

Introduction by Fatma Saleh

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The issue of women in Islam had always been a subject that offended and fascinated me. As a woman, born Muslim, I had been, in the past, not convinced and argumentative of my faith. I ascribed Islam as domineering, circumscribed, and prejudice towards women. I, like many other Muslim women (and non-Muslims) had based my religious convictions on the practices of culture rather than the core of faith, which had left me inimical about Islam.

I often echoed the tauntingly and haunting words of a Muslim woman I encountered briefly, “Thank God I found Islam before I found Muslims.” Not only had I found “Muslims” before I found Islam, but the constructed animosity of my faith was also formulated on the adverse writings, teachings, and dogmatic matters that shackled Muslim women.

Thus, I lived most of my life distant with preconceived and misconceived ideas about Islam and Muslim women, until I began to discursively question and ponder various subjects that I perceived as disturbing and complex. Hence, my research began on women and their rights in Islam.

Faithfully, I had maintained that God in His ultimate wisdom was just. So, –if God was a just God– then why was the share of inheritance not equal among the genders in Islam? Why was a Muslim woman’s testimony worth only half of a man? Did God really intend to limit the livelihood of Muslim women while allowing Muslim men more freedom? Was there really such a thing as rights for Muslim women? How does Islam regard the disposition of women? Would a just God ever be unfair to His creations?

Seeking the unalloyed truth, I interrogated the issues. Beneath the distorted images, misconstrued and omitted writings, the rights of women in Islam lay hidden. Undoubtedly, Muslim women had profound rights in Islam. But, like most eras of civilization, when men were fully empowered, they deemed to obstruct, deny, or strip women of rights, regardless of their religion, class, or ethnicity.

One of the most fundamental rights given to women in Islam was absolute freedom to educate themselves and Muslim women have either not taken advantage of this right, and in some cases, been denied the opportunity. Ignorance about Islam has been a major opponent for Muslim women.

Mostly, I focused my attention on Qur'anic verses, traditions of the Prophet, and some ambiguous Shari'a rulings (code of law based on the Qur'an) that related to women. Some of my findings on Muslim women were either unfounded or misrepresented, or needed an analytical explanation. I began to discover that simply reading the Qur'anic verses or shari'an laws at face value was an incomplete evaluation of their intended purpose, and that many of the injunctions were collocated by other related rulings.

For example, in the law of Hodud and Qesas (the law of talion and physical punishment) a woman is valued half of a man in terms of her death dues. The law apparently signifies a woman's life is worth less than that of a man's. But, one must recognize the law was based and dependent on the gender that was financially responsible for the livelihood of the family.

If a woman were murdered and she had been the responsible party in sustaining her family then her death due would be based according to a man's caliber. Islamic writings that are misleading or taken out of context continue to characterize the image that shadows Muslim women.

In my research, I began unfolding many of the misconceptions I had accumulated. Islam was not only a reverence about God, but also an institutionalized system that governed a community, both men and women alike, to function concordantly as a unit.

Yet, there remained many issues that needed defining and many rulings that needed to be discussed. I, an average Muslim woman was unaware of all the Islamic rights that pertained to Muslim women.

Muslim women had substantial political, social, and economic rights. The subject of women in Islam needed to be discussed, explained, and written about. Throughout my independent studying, I tallied numerous inquiries and commentaries on the subject of women in Islam. I was fortunate to come across a scholar whose knowledge on Islam was not only profound, but also contemporary.

I had known Sayyid Moustafa Al-Qazwini three years prior to my proposed offer to write a book on women's rights in Islam. I had attended his lectures, attentively listened to his interpretative views on Islam, and discussed Islamic matters with him. Sayyid Moustafa is a talented orator, but above all, he has a unique ability to discursively reason Islamic doctrines. He is a scholar with insight and sees beyond the technicalities of practicing Islamic rituals.

I wanted an opportunity to explore the subject of women in Islam from a woman's perspective with the expertise of a Muslim scholar. When I approached Sayyid Moustafa on writing a book about Muslim women he welcomed the proposal. For over a year I had put forth my inquiries and Sayyid Moustafa responded with the answers.

Throughout our numerous interviews and correspondences we discussed and debated Qur'anic verses, traditions of the Prophet, and rights of women in marriage, divorce, testimony, and many other related issues –the matters were endless– regarding Muslim women. With his knowledge on Islam, and citing

various sources, he was able to manifest by interpreting and clarifying the issues regarding women in Islam. The end result came about as a book entitled “**A New Perspective – Women in Islam**”.

The degree of the subjects covered in this book is limited, but they are based upon the consensus of Muslim scholars and other reliable sources. However, the covered subjects, and others that were not, still remain to be explored in depth. One of the ways to strengthen Muslim women is through education, inquiries, and dialogue.

My motivation to write this book was not to inform only Muslim women about their rights, but also non-Muslims. A doctor once asked me, “Is there such a thing as rights for Muslim women?” My answer to him was, “ Most definitely.

What has been fortunate for Muslim women has been that their rights were divinely given to them. Muslim women never had to struggle for their rights, their struggle has been in securing them.”

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