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Book Review [Women in Islam by Mohammad Mazheruddin Siddiqi]

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Item Type	Article
Authors	Islam, Saif ul
Publisher	Qurtuba University, Pakistan.
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Download date	2026-09-16 08:36:38
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/187857

Book Review: Women in Islam

Author: Mohammad Mazheruddin Siddiqi
Publisher: Seraj Munir, Director Institute of Islamic Culture, 2,
Club Road Lahore, 1952
Pages: 186
Reviewed by: Saif ul Islam

The book “*Women in Islam*” was authored by M. Mazheruddin Siddiqi, a Professor of History who taught at Jamshoro University, Hyderabad, Sindh and many other universities at Karachi .He was also a Senior Research Associate at the Central Institute of Islamic Thought, Karachi which shifted in the era of Ayub khan i.e. in sixties to Islamabad. Besides this book he was also the author of another very good book “*The Quranic Concept of History*” which he wrote in the supervision of Dr. Fazlur Rehman, Director at *Central Institute of Islamic Thought* at that time.

In this book the author wants to acquaint the readers with the fact that the rights and freedom of women which the west blindly demands today as a crying need has reasonably been afforded to them by Islam 1400 years ago without corrupting its basic principles. For this purpose, the author explains woman’s status and rights in Islam by comparing her with woman in the West too convincingly, specially quoting the best western psychologists and other writers of profound learning and research who scientifically verify the position of Islam about woman. He has, undoubtedly, succeeded to prove that Islam from its very inception has given more than the West is demanding for a woman today and it is still flexible to adjust woman in society with the changing time and needs.

As said earlier, this book was authored in response to Female Liberation Movement in the West, so the writer in the opening chapter gives a slight but a very concise touch to the type of freedom a woman enjoyed in the West in different eras. The West demanded equality for a woman out of the spirit of democracy. Thus the great efforts of George Sand, Dumas and Alfred Naquet for free sex and no marriage in France, woman's coming out for work alongside men during Industrial Revolution in England, America's recruitment of women in Army after the second world war led to great sexual perversion and the disorganization of family life. The author says that in some of the countries like Russia, Italy, Germany and Spain she was freed to support the different Movements like Communism and Fascism etc. Adolf Hitler confined woman solely to the job of child production to increase the strength of his Army. Thus woman's freedom was exploited in the west by putting all morality to wind. On the other hand, Islam also gives freedom and equal rights to them but never at the cost of morality which is the basis of civilization in Islam unlike materialism as the basis of civilization in the West.

After this the writer gives the detailed explanation of Women in Islam. About the equality of woman in Islam he says that both the sexes will be equally rewarded for their good deeds within their respective fields assigned to them according to their biological make up. The west calls women's taking up men's jobs as equality which is impossible due to their different physiques. That is why Islam asks woman to avoid going out for work in different fields as she might take wrong decision or perform slow due to her menstruation which mentally weakens her.

One of the greatest contributions of author is that he has dealt the issues of Marriage and Divorce_ the issues of top priority in modern age

so scientifically and in detail. The Quranic verses and the quotations of the western experts make it interesting enough for both, the westerners as well as the Muslims. Thus he sifts away the prejudiced differences of views about women between them and gives them a chance to understand that Islam is a good source of guidance since long ago. The writer refers to the western approach about marriage by saying that the western nations take exception to marriage and advocate unreasonable free sex/polyandry. They don't think that in case of no marriage we indulge in prostitution, irregular development of illegitimate children who are not under the supervision of proper parents and the loss of respect of unchaste woman as no man accepts her as his own partner to life. Islam strongly supports the institution of marriage and gives a free choice to woman in selecting her husband. Though her elders can interfere for guidance but she can't be compelled by them. Besides, Islam binds us in marriage in the presence of two witnesses to dispel any doubt about woman's consent. Islam also gives her a dowry in marriage and property rights which perhaps no western nation has ever given. The writer has compiled her property rights in such a compact form that it puts a full stop to the baseless western blame of unequal rights of married woman in Islam. e.g.

1. Her half share with brother.
2. Her half share of the entire property of father if no brother and sister
3. Two third of father's property if no brothers but more sisters
4. A widow's $\frac{1}{8}^{\text{th}}$ share in husband's property and $\frac{1}{6}^{\text{th}}$ share in his property if he has no children etc.

So this is how Islam gives equal rights and freedom to woman in marriage. Here the writer may not be spared for dwelling so much upon western sources to validate Islamic status of woman but comparatively so little upon Islamic resources that perhaps he forgets that he has to explain and prove his ideas in the aimed Islamic context.

The writer establishes a very good logical connection in the book by shifting to the aspect of divorce suddenly after marriage, an essential part of marriage. His method of dealing with the topic is so beautiful to understand the amount of freedom a woman enjoys in Islam. Like before, here also he compares the method of divorce in Islam as compared to that in the west. According to him, divorce was strictly banned in Christianity until eighteenth and the nineteenth century. The protestant still discourage it except in case of adultery. The author shows great sharpness of mind when he says that divorce is both in the west as well Islam but Islam has an upper hand on other religions in the west because of its proper check and balance in divorce to give durability to marriage. In Russia and France divorce is allowed if both the parties and even one of the parties are agreed. Similarly, The Royal Commission of 1909, legalized divorce in cases like adultery, sexual impotency, habitual incurable drunkenness, commuted imprisonment or willful desertion by husband for three years etc easily leading to the sexual corruption and family disorganization. But Islam claims of a proper check and balance on divorce to safeguard women, though they are absolutely free to demand it if she faces any legal problem from her husband side. Divorce, though permissible, is deemed an abominable act by God almighty as it is said that His Throne sways when divorce takes place. Moreover, Islam does not want that human beings should take divorce lightless. Rather it needs to be announced in three pronouncements each after a month

alternatively giving a chance of revision of decision to the husband. Similarly, marriage is not a source of permanent imprisonment for a woman, rather a socio-moral & legal contract. So a woman has also every right in Islam to seek divorce if the husband is sexually impotent, deserts her willfully, changes religion, disappears for long period of time. Islam gives a proper name of “*Khula*” to the divorce sought by woman. She can take recourse to the court also if not divorced at her request by the husband. Besides, the married minor whose mind changes after puberty can also seek divorce. In this chapter of divorce the writer gives a lot of examples from the age of the Holy Prophet (SAW) and his companions specially the caliphs which enhances our understanding but gives no proper references which puzzles the readers to take further guidance in this regard. In some places the author seems to lose confidence when he leaves some of the things unexplained e.g. according to him a man can marry a non Muslim Christian or Jewish woman but a Muslim woman cannot marry a non Muslim man but he does not tell us the logic behind it. Similarly he raises objection to other Imams (jurists) and favours only one imam who talks about the divorce of woman if a husband does not turn up after six months to avoid sexual laps. He again puts the reader in a bit dilemma when he does not explain as to what about in case such a woman has not suddenly married after divorce because even then she might compel for illegal sex with others. Otherwise, he has proved the liberty of woman she enjoys if not happy with her husband.

Then the writer comes to social restrictions Islam imposes on both sexes. Islam imposes different restriction on both sexes due to their different physical make up. Restrictions on woman are like:-

1. Not working out side to earn lively hood due to menstruation, motherhood and danger of losing her chastity except in case of extreme compulsion.
2. No attractive gait, show of elegance to public.
3. Soft speaking and wearing tight or thin dress.
4. Purdah and modesty etc.

The writer elaborates the matter of motherhood scientifically through the research of western psychologists who say that motherhood is a great desire a woman has. Besides, the writer give a very convincing statement by saying that a woman should not come out unnecessarily for work to make herself sexually vulnerable, rather she should contribute by producing and bringing up gifted children . Similarly, she cannot work together with men except when she is compelled to do so due to her husband's death etc. It is scientifically proved that women working in industry are always disorganized mothers and wives making the family instable. The writer elevates the religion of Islam by saying that Islam is such a comprehensive religion that it gives full freedom to woman but not at the cost of her chastity. One of his suggestions that make a great sense is that the mixing together of both sexes is never free of danger. So, to avoid any such mishap he emphasizes to train some old women by men out of compulsion and then let these women train other young women for work to avoid mixing with males in future Thus Islam doesn't ban business or job by woman if within Purdah and separate from male, except in compulsion . The writer is greatly credited for such a logical explanation of these topics but he seems to deviate from his target when he brings in so much scientific detail of sex and motherhood that we lose the main purpose – women rights in Islam

Then he comes to the importance of polygamy. He says that Polygamy ensures our chastity and respect in society. This can be known from its benefits e.g. some western scientists strongly argue that sex with pregnant wife is injurious to health. So polygamy is a legitimate way of satisfying sexual desires. Even England allowed it to avoid prostitution, infanticide and venereal diseases. But Islam allowed it 14 hundred years back.

The author views about co-education are too convincing because he discusses the views of the westerner experts who are against it. He mostly quotes the psychology of education by professor Wilton to substantiate that Co-education never goes smoothly owing to difference in Psychology, taste and temperament of both the sexes. How can both the sexes learn fruitfully after such a big difference between them. Once again he draws so much upon the western research about co-education that at the end we are left still waiting for Islamic approach about co-education.

Now he takes a very modern issue of family planning. He says people control birth as they are afraid of sustenance. He again refers to western scientists and experts to enlighten those Muslims inspired by the west about the loss of birth control. Such experts declare birth control as a big economic loss along with men power. History has proved that France suffered defeat against Germany solely due to shortage of manpower. Islam is strongly against it.

At the end he impresses upon us to accept the universality of Islam and concentrate on it for guidance in life. But when we look into the explanation of this chapter of "Deviation from Islam", we find nothing new, rather a mere repetition of earlier ideas. So I think he had better

inspired us about the lessons from Islam somewhere in the conclusion, rather than in this chapter.

All in all, the book was written far back in 1952 for the first time but it is still alive and enjoys a universal status, partly due to the issues of hot debate of modern age in it and partly due to its simple language and convincing arguments. The author's exceptional comparison of women in Islam with that of the west has really proved an affective response to the Female Liberation Movement in the west which was the aim of the author.