302114 - Are Women Deficient in Intellect and Religion?

the question

I know that Islam honours women, and I do not deny that. But the only thing is that there are some religious texts that I am confused about. For example, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) explained in what way women are lacking in reason when giving testimony.

Why do some scholars interpret this lack of reason and apply it to all matters, not only to the issue of giving testimony? Can the words of the Prophet, “that is because of her lack of reason and her lack of religious commitment” be understood as meaning that there are also other ways in which she is lacking other than what is mentioned?

How do you expect the Muslim woman to feel when she reads something like the words of Imam An-Nawawi in his explanation of the Hadith, which mentions that women are lacking in reason and religious commitment, as he says: “And one should bear patiently their crooked behaviour and manner”, as if all woman behave badly and men should put up with their lack of reason?

And Imam Ibn Hajar advises men to: “show kindness to avoid trouble.” In fact, more than one scholar used this phrase, “show kindness to avoid trouble.” It is as if they are talking about someone who has a mental illness or is completely insane! We women are capable of thinking, we are able to manage our lives, we are able to understand what is happening, and we seek knowledge, praise be to Allah. So why are we viewed in this manner?

It is well known that good manners and good attitudes are more common in girls, so explain to me the Hadith about the rib; if a woman is polite and righteous, how could she be crooked? One may say that this is rare, and no judgement is to be based on what is rare, so are good attitudes and religious commitment rare in women?

It says in a report, “She will never be consistent with you.” But all people are like that; they cannot remain consistent. So why are women singled out for this? And many more questions

spring to mind when I read the Quran and tafsir. I try to ignore these thoughts, but they keep coming back to my mind.

That is why I am asking, so that I may have peace of mind. Before, I used to reject specious arguments (against Islam). I hope that you will be generous and give a detailed answer to every point in my question, because a general, brief answer will not solve my problem.

Summary of answer

1. With regard to a woman's lack of reason, it is because women are easily swayed by emotions, which make them unable to deal appropriately with new issues that arise.
2. As for a woman's lack of religious commitment, it is because women do not pray and fast during the days of their menses and when they are bleeding following childbirth.
3. Prophet Muhammad spoke about creating women from a rib to urge men to show kindness to women and to be patient in putting up with any annoyance that may come from them; they should not criticise women, rebuke them or belittle them.
4. Islam respects and honours women and treats them fairly and gives them their rights. Islam honours the woman as a mother, as a daughter, as a sister and as a wife.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Does Islam respect and honour women?

The believer should be certain that Islam respects and honours women , and treats them fairly and gives them their rights. Islam honours the woman as a mother, as a daughter, as a sister and as a wife. This is well known in the religious texts and teachings.

Allah, may He be Glorified, is the Creator of male and female; He is their Lord, the One Whom they worship, and He is far above any injustice:

{And your Lord is not ever unjust to [His] servants.} [Fussilat 41:46]

{And your Lord does injustice to no one.} [Al-Kahf 18:49]

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was compassionate and merciful towards his Ummah; he did not differentiate between men and women in that regard. Rather he specifically instructed men to treat women kindly, lest they be oppressed or mistreated. He (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was the greatest in showing kindness to and honouring his wives, to the extent that he said that the best of people is the one who is best to his wife, and he said: “The most perfect of the believers in faith is the best of them in attitude, and the best of you are those who are best in attitude to their wives.” (Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, 1082; classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih At-Tirmidhi)

He (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) also said: “The best of you is the one who is best to his wife, and I am the best of you to my wives.” (Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, 3895 and Ibn Majah, 1977; classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih At-Tirmidhi)

And he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “I urge you to be kind to women.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 3331 and Muslim, 1468)

Whoever takes these facts into account will be able to understand the texts referred to in the question in an appropriate manner. There is nothing in our religion that undermines the status of women or scorns them. How could that be the case when a woman is the mother who is more deserving of honour and kindness than the father; and she is the wife whom Allah has described as a source of comfort and joy and, in fact, the best of worldly joys; and she is the mother of children and progeny – so how could a man accept for the mother of his children to be blameworthy and despised?

Are women deficient in Intellect?

With regard to a woman’s lack of reason , it is explained in the Hadith. It is because women are easily swayed by emotions, which make them unable to deal appropriately with new issues that

arise. Hence there is a need, with regard to giving testimony, for someone who will complete her testimony and remind her if she forgets.

Are women deficient in religion?

As for their lack of religious commitment, it is also explained. It is because women do not pray and fast during the days of their menses and when they are bleeding following childbirth. They are not to be blamed for that shortcoming, and it is not possible for them to avoid it; rather it is only a shortcoming in comparison to the one who is not prevented from praying and fasting. This is the bounty of Allah which He bestows upon whomever He wills.

Allah has told the believers that no one among them should wish for what someone else has been favoured with over him, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned. And ask Allah of his bounty. Indeed Allah is ever, of all things, Knowing.} [An-Nisa' 4:32]

It was narrated from Mujahid (may Allah have mercy on him), from Umm Salamah (may Allah be pleased with her), that she said: Men go on campaign [Jihad] and women do not go on campaign, and we only receive half of the share of inheritance. Then Allah revealed the words: {And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others.} [An-Nisa' 4:32] Mujahid said: And the verse {Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward} [Al-Ahzab 33:35] was revealed concerning her. (Narrated by At-Tirmidhi, 3022; classed as authentic by Al-Albani)

We have previously explained what is meant by women lacking in reason and religious commitment in the answer to question no. 111867 . There we stated that they are lacking only in

what is mentioned in the Hadith, and this does not apply to everything.

We do not think that the fact that a woman is easily swayed by her emotions and, as a result, cannot handle some issues rationally is to be regarded as a criticism, for Allah has prepared women to deal with some serious issues that men are unable to handle, which includes taking care of her children and putting up with hardship that no one else but women can bear. The woman also shows patience in putting up with her husband and his annoyance, but she quickly forgives him and reconciles with him.

Meaning of creating women from rib

The fact that woman was created from a rib, and the most crooked part of the rib is the top, is something that was decreed by the divine decree, and woman is not responsible for that and she cannot object to her Creator so long as she is a believer, for He is Most Wise, Most Aware of what He creates and decrees.

The fact that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) spoke about that is for the purpose of urging men to show kindness to women and to be patient in putting up with any annoyance that may come from them; they should not criticise women, rebuke them or belittle them.

Al-Bukhari (1468) and Muslim (1468) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "I urge you to treat women kindly , for woman was created from a rib. The most crooked part of the rib is the top of it. If you try to straighten it you will break it, but if you leave it alone, it will remain crooked. So I urge you to treat women kindly."

Muslim (1468) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "A woman was created from a rib and she will never be consistent with you in any way. If you want to, you can enjoy your life with her, even though there is some crookedness in her, but if you try to straighten her you will break her – and breaking her means divorcing her."

Ahmad (20093) and Al-Hakim (7333) narrated from Samurah ibn Jundub (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Woman was created from a rib, and if you want to straighten the rib, you will break it. So be kind to her and you will be able to live with her.” (Classed as authentic by the commentators on Al-Musnad, and by Al-Albani in Sahih Al-Jami`, 1944)

Women were created with some natural weakness and their own inclinations; they are very jealous and easily swayed by emotions. Whoever overlooks that and forgives his wife’s mistakes will have an easy life with her, but whoever picks on every minor issue and wants to correct her in every single matter will have a lot of trouble with her and will not enjoy his life with her, and that will lead to his divorcing her.

This is something that husbands and anyone who has dealt with marital issues is aware of.

If a woman does not accept these facts, it is because she has never studied the issues of women with their husbands.

A man may treat his wife kindly for a lifetime, then if he does one thing to upset her, she says: I have never seen any good in you!

Showing ingratitude in this manner is something that may also occur among men, but it is more common among women, and it is part of the inclination that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) described as crookedness and instructed men to be patient in putting up with it.

It has been explained above that the idea of showing kindness to avoid trouble is referred to in a Hadith; it is not something that the scholars came up with. What it means is overlooking shortcomings, as noted above. It does not mean thinking that the woman is insane or has a mental illness, as you suggested.

As for crookedness in attitude and similar expressions, this description does not apply to every woman, or suggest that the attitude of all women is like that. Rather what is referred to is the

mistakes that they make, and what results from them being swayed by their emotions and reacting too quickly, and the like.

The words of any person may be accepted or rejected, except the words of the infallible Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

Think about what you said: “And many more questions spring to mind when I read the Quran and tafsir.” This is an example of exaggeration and jumping to conclusions, which is something that reflects the attitude of women. What have you found in the Quran that is akin to what you have mentioned in your question?

Furthermore, we find such questions, in which there is objection to the words of Allah or the words of His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) very off-putting. We wonder about one in whose heart faith has become established; why is he worrying about such things?

It is sufficient for the believing man or believing woman to strive to do righteous deeds, in order to attain bliss and happiness in this world and the hereafter, as Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.} [An-Nahl 16:97]

{And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer - those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed.} [An-Nisa’ 4:124]

{And their Lord responded to them, “"Never will I allow to be lost the work of [any] worker among you, whether male or female; you are of one another.”} [Al `Imran 3:195]

So focus on your worship and doing righteous deeds, and ignore these intrusive thoughts and specious arguments, for this world is the realm of striving, and tomorrow each soul will be paid in full what it has earned, and those who sowed will reap what they sowed.

We ask Allah to fill your heart with reassurance and comfort, to make your affairs easy for you, and to protect you against the tricks of the Shaytan.

And Allah knows best.