

Equality

In spirituality, men and women are both equal in Islam. They both have brains, hearts, and intellects to differentiate between right and wrong. Each of them has the capability of acquiring the highest stages of spiritual perfection and their purpose on earth is the same, namely to obey and please their Creator.

From the teachings of Islam, we learn that both men and women are responsible for reforming and improving the morals of the society they are part of. They both need to encourage good, forbid evil, practise on good morals, display good character, educate others and spend in charity.

Distribution of Roles

However, despite their overall purpose in life being the same, their rights and responsibilities are different. There is a balanced distribution where men and women complement each other in their roles. Men need to earn a living and women need to manage the home and raise children. This is a perfect system because justice demands that the gender that has been chosen by nature to rear children should be relieved of duties in society such as earning.

To force a woman to earn a living in the economic field, together with shouldering the responsibilities which nature has exclusively chosen for her, amounts to abuse and injustice. A morally upright

system is that which grants the woman all her rights in her own natural sphere. It allows her to develop to her full potential and progress towards success within her own domain and at her own pace. When a woman is forced to live like a man, her potential for spiritual development is compromised because she can only gain closeness to the divine by functioning within the framework that her Creator has chosen for her.

A Unique Status

In keeping with a woman's unique position, in Islam, many laws of worship apply differently to her. She is exempted from all outdoor religious obligations such as attending the mosque for the five congregational prayers, and other congregational gatherings, like the Eid prayer and the prayer for the deceased. She is exempted from performing prayers and fasting during menstruation and when bleeding after childbirth. She is exempted from fasting if it has adverse effects upon her during pregnancy and while breast feeding.

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GENDER EQUALITY IN ISLAM

Are men and
women equal in
Islam?



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One of the primary factors that has caused much confusion in the West is that of gender equality. In essence, according to this concept, men and women are equal, hence any job done by a man can be done by a woman. Outwardly, it seems very slick and attractive, but in reality it is absurd.

A Meaningless Concept

Maryam Jameela, a revert to Islam, has explained it perfectly: "Equality of men and women is meaningless in Islam. It is like discussing the equality of a rose and a jasmine. Each has its own colour, beauty, shape and perfume. Men and women are not the same. Each has their own features and characteristics. Their roles are not competitive but complimentary. Each has duties in keeping with their nature."

Even statistics oppose the idea of gender equality. Studies show that prior to 1950, men suffered more mental and psychological problems compared to women. For every seven men diagnosed as mentally ill, only two women were diagnosed with the same problem. After 1950, the figures changed to 22 women for every two men. This was precisely because of their change of roles. Women were forced to leave their homes and enter into factories and offices. They were now subjected to self-analysis and competition. They were overburdened by being forced to work outside the home as well as inside. They had to make it in a man's world by using all their natural feminine

qualities (beauty, gentleness and provocative dressing), as well as by adopting masculine qualities (physical strength and aggressiveness) which are unnatural to their makeup. Forcing women into the commercial world led them to combine forces which are diametrically opposed to each other, throwing them into psychological turmoil.

Gender equality makes no sense. If women are granted leave from work for 6 months maternity leave in a gender equal society, it is fair to ask why men are not allowed the same privilege. Does this not give women an unfair advantage over men? Again, logic teaches us that every woman cannot be equal to every other woman. A nurse cannot be equal to a Montessori teacher. They cannot simply reverse their roles. When members of the same gender are not equal, how can we expect opposite genders to be equal?

Obvious Differences

We know for a fact that men and women are different physically, anatomically and biochemically. Their biological makeup and genes cause women to have feminine qualities and men to have masculine qualities. When scientists injected the male hormone testosterone into females, they began to develop masculine qualities. Unsurprisingly, studies have found that even their IQ's are different.

Due to the multi-dimensional nature of life, in some areas men are stronger than women, while in others, women are stronger than men. Human

existence and success in life requires both rigidity and tenderness. We require strong generals, perceptive statesmen, and astute administrators just as we require caring mothers, loving wives and efficient housekeepers.

A woman excels in those fields which conform to her feminine nature such as nursing, teaching and dealing with children because she has been endowed with feelings of love, sympathy, compassion and caring. She is gentle and tender. Her loyalty is beyond measure. She unselfishly sacrifices her pleasures and luxuries for others. She nurses her family even if she is ill; she feeds them even if she has to remain hungry; and she forgoes her sleep for their benefit.

Psychology

Human psychology also teaches us that a woman is more emotional than a man. This suits her role as a homemaker because emotional sentiments are required for the upbringing of children. In a home situation, a woman is not expected to respond to her child's call after intellectual thought and rational pondering; her response has to be prompt and instantaneous and she fits this mould perfectly. In contrast, in the outside world of business, politics, war, international relations, industrial planning, security, etc. men have to deal with situations based on their physical and mental strength. For this reason, men are by nature more aggressive, assertive and adventurous.