

Women's Role In The Society

Introduction

The issue of women's participation in the society - including their role in the Islamic organizations, the masjids and the various outdoor communal services - has been subject to much debate between people who have enormously different backgrounds and visions.

Some people want the Muslim women to be just like the western women, with no boundaries or rules guiding their involvement in the society or mixing with men. Others want from the Muslim woman to be locked in her home for house work, which some women obsessively perform from sun up till they pray isha and then drop unconscious in bed.

Often times you find people on both ends of the spectrum quoting proofs from the Quran and Sunnah that would support their opinion and show the weakness of the opponent's opinion. In this article I will embark on presenting the proofs used by both teamsⁱ, from the Quran, the Sunnah, the scholarly opinions and rational proofs as well. I hope that this approach will lead me and those who may read this article to a more balanced position regarding this sensitive and critical issue that is loaded with much emotions and unfortunately little impartiality.

Necessary principals to agree upon

There should be no difference between us on the obligation of following the Quran and the Sunnah. And there should be no disagreement over the approach to reports. As Sunni Muslims we accept all that comes to us from the Prophet and deemed authentic by the great scholars of hadeeth. If we don't agree on this fundamental, the any dialogue is a mere waste of time until we do.

We should have respect for the scholars of Islam. This doesn't mean any one of them is infallible, yet their opinions are to be regarded with respect and their consensus – as agreed upon - is to be regarded as a proof. Those who may have the delusions that the scholars of Islam across the generations conspired to twist the evidences and change the religion in favor of, or against a particular gender because of their biases, such people will need to study the history of those scholars, and learn to appreciate their efforts and sacrifices which Allah used to preserve his final message as He promised. Before that, it may be quiet hard to have any productive dialogue with those conspiracy theorists.

The prohibition of all means to evil (sadd al-tharae') is a concept that is well established in al-sharee'at. Based on that, if the Muslims find that a particular practice or behavior leads to evil, they must forbid it. This concept however may be abused to make impermissible much of what Allah made permissible. The application of this concept must therefore be left to those most grounded in knowledge.

A truth seeking Muslim should never look for and follow the mistakes of any scholar. Many times people take the opinion of a particular scholar because it agreed with their pre-set conclusions or desires. They often do that at the expense of casting away proofs from the revelation and expert legal opinions of hundreds of scholars known to be superior in knowledge to the one they chose to follow. Impartiality is a necessary quality for the seeker of the truth. Submission, which is the essence of Islam, is to put aside your own preferences and seek Allah's judgment and that of His Messenger. It was reported that the Prophet (May Allah bless him and

give him peace) said: "إني أخاف عليكم ثلاثاً وهي كائنات: زلة عالم، وجدال منافق بالقرآن، ودنيا تفتح عليكم" "I fear for you from three things, and they will come, a mistake of a scholar, a hypocrite arguing with Quran, and the pleasures of lie given to you in abundance."ⁱⁱ

It is essential for the Mufti who forbids the people from unlawful practices to guide them to the permissible alternatives, as Ibn al-Qayem said:

" من فقه المفتي ونصحه إذا سأله المستفتي عن شيء فمنعه منه وكانت حاجته تدعو إليه؛ أن يدلّه على ما هو عوض له منه، فيسدّ عليه باب المحذور ويفتح له باب المباح وهذا لا يتأتى إلا من عالم ناصح مشفق قد تاجر مع الله وعامله بعلمه"

"It is a sign of the Mufti's good understanding to provide alternatives when he forbids something he was asked about, and the one who asked him needs it. This can only come from a scholar who is caring and compassionate, one who trades with Allah and worships him with his knowledge"ⁱⁱⁱ

If not in conflict with Islam, the customs and habits of people are to be considered and respected. This concept is one of the legal principals^{iv}. This means that we should not condemn a practice of a people that is not in conflict with Islam because it is unlike ours. This also means that many times, because of our cultural diversity, we will have differences in the application of certain rules within the bounds of that which is permissible. Such differences are to be tolerated by people on both ends of the allowable spectrum.

The rights of women have been usurped by men for centuries in many parts of the Muslim world, and in many areas of life. This is because of the people's ignorance of Islam and lack of piety. For women to rebel against Islam itself would be devastating to their cause, since they would be side lining their greatest supporter in their pursuit of justice. Women as well as men interested in their rights need to familiarize themselves with the correct Islamic position on various women's issues to avoid miscalculated moves that are not unexpected from reactionary people who lack the guiding knowledge.

"There should be no condemnation in matters of *ijtihad* (expert legal opinion)"^v, that is – as agreed upon – in case the opinions have validity and are substantiated by the revelation. The difference – bound to take place - between us Muslims who follow the afore-mentioned principals should never lead to enmity or disunity.

Now, to be able to understand the issue of women's participation in the Muslim society and the limitations to mingling and how to reach a balanced position in light of the revelation, we will need to go over some of the proofs used by people on the left and right of the spectrum of opinions on this issue. Our intention should never be to arm ourselves with ammunition that we can use in refuting the position of the opponents, since that is not what knowledge is for, but rather find guidance in the various proofs, and reach that moderate and balanced position.

Let us start with proofs often used to justify the involvement of women in the society,

1- from the **Quran**

Allah says:

(وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ)
(التوبة: 71)

" The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise."

In this verse Allah assigns the same social responsibilities to men and women. The function of ordaining good and forbidding bad is one of the

most essential characteristics of the Muslim society. It is without doubt that some mixing will take place if women performed this job to the fullest extent - like 'Aisha^{vi} tried to do when she went out with al-Zubair and Talha, seeking retaliation from the murderers of Othman –. On the other side, it may be said that women may do this within their own circles, and if they came across a man doing wrong they would still – within the bounds of safety and decency – try to prevent him; this practice by itself wouldn't mean that they would intentionally mix with the other sex to spot such deviations, since it is an Islamic etiquette that we don't look for people's mistakes, but when we come across them, we should attempt to stop the evil as much as we can. Also, of note here that many of the reports talking about women taking up a more involved role in the society were about older women. What is proper for a sixty year old lady may not be so for a sixteen year old girl.

Allah said regarding Queen Sheba:

(إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ) (النمل:23)
"I found (there) a woman ruling over them and provided with every requisite; and she has a magnificent throne."

This speech was from the hoopoe to Prophet Sulayman (May Allah bless him and give him peace) and the story is known; also known is how this wise lady was able to lead her people to safety and success. Many argue that there is evidence here that women can do well in leadership positions. It is probably true except for the khaleefship and rulership of states and their likes, for several reasons including the hadeeth in which the prophet said: "A people who choose for their leader a woman will not prosper." (reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim). It is in fact quiet obvious that these positions are not appropriate for women since they entail leading the believers in prayers and jihad. They also entail meeting behind closed doors with men who are Muslim and non Muslim such as the dignitaries of foreign countries...etc. Also the primary role of a woman is motherhood and it would be unbecoming of the leader to leave her sick child home when s/he needs her care and attention. Likewise it would be reckless to postpone important business of the state pending the recovery of her children.

Now, how do we answer the verses regarding queen Sheba? Well, we are not bound by the legislation of the Prophets before us if they conflict with ours, so what do you think of the legislation of the sun worshipers (queen Sheba's people)! The fact that she behaved wisely doesn't mean that women are suitable for this job; many times a less qualified person may

do better in a particular incident. Also this is an anecdote, or one case, and making generalizations from one or few cases is wrong.

There is no harm however that a woman leads a company or even a department or ministry. Such jobs will require some degree of mixing.

2- from the Sunnah

1. The Messenger of Allah said regarding women going out:

(إنه قد أذن لكن أن تخرجن لحاجتكن)

"It has been made permissible for you to go out for your needs"

reported by al-Bukhari from 'Aisha.

Notice that this hadeeth may be used by people who encourage women's liberal involvement in the outdoor life and at the same time by their opponents, since they may say, the Prophet while making permissible the going out of women for their needs, he indicated by *mafهوم al-mukhalafah*^{vii}, that it wouldn't be permissible for them to go out for no need. It is also to be noted that many of the earlier scholars interpreted the hadeeth to mean going out to the lavatory, and that is before they had them in their homes. The permission was given by the prophet in this context, but the wording indicated that they may go out for any needs.

2. Al-Bukhari reported from Abdullah ibn Omar that the Prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

" إذا استأذنت امرأة أحدكم فلا يمنعها "

"If the woman of any one of you asked him to go to the mosque, he should not prevent her"

There is no disagreement over this ruling except from some of the latter hanafi scholars who argued it was disliked for women to come to the masjid. Such opinion is contrary to the Sunnah, thus it must be forsaken.

3. Abu Balj Yahya ibn abi Sulaym said:

" رأيت سمراء بنت نهيك - وكانت قد أدركت النبي ﷺ - عليها درع غليظ وخمار غليظ، بيدها سوط تؤدب الناس، وتأمُر بالمعروف وتنهى عن المنكر. "^{viii}

"I have seen Samra' daughter of Nuhayk – and she was of the Prophet's companions – I saw her wearing a thick dress and a thick head cover khimar, holding a whip in her hand, disciplining people, forbidding evil and enjoining good."

Reported by al-Tabarani in al-Mu'jam al-kabeer and decreed sound by al-Albani.

There is so much debate regarding this report and another one in which al-Shefa' – another female companion – was claimed to have been hired by Omar to monitor the market and enforce the law. There seems to be an origin for these reports, yet there is no agreement on their utility, since the market has both men and women and she could have been hired to watch over the women, this is specially valid for al-Shifa' since there are reports indicating that it was her son who was in charge, and she was helping him. At any rate these reports have to be put in context, and no one should disagree with an older woman *wearing thick clothes* enjoining good and forbidding evil in public.

4. Al-Bukhari reported that 'Aisha and Umm Sulaym used to go out with the Prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace) on his expeditions, and would carry on their backs water skins and go pour it in the peoples' mouths and go back and fill them and go back and pour them in the peoples' mouths. It may be said, this is a time of war and necessity, yet the Muslims could have still done it without the help of 'Aisha and Umm Sulaym. One can say there must have been other men to do that, or at least older women. So there is no doubt that there was some need for them, but not necessity, and this role does require a certain degree of mixing. Similar reports were authentically quoted from Umm 'Ateyah and ar-Rubaye'.
5. Ibn Abbaas reported that the Messenger of Allah (May Allah bless him and give him peace) went out on the day of Eid and prayed two rak'at, without any prayer before them or after. Then he went to the women, with Bilal, and exhorted them and ordered them to give in charity, so the women would throw their jewelry (earrings and necklaces) in Bilal's garment."
6. Al-Bukhari reported that when Abu Usayd wed, he invited the Prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace) and his companions and it was none but his wife Umm Usayd who made the food and waited on them.
7. Muslim reported from Abu Huraira that a person came to Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) and said: I am hard pressed by hunger. He sent (message) to one of his wives (to procure food for him). but she said: By Him Who has sent you with Truth, there is nothing with me (to serve him) but only water. He (the Holy Prophet) then sent the (same) message to another, and she gave the same reply, until all of them gave the same reply: By Him Who has sent thee with the Truth, there is nothing with me but only water, whereupon he (the Holy Prophet) said: (من يضيف هذا، الليلة، رحمه الله)

Allah would show mercy to him who will entertain this guest tonight. A person from the Ansar stood up and said: Messenger of Allah, I (am ready to entertain). He took him to his house and said to his wife: Is there anything with you (to serve the guest)? She said: No, but only a subsistence for our children. He said: Distract their attention with something, and when the guest enters extinguish the lamp and give him the impression that we are eating. So they sat down. and the guest had his meal. When it was morning he went to Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) who said:

(قد عجب الله من صنعكما بضيفكما الليلة)

Allah was well pleased with what you both did for your guest this night. Regarding this hadeeth an-Nawawi said, it indicates the permissibility of the wife eating with her husband and a guest.

8. Al-Bukhari reported from Khalid ibn Dhakwan that he visited al-Rubaye' bint Mu'awedh who said to him, the Prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace) visited me in the late morning of my wedding day, and sat as close to me as you are..."

It may be said that many of these reports may have been before the Hijab was mandated on Muslim women. It is however not likely that the reporters would all fail to mention that some of the implications of those events are abrogated. It is also not right to claim abrogation without proof of dates of both accounts (the abrogating and abrogated) It is therefore permissible when there is no fear of temptation, to sit down in the same room and eat with a foreign man in the presence of a husband or a mahram (non marriageable kin). Would I allow my 17 year old daughter to do that with a 17 year old visitor? Probably not! And I wouldn't allow that based on the evidences mentioned here below. We also don't know exactly how old those female companions were.

Scholarly opinions

- According to Abu Haneefah, ibn Hazm and at-Tabari, a woman may be a judge, with differences between them regarding the spectrum of cases she may handle. This at least would require a certain degree of mixing with a lot of men. (Of note here that the vast majority of scholars rejected that position.)
- Al-Muwaq – a maliki scholar -said: "Malik was asked if a woman may eat with a marriageable man or her slave boy. He said: there would be no harm if she did with some one she is used to eat with.

And she may also eat with her husband and someone eating with him."

Rational proofs

1. The alienation of women from public life will only contribute to their mental demise and social handicap. There must be some recognition of the injustice suffered by many Muslim women because of the above. We need to agree on this to an extent.
2. The neglect of women will lead to the deterioration of the whole society, since they are the first school of all children, who are the future. All people need to agree on the importance of educating our Muslim women.
3. In communities where women are limited within their homes, and not seen taking part in public life, you will find that there usually is more obscenity and cruelty in the way people talk and behave. That is true to an extent. The lack of piety is more of a factor here, however, and you may find other communities that are more obscene and cruel despite being liberal with regards to women's issues. You may find such communities more in the developing world. It appears that poverty and prosperity each comes with a baggage of good and bad influences on the society.
4. Women are one half of the society and underutilizing their talents and capacities in all fields such as medicine and engineering would be a great loss. The other side of this is two fold: no one (of the notable scholars) said they can't work, but if they work they still need to recognize their homes and children as their first priority, and fortunately they are born with genuine talents and as a gender have a trans-generational expertise in home making, thus the argument of underutilization goes both ways, See below for more.
5. Mixing would ultimately lead to the control of the sexual desire and excitability and men and women will mingle without the harms often talked about by people who want to send women back home. Moreover if you separate between them, the rule is that "what is forbidden is more desired" and you will wind up having more moral problems than if you allow unchecked mixing. The other side to this may be obvious after reading the statistics quoted here below about rape and sexual assault in liberal communities.
6. We all find that societies that granted women their unlimited freedoms are more prosperous and advanced. This is true and false! True at the first thought, yet if you study the matter deeper, you are bound to realize the following mistakes with this assumption, the first is that women were given some freedoms yet in the other side

they were exploited and asked to do the job of men and still keep their own job of conceiving, nursing, raising the children and yes the various house keeping functions, which are still the responsibility of the woman to a great extent, and in most western homes. Secondly, the west started on the path of progress long before women were given any rights, so I may claim that their prosperity led rise to giving women some rights, not vice versa.

Now, let us with the same openness and impartiality and the truth seeking attitude balance out the previous reports with the following ones,

1- from the Quran

Allah said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ إِلَى طَعَامٍ غَيْرَ نَاطِرِينَ إِنَاءَهُ وَلَكِنْ إِذَا دُعِيتُمْ فَادْخُلُوا فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوا وَلَا مُسْتَأْنِسِينَ لِحَدِيثٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ كَانَ يُؤْذِي النَّبِيَّ فَيَسْتَحْيِي مِنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُؤْذُوا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَنْ تُنْكَحُوا أَزْوَاجَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ أَبَدًا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ كَانَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمًا (الأحزاب: 53)

..."for anything ye want, ask them from before a screen: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs..." Surat al-Ahzab 33/53.

In explaining this Verse, Ibn Katheer (May Allah have mercy on him) said: "Meaning, as I forbade you to enter their rooms, I forbid you to look at them at all. If one wants to take something from a woman, one should do so without looking at her. If one wants to ask a woman for something, the same has to be done from behind a screen."

Allah said:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ (النور: 30)

Allah says in the Quran: "Tell the believing men and women to lower their gaze and protect their chastity, for that is bound to render them purer. Allah is aware of all that they do."(An-Nurr: 30)

Keeping in line with this injunction of lowering the gaze would require some limits on the permissible mixing.

Allah said:

(وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيراً) (الأحزاب: 33)

"And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger. And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless." al-Ahzab 33/33.

There is no doubt that such etiquettes are required from all Muslim women. It would be very conflicting with the just system of Islam that Allah would want to purify from abomination only the wives of the Prophet.

2- from the Sunnah

The Prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace) enforced separation of men and women, and made provisions to prevent temptation, even at the most sacred place, the masjid. This was done by:

1- Separation of the women's rows from the men's

Abu Hurayrah said that the Prophet (May peace and blessings be upon him) said:"" The best of the men's rows is the first and the worst is the last, and the best of the women's rows is the last and the worst in the first. "Narrated by Muslim

Al-Qurtubi, in al-Mufhim and an-Nawawi, in Sharh Saheeh Muslim, said, regarding this hadeeth, that this is due to the closeness of the women's first row to men and vice versa.

2- Men were asked to stay in the mosque after completion of the obligatory prayer so that women will have enough time to leave the mosque:

Umm Salamah (May Allah be pleased with her) said that after Allah's Messenger (May Allah bless him and give him peace) said" as-Salamu Alaykum wa Rahmatullah" twice announcing the end of prayer, women would stand up and leave. He would stay for a while before leaving. Ibn Shihab said that he thought that the staying of the Prophet (May peace and blessings be upon him) was in order for the women to be able to

leave before the men who wanted to depart." Narrated by al-Bukhari under No. 793.

3- A special door was assigned to women:

Abu Dawood under No. 876 narrates the same hadith in Kitab al-Salaat under the title "Insiraaf an-Nisaa Qabl al-Rijaal min al-Salaah" (Departure of Women before Men after the Prayer). Ibn Umar said that Allah's Messenger (May peace and blessings be upon him) said: "We should leave this door (of the mosque) for women." Naafi' said: "Ibn 'Umar never again entered through that door until he died."

Narrated by Abu Dawood under No. 484 in "Kitab as-Salah" under the Chapter entitled: "at-Tashdid fi Thalik".

4- And even though the Prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace) insisted on allowing women to go out to the mosques, he cautioned that they may only do that while carrying themselves in the most modest and decent manner.

He said:

The Messenger of Allah (May Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

"لا تمنعوا إماء الله مساجد الله ولكن ليخرجن وهن تفلات"

"Do not prevent the female slaves of Allah from the mosques, yet they must go unscented." Reported by Abu-Dawood from Abu Hurairah.

Ibn Daqeeq al-'eid – in commenting on this hadeeth - said: "the prohibition applies as well to that which is like wearing perfume as the elegant clothes and jewelry; Ibn Hajar added: "and mixing with men"

These hadeeths are authentic and clear; now I invite those who ask for mixing in the masjids, what would you do with all of these hadeeths. I would also ask those who are keen to follow as-Sunnah and have no wall or partition between the men and women, did you also consider these prophetic injunctions? Moreover, what would you do with women who would come without proper hijab? Would you prevent them from the masjid? Or would you change our mosques – like the sad case in other worship places – into places for "bird-watching"?

Also during the time of hajj, which is a time of great crowdedness, the companions – unlike us - observed separation and modesty,

'Aisha, the mother of the believers (May Allah be pleased with her) said: "The men on their mounts would pass by us while we [the prophets wives] were with the prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace) in a state of ihram (the state required during hajj), and whenever they get

close to us we would bring down our garments onto our faces. And when they pass us up we would uncover it [our face]" reported by Ahmad and Abu Dawood.

In the streets,

Allah's Messenger (May peace and blessings be upon him) said to the women on his way out of the mosque when he saw men and women mixing together on their way home:

"استأخرن، فإنه ليس لكن أن تحققن الطريق عليكن بحافات الطريق"

Give way (i.e., walk to the sides) as it is not appropriate for you to walk in the middle the road. Thereafter, women would walk so close to the wall that their dresses would get caught on it.

Narrated by Abu Dawood from Abu Usaid al-Ansari, yet for the sake of honesty, we have to admit that this hadeeth does have controversial authenticity, even though al-Albani deemed it good (hassan) based on the combination of mutually strengthening reports.

The Prophet also said:

" الْمَرْأَةُ عَوْرَةٌ فَإِذَا خَرَجَتْ اسْتَشْرَفَهَا الشَّيْطَانُ "

"Women are 'awrah (nakedness to be covered), and when she goes out of her house the devil follows her"

Reported by al-Tirmithi and de-authenticated by several scholars including Ibn Khuzaimah, yet was authenticated by al-Albani and several others.

The last two hadeeths though of suboptimal authenticity are supported by several other reports, including the following.

To further encourage women to stay home - when there is no need to go out - and care for their household, Allah made the woman's prayer at home more vitreous than at the mosque, the Messenger (May Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

"صلاة المرأة في بيتها أفضل من صلاتها في حجرتها، وصلاتها في مخدعها أفضل من صلاتها في بيتها"

It is more excellent for a woman to pray in her house than in her courtyard, and more excellent for her to pray in her private chamber than in her house. Abu Dawood from Ibn Mas'ood, and in a different report he added, and her prayer in her courtyard is better than her prayer in the mosque of her people.

The Quran – as quoted above - does also call on women to stay home. It is however clear from the Sunnah that the wives of the Prophet and the female companions did go out not infrequently, to the masjid, and also to other places to run errands and obtain their needs, etc. thus the references here above regarding staying home are to be understood in this context. So women should be able to go out for their various needs, which certainly include education, and they are encouraged to stay home when there is no need to go out.

At home, the rules of observing separation between women and their marriageable kin are to be strictly implemented,

In this regard, the Messenger of Allah (May Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

" إِيَّاكُمْ وَالذُّخُولَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ فَقَالَ رَجُلٌ مِّنَ الْأَنْصَارِ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَفَرَأَيْتَ الْحَمَوَ قَالَ الْحَمَوُ الْمَوْتُ "

Never enter houses in which there are only women. A man from al-Ansar said: what about the kin of the husband. The Prophet answered: "The kin of the husband is death [i.e. great evil can ensue from mixing with them]"

Being alone with a woman behind closed doors is utterly prohibited by Islam,

The Prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

"ألا لا يخلون رجل بامرأة إلا كان ثالثهما الشيطان"

" When a man and a woman are alone together, the third person is Shaitaan." Reported by Abu Dawood

Recent psychologists' reports agree that when there are two persons of the opposite gender in enclosed surroundings, sexual ideas and connotations are bound to pass through their minds. (Time Magazine, June 1, 1997)

Al-Bukhari reports from Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri that the prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace) assigned a special time for educating women alone.

In general, the Messenger of Allah (May Allah bless him and give him peace) warned us repeatedly from the harms of mingling between the genders and dropping the barriers.

He (May Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

" ما تركت بعدي فتنة أضر على الرجال من النساء "

"I have not left behind me a temptation for men more harmful than that of women" reported by Muslim from Usamah ibn Zaid.

And in warning Ali from the harm of looking twice at a woman he (May Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

" يا علي ، لا تتبع النظرة النظرة فإنما لك الأولى وليست لك الآخرة "

"O Ali, do not look [at a woman] twice, for the first look is permissible for you, and the second is counted against you" reported from Ali by al-Hakim, who authenticated it; al-Thahabi agreed with him.

He also said:

" العينان زناهما النظر، والأذنان زناهما الاستماع، واللسان زناه الكلام، واليد زناها البطش، والرجل زناها الخطأ "

"The eyes commit fornication by looking, the ears commit fornication by listening, the tongue commits fornication by talking, the hands commit fornication by touching and the legs commit fornication by walking" Reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim from Abu Hurairah.

Scholarly opinions

There are certainly countless reports about the evil of mixing and its prohibition, yet we will select some as samples.

The respected Hanafi scholars,

Al-Hamawi prohibited attending mixed weddings. Ghamz 'Uyoon al-Basa'er 2/114.

Ibn 'Abdeen for the same reason prohibited from going out to see the parade of princes. Radd al-Muhtar 6/355.

Some of the latter Hanafis forbade women from going to the masjid, such opinion is to be rejected, since it is in conflict with the Sunnah. If at all acceptable, it would be so for a limited time in a limited location for evading a clear evil.

The respected Maliki scholars

Imam Malik said: "I don't allow a young woman to sit with the jeweler [at the jewelry shop] however, an older woman or a servant may"

From al-Mudkhal by Ibn al-Hajj 4/199.

Khaleel – the great maliki scholar - said it would be mandatory to respond to one's invitation to his wedding party, unless there is clear evil, and he mentioned as one mixing between men and women.

From al-Fawakih al-Dawani, by al-Nafrawi 2/322.

The greatest maliki scholars, Ibn Farhoon and al-Qarafi reported the consensus of the school of Malik that the testimony of those who attend wedding parties in which men and women mix should be rejected.

See, Tabsirat al-Hukkam by Ibn farhoon 1/361; al-Burooq fi Anwa' al-Furooq by al-Qarafi 4/156.

The respected Shafe'ee scholars,

The Shafe'ees went even a step further to separate between men and women in the graves.

Nehayat al-Muhtaj 3/10.

The respected Hanbali scholars,

As for the hanbalis, Ibn Qudamah reports in al-Mughni, from Imam Ahmad, that he was asked about a man eating with his divorcee, and Imam Ahmad forbade it.

Rational proofs

I would like to start this section of my article by praising Allah for this perfect and beautiful religion that He blessed us with, I also thank him for the great scholars of Islam whose majority refused to yield to any pressures and continued to preach the very true and authentic Islam revealed by Allah to his Messenger. In some other religions they continued to retreat in the face of societal pressures until their religion was forced into a far corner, completely away from guiding the people in the various affairs of their life.

One of the fruits of such blessings is the amazing phenomenon of the geographic and demographic distribution of AIDS. You will easily notice that this killer disease didn't spare any peoples aside from the Muslims – with insignificant exceptions – which is because of the Islamic teachings and the Muslims' way of life.

Someone may like to say, what does this have to do with mixing; mixing doesn't have to be lewd or lead to impropriety. The answer is simple, why wasn't it like this for all other peoples. Show me a nation that was able to

have this utopian mixing. This issue is just like the case of wine, you just can't tame it. The people who call for mixing and accept – in public – all of its evil consequences are less contradictory with themselves than those who call for a system that never existed, and is a poor hybrid of various mutually exclusive life styles.

Women exploitation not liberation

What is the relationship between a tractor and an almost naked woman?

None, yet to grab men's' attention to a bill board advertising for tractors, they put next to it a picture of an almost naked woman.

Have you not known that women are put in windows at the countless sex shops throughout the "civilized" world, and they are there for the pleasure of men.

It is quiet known that secretaries are usually women. It is equally known that the appearance of the secretary has a lot to do with her chances of getting hired; do you still wonder why there are almost daily reports about scandals involving celebrities from all walks of life, and people from all socio-economic groups, up to ministers, prime ministers and presidents.

These phenomena and countless others like them are the most degrading and indignifying assault on the entire woman kind.

The very simple question that we as Muslims should ask ourselves is: are women in liberal societies happier, safer or less abused than they were, or their counterparts in the Muslim societies – despite the injustice inflicted upon them – are.

To answer this question I will quote some statistics:

A survey by Parenting magazine in 2000, showed that 93 percent of working mothers would rather be at home with their children; however, because of financial obligations, they could not

Medicine Digest, March 1981 indicated that the number of abortions in the developing world was 13 million and 700 thousand cases in the year of 1976 alone. In Spain and Portugal it is about one million cases per year! In Buddhist Japan, it was one million per year as well.

In the USA,^{ix}

In 2001, there were 249,000 victims of rape, attempted rape or sexual assault. [2000 national crime victimization survey (NCVS)]

Of these 249,000, 102,000 were victims of sexual assault, 63,000 were victims of attempted rape, and 84,000 were victims of completed rape. [2000 NCVS.]

Because of the methodology of the national crime victimization survey, these figures do not include victims 12 or younger. While there are no reliable annual surveys of sexual assaults on children, the justice department has estimated that one of six victims are under age 12.

One out of every six American women have been the victims of an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime (14.8% completed rape; 2.8% attempted rape). A total of 17.7 million women have been victims of these crimes. [Prevalence, incidence and consequences of violence against women survey, national institute of justice and centers for disease control and prevention, 1998.]

About 44% of rape victims are under age 18. Three out of every twenty victims (15%) are under age 12. [Sex offenses and offenders. Bureau of justice statistics, U.S. department of justice, 1997.]

Seven percent of girls in grades five to eight and twelve percent of girls in grades nine through twelve said they had been sexually abused.

[Commonwealth fund survey of the health of adolescent girls, 1998.]

Approximately 66% of rape victims know their assailant. [2000 NCVS.]

Approximately 48% of victims are raped by a friend or acquaintance; 30% by a stranger; 16% by an intimate; 2% by another relative; and in 4% of cases the relationship is unknown. [2000 NCVS.]

61% of rapes/sexual assaults are not reported to the police. Those rapists, of course, never serve a day in prison. [1999 NCVS]

In America a woman is raped every 2 minutes

According to the National coalition against domestic violence web site: Ninety-two percent of American women rank domestic and sexual violence as one of their top priorities.

One out of every three women experiences at least one physical assault by a partner during adulthood, according to a 1996 study by the American psychological association.

Other statistics from the National Medical Series, Book on Psychiatry:

One eighth of homicides are a man killing his wife

6% of women are hospitalized for depression during their adulthood.

The saddest part of this story is that, it is not only women who suffer the evil consequences of their "freedoms" but unfortunately the most vulnerable sector in human societies and that which is most deserving of protection is the very sector of the society that suffered the most from this chaos; these are the children. In a CNN report: More than 100,000 are waiting to be adopted in America.^x

It is common knowledge that obesity, violence and psychological disturbances were increasing dramatically in prevalence among the American children.

What does obesity have to do with women? There is a scientifically proven correlation between eating home cooked food and protection from

obesity, so if only 30% of the food consumed by Americans, including children is home cooked, then there is no wonder obesity will become epidemic.

If a child goes back after a hard day at school, often being bullied by other kids, if he goes back home and find no mother to complain to and receive comfort from, what do you think will happen to that child? Depression!?! Absolutely, and that is why the prescriptions for antidepressant medications reached astronomical figures.

All of the above and much more led some sane people in the "liberal" societies to scream out for an end to this madness, and let us start at the schools.

In an AP report titled "More U.S. Schools Segregating Sexes" by Liz Austin, it said: "For an increasing number of public schools, the formula for a better education requires a little arithmetic: divide the girls from the boys."^{xi}

That is why the government of the USA is trying to push in this direction as you may deduce from this excerpt from a CNN report: "The Bush administration is pushing rule changes to encourage more single-sex classes and schools, marking a significant change in the U.S.

government's 30-year policy prohibiting gender discrimination in public schools."^{xii}

The sad thing is that this is happening at the same time some Muslims are trying to push the society in the opposite direction, and those who don't learn from the history are bound to re-live it!

And for those who believe in science, the BBC reported that a group of researchers at the University of Chicago found that Male sex hormone easily triggered. I find the report quite interesting so I will quote some of it here, and the rest in the footnotes: "Scientists have proved that even the most seemingly innocent chat with a woman can be enough to send male sex hormones soaring. A team from the University of Chicago paid students to come into their lab under the pretence of testing their saliva chemistry. While there, the students got to chat to a young female research assistant. Saliva tests showed the brief interaction was enough to raise testosterone levels by as much as 30%. The more a man's hormone level shot up, the more attractive he later admitted to finding the research assistant. And perhaps more tellingly, the research assistant herself was able to identify those men who found her attractive. The men who she judged to be doing the most to try to impress her proved to be those who registered the biggest jump in testosterone levels. However, little or no change was detected in the saliva of students who chatted with other men. For more see the footnote"^{xiii}

Conclusion and Recommendations

As I indicated in the beginning this was a mental tour not a comprehensive study, and the aim was to acquaint ourselves with the various arguments pro and anti mixing between the sexes. It certainly is not a yes or no question, yet it requires a much more detailed answer.

I believe that mixing between the genders must be forbidden unless there is need for it, and then the right Islamic etiquettes must be strictly observed.

The needs that I am talking about are not the life or death necessities as some may like to think, yet they are much broader than this, including educating the women and allowing them to participate in the progress of their families and nation without compromising their primary function of home making and child rearing.

We have to understand that a 17 year old woman may be required to observe modesty and separation from men more than a 70 year old. Also the male teacher of female students may have to be in more contact with them than the usual for the need of education.

Women may need to observe more modesty with men who are less pious, and men should do the same.

Women and men talking about the management of the masjid or any other legitimate activities are not like those who socialize and joke around with each other; the former are mixing for a legitimate reason.

Men and women may be in the same room, yet each kind will take one side of the room and all must observe modesty; after all, not all Muslims have two separate reception rooms for guests.

The dilemma that is perplexing many people is that they think mixing and women's rights and participation go hand in hand, which is false.

I hope in the following few lines I can make some practical recommendations for the individual Muslim women and the society.

As for the individual Muslim woman,
Have complete confidence that what Allah prescribed for you is what is best for you in this life and the hereafter,

Continue to demand justice from your male partners in the Muslim society, yet don't overstep the limits of the very share'at that is your greatest source of pride and protection.

Don't disturb the civil peace of the society and don't seek help from people who have never been sincere for this nation of ours. Seek help from Allah and then the righteous Muslim men who will stand to defend the rights of the weak as enjoined by our beloved Prophet (May Allah bless him and give him peace).

Excel in your education, since you may need to help your husband or the society if you specialize in some field needed by the society such as health care or education. Even if you will not work, your kids need an educated mother who can nurture them mentally.

Don't forget your main job, the one you were born expert in, which is home making and child rearing.

Protect your chastity and modesty at all times, in the street, the masjid as well as home.

Needless mixing with marriageable men is a means to great evil, so beware for your safety and don't compromise your piety.

For the society,

Let us undo the tie between women's participation and unhealthy mixing with men,

Let us have women's boards in our masjids and organizations, why not, there will be no need for excessive or unhealthy mixing. In most countries the parliaments have two houses, why can't we have the same in our organizations. I am not calling for women to run only their part in the masjid, I am talking about complete participation in which their opinion will be sought in all decision making including purchasing of new properties and renovations etc.

Let us fear Allah in organizing our meetings and conventions and all similar functions; let us observe the right Islamic etiquettes; let us make provisions for ample place for the women, which is equivalent to the men's area in every aspect with even more provisions for the young kids who usually accompany their mothers. The least the organizers of such conferences may do is to list

the Islamic etiquettes of such gatherings on the back of the event schedule booklet.

In our masjids it is not acceptable any more to squeeze our sisters and daughters in small rooms in basements; let us afford them decent space, preferably with a partition^{xiv} that is incomplete to allow the woman who wants to ask an oral question to do so, or even that woman who may want to disagree with the speaker or correct him.^{xv}

We have to afford our Muslim women and girls facilities – such as Muslim community centers – where they can practice their favorite sports, etc while observing modesty; Remember that there is no desert in Minnesota to take your wife out to and run with her like the Prophet did with 'Aishah.

The imams and teachers need to frequently address the rights of women and particularly within the family, because many men abuse some general conceptions and usurp their wives rights in the name of Islam, which is clear of any injustice committed by those men. The imams and teachers need to be advocates for the women, who are naturally weaker than the men and consequently need more advocacy and support.

ⁱ The draw back of this approach is that some people may only take the proofs that agree with their whims and abuse them, yet in this age of the internet, they probably don't need to read my article to find what they seek. It is known to the scholars that some knowledge may not be made public to all people since some of them may abuse it, yet in the information age, we probably have to concentrate on explaining the truth and convincing the people of it, while refuting the misgivings of those who are deviant.

ⁱⁱ Reported by al-Haithami in Majma' al-Zawaed 1/186. has several reports that may raise it to sound hassan li ghairih. See, Jame' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlih, 2/980.

ⁱⁱⁱ I'lam al-Muwaqe'een, 4/122.

^{iv} Al-Ashbah wa al-Nazaer, Ibn Nujaym, 102-114; Usool Madhab Ahmad 736.

^v Al-Ashbah wa al-Naza'er, al-Suyooti, pp 292; Majmoo' al-fatawa, Ibn Taymeyah, 20/221.

^{vi} 'Aisha was wrong in going out with them, yet the point is still valid.

^{vii} When the statement indicates that what is omitted from it should take the opposite ruling of that which is mentioned.

^{viii} Al-tabarani in al-Mu'jam al-Kabeer with a chain deemed good by al-Albani.

^{ix} Refer to: RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) @ www.rainn.org calculation based on 2000 national crime victimization survey. Bureau of justice statistics, U.S. department of justice.

^x <http://www.cnn.com/2004/health/parenting/11/17/adoption.ap/index.html>

^{xi} AP-NY-08-24-04 2136EDT

^{xii} <http://archives.cnn.com/2002/fyi/teachers.ednews/05/09/bush.education/>

^{xiii} **Animal reaction** Testosterone has long been closely linked with the male libido. The researchers say their work is the first time that hard evidence has been produced in this way. It is known that the release of testosterone in animals can embolden them, triggering courtship or aggressive behaviour. The Chicago team believe the same may be true in humans. However, lead researcher Dr James Roney said it was also possible that the release of the hormone was stimulated by a stress reaction. Dr Roney told BBC News Online: "The findings are consistent with the existence of brain mechanisms that are specialised for the regulation of courtship behaviour and thus respond to cues from potential mates with coordinated behavioural and hormonal reactions. "One might call these reactions components of a "mating response" which, if confirmed by future research, could be as basic and significant as, say, the well-known "fight or flight" reaction." Dr Nick Neave, of the Human Cognitive Neuroscience Unit at Northumbria University, said the study was "very interesting". "Other researchers have found changes in male hormone levels after watching erotic movies but this seems to be the first that has attempted to assess hormone changes when males meet women on a more 'normal' level." Dr Benjamin Campbell, an expert in anthropology at Boston University, said it was possible that testosterone made men more bold by suppressing activity in an area of the brain called the amygdala, which controls the stress reaction. Testosterone levels peak in a man by his early twenties, and then gradually diminish. Men who are married or in long-term relationships have lower testosterone levels than those still playing the field. The research is published in the journal *Evolution and Human Behavior*.

Story from BBC NEWS: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3241579.stm>

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^{xiv} Those who oppose the partition will need to strictly follow the guidelines observed in the masjid of the Prophet to prevent unhealthy mingling, as discussed earlier in this article.

^{xv} The report usually quoted from Omar regarding the woman who corrected him during the khutbah doesn't have an authentic chain of narrators, yet there is no proof that women may not do just that.