

# Gender Equality From Islamic Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Islam is the way of life, a comprehensive and perfect guidance in completing the incomplete or shortage in every aspect of a human being. Islam never underestimated nor mistreated any living thing incredibly human as the most incredible creature created by Allah The Almighty. Human being was created with the sexes of male and female. Although there are differences in physical, biological, and psychosocial aspects between men and women, Islam has never seen these differences as an excuse to oppress any party. Every individual is given freedom to speak, worship, learning, working, let alone fulfil every need and desire in daily life as long as it does not conflicted with Islamic teaching. This paper discussed the way Islam treats both sexes based on Quran verses and hadith

**Keywords:** *Gender, Differences, Equality, Rights, Islamic perspective.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

All Al-Quran in chapter al-Hijr verse 26 to 29 explained the creation of Adam as the very first human being. Allah stated that He created Adam from a lump of soil that was shaped into parts of human body (the head, face, torso, hands, legs, organs and so on) before the spirit breath in by Allah. Thus, the creation of the very first human being was completed and being glorified by the angels but not the devils. Since Allah is the creator of human, He knows well all about human being's nature – the needs, desires and etcetera. Because Allah acknowledges the heart of a human being, He then creates Hawa (Eve) to be Adam's spouse so that Adam will find tranquil and from them twain scattered countless men and women. This process and primary purpose of Eve's creation clearly stated in the first verse of chapter an-Nisa'.

By those verses, a lot of significant information gain. First, human being consists of two elements – physical and spiritual. Allah then explained in detail how we, the descendent of Adam and Eve evolved. The physical body was developed from a drop of liquid (semen that contain millions of sperms which only one be able to penetrate the ovum and the process known as fertilization) which then turn into a clot of blood before forming into foetus that being strengthen with flesh and bones along with the organs (al-Hajj,

22:5; al-Mukminum, 23:14; al-Ghafir, 40:67; Qiamah, 40:67; al-'Alaq, 96:2). After the physical body completed, the spirit was breath in by Allah. However, Allah never explained in detail about the spirit attributions (al-Isra', 17:85) because it is beyond human intellectual to understand [1]. Even Prophet Muhammad pbuh was not given the detailed knowledge of spiritual. Hence, Muslim scholars being discreet when discussing the spiritual element of human being. [1] suggested that spiritual consists of four parts – ruh (spirit), qalb (heart), 'aql (mind/intellect) and nafs (soul/self). He stated that these elements are in charge of emotions and cognition manifest through behaviour. Well manner person indicates their sacred spiritual and vice versa. He also claimed that humanity not simply reaches holy or tranquil soul unless the spiritual being purifies from time to time as society being forgetful, rebellious or ignorant of Allah's commands. We are not going to discuss further about soul purification since the aim of this paper is to examine the equality treatment of Islam for both men and women.

The second information is that Allah created men and women so that each finds their mate. Never in the Quran stated that Allah only created either men or women to be live in this world. Yet, humanity since forever always opposes Allah's decree by willingly to kill their sons and daughters with silly excuses. For

example, the Pharaoh during his reign ordered to slaughter every baby boy because of his fortune-teller anticipated the overthrow of him by a man; while the girls was left to live and that was the time Moses born. To fulfill the inhumane ordered, Moses was chased by Pharaoh's men. Glory upon Allah, because of His willing and intention, Moses survived – saved by the Pharaoh's wife. Because of the wife's persuasion, Pharaoh agreed to adopt and raised Moses. This tragedy recorded in chapter 2 verse 28 and chapter 49 verse 9 of the Quran (al-Baqarah, 2:49; Qasas, 28:9). In different occasions, before the time of Prophet Muhammad pbuh appointed as apostle, the ignorant Arabs society buried their daughters alive as they claims that having a daughter in family is a shame. The occasion recorded in chapter 16 verses 58 and 59 of the Quran (al-Nahl, 16:58 – 59). Right after the appointment as apostle, Prophet Muhammad pbuh strictly forbade the act of burying daughters alive as commanded by Allah (al-Syura, 42:48 – 49). Thanks to the Almighty Allah, because of this command, the Arabs women and society still exists on the earth to this day. That is how Islam glorifies each soul of human beings – men and women have the rights to live in this world.

As referring to the forth chapter, first verse (an-Nisa', 4:1), Allah stated that He created Eve for the sake of fulfil Adam's nature and desires. Eve destined to be Adam's wife and their blessed marriage evolves human generation. On different exclamations, Allah stated that He created men and women to know, love and completing each other (al-Baqarah, 2:35; Rum, 30:21; Yasin, 36:36; al-Hujurat, 49:13; al-Zariyat, 51:49). By the meaning of these exclamations, Allah forbids same sex relationship – gay or lesbian. This command is not only subject to the Prophet Muhammad's pbuh people but since forever. Prophet Lut's people, centuries before Prophet Muhammad pbuh born, they received this command but ignorantly oppose it as they practice the live of same-sex relationship. For the punishment, the land they inhabited was turned upside down where all the disobedient people including the Prophet Lut's wife buried alive with their ignorant. The story of Prophet Lut's people recorded in the Quran as a great lessons for us through chapter 11 from verse 77 until 83 (Hud, 11:77 – 83).

All the stories of previous prophets and apostles' people were recorded in the Quran to take lessons by us – the latter ones. All of Allah's commands are how Islam guides humanity to live a good, prosperous, blessed and successful life. Allah guides humanity with equality, no different between genders, skin colours, language etcetera – however He blessed, glorify and honoured those who truly obedient and believe in Him (Rum, 30:21 – 22; al-Hujurat, 49:13). Every commands of Allah were exclaimed for each

every human being. Nevertheless, some special issues such as menstrual, pregnancy, hijab and etcetera were dedicated for women yet men indeed have to take notes since they related with women (especially the mother and sisters) in their life. That is how Allah fulfil the nature of humanity since He is the Great Creator thus knows us well.

## **2. THE NATURE OF MEN AND WOMEN**

When she was delivered, she said, “O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child!” – and Allah knew best what she brought forth – “And no wise is the male like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Thy protection from the evil, the rejected (Ali Imran, 3:36).

The verse proved that indeed men and women are different in some aspects. Physically, once girls stepped into adolescent phase, they experienced rapid changes in their body especially the breasts, hips and vagina getting bigger making the body curves prominent. Meanwhile, boys experience rapid development of height and muscle once they reach puberty. However, both boys and girls experienced hair growth at some part of the body – face, armpits and genitals. These developments slowed down as they reached the early adult stage especially for most girls, their growth stops at the age of 18. However, boys still experience story until they get 23 years of age [2, 3]. Physical development varies for each individual as some might experience earlier and faster while others later. Thus, physical development associates with the individual's environment, nutrition and safety [3].

On the other hand, biologically perspective, men have XY while women have XX pair of sex chromosomes. The other pairs of chromosome known as autosomal chromosomes that looks same for both men and women as they inherited from the parent. In addition, the hormone level for men and women also different. Men have higher level of testosterone while women have higher level of estrogen and progesterone. These hormones function as sexual hormones. Testosterone regulates men sex drive or ejaculation, bone mass, fat distribution, muscle mass and strength also the production of red blood cell and sperm [4, 5]. Meanwhile, estrogen and progesterone play a pivotal role to regulate the development and function of uterus [6]. The estrogen regulates menstruation cycle and also affects the reproductive, musculoskeletal and cardiovascular systems and also the brain. At the meantime, the progesterone triggers the endometrium (mucous membrane lining the womb) to thicken to accept fertilized egg and stops muscle contractions in uterus that would cause the

body to reject an egg. It is believed that these hormones also affect individual moods [7]. Next, the deposition of fat for both men and women also differ where the fat deposits more around the organs for men while the fat deposits more around the abdomen especially the pelvis as a ring for women. Lastly, the reproductive system of a man and woman is different in term of anatomy and function. Men's reproductive system comprises internal (inside the body) and external (outside the body) parts. The inner part consists of vas deferens (transports mature sperm to the urethra in preparation for ejaculation), ejaculatory ducts (formed by the fusion of vas deferens and seminal vesicles, empty into urethra), urethra (a tube that carries urine from bladder to outside of the body and also excretes semen during sex), seminal vesicles (produce fructose that provide energy to the sperm for motility), prostate gland (contribute additional fluid to nourish the sperm), and bulbourethral glands (make juice to lubricate the urethra and neutralize any acidity that may be present due to residual drops of urine in the urethra). The outer part consists of penis (transport urine and semen outside the body), scrotum (protect testes and provide a sort of climate control system). On the other hand, women reproductive system consists of the vagina (birth canal), uterus (home to a developing foetus), fallopian tubes (pathway for the egg to travel to uterus), and ovaries (located on either side of the uterus which produce eggs and hormones) [8].

It is a broad discussion of gender differences from psychosocial aspect. There are a lot of perspectives or fields to dig into – the psychology, sociology, anthropology and so on. Universal perceived men as being dominant, assertive, risk-prone, tough-minded, cold hearted and emotionally stable while women opposite of those characteristics [9]. (According to [10], women exhibits more nurturing behaviour than men either inside or outside family. Women also tending to be ‘person-oriented’ while men managing to be more ‘object-oriented’. That is why men tend to seek a realistic and investigating nature of work rather than women with artistic and social orientation of work. We are not denying that culture plays essential role in distinguished and stereotyping the part of both genders. In addition, [11] based on his shared experienced with men of different types of works and positions even the inmates stated that deep inside them, they feel the need and responsibility to provide, protect and love women especially the love one. It is already there – since they know what is permitted and could be done – and the society helps it to develop. For such, the family plays the most significant role thus they could manifest the feeling while growing up. It is a universal understanding that women are opposite to men in different aspects and that amusingly how harmoniously we live in this world.

Al-Quran in chapter 30 and 49 verses 21 and 13 respectively (Rum, 30:21; al-Hujurat, 49:13) clearly stated that Allah creates men and women with different characteristics for them to be able to love, find tranquil and complete each other needs and desires. These verses are perfect exclamation in explaining differences of men and women from different aspects. As such, the physical and biological differences are intended to meet sexual and psychological need while personalities differences as to meet the psychosocial needs of an individual.

### **3. ISLAM GLOWRIFIES WOMEN**

According to [12], feminism believes in social, economic and political equality of the sexes. Feminism originates from the West however manifested worldwide, represented by various institutions. The institutions are committed to activity on behalf of women’s right and interest.

It is believed that women treated badly since the ancient world. In the third century BCE, the Roman consul, Marcus Porcius Cato denied repealing laws limiting the use of expensive goods by women with the excuse of women might be superior if they were treated equally as men. For the record, only lone voice spoke out against the inferior status of women. However, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century in France, the first feminist philosopher, Christine de Pisan made a bold call for female education. Her call triggered a massive so called ‘women-debate’ forum, expanding throughout Europe. Later, in the Age of Enlightenment, the movement became vigorous and society paid more attention. The exclamation received a positive response from the authorities [12]. Alas, women still claim that they received injustice treatment until now especially the blacks who were denied to work as some companies never hired black women [13]. As the world develops and changes, the ancient perspectives and stereotypes of women also improving yet the ‘norm’ is still there, existing and haunting minor groups in the society [13].

It is a long history of feminism’s movement. Nowadays, the world seems to treat women better – education, career, luxury life, being a leader and so on – recognized, appreciated and celebrated with the declaration of Women’s Day. Although the world nowadays treats women better, yet some individuals or institution still demand other matter based on defending women’s rights. Recently, some influential men such as Parker Pillsbury, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Mark McGowan and etcetera worked together with feminist making the movement more legitimate. It is a long and hard way for western society to acknowledge and elevate women as they deserve.

Opposite to the western, Islam from the very beginning glorifies women. Since the creation of Adam and Eve, Allah has demanded them to live happily together. Alas, they make a mistake and as a lesson, Allah sent each of them to a separate part of the earth. They continuously, sincerely repent, and Allah is Merciful, He forgave and reunited them to live happily once again (al-Baqarah, 2:35 – 38). One of the lesson from this story is that both men and women were treated equally – have the rights to repent and forgiven (al-Baqarah, 2:37). In latter verse, Allah clearly stated that He will forgive anyone that seeks for His forgiveness sincerely (al-Baqarah, 2:160). Besides, Islam gifted an equal opportunity for both men and women to worship and do good things as manifestation of faith in Allah (al-Ahzab, 33:35; al-Ghafir, 40:40; al-Hadid, 57:18) – and of course rewarded equally (Ali Imran, 3:195).

As feminist movement seek for equality in the aspects of social, economic and politic, this paper discussed each demands from Islamic perspectives. First, the feminist demands education for women. However, Islam since forever encourages each every individual to learn, to be educated. Even the first revelation upon appointed as apostle of Prophet Muhammad pbuh is to know (al-'Alaq, 96:1 – 5). Prophet Muhammad pbuh also emphasized people around him including his wives and daughter to learn. He even invited women regardless of age to pray at the mosques and join his lecture. That way, he was able to delivered, shared and answered any problems or concerns arise by his people. Hadith number 434 narrated by Muslim stated that Ummu Atthiyyah said that Prophet Muhammad asked her to invite all women, young or old to pray for Eid Fitri and Adha together with him in the mosque [14]. Noted that mosque also serves as community centre where intellectual and community activities were held aside from worship purpose. People at that time love to sit around the prophet after prayers to listen or raise questions as to clear their understanding about Islam so they could improve their quality of worship as well as life. On the other hand, there are repetitive words of *ulul albab*, *ulin nuha*, *ta'qilun*, *ya'lamun*, *'ilm* and so on in the Quran which means intellectual or knowledgeable people. Thus, Islam wants every individual to be educated regardless of gender and background. By being knowledgeable, individuals know Allah and at the same time increase their faith in Him. Allah also stated that He blesses and rises up the ranks of intellectual people (al-Mujadalah, 58:11).

Next, the normalizing of sexual objectification or harassment was demanded to be stop by the feminist. Sexual objectification is the act of treating a person solely as an object of sexual desire without regarding their personality or dignity [15, 16]. The claim was made by [17] in 1997 as they stated that because of

sexual objectification, women learn to internalize an outsider's view of their bodies as the primary view of themselves. Their body being expose to the public through advertisements, television programs, beauty contests and etcetera while brazenly judged [15]. [18] claimed that sexual objectification lead to adverse psychological effects and self-image because of the belief that their intelligence and competence not (or never) being acknowledge by the society. This received different responses as some of the women built their self-confidence when received likes and praises for their self-photos uploaded to social media [18]. Hence, this demand seems has a long and complicated way to accomplish.

As the demand of feminist to stop sexual objectification and harassment, Islam provides guidelines to prevent women from this humiliation. Firstly, Islam commanded women to cover their aurat (the whole body except palms and face – according to Syafie's sect) as clearly stated in the Quran chapter 24 verse 31, chapter 33 verse 59 (an-Nur, 24:31, al-Ahzab, 33:59). Why Islam demand women to cover their aurat? According to [19, 20, 21], the main reason is because women's beauty effectively triggers men's syahwat (lust) as women are the needed element of passion in every man naturally. By covering their body, there is nothing to glance, admire or drool at – not to mention to flirt. Instead, they respect women more. Other than the whole body, Islam command women not to talk seductively towards their ajnabi (permitted man to be married) as the behaviour also could triggers men's syahwat. This situation stated clearly in the Quran by chapter 33 verse 32 (al-Ahzab, 33:32). Thus, women should use their normal – plain tone of voice when talking to their ajnabi. Besides, Islam advices women to not make a dazzling display (enough with simple adorn) while in public as stated in the Quran through chapter 33 verse 33 (al-Ahzab, 33:33). All these orders subject when women in public; as such the opposite while women being with her husband as to please him (an-Nur, 24:31). As Islam presents guidelines for women, men being strictly ordered to lower their gaze and guide their modesty – that will make for greater purity for them (an-Nur, 24:30). It is clear that Islam teaches all humanity to live a decent life with respect to each other – no discrimination.

Feminism demanded for employment as an economic equality. Western women still facing discrimination in employment. [13] claims that western society is still biased against women and races as they being discriminate and mostly the blacks. Women regardless their competence and intellectual as valid qualification for specific post seems denied purposely because of their gender and race although the world moving to the new millennium [13]. Perhaps

this situation improving as the paper was discussed the topics of 30 decades ago.

Opposite to the western situation, Islam permitted women to work; have career either to support themselves or their family [21]. For record, the first wife of Prophet Muhammad pbuh named Khadijah was a successful businesswoman. Her businesses spread across the Arabs regions. Before being her husband, Prophet Muhammad pbuh used to manage one of her business. She was attracted to the Prophet Muhammad's personality and business skills so she proposed to Prophet Muhammad. After the marriage, they manage the business together until she died [22, 23]. Meanwhile, Asma', daughter of Prophet Muhammad's best friend named Abu Bakar helps her husband, Zubair al-Awwam in managing their wheat fields [21]. On the other hand, during the reign of Caliph Umar al-Khatib, he appointed a woman named as-Syifa as finance officer [21]. Also in the Quran, chapter 28 verse 23 tells the story of two sisters waiting for their turn to water their flocks. They have to manage their communities as their father was an older man and have no strength to work. These cases proved that Islam demanded women to be educated and permitted them to have career although have family to manage at the same time. Women's competence and intelligence were appreciated and acknowledged by Islam. In the same time, Islam guides women (also for men) in choosing a career that complies with the shariah (Islamic law) as discussed by Al-Qaradhawi [21];

- a) Does not relate to syubhah (indefinite) or haram (prohibited) things such as alcohol, prostitution, manipulation, riba' (usury) and etcetera.
- b) Obey the guidelines of being in public such as covers the aurat, the manners in communication and socialization.
- c) Do not neglect the responsibilities as a daughter, a wife and a mother.

Lastly, feminist demands for positions in politic. The order means that women should be given the opportunity to involve with the country's management; their idea and voice to be heard and taken into account – especially with the legislation – for the sake of the national well-being [13]. As nowadays, more women appointed for more significant and essential positions either to lead a department, organizations or even a country. For example, Margaret Thatcher (former UK Prime Minister), Angela Merkel (Germany Chancellor to date), Jacinda Ardern (New Zealand Prime Minister to date), Marry Barra (CEO of General Motors), Melanie Kreis (CFO of Deutsche Post DHL Group) and so on – indicates that world recognized and acknowledged their ability and competency better now.

The improvement in the western society was long ago experienced by Muslim women. Chapter 27 verses 23 to 44 of the Quran told the story of Balqis, the king ruling Saba' kingdom who converted into Islam once she met with Prophet Solomon. She was successful in leading her kingdom with the people lived in prosperous. Islam appraised each every individual's ability and competency, thus however prominent and influential the positions are, Islam never forbid women to take the challenge as long complies with the shariah, being responsible and committed [21]. As Islam glorifies women, more Muslim women bravely take on the challenge of holding essential positions lately. For example, Reema Bandar al-Saud (ambassador of Saudi Arabia to USA), Wan Azizah (former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister), Shaikha al-Bahar (CEO Kuwait Bank of National), Shaikha Lubna al-Qasimi (Minister of State for Tolerance, UAE), Aireen Omar (President of Air Asia Group Digital) and so on.

However, Muslim women never be loud in demanding the right to be appointed as a leader because of the self-awareness of their competency and ability as they also perceived that the responsible as a mother itself quite challenging and this already be reminded by Allah in the Quran (al-Baqarah, 2:233; an-Nisa', 4:135). On the other hand, Allah stated that He created man with the quality to be a leader. Allah entrusts men to protect and provide for his family – the smallest unit of society (an-Nisa', 4:34). This statement was totally agreed by [11] with the claim a man will showed his love by providing, loyalty and sex. So, it is the nature and naturally men who supposed to be the leader, holds the positions of a leader. Yet, if a man not qualified thus, a woman who has the competency for the job, and then there is no prohibition in Islam. Islam never denies.

#### **4. WOMEN AND HIJAB**

Hijab (veil) is a sensitive issue for the both Muslim and non-Muslim. As France being the first country banned hijab, the awareness and respect for whoever wearing hijab are increasing among the Western [24]. In France, the banning movement started in 1989 and in 2003, Sarkozy confirmed that wearing the hijab would continue to be officially banned – and we struggle to understand why hijab received such massive attention in the France parliament. Even the nuns are prohibited to wear hijab for the ID photo. Otherwise, a neighboring country such as the UK, Sweden, Germany and so on do not show any problems with the issue of wearing [25] – however, women in those countries who wear hijab admit that they still receive injustice treatment from society [24].

There are several perspectives on hijab. Most of the westerns see hijab as a violation of dressing rights.

Some perceived hijab as fashion while some respected that hijab is a manifestation of complying the religion doctrine. As for Muslim, hijab is a command in Islam (an-Nur, 24:31) and thus it becomes the way of life; the dressing code. We, as Muslim women perceived that wearing hijab never be a burden because of;

- a) Hijab gives some sense of safety – men never have a chance to glance at the chest.
- b) It feels weird to walk around without something covering your head but all other part of the body was covered completely – liked being stripped in public.
- c) Hijab complete the fashion – different ways of wearing hijab could be applied as long complies with the shariah which is to cover the chest.
- d) It is a significant benefit when breastfeed in the public – since Islam is the polite and shy religion.
- e) Or at least, hijab functions as a cover for head defects (hair damage, dandruff etcetera) while being in public. So, it kinds improve one’s self-esteem to be in public.

However, there are some of Muslim women do not comply this command. They claimed that it is they choice to wear hijab or not. With this claim, then it is up to the individual as Islam provides complete guidelines to live a prosperous life to the fullest. However, with the attitude to argue with Allah’s command, it is their choice to be an open as disputer. Allah already reminded this kind of humanity attitude in the Quran by chapter 16 verse 4 (al-Nahl, 16:4).

We hoped by this explanation, the world being more positive thus; accept the norm of wearing hijab among Muslim women. We never considered the command of wearing hijab as a burden, let alone against the rights of dressing. Otherwise, hijab boost self-esteem, the feel of safety and being respected while in public. Furthermore, Muslim women were commanded to wear hijab while in public; the command lifted when women with their mahram (prohibited man to get married to) or family. The argument was raised when people misunderstood Islam. Each commands in Islam for the benefits of all humanity; Allah never gain any advantage from human being (al-Baqarah, 2:139; Yunus, 10:108; al-Iara’, 17:7).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Islam is a religion that perfectly fulfills human nature; a complete guide for a human being to live a prosperous life. Islam gives every human right to live their life as long complies with the shariah. As the purposes of shariah (maqasid shariah) are to preserve one’s religion, life, intellect, lineage and property [26]; Islam treated every human being equally, no discrimination, no favourism. Besides, it is human nature to love goodness because Allah also loves

people who do good (al-Baqarah, 2:195; Ali Imran, 3:134:148). So, every command is for the benefits of all human being.

Allah created human with all good quality along with a touch of desire. Alas, most human swept away by their lusts. They see and listen to the revelations but refused to understand and take lessons (al-An’am, 6:25). Thus, this stubbornness and rebellious attitude of humanity (men or women) defiles the sanctity of Islam (Ali Imran, 3:182; al-A’raf, 7:56; Rum, 30:41; Muhammad, 44:22). Then, it leads to the Islamic teaching misunderstanding, and those irresponsible people take this opportunity to incite by claiming that Islam denies women rights – unjustly treats women. We declare that such misunderstanding of Islam is a form of ignorance, so never get involved with this stupidity.

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