Islamic Queries+

Original Translations of Articles from Various Religious Sources

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Why does Allāh use the Masculine Pronoun when referring to Himself in the Qur'ān?

✆ Question

Why does Allāh ﷻ [God] use the masculine pronoun when referring to Himself in the Qur'ān? Why has the masculine pronoun taken precedence over the feminine pronoun?

✆ Answer

The language of the Qur'ān is ʿArabic and contrary to some languages of the world, ʿArabic makes use of [only] the masculine and feminine

pronoun and thus it is natural that if any book is to be written in this language, even if it is a book from the Divine, it must follow the rules of that language and must structure itself based on its conventions. Because of the fact that the ʿArabic language does not have a 'neutral' gender to be used as a pronoun, and because there are some things which are outside of the scope of gender, these are commonly referred to with the masculine pronoun in ʿArabic. One should note that there are examples of this in various other languages such as French.

Therefore, building upon this first point we reach the following initial conclusion that: Simply using the masculine pronoun does not denote masculine traits [to be associated with that thing]. In fact we can state that the Qurʾān does not present a world-outlook based on the recessive male-dominated culture prevailing at the time of its revelation — but rather, the use of the masculine pronoun is merely a feature of the language which the speaker [in this case, Allāh ﷻ] is bound to follow.

Therefore, due to the fact that the Qurʾān was revealed in ʿArabic, it speaks in the same manner [as the people would be speaking] and is fully compliant with the rules of ʿArabic grammar and has therefore used the pronouns and expressions of the masculine form when speaking about Allāh ﷻ.

In other words: From one point of view, in ʿArabic, nouns and verbs (with the exception of the first person singular and dual/plural) are of two types — masculine and feminine — and these two categories are further divided into two more categories – the 'natural' – 'ḥaqīqī' and 'grammatical' – 'majāzī'.

Creations which have either the male or female reproductive organs are referred to as 'natural masculine' or 'natural feminine' and

in other instances, they can be 'grammatical masculine' and 'grammatical feminine'.

An example of a 'natural masculine' word would be 'الرجل' – *al-rajulu* – the man and 'الجمل' – *al-jamalu* – the male camel; and a 'natural feminine' example would be something like 'إمرأة' – *imra'atu* – female or 'ناقة' – *naqatu* – female camel.

In addition, an example of a 'grammatical masculine' word would be 'القلم' – *al-qalamu* – the pen and 'الجدار' – *al-jidāru* – the wall; while an example of a 'grammatical feminine' word would be 'الدار' – *al-dāru* – the home and 'الغرفة' – *al-ghurfatu* – the room.

Words which are used in the 'grammatical feminine' sense, for example, things like the names of cities, or parts of the body which are in pairs [hands, arms, feet, etc...] are done inductively and according to rules [of ʿArabic grammar], while in all other instances, there are no set rules to be followed. Rather, such words are built and used based on normal custom or usage [of the ʿArabs] – meaning that the only criterion for some words [to be of the grammatical masculine or feminine] can strictly be gained by listening to those who speak ʿArabic and how they use such words [in their daily conversation]. Therefore in this area, one must observe how the ʿArab speakers use a word [either in the masculine format or feminine format] and if something is not a 'natural feminine' or a 'grammatical feminine' nor is it a 'natural masculine', then in this case, the default is that it is referred to using the 'grammatical masculine'.[1]

From another point of view, because of the fact that Allāh ﷻ neither procreates nor is He born and that there is absolutely nothing

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[1] *Ṣarf Sādeh*, pg. 28 and 145

like Him[2] and in its analogical and practical application [of how the ʿArabs use such words] He (Allāh ﷻ) is also not a 'grammatical feminine', therefore based upon the agreed-upon rules of the ʿArabic language one must use pronouns, names and characteristics in the masculine [grammatical] pronoun for the exalted name of Allāh ﷻ.

One must also pay attention to this important point that grammatical indications of feminine and masculine do not really carry any intrinsic value to them and definitely do not attest to any worthiness and distinction and therefore, if referring to something with a word which is of the masculine form was to denote some worthiness or excellence [to that thing] then it would not have been used for some non-human creations and some of the filthiest of creations in existence such as *Shayṭān* and *Iblīs*, etc... and should not be used for some verbs, names or pronouns.

In the same vein, if referring to something with a word which is of the feminine form carried any meaning of imperfection or of being worthless, then why would it be used for valuable things in creation such as the sun (الشمس – *ash-shams*), the Earth (الأرض – *ash-ardh*), men [plural] (الرجال – *al-rijāl*), water (الماء – *al-māʾ*) and also for the best of actions and the best of places – things such as the prayers (الصلاة – *as-ṣalāt*) or the charity (الزكاة – *al-zakāt*), paradise (الجنة – *al-jannah*), etc...[3]

O Allāh! Send Your prayers upon Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad!

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[2] *Noble Qurʾān*, Sūrah al-Tawḥīd (112), verse 3; Sūrah al-Shūrā (26), verse 11
[3] Āmulī, ʿAbdullāh Jawādī, *Women in the Mirror of Glory and Beauty*, pg. 78