

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

Womens' Rights in Islaam

Women have gone through various social changes in western society. To name just a few, she has gone through the stages of being abused, being treated as property, being denied her simple rights, to even being considered "evil". When we look in today's society things look very different, especially for the case of the western woman. The women of today seem to think they are "liberated", "independent", "self sufficient" and so forth. She struggled to get to the position that she is in now for several reasons. Regardless of where she stands today is she truly liberated and independent? For most people the only oppressed women that they see and hear of are the veiled women. They seem like the only ones that are being denied rights, and "freedom". It is vital to compare the two without the distorted image of Islaam presented by the media and society.

Throughout history, women of the west have struggled to gain voice and to be regarded as individuals rather than the subordinates of man. They were considered this because of the image that the Christian priests and Jewish rabbis had displayed of them. In the Judeo-Christian tradition the image of Eve was that of a temptress thus leaving a negative impact on all women. In one part of Hebrew literature, which is found in the Catholic bible, it reads, "No wickedness comes anywhere near the wickedness of a woman ... Sin began with a woman, and thanks to her we must all die" (Ecclesiastics 25:19,24). In the New Testament St. Paul states, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I don't permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam wasn't the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.." (I Timothy 2:11-15). It is statements like these that caused the status of the woman to be degraded and considered worthless. So neither did the women have the right to vote, or to put her two sense into anything.

From their constant struggles women finally gained the right to vote in the 1920's and some laws were passed in the favor of women. Their liberation movement was finally getting somewhere. However, what needs to be addressed is that women did not begin the "liberation movement" and women were liberated way before the 1920's by God at the hands of a man in the seventh century by the name of Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last Prophet. Islaam has given women rights, which she has never enjoyed under any other religious or constitutional systems. When talking about equality and being fair, one must understand that man and woman are two different creations and two different creations have different roles in society. Being two different creations they are equal, but not the same. In Islaam, women are not inferior to men. Her rights are just not identically the same as his, but that does not make her any less important. While the western women were struggling to find their place in society, Muslim women were being acknowledged, recognized for independent personality, and considered in all aspects of their lives. Islaam never branded women as the seed of evil, instead it showed the status of women and her being an independent being as any man. In the Quraan, Eve was not blamed alone for the first sin, rather Adam and Eve had both sinned and pardon was granted to both after repentance. The Quraan states, "O Adam dwell with your wife in the garden and enjoy as you wish but approach not this tree or you may fall into harm. Then Satan whispered to them, 'Your Lord only forbade you this tree lest you become angels.' and he swore to them both that he was their sincere adviser. When they tasted the tree their shame became manifest to them... Their Lord called unto them, 'Did I not forbid you that tree?' They said: 'Our Lord we have wronged our own souls and if You forgive us not and bestow not upon us Your mercy, we shall certainly be lost.'

In Islaam a woman is recognized as a full, and equal partner of man in the creation of mankind. The man is the father while the woman is the mother; different roles, but both essential to life. She has partnership, and is entitled to equal rights, and responsibilities. Allah (swt) states, "O mankind! Verily We have created you from a single (pair) of a

male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other ... (Qur'an,49:13; cf. 4:1). Women are acknowledged as an independent personality, neither inferior to nor deviant from that of man. Allah states, "And their Lord has accepted (their prayers) and answered them (saying): 'Never will I cause to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female; you are members, one of another...' (3:195; cf 9:71;33:35-36;66:19-21). In regards to education, most of western society has this misconception that Muslim women are suppose to be uneducated and illiterate, that it is not in their religion to pursue education. It is very ironic because almost fourteen centuries ago, Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated that the pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim male or female. Whereas, St Paul, in the New Testament stated, "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."(I Corinthians 14:34,35). How can women learn, and grow if they are not allowed to speak? According to this the only source of information she has is her husband at home.

In Islaam the women was and still is entitled to the freedom of expression, whereas the western woman received the right to vote or have a say in matters in the 1920's. Her sound opinions are taken into consideration, and are not disregarded just because she is of the opposite sex. It is reported from history that the Muslim woman expressed her opinions freely and argued and participated in discussions with the Prophet himself, and Muslim leaders. A specific example took place during the Caliphate of Umar Ibn AlKhattab. Also it is evident that Muslim women have the right to participate in public life for in early records it was shown that women used to accompany the Muslim armies and engaged in battles to nurse the wounded, prepare supplies, and so on. They were not considered worthless, or deprived souls.

It is essential to shed some light on the veil. According to the west, it is the greatest symbol of

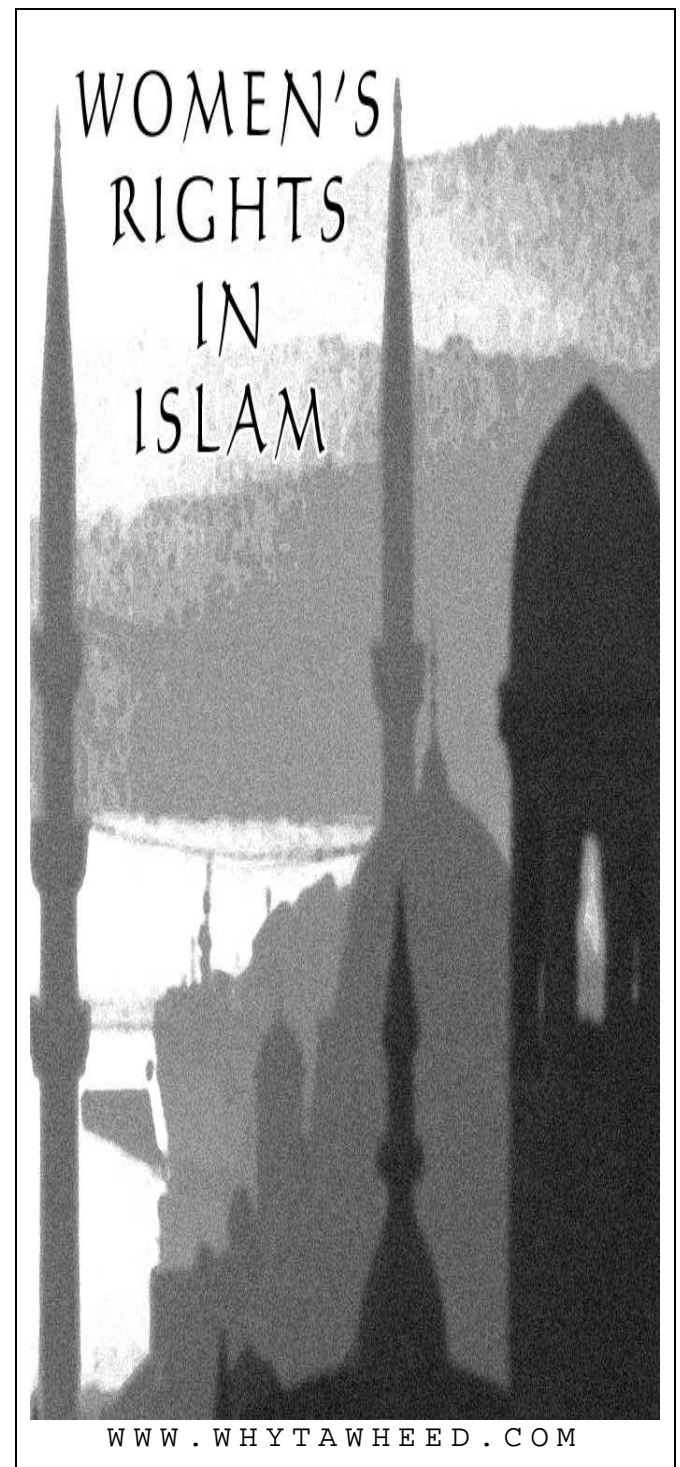
women's oppression. According to Rabbi Dr. Menachem M. Brayer (professor of Biblical Literature at Yeshiva University) in his book The Jewish Woman in Rabbinic Literature, it was the custom of Jewish women to go out in public with a head covering which, sometimes, even covered the whole face leaving one eye free. He quotes some famous ancient Rabbis saying, "It is not like the daughters of Israel to walk out with heads uncovered" and "Cursed be the man who lets the hair of his wife be seen....a woman who exposes her hair for self-adornment brings poverty." In the Christian tradition St. Paul in the New Testament stated, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head - it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman doesn't cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man didn't come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head." (I Corinthians 11:3-10). It is evident that the practice of veiling the women was not "invented" by Islaam. In Islaam the veil is for the purpose of modesty and the preserving of chastity. Modesty is prescribed to protect women from molestation. However, in the Christian tradition it's a sign of man's authority over women and in Jewish tradition it is the sign of luxury and distinction. In the Quraan it states, "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms" (24:30,31). Therefore, the veil in Islaam is not to subject the woman to man, nor label her as oppressed, but instead it is for her own benefit.

Now looking in today's society the western woman seems so much freer then what she was right? Now let's lay down a few facts. In Canada, a woman is sexually assaulted every 6 minutes. 1 in 3 women in Canada will be sexually assaulted at some time in their lives. 1 in 4 women are at the risk of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. 1 in 8 women will be sexually assaulted while attending college or university, and a study found 60% of Canadian university-aged males said they would commit sexual assault if they were certain they wouldn't get caught. So are the western women truly liberated? Women in Islaam are the slaves of God and technically the western women are the slaves of man. They slave on their looks, and spend loads of money on surgeries; special paints so that they can paint their faces. For what? For man. Man cheats on her, abuses her, and leaves her. She is judged according to her physique, and what she has to offer physically. Her mind is not acknowledged, nor is her character. She has become a mere sex toy, talked about in music, conversations, and advertisements. She has no status other than that. When speaking about work so many surveys show that even though she works the same jobs as man, in most cases she gets paid less. So what is the actual reality of the Western woman today?

All in all, the rights that the women of modern times have were granted to them voluntarily and out of kindness. They have reached their position by force, and not by divine teachings. Islaam already established for women what suits her nature. She has been given such a high position in society and in her home. When understanding all the facts, it is only evident that Muslim women were and still are the most liberated, and respected women. We are no where close to oppressed, rather the women that claim to be "liberated", and "independent" are indeed the ones that are suffering. Islaam provides for society a strong innate structure, for it has clearly defined the roles for men and women with equality rather than similarity.

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