

Women living under muslim laws
النساء في ظل قوانين المسلمين
Femmes sous lois musulmanes

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Female Sexuality and Islam

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History reveals that sexual oppression of women, in one form or another, exists in every society in the world. Nevertheless, it has been achieved by different methods, economically, intellectually, physically and psychologically. The control of women's bodies, or in other words physical mutilation, was raised with the rise of patriarchy.

With the rise of patriarchy, many customs and traditions were developed. Of these customs and traditions, many have disappeared or were gradually abandoned, while some remain. Female circumcision is one of the customs still surviving and practised in the name of religion i.e. Islam with the fair justification of Islamic traditions. Although it has no religious basis and the custom is pre-Islamic in origin, the practice spread and gained strength with the rise of Islamic traditions, which bear the distinctive impress of Arabian social history and of the Arab mind and character of the seventh century.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that destructive qualities of female sexuality have been quoted in many Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) as well as in the writings of eminent Muslim scholars like Ghazali, Sha-wali-ullah etc. In all the books of Hadith and Fiqh, as well as in the interpretations of the Qur'an, one can easily find the chapters related to the destructive powers of women's sexuality which strongly support the physical mutilation of women i.e. circumcision. Although Islam does not favour the practice, it provides the ideological justification for it.

From centuries ago, right from the beginning when Islamic traditions and jurisprudence were compiled, women were considered as "empty headed blabbers" causing all the chaos of mankind. In one interpretation of the Qur'an, commentators placed women, children and lunatics at the same level. (Mauraful Qur'an and Tafsir Ibn-Kasir, Surah Al Nissa verse N° 6). Woman has further been regarded as more disposed to passion and emotions than to reason (Naqis-ul-Aql). She has been considered as a symbol of disorder and Fitna (chaos and discord):

"After I have gone, there will be no greater menace to my nation more liable to create anarchy and trouble than women." (Bukhari 1868:419).

Fitna, in this sense means that sexually irresistible, beautiful woman who disrupts the world order.

In order to perpetuate male domination and to limit women's fitna, women were relegated to a submissive role by giving them a negative concept of themselves: this takes many forms, e.g. chastity, sexual repression, seclusion, female circumcision; polygamy (for men), monogamy (for women) motherhood and so on.

In Islam, extra marital sex for men has become an inseparable part of life and society, whereas for the women Islamic society upholds the value of virginity and marital fidelity.

Islam does not set limits on the freedom of man in the practice of sex with his wife without her

consent. This is based on the Qur'anic ayah (verse) which says "women are the land which is yours to plough - you may therefore plough them wherever you wish. (2.22").

On the other hand, Islamic teachings forbid women to desert their husbands in bed. According to the Hadiths, often quoted by Muslim jurists and scholars to give an image of an "ideal Muslim woman", if a woman spends the night deserting her husband's bed (without a reasonable cause) she is sinful (Bukhari).

Abu-Huraira narrated: The prophet said " If a man invites his wife to sleep with him and she refuses to come to him, then the angels sends their curses on her 'til morning." (Bukhare).

"When a man calls his wife to satisfy his desire she must go to him even if she is occupied at the oven." (Mishkat 1, P.691).

Muslim scholars explained later that all these commands were made for the security of the social order, to prevent men satisfying their sexual needs with prostitutes. These grave distortions have been used to justify the practice of polygamy.

On the other hand, men could desert their wives if they felt suspicious about her character, following the famous event of Aisha (Prophets wife) when the Prophet deserted her for a month. (Surah al-noor). On another occasion, when the Prophet had decided to abstain from eating a certain kind of food and was blamed by Allah for doing so. (Surah Al-Tahrim verse n° 1) His wives were accused as the cause of His taking that decision and He deserted them for one month (Bukhari).

Here I would like to quote a few traditions (sayings of the Prophet) related to women, considering her as a source of evil.

1. A woman is the string of the devil. (Ahya-al-alum-alain, Ghazali).
2. A woman is like a private part when she comes out, the devil holds her high. (Ibid).
3. The duties of a wife towards her husband are many; the foremost is to preserve chastity. (Ibid)
4. Truly, among your wives and your children there are enemies for you (i.e. they may stop you from the obedience of Allah). (Bukhari).
- 5."Abdullah bin ` Umar, Allah's Apostle said, "Evil omen is in the women, house and the horse. (Ibid).
6. Usama bin Zaid narrated: The prophet said, "After me I have not left my affliction more harmful to men than women. (Ibid)
7. A woman advances in the form of a devil and retires in the form of the devil, 'the Prophet says "When one of you is charmed by a woman and she affects your heart, he should go to his wife and have intercourse with her, for that will repel what he is feeling." In another tradition, the Prophet, after a personal incident, says, 'If any man sees a women who charms him, he should go to his wife, for she has the same kind of thing as the other woman. (Mishkati, p662).
8. The prophet saw a woman. He hurried to his house and had intercourse with his wife Zainab, then left the house and said, "When the woman comes towards you, it is Satan who is approaching you. When one of you sees a woman and feels attracted to her, he should hurry to his wife. With her, it would be the same as with the other one." (Tirmidi).
- 9.Usama narrated: The Prophet said, "When I stood at the gate of the fire I saw that the majority of those entered it were women. When asked what is the reason for that, He replied, "because of their ungratefulness to their husbands. (Bukhari).

10. A man will not be asked about why he beats his wife (Mishkat 1. p.693).

Men, (husbands) have been regarded as Majaz-e-Khuda (next to God): "If I were to order anyone to prostrate himself before another, I would order a woman to prostrate herself before her husband." (Mishkat) Several other traditions shows that women are looked upon as things to be enjoyed: The Prophet is reported to have said, 'The whole world is to be enjoyed, but the best THING in the world is a good woman.' (Mishkat, 1, p.658)

These traditions on female sexuality are based on Greek mythology, according to which woman is body without head so the body should be covered, and man is her head so he should rule over her. Veiling was also inspired by this idea.