

Women in Islam

Session 2: Women's specific rights in different areas of life

NOVA Life-Long Learning (NOVA-LLI)

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Outline of Topics

Session 1:

- Significance of this topic
- Watching a video on Women in Islam
- Some Islamic principles about gender

Session 2:

- Women's specific rights
 - Basic human rights
 - Economic rights
 - Political rights
 - Social rights
 - Education rights

Session 3:

- Some areas in need of clarification
 - Women's Dress Code
 - Polygamy
 - Marital discord and "wife beating"
 - Inheritance share of males and females
 - Witness of women vs. men
- Summary and conclusions

Women's Rights

I. Basic Human Rights

- Inhumane treatment of women was so common before Islam that even female infanticide was an accepted act
- Islam took the following 3 measures to restore human rights of women:
 1. Prohibited female infanticide and any other inhumane treatment (see Verses 81:8-9)
 2. Condemned those who are not happy with the birth of a baby girl (see Verses 16:58-59)
 3. Declared equality in creation
 - “God created males and females from a single soul, one complementing another” (based on Verse 4:1)

2. Economic Rights

- Ownership of property, independence of earning and spending for women in Islam
 - Women achieved this right in Britain in 1887
- Working in any field is permissible for females if permissible for males, but certain fields are desirable for females
- Women have no financial responsibility for the household – men are responsible for that
- Receiving marriage gift – men are required to pay

3. Political Rights

- *Men and women should stand for each other, and both should participate in public affairs*
- *“Believing males and females are protectors of each other” (9:7)*
- *“Both shall ordain the good and prohibit the evil in society” (9:7)*
 - It obviously means political activism
- Practice of women’s voting rights even in the early days of Islam
- Participation in public decision making

4. Social Rights

Islam offers a systematic approach for the social rights of women in all stages of their lives

- As a baby - Celebrating her birth
- As a daughter- Not favoring a son over her
- When she gets ready for marriage : Her right to accept or reject marriage proposal
 - Prophet gave the choice to cancel a marriage without woman's agreement (Hadith)
- After she gets married, as a wife:
 - A partnership concept, "As garments of each other" (2:187)
 - Marriage based on mutual peace, love, and compassion (30:21)

Social Rights

- When a woman becomes a mother, she reaches very special status
 - “Paradise is at the feet of the mother” (Hadith)
 - “Who among the people is most worthy of my companionship? Answer: “Your mother” (3 times), and “your father” 4th time.” (Hadith)
- In all stages of her life, she is a favor and gift to men
 - As a daughter, a girl opens the door of heaven for her father
 - As a wife, she completes half of the Deen of her husband
 - As a mother, heaven bestows upon her feet
- In case marriage does not work at all, divorce is permitted
 - If divorce happens, very detailed and special rights
 - Financial support for 3-12 months
 - Support for child custody
 - Right of canceling marriage by wife (Khul’a)
- In broader social context: As a sister to all believers

Man's Extra Responsibility: Head of Household

- *And the women have rights similar to their obligations, according to what is recognized as norms of decency; however, men have a degree more than them; and Allah is All-Mighty, Most Wise (2:228)*
- Rights do not belong to men only, and obligations do not belong to women only (as many people assume)
- Women have similar rights and obligations as men
- However, men also have a right to lead the family in creating the appropriate environment of piety in their household
- Man is the head of the household because of their financial responsibility and extra physical strength
- Otherwise, both have similar rights and obligations over each other
- Note that in Islam, a leader of a group is their servant

5. Education Rights

- Education: Not only a right, but “obligatory on both men and women” (Hadith)
- Because of women’s innate ability to nurture and love, most potential area of women’s contribution to society is through family
 - Although not limited to this area, it easily gets lost as women expand their roles in their professional careers and competition in industry
 - At times, it can become conflicting by a deep desire to provide for her family’s emotional and necessary needs, on one hand, and pursue personal aspirations related to career and education on the other hand
 - Need to balance
- Not only allowed for education, but expected to lead activities in certain areas, e.g. Education, Health, Charity, Social Services, etc.