

# A Comparative Study of Women's Status: Exploring It in Islam and Some Other Religions

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## Abstract

In various religions, including Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Buddhism, women have held different statuses and positions. In Islam, women are recognized as symbols of sanctity and purity and are highly esteemed. This religion expresses equality between men and women and grants women the ability to attain high levels of perfection and divine proximity. However, in examining the status and position of women in different religions, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity, enjoy different views from those of Islam. In this article, we can observe that the status of women in different religions depends on their interpretations and respective rituals. While some religions grant women equal rights and equality, others impose limitations and discriminations on them. These different perspectives demonstrate the complexity and diversity in attitudes towards the role of women in religions. Utilizing a descriptive analytical method, the present study succinctly and effectively elucidates the viewpoints of other religions and Islam regarding the status and position of women.

**Keywords:** Woman, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism

## Introduction

A woman is a reality that has endured many ups and downs throughout history, experiencing everything from being buried alive to being revered as divine. Beyond her human essence, a woman holds a mystery within herself that needs to be unveiled and various aspects of her identity need to be discovered so that she can be recognized and

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introduced as she truly is. In Islam, a woman is seen as a symbol of sanctity and purity, known as a source of goodness and blessings, and she is held in exceptional esteem and respect. The identity of a woman reflects the identity of society, and indeed, valuing a woman and her endless virtues and contributions is equivalent to valuing all segments of society. This appreciation of women is not exclusive to Islam; in the broader culture of divine revelation, women are mentioned with great reverence. For instance, one can refer to Lady Mary (peace be upon her). Lady Mary is introduced as one of the greatest heavenly miracles, and the existence of Jesus (peace be upon him) is considered one of the manifestations of this woman's spiritual perfection. Lady Mary, with her piety and wisdom, never wavered in her attention to her Lord, and because of these virtues, her embrace became the cradle for the nurturing of Jesus (peace be upon him).

Throughout history, women have always faced oppression and discrimination and have endured many hardships. A glance at history reveals that in some societies, women were deemed insignificant and lowly, and even their survival was considered a disgrace to the family patriarch. In such societies, women had neither respect nor dignity. However, in other societies, women were respected and valued. The position and rights of women, as half of the human body and the fabric of human society, are as worthy of examination and deep contemplation as is the understanding of humanity itself. Any analysis and study of the existential dimensions of women—beyond their gender and social roles—is, in fact, an analysis of human life. Recognizing women and their status and position is tantamount to recognizing human dignity and worth. Examining the conditions of women and exploring the dimensions of the lives of this segment of human society is a step towards understanding humanity. Analyzing and understanding the identity of women and becoming familiar with their spiritual status, heavenly emotions, and their natural and human rights are among the important issues that must be recognized and introduced. Essentially, the identity of women is the identity of society, and valuing women is essentially valuing every individual in society. The question that arises here is: What is the perspective of these five religions regarding women?

## **Islam**

Islam brought about a significant transformation in the society of its time, particularly in the lives of women. Women, who previously held little value in that society, were able to participate in various aspects of community life, express themselves, and voice their opinions. Islam granted dignity to women, provided them with a share in all aspects of life, and promoted equality between men and women. It is evident that there is no injustice in the system of creation. No woman can claim that she has been oppressed in the order of existence, and no man can assert that he has been given superiority in the order of existence.

The Holy Qur'an clearly states: "Indeed We sent Our Messengers with clear proofs, and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain justice" (Quran 57:25).

In the Qur'an and Hadith, we encounter statements that introduce women as companions of angels and as figures who received attention from prophets and as blessings from God. This signifies the high human dignity of women. From the perspective of the Qur'an, a woman is a human being endowed with all the benefits of growth and perfection. God created human beings and divided them into male and female. This division of beings into male and female is a general law in the material world.

The Qur'an in numerous verses states that alongside every great man, there has been a great woman. It honors the wives of Adam and Abraham and the mothers of Moses and Jesus. Even when it mentions the wives of Noah and Lot as women of ill character, it remembers the wife of Pharaoh as a great woman who was afflicted by an evil man. Through this, the Qur'an aims to maintain balance in humanity and ensure that the heroes of historical events are not exclusively men. (Motahari, 1995, p.149) Mentioning the names, virtues, and even the faults of women in the Qur'an highlights the importance of women in the history of the prophets. The clearest sign of a woman's perfection is that the Holy Qur'an presents Mary and Asiyah not only as good examples for women but also as role models for all believers, both men and women.

## **Women in Quran**

The Qur'an says about Lady Mary:

كلما دخل عليها زكريا المحراب وجد عندها رزقا قال يا مريم أنى لك هذا قالت هو من عند ... (Quran 3:37) "الله إن الله يرزق من يشاء بغير حساب

"... Every time Zakariya entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said, 'O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?' She said, 'It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account.'"

According to the verses of the Qur'an, angels spoke to Mary and heard her words, and Mary also saw them. Additionally, the Holy Qur'an states:

وإذ قالت الملائكة يا مريم إن الله اصطفاك وطهرك واصطفاك على نساء العالمين. يا مريم اقنتي "لربك واسجدي واركعي مع الراكعين (Quran 3:42-43)

"And [mention] when the angels said, 'O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds. O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord and prostrate and bow with those who bow [in prayer].'"

In continuation, the Quran states:

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِهَا فِي الدُّنْيَا " (Quran 3:45) والآخره ومن المقربين

"And [mention] when the angels said, 'O Mary, indeed Allah gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary - distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allah].'"

It means that numerous angels gave tidings to Lady Mary that she was pure and among the distinguished women of the world. They instructed her to always remember God, to never forget prostration and bowing, and to be among those who are humble in prayer, just as they gave her the glad tidings of the birth of Jesus. Based on the apparent meanings of the Qur'an, the angels spoke to Mary, not only through hidden whispers but also visibly, as these addresses and calls sometimes manifested themselves in tangible forms. "So, We sent to her Our angel, and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man." (Quran 19:17) Thus, when a human being appeared to her, it was in harmony with her. According to the apparent meaning of the verses, Mary alone received these stations, and her station was such that it prompted Zakariya to pray to God for a child, "Thereupon, Zechariah prayed to his Lord." (Surah Al-e Imran, Ayah 38) Then there is the recommendation for devotion, continuous humility, and prostration and bowing, which are signs of Mary's elevated status. (Jawadi Amoli, 2006, p. 127-128).

In Islam, the status of women is so elevated and sublime that she is referred to as a divine sign and a symbol of God.

"...وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا" (Quran 30:21)

"And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them..."

"...وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا"

"And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them..."

"Islam clearly states that the earth and the heavens, plants, and animals are created for humans, but it never says that women are created for men." (Motahari, 1995, p. 151)

The Quran states: "هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَّهُنَّ" (Quran 2:187)

"They are clothing for you and you are clothing for them."

### **Women from Ayatollah Khomeini's Perspective**

Ayatollah Khomeini states:

"The role of women in society is higher than that of men; because besides being active in all dimensions themselves, they train other active groups within themselves." (Khomeini, 1989, Vol. 14, p. 197)

Islam is the first school that declared the position of women in society legally and accepted women as an influential member of society, participating in the construction of society, social affairs, and the important matter of allegiance. Legal rights were declared for her. Both men and women are equally builders of social order, guardians of law, and overseers of public safety in society. Ayatollah Khomeini says:

"We are proud that women, both young and old, and of all intellectual capacities, are present in cultural, economic, and military arenas, side by side with men or even better than them, in the path of Islamic elevation and the goals of the noble Qur'an." (Khomeini, 1989, Vol. 21, p. 397). "In the Islamic system, a woman has the same rights as a man: the right to education, the right to work, the right to ownership, the right to vote, and the right to be elected. In all aspects where a man has rights, a woman also has rights." (Khomeini, 1989, Vol. 5, p. 189)

Islam considers the material and spiritual rewards of women equal to those of men and that they share equal duties and responsibilities. It acknowledges that both women and men are capable of understanding all divine teachings, contemplating the creation of the heavens and the earth, and that the female gender is also capable of acquiring all knowledge.

Ayatollah Khomeini says: "Islam has saved women from the things that existed in the era of ignorance. To the extent that Islam has served women, God knows that it has not served men to that extent. You do not know what women were like in the era of ignorance and what they have become in Islam." (Khomeini, 1989, Vol. 4, p. 427)

"Islam regards women as equal to men, possessing three important characteristics: autonomy, accountability, and aspiration for perfection." (Majmu'eh-ye Maqalat, 2006, p. 54)

### **Women in Hadith**

There are also numerous narrations filled with the compassion and mercy of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) towards women. The Holy Prophet (PBUH), in both words and actions, clarified the status of women in the Islamic society, saying: "Indeed, women are the counterparts of men." (Hanbal, 2010, Vol. 6: p. 256) "النساء شقائق الرجال"

The Prophet of Islam (PBUH) considered one of the criteria for the superiority of a person's character to be how they treat women: "The best of you are the best to their women." Ibn Majeh, 2016, Vol. 2: p. 363) "خياركم خياركم لنسائهم"

It is narrated that whenever the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) came to the house of Fatimah (SA), he would kiss her hand, which indicates the great respect he had for women and daughters. He also said: "If fathers buy something for their family, they should give it to the daughters first because they are more delicate and sensitive."

In the Farewell Sermon, which the Prophet (PBUH) delivered in the presence of a multitude of Muslims in the final year of his life, he said: "O people, you have a right over your women and they have a right over you... Fear Allah regarding women and treat them well." (Al-Harrani, 1416/1995: p. 30) "ايها الناس ان لنسائكم عليكم حقا و لكم عليهن حقا...فا تقوا الله فى النساء و استوصوا بهنّ خيرا"

Islam guarantees the independent personality of women. A husband is not allowed to have a share in his wife's property, except for what she willingly and freely gives to him. (Sabiq, 2008: pp. 218-229)

The Prophet (PBUH) stated: "Do not dislike your daughters, for indeed, daughters are comforting and precious human beings." (Muttaqi, 1981, Hadith 74453) "لا تكرهوا البنات فإنهنّ المؤمنات الغاليات". The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

"Be fair in giving gifts to your children. If I were to prefer anyone, I would prefer women over men." (Bukhari, n.d., Vol. 3: p. 157) "سوا بين أولادكم فى العطيه فلو كنت " مؤثرا احدا لاأثرت النساء على الرجال

### **Equality in Creation from the Islamic Perspective**

According to Islam, all human beings are creatures of God and have been created equal, and thus, they are equal to each other, with no one being superior to another. The human dignity is equal for all. In the Quran, the value of the creation of women is stated to be like that of men, and women have not been created subservient to men, nor does one have superiority over the other except in piety. The Quran states that the creation of men and women is equal and alike, and all human beings are equal, with no inherent differences in their creation, and that men and women have been created from a single soul.

يا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا

"O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed, Allah is ever, over you, an Observer." (Quran 4:1)

According to Allama Tabataba'i, this verse seeks to express that "human beings are essentially the same and, despite their numerical plurality, have originated from one root." (Tabataba'i, Vol. 4, p. 213)

Women are not considered inferior or the second gender in creation, as some accuse Islam of believing. Islam does not assign women a subservient role from the beginning of creation. This notion is a relative and inaccurate misrepresentation of Islamic teachings resulting from carelessness regarding Islamic doctrines. However, it can be argued in response to such claims that, based on the Quran, the creation of Eve (Hawwa) occurred after the creation of Adam, but this fact, which has various interpretations, does not imply the inferiority or subordination of women. The precedence of the creation of men over women is only in terms of temporal appearance, and it cannot be used as evidence that the creation of men generally precedes that of women. Just as the precedence of the earlier prophets over Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is not evidence of their superiority.

According to a group of Muslim scholars and thinkers, the creation of Eve (Hawwa) after Adam is not a criterion for the subservience of women. The sequence of the creation of women after men is a matter of temporal order, not a real and substantive sequence of creation. All individuals have been created equal. The first woman, who is the spouse of the first man, has been created from the same essence and substance as man, not from a different essence or as a subordinate to man. Allah has created the first woman from the same essence that He created all men and women from.

Another verse from the Quran states:

"... هو الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا "

"He is the one who created you from one soul and made from it its mate that he might find tranquility in her." (Quran 7:189)

What is understood from these verses is that both genders are identical and equal in essence and nature, and there is no real distinction or difference in essence and nature between women and men. Allah also values His creation, mentioning the creation of men and women together in a unified manner, sanctifying this creation:

"And [by] the night when it covers and [by] the day when it appears and [by] He who created the male and female." (Quran 92:1-3)

The word "ما" (we) in "وما خلق الذكر و الانثى" (and [by] He who created the male and female) is a verbal noun, indicating that the subject of the oath is creation, not the created beings. Allah swears not by men and women, but by the creation of men and women, which is His action.

Additionally, the Quran states: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." (Quran 49:13)

Here is the English translation of the provided text along with the Arabic Quranic verses:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا ...

"He is the one who created you from a single soul and made from it its mate so that he might find comfort in her." (Quran 7:189)



وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا....

“And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you might find tranquility in them.” (Quran 30:21)

What is understood from these verses is that both genders are identical and unified in essence and nature, and there is no distinction or difference in the truth and essence between man and woman. Additionally, God values His creation and swears by the creation of man and woman together and equally, and He honors this creation:

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَىٰ، وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّىٰ، وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ

“By the night when it covers, and the day when it unveils, and by what He created of male and female.” (Quran 92:1-3)

After swearing by the night and day, He also swears by the creation of man and woman. Since the word ما in “وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ” is a verbal noun, the subject of the oath is creation, not the creature. God does not swear by man and woman :but by the creation of man and woman, which is His act.” (Jawadi Amoli, 2006 (79-78

Additionally, the Quran states: We created humans equally, and if there is any difference, it is in their piety and moral virtues.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا<sup>٥</sup> إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.” (Quran 49:13)

“O mankind” means the very mankind for whom the Quran was sent for guidance, and this verse addresses both the body and the soul, meaning if you want to take pride in the body, both man and woman are created from a man and a woman. Therefore, the creation of a man’s body is not superior to the creation of a woman’s body, nor vice versa.” (Jawadi Amoli, 2006: 85)

The address in the verse is to all people, both men and women, who are fundamentally equal in their creation and possess human potentialities. Both men and women share the same human characteristics and have equal capacities in building their character. Both can be devout believers in God, which is the core of

all values, and both can practice piety, truthfulness, and righteousness. They can attain high character and sublime values, with no difference in their inherent nature or creation.

Moreover, human perfection is a matter of choice, and any individual, through strong will and effort, can achieve it. Women, too, can attain this perfection, which is essentially piety, and traverse all stages of spiritual ascent to reach closeness to God.

Two interpretations are suggested for this verse:

The verse aims to eliminate pride and boasting about lineage. By reminding people that everyone is descended from a single man and woman (Adam and Eve), God seeks to remove the grounds for such reprehensible behavior. The verse aims to negate all forms of class distinction and demonstrate equality. This inherently includes the first interpretation as well.” (Tabataba’i, vol. 18, p. 354 (Arabic edition), vol. 8, p. 487 (Persian edition)) Therefore, the verse intends to convey that all humans are equal in their humanity, and factors such as form, color, race, language, tribe, and lineage do not affect one’s humanity. These factors are merely for identification purposes, and the criterion for distinguishing honor and pride in humans is piety and righteousness.

However, regarding the creation of men and women, Ibn Babawayh Qummi narrates: “Zurara bin A’yun asked Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him), ‘There are people among us who say that God created Eve from the final part of Adam’s left rib.’ The Imam replied, ‘God is far exalted and above such an attribution. Does anyone say that God did not have the power to create Adam’s wife from anything other than his rib, thereby giving a pretext to the critics to say that some parts of Adam married other parts? God created Eve anew after the creation of Adam.’” (Ibn Babawayh, 2015, vol. 3, p. 379)

Although this hadith is lengthy and only parts of it are mentioned here, it contains significant and beneficial points. One of them is that the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib is not correct. God did not say, “I created you from Adam,” but rather, “I created you from a single essence,” from which both Adam and Eve were created. Therefore, it can be said: “The idea of the equality of men and women comes from the Quran, stating that both were created from the same essence, and the Creator of both is the same God, with no superiority of men over women. If some narrations suggest otherwise, they are either not authentic in terms of their chain of transmission or are incomplete in their implication. And even if they are

complete in both aspects, since the issue under discussion is not purely a matter of religious devotion, it cannot be established with a purely speculative and uncertain argument, as such arguments are not useful in scientific matters.” (Jawadi Amoli, 2006: 44) According to these discussions, all humans are equal in their humanity, and factors such as color, race, language, tribe, and lineage do not affect one’s humanity. These factors are only for identification purposes. As emphasized by the Quran, the criterion for distinguishing honor and dignity is piety and righteousness. Nonetheless, the efforts and perseverance of women, especially in various social and political arenas, are the most important means by which they can attain their rightful Islamic position in society.

## **Buddhism**

In the teachings of various sects of Buddhism and among analysts of this religion, there is no uniform view regarding the status of women. Some, like Buddha himself, do not distinguish between men and women in achieving liberation, which is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. However, some Buddhist schools hold a misogynistic and negative view, considering liberation to be exclusive to men.

Some analysts argue that Buddhism, in its essence, does not differentiate between men and women in terms of knowledge and enlightenment. The misogynistic views found in Buddhist teachings are attributed to the influence of patriarchal cultures dominant in the societies where Buddhism spread. Buddhist teachings regard women with respect and assign them special roles as wives and mothers.

From Buddha’s perspective, existence is an eternal cycle without beginning or end, where life is intrinsically accompanied by suffering. The path to liberation from this suffering lies in detachment from worldly attachments and achieving Nirvana; otherwise, a person will undergo repeated cycles of suffering through rebirths. This cycle continues until one is freed from attachments (Ali-Ja’farii & Dehqani-Zadeh, 2019, p. 12).

## **The Nature of Women in Buddhism**

There are three main perspectives regarding the nature of women in Buddhism:

**Equality in Enlightenment:** According to some teachings, Buddha believed that there is no distinction between men and women in acquiring Buddhist teachings and reaching enlightenment. Both are capable of attaining liberation (Chenin Goft Buda, 1378, p. 244).

Misogynistic View: A negative and misogynistic perspective suggests that women can only achieve liberation if they are reborn as men in subsequent lives. Some Buddhist sects adhere to this belief, leading to instances of gender transition among women (Holmes, Booker & Ghaffari, 2005, p. 60).

Separating Misogyny from Buddhism: This perspective seeks to separate misogyny and patriarchy from Buddhism itself, arguing that Buddhism inherently does not harbor disdain or aversion towards women. Instead, the misogyny present in Buddhism is attributed to cultural and patriarchal influences on Buddhist teachings (Holmes, Booker & Ghaffari, 2005, p. 34, 60).

### **The Religious Status of Women in Buddhist Sects**

Initially, Buddhism was predominantly male-oriented. However, with the insistence of some women, Buddha allowed the establishment of special communities for Buddhist nuns, known as bhikkhunis. Some of the conditions imposed on Buddhist nuns included: 1. Acceptance of the monk's way of life and renunciation of the world; 2. Respect and obedience of female practitioners towards male monks; and 3. Women were not granted the right to teach male practitioners.

Buddha even rejected proposals from women suggesting the consideration of lineage as a criterion for respect instead of gender (Ali-Ja'farii & Dehqanizadeh, 2019, p. 20, 23). Despite emphasizing the importance of respecting women, Buddha instructed his disciples to regard women as mothers, sisters, or daughters in order to maintain purity of body and mind (Kyokai, 1999, p. 145).

With the expansion of Buddhism, various schools and orientations emerged within this religion (Pashaei, 2000, pp. 241-252). The Theravada sect continued the individualistic and monastic aspect, while the Mahayana sect, which considered the social aspect, believed that even without renouncing household life, women could attain enlightenment and reach higher spiritual levels (Hekmat, 1963, pp. 79-80). In this sect, there was no prohibition for women or married individuals to embrace Buddhism (Razi, 1965, p. 364). At certain times and in certain regions, granting religious status to women was feasible (Madani & Mahmoodi, 2007, p. 176).

## **Marriage in Buddhism**

Buddhism originated with an emphasis on monasticism and celibacy. Among its various sects, Theravada (Hinayana) does not attach spiritual importance to family life; however, in the Mahayana tradition, marriage, accompanied by adherence to Buddhist teachings, is considered a means of growth and enlightenment for those who cannot live a monastic life (Ali-Ja'farii & Dehghanizadeh, 2019, p. 24, 26). Today, in Japanese society where Buddhism is intertwined with its culture, Buddhist priests' marriages are recognized, and renunciation of household life and monasticism have gradually diminished (Holmes, Booker, translated by Ghaffari, 2005, pp. 34, 60).

According to Buddhism, marriage is a non-religious contract that has existed in societies before. Marriage is not considered sacred in Buddhism because the principle is based on celibacy (Ali-Ja'farii & Dehqanizadeh, 2019, p. 25). Additionally, there is no specific mention of marital privacy in Buddhist teachings (Ali-Ja'farii & Dehqanizadeh, 2019, p. 13). Marriage among Buddhists is recognized according to the customs of each region and sometimes merely by registering in official documents. Buddhists even remain impartial towards same-sex marriages. Monks only offer blessings to the couple during or after the ceremony, and the type of marriage does not matter to them (Ali-Ja'farii & Dehqanizadeh, 2019, pp. 25-28).

In this tradition, although women are revered with angelic appearances, deep within their hearts lie demonic spirits and dangerous traps. Therefore, for a while, they did not accept any women into their religion and proclaimed: "O God, protect us from the evil of Satan, the vile soul, and woman." Their slogan was: "Salvation is not found in the company of women!"

While Buddha accepts women for renouncing the world in a certain way, this acceptance is conditional on two conditions: 1. The conduct of women must generally be supervised by male monks. And 2. Every fifteen days, they must report themselves and their actions to male monks. When Ananda, one of Buddha's most respected followers, asked why women were deprived, Buddha replied: "Beware of women in general, O Ananda! Women are wicked, women are envious, women are miserly and lowly, women are distant from wisdom and thought." When Ananda asked what to do if faced with a woman out of necessity, Buddha replied: "Stay completely awake, if they are elderly, treat them like mothers, and if they are young, treat them like sisters, because a woman is like a

crocodile and a voracious whale that sits in the river of life to catch the swimmer and make him its prey” (Bani Hussein, 1995, pp. 1186-1187).

## **Christianity**

Before the advent of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him), women were looked down upon in human societies, especially in Jewish culture, where women were considered second-class citizens and had no rights (Ashtiyani, 2010, p. 39). At that time, Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) appeared and introduced his religion as a religion of mercy (Tafsir Ahd Jadid, 1357). He treated everyone equally with his love. For him, there was no difference between men and women, masters and slaves, poor and rich (New Testament, Introduction to the Gospel of Luke). Jesus’ loving approach led some people to believe in him from the beginning of his mission, and they remained with him until his ascension to heaven (New Testament, Gospel of Luke 3:8-2). And since Jesus paid more attention to women, they are mentioned more in the Gospels (Merrill C., 1983: Vol 1, 200).

However, the disciples of Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) did not have favorable views towards women, and various versions of the Gospels and the remaining epistles of prominent Christian figures, priests, and different sects and Catholics each have expressed different views on the identity and status of women. In them, they bring up Eve’s creation, deception, and sin (First Epistle to Timothy: 15:2-13). God first created Adam and then Eve. Adam did not deceive, but Eve fell for Satan’s deception and became trapped in sin. For this reason, the Lord brought forth the pain of childbirth for Eve, and on the condition that her faith, love, and piety remained steadfast, she would be saved. In this epistle, Adam is acquitted of all sins and places all sins on Eve as a woman. Christians believe that Eve’s sin plays a fundamental role in the faith of Christians. According to them, Eve’s disobedience and defiance of God’s command led to the mission of Jesus (peace be upon him) on earth. She sinned and then misled Adam to fulfill her request. Therefore, the Lord sent both of them from heaven to the earth, which was cursed because of them. They left their sins, which were not forgiven by the Lord, to all their generations, and therefore, all humans are born sinful. To cleanse humanity from the first sin, the Lord had to sacrifice Jesus Christ (peace be upon him), who was the Son of God, on the cross.

The Christian perspective portrays women as subordinate and inferior to men socially, ontologically, and legally. This ideology fundamentally equates the patriarchal social system with the natural or divine creation system and believes

that any attempt to overturn this system, whether by granting women independence or giving them material rights, is considered rebellion against God.

“We should ensure that women remain subordinate to men, allowing them no authority but to be under the authority of men, and they should remain silent. Adam was created first, then Eve. Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” (First Letter of Paul to Timothy, Chapter 2, verses 11 to 14). No woman had the right to become a nurse, actress, or anything similar, as they did not see external occupations suitable for them (Morris, 2007: 224).

In the letters of Paul and Peter, along with obedience of women to their husbands, loving one's spouse and having respectable behavior, accompanied by respect, are considered the duties of a husband. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” (Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 5:25-33). Peter also says: “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.” (Peter's Letter 7:3). In the church, it was the husband's duty to guard his wife, and the woman was obliged to obey her husband (because) it was man who was created in the likeness of God, not woman, so women should be subject to their husbands (Durant, 1992).

Another point mentioned in Christianity and some historical texts is that the creation of woman was solely for the service of man. Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians 9:11: “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.” “But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of a wife is her husband.” (Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 3:11). Women are deprived of Christ. “For man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.” (Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 7:11). Only men can be the glory of God. “For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.” (Ephesians 23:5) “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” (Ephesians 22:5) “As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” (Ephesians 24:5).

The unconditional obedience of women to men is considered the same as the obedience of men to Christ. Preachers of religious laws used to say that it is

evident that women should be subject to their husbands and almost be their slaves (Durant, 1992: Vol 1, 112-111). Therefore, women are expected to be obedient to their husbands within the family, and obedience to husbands is obligatory for women, just as obedience to Christ is obligatory for men. However, the position of women as mothers holds great importance in Christianity. In the world of Christian art, from ancient times to the Middle Ages, many paintings and images of Mary holding her child have survived. These artistic representations of Mary in the role of a mother reflect the general interest and attention to the role of motherhood ((Holmes, Booker, translated by Ghaffari, 2005: 106-107).

Nevertheless, the birth of a daughter for her father is considered painful and a loss of honor. “Is your daughter disobedient? Be extremely careful with her, lest she cause you to be the laughingstock of your enemies, to be the talk of the town, and to bring shame upon yourself among the people.” (Catholic Gospel, Chapter 26, Verses 10 and 11). The Catholic Gospel states: “The birth of a daughter is a loss.” (Catholic Gospel, Chapter 3, Verse 22).

One of the laws mentioned in the Old Testament is the laws of selling daughters as slaves, for which they have established laws, and Christians consider these laws to be from God (Book of Exodus, 7:21). The church considers her as a slave and servant, and priests always advised people to avoid and be safe from her. A famous proverb among Christians is that “God, afflict me with any plague but the plague of the heart, and involve me in any mischief but the mischief of a woman” (Mostafavi, 2009: 378). The wickedness of women is well evident from this proverb among Christians. Among some Christians, not only is there no talk of equality between men and women, but there is also doubt about their nature and humanity, as “the Catholic religion believed that the soul of man differs from that of woman, and only Mary (peace be upon her) among women has a soul equivalent to that of men, and the souls of other women have a state between human and animal.” (Alaviqi, 2006: 37).

According to the Gospel, if a man makes a covenant with God, he must fully fulfill it and must not break his covenant. However, a vow by a woman is not obligatory for him, and it must be with the consent of her father. If she lives in her father’s house or is married, it must be with the consent of her husband. And if her father or husband deems her covenant and vow null and void, any guarantee made by her will be void and meaningless. “But if her father opposes her on the day he hears of it, none of the vows or pledges that she has made will stand... if her husband nullifies them on the day he hears of them, then whatever proceeds from



her lips concerning her vows or concerning her pledge of herself shall not stand. Her husband has made them void.” (Book of Numbers, Chapter 30, Verses 2 to 15).

In general, in the Bible, women are depicted as being created in a lower position than men. “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.” (Genesis, Chapter 2, Verse 7) “Then the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’” (Genesis, Chapter 2, Verses 21-23) “So when God saw that Adam was alone, He said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’ Then the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.” (Qoli Khan Qizilbash, The Gospel of Barnabas, Chapter 39, Verses 30-32)

## **Judaism**

In Judaism, according to the Torah, man is created as the rightful heir, as woman is a part of nature, but man is superior to nature. According to these beliefs, women lose the privilege of presence in the ideal paradise because women who qualify to live in that land are reborn as men.

The Talmud describes the position of women as follows: “A person is obligated to recite these three prayers every day: Blessed be God who made me a Jew, who did not make me a woman, and who did not make me ignorant or unlearned.” (Talmud / 177) In the view of Judaism, the role of women is confined to household affairs, and the only way for a woman to achieve perfection is to encourage her husband and children to learn the Torah: “How do women earn merit and distinction? By sending their children to the synagogue to learn the Torah, and by persuading their husbands to learn the divine laws in the presence of scholars.” (Talmud / 178)

In the Torah’s view, woman is the second gender and derived from man’s body, and the purpose of creating woman is to accompany and assist man. A virtuous woman is a crown for her husband. (Old Testament, 1981: Book of

Proverbs, Chapter 12, Verse 28) In the Torah, it is stated that when man could not find a mate among the creatures, God took him in a dream and took one of his ribs and created Eve from it, and Adam realized that this being is of his flesh and bone, and called her woman.

The extremely negative role of female descendants of Eve is expressed in a sermon attributed to Prophet Solomon as follows:

“I found a woman who is like traps and snares, whose heart is like nets and whose hands are chains. She is more bitter than death. She who is approved by God - Eve - has been portrayed in Jewish narratives as an infinite source of negativity towards women, and all women have been considered as those who inherit sin, deceit, and deception from their mother, Eve, and as a result, all of them are dishonest and morally low. But the sinner will be caught by her. Now the preacher says; that I have found this, after counting one by one until I find the quality of judgment, that my soul has been searching for her until now and cannot find her. That’s because out of a thousand men, I found one righteous woman, but I did not find one righteous woman among them all.” (Sermons of Solomon, Chapter 7, Verses 26-28.)

However, in the sacred texts and ancient Israelite literature, we encounter a form of matriarchy, but this does not imply power and authority for women; rather, it refers to the power of women within the family. In these writings, it is the mother who determines the individual’s identity and even the tribal identity. The stories of Hagar and Rachel illustrate this point. Hagar is the Arab Ishmaelite’s grandmother, while Rachel and Leah also give rise to Israelite tribes. (Exodus 15/22) Mishnah and Talmud reveal the limited rights of women. They did not send their daughters to school, and acquiring any knowledge, especially dangerous knowledge, was considered undesirable. Nevertheless, private tutoring for females was allowed. (Durant, 1988) Women’s social activities were prohibited, and they were not allowed to hold executive or judicial positions. (Ishtayn, 2004) It is mentioned elsewhere that since the woman’s sphere of activity was in her home, there was fear that “if a woman devoted her time and energy to studying, she might neglect household duties”. (Abraham, 2003, p.198) Extremist views in Jewish religious and cultural society of the time-imposed restrictions on women in the realms of intense male dominance, as evidenced by the outright prohibition of girls’ schools. (Al-Masiri, 2004) Consequently, girls were not admitted to religious schools, and as a result, they were not socially or religiously privileged.

What is seen in the holy books is that some worship is reserved only for men. However, prayers of children and women and servants are mentioned equally. Women are exempt from studying the Torah. (Talmud) The heart of Judaism is the Torah, and the Torah means the law. But according to the Talmudic rabbis, they strongly adhere to the belief that it is better to burn the words of the Torah than for women to benefit from it. And whoever teaches his daughter is like teaching her lewdness. Women did not have the right to pass through the temple - beyond the threshold. They were not allowed to participate in sacrifice ceremonies, nor were they allowed to witness these ceremonies. Women were considered lower than men in Jewish culture. The study of the holy books and Jewish texts of that time confirms this fact. (2 Samuel, 13,21/22)

In the corrupted Jewish scriptures, woman is considered inherently flawed and never a source of happiness; rather, she is bitter and unpleasant, much like death to man. Essentially, in the Jewish religion, women were not regarded as having any personality or status because some unjust human laws replaced divine laws in the sacred books. Otherwise, it is clear that the goal of the great prophets was to establish justice and eradicate all forms of oppression and injustice from society, and these honorable figures never advocated for oppression against women.

According to one of the rabbis: "Where the foot of the law was present: 'One hundred women were equal to one man as a witness'." Jewish women's property rights during the Talmudic period were as limited as English women's rights in the eighteenth century! The income and earnings of any property they owned belonged to their husbands!" (Durant, 1992, Vol. 4, p. 426) Jewish rabbis consider the husband's right to his wife's property as a secondary consequence of the husband's ownership of the wife. If someone becomes the owner of a woman, do we not conclude that he also owns her property? And if he acquires a wife, does he not acquire her property as well? (Swidler, 1976, p. 164-165) The Talmud describes the financial situation of the wife as follows: "How can a woman possess anything of her own when she belongs to her husband? Everything in the husband's possession belongs to the husband, and whatever belongs to her (the wife) also belongs to the husband... The income and whatever she earns in the streets belong to the husband. The property in the house, even the crumbs of bread on the table, belong to him (the husband) ... If she hosts a party at home and provides food, she has stolen from her own husband." (Talmud / 62)

## Zoroastrianism

In Zoroastrianism, the position of women is often misrepresented by Zoroastrian-influenced and conservative currents, falsely claiming equality of rights between men and women in the Zoroastrian faith. Some individuals, willingly or unwillingly, believe in these baseless claims, while this assertion - the equality of rights between men and women in Zoroastrianism - is akin to a joke rather than reality. It is worth noting that in Zoroastrianism, women are considered descendants of Ahriman, the evil spirit, and in Zoroastrian law, women have often been subjected to ridicule and insult (Dustkhah, 2012, Vol. 2, p. 852). However, it is interesting to note that in the Gathas, the relationship between husband and wife is defined in a specific way that is open to criticism and examination.

In the Avesta, in the Gathas, Yasht 44, verse 9, the word “Paiti” is mentioned as an attribute of Ahura Mazda, meaning God and Lord. In fact, Christian Bartholomae interprets this term as meaning “master” (Pourdavoud, 2005, p. 201), Ibrahim Pourdavoud (the father of Iranian Avestan studies) interprets it as “Lord” (Pourdavoud, 2005, p. 514), and Professor Shushtri also takes this word to mean “God” (Shushtari Mehrin, 2000, pp. 132-273). Abtin Sassanfar has written that the word “Paitiš” in the genitive case is derived from the root “Paiti,” meaning master, owner, or lord (Abtin, 2011, p. 633), which is also stated by Ibrahim Pourdavoud (Pourdavoud, 2002, pp. 244-245).

Now that the meaning of this word has been clarified, let us look at the Gathas in the Avesta, Yasht 53. In the third verse of this hymn, Zarathustra tells his youngest daughter (Pouruchista) that he has chosen Jamaspa as her husband (Firooz Azargoshsp, 2000, p. 106), and in the fourth verse, the young girl says that she has also accepted Jamaspa as her husband (Pourdavoud, 2002, p. 245). This word is derived from the root “Paiti,” as mentioned. As stated, it means great, master, owner, or lord (Pourdavoud, 2002, pp. 245-244). Therefore, the daughter of Zarathustra says that she has accepted Jamaspa as her husband (or lord), which is synonymous with God! (Pourdavoud, 2002, pp. 245-244).

In conclusion, the daughter of Zarathustra says, “O Pouruchista, from the lineage of the Holy Horses from the family of Spenta, O youngest daughter of Zarathustra! Mazda Ahura has given him to you as lord and husband, who loves you with pure intention, righteousness, purity of heart, and faith. So, go and counsel wisely with your intellect and behave with pure love and complete awareness.” (Firooz Azargoshsp, 2000, pp. 105-106)

## **The status of women in Zoroastrianism: The humiliation of suffering women in the Zoroastrian religion**

One of the behavioral teachings in Zoroastrianism that indicates the status of women in this faith is the insulting treatment of women who give birth to a stillborn child. Women, in addition to enduring the physical pain and suffering caused by bodily harm, must also endure the ridicule and insults of their surroundings. In the Avesta, Vendidad, Fargard V, paragraphs 45 to 48, it is mentioned that Zoroaster asked Ahura Mazda what the Mazdapriests should do with a woman who gives birth to a stillborn child? Ahura Mazda responds that they should keep this woman thirty steps away from water, fire, and their people, even in a place where cows and sheep pass by. They should build a wall around this woman. The first food for this woman should be three, six, or nine cups of filthy water (cow's urine) with ashes. This woman should not drink water until three nights. And she should remain alone until nine other nights and live separately from the Mazdapriests. Then she must wash herself and her clothes with the urine of a male cow and water to become clean. Of course, no one else has the right to use her clothes except unclean people! (Darmesteter, 2005, pp. 127-130).

Even more surprising is that in paragraph 70 of Fargard VII, Zoroaster asks Ahura Mazda: "O Lord of the Universe, O Asha, if the impure body of that woman develops fever or suffers from the dual afflictions of hunger and thirst, is it permissible for her to drink water?" In paragraph 71, Ahura Mazda responds that in this situation, this woman can drink water with the permission of the Mobeds or other men! And in paragraph 72, it is stated that this woman - even in a state of extreme thirst - if she drinks water without the permission of the Mobeds, she must be struck with four hundred blows! (Darmesteter, 2005, pp. 155-156)

Seemingly, in the belief of Zoroastrian leaders, women are the cause of misfortune! They are only useful for childbirth. In the Shahnameh, it is recounted that Bahram V (a Sasanian Zoroastrian king) went hunting for onagers. He saw a male onager approaching a female. So, he drew an arrow from his bow and aimed. The arrow struck both animals, causing them to collide with each other. The soldiers, upon witnessing this act, praised the king. After this incident, Bahram sought to find a new wife. At that moment, Rouzbeh (the chief Mobed of the Zoroastrians in the era of Bahram V) spoke out and prevented the king from doing so. Because Bahram already had 931 other wives! Mobed Rouzbeh said: "O King of Kings! It is because of the scent of women that the hair of men turns white, and the whiteness of hair makes a man hopeless. From the work of women, the straight

waist of youth becomes bent, and other hardships and difficulties arise. So, if you engage in intercourse more than once a month, it is like shedding blood. And this (once a month intercourse) is only for a wise young man to obtain offspring. Otherwise, if you increase it, the body will decrease, and from this weakness, the man's body becomes bloodless.” (Mehrabadi, 2000, Vol. 3, pp. 105-106)

Similarly, Abu'l-Qasim Ferdowsi writes:

ز بوی زنان موی گردد سپید	سپیدی کند در جهان ناامید
جوان را شود گوژ بالای راست	ز کار زنان چند گونه بلاست
بیک ماه یکبار آمیختن	گر افزون بود خون بود ریختن
همین بار از بهر فرزند را	بباید جوان خردمند را
چو افزون کنی کاهش افزون کند	سستی تن مرد بی خون کند

“From the scent of women, the hair becomes white; Whiteness makes the world hopeless

It gives young people gray hair; From the work of women, there are various troubles

If intercourse happens more than once a month, it's like shedding blood

This act is only for the sake of having children for a wise young man

When you increase it, the decrease increases; Weakens the man's body, making it bloodless.” (Ferdowsi, 2005, p. 488)

Some Zoroastrians and adherents of ancient beliefs, in a divisive rhetoric, claim that Islam does not value women, while conversely, Zoroastrianism greatly values women. However, the reality is that Islam regards men and women as equals and even in the Quran, a woman (Asiyah) is described as an exemplary figure for both men and women. If we visit the shrine of Hazrat Fatimah al-Masumeh (peace be upon her) in Qom, we see men coming in groups, bowing their foreheads to the ground, considering themselves as humble as the dust of that courtyard. However, in Zoroastrianism, women are counted as creatures of the devil. Moreover, one of the beliefs in Zoroastrianism regarding the difference between men and women is that if a woman does not marry, she is worthy of an

easy death (meaning deserving of death / worthy of being killed). But if a man does not marry, an easy death is not warranted. In the Zoroastrian text “Shayest ne-Shayest” Chapter Ten, we read: “One of these is that if a man does not marry a woman, an easy death will not be granted, and if a woman does not marry, surely an easy death will be granted.” (Mazdapour, 1990, p. 128)

### **Women During Menstruation; Comparing the Rules of Islam and Zoroastrianism**

In the laws of Zoroastrianism, women and girls during menstruation had very strict and exhausting restrictions, to the extent that they were deprived of normal life (Boyce, 2012, p. 71). Women were not allowed to approach water and fire during those days. This meant they should not approach water in summer and should stay at least 15 paces away from fire in cold winters. Zoroastrian traditions state that if a menstruating woman approaches water and fire, she will go to hell after death, where the excrement of the people of hell will be poured into her mouth as punishment (Moqaddas, n.d. Chapter 20. Avesta, Vendidad, Fargard 16, Paragraph 4). In those days, even women were not allowed to look at the sky, the moon, and the sun (Moqaddas, n.d. paragraph 4). They were not allowed to look at fire (Avesta, Vendidad, Fargard 16, paragraph 2). Women and girls, during menstruation, should not approach plants. They should sprinkle dry earth on the ground and sit on it (Avesta, Vendidad, Fargard 16, paragraphs 1-2). By the order of Ahura Mazda (the god of Zoroastrians), women and girls should be kept hungry during those days, and only a very small amount of food should be given to them (Avesta, Vendidad, Fargard 16, paragraph 7). At the end of menstruation, Zoroastrian women and girls should wash twice with cow urine and once with water, and then kill (remove) 200 ant eggs to be purified (Avesta, Vendidad, Fargard 16, paragraph 12). According to historical documents, in Zoroastrianism, menstruating women were confined to underground houses, stables, or prison cells to avoid contaminating others (Boyce, 2012, p. 214).

However, in Islam, there is no mention of such exhausting restrictions. Women are exempt from some rituals during those days. At the end of those days, they perform ablution with clean water, and that's it! For this reason, Dr. Jamshid Khorshid Choksy, a Zoroastrian professor at Indiana University in America, writes: “After the arrival of Islam in Iran, Zoroastrian women preferred to marry Muslim men more. Because in Zoroastrianism, the rules related to women (menstruation, etc.) were very difficult and exhausting. But in Islam, the rules

were simple, and in other words, women in Islam had more freedom” (Ghorshasb Choxi, 2002, p. 153).

## **Conclusion**

In summary, across various religions including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity, women have generally been relegated to a lower status. In Buddhism, women are depicted as demonic and dangerous entities, and distancing from them is recommended for salvation. In Judaism, women are described as the descendants of Eve, responsible for sin and corruption, leading to social and even testimonial deprivation. In Christianity, interpretations in sacred texts have transformed women into inferior and sinister beings. This negative portrayal of women in these religions reflects constraints and discrimination in their treatment.

However, in Islam, women are recognized as embodiments of purity and sanctity, enjoying exceptional value and respect. This faith emphasizes equality between men and women, granting women the capability to attain high levels of spiritual and moral perfection. Islam endows women with significant value and respect, encouraging them as essential partners in the social and spiritual structure. Divine verses, narrations, and the words of religious authorities in Islam indicate the equality of men and women in creation and evolution. Women, like men, are entitled to all human rights, including worship, education, ownership, and the right to vote. Indeed, the audience of Quranic verses is the essence and truth of humanity. In Islam, sincerity, faith, humility, and all superiority and virtues are equally expressed among men and women, indicating the potential and capability of women to attain high levels of perfection and divine proximity. It is noteworthy that Ayatollah Khomeini once said, “From the lap of a woman, a man ascends to the heavens.”

Therefore, Islam grants women the necessary status and value, interpreting them as equal and fundamental partners in the social and spiritual structure. This Islamic perspective, in contrast to the views of other religions, serves as a guide for the advancement and progress of women and society. This Islamic viewpoint demonstrates progress and attention to women’s rights, representing the best approach in this regard compared to other religions.



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