

plight of women. The capitalists were exploiting her weak position. So she fought for her equality, and justifiably so. Islam is not against this form of justice for women. Labour done by man or woman is to be equally rewarded (4:32). However, the origin of the equal rights movement in the employment market in the West took a blind extension into the home and family. Women's comparisons with men became competitions with him, and she lost sense of her own identity, by seeking sameness instead of "complementarity" with man.

Islam keeps these two realms – the labour market, or social level, separate from the unit of family. A woman can work as long as the demands of work are not asking compensations from her nurturing and guidance toward her children. If a husband and a wife have mutually agreed for her to work – he should assist her – since he is expected to show "kindness and equity" in marriage.

Giving priority to the role of mothering, Islam justifiably makes it mandatory for a man to provide sustenance and protection to his wife. This gives her the needed respite for bearing children. So the role of financial support of wife and family are a required responsibility. However, if a man is unable to work due to circumstances, Allah does "not burden one more than one can bear." Similarly if a woman cannot have children or remains single, she is not degraded.

Q4. If the woman has to depend on a man financially, does this not create a power imbalance in marriage. Does this not make their rights unequal?

A4. Here, one needs to compare the framework of the present day Western ideology of relationships, and the Quranic conception, and judge equality of rights on that basis. According to the Western capitalistic ideology – materialistic goods are the basis of power in relationships. From the Quranic framework, the power is with Allah. Now, taking a sapiential approach, i.e. Looking for the intellectual wisdom behind why this mandatory responsibility is placed on man, one may note that the family is given importance in the continuation of the human race. It is as if when this institution is not guarded, its antithesis may occur – that is, the family may be destroyed and consequently, the human race.

The family is considered the microcosm of society, wherein the most dependent of all creatures, the human child, is led toward autonomy and self-responsibility through guidance and differentiation between right and wrong. It is the hearth where human nurturing, support and understanding lay the basis of love. It is the foundation where the seeds of moral character are implanted. So it is essential that the ecology or milieu in which the child grows be compatible, complementary, blissful and harmonious.

Hence, within the family, man and woman are given responsibilities for the harmonious running of the family. The child-bearing responsibility is of grave importance. The responsibility requires pre-natal care, stamina, intelligence and deep personal commitment. A man also wishes to preserve his procreation and respects a woman's need to be cared for. He provides so that his wife does not feel burdened with the responsibility of financial sustenance and the needed tenderness during these times. He gives this role due respect. And this respect should also be prevalent in the social interface of an Islamic society. So the provision is not perceived as a source of power but one of meeting a larger purpose by both i.e. Responsibility for the constructive good of themselves, and consequently the good of society.

The woman can work by actualizing her abilities and talents as long as she gives **priority** to her child-bearing and child-rearing roles. In fact, there are financial checks and balances in Islam. All of the earnings she makes are her own. If she shares with the family for financial need, it is because she wants to. She also acquires half of the inheritance that her brother acquires from her family of origin, which she brings to her family of procreation. Putting this holistically in the financial equation, it makes her rights equitable. **She does not need to feel financially incompetent or incapable of using her abilities.** She should feel her abilities can always be utilized during the child-rearing function as well as in a career.

Let me reiterate that the religiously mandated hijab is **positive and liberating**. It should be regarded as a prescribed system of attitudes and behaviour regarding modesty and dignity.



The Filter

Freedom

**in the West
implies removing
all restraints
from sexuality,
from expressions
of violence
and from speech.**

**Islam
defines freedom
as removing
subservience
from worldly idols
of vanity, sexuality,
power & narcissism.**

A Muslim woman is walking in a library. A non-Muslim comes to the same aisle. She gives a “look,” “a smirk” to the Muslimah. Questions arise. She begins, “When I see you in hijab, my mind sculpts an image of you. An image created by the filter of Western perception. The mystery behind the hijab takes form, and the picture I get is of one who is medieval, fossilized, repressed, discriminated, victimized, a slave of man, illiterate...

“And yet, when I look at you over time I get glimpses of you as stable, calm, unwavering, full of undaunted convictions, ready to fight for your beliefs. Who are you? Curiosity possesses me. Let me see if my projections match your reality. Before the delusions of my superiority possess me, let me check the real you.”

Q1. The woman asks a number of questions of the Muslimah, and these are the answers she gets:

A1. The hijab that you wear stands out so dramatically against Western clothing. Do you **not** feel that your freedom is restricted? Do you **not** feel discriminated against because of it?

A Muslim woman obeys the commands of Allah; not the commands of Hilfiger, Gap, Calvin Klein or the thousand and one Western fashion labels. The dress code demands that she cover her body except the face, hands and feet. Some women cover the face and that directly flies in the face of Quranic & Prophetic sayings. There is a purpose or a constructive wisdom behind such a requirement. Hijab is not merely a headscarf but a concept of modesty. A Muslimah acknowledges that her body is feminine; different from that of a man. She honestly acknowledges that it can be physically attractive. If beautified beyond modesty and exposed to men, it can lead to destructive outcomes in relationships. Being very caring and protective about the beautiful purposes for which her body is created, she reserves it for the legitimate physical intimacy with her husband. Her goals are clear. The hijab represents her values about sexuality and what she stands for in her womanhood. She is not a nun, for Allah recognizes the need for physical intimacy.

The Quranic verse says: “They, women, are raiments for you, as you men are raiments for them.” (2, 187)

As far as restricting her freedom is concerned, Islam has a very different definition of freedom. Freedom in the West implies removing all restraints from sexuality, from expressions of violence and from speech. Whereas Islam defines freedom as removing subservience from worldly idols of vanity, sexuality, power and narcissism. So freedom means being true to one’s own spiritual nature, which guides toward constructive goodness. Placing restraints in the appropriate places gives one this freedom, by creating unity with this inner spirituality. Aren’t you ashamed of those girls who “pose” nude. No inner or outer shame. What a shame they chose no garb over hijab! We are garments whilst those “stars” are garbage. The hijab is indeed an amulet, which wards off the evil eye. People do discriminate, in their glances, on the job etc. This is the reason some women have made compromises with their clothing. They realize it is a compromise.

Q2. But can’t she practice these values by having good intentions? Does she need to have all the clothing?

A2. Of course intentions are extremely important, because if you do not have the right intentions, your clothing is a deception. Clothing only shows congruence to intentions. They are an outer manifestation of her inner intention. There are no double messages. This manner of modesty is also expected of a man.

Women in the West tend to give these double messages, and so do men. Modesty works both ways. The concept of no inhibition regarding clothing has confused a woman’s perception of her anatomy. There is a denial and self-deception about it, tending to annihilate the beauty of opposites. It has taken mutilating and destructive proportions in both men and women toward their own bodies. This has also taken away the innocent rights of a foetus from the miraculous growth in its mother’s womb.

Q3. Do biological differences not polarize the roles between man and woman as distinctively different? Aren’t the women unhappy to be an extension of biology? Does this not create role differences. Hence disparity?

A3. The universal distinguishing trait is that a woman has the potential to be a mother and men do not. This

becomes the essential basis of distinction. There is compatibility and congruence between the two on this difference. So this particular difference does not mean inequality neither does its antithesis hold, which is, that sameness means equality.

A man and woman are created of the same nature. This is a universal generic commonality. So, there are also many commonalities which become the basis for them to understand each other and communicate about these differences. There is also the concept of non-discrimination of resources at birth. Allah blesses each child at birth with individual physical, intellectual and temperamental qualities which can be actualized. There is no discrimination, in terms of superiority, stated between a male or female child in these potentials. So these may be developed and actualized by each for acquiring education, skill or spiritual knowledge as circumstances and opportunities permit.

As far as feeling an extension of biology – no, a woman does not consider giving priority to pre-natal care and child rearing as degrading. In fact, the concept of motherhood is highly respected in the Quranic citations of women.

In the Quran, Allah makes us recognize the surprise and happiness of Prophet Abraham’s (peace) wife when they are informed of the forthcoming birth of a child. He helps us recognize the anguish of Prophet Moses’s (peace) mother, when she has to cast her child in the river. He also recognizes her desire to nurture the baby. He comforts her with tender words. He provides sustenance for Maryam (peace) and comforts her during labour. You can see that in the roles defined for women, the concept of family is considered very crucial.

In the West, equality has been sought by wanting to be the same as men. If men want to remove their clothes, so do the women. This has happened because the equal rights movement, which only started in the 20th century, began in the labour market. The pitiable conditions of female workers and children focused attention on the

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(Quran 2,187)