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Role and Status of Women in Islam

Islam envisages that the men and women have equal role in defending the faith. The holy Quran says as follows: The believers men and women are protectors, one of another : they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil : they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey God and His Apostle. "In them will God pour His mercy: for God is exalted in power, Wise" "God hath promised to Believers, men and Women, gardens under which rivers flow, To dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in the gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God : That is the supreme felicity". (*Sura* paras 71 and 72).

Having given the women equal rights and duties to protect the faith, the almighty Allah has chosen the man to be the head of the family and the woman to be the queen of the house hold. The maintenance of the wife and children have been assigned as the special duties of the man. The Holy Quran says thus "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, Because God has given them one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard, in (the husband's) absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and illconduct, Admonish them (first). (Next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly). But if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance). For God is most high, Great (above you all)" (*Sura* 4 para 34).

In consideration of the feminine subordination contemplated in Islam, Allah has prescribed that the women could claim dower, as a condition precedent for the marriage. The women in Islam are maintained that is to say fed, housed and clothed and all her requirements are attended to by the husbands. Nevertheless Islam has given her

independent rights to property. On the death of any one of the parents or on the death of the husband, specific shares have been allotted to the women. The Holy Quran says thus : to the male, a portion equal to that of two females : if only daughters, two or more, their share is two thirds of the inheritance ; if only one, her share is a half. For parents, a sixth share of the inheritance to each, if the deceased left children; if there are no children and the parents are the (only) heirs, the mother has a third ; if the deceased left brothers or (sisters) the mother has a sixth. (The distribution in all cases is) after the payment of legacies and debts.) "Ye know not whether your parents or children are nearest to you in benefit. These are settled portions ordained by God and is All knowing, All-wise" (*Sura 4. para 11*). When shares are allotted, it is given absolutely whether it be to a male or female member. But, the general principle is that the male takes double that of the female. Since Islam envisages that the entire burden of maintenance of the family is with the husband, one may think that the shares allotted to the female members are superfluous. The divine plan is that the female member must have absolute rights, as male members if not for anything else, but more for maintaining the dignity and honour of the womanhood and enabling them to pursue religious observances like prayer, *Zabath* and *Haj*.

In the pursuit after attaining highest and everlasting bliss in the life after death, women stand on an equal footing with men. The Holy Quran says as follows : "For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves) for men and women who guard their chastity and for men and women who engage much in God's praise. For them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward (*Sura 33 para 35*). But, Islam recognises the general physical weakness of the feminine species and has insisted that there must be two witnesses instead of one, if the witnesses belong to the feminine species in the matter of written contracts.

Islam has made it incumbent on both men and women to observe strict chastity. The restriction imposed on women in Islam are some times misunderstood to be a restriction both on men and women

alike. The Quran says : "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty ; that will make for greater purity for them : and God is well acquainted with all that you do. (*Sura 24* para 30). The Quran further commands "And say to the believing women that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof. (*Sura 24* para 31). Strict morality has been prescribed for both men and women.

On a correct reading of the divine commandment contained in that para 3, *Sura 4*, there cannot be any doubt what God has commanded is monogamy. The divine commandment reads thus : "If ye fear that Ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans marry women of your choice, two or three or four ; But, if Ye fear that Ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them) then only one or a captive that your right hand possesses. That will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice. The divine commandment permits you to marry until four, if that can help in doing kindness to the orphans under your care. If, by marrying more than one you cannot be just to all of them equally then you can marry only one."

In Islam, the marriage a solemn contract by which the guardian of the women gives the ward in marital relationship to the bridegroom for all time to come and, on receipt of the dower, the husband takes up the responsibility of love, guardianship and maintenance. This holy marital tie is not expected to be broken at all. When there occurs difference of opinion and incompatibility of temperament Islam prescribes clear modes of conciliation. Only on a complete failure of conciliation, Islam permits divorce which is the most hateful thing in the eyes of God according to Islam. But, when the parties are separated finally, they become distinct personalities without any further relationship subsisting between them. The talk of ex-wife of former wife is not tolerated in Islam, so much so what is ordained in Islam is that the divorcing husband should pay a substantial amount to enable the women for her future maintenance. This is contemplated in para 241 of *Sura 2* wherein it ordained "For divorced women maintenance (should be provided) on a reasonable (scale). This is a duty on the righteous." The divorced women's entire future has to be provided for, by a substantial payment in lump sum without necessitating any monthly payments. Any further payments,

monthly, yearly, or other wise is against the concept of marital relationship. By divorce the relationship is terminated for ever never to renew. According to Islam, the women never loses her entity. Adding Mrs. to the name of the husband is not the language of Islam. The wife continues to have her separate entity, separate and distinct and absolute rights to property. She has her independent pursuit after a great life for the pleasure of God. This view of the life of our sisters should instil in us a feeling of reverance for the womanhood about which the holy prophet has said that the heaven lies at the feet of the mother.