

## Women in the Qur'an

### Qur'anic Standard and Actual Practice

**CC Question:** (a) *How does the Qur'an say women should be treated,*  
**(b)** *and does this conform to or contradict what is practiced in many Muslim countries or cultures?*

I interpret the questions as intended to evoke a discussion about Muslim suppression of women, since that is such a major Christian concern.

If you ask the same question about the Bible, you will get a wide variety of (contradictory) answers. There are OT texts about women from which pretty well all Christians distantiate themselves. For one thing, they are written from a male point of view—what the male should do for, with or to women. They were subject to men and valued mainly as wives and mothers. A father could sell his daughter into slavery. A father could annul his daughter's vows or pledge, as could a husband his wife's. Adultery could lead to stoning, but for both partners. The husband had various unilateral rights over his wife. A woman was worth half a man. Women could be taken as booty after victorious battles. They could become ceremonially unclean. Etc., etc. Christians have long rejected all or most of these ideas for sound Biblical and theological reasons. In the NT, women were restricted in their leadership roles.

You find similar situations in the Qur'an and in the Muslim community. There is a wide range of interpretations from the literal to contextual-historical. Just as Christians have largely rejected the OT perspectives on women, especially those they see as oppressive, so do many educated Muslims argue their way out of similar Qur'anic texts. Most Muslim *men* tend to agree that women are honourable but fragile creatures that need to be protected from other men. Hence, the elaborate precautions to which *some* are subjected in terms of movement and dress code, while others dress and move about as they please. Most men regard women as too emotional and therefore insist that they, the men, should do the thinking and make decisions for them. They are seen as powerful when they play their legitimate role as mothers and wives who bring up and teach the next generation. They are allowed to conduct business and own property, but not at the expense of their primary role in the family. There is currently a dynamic at work in many Muslim communities that tends to restrict women more than was the case in the past, especially with respect to dress. One American female Muslim medical doctor practicing in Saudi was absolutely amazed at the restrictions placed on women in Saudi and condemned it outrightly as a retrograde form of Islam.

At the levels of militant fundamentalism and folk Islam, the literal interpretation tends to hold sway. Folk Islam is intimately mixed up with local pre-Islamic cultures. Its adherents often identify these foreign accretions as part of core Islam, with the result that anyone critiquing some cultural tradition may be accused of attacking Islam itself. In Saudi, public amputations constitute public entertainment after Friday prayers, but many educated Muslims are horrified.

The reality is that there is hardly any consistent pattern around the Muslim world. In many Muslim communities, women play a much larger role than the above would lead us to expect, while in most countries stoning and amputation form only a distant memory. And yet there have been several *female* Muslim heads of state in the largest Muslim countries! If Islam or the Qur'an were really as reprehensible and violent *in its core* as we witness today in some quarters, then the high civilization and culture they once reached would not have been possible.

A major difference between Christianity and Islam is that the former has experienced the philosophical developments from the Renaissance on—initially spurred on by Cordovan Islam—up to the current climate in the West. Before those developments, Christian individuals, religious leaders and nations were cruel and intolerant in ways hard to believe today, even though we already had the Bible. The change towards more civilized relationships is due as much to those philosophical developments as to our reading of the Bible. Most Muslims have not gone through this development.

How should women be treated according to the Qur'an? Your answer will be determined by the approach you prefer, literal or contextual-historical. Does the practice of some countries reflect the Qur'an correctly? To the extent that it is the result of a literal interpretation and mixed up with traditional cultural accretions, in agreement with more liberal Muslims, I would say "No." But those who practice various forms of suppression of women, will, of course, answer "Yes!" They are the literalists. So, how and on what basis do I, a non-Muslim, answer these questions? Which is the true Islam or the right interpretation of the Qur'an?

## **NOTES:**

### **Volume 2**

pp. 55-64—re degrading Western women dress  
p. 56—Islam fears all women sexuality displays  
What is the Muslim standard?  
P 56-7—Gumi re restrictions on women—  
p. 57-- also Adegbite and Suleiman—protection of honour  
p. 58—re uniforms  
p. 62—Failure to wear hijab leads to hell  
Zamfara women not in sports because of dress code  
p. 64 nurses uniforms 63  
Kano—all school girls to wear hijab—p. 59-60—also nurses  
134—Women not to lead men.

### **Volume. 6**

p. 276-- re progressives and conservatives  
p. 277ff—various contradictory opinions  
p. 280—Prime Minister Bhutto of Pakistan

### ***THE KORAN INTERPRETED***

#### **SURA 2 THE COW :**

p. 24 Men told when they can engage in sex with wives in relation to Azumi. It is the men who are addressed, not the wives. There is equality language:

“They are a vestment to you and you to them.”

p. 31 Not have sex when wife has period—till they are clean and “have cleansed themselves”

“Your women are a tillage for you; so come unto your tillage as you wish....”

“Divorced women shall wait by themselves for three periods....”

p. 31-32 rules for divorce, but always addressed to men p. 33c

p. 34b If you die, leaving your wife, there should be a testament for them incl provision for a year.

#### **SURA 4 WOMEN pp. 72-98**

p. 72 Marry up to 4, provided you treat them equally. Most likely you cannot so treat them (p. 91c)

Provide for them and clothe them and speak honourable words.

p. 73—Women inherit half of the men (p. 98)

p. 74—Women commit indecency—4 to witness vs them.

p. 75—Not inherit women vs their will

If you desire to exchange a wife for another—leave her with what you have given her.

List of women you may not marry.

p. 76—re marrying handmaidens.....

p. 77—Men are managers over women  
Women to obey; rebellious ones, send them to their couches. And beat them.,.  
p. 91—right settlement is better

### SURA LIGHT PP.

P. 355c—both men and women to cast down their eyes and guard their private parts.  
For women only it is added: “and reveal not their adornment.... Let them cast their veils. over  
their bosoms, and not reveal their adornment, save to their husbands or....(others listed).” Q  
24:30

p. 356 Not stamp their feet to make their hidden ornaments known.  
Do not force women slaves into prostitution.

### SURA THE CONFEDERATES pp.

- 432 Divorcing wife before having sex—make provision for her and set them free with  
kindliness.
- 433 When you ask Prophet’s wife for something, do so behind a curtain; “that is cleaner for  
your hearts and theirs.
- 434 Whom the Prophet’s wives may touch....  
Prophet’s wives to “draw veils close to them”

WIKIPEDIA Introduction

## Women in Islam

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Jump to: [navigation](#), [search](#)

Part of [a series](#) on

The complex relationship between women and Islam is defined by both Islamic texts and the [history](#) and culture of the [Muslim world](#).<sup>[2]</sup>

[Sharia](#) (Islamic law) provides for differences between [women's and men's roles](#), rights, and obligations.

[Majority Muslim countries](#) give women varying degrees of rights ...based on different interpretations.

Scholars and other commentators vary as to whether they are just and whether they are a correct

interpretation of religious imperatives. Conservatives argue that differences between men and women are due to different status and ), p. 278</ref> while [liberal Muslims](#), [Muslim feminists](#), and others argue in favor of other interpretations. Some women have achieved high political office in Muslim majority states. [\[3\]](#)

Rights of women in Islam today often seen as severely restricted, but compared to the situation which Muhammad found in place, he liberated them considerably.

[William Montgomery Watt](#) states that Muhammad, in the historical context of his time, can be seen as a figure who promoted [women's rights](#) and improved things considerably. Watt explains: "At the time Islam began, the conditions of women were terrible - they had no [right to own property](#), were supposed to be the property of the man, and if the man died everything went to his sons." Muhammad, however, by "instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance, education and divorce, gave women certain basic safeguards."[\[11\]](#)

Thousands of sources, many contradictory. Best

## **NOTES:**

IRSHAD MANJI

### 10.11 Gender separation in mosque

FRAN—experienced it in Burnaby mosque

11 If you're spiritual, you don't think.

13 Muslims do not know the Qur'an

13 Whose Islam?

=====xxxx

THIS MATERIAL WAS PART OF THE ORIGINAL BUT DROPPED DUE TO TOO MANY WORDS.

There are Old Testament texts about women from which pretty well all Christians distantiate themselves. For one thing, they are written from a male point of view—what the male should do for, with or to women. Their life centred around marriage, children and home. They were subject to men and valued mainly as wives and mothers. A father could sell his daughter into slavery (Ex. 21:7). A father could annul his daughter's vows or pledge, as could a husband his wife's (Num. 30:3-15). Adultery could lead to stoning, but for both partners (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). The husband had various unilateral rights over his wife. A woman was worth half a man (Lev. 27:1-8). Women could become booty after victorious battles. They could become ceremonially unclean. Etc., etc. But Christians have long rejected all or most of these ideas for sound Biblical and theological reasons. In the NT, women were restricted in their leadership roles.

*"Elke ketter heeft zijn letter" is a Dutch proverb meaning that every heretic has his favourite texts, while he ignores those inconvenient to her. We are all selective in our approach to Scripture—Christians as well as Muslims. Hence the many denominations and traditions.*