

Imam Khomeini's opinion of women (1)

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The deep social and spiritual turmoil which was instilled in women when the occupiers came to Islamic countries created a negative effect on women.

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Women's freedom

This negative effect was formed into characteristics in women, such as women are beings without intelligence and understanding, women have a weak will power, women are excessive in spending, women talk excessively, and women are the sources of evil.

Women are forced to leave these characteristics that have been incorrectly attributed to them. These are the characteristics that negate a woman's true personality.

Nobody other than a woman will give her such freedom – the freedom of the soul. Imam Khomeini emphasizes one must take their rights; that they will not be given to her. A woman must leave the characteristics that have been given to her. There are two methods of rejecting these characteristics:

A. A correct understanding of women's nature

Living beings were divided into two groups in ancient Rome. Male property owners were considered people. Slaves, women, and animals were considered objects. Women were lowered in the society. The nature of a woman, taken from the Christian religion which was accepted by Rome, was lower than the nature of a man.

Not too long ago the church debated whether or not the soul of a woman was a human soul or not. Some Muslims also believe that women were created from an impure substance. But, the school of the Ahl al-Bayt (a) believes that men and women have a single disposition quoting the verse: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." [Quran, 49:13]

Imam Khomeini (r) stated in a news conference: "Men and women both have the ability to choose in Islam. If there are differences between the two, they are in regards to their nature." [Sahifah-i Imam, v.5, p.189]

Imam, according to his daughter (in *Muqalah-i Imam va Huquq-i Zan*) emphasized that a woman must remain in a high human position because Allah created her with honor.

B. A woman's acceptance of responsibility

A person tries to find his value through the responsibilities that he accepts after puberty. During the age of puberty he tries to assess himself and experience having and not having certain freedoms. This freedom is what worried the angels when they thought that mankind will spread corruption and bloodshed on earth. [Quran, 2:30]. Therefore, man and his responsibilities cannot be separated. There are no other beings other than mankind which can accept responsibilities. If one does not have such an ability they would be outside the scope of humanity even if they have a human figure. Irresponsible people follow their carnal desires. But, the question is what responsibility causes one to know himself? Are they the responsibilities that secure individual benefits or are they the responsibilities that secure social benefits?

Man's divine disposition pulls him to the second choice – social benefits. Humanity is formed here. But, his arrogance drives him to the first choice. These two feelings fight amongst themselves inside man's existence. These principles present themselves outside of man's mind into democratic capitalism and communist socialism. These are the signs of the contradiction between the individual being the principle and the society being the principle. The Islamic system removes the unknown and solves this problem by keeping individual and social benefits in mind. An individual is responsible for securing social benefit. This is a divine responsibility and is playing the role of being the vicegerent on earth.

Imam Musa Sadr was of the opinion that actions which are described as being 'done in the path of Allah' are actions that fall under the concept of serving humanity. The reason for this is that any action which is performed for Allah is performed for people. Therefore, these actions are in the benefit of mankind and are spiritual practices. [Al-Fatawa al-Wadihah, Imam Sadr, p.716] A person who performs an action which benefits the society receives divine reward and personal satisfaction through his love of personal interest.

Hence, mankind who are the vicegerents of Allah on earth, include men and women (in Imam Khomeini's opinion there are no differences between man and woman. Both of them are human. The only differences are the natural differences which exist and which do not have anything to do with their creation.). [Muqalah-i Imam va Haquq-i Zan, Zahra Mustafawi, p.16]

Islam has divided the duties of men and women in accordance to their differences and specialties. For instance, the responsibility of rearing children has been given to women in the family because of the necessary amount of love and compassion that they have. Man has the responsibility of performing the difficult tasks outside because of the physical strength that he has been given. Traditions narrated through the infallible Imams (a) encourage each one of these genders to perform actions that are in congruence with their natural roles. For instance, the tradition 'heaven under the feet of mothers' encourages women to implement this huge responsibility in the

household. The tradition 'whoever strives to secure a life for his family is like a person who has become bloodied in the path of Allah' encourages men to perform his responsibilities.

But, in the society, the responsibilities and roles that women play become different than that which is mentioned in Islam. The reason for this is that, at the beginning, the caliphs did not present a clear opinion about women's role in the society. They only emphasized women's roles inside the household. The positions that religious women take in Algeria and Sudan are reactions to what irreligious women try to force upon them. In other words, the Sunni sect of Islam does not have a progressive opinion about the presences of women in the society and about their social responsibilities. They do not have an opinion the presence of women in fighting against oppression or in establishing an Islamic government.

But, the Shia school of thought has a philosophical and suitable opinion about the presence of women in the society. The scholars differ in regards to this presence which has created differences amongst the opinions regarding a woman's hijab. Some scholars believe that a woman's responsibility is limited to the family and women's circles. They believe that the obligatory actions such as befriending the good and staying away from the wicked, such as defending Islam, and such as enjoining the good and forbidding the evil should not leave this area. According to this, they have considered it forbidden for women to reveal their faces and their hands up to the wrists while they mix in the society. But, another group of scholars believe that the obligatory duties of a woman, including the instances mentioned above, must be performed in all walks of life, just like men. A woman has the responsibility of correcting a man just as a man has the responsibility to correct a woman. According to this, the opinion of these scholars regarding hijab, there is no problem for a woman to reveal her face and hands up to the wrists while mixing with men if the groundwork for corruption is not formed. Likewise, any form of pleasure, whether it is obtained through looking, touching, or hearing, must be refrained from.

Imam Khomeini (r) supported this opinion. He took pride in the active participation of women in cultural, economical, and even military fields. More than this, he considered a woman's military preparation to defend Islam to be one of the important obligatory actions. In one of his speeches he emphasized the necessity of the presence of women in the political arena: "Today, women in the Islamic Republic are standing next to men with their efforts of rebuilding the country." [Sahifah-i Imam, v.7, p.340]

He also stated: "You historical men and women must be steadfast on the path of striking the oppressors and defending the truth. You must prove your steadfastness to the world and to the future generations." [Sahifah-i Imam, v.3, p.481]

Once again, he stated at another time: "I take pride that our women are as active, if not better than men along the path of teaching the principles of Islam and the goals of the Quran, in cultural, economic, and military fields. Those who have the ability to fight in war and those who can teach military sciences in order to defend Islam and the country must participate as it is one of the most important obligatory duties." [Sahifah-i Imam, v.21, p.297]

The pride that Imam Khomeini took in regards to the participation of women shows

that women have an active role to play in social movements. It is even possible that their participation is more important than man's in rebuilding a society. This opinion of Imam Khomeini has been placed next to other people's opinions who state that the role women play is unimportant while the role that man's plays in a society is the principle role. A third opinion also exists – an opinion which is becoming extinct – which is that the presence of women in the society is the same as the presence of slaves and animals.

Imam Khomeini repetitively emphasized the importance of women's roles in the society. In his will he stated that he took pride in the widespread presence of women in the society; a presence that might have been greater than man's. Women bore two types of oppression in Islamic countries. On one side they were oppressed by the backwards cultures prevalent in those lands and on the other side they were oppressed by the occupation of foreign countries. These caused an incorrect opinion about women to present itself; for instance the opinions that state that women have incomplete intelligence (naqis al-'aql), that women are not fully religious, that women misuse commodities, and that women speak too much.

In these conditions women were forced to change themselves in order to save themselves from these opinions. She would not be able to be free when these opinions were prevalent unless: one, she obtains correct opinions about her origin and her humanity. Two, she accepts her responsibility in strengthening the society and the family. Iranian women are a clear instance of this.