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Testifying

Men and Women: A Serious Study

Despite all the pain and oppression women have undergone throughout history, no mentally sound woman feels sorry about her gender. Women have not begged nature to change their creation, no matter how painful their social pressures have been; there is greatness hidden in women that no man can ever par. Women devote their whole life and soul to men in order to obey the rules of creation and play their part in the rhythm of the universe.

Women should have faith in what they are; they ought to never ignore their distinctive aspects or waste time comparing themselves with men. Men and women should take into consideration the significance of the family, for that is what determines the fate of a society.

Men and women depend upon each other. Men rely on women, and vice versa. They do not differ in humanity. Men are as human as women are. If men do not recognize women, they do not deserve to be called humans; likewise, we cannot regard women human unless they recognize men.

Despite all that men and women have in common, they also differ in certain characteristics. This is when questions like these are posed:

- Can women bear dire straits as well as men can?
- Do women have genius, the power to discover or invent?
- Are women equal to men in pure intellect?
- Aren't men stronger than women when life comes to a dead-end?
- Don't men have more baseless pride than women?

Before we can respond to such questions – which are posed by those influenced by specific character and immature emotions and the answers too are affected by social factors – we must realize the fact that both sexes are subject to a great deal of diversity in mental activity. Not all men are equal. Can Imam

Ali's humanitarian feelings and Hajaj ibn Yusef's hideous atrocities be compared? Are all men as intelligent as Avicenna was? Can we consider a woman who regards herself as part of her man's personality as equal to a woman who spends a life of hatred and disgust toward her husband? Therefore, we can point out two forms of differences between men and women.

1– Differences that are not related to men or women's specific identity, but rather the differences existing among men as a whole, and among women as a whole. Such differences should not be regarded as differences between men and women. If nature granted some men and women's wish to be absolutely equal, or allowed women to drown in the games the purely theoretical intelligence plays, indulging in the momentary pleasures of life, like reproduction, or if nature granted men with the deep emotions women have, and a taste of real life and submitting one's body and soul to the highest call of nature instead of a real knowledge of the flow of life, would such equality not degrade man down to the level of extinct animals?

2– Differences due to the diversities of identities among men and women. As Islam asserts, these differences are doubtlessly not related to the human nature or disposition.

The Identity of Men and Women

Men and women are exactly alike in human identity and character. Their human identity can be discussed from two different points of view:

- a) Independently and separately
- b) In regard to each other

If men and women were to be separate, none of the hundreds of consequences they create in each other would be possible, and only their independent characteristics would flourish. Through physical and spiritual interaction, they create qualities in one another that is impossible to achieve individually.

Thus, a woman attracted by a man is different from the same woman living separately. Men also undergo change when they are attracted by a woman.

If we are to completely discover a married man's character, we should study his wife's character, too, for she affects her man's life, and vice versa for a married woman's case. If marriage occurs based upon the man and woman's natural, God-given identity and awareness of the human character on behalf of both the man and the woman, they can activate the highest of human virtues in themselves.

Some of the characteristics cited for men and women arise not from their character, but from secondary reasons. Some people believe, for instance, that women, unlike men, are incapable of changing their character. Men are believed to have the ability to gain the elements needed to change their character due to their frequent contact with various people and high awareness. However, there have been great

women like Rabe'a Aduya Basri who had a clear picture of themselves, and reached the highest of mystical levels.

Some others believe that “women are not tolerant to loneliness. They cannot be alone or keep to themselves. A woman with no man feels more imperfect than a man with no woman.” This also seems inaccurate, for we must first see what we mean by loneliness. If it means ignorance and isolation due to failure, that is neither imperfection nor an advantage for a man, and if one isolates oneself to study one's own character, that is true perfection – few men indeed have been able to do that.

Some people believe that women like their men to be muscular, and prefer men of physical strength to the average men.

That is not correct, for women actually prefer their men to be strong and firm in response to the problems and events of life. They like their husbands to be able to battle the ups and downs of life. It is also said that men pay more attention to women's beauty. Men do not have such an identity. men like their wives to be able to manage the family.

Theoretical Wisdom in Men and Women

Men's theoretical wisdom is stronger than women. Men can understand a series of facts by means of acquired knowledge, whereas women intuitively get a picture of some facts. Women seem to have intuitive knowledge about others' life, whereas men's knowledge should be gained. In other words, women see the truth of life in their own nature, but men have to use their senses and purely theoretical wisdom to do so. Such photography is not limited to life. As Jalal-addin Muhammad Molawi (Rumi) says:

تا بدانی کآسمانهای سمی هست عکس مدرکات آدمی

گر نبودی عکس آن سرّ و سرور پس خواندی ایزدش دارالغرور

(So that you may realize that the high skies are reflections of man's internal cognitions and perceptions. Don't you know that God has called this world the House of Deceit? The reason is that everything seen in the outside world is a picture, a reflection, of what goes on inside man.)

Men may have oceans on knowledge about the phenomenon called life and all of its characteristics and developments, but as we all know, that is quite different from getting a taste of life itself.

Women can intuitively understand other people's lives like their own. That is why history has been full of bloodthirsty tyrants like Genghis Khan, Nero and Attila, but very few of them were women. One

exception was Cleopatra, who took pleasure in putting needles into her maidservants.

When a woman loves a man, she is ready to sacrifice her life for him, but when a man loves a woman, he will not do such a sacrifice, no matter how great his love for her may be. That is where women are greater than men. Women are deeper in the context of life; on the other hand, men have stronger purely theoretical wisdom. That is not a human value. Abstract activities do not convey a value.

Men and Women in the Family

There are several possibilities about the role of men and women in the family:

- 1– Both man and woman manage the family. Each of them can have full authority and responsibility. This, however, is not acceptable, for it will cause disturbances and disorders in family life.
- 2– The woman can manage the family. This is also unacceptable, for the family has a lot of contact with the society, the adjusting of which is not possible considering the incapability woman have in dealing with some problems.
- Menstruation, pregnancy, nursing children and the necessity of making them familiar with the real taste of life – which women are extremely better at than men – are issues of crucial importance. These engagements cause serious problems if women are to be the sole leader of the family and deal with the problems outside the family.
- 3– The man can rule a patriarchy, a total dictatorship. This is wrong too, for it will ruin the woman's values, and the children raised in such a family will never get a taste of real life.
- 4– The family can be managed through group brainstorming and consultation accompanied by the supervision and management of the man. This seems to be the most logical form. This is possible, however, provided that all family members act on piety and justice. The decisions made through consultation are undertaken by the man to carry out.

In the following verse of the Qur'an, the word "qavvam" refers to the fourth possibility mentioned above:

الرجال قوامون على النساء بما فضل الله بعضهم على بعض و بما انفقوا من اموالهم فالصالحات قانتات حافظات للغيب بما حفظ الله

"Men are overseers and maintainers of women because God has made one of them excel to the other, and because the husbands provide the living. Therefore, righteous women are obedient and guard in their husband's absence what God orders them to guard." (4:34)

Let us consider several points in order to interpret of this verse:

a) Here, “qavvam” does not mean “having custody and responsibility” in its legal or jurisprudential concept, which refers to someone who is liable for another person’s life and belongings, like having custody of a child, or an insane person. Thus, men do not have custody of women, for women are free from all economic, moral and religious aspects of their lives, and even socially, provided that they do not violate men’s rights. Women must be responsible and accountable about the duties they have toward men. Likewise, men must also observe and fulfill the duties he has in regard to women.

b) “Qavvam,” considering the great deal of verses conveying the equality of men and women, means management and carrying out what is to the benefit of the family. The fact that the man must manage the family is due to man's resistance against the ups and downs of life and disturbing factors. If a woman rules a family and the man is completely marginalized, the man's potentials are downtrodden; this leads to serious disorders that will cause profound mental problems in the children.

Absolute dictatorship on the man's behalf also disables the potentials the woman and the other family members have. If the family is managed through consultation and group thinking, however, in which man has the executive responsibility, no rights will be violated; the man will see himself as part of the woman's character, and vice versa.

c) The word “fazl” in this verse does not convey that men are superior to women; it means that men are stronger built, and are more resistant against problems.

d) The verse points out women's human values. It points out that proper women are in constant contact with God, and safeguard God's commands in the absence of the man. They do not tarnish the man's character. Such women are guardians of the institution of the family. It is an experienced principle that if the woman in a family is a complete human being of reason and piety, all family members will almost definitely be happy, prosperous people, from the adult to the child. If the woman ignores human values, piety and good decision-making, however, the man will have little effect on the family, no matter how great a human being he may be.

The verse then discusses cases in which women show disobedience and what should be done about it:

و اللاتي تخافون نشوزهن فغظوهن و اخرجوهن في المضاجع و اضربوهن فان اطعنكم فلا تبغوا عليهن سبيلا

“And of those women you fear may be rebellious admonish; [if that does not work] banish them to their couches, [and if that proves also ineffective] warn them [and beat them very lightly]. And when they obey you, look not for any other way against them.” (4:34)

There are several kinds of actions to be taken when women commit disobedience:

1– Disobedience in sexual relationships due to the woman's physical problems. In this case, the only solution is seeking medical help.

2- Seeking revenge and crushing the man's character during sexual relationship. Such disobedience can be divided into two types:

a) Those that can be solved and moderated personally: here, the man can use logical and affectionate understanding, conscientious advice in bed and maybe even a very slight beating – that would lead to the least physical trouble for the woman – to eliminate the woman's obedience and bring peace and happiness back to their relationship.

How do we interpret by “beating” in the above verse? It refers to a very slight beating, like with a toothbrush. Imam Baqer also has a *hadith* on this, and no jurisprudential scholar has advised beyond that. In fact, it is not a beating at all; it is merely a warning reminding the woman to fulfill her duty.

What is the beating for? It serves the benefits of the man and the woman both, rather than providing revenge or quenching grudges. As Shahid-e-thani, the great jurisprudential scholar has said, “Beating a woman is religiously forbidden if it only serves to avenge grudges or satiate selfishness, and has no benefit for the couple's relationship.”

If the man's beating harms or injures the woman physically or mentally, the man has committed a crime. As all Islamic jurisprudential scholars have emphasized, “the beating should lead to absolutely no bleeding or suffering for the woman.”

b) Those unable to be solved and moderated personally: in such cases, the man must not use force; instead, he is to seek legal help from a judge, who will decide based upon the couple's mental situation and what is best for their relationship. Sometimes the judge may advise proper, logical solutions to which both the man and the woman should adhere, for the three different ways the above verse provides to solve problems are only to be used when it really helps the couple; they should not rush to a judge as soon as a small, personal problem arises – instead, they should try to solve it through intriguing affections, providing the possible guidance and slight warnings, which as the above verse and jurisprudential interpretations depict, refers to very light beating.

The woman's disobedience from her legal responsibilities: Again, maybe the couple can solve the problem here by means of mutual understanding, affection and logic; this is where the guidance, warning against wrongdoing and advising to do good, a must in Islamic rules, comes in.

Three Issues Concerning the Differences between Men and Women

In the *Nahj-ul-balaghah*, three points of difference has pointed out between men and women: imperfect faith, imperfect intelligence and different inheritance.

معاشر الناس ان النساء نواقص الايمان نواقص الحظوظ نواقص العقول. فاما نقصان ايمانهن فقعودهن عن

الصلوة والصيام في أيام حيضهن و اما نقصان عقولهن فشهادة امرأتين كشهادة الرجل الواحد و اما نقصان
حظوظهن فمواريثهن على الانصاف من مواريث الرجال

“O people, women have imperfect faith, imperfect inheritance and imperfect intelligence. The reason for their imperfect faith is that they miss a great deal of prayers and fasting when they menstruate. Their intelligence is imperfect because the testimonies given by two women is equal to one man's testimony. The third imperfection is because women inherit half of what men do.”

Let us discuss these points:

1– Imperfect faith: Women's faith is incomplete, for they cannot fast or say their prayers during their menstruation periods. This does not mean that their contact with God is imperfect; the point is merely their deprivation of their mandatory fasting and praying. Women can call God's name during these periods, and keep their contact with God. Their inability to pray or fast is just a passing, exceptional physical inhibition.

2– Imperfect intelligence: Here, again we are not implying imperfection in values. As we know, intellectual activity consists of correctly thinking about choosing the means for reaching the desired goals. Thus, all human beings have intellect and reason in common. They differ in how familiar they are with the units and theorems used for reaching their goals. Mental and intellectual activities are highly diverse. They include abstraction, generalization, and combining issues. Theoretical wisdom functions with logic. It has nothing to do with values; it only adjusts the preliminaries and arrangement of the means.

Purely theoretical wisdom is a tool for arranging and adjusting units regarded as correct in order to reach desired goals. It is not the absolute ruler of the facts and values of human knowledge of nature and what is proper for man.

Men and women differ in theoretical wisdom, though this difference does not mean that one sex has more value than the other, either. In practical wisdom, however, men and women are the same. Practical wisdom conveys what is proper, and how to achieve it. Some thinkers, like Kant, have considered practical wisdom as higher and more elegant than theoretical wisdom. What men are stronger in – theoretical wisdom – has no value alone; it can go no further than forming and arranging units and theorems. What really causes superiority is practical wisdom, which is equal in both sexes.

If women gain complete educational and developmental factors, we can claim that the development of the human character is as feasible in women as it is in men, for women have a crucial role in creation, they get a taste of real life and have the supreme emotions and the possibility to elevate their raw emotions to supreme ones; women are better at that than men.

Inequality of Men and Woman Testifying

This again lies in women's natural limitation and their lack of resistance against various events. Men are curious enough to mentally dig inside the roots of events, and are more capable and theoretically more accurate than women, so if a man is left far away from the ups and downs of life, his judgment will find fault, and his testimonies will also lose value. In affairs which only women can comment on, their testimonies are as valuable as men's.

3- Imperfect inheritance: Men and women inherit differently. As the Holy Qur'an says:

لوصيكم الله في اولادكم للذكر مثل حظ الانثيين

“About your offspring, God advises you to give men twice as much as women.”(4:11)

This law, however, does not apply to all issues of patrimony. If someone dies and has a mother, and a few brothers or sisters, for instance, his mother inherits as much as his brothers and sisters.

The reason why men inherit twice as much as women is that men are responsible for providing the family's living, but women do not have such a responsibility. Furthermore, women are entitled to a marriage settlement that makes up for the difference in what they benefit after their parents' death.

As a general conclusion, we can say that all three imperfections mentioned about women are accountable and justifiable. Imam Ali has referred to superficial differences between men and women; he does not consider them to be truly different in character.

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