

In What Way Are Men And Women Equal In Islam

During the early period of Islam, some women under the impression that men enjoyed more freedom with particular regard to public activities of the Ummah, began grumbling of bias and discrimination. Under the leadership of Asma – the daughter of Yazide Ansari, they once decided to send a delegation to the Prophet in order to lodge a protest.

Thus followed by a delegation of women of Madina, Asma came out to visit the Prophet and upon arrival, she addressed and submitted their protest in these words:

“May the lives of my father and mother be sacrificed for you , Oh the Prophet of Allah. On behalf of the women in Madina, I have come to submit a complaint to you. It is well recognized that you have been sent by Allah as a Prophet for both men and women and that you are not the Prophet for section of men only. We women have declared our faith in you and your God. Staying at home, we women look after domestic duties in fulfillment of the needs of men as well as remain in care of their children. Despite this fact, it would appear that we women are deprived of the important services (in Islam) which are restricted in favour of men only. It is they (the men) who are able to participate in the Friday congregational prayers, visit the sick, attendance the burial of the dead and repeated visit to the sacred mosque of Mecca. Not only this, it is only men who have been chosen in Islam to participate in Jihad – the holy war whilst we women are prohibited to do so, despite the fact that we oblige them by protecting their belongings and wealth and rear their children at home. Why is that whilst we share with them in life struggles, we are deprived from the share of reward in the performance of sacred services and duties?”

On hearing from Asma such logically presented words of protest, the Prophet turning to his companions said “Have you ever heard from any woman such impressive words on any religious issue?” Thereafter addressing Asma and her delegation, the Prophet replied by saying:

“Listen carefully to my words and thence convey them to the women who delegated you to me. Your arguments that men have been favoured with freedom to fulfill the acts of virtue as listed by you, thereby qualifying them for a special reward whereas you women are deprived of the same is not true. If efficiently and perfectly do women carry out their domestic duties in obedience to their husbands, in keeping their homes clean of indecency and undesirable things, in bringing up children respectfully (to higher level of Islamic character, their status and reward (before God) does extend to the same and equal level as that of men, in performance of all acts of virtue”

On hearing these words from the Prophet, Asma and her colleagues became exceedingly satisfied and conveyed them to the women of Madina.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the equality of men and women in Islam being raised time and again by critics in fact was also raised and thrashed out during the early period of Islam. The Prophet whilst explaining the separate but complementary spheres of activities for both men and women in life, stressed the equal status in reward and compensation from Allah for both the sexes.

By recommending women to concentrate their attention on domestic activities and to come out only when in real need, sufficiently covered with Islamic veil, the aim of Islam is to raise a healthy and descent society, to protect womenfolk from undesirable external influence and to enable them to bring up respectful generations in true spirit of Islam. If valuables made of gold and diamond are not to be kept loose and exposed but preserved in safe secure places, similarly the womenfolk as respectful and valuable section of society needs to be provided special cover and protection.

For parents and guardians to allow their teenage girls to come out uncovered and move shoulder to shoulder with men, whether at work in offices, attending mixed gatherings or co-education classes, is to play with fire and run risks having far-reaching effect on the future well-being of their society. For parents to discourage purdah lest their girls do not attract boys for marriage is to display weak mentality and lack of trust in Allah. In these days, one notices a demand for girls in purdah provided they are well educated and trained and with decent outlook and behaviour.

Let us not allow our mentality to be influenced by Western values and by the so-called modern societies. Let us draw lessons from the Iranian women who despite in purdah and practising Islamic way of life, took most active and bold part in the revolutionary transformation in their society.