



# Examining the Role of Motherhood in the Teachings of the Quran

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## Abstract

Motherhood along with wifehood is the most important role that women play in the family. Although these roles are challenged today by feminist attitudes, by relying on the feminine nature of women, the role of motherhood has been given special attention in Islamic teachings, especially in the glorious verses of the Holy Quran. The natural characteristics of women such as the desire for offspring, affection, and attachment to children and their care, as well as the rights of mothers such as providing for their material needs, honoring, respecting, and appreciating their efforts and motherly feelings, are mentioned in verses of the Holy Quran.

The Holy Quran has given a special status and position to the characteristics, duties, and rights of mothers, which makes this role even more valuable. Encouraging women to bear children and carry out the necessary responsibilities in this arena will lead to raising a generation that is physically and mentally healthy. This article examines the characteristics and rights of mothers according to the verses of the Holy Quran and the narrations of the Infallibles (peace be upon them).

**Keywords:** Motherhood, The Quran, Natural characteristics, Mothers' rights

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## Introduction

Motherhood is the concept of childbearing and caring for children, along with meeting material and spiritual needs and providing a suitable platform for their proper development and upbringing. Responsible performance of this responsibility plays an important role in the upbringing of the generation and, consequently, the well-being of the human society.

Numerous verses and hadiths that have addressed the honor and dignity of the mother show the importance of this role. According to the criteria of motherhood and the teachings found in the sayings and practice of the infallible Imams (peace be upon them), Islam has considered motherhood an excellent manifestation of the perfection of womanhood and has mentioned many spiritual rewards for it. On the other hand, an organized system of obligatory and desirable behaviors has placed fathers and children at the service of mothers in such a way that allows them to perform their motherhood role and raise their children comfortably in accordance with their activities and biological characteristics.

However, today, due to the spread of feminist thought, the wrong perception of individual freedoms, and the influx of women into the labor market, motherhood instead of being considered as a value, is seen as an obstacle to progress in education, livelihood, and so on. This phenomenon, along with medical and technological innovations, has given women the right to choose whether or not to be a mother and has intensified the anti-motherhood trend.

The study of the evolutionist attitude of Islam towards motherhood, pregnancy, child upbringing, and the recognition of the status and rights of mothers according to the verses of the Quran and the narratives of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) undermines negative attitudes in this field and equates it with values such as piety, patience and devotion, chastity and good morals.

This article aims to understand the Islamic view on the characteristics of the role of motherhood, and to identify the status and position of mothers as much as possible, because by identifying this position, children and husbands will be more grateful to mothers, and the mothers will also realize their duties by correctly understanding their special position in Islam.

## Characteristics of Mothers in the Quran and Hadiths

In Islamic teachings, being a mother is a great value and responsibility that is assigned to women due to their biological and psychological characteristics. Based on these characteristics, Islamic jurisprudence considers mothers more deserving than others in taking care of their children. These biological and psychological characteristics have been considered in the verses of the Holy Quran, which shall be discussed in two parts.

### a) Biological Characteristics

From a biological point of view, motherhood is a status that arises initially with pregnancy and the birth of the first child. Matters such as pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and child care are directly related to the mother's biological characteristics. On the other hand, according to the research, motherly feelings and taking care of children naturally exist in all women. This feeling is rooted in the action of a set of chemical compounds in all mammals, which is associated with changes in specific female organs such as the uterus. ('Azīzī, 1363 SH, 115)

### Natural Motherhood

Recalling and emphasizing aspects of women's biology in the role of motherhood, the Quran believes in natural motherhood as opposed to contractual motherhood. In establishing this issue, we can refer to this noble verse: "...their mothers are only those who bore them..." (Quran 58: 2)

In this verse, the Holy Quran emphasizes that mothers are the ones who give birth to their children. In the interpretation of this verse, the Quranic exegetes said that the relationship between a mother and a child is the result of going through special processes of pregnancy and childbirth, and it does not come into existence with human agreements, rather this relationship is a manifest reality. (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1374 SH, 23/410)

*This Quranic theory could also be used to prove adoption. The adoption of a son was a formal practice among Arabs in the pre-Islamic era, whereby people referred to their adopted children as their sons and implemented the rulings related to the biological son on them. This pre-Islamic custom was nullified by the revelation of the following verse: "... nor has he made your*

*adopted sons your [actual] sons. These are mere utterances of your mouths. But Allah speaks the truth and He guides to the [right] way." (Quran 33: 4)*

Ṭabarsī writes in his Tafsīr Majma' al-Bayān: "The Arabic term "Al-Ad'i'yā'" is the plural of "Daṭ" (adopting someone as a child) and God has said that this child [i.e., an adopted child] is not a biological child. This verse was revealed concerning Zayd ibn Hāritha, whom the Holy Prophet (PBUHH) adopted as his son before the revelation. After the Prophet's marriage with Zainab bint Jahsh, the divorced wife of Zayd, the Jews, and the hypocrites protested to the Prophet that he had married his son's wife. This verse was revealed to refute the hypocrites and the Jews." (Ṭabarsī, n.d, 8/527)

In the Tafsīr of al-Kashshāf, it is also stated: "Being a biological son and an adopted son could not be merged [in a person] at the same time. Being born and having a child are rooted in lineage and origin, but adoption is accidental, it is a mere name. A genuine thing cannot be combined with a non-genuine thing at a time. This is like the case of Zayd ibn Hāritha, whose people referred to him as "Zayd ibn Muḥammad" until this verse was revealed." (Zamakhsharī, 1407 SH, 3/520)

Therefore, it becomes clear that assuming the role of father and mother according to the verses of Quran 58 [Surah Mujādilah] is a natural thing and contractual relationships do not replace natural relationships.

### Menstruation

After the age of puberty, biological changes occur in women's bodies, which are for their preparation for playing the role of motherhood. These changes in women begin at puberty and continue until menopause. During this period, menstruation occurs, which is the periodic physiological bleeding of the uterus and usually occurs every four weeks during the fertile period of a woman and in the absence of pregnancy. In general, menstruation is considered necessary and a prelude to pregnancy, which in the perspective of Islam is one of the stages of motherhood and a difficult period for gaining rewards and proximity to God. In the glorious Quran, it is said: *"They ask you concerning [intercourse during] menses. Say, 'It is hurtful.' So, keep away from wives*

during the menses, and do not approach them till they are clean..." (Quran 2: 222)

Regarding the Arabic term "*Adhā*" [as used in the verse], some Quranic exegetes believe that it means something contaminated or harmful, and in fact, this sentence expresses the philosophy of avoiding sexual intercourse with women during menstruation (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1374 SH, 2/138). Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, a great Quranic exegete, does not accept this meaning and referring to the meaning of this Arabic term "*Adhā*" in other verses, he considers it to mean harm and any complication that is not mild to nature (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1417, 2/207). The author of the Tafsīr al-Jawāmi' also considers menstruation to be something that causes repulsion and harassment to the women according to this term. (Ṭabarsī, n.d, 1/121)

The attitude that menstruation is a genetic matter placed in a woman's existence by the will of Almighty God and according to the Holy Quran, it is considered a suffering and pain for women and a prelude to fertility and childbearing. Undoubtedly, enduring its pain and suffering will not be without reward. Although in this period, due to God's command, women also abandoned ritual prayer and fasting, but according to Allamah Majlisī, abandoning ritual prayer and fasting is the commandment of God (Majlisī, 1403 AH, 32/248), and adhering to it means accepting divine worship and it is a form of worship; because worship is sometimes an action (such as observation of a ritual prayer) and sometimes abandoning an action (such as abandoning a ritual prayer and fasting during menstruation).

## Pregnancy

In addition to menstruation, the Holy Quran also mentions the difficulty attributed to pregnancy: "We have enjoined man concerning his parents: His mother carried him through weakness upon weakness, and his weaning takes two years. Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the return." (Quran 31: 14)

The Arabic term "*Wahn*" [as used in the verse] means weakness and inactiveness. It is mentioned in the dictionaries that as the fetus grows in the mother's womb, the mother's weakness and inactiveness increase. For this reason, this term is used for the pregnancy of a woman. (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, 1412 AH, 887) This term in the noble verse shows the attention of

the Almighty God to the suffering and hardships of the mother during pregnancy, which, in return, obliges the children to be grateful to the mother and support and express gratitude to her along with gratitude to God.

In another verse, God mentions the heaviness of a woman in the final days of pregnancy, saying: *"It is He who created you from a single soul and made from it its mate, that he might find comfort with her. So, when he had covered her, she bore a light burden and passed [some time] with it. When she had grown heavy, they both invoked Allah, their Lord: 'If You give us a healthy [child], we will be surely grateful.'"* (Quran 7: 189)

The meaning of "a light burden" in the verse is the sperm that is placed in the woman's body at the beginning of pregnancy until the sperm grows in the womb and becomes heavy (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1417 AH, 8/374). According to the glorious verse, when the wife felt heavy, she remembered God and prayed and solicited God for help. (Qarā'atī, 1483 SH, 4/246) It may be concluded that the difficulty at this period is such that no one can help the woman and lighten her burden, take it off her shoulders for a while, or protect her fetus from danger. Therefore, the mother remembers God at this time and only asks Him for help.

The pregnancy period is also referred to in the Traditions thus: *"Then the right of your mother is that you should know that she carried you where no one carries anyone, and she fed you with the fruit of her heart - that which no one feeds anyone, and she protected you with her hearing and sight, and her hands and legs, and her hair and skin and all her other organs. She was highly delighted to do so. She was happy and eager, enduring the harm and the pains, and the heaviness and the grief until the Mighty Hand expelled you out of her and delivered you out to the Earth. She did not care if she went hungry as long as you ate ..."* (Majlisī, 1403 AH, 71/15)

In this narration, it is clear from the repetition of the expression "anyone else" that no one except the mother could make such a sacrifice for another person (child). With this expression, the value of the mother exceeds the value of the father; because the father is not able to help the mother in carrying and nursing the fetus. Therefore, the natural aspects of motherhood, such as pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding are considered valuable

works that deserve appreciation and reward for women in the Holy Quran and hadiths, unlike the proponents of feminist theories who deny natural motherhood and reject its natural necessities such as pregnancy and childbirth which are considered to be only an animalistic function that inhibits the development and excellence of women. They wanted women to free themselves from female biological constraints by accepting methods and technologies such as contraception, ectopic pregnancy, and the production of laboratory babies. (Bustān, 1388 SHb)

### **Childbirth**

Childbirth is a process in which the fetus and placenta leave the woman's body through the birth canal. Pregnancy lasts for about nine months and when the fetus is ready to be delivered, its head presses against the cervix and slowly opens it. The wall of the cervix gradually becomes thinner to create a passageway for the fetus to pass and be born. Then the membrane around the fetus is torn and the amniotic fluid flows out. Strong muscles in the uterine wall begin to contract strongly, which causes labor pain for the mother. This contraction is the necessary force to remove and give birth to the fetus; after the birth of the baby, another stage of the mother's role begins. It is stated in the Holy Quran about the birth of Hazrat Maryam: *"The birth pangs brought her to the trunk of a date palm. She said, 'I wish I had died before this and become a forgotten thing, beyond recall.'"* (Quran 19: 23)

In the honorable verse, the description of Maryam's condition during the birth of Jesus (peace be upon him) also mentions, that when she underwent childbirth pain, she distanced herself from the people and longed for death during that state. One of the reasons for this was pregnancy and childbirth in loneliness. (Qarā'atī, 1383 SH, 7/256) After pointing out the difficulty in childbirth, when a great figure like Lady Maryam could long for death at that moment (due to the childbirth pain and the fear and discomfort of people's slanders against her), God, with a gentle hint, talks about caring for the mother after childbirth, saying: *"Shake the trunk of the palm tree, freshly picked dates will drop upon you. Eat, drink, and be comforted..."* (Quran 19: 25-26)

One of the important points after giving birth is that the mother should get rid of the physical and mental discomforts and

problems during pregnancy and the birth process as soon as possible and return to a normal state. According to Maryam's condition, her physical needs after childbirth, and her mental condition, God orders her to eat dates (*Eat*) and drink water (*drink*) and have a pleasant feeling (*And be comforted*).

One of the causes of maternal mortality, especially in developing countries, is abnormal bleeding after childbirth. According to the research conducted about dates fruits, there are thirteen vital nutrients and five vitamins that make dates a source of food, and since women after childbirth need a lot of invigorating food and vitamins, it is recommended to eat dates. According to this need, the Holy Quran has recommended the best nutrition for Maryam.

It is stated in the Tafsīr of Qurṭubī: *"According to this verse, nothing in my opinion is better for parturient women than dates. If God found something else useful for parturient women from among the food items, He would have introduced it to Hazrat Maryam. For this reason, it has been said that dates are useful for parturient women. They also said: that when childbirth becomes difficult for a woman, there is nothing better for her than dates. In addition, the best food for a sick person is honey."* (Qurṭubī, 1364, 11/96)

Looking at the biological characteristics of mothers, going through and enduring the hardship of this period; whether the preliminaries of pregnancy such as menstruation or the difficulty of pregnancy and childbirth, it is considered the basis of female perfection in the light of Divine Will, with patience and belief, and the most foggy and great front of human morality such as the past and the legacy can be manifested. In the light of God's will. With patience and belief, one can nourish the soul and manifest the most important and greatest aspects of human morality, such as forgiveness and sacrifice.

The value and importance of the Islamic perspective can be understood when we examine the suffering and hardships of women during pregnancy and childbirth from the perspective of other schools of thought. One of the Jewish rabbis enumerates nine pains for a woman that God has revealed to her and her daughters because of the sin of the first woman (Eve): Enduring the menstrual period, virgin blood, the pain of pregnancy, the pain



of childbirth, the difficulty of having a child, etc. (Ṣādiqī Fasā'ī, et al., 1386 SH) In this view, the genetic characteristics of women, which is the preliminary to the acceptance of the role of motherhood, are considered as the punishment of women and the punishment for the sin of the first woman.

Some feminists also consider the biological reactions of reproduction to be painful and worthless and consider abortion as a right of women and modern reproductive technologies (such as IVF) as a useful tool for having children. Over time, these beliefs produced unexpected results, and many of these women and young ladies found the plan stressful and disturbing, especially when their fertility had declined in the middle of a year despite having a job and good conditions. Today, they have become the most popular customers of fertility clinics and spend millions of dollars to have children and compensate for the lost time. (Ibid)

### **b) Psychological Characteristics**

In addition to the biological characteristics of mothers, several spiritual characteristics are also mentioned in the Holy Quran, some of which are:

#### **Desire for a child**

One of the important needs and capabilities of women is the spirit of nurturing and motherhood. According to psychologists, the instinct of motherhood is the most natural instinct and the development of women and their health is possible with motherhood. The manifestation of the feeling of motherhood and the need for children in many women is simply visible; because the intensity of feelings and emotions is one of their distinctive features, and the most important field of manifestation of affection and feeling is motherhood, and a woman can express all her emotional capacities only by becoming a mother. In addition, the naturalness of this instinct causes the second stage of reproduction to be realized after reproduction, which includes the "continuity of the generation" in the human species. (Jamshīdī et al, 1385 SH)

The Holy Quran has also confirmed the instinct of women to have children. While reporting the story of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), when the good news of Isaac's birth was given during

Abraham's old age, God also mentions the happiness of his elderly wife, Sarah (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1374 SH, 9/172): *"His wife, standing by, laughed as We gave her the good news of [the birth of] Isaac, and of Jacob, after Isaac. She said, 'Oh, my! Shall I, an old woman, bear [children], and [while] this husband of mine is an old man?! That is indeed an odd thing!'"* (Quran 11: 71-72)

Sarah's indescribable happiness was an indication of her desire to have a child, which was alive in her even in her old age. According to this verse, it can be argued that women's feeling of having children is not limited to a special period and time, but since women usually have the capability of fertility and motherhood at a young age, this feeling is more intense at that time. Sarah's happiness was so great that upon hearing the news of becoming a mother, she behaved unusually: *"Then his wife came forward crying [with joy]. She beat her face, and said, 'A barren old woman!'"* (Quran 51: 29)

Another Quranic evidence to establish the desire to have a child in women is the story of 'Imrān's wife, the mother of Maryam. According to interpretations, Hanna and Ishiyā' were two sisters, the first married 'Imrān, who was one of the prominent figures of Bani Israel, and the second married Zakariya, the Prophet of God. Hana, Imran's wife did not have children for many years. One day, she was sitting under a tree and saw a bird feeding its chicks, seeing this motherly love ignited the desire for a child in her heart, and from the bottom of her heart, she asked God for a child. It did not take much time before this sincere prayer was answered and she became pregnant. (Zamakhsharī, 1407 AH, 1/355) To get her prayer answered, she had vowed to make her child serve the Sacred House [Jerusalem] (Fakhr Rāzī, 1420 AH, 8/203): *"When the wife of Imran said, 'My Lord, I dedicate to You in consecration what is in my belly. Accept it from me; indeed, You are the All-hearing, the All-knowing.'" (Quran 3: 35)*

### Affection towards the child

The affection of a mother to a child is one of the most beautiful manifestations of the life of a mother and a child, which creates beautiful scenes of sacrifice and love. Affection and love towards the child also create support and care for the child and encourage mothers to spend their life and youth in this task.

The natural nature of motherhood has established this love in their essence so much that in many cases, the law and Sharia do not need to recommend and interfere in its manner. However, there is a lot of emphasis in Islam, on matters such as the superiority of feeding a child with mother's milk compared to other feeding methods (Ḥurr 'Āmilī, 1409 AH, 15/175), the superiority of the mother's affection towards her child over other affections and the upbringing of children in the hands of mothers. This has great value, but this issue has been considered as an important priority; not mandatory; because mothers themselves naturally love and care for their children.

This love and affection are praiseworthy and respectable, as God Almighty has respected the love and concern of Moses' mother. When God orders his mother to save Moses' life: *"Put him in the casket, and cast it into the river...."* (Quran 20: 39) comforts him with special expressions, because naturally in the view of Moses' mother, throwing a baby into the river is putting him in danger and she could not simply abandon her young child in this situation.

The use of the Arabic term *"Iqdhiḥi"* [in the verse] which means "to throw" and "to cast" (Ibn Manẓūr, 1414 AH, 9/276) is an indication of the difficulty in this task, and perhaps a reference to the point that the mother, without any fear and determination should bravely place the baby in the box and throw him into the River Nile ignoring the turbulence of the waves and should not be afraid. (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1374 SH, 13/199)

In another verse, the depth of love and attachment of Moses' mother [to the baby] is mentioned, a situation which required divine help to overcome it: *"The heart of Moses' mother became desolate, and indeed she was about to divulge it had We not fortified her heart so that she might have faith [in Allah's promise]."* (Quran 28: 10)

However, Moses' mother, with the faith and steadfastness that God had instilled in her heart, sent Moses' sister after the box she had left in the water to find out about his fate. Her worries continued until God returned her son to her and gave her comfort: *"...Then We restored you to your mother that she might not grieve and be comforted."* (Quran 20: 40) It is as if God respects the mother's worries about her child and ends her grief by returning the child.

According to these verses, it can be said that the attachment and affection of a mother to her child is natural and nothing can diminish or destroy it. Musa's mother's attachment to her infant child was so great that, according to the Quran, she could not tolerate [separation] except with the help of God, otherwise, she would have revealed her child's secret information due to the intensity of her emotions.

In the hadiths of the Infallibles (peace be upon them), the instinct of women's love for children has also been explained, as if girls were initially created with attributes such as compassion, tenderness, and comfort for the stage of motherhood. The Messenger of God (PBUHH) saw a woman who, despite being hungry, gave her children a piece of bread that was given to her and he (PBUHH) said: *"Mothers are merciful to their children. If not for what they did concerning their husbands, it would have been said to them, 'Enter Paradise without being called to account'."* (Kulaynī, 1407 AH, 5/554)

It is appropriate at this juncture to mention the name of the great lady of Islam, Lady Fatima Zahra (peace be upon her) in this context, so that the exemplary model of her motherhood and kindness to her children will be known more. One of the nicknames of Hazrat Fatima is "Hāniyah" which means a compassionate and kind woman. Narrations are reported about the efforts of that noble lady in performing motherly duties, including playing with children (Majlisī 1403 AH, 43/286), feeding children at the same time, trying to establish justice in dealing with the children, trying to teach children patience in the face of hardships by calming hungry children who had not eaten for two days. (Ibid, 41/257)

With the transformation in the present era, it seems that these affiliations and attachments have decreased in some women and mothers, and on the contrary, other things such as social activities, employment, income generation, engaging in various entertainments, etc. have taken their place. The most important reason for this transformation can be seen as a change in the value placed on the role of womanhood and motherhood, which has become more widespread in recent years due to the growth of the feminist movement. By despising the institution of the family, radical feminists consider the value of motherhood marginal and unimportant, and by emphasizing the equality of men and women,

without any consideration for gender, the labor and importance of women's activities during pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and the breeding of the generation have been ignored. (Şādiqī Fasā'ī, et al., 1386 SH)

On the other hand, the prevalence of materialistic values and individualism, which is not proportional to motherly sacrifices, have also been influential in rejecting the role of motherhood. Some so-called intellectual movements consider women's individuality in the sense of women's economic independence, self-awareness, and putting an end to mother, wife, and seeing women as an inferior gender, and finally recognizing women's sovereignty over their own bodies, and calling for the development of individualism as the cause of women's challenge against patriarchy.

Individualism in the Western perspective means that the happiness of each person is defined only by his/her will and choice and based on his/her instinctive and material characteristics. (Tashakkurī, 1381 SH) With this point of view, no one, including a woman who plays the role of motherhood is required to spend time and money on her child. In addition, things like caring for the child, trying to provide proper nutrition and personal hygiene for the child, providing the basis for education, and staying awake at night to take care of an infant or sick baby will be meaningless, and the child will be considered a nuisance that will wake up the mother, deprives her of night rest, recreation, employment, and income generation, etc. as the baby gets into her life.

This idea can be seen in the opinions and writings of Feminism leader, Simon Dubois: *"Pregnancy is a sad story that takes place in a woman, between herself and herself... The fetus is a part of her body and is also a parasite that exploits her, and a woman caught in the traps of nature is a plant and an animal, a warehouse of gelatin, an incubator."* (Dubois, 1380 SH)

Some of them also consider the mother's care and spending time raising her child as a man's conspiracy that should be fought against with feminist activities. Ann Eckley, one of the radical feminists in this field, says that the fact that nature has embedded the process of the formation and embedded of the human embryo and its nutrition in the female body should not make the task of caring for and nurturing the human baby

the responsibility of the female." (Mushīrzādeh, 1381 SH)

### The Rights of Mothers

There is no denial of the fact that there are many difficulties during pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, caring, and upbringing of a child, which impose restrictions on women. Therefore, taking on these responsibilities requires strong support so that women are free from complications such as mental turmoil, frustration, feelings of emptiness, and alienation, and do not consider motherhood as a difficult and fruitless activity. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to favor mothers and introduce their position so that they are supported by fathers and children. The effort to honor the status of mothers and appreciate their efforts is a big step in the mental and physical well-being of mothers. The Holy Quran has some commandments for Muslims in this regard, some of which are mentioned below:

#### Respecting the hardships during pregnancy

In verse 14 of Quran 31 [Surah Luqmān], after the expression *"His mother carried him through weakness upon weakness"* which indicates the suffering and hardships of the mother during pregnancy, Almighty God instructs her children not to forget her labors and hardships and they should appreciate her. Then in the continuation of the verse, He says: *"Give thanks to Me and to your parents."* After this instructional order, the divine order comes in the form of a threat: *"To Me is the return."* This means that if you do not thank God and your parents, you will not have a good end in the hereafter. According to the noble verse, the sufferings and hardships that the mother endures during pregnancy have been given special attention by God, and the children are therefore obliged by Him to compensate for those hardships. This reminder of hardships, in addition to encouraging women to conceive, which is naturally associated with suffering, makes these hardships worthwhile, gives them divine color, and makes the woman more tolerant.

#### God's command to protect the mother's status

Some verses of the Quran command the children (with a general address) to respect the rights of their parents. In some other verses,

such as verse 83 of Quran 2 [Surah Baqarah], verse 36 of Quran 4 [Surah Nisā], verse 51 of Quran 6 [Surah An'ām], and verse 23 of Quran 17 [Surah Isra'], goodness to parents comes immediately after monotheism, which shows its importance.

In addition to these cases, sometimes the Prophets (peace be upon them) were specifically ordered to do this: *"And to be good to my mother, and He has not made me self-willed and wretched."* (Quran 19: 32) Although the Prophet Isa (a.s) was born through a mother without a father by divine commandment, and from his speeches, he mentioned goodness to his mother in the enumeration of his honors (Makārim Shīrāzī, 1374 SH, 13/56), we can see and realize the importance and status of women who play this responsibility.

In another verse, God praises a great Prophet like Hazrat Yahya (a.s) and says in describing his situation: *"And good to his parents, and was not self-willed or disobedient."* (Quran 19: 14) It can be understood from this glorious verse that kindness to parents is a sign of God's piety and this kindness is valuable when there is no disobedience and domination. It is also emphasized that leaving kindness to parents is a sign of rebellion and disobedience.

In the narrations, the rights of mothers are prioritized over fathers. It is stated in a hadith of the Holy Prophet (PBUHH): A man said to him: *"O Messenger of God, who is the most deserving of my good companions? He said: Your mother. He said then who? He said: Your mother. He said then who? He said: Your father."* (Nūrī, 1407 AH, 15/182)

### Physical care of Mothers

Proper nutrition and physical care of mothers during pregnancy and childbirth are very important, and as earlier mentioned, verses 25 and 26 of Quran 19 [Surah Maryam] pointed to this: *"Shake the trunk of the palm tree, freshly picked dates will drop upon you..."*

Provision of the material needs of mothers during breastfeeding is also considered in the Quran. God has said about providing these needs: *"Mothers shall suckle their children for two full years—that for such as desire to complete the suckling—and on the father shall be their maintenance and clothing, in accordance with honourable norms..."* (Quran 2: 233)

In this verse, the expenses of the mother's food and clothing during breastfeeding are the responsibility of the father of the baby so that the mother can breastfeed the child with peace of mind. In the verse, the phrase "*Al-Mawlūd lahu*", that is, the person to whom the child is born is used instead of the word "father" or "a parent" to indicate the biological father. As if Allah wants to mobilize his father's emotions to perform this task. That is, if the expenses of the child and his mother are the responsibility of the father at this time, it is because this baby is also his child. (Makārim, 1374 SH, 2/187) This ruling solves the concerns of mothers to meet their material needs so that they can perform their duties better towards their children. (‘Allāsavand, 1390 SH, 2/109)

This sublime thought and plan can never be compared with the perspective of the feminist theorists. Karen DiCro says: "*No man is allowed to support his wife, even if his wife is very willing, and if she has been through such domestic patterns for centuries, and even if she has very good economic logic and a good feeling for her husband because it will cause the feelings and respect of the person to be destroyed and diminished. Love will be formed between two people when they both pay their own expenses separately!*" (Ṣādiqī Fasā’ī, et al., 1386 SH)

In the opinion of this author, dependence, and attachment are two opposite elements, while in human life, dependencies cause attachments. Certainly, if a woman has to bear all the financial costs and emotional pressures of being a wife and mother, she will not have the motivation to take on these roles, especially the role of motherhood. On the contrary, according to Islamic thought, motherhood is a serious duty that everyone, including the father of the child, who is the legal wife of the woman, should accompany her and create the necessary conditions for the comfort of the woman. In the traditional culture of some countries of the Middle East, including Iran, it can be seen that mothers, especially during pregnancy and breastfeeding, receive more attention in society, and others try to comfort them with behaviors such as offering food when they are sick or when their children are crying and they receive psychological support.



## Rewards and spiritual support

It was said that sometimes mothers suffer mental and emotional disturbances while performing difficult motherhood roles during pregnancy, childbirth, and child upbringing. By emphasizing the spiritual dimensions of motherhood, Islam strengthens mothers' mental health and sense of satisfaction and hope. The high status of mothers in Islam and the mandatory and desirable recommendations regarding kindness and goodness to them remove the background of these disturbances to a large extent. The loving relationship and mutual respect of parents and children in many religious families is proof of this claim. (Bustān, 1388 SHa)

On the other hand, the expression of spiritual reward makes them not be discouraged from performing their duties even if they are not appreciated by others in the hope of gaining divine satisfaction and reward. In the narratives, the spiritual value of specific female activities in reproduction and childbearing is also expressed as the highest virtue of good deeds.

It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s): Umm Salma (the Prophet's wife) said to the Prophet: *"O Messenger of God! Men have taken all the good things. So, what is the share for the helpless women? The Prophet replied: "This is not the case. A woman during pregnancy is like someone who fasts during the day prays at night, and struggles with her wealth and life in the way of God. So, when she gives birth, she deserves a reward that no one can understand because of its greatness, and when she breastfeeds her child, for every suckling, she is entitled to a reward equivalent to freeing one of the descendants of Hazrat Ismail. So, when she finished breastfeeding, a noble angel said to her, start your deeds, because all your sins have been forgiven."* (Ḥurr 'Āmilī, 1409 AH, 21/451)

In this narrative, motherhood aspects such as pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding have been given special spiritual value; because the spiritual aspects are exciting and satisfying for humans and can make many of the limitations and problems that a mother suffers in the process of procreation and child upbringing tolerable and appealing.

This valuing of Islam for the role and emotions of mothers is also manifested in the greatest acts of worship and religious duties. The Holy Prophet (PBUHH) says: *"When you were in*

*supererogatory prayer, if your father calls you, do not interrupt your prayer, but if your mother calls you, interrupt your prayer."* (Nūrī, 1408 AH, 15/ 181)

In another ruling regarding prayer, it is stated that a mother can hold her crying child in her arms and give him/her milk while praying. This ruling is a form of support and understanding of motherhood. One of the authors writes about giving support to the mothers and their spiritual rewards: *"Maybe women were oppressed in their motherhood and physical position, but they had a superior position in terms of metaphysics and spirituality. This superior status gave them a sense of satisfaction that they would not rebel against the mother's position."* (Munajjim, 1381 SH, 85)

In criticizing this statement, it should be said that if playing the role of motherhood is accompanied by faith and spiritual beliefs, and the others, including father and children, appreciate her efforts, due to performing this role of motherhood, she is given spiritual, material and legal support in the society, she will never rebel against motherhood; this is because childbearing and desire for children are like women, and they feel happy doing so and manifest their sense of nurturing.

Mothers are said to have a more perfect personality compared to women who have not experienced motherhood. The reason for this is moral abilities such as gentleness and tolerance, which are the result of coping with the state of pregnancy along with an increase in the spirit of cheerfulness and instinctive affection, and women acquire them from pregnancy to months and years after childbirth. During pregnancy, childbirth, and baby care, the mother adjusts herself to the condition of the fetus and the baby. This brings flexibility to the mother's state and moods. ('Allāsavand, 1390 SH) In this way, mothers can develop and nurture their souls with the growth of their children and feel satisfied with this relationship.

## Conclusion

The role of motherhood in Islam and in the Holy Quran, which is the most important document of Islam, is sacred. Islam emphasizes natural motherhood against contractual motherhood, which is desired by feminists, and respects the biological role of the mother in the birth of the child, this is the minimum limit of a

mother who obliges the child to be grateful and appreciative of the mother until the end of his life.

In addition, by referring to matters such as pregnancy and childbirth, which are very difficult, it draws people's attention to the difficulty of mothers' duties so that they have better and more motivation to serve their mothers. The physical and mental needs of the mother are not insignificant in Islam, and the father of the child is obliged to provide these needs and be sympathetic and support the mother during the stages of childbearing and parenting, and with this attitude, be a practical model for the children in honoring the mother.

Displaying the value position of mothers is also influential in their personal and social values. This position is not established by material standards in society, but spiritual matters such as creating a valuable view of motherhood and reward and punishment in the hereafter in honoring mothers or disregarding them, guarantee the preservation of the position of mothers in the eyes of their children.

Islam's emphasis on protecting the position of mothers and giving them spiritual rewards is to encourage women to accept this role. Having a valuable view of motherhood, or seeing it as marginal and unimportant in society, has a significant effect on women's decision to assume this role. Only by recovering the real position of mothers, women will realize their value in this field and consider it sacred. With such an attitude, the hardships caused by it will be compensated by the affection and companionship of the children in their adulthood, and the mother-child relationship will be far away from conventional material bargains, but an arena of love and the manifestation of emotions. In this situation, children will have a healthy and capable personality, an empowered personality that will build a healthy society, provided they have a mother who is aware and benefits from proper upbringing.

Women's positive view of motherhood and acceptance of this responsibility is in their nature and is by their biological characteristics, but today, due to the prevalence and influence of feminist ideas in the form of individualism and ideas such as women not needing men in various aspects of life, employment, seeking pleasure and convenience, the desire of having and taking

care of children has decreased significantly in women. While in Islamic thought, all the physical characteristics and problems of women in bearing children are considered valuable and in addition to the spiritual reward that is a very good incentive for women to bear the problems of motherhood, the father of the child is given the responsibility to compensate for all the needs of the mother and be with her in all stages and sympathize with her.

### **Solutions and Suggestions**

As it is appropriate and mentioned in the Holy Quran and the narrations of the Infallibles (peace be upon them) and also considered in the traditional culture of Iranians, nowadays childbearing and the valuable place of motherhood in culture building have not been addressed and sometimes ideas that contradict it have been formed. One of these cases was population control policies, the only reason for which was introduced with the slogan "fewer children, better life", more comfort and prosperity. Television programs, which have a great role in creating culture in society, showed families in television series and movies who were comfortable and happy who had no children or had one or two children. More populated families were considered uncivilized people from a vulnerable class of society with little education.

The introduction of women's employment model in different fields was also not without influence. The dominance of such a view in the media and cultural institutions of the country caused a change in women's view of having children. On the other hand, with the decrease in the number of children, the responsibility of fathers towards children not only did not increase but sometimes it was limited to paying material expenses. To change these conditions, the value view of motherhood in society must be changed. This goal can be pursued by cultural investment in the media.

In Islamic society, all issues, including family roles such as motherhood, should be considered with a divine and valuable perspective. It is possible to use Quranic and religious principles in family relationships and issues related to mothers in the society's culture and improve the view of women and men on the role of motherhood. To achieve this goal, it is

necessary to recognize the obstacles of this work, the most important of which is the spread of feminist ideas and distance from moral and religious values, and plan to eliminate them. These programs include:

- Improving the role and status of mothers in society;
- Transformation in attitudes, methods, and educational content of textbooks in making motherhood and its related duties valuable;
- Education and physical, mental, and scientific empowerment of adult girls to assume the role of mother;
- Changing the value view of women and men in the society towards motherhood;
- Introducing the Islamic and national models from among the exemplary mothers;
- Scientific rejection of feminism doubts and thoughts by Islamic researchers.

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