better position. She has to work so hard to live and sometimes she may be doing the same job like that a man does but her wage is less than his.
19. It is true that the woman of today has got rights but these were not granted voluntarily or out of kindness to her. She had to pay painful sacrifices and give up many of her natural rights. But even then, she has not acquired what Islam has established by Allah in the Qur’an for a Muslim woman.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN AS DEFINED BY ISLAM

1. Islam recognizes a woman as a mother and it is said that "Paradise lies under her feet." In an authentic hadith the Prophet (PBUH) was asked by a man: *'Who is the one most worthy of my care?'*. The Prophet replied: *'Your mother'*. The man asked: *'Then whom?'*. He replied: *'Your mother'*. The man further asked: *'Then whom?'*. He replied: *'Your mother'*. The man asked: *'Then whom?'*. And in this fourth time the Prophet replied: *'Then your father.'* This shows how important the mother is in Islam compared to the father.
2. In his farewell speech, the Prophet PBUH stressed the status of women in society when he said;

“O people! Surely there are rights in favour of your women which are incumbent up on them ... I command you to treat women well because they are like captives in your homes.”

3. While addressing the issue of parents in the holy Qur'an, Allah does not distinguish between father and mother but rather He addresses them in the same voice.

Allah says in **Q (17:23)**; *“Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you be kind to parents. When one or both of them attains old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor repel them but address them in terms of honour”*

4. Referring to a woman as a daughter, Islam addresses them in the same as it addresses her male brothers that they are born of the same family and from the same womb.

Allah says in **Q (42:49)**; *“He bestows female (offspring) upon whom He wills, and bestows male (offspring) upon whom Him wills.”*

The Prophet PBUH said: *“Women are the equal sisters of men”*.

5. A woman is also recognized as a wife who is a source of comfort for her husband just as the husband is to her:

Allah said in **Q (2:187)**: *“They are like a garment to you and you are like a garment to them”*

6. A woman is recognized by Islam as a full partner of man in procreation of mankind. He is the father and she is the mother and both are essential for life. By this partnership, she has an equal share with the man in every aspect of life.

7. A woman's responsibility in faith is exactly the same as that of a man. She is accountable for her belief in Allah and the Prophet (SAW) even if her closest of kin, like her father, husband or brother disagrees with her in this. She is rewarded for her good deeds the same way Allah rewards man.

Allah says in **Q (3:195)**; *“Their Lord answers them, saying ‘I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labour. You are offspring of one another.’”*

8. A woman is equal to man in the responsibility of seeking knowledge. When Islam instructs man to seek knowledge, it makes no distinction between man and woman.

The Prophet PBUH said; *“The pursuit of knowledge is incumbent up on every Muslim, man and woman.”*

9. Women make up half of society and they are responsible for the nurturing, guidance and reformation of the subsequent generations of men and women. It is the female who instills principles and faith into the souls of the nation. It is probably because of this that a child's "Paradise lies under her feet."

10. A woman is entitled to freedom of expression as much as man is. Her sound opinions must be put into consideration and cannot be disregarded just because of her sex as a woman.

Allah says in **Q (58:1-4)**;

“Allah has heard the words of her who pleaded with you concerning her husband and made her complaint to Allah. Allah has heard the arguments of both of you. He hears all and observes all.”

11. A woman is free to participate in public life just as man is. According to Islamic traditions, women participated in public life with the early Muslims e.g they could accompany Muslim army to the battle field nursing the wounded, preparing supplies and serving as warriors. This alone shows how man and woman are equal.
12. In terms of good or bad deeds, God makes no difference between men and women. What is lawful shall be so for both men and women, and what is wrong shall be so for both men and women. Women are no longer seen as the devil's associates or just objects for sensual pleasure. Unless their feminine disposition prevents them to do so, women should assume their responsibilities in everything just as men do.
13. Likewise, the Quran underlines their equality with men in bearing charges and assuming their responsibilities in religion.

Q (74:34); *“Every soul will be held in pledge for its deeds...”*

14. At the same time, Allah discharges Eve from seducing Adam, as they were both ordered to keep away from the tree and therefore, she is not the origin of the sin as Christians allege. They were both tempted by Satan, they confessed and asked for forgiveness together.

Allah says in **Q (7:19)**;

“To Adam He said ‘Dwell with your wife in Paradise and eat whatever you please but never approach this tree or you shall both become transgressors.’”

15. The Holy Quran also stresses the likeness of creation for both men and women and, therefore, the likeness of responsibility and retribution. None of them holds a higher position than the other, except through good deeds. Women in the Holy Quran are not considered as dependent upon men, but rather as independent human beings.

Allah says in **Q (4:1)**; *“Men, have fear of your Lord, who created you from a single soul...”*

16. People are differentiated in Islam according to their faith, God-consciousness and good conduct and not by their sex. Therefore, man and woman are equal in the sight of Allah.

Allah says in **Q (49:13)**;

“O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most God-fearing”

17. The Muslim woman, like the Muslim man is called upon to believe in Allah, the Day of Judgement, the Books, the Angels, and the Prophets, etc. She is also asked to perform

prayers, pay out the Zakat duty, fast in the month of Ramadan and perform Pilgrimage to the Holy Places if she can do so. She must also call for the good and forbid evil in addition to being responsible for the well-being of the Muslim community.

Allah says in **Q (9:71)**; *“The believers, men and women, are guardians, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil.”*

- 18.** The Hudud punishments that are prescribed in the Sharia are the same for men and women; the female thief is punished the same way as the male thief, the adulteress is punished like the adulterer, the female wine-drinker is punished like the male wine-drinker, and the female who wages war on Allah and the Prophet is punished like the male who does so.

In Qisas (retribution), the woman's soul is equal to that of the man. The murderess is like the murderer and the murdered woman is like the murdered man. Qisas is exacted from a man if he kills a woman exactly and as equally as when he kills a man. Blood money rules do not discriminate between male and female.

- 19.** A marriage is not valid in the Sharia of Allah without the approval, acceptance and consent of the woman and it is forbidden by the Sharia that she be forced to marry someone that she does not accept. That means that man and woman are equal.

Allah says in **Q (2:232)**; *“... do not prevent them from marrying their husbands when they agree themselves in a lawful manner.”*

- 20.** The woman has full financial status that is no less than that of the man. She has the right in the same way that a man does to possess all types of wealth whether it be in the form of assets, real estate or cash. She has the right to use her wealth in any manner she wishes to as long as it is approved by the Sharia. So she can buy, sell, trade, barter, provide grants and loans, incur loans, exchange assets etc. All these actions do not require the consent of any male whether this be her father, husband, or brother.

Allah says in **Q (4:32)**; *“...For men is a portion of what they earn and for women is a portion of what they earn.”*

Al-Bukhari reports; *“A woman is permitted to free slaves and give gifts to someone other than her husband, unless she is mentally deranged.”*

- 21.** The Quran addresses everyone, men and women, equally, an indication that both sexes are equal since Allah, the exalted Creator, does not discriminate between them.

Allah says in **Q (33:35)**;

“The Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the worshipping men and worshipping women, the truthful men and truthful women, the pious men and pious women, the alms-giving men and the alms-giving women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who are chaste and the women who are chaste, the men who remember Allah much and the women who do likewise, Allah has prepared a forgiveness and a great reward for all.”

He also says in **Q (33:36)**; *“It is not for a believing man or woman, when Allah and His messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision.”*

He again says in **Q (24:30-31)**; *“Say to the believing men to lower off their gaze and be chaste for this is more pure for them and God knows what they do. Say to the believing women to lower off their gaze and be chaste...”*

- 22.** A woman is entitled to a share of inheritance much just as her male counterpart is unlike in Pre-Islamic Arabic where he was not only denied inheritance but she was also considered as a property to be inherited. In Islam, whether a woman is a daughter or a wife or a mother or a sister, she receives a certain share of her deceased kin's property.

Allah says in **Q (4:7)**; *“Women shall have a share of what the parents and near relatives leave...”*

- 23.** In conclusion, Islam recognizes man and woman as equal partners of one another. However, it also recognizes that both sexes are not the same based on their biological, physiological and psychological aspects. They belong to different sexes and therefore, they have separate and distinguished functions in life.

- 24.** Islam maintains equality between man and woman where there is a natural ground for it and differentiates between them where there is but natural reason for it.