

Women's Rights Between Secular Legislation and Divine Laws

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Abstract:

Throughout history, women faced oppression in both secular systems and religious laws before Islam. Ancient societies viewed women as inferior beings or even as demons inciting evil. They were bought and sold like commodities, inherited but not allowed to inherit, and always subjected to male authority.

Men held dominance in all matters, while women were treated as property with duties but no rights. Some religious councils even debated whether women had souls or were mere impure beings. Eventually, one council in Rome declared them soulless creatures, fit only for worship and service, silenced to prevent them from speaking or laughing.

Islam came and honored women, recognizing them as equals to men and forbidding the injustices they had endured in pre-Islamic times.

Keywords: rights; women; legislation; divine laws.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The status of women throughout history and across different civilizations has varied greatly—sometimes even contradictorily.

Perceptions of women have oscillated between considering them as inferior beings, more akin to objects than living beings, to viewing them as demons inspiring evil and sin, or as esteemed figures, rulers of society's fate, and diligent workers responsible for labor, childbirth, child-rearing, and managing the household and the comfort of their husbands.

Islam came to liberate women, while pre-Islamic societies oppressed them, denying their legal rights and viewing them as inferior. Even under Christian rule, some councils debated women's souls and accountability. Islam decisively affirmed their equal responsibility and reward in the Quran.

Some claim that women are the cause of humanity's suffering, as they allegedly seduced Adam into eating from the forbidden tree, leading to his expulsion from paradise and the hardships humanity endures today. However, this is a false accusation against women. The Quran contains no such claim; rather, it portrays the woman as following the man in this event.

Most ancient systems and religious laws degraded and humiliated women, while Islam honored them. The modern call for women's rights and liberation stems from the injustice and contempt they suffered under these systems, whereas Islam neither degraded nor oppressed women but honored and liberated them from the moment of its emergence.

The key issue this discussion raises is: How did ancient systems and religious laws perceive women? What are the differences between their views and those established by Islamic teachings?

To address this issue, we have divided our discussion into two sections:

First: Women in Some Ancient Systems.

Second: Women in Religious Laws.

2. Women in Some Ancient Systems

2.1 Women in Ancient Greek Society

The ancient Greeks, despite being one of the most advanced and civilized nations in history, had a highly unfavorable view of women. Women were considered inferior beings, valued only for their ability to bear children and manage the household. In some cases, a fertile woman could be temporarily transferred from her husband to another man to produce offspring for the state.

Greek laws offered little protection for women, denying them basic rights. In Sparta, most daughters were killed at birth. Marriage was a transaction where husbands purchased wives, who were later confined to their homes. Women's primary role was childbirth; if infertile, they were sent back to their fathers.¹ The orator Demosthenes once stated in one of his speeches: "We marry women to bear us legitimate children and to provide a loyal caretaker for the household. We keep concubines for our service and daily care, and mistresses for the pleasures of love."²

In this single astonishing sentence, Demosthenes encapsulated the Greek view of women during their so-called Golden Age. It is evident from the above that Greek religion had little influence on morality, as it was originally a collection of magical rituals rather than ethical principles. To a great extent, it remained this way until the final days of ancient Greece.³ The contempt and degradation of women extended even to the words and perspectives of philosophers. Aristotle viewed women in much the same way as slaves, considering them soulless beings. In general, women in Greek society had no significant status.

The Romans, who followed the Greeks in terms of glory and civilization, inherited much of their culture, and like the Greeks, they did not grant women any real dignity. Under Roman law, a woman was regarded as property owned by a man—a cheap commodity incapable of achieving independence. Her role was confined strictly to domestic life. Plato stated:

"A man's courage lies in command, while a woman's courage lies in performing humble tasks with silent modesty—this is her honor."

He also said: "Women should be exchanged as one exchanges necessities."

Socrates held equally degrading views, claiming:

"A true friend is one who honors his friends by lending them his wife."

He further asserted: "The existence of women is the greatest cause of crisis and downfall in the world. A woman is like a poisonous tree—its outward appearance is beautiful, but the birds that eat from it perish instantly."

Philosophers debated the very essence of women: Do they have souls or not? And if they do, are they human or animal? Even if they were granted a human soul, should their status be equivalent to that of slaves, or just slightly above them?

2.2 Women in Ancient Rome

According to Roman law, a woman—whether as a daughter or a wife—was deprived of all rights. She had no authority within the family or any right to civil ownership.⁴ They went so far as to deny maternal blood relations until much later. The Roman Twelve Tables Law stated that femininity was one of the causes of legal incapacity and guardianship. According to Roman law, there were three reasons for guardianship: minority, insanity, and femininity. On this, Gaius stated: "Our custom requires even rational women to remain under guardianship due to their weak minds."⁵

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The Romans believed that women were instruments of temptation, deception, and corruption of men's hearts, used by the devil for his evil purposes. As a result, they despised women and viewed them with contempt.

A great council was even held in Rome to discuss women's status, concluding that women had no soul—a notion previously asserted by Aristotle—and, therefore, they had no share in the afterlife. They also decreed that women were impure and should not eat meat, laugh, or speak, as "their words were tools of seduction."⁶

In ancient Rome, a woman was transferred from her father to her husband through a sale-like transaction. As wealth grew, elite women

sought independence, challenging male dominance. However, male writers dismissed them, viewing masculinity as the sole valid form of existence, with women's emotions deemed inferior to men's.⁷

Furthermore, women's work outside the family sphere was very limited. As in ancient Greece, women were excluded from performing on stage, as theater was exclusively reserved for men. Even when a role required a female character, a man would play it by wearing women's clothing and a wig.

Women who performed were deemed immoral, risking their reputations. Their only public role was as spectators in theaters. In Rome's final era, wealth and corruption contributed to moral decay and weakened marriage bonds.⁸ In the Middle Ages, Romans brutally tortured women without cause, using fire, tar, and other cruel methods. Paradoxically, women enjoyed freedom in times of prosperity but faced oppression during societal decline.

The author of the "20th Century Encyclopedia" provided an explanation for this contradiction:

"As the Roman Empire expanded and reached the peak of greatness, surpassing other nations with no rival left on earth, indulgence in luxury and comfort took over. These pleasures were incomplete without the mingling of the sexes, leading to the gradual unveiling of women until they ultimately gained dominance in political affairs. This intermingling resulted in such disgraceful acts and immoralities that I hesitate to put them into writing.

Their ambition faded, their resolve weakened, and events unfolded that changed perceptions of women. Hatred grew steadily, restrictions tightened day by day, leading to the oppression of women during the Middle Ages, lasting until the 17th and early 19th centuries.

Woman became a plaything: confined in piety, exploited in indulgence. Once her modesty was corrupted, she was deemed a burden and faced even harsher restrictions.⁹

2.3 The Status of Women in Ancient Egyptian Civilization

Ancient Egypt highly valued women, granting them inheritance, property rights, and household authority. Husbands transferred wealth to

wives, children were linked to mothers, and marriage contracts required husbands to pledge obedience.

In ancient Egypt, women could rule, but only five queens reigned among 470 kings, as leadership was seen as a male role. Hatshepsut even dressed as a man to conform. Ptahhotep urged men to honor their wives. The tradition of the "Bride of the Nile," where a young girl was sacrificed for the river's prosperity, persisted until Islam abolished it under Amr ibn al-As.

2.4 The Status of Women in Ancient Persia

In Persian civilization, traditions degraded and humiliated women, viewing them through a lens of religious fanaticism and superstition. Zealous followers of Zoroastrianism belittled women, believing them to be the source of evil that provoked the wrath and punishment of the gods. As a result, women were subjected to various forms of oppression.

The husband had absolute and unrestricted authority over his wife, treating her as his property. Polygamy was widespread and practiced without any limitations or conditions, further diminishing women's status and reinforcing their subjugation in society.¹⁰ To encourage reproduction, and despite establishing one of the most sacred family systems, it was permitted for a brother to marry his sister, a father to marry his daughter, and a mother to marry her son.¹¹

2.5 The status of women in ancient India

Ancient Indian civilization degraded women, denying them choice and dignity. Laws equated women with disasters and demanded absolute obedience to husbands, treating them as gods. Wives ate leftovers, walked behind, and spoke humbly.

Ancient Indian scholars saw wisdom as requiring detachment from family. Women were entirely dependent on men, passing from father to husband, then to sons or male relatives, leaving them without independent existence.

Some Hindu traditions required widows to burn on their husband's pyre. Those who refused faced social death—forced into poverty, disfigurement, and isolation. These customs persisted until the 17th century when Muslim rulers banned them..¹²

The Brahmins shaped laws to serve their elites, based on the Laws of Manu, which deemed women embodiments of evil. A wife's only duty was absolute devotion to her husband, regardless of his virtues..¹³

The art of reading among the Indians and the ancients was considered unfit for women, as it was believed that reading could strengthen a woman's influence over men. Furthermore, reading was thought to diminish a woman's allure.

The Laws of Manu in India did not recognize any independent rights for women separate from those of their father, husband, or son. If a woman's father and husband passed away, and she had no direct male guardian, she was required to belong to a male relative of her husband by blood. Under no circumstances was she allowed to live independently.

Even more severe than denying her economic and social rights was denying her the right to live independently from her husband. In fact, she was expected to be burned on the same funeral pyre as her deceased husband. This ancient practice persisted until the 17th century.¹⁴

Tagore, speaking through Shitara, says: "A woman finds happiness simply in being a woman, wrapping herself around the hearts of men with her smiles, sighs, services, and attentiveness. So what benefit would great knowledge and great deeds bring her?"¹⁵ The *Almagest* recounts the days of Chandra Gupta, stating: "The Brahmins prevent their wives—of whom they have many—from studying philosophy. They believe that if women learn to view pleasure and pain, life and death through a philosophical lens, they will either be struck with madness or refuse to submit to their husbands thereafter."¹⁶

Manu's Law deemed men complete through procreation and women devoted to childbirth. Marriage was mandatory; unmarried individuals faced disgrace. Parents arranged marriages early to prevent desire from leading to disappointment.¹⁷

Raising daughters is like watering someone else's fields"—a phrase commonly repeated by the inhabitants of Haryana in northern India—reflects the harsh reality faced by women. Since the advent of early gender-detection technology, Indians have circulated sayings even more brutal than infanticide itself. They believe that daughters will ultimately marry and

become servants to their husbands and in-laws.¹⁸

At Protak Clinic, located 80 km from the Indian capital, an elderly woman was celebrating the birth of her first male grandchild by distributing large quantities of sweets to the doctor and nurses. Suddenly, someone asked, "What if the baby had been a girl?" The grandmother quickly replied before leaving, "Why don't you say something nice"¹⁹

2.6 The Status of Women in Ancient China

In ancient Chinese civilization, the prevailing belief was: "There is nothing in the world less valuable than a woman." It was also said that "Women hold the lowest place in the human race and should be assigned the most menial tasks."²⁰

In China, fathers could sell children, and daughters were seen as inferior. Betrothed as infants, they were confined until marriage, unseen by fiancés. A dowry was paid, and wives endured hardships for their husbands and children.²¹

With Confucianism's rise, women's treatment worsened. Rural communities forced girls to wear metal shoes to keep their feet small, restricting movement to preserve chastity. This practice lasted until the 1948 Chinese Revolution.

2.7 The Status of Women in Sumerian Civilization

In Sumerian civilization, women managed households and farms, but men held dominance. A man could kill his wife or sell his mother to repay debts. Male adultery was forgiven, while female adultery was punishable by death.

The Code of Hammurabi (23rd century BCE) allowed fathers to sell family members. A divorced wife could be drowned or expelled half-naked as a public declaration. If she neglected her husband or ruined their home, she faced the same fate.

Furthermore, if a woman was accused of adultery without evidence and rumors spread about her, she would be cast into the river. If she floated, she was deemed innocent; if she sank, she was considered guilty. The principle of retributive justice further diminished women's status—if a woman was killed, the perpetrator had to compensate her guardian or offer

another woman as a replacement.

Babylonian women could only inherit in the absence of male heirs, except for priestesses. Widows had no inheritance rights unless they remained in their husband's home. If they left, they forfeited any claim to his estate.²²

Despite restrictions, Babylonian women had many rights, including engaging in commerce, owning property, testifying in court, and holding administrative roles. They could join the priesthood, manage businesses, and oversee households in their husband's absence. Hammurabi's laws permitted divorce under judicial review, but a husband could use his wife as collateral for three years, and infidelity could lead to her being sold.

3. Women in Religious Laws

3.1 The Status of Women in Judaism

Although Judaism is a divine religion, the Jews believed in parts of it, rejected others, and distorted many truths. As a result, the status of women became inferior and degrading. Some Jewish sects considered women to be on the same level as servants. A father had the right to sell his daughter while she was still a minor. Women could inherit only if their father had no male heirs, or if he voluntarily gave them a portion of his wealth during his lifetime.

In Judaism, women faced significant restrictions. If a girl was denied inheritance due to a male sibling, her brother was responsible for her support and dowry. If she inherited in the absence of male heirs, she could not marry outside her tribe or transfer her inheritance. Women were seen as a curse, blamed for Adam's fall, and treated as property—subject to inheritance, sale, and divorce at a man's will. A widow without a male heir was forced to marry her late husband's brother. Jewish law also considered a mother impure for twice as long after birthing a daughter compared to a son.²³

3.2 The Status of Women in Christianity

In Christian Europe during slavery and feudalism, women were viewed as the source of sin and a gateway to Hell, blamed for leading men astray. Marriage was deemed impure, with celibacy considered more virtuous. Women were seen as Satan's tool, urged to be ashamed of their beauty as a

means of temptation.

Saint Tertullian said: "She is the gateway of Satan to the soul of man, a violator of God's laws, and a distortion of God's image, which is man."

Saint Sostam said: "She is a necessary evil, a desirable affliction, a danger to the family and home, a fatal attraction, and a disguised calamity."

In the fifth century, the Council of Mâcon convened to debate the following question: Is a woman merely a body without a soul, or does she possess a soul? Eventually, they decided that she lacked a soul capable of salvation (from the torment of Hell), except for the mother of Christ.

When Western nations embraced Christianity, the views of religious leaders influenced their perception of women. In 586 AD, French churchmen held a meeting in some of their provinces and began discussing:

- Can women worship God as men do?
- Can women enter Heaven and the Kingdom of the Afterlife?
- Is a woman considered a human being with a soul that enjoys eternal life, or is she not?

The assembly concluded that women were human but created to serve men and had no eternal soul. With the French Industrial Revolution (1750 AD), women's conditions worsened as factories exploited them with long hours and lower wages than men. Meanwhile, men neglected their responsibilities, forcing women to provide for themselves.²⁴

After World War I, a movement began to reform the conditions of European women and grant them their rights based on three main objectives:

- Absolute equality between men and women.
- Women's independence in managing their own livelihood.
- Complete integration between men and women.

4. Women in Religious Laws

4.1 The Status of Women Among the Arabs Before Islam

The Quran describes the condition of the Arabs before Islam in the following verses and if one of those who ascribe daughters to Allah is given the news of the birth of what he attributes to Him, his face darkens with hatred for it, and he is filled with sorrow (while suppressing his grief). He keeps his distress hidden, overwhelmed with anguish at the birth of a

daughter, yet he does not openly express it.

Professor Muhammad Abduh describes the corruption that prevailed among the Arab nation before the Prophet's mission, saying:

"Arab tribes were driven by desires and conflicts, taking pride in bloodshed, plunder, and enslaving women. Corrupt beliefs blinded them, leading to idol worship—crafting gods from sweets only to eat them in hunger. Moral decay prevailed, with some killing their daughters out of shame or poverty, while chastity lost its value."²⁵

The status of women among Arabs is debated, with some historians elevating it and others diminishing it. In reality, it was balanced; the Arabian environment and culture necessitated respect for women. This is evident in poetry and historical accounts praising them, especially mothers. Some wars, like Dhi Qar and the Second Battle of Fijar, were fought to uphold their dignity.²⁶

Some Arab nobles were known by their mothers' names, like Abu Sufana and Abu Al-Khansa. Pre-Islamic women such as Khadijah bint Khuwaylid and Hind bint Utbah were esteemed for their wisdom and honor, with some advising men, engaging in wars, and reciting poetry at literary markets. However, this status was not universal, as most Arab tribes isolated women while men held authority and social responsibilities.²⁷

As for women, they did not receive the honor they deserved; rather, they were subjected to great injustice. This was because the tribal system placed great emphasis on having many male offspring, while the birth of daughters was often met with disdain. The Qur'an highlights this in the following verse:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ²⁸.

Females were not able to defend their homes in times of war; rather, they were the primary target of enemies during raids. The first objective of an invading force was to capture them, leading to enslavement, which brought humiliation, oppression, and disgrace to the tribe. Males, on the other hand, were the warriors, the protectors, and the source of pride for their people. This aversion to having daughters manifested in various ways—the mildest being hidden or openly expressed resentment, while the most extreme form

was infanticide through burial alive. The Qur'an condemns this practice in the following verse:²⁹ "وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ" Female infanticide was a common and accepted practice among the pre-Islamic Arabs, and it had various justifications. Some buried their daughters alive if they were born with disabilities, such as blindness or lameness, believing them to be a bad omen and unfit for marriage. Others practiced infanticide due to ancient religious customs, where female children were offered as sacrifices to deities. However, the most significant reasons were the fear of disgrace and dishonor, as well as the concern over poverty and financial hardship. The Qur'an condemns this practice, stating:

³⁰ "وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا"

The degradation of women in pre-Islamic times was not limited to infanticide; it affected all aspects of their lives, including marriage, divorce, deprivation of dowry and inheritance, and unrestricted polygamy. Various forms of marriage existed, which Islam later prohibited. One such practice was "Nikah Al-Istibda'", where a man would send his wife to conceive a child with another man, believing it would result in a noble offspring. Other forbidden forms included Nikah Al-Bigha' (marriage of prostitution), Nikah Al-Shighar, where two men exchanged their daughters or sisters in marriage without a dowry, Nikah Al-Mut'ah (temporary marriage), Nikah Al-Mubadalah, where two men swapped wives without divorce or a new contract, and Nikah Al-Mukhadana, where a woman formed a secret relationship with a man without a marriage contract.³¹

In pre-Islamic times, a man could marry and divorce without limit, while women had no right to separation. They were deprived of inheritance and were themselves inherited as property. A woman's dowry belonged to her guardian, leaving her with nothing.

Another hardship imposed on widows was the mourning period. Previously, a widow had to mourn for a full year in seclusion, wearing her worst clothes and avoiding perfume. Afterward, she would perform a ritual cleansing using an animal before resuming normal life. Islam later reduced this period to four months and ten days.³²

4.2 The Status of Women in Islam

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) came to correct the wrong practices of pre-Islamic times, reform improper behaviors, and highlight the true humane nature of relationships and concepts that had been distorted.

His approach was not based solely on commandments and instructions but also on being a role model in how to treat one's wife specifically and women in general.

Islam came to establish that a woman's status is no less than that of a man—they are equal in rights and responsibilities. The Qur'an addresses both believing men and women in numerous verses and affirms that men and women come from the same origin:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً³³.

And Allah, the Almighty, says:

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ³⁴ نَفِيرًا

And He also says:

"وَأَنَّهُ خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنْثَىٰ³⁵"

"And that He created the two pairs – the male and the female."

am strongly emphasized honoring women based on pure humanity, equally applying to both men and women. It also affirmed that faith and deeds hold the same value for both genders, and the reward is shared equally between them:

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا³⁶.

There is no ideological stance in the Qur'an that favors men over women in terms of responsibility or its consequences. Rather, the principle of preference is based on a universal criterion applicable to both genders, summarized in His saying:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ ³⁷ اتَّقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

Thus, the criterion for distinction is piety (taqwa), which is a universal standard encompassing all of humanity, applying equally to both men and women. The difference between men and women is not a difference in human value but in faith and deeds. Therefore, a woman may surpass a man if she sincerely dedicates her actions to Allah. Allah says:

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أَضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُم مِّنْ بَعْضٍ فَالَّذِينَ ³⁸ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُودُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ

Furthermore, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) reminds men of the rights of their wives and the importance of caring for them. He said:

³⁹ "إنما النساء شقائق الرجال، ما أكرمهن إلا كريم، وما أهانهن إلا لنيم"

Islam granted women, whether previously married or virgins, complete freedom in expressing their opinion regarding a marriage proposal, whether in acceptance or rejection. Neither her guardian nor her father has the right to force her into marrying someone she does not want. This is in accordance with the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him):

⁴⁰ "لا تُنكح الأيم حتى تُستأمر، ولا البكر حتى تُستأذن"

Looking back in history, it is evident that Arab women actively contributed to wars and social services during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and those who followed. One of the most prominent social services in which women excelled was nursing and providing medical aid to the wounded in battles. They accompanied men to the battlefields, carrying water containers and essential medical supplies such as bandages and splints. Among these notable women were Ruqayyah al-Aslamiyyah, Aminah bint Mish al-Ghifariyyah, Umm Sulaym, Umm Sinan al-Aslamiyyah, and Umm Atiyyah al-Ansariyyah.

Women in the Prophet's time played active social and political roles. They participated in battles, offered aid, and even fought when necessary. The Prophet (peace be upon him) accepted their pledge of allegiance in Mecca,

marking a rare political engagement. After his passing, women narrated 1,700 hadiths, with figures like Samraa bint Suhail overseeing markets and al-Shifa bint Abdullah advising Caliph Umar and managing affairs.⁴¹

These are just a few examples of the righteous, faithful women who played vital roles in warfare and in building society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and beyond. They were models of sacrifice, generosity, and dedication, excelling in their responsibilities—whether in supporting their husbands, raising their children, or contributing to wars and various social services.

This highlights a concept of complementarity, not uniformity, nor inequality between men and women. The Qur'an equates men and women in human worth and responsibility. Regarding accountability, the Qur'an states:

“The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, establish prayer, give zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. It is they upon whom Allah will bestow His mercy. Indeed, Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.”

This verse emphasizes that both men and women share the duty of upholding righteousness, participating in societal progress, and fulfilling their spiritual and moral responsibilities equally.

The previous verse indicates that believing men and women cooperate in all matters. Even in cases where men were distinguished from women, it was not a distinction of value but rather a differentiation in roles through the diversification of responsibilities. This was the position of the divine Islamic message and its enlightened guidance on the status of women and their equality with men.⁴²

Islam honored women as half of society, ensured their complementarity with men, and guaranteed them the right to inheritance. In more than 30 cases, inheritance shares are either equal between men and women or women receive a greater share.⁴³

Allah Almighty firmly establishes women's right to inheritance, just as men, in His words: **“لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ**

وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ مِمَّا قَلَّ مِنْهُ أَوْ كَثُرَ نَصِيبًا مَّفْرُوضًا”⁴⁴

This verse affirms that both men and women have a rightful portion of

inheritance, ensuring justice and balance in the distribution of wealth.

Islam granted women the right to own and manage wealth, buy, gift, bequeath, testify, and act as agents. It allowed their participation in public life while balancing rights and duties. The rights Islam provided surpass those in nations that claim modernity and civilization.⁴⁵

Islam does not prohibit women's political participation or work, allowing them to excel in professions while adhering to ethical principles. Misinterpretations of religious texts have been exploited to distort Islam's image. Over 1,400 years ago, Islam granted women rights surpassing those in modern European nations. Dr. Charles L. Videz notes that while European men acknowledge women's capabilities, they still deny them equal pay."⁴⁶

This can be confirmed by examining the status of women in contemporary Europe. Dr. Charles L. Videz, Director of the American Institute for Islamic Studies, states:"Many men in Europe have accepted women's ability to perform the same jobs as men, yet they have refused to acknowledge the assumption that women should receive the same pay for the same work. This belief in equality of capability but inequality in compensation persists."⁴⁷

The French writer France Quéré states:"Western women are losing their right to professional equality and their right to human dignity."

She further explains:"Despite having equal qualifications, women often find themselves in an unfair position, characterized by more monotonous tasks, less authority, and lower wages."⁴⁸

Statistics reveal widespread mistreatment of women in Western societies. In the U.S., a woman is beaten every 12 seconds, often by someone she knows. In the UK, up to 295,000 women face sexual assault annually, with many cases unreported. Similar trends exist across Europe, challenging the notion that women there are better off. Achieving sustainable development requires addressing gender disparities, as women make up half of society's productive capacity. A nation's progress depends on empowering women, ensuring their participation in all fields, and eliminating discrimination.

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5. CONCLUSION

Through the study and analysis of this research paper, we have reached several conclusions, the most important of which are as follows:

- Women were oppressed and had no rights in almost all past civilizations, with a few exceptions—most notably among the ancient Egyptians, who granted women rights that were unheard of in other nations.
- Judaism and Christianity followed the traditions of previous systems by undermining women's dignity, considering them a source of impurity and the cause of human suffering. Women were accused of leading Adam into eating from the forbidden tree, and debates even arose over whether women were fully human.
- In pre-Islamic Arabia, women's status was not significantly better than in other ancient societies, though conditions varied from one region to another.
- Islam honored women as mothers, sisters, and wives, granting them rights in the Qur'an and Sunnah. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized their dignity and rights in his final teachings.
- Women's rights movements in the West arose as a reaction to past oppression, whereas in Islamic society, Sharia ensured their dignity and rights from the start, eliminating the need for a so-called liberation.

6. Endnotes

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