

Components of Women's Identity Formation in the Quranic Thought of Martyr Imam Khamenei

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ABSTRACT

The issue of the components that contribute to the formation of women's identity is one of the fundamental questions in the field of women's studies from the perspective of the Holy Quran. The significance of this topic has long motivated Muslim scholars to identify and analyze these components. Employing a descriptive-analytical method and drawing on library-based data, as well as the perspectives of several experts in the fields of Quranic studies and women's studies, this article seeks to answer the following question: According to the Qur'anic thought of Imam Khamenei, what are the principal components involved in the formation of women's identity? The most important finding of the present study indicates that, from his perspective, factors such as adopting a positive view toward the lofty value and status of women within the order of existence, belief in women's diverse God-given capacities and potentials, recognition of the equality of women and men in the realm of faith and righteous action, and acknowledgment of the exceptional role of women's emotional capacities in the sphere of life, among others, constitute some of the most significant components in the formation of women's identity.

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Introduction

From the perspective of the Holy Quran, women and men share a common human identity and equally benefit from divine endowments. In its profound and balanced outlook, this supreme heavenly book neither diminishes women's human status nor ignores the biological differences and the wisdom underlying their creation (see Yūnusī 2021; Ḥusaynī Akbar-Nizhād & Shūshtarī 2018).

Historically, it is evident that women experienced extensive deprivation prior to the advent of Islam. With its divine message, however, Islam brought about a significant transformation in attitudes toward women. First, it recognized women as equal to men in terms of human dignity and acknowledged the value of their faith, beliefs, and intellectual capacities. Second, it restored many social rights that had been denied to women before Islam. Even in cases where distinctions were made between men and women, these differences were based on women's particular psychological and physical characteristics rather than reflecting any negative perception of them. Consequently, under the influence of these teachings, women gradually attained a more appropriate social position within Muslim societies (see Fattāhī-Zādih 2008).

This article aims to identify and analyze the principal components of women's identity in Imam Khamenei's Quranic thought.

Research Background

Numerous studies have been conducted on the subject of women's identity. Among them are: *Intellectual Approaches to the Issue of Women in the Quran* [in Persian] by Sayyid Ḥaydar 'Alavī-Nizhād (2001); *The Enlightening Role of the Quran in Shaping the Identity of the Muslim Woman and Consolidating the Family* [in Persian] by Zahrā al-Sādāt Ḥusaynī (2025) which argues that the Quranic paradigm is not only an effective framework for addressing the contemporary crisis of identity and the destabilization of the family, but can also serve as a foundation for cultural and social policymaking and as an inspiration for interdisciplinary research in the fields of psychology, sociology, and women's studies; and *Women's Identity in Light of the Philosophy of Specific Legal Rulings in the Torah and the Quran* [in Persian] by

Zaynab Akhbārī (2020) which discusses that women's identities in some rulings, whether dependent or independent, reveal their identities and ultimately provide a platform for new reading of the teachings of the Quran and the Torah.

Despite these contributions, the components that shape women's identity in the Quranic thought of Imam Khamenei have not yet been examined independently. Therefore, this article seeks to analyze his perspective on this important cultural and social issue through a descriptive–analytical method and by drawing on library-based sources.

Concepts

At the beginning of the discussion, it is necessary to clarify the lexical and terminological meaning of the key concept *huvīyat* (identity).

1. The lexical meaning of *huvīyat*

The word *huvīyat* is of Arabic origin and is derived from the pronoun *huwa*, meaning “he” (third-person singular). From this pronoun the expression *huwa huwa* has been formed, which in classical usage denotes essential unity or intrinsic sameness (*ittiḥād bi-al-dhāt*). Accordingly, the *hovīyat* of any phenomenon refers to the form and existential essence through which that entity is recognized (Al-Ṭā'ī 2017: 34).

2. The terminological meaning of *huvīyat*

The concept of *huvīyat* has been widely used in various fields such as individual, social, national, cultural, and religious studies. This diversity of usage has led to the presentation of different terminological definitions of the concept within cultural and social studies. In the present research, which adopts a social perspective, *huvīyat* refers to a set of shared social, cultural, psychological, philosophical, biological, and historical characteristics that indicate unity or similarity among members of a group and consciously and clearly distinguish them—within a specific temporal and spatial context—from other groups and their members (see Niyāzī 2010, 5; Najafī 2020, 26).

In another definition, *huvīyat* refers to those characteristics through which a person is recognized, such as family name, paternal name, and other identifying attributes. Therefore, *huvīyat* encompasses essential attributes that express the reality of a thing and the personality, essence, being, and existence of a human being (see Dihkhudā 1962; Muʿīn 1972; ʿAmīd 1996; entry “*huvīyat*”).

In the statements of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, elements such as personality, habits, customs, and traditions are likewise described as components of a person’s *huvīyat* (Khamenei, Speech delivered by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution during a meeting with hundreds of prominent Iranian women, January 4, 2023; <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/9400/Men-and-women-as-human-beings-are-completely-equal-in-Islam>; <https://khl.ink/f/51655>).

Manifestations of the Most Important Components of Identity Formation for Women in the Qur’ānic Thought of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution

By examining the spoken and written works of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution—works that are imbued with Quranic teachings—it becomes evident that, from his perspective, numerous factors contribute to the formation of women’s identity. Among these, the most important components are as follows:

1. Emphasizing the Exalted Human Status of Women

Historical sources indicate that during the Age of Ignorance, Arabs did not recognize any independence, dignity, or honor for women (Muṭahharī 2017, 241). In contrast, in the view of Islam, women—like men—possess full humanity. This is because the origin of the creation of both derives from the existence of the first two human beings, Adam and Eve. Neither of them holds superiority over the other except through piety and God-wariness (Quran, *al-Nisā’* 4:1; *al-Ḥujurāt* 49:13).

Inspired by the teachings embedded in the noble verses of the Quran, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution has explicitly stated:

Regarding the Islamic perspective, it can be stated that Islam, in its human and religious valuation, regards the *human being* as its

fundamental subject; women and men possess no distinguishing characteristics in this regard — there is no difference between them. The equality of women and men in the domain of human and Islamic values is among the unquestionable tenets of Islam, and there exists absolutely no doubt in this matter. In a Quranic verse, following the very passages that were recited here, it is stated: *“Indeed the muslim men and the muslim women, the faithful men and the faithful women, the obedient men and the obedient women, the truthful men and the truthful women, the patient men and the patient women, the humble men and the humble women, the charitable men and the charitable women, the men who fast and the women who fast, the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard, the men who remember Allah greatly and the women who remember [Allah greatly]”* (Quran 33:35) — ten principal attributes are enumerated for both men and women, all equal in reward — *“Allah holds in store for them forgiveness and a great reward”* (Quran 33:35). This is the Islamic perspective. Similarly, in another verse, it is declared: *“I shall not cause the work of any worker among you to be lost, whether male or female”* — there is no distinction. That is to say, from the standpoint of human and Islamic valuation, there exists no difference whatsoever between women and men. Islam’s view of women and men is its view of the human being; neither is accorded any differential characteristic. (Khamenei, Speech delivered by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution during a meeting with hundreds of prominent Iranian women in the Imam Khomeini Hussainiyah, January 4, 2023; <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/9400/Men-and-women-as-human-beings-are-completely-equal-in-Islam>; <https://khl.ink/f/51655>)

God considers the criterion of superiority for both men and women to be piety and God-wariness, as stated in the Quranic verse: *“O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God*

wary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware”¹ (Quran 49:13). ‘Allāmah Ṭabātabā’ī explains this verse as follows: People, insofar as they are human beings, are equal with one another, and there is no inherent difference or superiority among them. The distinctions observed among them in creation—such as their belonging to different tribes—exist only so that they may recognize one another. This recognition enables the establishment of social order and the realization of cooperation and unity among them. Without such recognition, neither cooperation nor social cohesion could be achieved (Ṭabātabā’ī 1995, 18:489). Therefore, God wariness (*taqwā*) alone constitutes the true criterion of dignity and merit before God.

2. Rearticulating the Role of Women in Providing Tranquility and Emotional Stability

The human need for tranquility, which is rooted in human nature and is even more fundamental than sexual need, is regarded in the teachings of Islam as one of the most important—and perhaps the primary—motivations for marriage. In reality, marriage establishes a center in which both woman and man experience peace and psychological comfort, for women and men serve as sources of emotional tranquility for one another. In this regard, God the Exalted states: “*And of His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them, and He ordained affection and mercy between you. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect*”² (Quran 30:21). A righteous spouse brings the path to tranquility and happiness closer in the challenges of life. God the Exalted states: “*It is He who created you from a single soul, and made from it its mate, that he might find comfort with her...*”³ (Quran 7:189).

1. ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾ (الحجرات/ ١٣)

2. ﴿وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ﴾ (الروم/ ٢١)

3. ﴿هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا...﴾ (الأعراف/ ١٨٩)

Some exegetes have interpreted the term “garment” in the verse, “...*They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them...*”⁴ (*Quran 2:187*), metaphorically as a reference to concealment and protection, because spouses act as coverings for one another (Rashīd Riḍā 1990, 2:176). Spouses satisfy each other’s sexual needs and thereby direct these natural inclinations into a proper and legitimate path. In this way, they protect one another from sexual misconduct and moral corruption, just as clothing protects a person from exposure and disgrace (Ṣādiqī Tihirānī 1986, 2:58). However, some exegetes—including Ṭabarī (*Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 1999, 3:491), Ṭūsī (*al-Tibyān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur‘ān*, 2:132-133), and Ṭabarsī (*Majma‘ al-Bayān* 1992, 2:22)—have interpreted the notion of “garment” in the verse as symbolizing tranquility and comfort, just as God describes the night as a garment and a source of repose: “*and make the night a covering*”⁵ (*Quran 78:10*). Therefore, family-centeredness and the inclination toward forming a family are matters rooted in *fiṭrah* (innate human nature). Those who turn away from this divine tradition possess an incomplete mode of existence, for one stage of their human perfection and existential growth has been stopped. It is for this reason that, in the thought of Imam Khamenei, another fundamental component of women’s identity formation is the recognition of women as a source of tranquility, repose, and emotional stability within the family.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution states in this regard: “Those who belittle the institution of the family betray the community of women. They are the ones who pretend that gender justice means that in every field into which men enter, women must also enter. Such individuals betray the dignity, honor, and identity of women. Woman is honorable, and among all occupations the most important roles for a woman are motherhood, being a spouse, and creating tranquility within the family. This is the distinctive characteristic of women in Islam” (speech delivered by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution during a meeting with hundreds of prominent Iranian women in the Imam

⁴. ﴿...هُنَّ لِيَابِسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِيَابِسٌ لَهُنَّ...﴾ (البقرة/١٨٧)

⁵. ﴿وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِيَابِسًا﴾ (النبا/١٠)

Khomeini Hussainiyah, January 4, 2023; <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/9400/Men-and-women-as-human-beings-are-completely-equal-in-Islam>; <https://khl.ink/f/51655>).

Ayatullah Jawādī Āmulī considers the inclination of man toward woman to originate from divine affection (*mawaddah*) and mercy (*rahmah*), and maintains that this divine affection and mercy are different from the instinctive attraction between male and female that exists among animals. Moreover, the Noble Quran does not describe the instinctive and lustful inclination of animals as a divine sign, whereas it explicitly introduces the inclination of man toward woman as one of the signs of God (Jawādī Āmulī 1996, 39). Thus, from the perspective of Islam, a bond higher than mere sexual desire is established between woman and man in the institution of marriage. This bond forms the foundation of the unity of spouses and presents woman as a source of tranquility and repose within the family.

3. Consolidating Women's Presence in Fundamental Political and Social Arenas

The political sphere has historically been an arena in which societies strive to demonstrate their capabilities. In many of these societies, men have consistently played influential roles in major political transformations and have displayed their capacities in this field. However, the role of women in this sphere has appeared less prominently.

Historical sources indicate that during the Prophetic era, manifestations of women's political participation could indeed be observed. One example is the migration (*hijrah*) of women (Quran, *al-Nisā'* 4:100). It should be noted that in the early period of Islam migration occurred in two forms by the command of the Prophet (s) (Ibn Sa'd 1989, 8:239). Another example is the pledge of allegiance of women mentioned in verse 12 of *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥanah*. On the day of the Conquest of Mecca, when the Prophet took the pledge of allegiance from men on Mount Ṣafā, women also came to pledge allegiance. At that moment a verse was revealed explaining the manner of their pledge. The Prophet's pledge with the women was conducted in the

following way: the Prophet placed his blessed hand in a vessel of water and then instructed the women to place their hands in the water as a sign of allegiance. The conditions mentioned in this verse consist of fundamental doctrinal and ethical principles that both women and men are required to observe (Qarā'atī 2004, 9:593).

Martyr Imam Khamenei, inspired by the content of numerous Quranic verses and narrations, believes in the presence of women in fundamental political and social arenas and considers it of great importance. He explicitly states that Islam stood firmly against the ignorance that oppressed women: both in the sphere of spirituality, thought, and human values, and in the sphere of political participation, and above all within the domain of the family. Thus, Islam has assigned value in all three arenas. Imam Khamenei states: "In our country, at no point in history, neither in the past nor in the era of westernization, did we have so many educated women active in social, cultural and scientific areas. We did not have all these women capable of influencing the social destiny, we did not have all these women with the power to understand and analyze political affairs, and we did not have so many female writers, female translators and female artists in the true sense of the word. All these have been achieved thanks to the Islamic Republic and the viewpoint of Islam on women, which is based on respect" (Khamenei, Speech delivered via video conference on the occasion of the birthday anniversary of Hazrat Fatimah Zahra (greetings be upon her) and with the participation of a number of panegyrists of the Ahl al-Bayt, February 3, 2021; <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/8340/We-object-to-Western-logic-concerning-women-They-oppress-women>).

Several verses of the Noble Quran refer to this reality. Among them is the verse in which God the Exalted states:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتُ يُبَايِعْنَكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ لَا يُشْرِكْنَ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَسْرِقْنَ وَلَا يَزْنِينَ وَلَا يَقْتُلْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ وَلَا يَأْتِينَ بِبُهْتَانٍ يَفْتَرِينَهُ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِنَّ وَأُزْجُلِهِنَّ وَلَا يَعْصِيَنَّكَ فِي مَعْرُوفٍ فَبَايِعْهُنَّ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُنَّ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴾ (الممتحنة/١٢)

“O Prophet! If faithful women come to you, to take the oath of allegiance to you, [pledging] that they shall not ascribe any partners to Allah, that they shall not steal, nor commit

adultery, nor kill their children, nor utter any slander that they may have intentionally fabricated, nor disobey you in what is right, then accept their allegiance, and plead for them to Allah for forgiveness. Indeed Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful” (Quran 60:12)

This verse indicates that woman is a choosing and volitional being who possesses an independent personal and legal identity. Therefore, Islam has not only refrained from preventing women’s participation in society, but has also sought—through specific principles and guidelines—to provide the necessary conditions for their appropriate and constructive presence in the social sphere.

4. Rejecting the Degrading View of Women

Through careful examination of Quranic verses, narrations, and reliable historical sources, it becomes clear that during the Age of Ignorance in Arabia, women possessed neither existential value nor social standing. Two historical reports can serve as evidence supporting this claim:

Only those women who gave birth to male children or who managed the internal affairs of men’s households efficiently received attention and appreciation. Consequently, most Arabs regarded the birth of a daughter as a source of shame. Indeed, when they were informed of the birth of a female child, they would become intensely angry. The Quran refers to this attitude as follows: “*When one of them is brought the news of a female [newborn], his face becomes darkened and he chokes with suppressed agony*”⁶ (Quran 16:58). This verse explicitly indicates that when one of them was informed that his wife had given birth to a daughter, his face would darken with anger and distress.

The well-known Sunni scholar, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, in explaining the meaning of the verse: “*And they say, ‘That which is in the bellies of these cattle is exclusively for our males and forbidden to our wives. But if it be still-born, they will all share it.’ Soon He will requite them for their allegations. Indeed He is all-wise, all-knowing*”⁷ (Quran 6:139),

⁶ ﴿وَ إِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُمْ بِالْأُنْثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَ هُوَ كَظِيمٍ﴾ (النحل/ ٥٨)

⁷ وَ قَالُوا مَا فِي بُطُونِ هَذِهِ الْأَنْعَامِ خَالِصَةٌ لِذُكُورِنَا وَ مَحْرَمَةٌ عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَ إِن يَكُن مَيْتَةً فَهُمْ فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ نَسِيخِزِيهِمْ وَ ضَفَّفْهُمْ إِنَّهُ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ (الأنعام/ ١٣٩)

states that among the Arabs of the Age of Ignorance it was customary that when certain animals gave birth to a live male offspring, they would slaughter it and only the men would eat from it; but if the offspring was born dead, women would also be allowed to share in eating it (Suyūṭī 1984, 3:48). A contemporary Quranic scholar, in explaining this verse, writes that one of the superstitious beliefs of the polytheists was that they claimed whatever was in the wombs of certain livestock dedicated to idols belonged exclusively to their men and was forbidden to their women; however, if it was born dead, then both men and women were permitted to partake of it. God, the Exalted, declares that He will soon punish them for such false attributions and baseless claims (Qarā'atī 2004, 2:565).

These reports and others similar to them indicate that in that degenerate society Islam regarded woman as one of the two wings of humanity, granting her a genuine and independent personality and rescuing her from the state of humiliation and degradation in which she had been placed. The Noble Prophet (s), through his wise command—“Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim man and Muslim woman”⁸ (Majlisī 1983, 67:68)—made it clear that women in Islamic society, like men, may pursue education and attain the highest levels of knowledge.

According to one scholar in the field of women's studies, the ignorance of earlier societies and tribes regarding the natural gifts and innate capacities of women, as well as their failure to recognize the powerful role of women in the formation of a healthy human society, the upbringing of children, and the strengthening of family foundations—capacities entrusted to women's existence by the wisdom and design of the Creator—placed women throughout history under the pressure of unjust and distorted judgments. It is evident that in the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance the legal rights and human values of women were violated, and the status of women in the culture of the pre-Islamic Arabs was at its lowest level. The degradation of women and their inclusion among the possessions and property of men deeply affected all aspects of women's lives (Muballigh 2002, 194).

⁸. «طَلَبُ الْعِلْمِ فَرِيضَةٌ عَلَى كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ وَ مُسْلِمَةٍ».

Reflecting on the foregoing discussion leads to the conclusion that one of the most significant characteristics of the first Age of Ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*) was the neglect of women's rights and the oppression inflicted upon them in various dimensions of human life. In drawing attention to this negative feature of the ignorance system, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution states that one of the defining features of *jāhiliyyah* was the existence of an oppressive system. Injustice was the prevailing norm. It was not merely the case that occasionally an individual committed oppression; rather, the very structure of society was founded upon injustice, discrimination, and the domination of the strong over the weak—including the domination of men over women (Statements of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, 10 Dey 1373 Sh; <https://khl.ink/f/2735>).

According to Martyr Muṭahharī, the Islamic movement concerning women differs fundamentally from the movement that emerged in the West in two respects. The first difference lies in the psychological understanding of women and men, where Islam has presented a remarkable and profound perspective. The second is that although Islam made women aware of their human rights and granted them personality, identity, and independence, it never encouraged them toward rebellion, defiance, or hostility and pessimism toward men (Muṭahharī 2017, 76). Therefore, from the perspective of philosophical thought and the interpretation of creation, Islam has never adopted a degrading view of women; rather, it explicitly rejects such notions.

5. The Absence of Distinction Between Women and Men in Nearness to God

The historical experience of women throughout different periods confirms the reality that some failed to pursue the path of nearness to God, while others attained remarkable success in it. The Quran introduces both of these categories of women as instructive examples. God the Exalted states:

﴿صَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأَتَ نُوحٍ وَ امْرَأَتَ لُوطٍ كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا صَالِحَيْنِ فَخَاتَاهُمَا فَلَمْ يُغْنِيَا عَنْهُمَا مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَقِيلَ ادْخُلَا النَّارَ مَعَ الدَّاخِلِينَ • وَ صَرَبَ

اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا امْرَأَتَ فِرْعَوْنَ إِذْ قَالَتْ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنْ فِرْعَوْنَ وَعَمَلِهِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ * وَ مَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَ صَدَقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَ كُتِبَ عَلَيْهَا وَ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْقَائِمِينَ ﴿التحریم/۱۰-۱۲﴾

“Allah draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of our righteous servants, yet they betrayed them. So they did not avail them in any way against Allah, and it was said [to them], ‘Enter the Fire, along with those who enter [it].’ Allah draws an [other] example for those who have faith: the wife of Pharaoh, when she said, ‘My Lord! Build me a home near You in paradise, and deliver me from Pharaoh and his conduct, and deliver me from the wrongdoing lot.’ And Mary, daughter of Imran, who guarded the chastity of her womb, so We breathed into it of Our spirit. She confirmed the words of her Lord and His Books, and she was one of the obedient” (Quran 66:10-12)

These verses clearly demonstrate that spiritual proximity to God is not determined by gender, lineage, or family affiliation. The wives of two great prophets—Noah and Lot—failed because of their own disbelief and betrayal, despite their close association with prophets. In contrast, Āsiyah, the wife of Pharaoh, and Mary the daughter of ‘Imrān attained the highest spiritual ranks through faith, purity, and steadfast devotion to God. Thus, the Quran affirms that the path toward divine proximity is open equally to both women and men, and that the determining factor is faith, righteousness, and sincere obedience to God.

‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī explains that these verses present two parables contrasting the fate of disbelievers and believers. The first illustrates that betrayal of God and His Messenger inevitably leads to destruction, even for those closely connected to prophets; thus, the Quran cites the wives of Prophet Noah (a) and Prophet Lot (a), whose marital ties offered them no protection when they betrayed their husbands and were condemned to the Fire. The second parable shows that sincere faith, devotion, and obedience are the true sources of salvation, unaffected by association with disbelief. Hence the Quran presents Pharaoh’s wife, who was saved despite her husband’s tyranny, and Mary, daughter of ‘Imrān, who received God’s special grace. Together, these examples affirm that piety alone is the criterion of honor before God (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1995, 19:575).

Drawing upon the teachings of Quran and hadiths concerning nearness to God, Martyr Imam Sayyid Ali Khamenei likewise emphasizes that there is no difference between women and men in the fundamental spiritual domain. In this regard, he states:

In the fundamental matters of human existence—those that pertain to the human being as such—there is no difference between women and men. Consider the matter of drawing near to God: women such as Lady Fāṭimah, Lady Zaynab, and Lady Mary attained ranks that are beyond the imagination of people like us. God the Exalted states in *Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān*: *‘I do not waste the work of any worker among you, whether male or female; you are all on the same footing...’* (Quran 3:195). Thus, men and women are not different in this regard. Indeed, in one place the Quran refutes the ignorant pre-Islamic notions that demeaned women by presenting them even above men in symbolic representation. This is something rarely found in the Quran concerning human examples. God says: *‘Allah draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot...’* (Quran 66:10). These two women are presented as symbols of disbelief—not merely for women, but for all people. Then God presents two women as examples for the believers. Reflect on this: throughout history, countless believers have come and gone—great saints, righteous individuals, prophets—yet when the Quran seeks to present a clear symbol and embodiment for believers, it introduces two women: the wife of Pharaoh, who said, *‘...My Lord! Build me a home near You in paradise, and deliver me from Pharaoh and his conduct, and deliver me from the wrongdoing lot’* (Quran 66:11); and Mary the daughter of ‘Imrān, *‘...who guarded the chastity of her womb, so We breathed into it of Our spirit. She confirmed the words of her Lord...’* (Quran 66:12). This is truly remarkable. Therefore, gender is a secondary and incidental matter. It acquires meaning in the practical functions of life, but in the essential spiritual journey of human beings it has no determining role. Even though the functions of men and women in life may differ, this difference has no effect on the principal path of human perfection. (Khamenei, Leader’s Speech at 3rd Strategic Thoughts Forum, 4 January 2012 / 14 Dey 1390 Sh; <https://khl.ink/f/18453>).

Accordingly, from the Quranic perspective there is no difference between women and men in terms of human value and dignity. The reason for this lies in their shared participation in the fundamental anthropological and ethical criteria of humanity, as well as in their equal capacity to attain nearness to God and ultimate salvation.

6. Shared Responsibility in Religious Obligation

The clear implication of numerous Quranic verses as well as many hadiths is that the human being is a morally responsible and duty-bound creature. Such responsibility is not restricted to men; rather, it encompasses women equally. Accordingly, another component of women's identity from the perspective of Martyr Imam Khamenei is the shared obligation of women and men. In this regard, he states:

According to the perspective of the noble religion of Islam, women and men are equal in terms of human values: *'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 chastity and the women who guard their chastity, and the men who remember God much and the women who remember [Him]—God has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward'* (Quran 33:35). Muslim men and Muslim women have no difference with one another in divine and human values. They also share common duties: the duty of enjoining good (*amr bi-l-ma'rūf*) is shared; the duty of service is shared; the duty of striving in the path of God (*jihād fī sabīl Allāh*) is shared in ways appropriate to each. None of these responsibilities belong exclusively to men or exclusively to women. At the same time, each also possesses particular duties—women have specific responsibilities and men have their own particular responsibilities. God the Exalted has fashioned their physical and spiritual constitution in harmony with those distinctive duties. (Khamenei, Speech in a meeting with eulogists Lady Fatimah's (pbuh) birth anniversary, 15 Bahman 1399 Sh / 3 February 2021, available at: <https://khl.ink/f/47254>).

As mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, a number of Quranic verses also draw attention to this shared characteristic between women and men. God the Exalted states:

﴿إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا * لِيُعَذِّبَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ وَيَتُوبَ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا﴾
(الأحزاب/٧٢-٧٣)

“Indeed We presented the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were apprehensive of it; but man undertook it. Indeed he is most unfair and senseless. Allah will surely punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the polytheists, men and women, and Allah will turn clemently to the faithful, men and women, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful” (Quran 33:72-73)

The concept of “Trust” (*amānah*) has been interpreted in various ways—ranging from divine authority and the perfection of servitude, to human free will, reason as the basis of moral responsibility, the ethical use of bodily faculties, interpersonal obligations, knowledge of God, and religious duties such as prayer and fasting. Upon closer examination, these views are not contradictory; rather, they highlight different dimensions of the same reality. In essence, the divine trust may be understood as the human capacity for boundless spiritual and moral development, grounded in free will and responsibility, through which a person can attain the state of the perfected human being and fully accept the Divine guardianship (Makārim Shīrāzī 1995, 17:453). Reflection on these verses reveals that the capacity for moral and religious responsibility belongs equally to women and men. Both participate in the acceptance of the Divine Trust and thus share equally in the sphere of obligation and accountability before God.

Conclusion

Throughout history, human societies have been arenas of intellectual and social contestation, and the question of women’s identity, status, and rights has consistently figured within these debates. As shown in

earlier sections of this article, pre-Islamic *jāhiliyyah* largely denied women an authentic human identity, reducing them to property owned by men—a perspective that, in subtler forms, persists in what can be described as modern *jāhiliyyah*. In contrast, the Quranic thought of Imam Sayyid 'Alī Khamenei rejects such degrading views and critically examines the epistemological foundations underlying both ancient and contemporary conceptions that marginalize women. Central to his Quranic framework is the assertion that although natural differences exist between men and women, these distinctions cannot justify any hierarchy of superiority; rather, both share a common human dignity that entitles them to equal access to material, spiritual, and social opportunities.

Within this conceptual foundation, Martyr Imam Khamenei repositions the discourse on women from the margins of historical neglect to a space of conscious societal engagement. His approach operates along two major axes: first, an interpretive effort to expose misconceptions about women and to articulate their rightful standing within a reformed intellectual system; and second, a practical program outlining educational, moral, and social structures aligned with women's distinctive capacities. From this perspective, women's identity is shaped by several key elements, including their elevated human status, their role in fostering emotional stability within the family, the rejection of reductionist views, the absence of any gender distinction in attaining divine proximity, their shared capacity for spiritual perfection, and their equal participation with men in moral and religious responsibility. Together, these components form the essential contours of women's identity within the Quranic and Islamic worldview.

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