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AN OVERVIEW OF COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OF WOMAN'S RIGHTS IN ISLAM

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ABSTRACT

Men and women worship Allah in the same way, meaning they worship the same God (Allah), perform the same acts of worship, follow the same scripture, and hold the same beliefs. Allah (the Arabic word for the One true God of all creation), judges all human beings fairly and equitably. Allah emphasizes the just treatment and reward due to both men and women in many verses of the Qur'an:

“Allah has promised to the believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss.” Qur'an 9:72

“Never will I allow the loss of the work of any worker amongst you, male or female; you are of one another.” Qur'an 3:195

Islam has honored women by giving them the right to choose a spouse and keep their original family name once married. Additionally, many have the impression that parents force their daughters into marriage. This is a cultural practice, and has no basis in Islam. In fact, it is prohibited.

KEYWORDS: *Islam, Women, Right*

INTRODUCTION

At the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), a woman came to him and

said, “My father has married me to my cousin to raise his social standing and I was

forced into it.” The Prophet sent for the girl’s father and then in his presence gave the girl the option of remaining married or nullifying the marriage. She responded, “*O Messenger of Allah, I have accepted what my father did, but I wanted to show other women (that they could not be forced into a marriage).*”

While men and women have equal rights as a general principle, the specific rights and responsibilities granted to them are not identical. Men and women have complementary rights and responsibilities.

Aside from external and internal anatomical differences, scientists know there are many other subtle differences in the way the brains of men and women process language, information and emotion, just to mention a few.

A socio-biology expert, Edward O. Wilson of Harvard University, said that females tend to be higher than males in verbal skills, empathy and social skills, among other things, while men tend to be higher in independence, dominance, spatial and mathematical skills, rank-related aggression, and other characteristics.

God created men and women to be different, with unique roles, skills and responsibilities.

These differences are not viewed as evidences of superiority or inferiority, but of specialisation. In Islam, the family is of central importance. The man is responsible for the financial well being of the family while the woman contributes to the family’s physical, educational and emotional well being. This encourages cooperation rather than competition. By fulfilling their mutual responsibilities, strong families are created and hence strong societies.

Before Islam, women were considered shameful, female children were buried alive, prostitution was rampant, divorce was only in the hands of the husband, inheritance was only for the strong, and oppression was widespread. Islam came and abolished these practices. Even now, in “developed countries”, women are not granted respect, dignity and honour, let alone equal pay for equal work. Islam, however, regards women as precious and valuable, not to be disrespected or disgraced. The mistreatment of women in some Middle-Eastern countries or Muslim families is due to cultural factors that some Muslims wrongly follow, not because of Islam.

Islam gave women rights and privileges at a time when only barbaric manners and values dominated. Yet, some people argue that

Islam has alienated women in some domains. In fact, this belief is a misconception. People who say so, may have read about it in a magazine or seen it on TV. A quick examination of the issues judged as unjust to women will certainly correct the misunderstanding.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Man as the head of the household:

Some people believe that a woman in Islam is regarded as inferior to man since the Quran says (what means): "Men have one degree above women." [Quran 2: 228]

In the Quran it also says (what means): "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allaah has given the one more than the other and because men support them from their means." [Quran 4:34]

This verse implies that it is a man's duty to support his wife, and not the reverse, but this, in no way, makes him superior to her. In fact, the rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man but they are not necessarily identical. Since men and women are not created identical, they have different physical and emotional qualities,

jobs and privileges. This does not mean that women are inferior.

On the contrary, women are considered crucial members of society in Islam since they are assigned the job of bringing up future generations. People today tend to look down at housewives but, in fact, raising children is one of the most important and difficult tasks. The way a mother brings up her child determines the way he will behave in the future. This duty, which requires patience, love, understanding and wisdom was significantly assigned to women in Islam because her nature suits this job.

Allaah The Exalted, in His Wisdom, has assigned a role for each member of the family so that there would be no arguments concerning who should do what. If a sailboat has two leaders, each will want to follow a path, leading ultimately to chaos and even a crash. In the same manner, how many times have your parents fought over some decision because each had their own point of view and wanted to apply it? This is precisely why it is preferable to have one leader for each household. However, this does not give the leader the right to be a dictator, or to neglect the role of his companion. This does not make him superior to other members of his family. It just gives him a larger duty.

Inheritance:

Some people claim that Islam is unjust towards women because it entitles them to inherit half of what men get. In fact, those people only know one side of the truth. First, the principle of women inheriting half the money is only applicable in 45 percent of the cases. In the other 55 percent, women inherit the same amount or sometimes even more. For example, a mother and a father each inherit the sixth of their son's property when they are not the only inheritors.

In addition, the laws of inheritance in Islam are proportional to the duties of spending. Indeed, a man in Islam has the responsibility of supporting his family, his brother's children (when his brother dies), his parents (when they retire and do not have an income), his children from his previous marriage (if he has them) and his household, including his wife and children. A woman, on the other hand, does not bear this responsibility. She has the freedom to use the money she collects from her dowry or work as she pleases.

Polygyny:

Polygyny is one of the most questioned principles that Islam grants men and women. Indeed, many people wrongfully accuse

Islam of injustice because it allows a man to have up to four wives. Nevertheless, like every instruction in the Quran, polygyny has a reason. You see, Islam is a practical religion that acknowledges the needs and temptations of human beings and provides laws that deal with them, thus preserving harmony and morality. - Polygyny might be the solution for a couple if the wife is barren, the husband wants children of his own and the option of separation does not appeal to both parties. - If a woman is chronically ill and is unable to perform her marital duties. Polygyny may also be the solution when the couple does not want divorce.

Polygyny is the religion's answer to cases where some men have excessive sexual needs that cannot be fulfilled by one wife. This in no way means that men should abuse this right and use it whenever they fancy a woman. It is rather a chance Islam has provided to prevent men from committing adultery. Many people who condemn polygyny cheat on their wives, calling this phenomenon a 'swift affair.' Islam, at least, has offered the second woman the option of being called 'a wife' rather than 'a mistress', especially in some countries where women remarkably outnumber men. - Polygyny may

settle the problem of an increased number of unmarried women, especially during wars.

However, polygyny has some limits and conditions to be met. Indeed, the Quran instructs the man to be fair with his wives on all levels, including treatment, money, house, etc. The only level where the man may have an uneven stance is the level of the feelings that he cannot control:

The Quran says (what means): "You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire, so do not incline too much to one of them [by giving her more of your time and provision] so as to leave the other hanging [i.e. neither divorced nor married]. And if you do justice, and do all that is right and fear Allaah by keeping away from all that is wrong, then Allaah is Ever-Forgiving and All-Merciful." [Quran 4:129]

Finally, it is worth knowing that Islam gives a woman the right to refuse polygyny for her husband by setting it as a condition during the marriage procedures. If this condition is set, then the woman is granted divorce if her husband marries another while he is still married to her.

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