

Marriage and Islam

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Muslims believe that God has created humankind and the universe not in sport, and certainly not in vain, but for a purpose. This purpose is that humans may fulfill their ethical vocation- that they may do good deeds.

The scripture of Islam pictures the life of humans as a free competition among them for doing the better, the nobler deeds. On this account, it called the individual a *Khalifah* or a Trustee, that is, one who acts in accordance with God’s covenant and trust. The world God created is one that fits this moral vocation of humans. It is one in which they are effective, where the realization of goodness, truth, and beauty is actually possible

Realization of the moral good requires that it be achieved in freedom, that is, under the conditions where it is equally possible to realize as well as to violate the moral imperative. Of all creatures on earth, only humankind is so equipped. That is why they stand among the noblest of all God’s creatures.

“We honoured the progeny of Adam: provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure and conferred on them special

favours (spiritual faculties) above a great part of our creation” 17:70

Marriage and Family

The importance attached to marriage and family life in Islam is reflected in the many Islamic proclamations, directives, and laws aimed at supporting and protecting the institution of the family.

Marriage in Islam is a contract of duties and responsibilities between two partners who have given their full and free consent to marry each other. Marriage is regarded as the norm for all, a safeguard on chastity, and essential to the growth and stability of the family. Marriage is a covenant between two individuals, and moreover between their families. Thus, in the traditional practice of marriages, the families or guardians are primary actors who have an interest and a stake in the success of the new marriage. They are consulted in the process of identifying a suitable partner and they are obliged to offer support and guidance to the newly formed family.

The relationship of a husband and wife is viewed as complementary, reflecting their differing characteristics, capacities and dispositions. Besides legal provisions, Islam prescribed a whole range of ethical directives pertaining to the relationship between men and women. As husband and wife the Qur'an says:

“And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell with them in tranquillity, and He has put love and mercy between you. Indeed, in this are signs for those who reflect.” 30:21

Aisha the wife of the Prophet reported that he said “The most perfect amongst the believers is he who is the best in manner and kindness to his wife” Tirmizi

Aisha also reported that the Prophet said “The best amongst you is he who is the most kind to his wife and I am the kindest amongst you to my wives”

In the Qur’an - probably for the first time in religious history - the spiritual equality of men and women was emphatically proclaimed. For instance,

"O mankind! Fear your Guardian Lord who created you from a single Soul. Created out of it his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women. Fear God, through whom ye demand your mutual rights, and be heedful of the wombs (that bore you); for God ever watches over you." 4:1

Some argue that Islamic teachings seemed very enlightened for the time that they were revealed, however these do not accord women equal rights in the light of our modern understanding of the equality of sexes. The problem is compounded by the fact that in many Muslim societies women do not even enjoy the rights and privileges that Islam has decreed for them. A combination of traditional male-dominated concepts, local practices, narrow-minded interpretation of Islamic teachings and economic factors have prevented women from achieving a political and economic status that is equivalent to their potential.

On the other hand the main shortcoming with gender equality discourse is its minimalist approach. Gender relations especially in the context of the family has been relegated to a lower order level of human relations, while in the process neglecting the influence of higher order values such as justice, kindness, compassion and love. This is a fundamental issue which Islam has addressed by emphasizing a balanced approach in the realm of human interaction in general and the family in particular.

Since the happiness of the family depends in the first place on a range of human values coming into play between husband and wife in their shared life, the firmer the spiritual and ethical bonds the surer the happiness of the household and the greater its ability to withstand the shocks of life in a selfless and harmonious union. The Prophet said, "Best of my people is the man who shows his family not harshness but perfect kindness and goodness."

Islam gives specific directions for the settlement of family disputes. And when the community raised the issue of equal rights in the context of crises in family life, it added the expression "in kindness or justice":

"Women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, three (monthly) courses. And it is not lawful for them that they should conceal that which Allah hath created in their wombs if they are believers in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands would do better to take them back in that case if they desire reconciliation. And they (women) have the same rights to those (of men) over them in kindness (or according to what is equitable); and men have a degree above them. Allah is Mighty, Wise." 2:228

“O ye who believe! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may take away part of the dower ye have given them,-except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good.”4:19

Islam has neither encouraged nor condoned the practice of domestic violence. On the contrary the Prophet described it as shameful and history testifies that as a husband and a father he was a role model of kindness in his household. As it is true that Islam has pioneered the rights of women to life, to ownership, to education, and to work and trade, it must be untrue to say that the same faith has allowed wives to be abused.

In the social domain Islam provides an inspirational source of mercy and compassion.

In Muslim societies Islam is the major driving force behind social cohesion and communal solidarity. It promotes with vigor the goals of economic and social regeneration, because it considers poverty, deprivation and unstable family life as serious threats to the welfare of human society.