



The best of you are those  
who are best to their women.

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

# WOMEN IN ISLAM

Shaping Society and  
Family Through Faith and  
Spiritual Insight



MAULANA  
WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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## FOREWORD

In Islam, there is no difference between man and woman regarding status, rights, and blessings in this world and Hereafter. Both men and women are equal participants in life, following the principles of being 'equal in respect and different in roles.' Man and woman, in the eyes of Islam then, are not duplicates of one another but complements. This concept permits the shortcomings of one sex to be compensated for by the strengths of the other.

Men and women can be likened to a cart running on two wheels. Each of the wheels contributes equally to the running of the cart. Even if only one of the wheels goes out of order, the cart will stop. The way a cart traverses its path with the help of the two wheels, precisely in the same way, with the cooperation of men and women, the life system can be run efficiently.

Similarly, when it comes to the establishment of a home and the raising of a family, men and women have their separate roles to play. But each is vital. Each is indispensable to the other. For them to come together, function in unison, and live in harmony, there must be mutual respect and a prevailing sense that a difference in biological function does not imply inequality. The biological division of human

beings into male and female is the result of the purposeful planning of our Creator.

Possessing qualities of gentleness, compassion, patience, and emotional connection, women have been bestowed by the Creator the role of shaping future generations of human beings.

According to a tradition of Prophet Muhammad, “The best of you are those who are best to their families, and I am the best among you to my family.” (*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 3895)

Families are fundamental units of society, collectively shaping its fabric. If families are in good order, society will follow suit. Conversely, if families sink into a low moral state, society cannot prosper. Every person is born into a family, where he experiences his first lessons about home, family, and society. Therefore, to improve society, we must improve the quality of family members.

Preparing the next generation is a mother’s responsibility. The human generation is like a flowing river, where the water is continually replaced. In human beings, too, the new replaces the old. And a mother plays a crucial role in preparing this new generation. The responsibility of supplying good human beings to every generation devolves upon her. A mother plays a pivotal role in shaping the character of individuals in a family. If mothers can develop goodness and high moral character in their children, they will be able to contribute to the betterment of society.

## FOREWORD

If women understand their responsibility and prepare themselves to fulfill this role, they can play a pivotal role in not only shaping the lives of their children on spiritual lines but, in turn, they will be able to shape society on positive lines.

Farida Khanam

May 2, 2024  
New Delhi, India



## CHAPTER 1

# WOMEN AND ISLAM

The Quran states that God has created man and woman from the same soul. (4:1) This means that God has created both man and woman from the same substance. The entire human race has come from Adam and Eve, the first man and the first woman. Looked at in this way, human beings on this earth are blood brothers and blood sisters.

The Scriptures of Islam make it clear that neither sex is inferior or superior to the other. However, studies in biology and psychology show that the sexes are different, each being designed for a different purpose. So, the Islamic maxim runs: “Equal in respect, but different in role.”

In Islam, a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. There is no difference between man and woman regarding status, rights, and blessings in this world and the Hereafter. Both are considered equal participants in carrying out the functions of daily living. Men and women can be likened to a cart running on two wheels. Each of the wheels contributes

equally to the running of the cart. Even if only one of the wheels goes out of order, the cart will stop. The way a cart traverses its path with the help of the two wheels, precisely in the same way, with the cooperation of men and women, the life system can be run efficiently. Thus, the biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of purposeful planning by the Creator.

### THE WISDOM OF CREATION

The Quran states: “O Mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul. He created its mate from it, and from the two of them, countless men and women (throughout the earth) spread. Fear God in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your obligations with respect to ties of kinship. God is always watching over you.” (4:1)

Fear of God and honouring of one’s fellow men—this is the twin foundation of Islam laid down in the Quran in the above verse. According to most commentators who have penetrated the meaning of the Quran, ‘it’ in the above verse refers to ‘species.’ Eve was created not from Adam himself—but from the same species as Adam.

In several other verses from the Quran, the word ‘soul’ has been used to mean ‘species’—for example “God has created for you spouses of your kind.” (16:72)

Another of His signs is that He created for you from among

yourselves spouses so that you might find repose in them, and He created affection and kindness between you. (30:21)

Thus, women and men are from the same species. Biologically speaking, women have not been extracted from the bodies of their male counterparts. God fashioned them according to His Will, just as He fashioned men by His Will and Power.

Modern research has presented the facts on a purely academic level, that fundamental, inborn differences do exist between men and women. A detailed article on the 'Status of Women' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* includes a section on Scientific Studies of Male-Female differences. Here, the author points out physical differences in the respective constitutions of male and female forms of the human species. "Concerning personality traits," he writes, "men are characterized by greater aggressiveness, dominance, achievement and motivation, women by greater dependency, a stronger social orientation and the tendency to be more easily discouraged by failure than men. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 19, p. 907)

And there are many latter-day scientific experiments to back this up. Child specialists say that male-female differences are entirely genetic in nature. The delicateness found in women is due to the particular nature of the female hormone. Differences between male and female hormones exist from birth; they are not acquired later, as would be the case if they stemmed from environmental differences.

The tenets of Islam are based wholly on nature. This



is because Islam is the religion of nature. The laws Islam requires us to follow are our instinctive human requirements expressed in legal terms. And the teachings of Islam concerning women are no exception. They, too, are based on nature. Modern psychological, biological, and anatomical research proves women to have a more delicate constitution than men. This is the way their Maker has fashioned them. The nature of their womanhood and the particular part they have to play in society demand that they should be just as they have been made—that is relatively delicate compared to men.

It is this fact of nature on which Islamic teachings have been based. Because of women's delicate constitution, Islam teaches men to be gentle with them. That way, they will not lose heart or become too despondent to perform their special duties in life. Women are not like iron and steel, immune to rough treatment. They are fragile and delicate. It is best to let them be in their natural state.

In various traditions, the Prophet of Islam advised that people should be gentle with women. A tradition of the Prophet states:

“The best among you is he who gives the best treatment to his womenfolk.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1978)

The Prophet himself followed this principle in life. During the time of the Prophet, women attended the night prayer. Sometimes, they used to take their small children along

with them. The Prophet used to pay special attention to strict and full observance of prayer. Yet so great was his consideration for women that sometimes, when he heard babies crying, he would cut short the prayer. He said, "Sometimes I stand up for prayer, intending to do a long one. Then I heard a baby cry, so I cut short the prayer, not wanting to make things difficult for the child's mother. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 707)

Thus, when God says that He created man's mate from the same soul, He means that women are of the same species as men. God made them that way, so there should be harmony between the two sexes so that there may be peace and harmony in family life. In this way, together, they may be able to build a better society and the world.

### SOME SAYINGS OF THE PROPHET

Now we come to certain sayings attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, in which the Arabic word '*dhil*' has been mentioned for the word 'rib.' The first thing that has to be remembered here is that these traditions are about ordinary women and do not refer to the creation of Adam and Eve. It is the manner of every woman's creation that is being dealt with, not precisely that of Eve. One of the relevant sayings is as follows:

"Treat women well, for they have been created from a rib." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5186)

This cannot be taken to mean that women have been created from a rib, for this has no connection with the point conveyed in the rest of the sentence, which is that women should be treated well. A correct interpretation of the word 'rib' has to fit in with the underlying purpose behind the Prophet's statement.

The statement, 'women have been created from a rib,' should be taken metaphorically, not literally. What the Prophet wished to convey was this: "Women are akin to a rib and should be treated with due consideration.' There is another tradition that explains what this means. 'A woman is like a rib,' said the Prophet, 'If you try to straighten it, it will break.'" (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1468)

This saying of the Prophet Muhammad, related in the *Sahih* of both Bukhari and Muslim, which are the most authentic collections of traditions, makes it clear that women are like ribs, not created from ribs. The allusion is figurative, not literal. Light is also cast on the meaning of the metaphor. Ribs break when one tries to straighten them. So, it is with women. Rather than try to straighten them, it is better to let them be.

'Women have been created from ribs' and 'Women are like ribs' are two different ways of saying the same thing. There is a difference in the mode of expression of the two statements, but there is no difference in meaning. It is common in every language for metaphors to be expressed directly without using the words 'like' or 'as.' For instance, if one wishes to pay tribute to a person's bravery, one can

say that he is like a lion. But there is not as much force in saying that a person is 'like a lion' as in saying that he 'is a lion.' Examples of such usage abound in every language, including English. A notable one is to be found in the poem "Morte d'Arthur" by the celebrated poet Alfred Lord Tennyson:

...More things are wrought by prayer  
 Than this world dreams of, wherefore, let thy voice,  
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day  
 For what are men better than sheep or goats  
 That nourishes a blind life within the brain,  
 If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
 Both for themselves and those who call them friends.  
 For so the whole round earth is every way  
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

In this last line, the poet does not mean that the world is physically tethered to the feet of God by chains but merely wishes to indicate the unbreakable bonds between God and this world. In referring to the chains as 'golden,' he suggests these bonds have great beauty and value. By referring to the 'feet' of God rather than any other part of Him, he suggests the humble position of man in God's divine scheme. It is, indeed, a vibrant metaphor.

To return to the metaphor of the rib, in saying that if one tries to straighten a woman, one will break her, the Prophet was referring to her delicate nature. Physically, women are weaker than men; psychologically, they are more strong

and more prone to emotional upset. Everyone realizes this is a fact of life, regardless of whether he is educated or not. A father, for instance, will not be as hard on a daughter as he might be on his son, for he knows that boys are made of sterner stuff than girls. The latter tend to break under severe pressure.

For this reason, females are more prone to emotional breakdowns. Sometimes, a trivial matter can drive a woman to have a nervous breakdown. In likening a woman to a rib, the Prophet metaphorically expressed this fact of life. Ribs have a slight curve in them. There is good reason for them to be made that way. They should be left in their natural state. No attempt should be made to straighten them. The Prophet used a parable to explain the delicacy of women's nature, pointing out that due to their nature, their delicate emotional constitution should always be borne in mind. God has created them that way and has done so for good reason. They should be treated kindly. It should be done tactfully and gently if they must be told something. Abruptness and severity will break them, as a rib is broken by any attempt to straighten it. Once, when the Prophet was on a journey, he saw some women riding on a camel. The man leading the camel made to drive the animal on faster, forgetting that this would cause undue discomfort to his passengers. So, the Prophet said to the camel driver: 'You have glass cases there. Be gentle with them.' (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2323)

## EQUAL IN RESPECT, DIFFERENT IN ROLE

A study of the Quran and Hadith tells us that a woman enjoys the same status as a man in Islam. The Quran says: “You are members, one of another.” (3:195)

Men and women have no difference regarding status, rights, and blessings in this world and the Hereafter.

Both men and women can be likened to a cart running on two wheels. Each of the wheels contributes equally to the running of the cart. Even if only one of the wheels goes out of order, the cart will stop. The way a cart traverses its path with the help of the two wheels, precisely in the same way, with the cooperation of men and women, the life system can be run efficiently. Thus, the biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of purposeful planning by the Creator.

The first verse that we find in the Quran on this subject is as follows:

“O mankind! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul. He created its mate from it, and from the two of them, countless men and women spread [throughout the earth]. Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your obligations with respect to ties of kinship. God is always watching over you.” (4:1)

This verse of the Quran tells us that God has created man and woman from the same soul, that is, from the same substance. The human race has come from Adam and Eve,

the first man and the first woman. Looking at it this way, human beings are blood brothers and blood sisters.

Another verse of the Quran reads:

“It was He who created you from a single soul, and from it made its mate so that he may find comfort in her.” (7:189)

This verse stresses what is common between man and woman; both are a source of comfort to one another. The word ‘comfort’ relates to all the activities of life, meaning thereby that God has created men and women in such a way that they assist one another in all matters so that life’s journey continues peacefully and successfully.

In the early period of Islam, both sexes were fully active in different fields of life, from housework to agriculture and horticulture and from worship in the mosque to the battleground. Everywhere, women were visible and active.

In Islamic history, there are many examples of women giving invaluable help to their husbands in critical situations. One of the most notable was Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet of Islam, who successfully brought the Prophet back from a state of fear and trembling to a state of normalcy after he received the first divine revelation in the solitude of the Cave of Hira from the Archangel Gabriel. She was able to reassure him that his life was not, as he feared, in danger, as she was emotionally detached from the incident. She observed: “God will surely never forsake you. You are kind to your kin; speak the truth; you always help the weak;

take care of whoever crosses your threshold; give solace to the weary.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 4953)

Another verse in the Quran tells us that men and women have equal status in God’s eyes. None is superior to the other.

“I will not let the deeds of any doer among you go to waste, be he male or female. You are members, one of another.” (3:195)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the well-known commentator on the Quran, remarks in his commentary on this verse: “In Islam, the equal status of the sexes is not only recognized but insisted on. If sex distinction, which is a distinction in nature, does not count in spiritual matters, artificial distinctions, such as rank, wealth, position, race, colour, birth, etc., would count even less.”

Thus, the very same virtues in thought, word, and deed will be prerequisites for both sexes to enter paradise. If the qualities of piety, humility, honesty, patience, and compassion are demanded of men, they will, in like measure, be demanded of women.

So, we see that Islam gives women equal status to men. The following Hadith gives an apt description of the role of women: “Men and women are two halves of a single unit.” (*Sunan Abi Dawood*, Hadith No. 236)

We see that the scriptures of Islam make it clear that neither sex is inferior or superior to the other. However, studies in



biology and psychology show that the sexes are different, each being designed for a different purpose. So, the Islamic maxim runs:

“Equal in respect, but different in role.”

Islam gives the same status to women as it does to men. Both are considered equal participants in carrying out the functions of daily living. There is no difference in their status, rights, and blessings in this world and the Hereafter.

## THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

Here are some further quotations from the Quran and Hadith regarding the position of women in Islam.

### Some Verses of the Quran

Women shall, with justice, have rights similar to those exercised against them. (2:228)

Women shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave, whether little or much, it is legally theirs. (4:7)

... Those that have faith and do good works, both men and women, shall enter the Gardens of Paradise and receive blessings without measure. (40:20)

## Words of the Prophet Muhammad

The following traditions of the Prophet indicate the elevated function of women in Islam:

The best among you is he who is best for his family. For my family, I am the best of all of you.  
(*At-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 3895)

The most perfect man of religion is one who excels in character. The best among you is he who treats his womenfolk best. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6035)

From the above verses of the Quran and Prophetic Traditions, it is clear that, although males and females differ from one another biologically, they are equal in terms of human status. No distinction is made between women and men as regards their respective rights. This is all to the good if they are to be lifetime companions.

Man and woman, in the eyes of Islam then, are not duplicates of one another but complements. This concept permits the shortcomings of one sex to be compensated for by the strengths of the other.

It is a fact that women, in general, are not physically as strong as men, but their physical weakness in no way implies their inferiority to men. The eyes are the most delicate parts of our body, while the nails, by comparison, are strong. That does not mean that the nails are superior to the eyes.

Just as two different kinds of fruits will differ in colour, taste, shape, and texture, without one being superior or inferior to the other, so also do men and women have their different qualities that distinguish the male from the female without there being any question of superiority or inferiority. They are endowed by nature with various capacities to play their respective roles in life with greater ease and effectiveness.

However, regarding innate talents, all individuals, be they men or women, differ. Yet their need for each other is equal. All are of equal value. One is not more important or less important than the other. Similarly, when it comes to establishing a home and raising a family, men and women have separate roles to play. But each is vital. Each is indispensable to the other.

In Islam, therefore, a woman enjoys the same status as that of a man. But in ancient times, women were considered inferior and deprived, among other things, of the right to inherit property. Islam gave them their due legal rights over property for the first time in human history. Neither did it distinguish between men and women regarding status, rights, and blessings in this world and the Hereafter. Both were considered equal participants in carrying out the functions of daily living. As the Quran aptly puts it: "You are members, one of another." (3:195)

## ISLAM GIVES MORE RESPECT TO WOMEN THAN MEN

Islam grants even more respect to women than to men. According to one Hadith, a man once asked the Prophet who deserved the best treatment.

“Your mother,” said the Prophet. “Who’s next?” asked the man. “Your mother.” “Who comes next?” the man asked again. The Prophet again replied, “Your mother.” “Who is after that?” insisted the man. “Your father,” said the Prophet. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5971)

This clearly shows that Islam gives more respect to women than to men. Another example concerns Hajra, Prophet Abraham’s wife. Hajj, regarded as the most superb form of worship in Islam, entails the performance of Sa’i, which is one of the main rites of the Hajj. This is accomplished by running back and forth seven times between Safa and Marwah, two hillocks near the Kabah. This running, enjoined upon every pilgrim, be they rich or poor, literate or illiterate, kings or commoners, is in imitation of the desperate quest of Hajra, Prophet Abraham’s wife, for water to quench the thirst of her crying infant four thousand years ago. The performance of this rite is a lesson in struggling for the cause of God. It is of the utmost significance that this was an act performed by a woman. Perhaps there could be no better demonstration of a woman’s greatness than God’s command to all men to follow in her footsteps.

We can see that the principle implied by the expression

‘ladies first’ in modern times had already been established in Islam at the very outset.

### THE SUCCOUR OF GOD

In the sixth year of Hijrah, a 10-year peace treaty was concluded at al-Hudaybiyyah, one article of which specified that anyone emigrating to Muhammad’s camp without the permission of his guardian would have to be returned to Makkah. In contrast, any Muslim emigrating from Muhammad’s camp to Makkah would not have to be returned. (Ibn Kathir, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, 3/321) This was adhered to in the case of men; one notable instance was that of Suhayl ibn ‘Amr’s son, Abu Jandal, who, despite having walked 13 miles from Makkah to al-Hudaybiyyah, in a badly injured condition with his feet in shackles, was promptly returned to his persecutors. Similarly, other Muslims, having managed to free themselves from Quraysh, were returned one after another. (Ibn Kathir, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyah*, Vol. 3, pp. 321-335) This pact, however, was not regarded as covering the case of Muslim women. This verse of the Quran was revealed on this occasion:

“Believers! When believing women come to you as refugees, submit them to a test. Their faith is best known to God. Then, if you find them to be true believers, do not send them back to those who deny the truth.” (60:10)

Many incidents have been recorded of women managing to

free themselves from the clutches of the Quraysh, coming to Madinah, and then not being returned to the Quraysh despite the latter invoking the terms of the peace treaty. For example, when Umm Kulthum bint ‘Uqbah ibn Abu Mu’ayt escaped to Madinah, she was not returned even when two of her brothers came to take her back. (*Sirat Ibn Hisham*, Vol. 2, p. 362) The Quraysh considered this refusal a pact violation and quickly seized this opportunity to defame the Prophet. It is remarkable, however, that they soon ceased to protest on this score, and considering that they were the Prophet’s direst enemies, it is not easy to understand how this came about. No satisfactory answer is to be found in the books of Sirah and Commentaries on the Quran. Qadi Abu Bakr ibn al-’Arabi writes that the Quraysh ceased to protest because God had miraculously silenced their tongues. (*Ahkam al-Quran*, Edited by ‘Ali Muhammad al-Bajawi [Beirut, 1987], Vol. 4, p. 1786).

There can be no doubt about it: it was one of God’s miracles, although not in the usual sense of the word.

It is perhaps easier to arrive at the truth by examining the wording of this particular condition of the pact. Here we quote Bukhari’s version, which may be taken as the most authentic:

“You will have to return any of our men who come to you, even if they have accepted your faith.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2731-2732)

The expression “any of our men” (*rajul*) gave Muslims a

loophole by which to exclude women from the application of this condition. The Muslims had not put forward this condition of the pact, but the delegates of the Quraysh had dictated the Makkans and the actual wording. It seems that when one of them, called Suhayl ibn ‘Amr, was dictating, he was thinking of both men and women, but the actual word he chose to convey “any person” (inclusive of both men and women) was *rajul*, which in Arabic is used only for men. Most probably, this was why the Prophet could legitimately refuse—according to Imam Zuhri—to hand over Umm Kulthum bint ‘Uqbah to her brothers when they came to him to demand her return. Razi is another person who records the Prophet on this occasion as having explained that “the condition applied to men and not to women.” (Ibn Hajar al-‘Athqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, Vol. 9, pp. 345)

This was a divine succour for Muslim women.

### ISLAM HOLDS WOMEN IN HIGH ESTEEM

Referring to men and women, verse 195 of chapter 3 of the Quran says, “You are members one of another.” Further to this, a man and a woman are considered as ‘two halves of a whole.’ (*Sunan Abi Dawood*, Hadith No. 236) Another important fact is that the whole of the human race comes from Adam and Eve. Two other verses of the Quran state:

“Glory be to God, who created in pairs all things that the earth produces.” (36: 36)

“O Humanity! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female.” (49: 13)

Islam is often seen as keeping women in subservience. But Islam holds women in high esteem. Women enjoyed a special status during the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam. During the initial days of Islam, the Prophet's wife, Khadijah, was a businesswoman, and she employed the Prophet himself. Moreover, it was her initiative that led to their marriage. The Prophet's later wives, Umm Salmah and Zaynab, also earned their own money. Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, helped give first aid to the wounded in battle, and Asma, Abu Bakr's daughter, used to look after camels and date orchards. But, if a woman chose to lead a domestic life, taking care of her family, she had every right to do so. Thus, we can rightly say that women had the right to express themselves and take their own decisions in life.

According to Islam, women are not required to stay at home and confine themselves to household tasks; they can also seek work outside their homes, as long as there is no harm to their modesty and they do not compromise on their values.

The Quran does not prohibit a woman from working outside her home or engaging in business. What is more important is her virtue and how she conducts herself.

### WOMEN IN EVERY FIELD

Once, Umm Salmah was combing her hair when she heard the sermon starting in the mosque. The Prophet began



with the words, “O people ...” On hearing this, she told the woman, combing her hair, to braid it just as it was. The woman asked her why she was in such a hurry. Umm Salmah replied, “Are we not counted among ‘people’?” And so saying, she promptly braided her hair, went to the corner of the house nearest the mosque, and listened to the sermon.

In all, Umm Salmah related 378 traditions and used to lay down laws. Ibn Qayyim writes that if her decrees were to be compiled, they would take up a whole book.

Of all the Prophet’s wives, ‘Aisha was the most intelligent. About 2210 traditions of the Prophet were related by her, and these were passed on by about one hundred of the Prophet’s Companions and their close associates. Among her pupils were such eminent scholars as ‘Urwah ibn Zubayr, Sa’id ibn Mussayyib, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amir, Masruq ibn Ajda,’ ‘Ikrimah and ‘Alqama. A jurist of high calibre, she used to explain the wisdom and background of each tradition that she described. To take a straightforward example, she explained that the prescribed bath on a Friday was not just a matter of ritual, as had been maintained by Abu Sa’id al-Khudri and ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, but was meant as practical advice for people who had to travel from far-off places to say their Friday prayers in the Prophet’s mosque. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 877- 879). While travelling, they perspired and became dust-covered: the Prophet had told them to bathe before attending prayers.

(*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 902; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 847)

When the Prophet was preparing to set off for the Khaybar expedition, some women of the Banu Ghifar tribe approached him and said, “O Prophet of God, we want to accompany you on this journey so that we may tend the injured and help Muslims in every possible way.” The Prophet replied, “May God bless you. You are welcome to come.” (Ibn Sa’d, *Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Vol. 8, p. 292)

Umm ‘Atiyah, a Madinan woman, said she had been present on seven expeditions: “I treated the sick, attended to their wounds, and took care of their belongings during their journeys. I also prepared food for them.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20792)

During the battle with the Jews in Madina, the Muslim women and children gathered on the roof of a fort with Hassan ibn Thabit as their guard. Safia, the daughter of Abdul Muttalib, who was also present on the roof, describes how she saw a passing Jew taking a round of the fort: “At that time the Banu Qurayza (a Jewish tribe) were doing battle with the Muslims, which is why the road between us and the Prophet was cut off, and there was no one to defend us from the Jews. Being on the battlefield, the Prophet and his Companions could not assist us. Meanwhile, the Jew approached the fort, and I said, ‘O Hassan, look! This Jew who is walking all around our fort is a danger to us because he might go and inform the Jews of the insecure position we are in. The Prophet and his Companions are in

the thick of battle, so you must go down and kill him.’ But Hassan replied, ‘By God, you know I am not fit for such a task.’”

“At this, she tied a cloth round her waist, picked up a stick, went down to the outside of the fort, and beat the man to death. “This done, I came back inside the fort and asked Hassan ibn Thabit to bring the things the Jew had on him, as I, a woman, did not want to touch him.” Hassan ibn Thabit replied, ‘Daughter of Abdul Muttalib, I do not need his possessions.’”(Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wa an-Nihayah*, Vol. 4, pp. 108-109)

## WOMEN AND EDUCATION

A study of the life of the Prophet Muhammad tells us that education, whose actual goal from the Islamic point of view is the awakening of human awareness, is as essential for women as it is for men. There is a famous saying of the Prophet that acquiring knowledge is the duty of all Muslims. (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 229)

Indeed, only men and women who acquire knowledge and are aware can conduct the practical matters of life smoothly.

In the biographies of the narrators of Hadith literature, mention is made of the academic services of women, which shows that during the first era of Islam, there was a strong tendency among women to acquire knowledge. Imam Bukhari, who compiled the Hadith book *Al-Jami*

*as-Sahih*, considered the most authentic source of Hadith, was initially educated at home by his mother and sister.

According to the Quran, there is no difference between a man and a woman. They share a common fate and are subject to the same existential conditions with the same potential and the same purpose of being.

Some reports tell us that the Prophet's conversations with his wife, Aisha, were aimed at educating her. Aisha reported that the Prophet would often get up in the middle of the night and then converse with her on various topics. This informal education was an essential part of their life together. These interactions and discourses made her the most distinguished personality in matters of religious knowledge. The Prophet also took her with him on many trips, which gave her more understanding, and exposure to different aspects of the religion. She survived the Prophet for a full 50 years, and throughout this period and with her excellent almost photographic memory, she remained a valuable source of Islamic knowledge. Her house served as a school of religious learning.

Women are just as entitled to seek education as men. However, this does not necessarily mean that an educated woman should be rebellious and headstrong, challenging the authority of whomever she likes. Education, in the real sense, makes a person see reason and gives an insight into all aspects of life.

## ISLAM AND MODESTY

The Quran enjoys modesty in dress for both men and women, which will maintain one's dignity and respect irrespective of gender. The Quran tells the Prophet to clothe his wives and daughters and the daughters of the believers modestly and respectably so as not to attract undesirable elements. This means a woman should, by her attire, indicate that she is well-bred, respectable, and modest. It also means that a believing woman, out on the street or at work, should not draw attention to herself but lead a modest life of her own free will.

The Quran also says, "O children of Adam! We have sent down to you clothes to cover your nakedness, and to be pleasing to the eye, but the raiment of righteousness is the best." (7:26) According to this verse, to dress appropriately and act righteously is the truly Islamic way of life. The Quran further calls upon women and men to lower their gazes. One of the teachings of the Prophet is, "Every religion has a characteristic, and the characteristic of Islam is modesty." (Al-Tabarani, *Al-Mo'jam al-Kabir*, Hadith No. 10780)

Islam allows women to work outside the home. Although maintaining modesty in dress and demeanour is essential.

## THE OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Both, a woman and a man are obliged to believe in the oneness of God, without which there is no salvation. Both

men and women are also required to say the obligatory prayers and keep the fasts. A woman who is sufficiently capable and talented may earn her livelihood outside the home. Islam attaches particular importance to morality and exhorts both men and women to be morally responsible to each other and, most importantly, to God.

For the first time in human history, women were given their due legal rights, thanks to Islam, which specifies that property must be divided among the rightful heirs, which included women. A woman can possess a property separately, and neither her father nor her husband can exercise any right over it. On this subject, a retired Chief Justice of the Delhi Court, Mr. Rajinder Sachar, had this to say: "Historically, Islam had been very liberal and progressive in granting rights to women. Islam had granted these rights to Muslim women over 1400 years ago." (*The Statesman*, New Delhi, April 26, 1986)

Entitling women to have a share in the property, contrary to the custom of the time, is clear proof that Islam had no desire to degrade them. A woman also has the right to demand maintenance, and the court can ask her father or her husband for a contractual sum. At the time of marriage, a woman is entitled to mehr or dower, which should be solely in her name, not her father's. The mehr or dower is in no way a payment for conjugal rights. It is, in fact, a token sum of money, which symbolizes, in material form, the man's responsibilities towards his wife till his last breath.

A woman is also free to give or refuse her consent to

marriage. No one can force her to marry against her will. At the time of the marriage, she is required to give her consent, failing which the marriage would be invalid. Marriage, according to Islam, is a bilateral contract based on the free consent of the two contracting parties. The Prophet of Islam said, “An unmarried girl should not be married until her permission has been taken.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5136)

We can see that besides giving respect and equality to women, Islam gave them many rights.

### ATTRIBUTES OF MEN AND WOMEN

The characteristics of true believers, both men and women, are depicted in the Quran in the following words:

Men and women who have surrendered,  
believing men and believing women,  
obedient men and obedient women,  
truthful men and truthful women,  
enduring men and enduring women,  
humble men and humble women,  
men and women who give in charity,  
men who fast and women who fast,  
men and women who guard their chastity,  
men and women who remember God in  
abundance:  
For them, God has prepared forgiveness and a  
great reward. (33:35)

These, then, are the essential attributes that both men and women must cultivate if they are to endear themselves to God and become His favoured servants. These are explained below.

### Submission to God: *Islam*

The initial step to be taken is to embrace Islam, which means that one should willingly obey God, leading one's life within the bounds of God's commandments.

### Faith: *Iman*

*Iman* or faith begins from the realization of God. Discovering God as one's Creator causes a person to treat Him as an object of worship and to mould one's thinking on God-centred lines. The hue of faith colours every facet of one's lifestyle. Then one controls one's desires for the sake of God. The consciousness of one's servitude to God makes one remember God constantly, on all occasions, and at all times. Faith becomes the basis for one's way of living.

### Sincere Obedience to God: *Qunut*

*Qunut*, or sincere obedience to God, entails the adoption of the path of piety as shown by God and His prophet. It means total concentration of the heart and mind on the will of the Almighty God.

### Truthfulness: *Sidq*

*Sidq* or truthfulness means living an honest, straightforward life in the sense of saying plainly what one is going to do



and then actually doing as one has said. In other words, it means leading a life of principle.

### Patience: *Sabr*

*Sabr* or patience is a quality that enables one never to deviate from religious teachings, even when faced with difficulties and persecution. It is the quality one needs to follow the path of Truth, surmounting all obstacles placed there by the self or Satan. It is the virtue that will keep one from abandoning the divine path and succumbing to worldly temptations.

### Apprehension, Fear: *Khushu'*

'*Khushu'* meaning apprehension or fear, is a powerful emotion that engenders humility and submission. One comes to this state by realizing God's greatness and absolute power, which starkly contrasts with man's total powerlessness or helplessness. The fear of God completely engulfs the believer, making him bow before his Maker. In consequence, he becomes accountable to God and is kind and humble towards other human beings.

### Alms-Giving, Charity: *Sadaqah*

*Sadaqah* or alms-giving, charity is the duty of giving others the right to share in one's wealth. It makes one aware that if one's own needs require the expenditure of money for one's satisfaction, so also do the needs of others. One is never then oblivious to the needs of others.

## Fasting: *Sawm*

*Sawm* or fasting must be practised for the sake of God. By fasting, man contrasts his helplessness with God's omnipotence and thanks God for the food and drink He has bestowed upon him.

## The Preservation of Chastity

The preservation of chastity is essential as it keeps one pure and guards against shameful behaviour. The sense of shame which God has given man acts as a natural deterrent against permissiveness.

## Remembrance of God

Remembrance of God is one of the most important virtues. It means the frequent remembrance of God. It is not enough to have discovered the Creator and Sustainer of humanity: truly virtuous men and women must never forget God. One who has indeed found God will always have Him in his thoughts and His name on his lips.

The 66th chapter of the Quran, entitled 'Prohibition,' mentions three more qualities of believing women: penitence, devoutness, and obedience.

## Repentance: *Tawbah*

*Tawbah* or repentance means feeling penitent about committing a sin and then turning away from sinfulness. This is an exceptional attribute of believing men and women. In this world of trial, one does make mistakes

from time to time—dominated as one is by the self—but the effect of one's wrongdoing will not be irreversible if one at once turns to God and repents one's misdeeds. This repentance acknowledges God's greatness as compared to man's insignificance. Those who are genuinely repentant find the greatest favour in God's eyes.

### Worship: '*Ibadah*

*Ibadah* or worship is the act performed to acknowledge supernatural exaltedness. It is familiarly known as worship, and its object should be none other than the Almighty God. Believing men and women worship God and God alone.

### Itinerancy: Travelling for God's Cause

Itinerancy, or travelling for God's cause, is an important part of Islamic teachings. The virtues of undertaking journeys for God's cause are best explained in the hadith recorded by Abu Dawud: 'According to Abu Umamah, a certain individual once asked the Prophet's permission to become a dervish. The Prophet replied that the dervishism of his 'Ummah (community) meant struggling in the path of God.' (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Hadith No. 2486)

Travelling for the cause of God includes, according to Imam Raghīb Asfahani, taking such action for His sake as necessitated moving about from one place to another. Examples of such travel are covering long distances to acquire a knowledge of religion, emigrating for the sake of religion; visiting scenes of natural beauty or places of

historical interest which have some lesson for humanity; especially undertaking journeys to convey God's message to His creatures.

When taken together, these qualities, separately enumerated above, constitute an ideal for men and both sexes. These qualities form the basis of Islam and are the true means of salvation in the world.



## CHAPTER 2

# RIGHTS AND PROGRESS OF WOMEN

Islam accords equal status to men and women, notwithstanding the natural differences between them. Besides conferring innumerable rights to women, Islam has enhanced their prestige in their families and communities. At the time of Prophet Muhammad, women were free to participate in congregational prayers in mosques and attend the sermons of the Prophet.

Women were given the right to own property, dispose of it, inherit from their relatives, and keep to themselves their earnings, which they could spend in any way they wished. Muslim women play many societal roles: daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives to men. In their different capacities, they are allowed to share in the properties of their relatives in proportions fixed by the Quran, which are explained in the traditions of the Prophet and the literature of Islamic jurisprudence.

According to Islam, a woman can seek employment and work if she wishes to work. No text in the Quran or the Hadith prevents a woman from working outside the house, as long as it is lawful, within the preview of the Islamic Shariah, and as long as she maintains her dignity and safeguards her honour. The 12th-century famous Islamic philosopher Qadi Ibn Rushd (Averroes) said that women were equal to men in all aspects and thus could excel in times of trouble like war or peace. (Jamil Ahmed 1994. Ibn Rushd. Monthly Renaissance IV. Retrieved 2008-10-14) Professor T.W. Arnold has written in this regard: “It is interesting to note that the propagation of Islam has not been the work of men only, but that Muslim women have also taken their part in this pious task.” (T.W. Arnold, *The Preachings of Islam* (1976), p 415)

From this, we can understand that women have played an important role in Muslim history.

### THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

According to the Oxford Dictionary, “Women’s Rights are the rights that promote a social and legal equality of women to men.” In Islam, a woman enjoys the same status as a man regarding rights and blessings in this world and hereafter. According to Islamic belief, men and women are equal partners in life. (*Quran*, 3:195)

The Prophet reportedly said, “Only a man of noble character will honour women, and only a man of base intentions will

dishonour them.” (Ibn Asakir, *Tarikh Dimashq*, Vol. 13, p. 313) He also said, “The perfect man of religion excels in character. The best among you is he who gives the best treatment to his womenfolk.” (*Sunan At Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 1162)

Islam confers on women all the political and social rights that man enjoys. She is entitled to all the privileges a man also has. The Quran says, “O humanity! Fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul. He created its mate from it, and the two spread countless men and women (throughout the earth). Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your obligations regarding kinship ties.” (4:1)

From these verses, we can see that a man and a woman were created from equal parts, and from them, both progenies spread. It also tells humanity to respect one another and fear God in this matter.

Another verse of the Quran aptly describes the relationship between a man and a woman in this manner, “Another of His signs is that He created for you from among yourselves spouses so that you might find repose in them, and He created between you affection and kindness. Truly, there are signs in this for people who reflect.” (30:21) This verse brings out the need for love and respect of women, as created by God for its specific purpose. The discerning men must obey God’s command regarding women.

In this regard, the famous historian and writer William Montgomery Watt says that concerning the historical



context of his time, the Prophet Muhammad is seen as a figure who promoted women's rights and improved the status of women considerably during his time. He also highlighted how the women of those pre-Islamic days had no rights whatsoever and that after the death of a man, whatever he owned went to his sons and not to his wife. However, the Prophet Muhammad, by instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance, education, and divorce, gave women certain fundamental rights. (Maan, McIntosh, 1999)

Under Islam, marriage was not considered as just a status but as a contract, where the consent of the woman was imperative. The relationship formed by marriage in Islam is described in the Quran as a 'firm contract' (4:21). It is the same as any other contract, where rights and responsibilities bind a man and a woman together in a vital partnership, making them companions for life. The Prophet had said, "Beware, your women have rights over you, and you have rights over your women." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20695). Even what once was 'bride-price' became a nuptial gift that the woman could retain as her own. (Esposito, 2005, p. 79/ Khadduri, 1978).

The Quran says, "And give the women their dowers willingly..." (4:4). The dower is in no way a payment for conjugal rights. It symbolizes in material form the responsibility a man has to fulfill regarding his wife until his last breath.

Annemarie Schimmel writes that compared to the pre-

Islamic position of women, Islam gave enormous progress to women as they now had the right to own their property, whether delivered to them by their family or earned. (Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam: An Introduction*, 1992. p. 65) A woman could inherit property as a mother, sister, daughter, or wife. In their different capacities, they are allowed to share the properties of their relatives in a proportion fixed by the Quran, which is explained in the traditions or legal literature. The Quran says, “Concerning your children, God enjoins that a male shall receive a share equivalent to that of two females...” (4:11-12). Women thus enjoyed legal standing as equal and autonomous individuals with the right to manage and dispose of their property as they wished. Their marital status did not affect their ability to buy, sell, gift, or endow their property.

It is worth mentioning what the famous Historian J.M Roberts had to say regarding this. He writes: “It’s coming was in many ways revolutionary. It kept women, for example, in an inferior position but gave them legal rights over property not available to women in European countries until the 19th century.” (J. M. Roberts, *The Pelican History of the World*. New York, 1984. p 334) Retired Chief Justice of Delhi Court has said the same, Mr Rajindar Sachar:

“...Historically, Islam had been very liberal and progressive in granting property rights to women. It is a fact that there were no property rights given to Hindu women until 1956, when the Hindu Code Bill was passed, whereas Islam had granted these

rights to Muslim women over 1400 years ago.” (*The Statesman*, New Delhi, April 26, 1986)

What is significant is that, in giving women equal status and proper rights, Islam set an important precedent, which in turn had a far-reaching effect on the civilization of the times. This raised the status of women without any sacrifice of femininity or traditional values and without creating any perversion in society.

### PROGRESS OF WOMEN IN ISLAMIC SOCIETY

Islam also pays utmost importance to education. It is evident from the first revealed verse of the Quran, which says, “Read! In the name of your Lord who created man from a clot. Read! Your Lord is the most Bountiful One who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.” (96:1-5)

According to the Quran, this shows the importance of reading and learning to read. The first command of the Quran was not to pray or fast but to read and to learn to read. We can see the examples of the Prophet’s wives, Khadijah and Aisha, who made a name for themselves. Khadijah was a successful businesswoman, while Aisha was a renowned Hadith scholar and leader after the passing away of the Prophet. About 2210 traditions of the Prophet were related by her, and she passed them on to about 100 of the Prophet’s Companions and their close associates. She was

also a jurist of high calibre and used to explain the wisdom and background of each tradition she described. (Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *Women between Islam and Western Society*, p 160)

According to a Hadith of the Prophet, the Prophet Muhammad praised the women of Madina for their desire for religious knowledge. (James E. Lindsay, *'Daily Life in the Medieval Islamic World'*, Greenwood Pub. Group, 2005, p. 196)

We can also see the case of Imam Bukhari, whose al-Jami'as-Sahih is by far the most authentic source of Hadith learning. He had set off at the young age of 14 to acquire knowledge in distant lands. But his education had started with his mother and sister at home, who gave him a sound educational background. (Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *Woman Between Islam and Western Society*, p, 155).

The Quran advised humanity to pray thus: "Exalted is God, the True King. Do not be impatient with the Quran before its revelation is completed and say, 'My Lord, increase my knowledge.'" (20:114)

According to a saying of the Prophet of Islam, every believer must acquire knowledge. (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 224)

A woman can seek employment and work if she wishes to work. No text in the Quran or the Hadith prevents a woman from working outside the house, as long as it is not unlawful, within the preview of the Islamic Shariah,

and as long as she maintains her dignity and safeguards her honour. The 12th-century famous Islamic philosopher Qadi Ibn Rushd (Averroes) said that women were equal to men in all aspects and thus could excel in times of trouble like war or peace. (Jamil Ahmed 1994. Ibn Rushd. Monthly Renaissance IV. Retrieved 2008-10-14.) Professor T.W. Arnold has written in this regard: "It is interesting to note that the propagation of Islam has not been the work of men only, but that Muslim women have also taken their part in this pious task." (T.W. Arnold, *The Preachings of Islam*. (1976), p 415)

### WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

In Islam, there is no difference between men and women regarding their relationship with God. They would both receive identical rewards and punishments for their conduct. The Quran says:

"To whoever does good deeds, man or woman, and is a believer, We shall assuredly give a good life, and we will bestow upon them their reward according to the best of their works." (16:97)

A tradition of the Prophet says, "Everything in this world is a piece of property or a possession. The best possession in the world is a pious woman." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 6567) The early days of Islam showed the prominence of female religious scholars. Women took part in national activities, acted as advisors, and, while they were efficient

managers of the household, joined the congregational prayers in the mosque, too. (*Sahih al-Bukhari* Vol. 10, pp. 162,164) Mohammad Akram Nadwi, a religious scholar, has compiled biographies of 8000 female jurists. The famous Orientalist Ignac Goldziher has said that 15% of medieval Hadith scholars were women. (Power, Carla. 'A Secret History.' New York Times, Feb 2007.) He has also said that the number dwindled over the years. However, this was more because cultural barriers hindered women from seeking to pursue such a vocation. (Khalid Abou El Fadl 'In Recognition of Women.' Published in 'The Minaret,' July/Aug 1991. Reprinted in 'Voices,' Vol 1, No. 2 Dec/Jan 1992).

We can thus see how no other religion or society provides such considerate laws for the welfare of women as Islam does. And we can also see how women enjoy equal status. At the United Nation's 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1994, 189 governments signed a document calling for equality between men and women. The international community acknowledged this as a guiding principle towards promoting Women's Rights. However, this was rejected by many Muslim countries. This rejection was because they already had a Shariah, a Divine Law that cannot be questioned.

Most importantly, the Shariah has made women equal to men as they should be! (Mayer, A.N. "Rhetorical Strategies and Official Policies on Women's Rights." The Merits and Drawbacks of the New World Hypocrisy, p. 107)

In light of the above movement, it is possible to assert that the universal principle of equality between men and women, a significant movement in the contemporary world, is also an Islamic vision. Thus, according to the Shariah, Muslim states and societies must promote women's rights in the family and society. The Quran in these verses aptly reflects the unity of all believers and their identical moral and spiritual obligations in these lines:

“Surely, for men and women who have  
surrendered to God  
Believing men and believing women  
Obedient men and obedient women  
Patient men and patient women  
Humble men and humble women  
Charitable men and charitable women  
Fasting men and fasting women  
Men and women who guard their chastity  
Men and women who are ever mindful of God  
God is ready with forgiveness and an immense  
reward” (33:35)

In Islam, there is thus no difference between a man and a woman regarding their duties, rights, and blessings in this world and hereafter. Both are equal participants in carrying out their daily lives. The biological division of human beings into male and female is the result of purposeful planning on the part of the Creator, and they are not duplicates of one another but complementary. At the same time, the more a woman increases her knowledge, skills, alertness, and

awareness, the more effective she will be in the part she plays in all the activities of daily living. And one who is thus intellectually aroused will be able to play a role of any significance.

## ISLAM AND WOMEN

A dispassionate study of Islam's basic tenets would make it exceedingly clear that its sole purpose is to enable both men and women to follow the straight path, leading to peace and bliss in this world and the world to come.

To have a correct understanding of women's status in Islam, we should first address the question—Is the idea of change and adaptation to a new environment created by the passage of time obnoxious to it?

To begin with, Islam is not opposed to change if it is in the interest of the common people inhabiting the globe. We cannot sidetrack the fact that Islam was necessitated by the momentous changes that were taking place in Arabia.

Those who insist that every word written in the Quran is to be followed irrespective of the changed circumstances are mistaken in their belief. Change is the law of Nature, and to set one's face against the wind of change sweeping across the world is an irrational stand. It is not necessary to follow every word written in the sacred books without a frame of reference to the time when it was conceived and acted upon for the benefit of contemporary society. Those



words may not be used today; therefore, to insist on their observance is not just and proper.

The Quran enjoins on us the sacred task of following only those verses that are basic to it; if anybody follows the verses that are not its foundation, he is charged with perversity. The Quran categorically lays down:

“Some of its verses are clear and precise in meaning—they are the basis of the Book—while others are allegorical. Those with deviation in their hearts pursue the allegorical, so as to create dissension by seeking to explain it” (3:7)

The condition of women in the world before the coming of Islam in the seventh century AD was appalling. By and large, women were treated as goods and chattel. Female infanticide was in vogue. The Quran and the Sunnah condemn this evil practice in the strongest possible words. The Quran says: “Kill not your children on a plea of want. We provide sustenance for you and them.” (6:151) It further states: “Verily the killing of them is a great sin.” (17:31). It was Islam that, for the first time in the history of the world, took bold steps to outlaw the cruel practice of female infanticide.

Prophet Muhammad made no distinction between men and women. His sons died young, and the children who continued to live were all daughters. He looked after them with great love and care as if to set an example for others to emulate. He said: “Whoever has a daughter and does

not bury her alive, scold her or prefer his male children to her. May God bring him into paradise.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 1957) According to a hadith, the Prophet once articulated that the most significant human virtue is to do good to one’s daughter after her husband has returned her.” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 17586)

It is a wrong belief that Islam had introduced polygamy. It is a fact that every civilized nation has practiced polygamy in the past. The custom of polygamous marriage still exists in many parts of the world. For example, a woman can marry several men in our neighbouring country, Tibet. Thus, polygamy and polyandry have been existing side by side.

Islam did not encourage plural marriage. On the contrary, it restricted the number of wives to four. Even this liberty to marry more than one woman was made subject to the rule that one could not take more than one wife if he was not sure of giving equal and just treatment to all of them. The Quran is obvious on this point. It lays down, “Marry women of your choice, two or three, or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one.” (4:3)

Muslim personal laws are not entirely scriptural. Most of these laws are of recent origin. The Shariat Act, for instance, was enacted by the British legislature in 1937 and later came to be regarded as the Muslim Personal Law. Many of its provisions relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, maintenance, and custody of children are outdated and require timely alteration without touching

the fundamental rules of conduct enjoined on the whole of mankind by the Quran and the Hadith.

Notwithstanding the natural differences between men and women, Islam accords them equal status. Besides conferring innumerable rights to women, Islam has enhanced their prestige in their families and communities. At the time of Prophet Muhammad, women were exhorted to act as imams and could lead congregational prayer.

The Prophet was very emphatic about respecting women. He said, "A Muslim must not hate his wife, and if he is displeased with one bad quality in her, let him be pleased with another which is good." (Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 1469) Another tradition of the Prophet states, "Heaven lies at the feet of the mother." (Musnad Al-Shihab, Hadith No. 119) These and other sayings of the Prophet show his mental attitude towards women in general.

After the passing away of Prophet Muhammad around 632 AD, the strong edifice of women's rights started to crumble down.

Although the Quranic legislation sought to improve women's status considerably, many evil practices crept into society. Triple divorce in one sitting is one such evil. The conferment of absolute right on the husband to divorce his wife at will cannot be justified. This practice is not in conformity with the true Islamic principles relating to the dissolution of marriage.

The time has come to understand and interpret Islamic

laws correctly and to do away with discrimination based on sex, place of birth, colour, creed, and caste.

### ISLAM GIVES WOMEN COMPLETE FREEDOM

Contrary to the common misconceptions, women enjoy complete freedom in Islam. During the life of Prophet Muhammad, a Muslim lady, Barira, wanted separation from her husband, Mughis. The case was referred to the Prophet of Islam, who counselled: "I would like you to withdraw your case and live with your husband by adjusting with him." Barira asked the Prophet: "Is this your request, or is it the command of God?" The Prophet replied, "It is my request." Barira said, 'Then, I do not need it.'" (*Sunan an-Nasa'i*, Hadith No. 5417) The marriage was then dissolved. This clearly shows that Islam gives complete freedom to women.

Women were allowed to visit mosques and pray in congregations or individually throughout the Islamic period. Moreover, throughout the history of Islam, women have been free to perform significant roles in the vast arena that Islam affords them for the performance of noble and heroic deeds.

In the early period of Islam, regarded as a model for all believers, we have several examples showing that women used to participate in practical matters. For instance, Hazrat Khadijah, the Prophet's wife, conducted business, and Hazrat Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter, helped give

first aid to the wounded in battle. Asma, Abu Bakr's daughter, looked after her camels and the date orchard.

Thus, we can see that Islam exalts the position of women. It holds men and women to be equal in respect but different in role, precisely as they were created.

So far as practical home management is concerned, the man is held responsible. However, this does not mean a woman cannot shoulder these responsibilities. If she can bear this burden, no objection will be raised from any quarter. One example of this can be found in the Quran regarding the people of Sheba. They lived in Yemen. The famous dam of Marib made their country very prosperous and enabled it to attain a high degree of civilisation. The Quran tells us that they were ruled by a woman (27:23) without disapproving of her rule. Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, was sagacious, even more so than the men in her court. She did not want to embroil her country in war, while the men advised her to confront her enemies, Solomon's army. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the Commentator of the Quran, writes:

"In Bilqis, we have a picture of womanhood, gentle, prudent, and able to tame the wilder passions of her subjects."

It is an accepted principle with the commentators of the Quran that when the Quran reports something without any disapproval, it means the Quran has approved of that.

So, when we look at this incident in the light of the Quran, we find the status of women even higher than that of

men. A woman is in charge of men and shouldered this responsibility more effectively.

Thus, the example of the Queen of Sheba, mentioned in the Quran, shows that rulership is not man's monopoly. A woman can be a ruler over men if she has the capabilities to do so, and the Quran has testified to it.

### AN OLD WOMAN'S COURAGE

Mamun Rashid (108-218 A.H.), a caliph of the Abbasid dynasty, although known for his ruthless treatment of political adversaries, was very kind and considerate towards the common people. Once, an older woman from Baghdad entered his court and approached him. "I am a poor woman," she complained to the caliph. "I once owned a plot of land, but a tyrant has taken it away. He would not listen to my cries, so I have come to you to ask for justice."

"Who has maltreated you in this way?" the caliph asked. The older woman pointed to the person sitting next to the caliph. Mamun Rashid saw that it was his son, Abbas, that she was pointing at. He ordered his *Vizir*, i.e., his chief advisor, to take Abbas and stand him up next to the older woman. This order was carried out. Now, the caliph asked them both to state their cases.

The prince spoke falteringly and in an undertone. But the older woman spoke firmly and in a loud voice. The *Vizir* admonished her to talk softly and respectfully as if she were in the caliph's presence. But the caliph intervened and said

she should express herself as she wished. It was the truth that had made the older woman speak loudly and falsehood that had made the prince dumb. She was found justified in her claim. The case was decided in her favour, and the land returned to her.

The truth is a force in itself. The conviction of being in the right makes one bold. One who utters the truth does so without fear. His speech is free from contradiction and artificiality. There is no inconsistency in what he says. There is no trace of guilt on his face when he speaks and no hesitancy in his voice. As a result, there is a power in the voice of one on the right that convinces the listener.

However, one cannot speak convincingly if one's case is false. One's guilty conscience will manifest in one's voice; one's face will reflect a lack of inner conviction. The attempt to make one's lies credible will contain apparent contradictions. Despite having a tongue, one will be as good as speechless. One should never forget that God is one's witness.

The above example shows to what extent Islam gave women freedom throughout Muslim history.

## WOMEN AND INHERITANCE OF PROPERTY

Islam recognizes equal status of man and woman in the eyes of God. Therefore, women have their legal personalities under Muslim law. They are given the right to own

property, dispose of it, inherit from their relatives, and keep to themselves their earnings, which they can spend in any way they wish.

Women play many societal roles: daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives to men. In their different capacities, they are allowed to share in the properties of their relatives in proportions fixed by the Quran, which is explained in the traditions or legal literature.

Most guidance relating to women's inheritance is contained in the Chapter Women. The Quran says:

“Concerning your children, God enjoins you that a male shall receive a share equivalent to that of two females. But if there are more than two females, then their share is two-thirds of the inheritance. If there is only one, she will receive the half...”  
(4:11)

The next verse of the same chapter deals with the shares of husband or wife:

“You will inherit half of what your wives leave, provided they have left no children. But if they leave children, then you inherit a quarter of what they leave after payment of any bequests they may have made or any debts they may have incurred. Your wives shall inherit one-quarter of what you leave if you are childless. But if you leave children, your wives shall inherit one-eighth after payment of any bequest or debts. If a man or woman has no



direct heirs [neither children nor parents] but has left a brother or a sister, they shall each inherit one-sixth, but if they are more than two, they share one-third between them, after payment of any bequests or debts, so that no harm is done to anyone. That is a commandment from God: God is all-knowing and forbearing.” (4:12)

In his English translation of the Quran, Abdullah Yusuf Ali notes: ‘The principles of inheritance law are laid down in broad outline in the Quran; the precise details have been worked out based on the Apostle’s practice and that of his Companions, and by interpretation and analogy. Muslim jurists have collected a vast amount of learning on this subject...’

Women also have a right to make a will the way men are given this right and on the very same condition as men: that not more than one-third of the property shall be bequeathed and that those who will inherit as heirs shall not be entitled to take under the bequest. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2744; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1628)

It is a grave sin to devour the property of an orphan, and even more so if the orphan is a helpless girl. To protect the weaker sections of society, Islamic revelation has given particular emphasis to points that bring out the importance of giving due rights to these sections, including women.

## THE TESTIMONY OF WOMEN

The testimony of two women is regarded as equal to that of one man. While dealing with matters of debt, the Quran says:

“When you contract a debt for a fixed period, put it in writing. And call in two male witnesses from among you, but if two men cannot be found, then one man and two women whom you judge fit to act as witnesses so that if either of them forgets, the other will remember.” (2:282)

Recent research has testified to this law in the Quran as perfectly natural. A report quotes a Soviet scientist saying that men have a more remarkable ability to memorize and process mathematical information than women, but females are better at words. Speaking to the Tass News Agency, Dr Vladimir Konovalov said, “Men dominate in mathematical subjects due to the peculiarities of their memory. The stronger sex shows greater difficulties in processing and adapting language material.” (*The Times of India* (New Delhi) January 18, 1985)

As indicated in the Quranic verse initially quoted, whenever there is to be any delay in payment after the conclusion of a business transaction, there must be witnesses, either two men or one man and two women. The phrase, “so that if either of them forgets, the other will remember,” clarifies that memory has to be considered next in importance to justice in such credit dealings. When biological studies

have shown a woman's memory to be weaker than a man's, it is entirely by the facts of nature to stipulate that there should be two female witnesses in place of one man. This command thus sets a value upon memory per se. This is a practical requirement, and it does not discriminate against women or grant superiority to men.

### WORKING OUTDOORS

According to 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, when Abu ad-Dahdah, one of the Prophet's Companions, heard the revelation of this Quranic verse: "Who will give a generous loan to God? He will pay him back two-fold, and he shall receive a rich reward,"(57:11) he asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of God, does God want a loan from us?" When the Prophet replied in the affirmative, Abu ad-Dahdah took him by the hand and said, "I, at this moment, lend my orchard to God."

Abu ad-Dahdah's orchard was a sizeable one with six hundred date palms, and, at the time he donated it to the cause of Islam, his wife, Umm ad-Dahdah, was staying in it with her children. Nevertheless, having made his pledge to the Prophet, Abu ad-Dahdah came to the orchard, called his wife, and told her that she would have to leave, as it had been loaned to God. Umm ad-Dahdah's reaction was that he had made a good bargain. That is, God would reward him many times over hereafter. So saying, she left the orchard with her children, carrying all her bags and baggage. (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 4, p. 308)

From this incident, we can gather that Umm ad-Dahdah

worked on the date orchard. Many such incidents in the early phase of Islam (the exemplary phase) show that women were certainly not confined indoors. They went out to attend to many necessary outdoor duties. However, one point should be made clear: these outdoor activities of women were not engaged in entertainment but as a matter of necessity.

### WOMEN IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

A study of the life of the Prophet Muhammad tells us that education, whose actual goal from the Islamic point of view is the awakening of human awareness, is as essential for women as it is for men.

As women performed their role without going outdoors, there is a general impression that Islam has restricted women's workplaces to performing only domestic chores. But this is not the truth. First, Islam encouraged them to receive education and then enthused them with a new zeal. Subsequently, they went out to impart this learning to the next generation.

Let us take the instance of the Prophet's wives, who were held up as role models for women in Islam. Preserving their femininity, they participated in various religious and worldly activities. For instance, the Prophet's wife, Aisha, having gained full knowledge of Islam from the Prophet, was able, after the death of the Prophet, to perform the task of teacher and guide to the Muslim community. Such

traditions tell us that the Prophet's conversations with his wife, Aisha, aimed to educate her. Aisha says that when the Prophet Muhammad would get up at night after a few hours of sleep, he would converse with her at length in that peaceful atmosphere. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1161; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 743) This course of informal education, continuing uninterruptedly, even while travelling, benefited Aisha so much that she became the most distinguished authority on religious knowledge. She survived the Prophet for a full fifty years, during which period she remained a precious source of religious knowledge. Her house served as a school of religious learning. It is said that Aisha herself handed down to posterity a substantial portion (2210 traditions) of the vast majority of Islamic knowledge. Abdullah ibn Abbas, a Companion of great stature and one of the best commentators of the Quran, was one of Aisha's pupils. In their turn, the next generation of women handed down the traditions they had heard first-hand from the Prophet or his Companions or religious scholars to whom they were related to others.

Since the earliest ideal phase of Islam, Muslim women have successfully exploited their talents in the field of education. Homes had become centres of learning as primary schools (*Makateeb*). This tradition was practiced in almost all Muslim communities well into the 20th century when the modern education system took over this function.

As modern-day research tells us, women are better with words than men. Perhaps this is the reason why they can

run educational institutions successfully. Besides this, there may be many workplaces where women can exploit their full potential. Since the earliest days of Islam, we have found Muslim women working outdoors. Umm Dahdah, wife of a Companion of the Prophet, worked in her orchard. Khadijah, the Prophet's wife, conducted business, to cite only a few examples. However, Islam sets great value on the proper management of the home. This is because the home is the most essential unit of any society. Home is the centre of preparing succeeding generations. Thus, neglecting the home front will amount to ignoring the next generation, resulting in a significant national loss.



## CHAPTER 3

# WOMEN IN HISTORY AND TODAY

An anthology of the Quran prepared by English orientalist, Edward William Lane, published in 1843, carried a foreword that stated that “the fatal point in Islam is the degradation of women .” This ill-considered observation gained currency over the years. If one takes an objective study of the Islamic scriptures, one will conclude that this is contrary to the fact.

In almost every inhabited corner of the globe, the societies of ancient times regarded the status of women as being inferior to that of men. Islam set a precedent in human history by granting women equal status and proper rights, which had as far-reaching an effect on the civilization of the times as Western civilization has had on today’s world.

While giving women rights, Islam also explained that there are apparent differences between men and women. The difference between the sexes can be compared to the



two wheels of a cart. One wheel is not equal to the other. They are complementary to one another. God had made biological and psychological differences between a man and a woman. This difference is made so that they become good life partners for one another. Both are complementary to one another. Both complete one another. Therefore, the concept of gender equality is unnatural and creates unnecessary conflict between the two. The concept of gender differences produces the concept of being complementary to each other and supporting each other. It enables the partners to run the cart of life as two wheels joined together.

## STATUS OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

In almost every inhabited corner of the globe, the societies of ancient times regarded the status of women as being inferior to that of men. "In Athens," says the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "women's status had degenerated to that of enslaved people. Wives were secluded in their homes, had no education and few rights, and were considered by their husbands no better than chattels... In ancient Rome, a woman's legal position was one of complete subordination, first to the power of her father or brother and later to that of her husband, who held paternal power over his wife. In the eyes of the law, women were regarded as imbeciles." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984), Vol. 19, p. 909)

The reason for the ill-treatment of women in ancient times was the prevalence of superstition. There were, in fact,

very few matters upon which irrational beliefs of one sort or another had not been adopted. Such perverted thinking became elevated to the status of religion and, as such, had a pervasively baneful influence on all human relations.

Speculation was another mode of thought which produced strange and often pernicious results. Ridiculing the thought processes of the ancient Greeks, Bertrand Russell writes, "Aristotle maintained that women have fewer teeth than men; although he was twice married, it never occurred to him to verify this statement by examining his wives' mouths." (Bertrand Russell, *The Impact of Science on Society* [1976], p. 17)

## Women's Status in Christianity

Christianity did little to improve this situation, having given great importance, in the very first book of the Bible, to the erroneous belief that it had been Eve's wrongdoing that had caused Adam's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Referring to women in general in this context, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says, "(According to Christianity) they were regarded as temptresses, responsible for the fall of Adam, and as second-class human beings." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1984], Vol. 19, p. 909) With such a myth ever-present in the collective consciousness of society, it is little wonder that women were allotted an inferior position in both religious and secular matters. In the first letter addressed to the Corinthians, St. Paul says, "For the man is not of the woman, but the woman is of the man. Neither

was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man.” (Bible, Corinthians, 11:8.) St. Paul is simply reaffirming the gospel truth in the Old Testament Book of Genesis.

## Women’s Status in Islam

In ancient times, thanks to the unreasoning and unreasonable approach fostered by superstition, speculation, and other forms of irrational thinking, the woman came to be considered inferior; one distressing result was that she was deprived, among many other things, of the right to inherit property. She was entitled to no share, even in family property. How great an incapacitating factor this was may be judged by the neglect and degrading treatment that women had to suffer for centuries. It was not until the advent of Islam that, for the first time in the history of humanity, women were given their due legal rights over property.

What is significant is that, in granting women equal status and proper rights, Islam set up an important precedent that had as far-reaching an effect on the civilization of the times as Western civilization has had on today’s world. If Islam could accomplish such a revolution in human affairs, it was because Islam did not remain just a philosophical creed, but it conquered and influenced the minds of the people in most parts of the inhabited world of the times.

In the world of today, even those commentators who generously acknowledge the virtues of Islam often repeat

this phrase that Islam has conferred an inferior status upon women. But these two things that Islam gives women a share in property and that Islam has degraded women are contradictory. From ancient times till today, the question of inheritance has been the most important social issue. The issue of inheritance might well be considered the sole criterion of status in society. Contrary to the custom of the time, the entitling of women to have a share in property is clear proof that Islam had no desire to degrade women. Had this been so, the first demonstration of this desire would have been reflected in her being deprived of her share in property, which would have been considered correct and justifiable according to the traditions of the times.

It is interesting to see the reverse side of the coin as presented by a recent revert to Islam, namely, the English pop singer Cat Stevens, now known as Yousuf Islam. Asked by a Jewish woman how he intended to deal with the problem of Islam's 'degradation' of women, he said that he had not made a study of women's status in Islam but that, for his part, he had, since his reversion, asked his mother to come and stay with him and that he loved looking after her. His relations with his wife had also considerably improved.

In its assessment of the status of women, the Western mind has made the same error as the ancient man: it has formed opinions based on irrational beliefs. This accounts for latter-day distortions of thought on the balance of power between the sexes in advanced Western countries and the resultant grave distortion in the concept of women.

## Women in Modern Civilization

The modern Western man fell deeply into error because of his blind acceptance of the concept of the equality of the sexes without giving due consideration to what equality—in its best sense—ought to mean or to what, in practice, it entails. According to modern thinking, equal status to women meant bringing them out of their homes, thus making them come face to face with men in all facets of life without regard for the practical and moral problems that might ensue. Islam, on the other hand, defines separate roles and, therefore, separate spheres of work for men and women since it is natural and realistic to do so. The other significant error made by modern Western thinkers was to assume that a role that was separate, different, and played out in other than traditionally masculine strongholds was necessarily of trifling importance—in short, inferior. As such, the West concluded (because of separate roles) that Islam gives a subordinate position to women.

On the contrary, since it is being said in the West (in theory) that women must be given a place in every department of life given to men, they conclude that the West provides her with a superior position. So, modern man imagines that his feminine counterpart has been accorded a superior position. But let us examine the state of women's affairs in the West. In the societies of the West, which have attained a high level of material development, theory has not been put into practice, and men and women still live and work in their own very separate domains. The status of women is

only marginally better than in ancient times; there are still mutually exclusive divisions into male and female spheres, with the corresponding attitude very much in evidence. If this were not so, what need would there be for 'women's lib'?

Fourteen hundred years ago, Islam launched a much-needed 'women's lib' movement, whose purpose was to free women from artificial curbs and to give them the position that any normal human being should have in society. (One instance is to provide them with a share in family property). This movement increased their status without any sacrifice of femineity or traditional values and without creating any perversion in society.

The fact that Islam launched its movement under the guidance of revelation, its exponents were in no doubt as to what limits should be set to societal change. The West, however, in its preoccupation with modernity, plunged headlong into experimentation with the old order of values, sweeping away traditional moral precepts and 'restrictive' conventions. All of this was done under the banner of 'reason,' 'empiricism,' 'logic,' 'liberalism' and so on. However, the whole 'liberation' movement has been so swamped in a welter of emotion that what is supposed to be acceptable in terms of normal human standards is once again becoming obscured, and the problems created in society by morally rudderless individuals are becoming legion.

## UNNATURAL EQUALITY

Selected readings from the Quran were prepared in English by the English orientalist Edward William Lane and were first published in book form in London in 1843. In his foreword, Lane wrote that “the fatal point in Islam was the degradation of woman.” Since then, this remark has been regularly taken up as a stick with which to beat Islam. Whenever Islamic affairs were mentioned, it became such a common observation that not only the enemies of Islam but also relatively just writers such as the historian J .M. Roberts, who did justice to Islam in pointing out its virtues, mentioned it as if it were an established fact.

This allegation is entirely baseless, and the facts are quite the reverse. Islam has, in actual fact, raised the status of women. If the truth were told, women’s degradation has come about at the hands of two major civilizations, one ancient and polytheistic, the other modern and atheistic. The former has been culpable in theory and practice, while the latter has been so in practice despite its theorizing to the contrary.

Modern Western civilization has hardly produced a better result in ostensibly exalting the status of women. It may have pronounced men and women equal in every respect and decreed that all work that a man can do can be done by a woman, too. It may have encouraged women to come out of their homes and try to find a position equal to a man’s in every department of life (hence the slogan, Don’t make coffee, make policy.’); but, in practice, this concept of

equality has done more to degrade her than any traditional view could have done.

What is the reason, then, for this state of affairs? The reason, to put it briefly, is the erroneous concept of sexual equality held in Western countries. Even the equality that allegedly exists between men, which we tend to take for granted, needs careful examination. Let us suppose that equality truly exists between one man and another. We should then be able to take an Einstein, put him in the boxing ring with the world heavyweight champion, and expect him to last at least for several rounds. We should also expect the boxer to be able to hold his own while presiding over international scientific conferences. This may seem laughable, but that is what absolute equality would mean. Obviously, there are degrees of equality and different varieties of equality, just as there are degrees and kinds of excellence. When we want an accurate picture of equality, we have to think in terms of status and not the workplace. Equality does not mean that the president should be interchangeable with the dustman. Instead, it means that every man should be looked upon with the same respect and should be able to expect the same treatment, legally and morally.

The error into which the West has so lamentably fallen is its attempt to establish an unnatural equality of the workplace for men and women. The result is as might have been expected: the greatest *inequality* in human history has developed between men and women. If men and women are of two different sexes, they were created to serve separate



purposes and roles. Place them then in their respective fields, and they will be equally successful in various ways. But if they are placed in the same field, neither men nor women can make the best use of their creative faculties and general abilities. In such a situation, the women will inevitably find themselves forced into inferior positions.

### STATUS OF WOMEN IN RELIGIONS

The study of religions shows that despite theological differences between the various religions, they all place equal emphasis on human values in their teachings. Each religion lays stress on respect for humanity. Women are a part of humanity, and respect for them is essential to religious teachings. Discrepancies may be found in practice, but so far as the teachings are concerned, each religion accords equal status to women.

For instance, Christianity grants full rights to women. In the letters of St. Paul, women are mentioned as Christians of full value. St. Paul addresses Prisca (Priscilla) in *Romans*, Chapter 16, Verse 3, as his fellow worker. The four daughters of Philip were active as prophets in the congregation. Peter, in a sermon on Pentecost, spoke about men and women as recipients of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." (4/523)

What is the Islamic viewpoint regarding women? In this connection, there are two references, one from the Quran and the other from the Hadith.

On the subject of men and women, the Quran has this to say:

“...you are members, one of another.” (3:195)

Similarly, the Prophet of Islam has observed:

“Women are the second half of men.” “Indeed, women are counterparts of men.” (*Sunan At-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 113)

With these two references, it becomes clear that Islam recognizes equal status for both sexes without showing any discrimination.

## Islamic Viewpoint vs. Secular Viewpoint

This shows that so far as the question of assigning equal status to both sexes is concerned, there is no difference between Islamic and secular viewpoints. Both hold the same opinion on this matter.

Then, wherein lies the difference between the Islamic and secular viewpoints. This difference lies in the division of the workplace. In Islam, a woman's workplace is basically (though not totally) inside the home. Meanwhile, a man's workplace is basically (though not totally) outside the house.

Both these viewpoints may be stated in this brief description:

(1) Secular Viewpoint: gender equality within the common workplace.

(2) Islamic Viewpoint: gender equality in different workplaces.

We learn that the Islamic viewpoint is more rational when we go deeper into the issue. Since all research tells us that fundamental biological differences exist between men and women, it is natural that with such in-built differences, they should be allotted separate workplaces.

The difference between the two viewpoints results from Islam according to equal status for both sexes, so far as honour and respect are concerned while assigning them separate workplaces. This division in no way relates to the status of women in the family or society. Instead, it relates to the division of the workplace on the grounds of biological differences.

The division of labour is a principle of nature. It relates not only to the division of labour between man and woman but also between man and man and woman and woman. Concerning innate talents, all individuals differ from one another. Therefore, this division of labour is a permanent feature that affects men equally in the masculine sphere and women in the feminine sphere. Then what is so strange about Islam advocating the same division of labour between men and women?

This difference is in no way an obstacle to the performance of incredible feats. For instance, educational institutions for children provide an extended workplace for women. Educating a generation is one of the most significant tasks

in any human society. There may be many such workplaces that are best suited to the talents and aptitudes of women.

The Prophet's wives are role models for women in Islam. We learn that the women of those days participated in all kinds of religious and worldly activities while preserving their femininity. For instance, the Prophet's wife, Aisha, having gained full knowledge of Islam from the Prophet, was able, after the death of the Prophet, to perform the task of teacher and guide to the Muslim community for about fifty years.

Umar Farooq, the second caliph of Islam, once made a speech in Madinah as a caliph. During the speech, an ordinary woman of Madinah rose to tell him that what he had said was not by the Quran. Umar Farooq, in deference to her opinion, changed his statement forthwith and thanked the woman. These instances tell us how high a place is accorded to women in Islam.

It is true that in actual practice, we find many examples of women not being granted their rightful status in present Muslim society. But so far as the actual teachings of Islam are concerned, there is no discrimination between men and women.

## GENDER EQUALITY

In a seminar in Delhi, I met a retired Judge who asked, "Maulana Sahab, do you know what the weakest point in Islam is? Islam does not admit gender equality!"

Modern man finds such concepts unacceptable. The modern age is one of gender equality, while Islam talks of gender inequality. This concept is shared by most people of the world today. However, this concept is not based on a deeper reflection of the term. Gender inequality is a matter concerning gender difference and does not concern itself with gender inequality. The whole world is based on this difference, and the matter concerning men and women is not an exception to this rule.

There is nothing negative about this difference. Difference is a positive term. The difference between men and women can be compared to the two wheels of a cart. One wheel is not equal to the other. They are complementary to one another. God had made biological and psychological differences between a man and a woman. This difference is made so that they become good life partners of one another. Both are complementary to one another.

The concept of gender equality is unnatural. It creates unnecessary conflict between the two. However, the concept of gender differences produces the concept of being complementary to each other and supporting each other. It enables the partners to run the cart of life as two wheels joined together.

### EQUAL IN RESPECT, DIFFERENT IN ROLE

The term 'gender equality' was used for the first time in Europe in the late nineteenth century. To begin with, it

was used only to argue for women's right to vote. However, it later came to be adopted to describe the equality of both sexes in every respect.

This term spread rapidly all over the Western world as an expression describing the ideal status of men and women. In the second half of the twentieth century, extensive research was carried out on this subject, and this concept began to be doubted. The latest study on this was done by an IIT-Delhi alumnus, which the media extensively covered.

A study team led by Ragini Verma, associate professor of radiology at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, has revealed stark differences between men and women in the structural connections linking different regions of their brains. Verma and her colleagues are among the first to demonstrate differences in the brain's hardwiring to support long-standing observations of gender differences in functional tasks.

Their findings appeared in the US Journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences on December 2, 2013.

The researchers' findings only confirm the Islamic position in the first quarter of the seventh century. Islam says that men and women are different by birth rather than being identical. Both are complementary to each other. This fact is referred to in the Quran in these words, "You [men and women] are members of one another." (3:195)

According to another verse of the Quran, everything has been created in pairs: "We created pairs of all things" (51: 49)

In the material world, every atom consists of positive and negative particles. In the plant and animal worlds, there are males and females. The human world consists of men and women. This pairing system of the world means that everything functions in a pair fashion. In other words, nature works on the principle of complementarity rather than in an independent manner.

Observing this natural fact, one can say that using the term 'gender equality' to express the relationship between men and women is not realistic. The correct statement based on nature is: 'Men and women are equal in respect and different in roles.'

### ROLE OF WOMEN IN HISTORY

Both men and women, each being equal, have a different sphere of action. In contributing to social activity, the men undertake whatever is more challenging, while the women deal with whatever is lighter.

The Quran says that men are in charge of, that is, they are 'maintainers' of women (4:34). This leads to a common misconception that Islam gives a higher status to men than women. According to this verse of the Quran, it does not mean that men have a distinctive status over women—being maintainers of women has never been intended as a form of discriminatory treatment. It rather concerns the practical management of the home, for which the man is held responsible. However, this does not mean a woman will never be allowed to shoulder these responsibilities.

If she can bear this burden, no objection will be raised from any quarter. One example of this can be found in the Quran with reference to the people of Sheba. They lived in Yemen. The famous dam of Marib made their country very prosperous and enabled it to attain a high degree of civilization. The Quran tells us that they were ruled by a woman (27:23) without disapproving of her rule. Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba, was sagacious, even more so than the men in her court. She did not want to embroil her country in war, while the men advised her to confront her enemies, Solomon's army.

It is an accepted principle with the commentators of the Quran that when the Quran reports something without any disapproval, it means the Quran has approved of that.

So, when we look at the above incident in the light of the Quran, we find the status of women in Islam is even higher than that of men. A woman is in charge of men and has shouldered this responsibility with greater efficacy.

Thus, the example of the Queen of Sheba in the Quran shows that rulership is not man's monopoly. A woman can be a '*qawwam*' over a man, and the Quran has itself testified to it.

In fact, in the early period of Islam, both sexes were fully active in different fields of life, from housework to agriculture and horticulture and from worship in the mosque to the battleground. Everywhere, women were visible and active. Gradually, there came about a division of labour, which is justifiable not only biologically and physiologically



but also regarding the ensuing social benefits. One such significant advantage is that they can see each other's lives objectively, without personal involvement, which tends to cloud their judgment and lead to damaging emotionalism. They can better counsel each other coolly and wisely, give moral support at critical moments, and offer the daily encouragement with which every successful union should be marked.

In Islamic history, there are many examples of women giving invaluable help to their husbands in critical situations. One of the most notable was Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet of Islam, who successfully brought the Prophet back from a state of fear and trembling to a state of normalcy after he received the first divine revelation in the solitude of the Cave of Hira from the Archangel Gabriel. She was able to reassure him that his life was not, as he feared, in danger, as she was emotionally detached from the incident. Khadijah's reassurance to the Prophet of Islam on this occasion was one of the most significant contributions to the furtherance of Islam.

Then it occurred to Khadijah that she had best make enquiries of some learned Christians, who, well versed as they were in the scriptures, were bound to know revelation and prophethood. She went first to a *rahib* (hermit) who lived near Makkah. On seeing her, the priest asked, "O noble lady of the Quraysh, what has brought you here?" Khadijah replied, "I have come here to ask you about Gabriel." The *rahib* said, "Glory be to God; he is God's pure

angel. He visits prophets: he came to Jesus and Moses.” Then, Khadijah went to another Christian called *Addas*. She put the same question to him, and he, too, told her that Gabriel was an angel of God, the very same who had been with Moses when God drowned the Pharaoh. He had also come to Jesus, and through him, God had helped Jesus.

Then Khadijah hastened to Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian convert who had translated part of the Bible into Arabic. When she finished telling him what Muhammad had seen and heard, Waraqah exclaimed, “Holy, holy! By the Master of my soul, if your report is true, O Khadijah, this must be the great spirit who spoke to Moses. This means that Muhammad must be the Prophet of this nation.” On a subsequent visit, Khadijah brought Muhammad to meet Waraqah ibn Nawfal. Muhammad related the events precisely as they had taken place, and when he had finished, Waraqah said, “By the Master of my soul, I swear that you are the same Prophet whose coming was foretold by Jesus, son of Mary.” But then Waraqah warned: “You will be denied, and you will be hurt. You will be abused, and you will be pursued.” He nevertheless immediately pledged himself to the Prophet: “If I should ever live to see that day, I should surely help you.”

Thus, we can say that Islam does not hold women inferior to men. Islam considers men and women as equal in respect but different in role.

## A CLARIFICATION OF A MISUNDERSTANDING

An anthology of the Quran prepared by English orientalist Edward William Lane (1801-1876) was published in 1843. It carried a foreword by way of introduction to Islamic teaching, which, among other things, stated that “the fatal point in Islam is the degradation of woman.”

This ill-considered observation gained such currency that it was commonly repeated as an established fact. More than a century and a half has elapsed, but this conviction has only deepened. It has even been quoted as gospel truth by a prominent person in one of the court cases.

Suppose a doctor tells his patient that his eye is a delicate organ of the body to be treated gently and with great care, unlike his fingernails, which can be cut and filed if necessary. The doctor’s instruction does not mean he degrades the eye vis-a-vis the nail. He is only pointing out the difference between the nail and the eye.

If all laws in Islam are based on this fundamental reality that men and women are of two different genders, it is because their distinctive differences are established biological facts. This being so, male and female spheres of activity cannot be the same, whether in family or social life. There must necessarily be differences in the kind of work they do and their places of work.

All scriptures have held the same concept of women without ever being doubted. In modern times, it has been challenged by the women’s liberation movement, which

holds that men and women are alike in every respect and that both should be given equal opportunities.

This movement first reared its head in Britain in the 18th century and later spread across Europe and America. In 1772, the momentum increased with the publication of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women,' written by Mary Wollstonecraft. The author asserts that women should receive the same treatment as men in education, work opportunities and politics, and the same moral standards should be applied to both genders. Such was the zeal and fervour with which this movement was launched that it spread far and wide. Both men and women participated, and differences between men and women have been brushed aside as a sign of backwardness. By the beginning of the 20th century, this trend established its hold worldwide, and laws were made or modified accordingly. All doors were to be thrown open to men and women alike.

In practice, however, this experiment has been a failure. Even after a struggle of almost 200 years, women have failed to achieve equal status to that of men. The situation is the same today as it was before the launching of the "women's lib" movement. The only practical result has been that women have become a part of every field and work alongside men. This has created new problems, and society is paying a heavy price.

The failure of women's liberation has been established through wide-ranging research employing strictly scientific methods. Finally, the patent biological differences

between men and women have been scientifically proven. These differences have been a reason for women's failure to find an equal place in every department of life. Where philosophers had erroneously doubted the religious concept of women—scientific findings have now re-established this concept's veracity.

For instance, the following research, though specifically related to the medical field, can draw our attention to understanding that gender differences are a part of nature and not a creation of society. They are real, and one cannot just wish them away.

Catherine Woolley, the William Deering Chairperson in Biological Sciences, Professor of neurobiology in the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, and a Women's Health Research Institute member at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, has this to say:

“The importance of studying gender differences in the brain is about making biology and medicine relevant to everyone, both men and women. No one studies things such as who is better at reading a map or why more men than women choose to enter certain professions.”

Male and female brains operate differently at a molecular level; the research team reports in a new study of brain function involved in learning and memory, responses to stress, etc.

For 20 years, Woolley avoided studying gender differences

in the brain until her data showed that differences between females and males were fundamental.

“Being a scientist is about changing your mind in the face of new evidence,” Woolley said. “I had to change my mind because of this evidence.”

“We are not doing women—specifically women’s health—any favours by pretending that things are the same if they are not,” Woolley said.

Currently, much research is focusing on these differences. Science has supported the religious concept of men and women being different as being correct. Still, the allegation continues to be made that Islam has ‘degraded’ women. The Islamic concept of womanhood considers the two genders “equal in respect but different in roles.”

Unfortunately, well-read people have said that religious laws about women were socially reactionary. Such remarks are made so indiscriminately and so frequently that it is time one considers the possible root causes. One of the root causes is that the research results on the differences between men and women have remained only academic. These findings need to be transformed into a popular intellectual revolution. The social penetration of these ideas will have to take place on a vast scale. This is not far-fetched since modern science has provided all the arguments in its favour. It is only a question of engaging wholeheartedly in disseminating those findings.

## EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Empowerment of women cannot be achieved by encouraging them to enter every field of life. A better approach would be to increase their knowledge, skills, alertness, and awareness in their sphere of activity. The more a woman is endowed with these qualities, the more effective will be the part she plays in the activities of daily life. An intellectual woman can perform the greatest of services, whereas if she is left ignorant and untutored, she will never—even if she is brought to the forefront of things—be able to play a role of any significance.

Many women in history have never emerged from their homes but significantly influenced the outside world. The allegation that women cannot perform excellent services when confined to the house is refuted by Islamic history. Home management is also undoubtedly great work, but women can certainly perform the work concerning the outside world without putting themselves into uncongenial surroundings or forcing themselves to play unfamiliar roles for which neither training nor biology has fitted them.

It is a little-understood fact that a woman's role does not depend on her physical environment but on the degree to which her intellect has been cultivated. To progress, it is not binding that she has to put herself into all kinds of unsafe situations in the outside world. We can understand this from the following argument. If it were put to a writer that he could serve humanity better by stepping out of his study and jumping into the boxing ring, he would surely

retort that there is more to solving the world's problems than punching people in the nose. He would point out that the intellectual can best operate in his chosen sphere and that it is not physical brashness that counts in this life but the sharpening of the intellect. Imagine a reversal of the social structure, which entails a surgeon working in a butcher's shop, a teacher selling vegetables, etc. In each case, the change of workplace and role would render the innate and acquired skills, knowledge, and moral excellence of these highly qualified and experienced professionals useless and irrelevant. Moreover, their competence and effectiveness would be eroded by the sense of frustration and discrimination engendered by unsuitable surroundings.

Studies in biology and psychology have shown that the two genders are different in nature, each being designed for another purpose. They are endowed by nature with various capacities to play their respective roles in life with greater ease and effectiveness.

Differences in biological function do not imply inequality. Differences are meant to make both genders play complementary roles and endure life's challenges by supporting each other with the constructive capacities for which each is best suited. It should not be looked upon as a matter of superiority or inferiority. Looking at things from a proper perspective, these differences are blessings of God.

What the world perceives as a problem of inequality when it comes to the oppression and degradation of women is



a phenomenon of evil perpetrated by humans upon other humans due to the misuse of freedom. It has nothing to do with the role accorded to each gender by nature. Such evil is a part of every society.

The phenomena of oppression exist between the rich and the poor, men and women, an adult and a child, people in power and the common person, the educated and the illiterate, etc. The solution to this problem of women's backwardness due to the lack of opportunity for progress lies in helping people change their mindsets. To this effect, there should be tremendous efforts to raise the thinking levels of the individual to overcome such negative behaviour in society.

### PROGRESS OF WOMEN: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

Progress and evolution of society depend upon two primary factors: one, proper human relationships, and two, interconnection of rights and duties. Oppression, exploitation, and injustice are detrimental to a progressive society. It then begins to degenerate and tumble headlong towards destruction. In a just and balanced society, both men and women must work together for the betterment and upliftment of society by working in coherence, completing and complementing each other. It is as necessary that all members of society are granted their due share of rights and that their duties are well defined. In a just society, the weaker sections are looked after properly

and compassionately while complete care is taken to ensure they are not deprived of their rights or oppressed.

Women have all along belonged to the weaker section of humanity. As such, a society that tries to uplift the status of women and installs them on the pedestal of dignity, looking after their welfare and making provisions for their protection, can be considered a just society. In the 21st century, would it not be worthwhile to examine, in short, whether we have tried to grant women the rights that may lead them to a better future, to a more peaceful, just and dignified coexistence with all human beings?

The modern world may be more concerned about women and make very fair promises to them. It promises them freedom from slavery, from male domination, even from the established institution of marriage, from the boredom of being a housewife to a much more glamorous world. It promises them freedom from the burden of birth pangs and the pains of rearing a family. But instead, what does it have in store? Nothing but exploitation, injustice, oppression, aggression, harassment, neurosis and indignity. In the name of emancipation, women today have to bear with rape, mutilation, abuse, inequality, discrimination and harassment.

Coming nearer home, we find that the apparent glamour of the feminist movement has overawed us. We have our roots in the culture and religion embedded in our soil, but we try to unquestioningly imitate the West in as much of our activities as possible. On the one hand, our women,

with their demure and bashful nature, seem to be symbols of virtue; on the other hand, we try to instigate our women to reveal as much of their bodies as possible. Then, when our women are waylaid and their modesty torn, we shed crocodile tears. In the present Indian scenario, with events of female harassment ever on the increase, we have a most pathetic sight. Even our workplaces—not to talk about our homes—are not safe. Even those women holding higher bureaucratic posts are not spared. Laws against sexual harassment and rape are being moulded and remoulded, but the escalation in gender-related crimes keeps rising unabated. Female foeticide is on the increase. Most dowry deaths go unreported. In fact, with the present-day status, who would refuse to accept that women are poised suicidally on the brink of disaster? The facts and figures showing deliberate women's subjugation under the cover of pleasure-making cannot put them to sleep. There is a wave of restlessness to be found everywhere.

Many suggestions have been made in this regard, such as it being felt at certain quarters that women need rights, not power. In other places, education is being recommended for women's overall development. Some suggest political empowerment. Yet some say that women can only be genuinely emancipated by becoming economically independent. Whatever the case, we cannot isolate the various aspects of women's development into different channels and work for any one or the other. We have to devise a comprehensive system that, while recognizing

women as respectable human beings, may at the same time lend them confidence, dignity, poise, self-respect, and freedom from exploitation of all kinds. Only then could the human race become more vigorous, of a superior breed, capable of spreading welfare, love, friendship, and goodwill to make this beautiful earth a better place to live.

Till now, a dispassionate study of the position of women in Islam has rarely been made. Orientalists are in the habit of quoting and misquoting, even misinterpreting the Quranic injunctions and the Sunnah, which form the source of the Islamic system. The Muslim society is also, by and large, responsible for stultifying the dynamism of Islam and creating misconceptions because they have lost their capacity to represent Islam in its true spirit. The Muslim culture that we see around us is not truly the Islamic culture that the Prophet of Islam had evolved, but a sad mixture of many cultures, where un-Islamic infiltration has nearly altered the very essence of what should have been the Islamic society. So, while presenting these points regarding the rights of women in Islam, one thing should be clear in our minds: these are purely what should have been in Muslim society and not what exists today.

One significant point that we have to understand about Islam is that it does nowhere raise the question of superiority or inferiority of any sex while talking about men and women. Islam considers each sex unique in its sphere of activity and allows roles to each sex, best suited to them and according to their nature and needs. Men and women in Islam are

not antagonists but separate entities created to complement and complete each other. Each sex is given a definite set of goals to be achieved by their own efforts. The unit of society is the family. As such, the family's well-being would mean the well-being of the whole society.

Islam makes the family the fundamental social unit. Family members play specific roles in its welfare and upkeep. The position of women derives from the very premise that the family is the cornerstone of Muslim society. The Islamic system is very sensitive about protecting and safeguarding the family's foundation. Hence, there is a strict prohibition of extramarital relations or indulgence in free sex, as this weakens the base of the family. Under the Islamic system, discrimination on grounds of sex, power or wealth is not allowed. Indeed, the Quran states the origin of mankind very simply by rejecting any distinction or discrimination on account of birth. The Quran explicitly states:

“O Mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul. He created its mate from it, and from the two of them, countless men and women (throughout the earth) spread.” (4:1)

While conceding equality of the sexes, the Quran categorises men and women according to their deeds in this world. It states that all men and women are answerable equally to God:

“To whoever does good deeds, man or woman, and is a believer, We shall assuredly give a good life; and

We will bestow upon them their reward according to the best of their works.” (16:97)

Even while seeking the blessings of God, both men and women are promised full returns of their labour, apart from the excessive bounties showered by Him:

“Men shall be rewarded according to their deeds, and women shall be rewarded according to their deeds. You should rather ask God for His bounty. God has knowledge of all things.” (4:32)

The wisdom of the principles and the laws of nature has been employed in regulating mutual relationships. The Quran states: “We created pairs of all things” (51: 49). This acknowledges men and women as distinctly separate entities yet relates the two mutually, making each the friends and guardians of the other:

“The believers, both men and women, are friends to each other; they enjoin what is good and forbid evil, they attend to their prayers and pay the alms and obey God and His Messenger.” (9:71)

Personal development, intellectual pursuits and knowledge acquisition are human rights that should be conceded to males and females alike, without discrimination. Islam allows for equal opportunities for both sexes in the pursuit of knowledge. Here is nothing of the reaction or hatred that modern society preaches. There is no derision, no

underestimation anywhere. Each sex is encouraged to build up their individuality in every way. The Prophet of Islam said:

“It is essential for every Muslim man to acquire knowledge.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 229)

The guardians of women are advised not to obstruct their educational pursuits but to encourage and provide them with opportunities. Examples exist of several educated women scholars who contributed to Quranic interpretations, medicine, poetry, and so on during the Prophet’s time and after. The wives and daughters of magnates and sovereigns have patronized knowledge and lavish endowments to establish learning and social service institutes. All such actions as going for the construction of society and building up righteousness will not go unrecognized. God says in the Quran:

“Anyone who performs good deeds, whether it be a man or woman, provided that he is a believer, shall enter Paradise. No one shall suffer the least injustice.” (4:124)

Spiritual attainment is not exclusive to men only. Women have as much right over spiritual purification as men. The Quran is very explicit about this.

“Surely, for men and women who have surrendered [to God]— believing men and believing women,

obedient men and obedient women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, men and women who are ever mindful of God—God is ready with forgiveness and an immense reward.” (33:35)

Islam treats women in four dimensions: as mothers, as daughters, as wives and as separate human beings, and gives them rights accordingly.

Mothers contribute enormously to society. Their love and sacrifice for the offspring cannot possibly be ignored. The Quran recognises the pain and hardship the mother experiences while keeping the human race alive in the following words:

“for his mother bears him, in hardship upon hardship, and his weaning takes two years.” (31:14)

Keeping this noble service in view, the mother is evaluated to the highest pedestal of human glory. “Paradise lies at the feet of Mother,” taught the Prophet. Islam makes it compulsory for children to obey their mothers. A mother’s interest and welfare must be preferred thrice before a father’s. A mother deserves gratitude, respect, love, kindness and obedience.

As daughters, women always belong to the paternal family.



Marriage does not break this bond. The Islamic social order makes elaborate arrangements for fair treatment of the daughter. They must receive love and the best maintenance. They have as many rights as the son in educational, physical and mental upliftment. They have their share in the father's property, recognized and granted at every cost. If, by chance, a woman becomes a widow or is divorced, Islamic law reverts her back to the paternal home, where she may be looked after with love and affection. The Prophet said, "Should I not tell you what is the best charity: That you should show kindness to that daughter who (becoming a widow or having been divorced) has been returned to you, and who has no other maintainer or supporter." (*Ibn-e-Majah*, Hadith No. 3667)

Islam encourages marriage and prohibits any deviated forms of sexual gratification. Marriage helps men and women develop naturally and head towards development and success through cooperation. Marriage prevents immorality, licentiousness, and irresponsibility. The spouses in the marriage agree to share rights and responsibilities to develop a happy family. In this regard, it is a contract entered upon by both participants who vow to be ruled by the established law of God. The consent of the girl is essential for the completion of the marriage.

Further, the woman receives the mehr or dower in marriage, which is the bride's money, an exclusive right of the bride. This Mehr or dower may be paid immediately after the solemnization of marriage (at the time of nikah) or

at any time in life. But if it is not paid during the lifetime, it is considered a debt and, like all other debts, must be paid from the legacy of the deceased even before the distribution of property among the legal heirs. Apart from Mehr, the wife is also entitled to a share of her husband's property upon his demise.

During the period of the Prophet, the Caliphate, and early Muslim rule, these injunctions were followed. Therefore, women played an indispensable role in the construction of society. They received and imparted education and took an active part in opinion-building and decision-making. They delivered religious discourses, ventured outside their homes to pursue knowledge, and carried on independent trade. But later, as stagnation set in in Muslim society itself, the position of women also gradually deteriorated. Today, Muslim women, like the rest of their counterparts, are in more or less the same deplorable condition, deprived of their rights and opportunities, and kept under difficult conditions.

Hence, to improve the present status of Muslim women and women in general, we have to give them their due share in what is their right. It is indispensable that Muslim organizations, as well as secular organizations, should come forward and make efforts to improve the status of women. They must see that women are not deprived of proper education. They have to see that more and more educational institutions for girls are opened and run efficiently for the benefit of women. A thoroughly planned strategy must be

chalked out for vocational professional training of women to make them self-sufficient so they can stand on their feet when any such need arises. More centres should be opened for self-defence, and training and guidance should be provided for girls to equip them with adequate safety methods.

It is generally thought that Muslim women are only duty-bound to their husbands, family and home. They have no other activity outside their home. This is a gross mistake, very much against the spirit of Islam, which does not restrict the women within the four walls of their houses only. They are allowed to venture out of their homes to take part in a positive and constructive contribution to society. In doing so, their main motive should be to obtain the pleasure of God and service to humanity.

## CHAPTER 4

# WOMEN FROM MUSLIM HISTORY

There are innumerable examples of exemplary women in Muslim history. A notable example is that of Hazrat Aisha, a brilliant woman who was one of the Prophet's wives. Being much younger than he was, she survived him by about fifty years and, with her excellent and almost photographic memory, could she continue to communicate in great detail everything she had learned from him during their close companionship. So, she could fulfill a highly informative role for about half a century. In short, she became a living cassette recorder for the ummah. Abdullah ibn al-'Abbas, a Companion of great stature and one of the Quran's best commentators, was one of Aisha's pupils. The more significant part of his knowledge of religion was learned from her. Similarly, many other Companions of the Prophet and Tabi'un (companions of the Sahaba) acquired their religious knowledge from her. So here we have one excellent example of a Muslim woman imparting to others the religious knowledge she had imbibed directly from

the Prophet. In this way, innumerable Muslim women contributed to the Islamic cause.

## IDEAL WOMEN

The Prophet once remarked that the best woman of the Jewish people was Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the best woman of his people, Khadijah, the daughter of Khuwailid.

More light is thrown on the superiority of these two women by the following two statements of the Prophet:

“Aisha says that the only other wife of the Prophet she ever envied was Khadijah, even though she was not a contemporary of hers. ‘Whenever the Prophet sacrificed a goat,’ Aisha says, ‘he would tell me to send some meat to Khadijah’s friends.’ One day, I got annoyed. ‘Oh no, not Khadijah again,’ I exclaimed. The Prophet replied, ‘Her love has been imbibed into my heart.’” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2435-2437)

“Aisha says that the Prophet would not leave home without praising Khadijah. One day, he mentioned Khadijah, and I got annoyed. ‘She was just an old woman,’ I said. ‘God has given you better than her instead.’ This angered the Prophet, who said: ‘God knows, he has given me no better than her. She believed when others disbelieved. She had faith in me when others denied me. She gave me financial support when others left me in the cold. And God

gave me children by her, which He has not given me by my other wives.” (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 3818)

Mary and Khadijah enjoy a unique historical status because they gave themselves entirely to God and attached their own will to the Almighty.

When the Judaic era was drawing to a close, a woman who would be fit to be the mother of a miraculous Prophet of the nature of Jesus, on whom be peace, was required. God had ordained that the final Prophet of the Jewish people should be born without a father. For this purpose, a woman whose innocence and chastity were beyond question was needed. The Virgin Mary lived up to this standard. By living a life of extraordinary chastity, she showed herself fit to be selected as the mother of Jesus.

The circumstances of the final Prophet, Muhammad, on whom be peace, were such that he needed a woman who would put her life and her property entirely in his hands and would never complain about anything. God selected Khadijah for this work because of her superlative qualities. She gave up everything—her life, her property, her leisure and her comfort—for the sake of the Prophet. She suffered tremendous affliction but never complained. These qualities made her worthy in God’s sight to be the Companion of His final prophet.

In every day and age, women and men who will devote themselves to the mission of Islam are needed, as well as

people who are willing to involve themselves in the scheme that God seeks to implement in the world. Such people are like a small cogwheel, which revolves only according to the motion of a bigger cogwheel, in this case, the will of God. This is undoubtedly a trying task but carries a vast reward.

To perform this task is, in the words of the Quran, “to help God” (22:40). There can be no doubt about the excellence and superiority of those whom God deigns to make His helpers.

### THE STORY OF HAZRAT KHADIJAH

Khadijah (555-619) was a noble lady of Makkah. She was well known all around for her good nature and wealth. Like the Prophet Muhammad, she belonged to the tribe of the Quraysh. They had a common great-grandfather who was called Qusayy ibn Kilab. This is how they both were a part of the same big family. Khadijah was a 40-year-old wealthy widow when she married Prophet Muhammad.

The Prophet of Islam and Khadijah had six children, two boys and four girls. Both the boys, Qasim and Abdullah, died when they were still babies. The four daughters, Zaynab, Ruqayya, Umm Kulthum, and Fatima, grew up into beautiful young girls and were married when the time came. After his marriage to Khadijah, the Prophet started to spend more and more time thinking. There were many questions to which he tried to find an answer:

“Who is the being that has made the earth, the heavens,

and everything between them? How did man come into being? Why was he placed on earth? How should he live on earth? What is life? What is death? And what will happen to man after he dies?”

After years of seeking the truth, God showered His mercy on him and quenched his thirst for truth. He was visited by an angel in a cave called Hira. Here, he was blessed with prophethood. However, this experience in the Cave of Hira shook the Prophet to his core. He did not know what to make of it. Disturbed and frightened, he went straight home and told Khadijah about the incident. He said: “Khadijah, I do not understand what has happened to me. I am worried about my life.” Seeing him trembling in shock and distress, Khadijah put a blanket over him and comforted him, saying: “God will never let you down. You are kind to your family. You are truthful. You help people in need and people experiencing poverty. You gladly welcome anybody who comes as a guest to your house. You follow the way of truth and justice.” (Al-Seerah al Nabwiyah by Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, pp. 385-86)

Some time passed in this way. And then, one day, God commanded the Prophet: “Now the time has come to call people to Islam and preach the message openly.” (Seerah Ibn Hisham, Vol. 1, p. 262)

The Prophet realized that this was the beginning of a new era and that much would be expected of him now. He started to preach Islam full-time. He gave up his business



activities, and Khadijah placed her wealth at his disposal. Her entire fortune was used up in the cause of Islam.

Khadijah gave her wealth to the cause of Islam and became personally involved in dawah work. She organized meals for the people of Makkah. This allowed her to meet them in groups, talk to them, and tell them about Islam. Some liked what they heard and joined the small group of believers.

However, not everybody liked the Prophet's message, and many people in Makkah opposed Islam. This was especially true of the Quraysh tribe, who were the leaders of Makkah. They were scared that people would turn away from tribal traditions and would no longer listen to them. They began to be cruel to the Prophet and those who accepted Islam. They spoke rudely to them, threw dust and garbage on them when they passed their houses, and would not let them buy goods in their shops or do business with them. They would not allow them to take part in their gatherings. They spread all sorts of lies about them.

One day, the Prophet was sitting in Hira's cave and did not return home at his usual time. Khadijah became worried. She thought the Quraysh might harm him, so she sent a man to look for him. She wondered: "What could have happened to him? Why is he late?" The man she sent returned empty-handed and told her he could not find the Prophet anywhere in town. Khadijah decided to go and look for him herself. At that time, the Prophet was in the cave with the angel Gabriel. Gabriel said to the Prophet: "Khadijah is coming here. She has got some food and water

for you.” And then he added: “When she comes in, give her the greetings from her Lord and tell her that there will be a house made of pearls for her in Paradise.” When Khadijah arrived, the Prophet told her: “Here is Gabriel. He is giving greetings to you from your Lord, and he is greeting you.”

Khadijah replied: “God is peace, and He is the source of all peace! May God’s peace and blessings be upon you, Messenger of God. And my greetings to Gabriel.” (Al-Nasai, *Sunan Al-Kubra*, Hadith No. 8301)

The hatred of the Quraysh was so intense that soon the Prophet, his wife Khadijah, their children, his uncle Abu Talib and his family, and all those who accepted Islam were forced to leave their homes in Makkah. They took refuge in an open plot of land called Shi’b Abi Talib, just outside the town. No proper houses were there, and they had to live in tents. It was like a refugee camp, and the family of the Prophet had to stay there for almost three years. They faced hunger, disease, and poverty. Sometimes, they had to eat the leaves from a tree to satisfy their hunger, for there was hardly anything else to eat.

Khadijah could have stayed on in Makkah. But she chose to stay with the Prophet in these times of trial and difficulty. Once the wealthiest lady of Makkah, Khadijah now lived in a makeshift tent under the open sky without enough food and water. But she did not complain. She bore the difficulties with great patience and endurance. Her presence supported the Prophet.

All the people in the makeshift camp lived in great poverty.

They wore old clothes and slept on old blankets. They had hardly any personal belongings. Khadijah had just one wooden bucket and a mug. One day, even the mug broke. She did not have enough money to buy a new mug for herself. So, she remained patient about it. Luckily, a carpenter was passing her tent and agreed to repair it for her.

When the ban was finally lifted, the harsh treatment the believers had had to endure during the years of the ban had left them broken in mind and spirit. Their health suffered due to prolonged starvation, and many of them were sick. Khadijah's health was not good either. She suffered great hardships and used to give all the food to her children and husband instead of eating herself. She passed away in the month of Ramadan in AD 619.

### GLAD TIDINGS

Ibn Ishaaq, the Prophet's biographer, writes that when the Prophet began publicly communicating Islam's message to Makkans, he faced stiff opposition and hardship.

His wife, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, converted to the new faith without a moment's hesitation. Thus, apart from being the partner of his life, she now became a partner in his suffering, for the Prophet's adversaries found many ways of torturing them, not the least of which was to assemble before their house and create an uproar.

Under these circumstances, one day, the Angel Gabriel came to their house and asked the Messenger of God to

convey greetings from her Lord to Khadijah. Then Gabriel told the Prophet that God had ordained him to give glad tidings to Khadijah about a house made of pearls (in heaven) where there was neither ‘din’ nor suffering. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 7156)

These were glad tidings for Khadijah and a lesson for the believers. It was news of success for the believers.

In this world, the faithful must suffer at the hands of the arrogant. They have to live under great provocation. In such a situation, the faithful are ill-advised to quarrel with them. They should ignore the provocation and turn their attention towards the Hereafter. They should pray, ‘O Lord, grant us the patience to face the unpleasantness. Build us a house in Paradise without clamour or suffering.’

When a believer calls upon worshippers of heroes and religious personalities to stop revering mere mortals and, instead, to give their love and worship to God and God alone—for only He is deserving of such love and worship—they become enraged with him and oppose him with all their might. When he calls upon his fellow men to act purely to please God, they become antagonized and start harassing him. Yet, in the face of such hostility, he remains patient, for he has God’s promise of a heavenly abode in the Hereafter, which will be completely free from tumult and affliction. It will be a place where he can live in spiritual bliss forever.

## MOTHERS OF THE BELIEVERS

It is stated in the Quran that the Prophet's wives are the 'mothers of the believers' (33: 6). This title of the Prophet's spouses shows how much they are to be respected and honoured by the Muslims.

The words that appear in the Quran about the wives of the Prophet, on the one hand, describe the status of the spouses themselves, and on the other hand, through these words, it is made manifest what place they should have among the Muslims.

When the Prophet migrated from Makkah to Madinah, it was no ordinary journey. It destroyed his and his Companions' economy. In these dire circumstances, providing the necessary financial means for his family became very difficult. This was when the Prophet's spouses asked for financial support to care for their essential expenses.

Under normal circumstances, it is not objectionable for women to seek and demand material help. But this demand was inappropriate to the historic role that the wives of the Prophet had to play in his mission. Therefore, the Quran addressed them in these reprimanding words:

“O Prophet, say to your wives, ‘If you seek the life of this world and all its finery, then come, I will make provision for you and release you honourably. But if you seek God and His Messenger and the abode of the Hereafter, then know that God has prepared a great reward for those of you who do

good deeds.' Wives of the Prophet! Any one of you who commits a flagrant act of misconduct shall be doubly punished. That is easy enough for God.

But those of you who obey God and His Messenger and do good deeds shall be doubly rewarded. For them, we have made excellent provisions. Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women. If you fear God, do not be too soft-spoken in case the ill-intentioned should feel tempted. Speak appropriately.

Stay in your homes and do not flaunt your charms as in the former times of ignorance. Attend to your prayers, pay the zakat and obey God and His Messenger. Women of the [Prophet's] Household, God seeks only to remove all impurity from you and to make you entirely pure. Bear in mind that all that is recited in your homes are the revelations of God and wisdom. God is all-pervading and all aware." (33: 28-34)

In these verses of the Quran, all necessary directives about the Prophet's wives are very clearly stated. These verses enumerate their responsibilities and the duties of the believers towards them.

It is clear from these verses that the Prophet's wives did not get the status of Umm-ul-Mumineen, i.e., Mothers of the Believers only as a title. This title was granted to them for their pious deeds and exemplary sacrifices. The fact is that

they fully deserve to be given the status of Mother of the Believers till the Day of Resurrection.

According to some Hadith reports, when the verses mentioned above were revealed, the wives of the Prophet were given the option to stay with the Prophet if they wished and separate if they wanted. Then the Prophet entered the house and said to his wife Aisha: “O Aisha, I would like to talk to you about one matter. Regarding this option, you should not be in a hurry to decide unless you consult your parents. Aisha replied: “O Prophet of God, I will not consult my parents. Rather, I prefer God and His Messenger and his house.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 2468)

The response of all of his wives was similar. None of them decided to separate from the Prophet based on the option provided by the Quran. Under the circumstances, the decision of the spouses to stay with the Prophet was an extraordinary sacrifice. At that time, apart from other facilities of life, even simple food was not available for two meals a day.

The condition of the Prophet's wives at that time can be gauged from an incident. “Aisha narrates that an Ansari (a Muslim of Madinah) sent a goat to her house once. They struggled to make proper pieces of the meat at night. Someone said, “Why didn't you light a lamp so that you could chop the meat in the light of the lamp?” Aisha replied that if we had oil to light a lamp, we would drink this oil

owing to the intensity of hunger.” (Ibn Sad, *Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra*, Vol. 1, p. 384)

The difficult situation in which the Prophet’s wives decided to stay with him is a unique example and only one of its kind in history. This was excellent planning of God Almighty. Due to this, the uncommon and extraordinary greatness of the spouses was established so that people would consider them as role models for themselves. It is mentioned in the above verses that if the Prophet’s wives do good deeds and adopt the method of obedience, they will be rewarded twice as much as others.

This double reward was precisely in accordance with their privilege. One reward was for their good deeds. The second reward was because they performed good and pious deeds at the level of sacrifice. The Prophet’s wives were destined to play the role of guides for society. It would not have been possible for the wives of the Prophet to play a leading role in society unless people considered them superior in morals and character. The Prophet’s wives paid this price through extraordinary sacrifices. Therefore, they deserved a double reward.

In the Quran, when addressing the wives of the Prophet, they are commanded not to adopt a soft tone when talking to the people. (33:32)

This directive indicates a particular plan to give the status of Mothers of the Believers to the wives of the Prophet. They were expected to work with, guide, and train them. According to God’s plan, believers were to come to the



wives of the Prophet to discover the teachings of Islam and find solutions to their religious questions.

Among those who would come would not only be women but also men. Therefore, the said order was given so there would be no possibility of psychological complications while talking to the men. Thus, history has shown that it was in the time of the Prophet, and even after his death, many men and women kept coming to his wives to enquire about Islamic injunctions in various matters.

This shows that it was of particular interest that the Prophet was allowed to keep more than four wives. This arrangement was essential to expedite the purpose of the training. One woman alone could not be enough to serve a society's training and educational needs. This required several women to whom people could turn and discover Islamic injunctions. The wives of the Prophet belonged to different tribes and different families. In this way, they became a source of reference for the tribe and family. Thus, history shows that men and women of every tribe and every family used to come to the houses of the Prophet's wives and ask them for rules and issues according to their needs.

The wives of the Prophet are commanded to stay in their homes and bear in mind all that is recited in their homes of God's revelations and wisdom. (*Quran*, 33: 32-33)

This shows that the Mothers of the believers were specially trained for the task of reforming the Muslim community, i.e., ummah. They were instructed to end all irrelevant interests and activities and focus on gaining learning and

wisdom from the Prophet. This arrangement was put in place because the teachings of the Prophet had to be preserved so that during and after the life of the Prophet, they could convey these teachings to the ummah.

The role of the Prophet's youngest wife, Aisha, was exceptional in this regard. All the biographers of the Prophet agree that the benefits bestowed on the ummah by Aisha in teaching, training, and propagation of Islam were more than most of the male Companions of the Prophet. The simple reason was that Aisha was the youngest of all the wives.

Coupled with it, she was brilliant and had an extraordinary memory. Because of her great mental abilities, she memorized everything she heard from the Prophet in its most correct and perfect form. She fully understood and kept in mind every deed of the Prophet. Aisha lived for about fifty years after the death of the Prophet. She became a means of conveying the teachings of the Prophet to the two Muslim generations coming after him. It would be correct to say that Aisha was a great mercy for the Muslim ummah due to her unique attributes. She became a kind of living tape record and a source of blessings for the Muslim community for almost half a century.

### THE EXAMPLE SET BY HAZRAT FATIMAH

Hazrat Fatimah was the youngest daughter of the Prophet Muhammad. She was born to Hazrat Khadijah in 605 CE,

before the Hijrah. She passed away in 632 CE in Madinah, six months after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad. She was married to Hazrat Ali ibn Abi Talib when she was 18 years old. According to authentic narrations, Hazrat Fatimah had four children: Hasan, Husain, Zainab, and Umm Kulthum. Hazrat Fatimah has narrated Eighteen Hadith traditions.

Hazrat Fatimah's life was a life of hardship and struggle. She once asked the Prophet Muhammad for a servant, to which he replied, "Shall I not tell you of something better for you than a servant?" Then he taught her the famous 'Tasbih': SubhanAllah 33 times, Alhamdulillah 33 times, Allahu Akbar 34 times. This became known as "Tasbih Fatimah." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 6318) Hazrat Fatimah not only spent her entire life following this advice of the Prophet of Islam herself, but as she shared this advice with others, it also became a regular practice for women and men in the Muslim community. In this way, Hazrat Fatimah set an important example for the Muslim community.

The example set by Hazrat Fatimah is that the value of spiritual gifts is much more than material ones and that we should accept what is given to us with contentment and gratitude rather than insisting on our desires.

This incident teaches women (and men) that prayer, not material gifts, is the greatest treasure in this world. Hazrat Fatimah's example establishes that one should live a life of prayer in all circumstances rather than living in demands and complaints.

## EXEMPLARY MUSLIM WOMEN

Just as men function on different planes of religiosity, so do women have their separate spheres of religious effectiveness.

What are the traits of exemplary Muslim women? Let us first consider their everyday level of existence on which adherence to their religion broadly means paying the dues of God and men in purely personal matters. In particular, it means true belief in God and the carrying out of His commandments; strict adherence to justice in all worldly transactions; withstanding the temptations of the self as instigated by Satan; paying what is due to God in terms of one's wealth and life; giving the Hereafter priority over the present world; being guided by Islamic ethics in dealing with one's family, relatives and friends; in effect, invariably dealing with all matters in the manner approved of by Islam.

Next in importance to these feminine duties is the training and nurturing of children. Most women become mothers, and the relationship between mother and child is of the utmost importance because the mother's influence can be used for ends that may be good or evil, depending upon the mother's proclivities. As a Muslim, of course, she clearly must use her maternal influence to bring her children up as moral beings. If they have deviated from moral rectitude, she must reform them. Everything that she does should be for their ethical and intellectual betterment.

On a higher plane, talented women can further the cause of religion when the right opportunity presents itself. There

are innumerable examples in Islamic history of such work having been successfully carried out by women.

A notable example is that of Aisha, a brilliant woman who was one of the Prophet's wives. Being much younger than he was, she survived him by about fifty years and, with her excellent, and almost photographic memory, she continued to communicate in great detail everything she had learned from him during their close companionship. So, she could fulfill a highly informative role for about half a century. In short, she became a living cassette recorder for the *ummah*. Abdullah ibn al-'Abbas, a Companion of great stature and one of the Quran's best commentators, was one of Aisha's pupils. The more significant part of his knowledge of religion was learned from her. Similarly, many other *Sahaba* (Companions of the Prophet) and *Tabi'un* (companions of the *Sahaba*) acquired their religious knowledge from her. So here we have the excellent example of a Muslim woman imparting to others the religious knowledge she had imbibed directly from the Prophet.

There were other examples of the role of Muslims in the early period of Islam in religious matters, one of which occurred in the time of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph. It concerned the amount of money or goods that had to be given as a dower (given by the husband to the wife at the time of marriage as a token that he would meet all her expenses in the future). In the Prophet's lifetime, this had been a nominal amount, but with the increase in resources after the conquest of other countries, people had begun to

apportion more substantial dowers. Feeling that this was an unhealthy trend, 'Umar once addressed an assembly of his people from the pulpit, saying he did not know who had increased the dower to more than four hundred dirhams. The Prophet and his Companions handed over four hundred dirhams or even less. Nobody should fix a dower of more than four hundred dirhams. If it comes to my knowledge that anyone has exceeded this amount, I will confiscate the excess amount for the State Treasury.'

When he had had his say, a woman got up from one corner of the gathering and said, "O Commander of the Faithful, is the Book of God (Quran) to be followed or what you have to say?' 'Umar replied that it was certainly the Book of God that was to be followed. The woman then retorted, 'You have just forbidden people to increase the amount of dower, whereas God says in His book: O believers, it is unlawful for you... to force them to give up a part of what you have given them...'”(4:20)

The woman had actually misquoted the text, but 'Umar did not choose to assert himself and simply said, 'Everyone knows more than 'Umar.'(Al-Bayhaqi, *as-Sunan al-Kubra*, Hadith No. 14336) With these words, he relented on the question of the dower. This is a telling example of a woman successfully holding forth on a religious matter at a public gathering.

Another woman who made a significant contribution to the spread of religious learning in Muslim history is the daughter of Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (229-321 AH), the

famous Traditionist whose book, *Sharh Ma' ani al-Athar*, is regularly included in the syllabus of Islamic seminaries. He dictated his book of traditions to his daughter, and as he read out the Hadith, he would explain its finer points to her, and then she would write it all down. The whole book was prepared in this way. This is one of the finest examples of a woman helping her family members in matters of religion. The above examples show the nature and extent of the contribution that can be made by believing Muslim women to the cause of Islam.

### FORTITUDE OF MUSLIM WOMEN

The general conditions for women in the early days of Islam were often difficult. Still, they bore themselves with remarkable fortitude and adapted to whatever conditions they found themselves in. One shining example is that of Abu Bakr's daughter Asma' who was born 27 years before the Emigration. When she accepted Islam in Makkah, the Muslims were just 17 in number.

When Abu Bakr emigrated to Madinah, he possessed 6000 *dirhams*, all of which he took. When his father, Abu Qahafa, heard of this, he came to his family to console them and said, "I think that Abu Bakr has not only given us a shock by leaving you alone, but I suppose he has also taken all the money with him." Asma then told her grandfather that he had left them well provided for. She collected some small stones and filled up the niche where Abu Bakr had formerly

kept his money. She covered the pile of rocks with a cloth and then placed her grandfather's hand on it. Having gone blind in his old age, he was quickly taken in by this trick and thought the niche was full of *dirhams*. "It is a good thing that Abu Bakr has done. This will suffice for your necessities." Asma' then confessed that her father had not left them a single *dirham* and that it was only to comfort her grandfather that she conceived this idea. (Ibn Kathir, *As-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, Vol. 2, p. 236)

Before the advent of Islam, Asma's father had been one of the wealthiest merchants of Makkah, but when Asma' emigrated to Madinah with her husband, Zubayr, they had to live in the harshest conditions. Bukhari has recorded Asma's account of how her existence was eked out from day to day:

"When I married Zubayr, he had neither wealth nor property. He had no servant; only one camel brought water and only one horse. I got the grass for the camel and crushed date stones to eat instead of grain. I had to fetch the water myself, and when the water bag burst, I would set it up myself. As well as managing the house, I had also to take care of the horse. This I found the most difficult of all. I did not know how to cook the bread properly, so whenever I had to make it, I would knead the flour and take it to the Ansar women in the neighbourhood. They were very sincere women and would cook my bread on their own. When Zubayr reached Madinah, the Prophet gave him a piece of land two miles from



the city. I used to work on this land, and on the way home, I would carry a sack of date stones on my head.

One day, when I returned like this with a sack on my head, I saw the Prophet mounted on a camel going along the road with a group of Madinan Muslims. When he saw me, he reined in his camel and signed to me to sit on it, but I felt shy about travelling with men, and I also thought that Zubayr might take offence at this, as he was compassionate about his honour. The Prophet, realising that I was hesitant, did not insist and went on his way.

When I came home, I told Zubayr the whole story. I said that I had felt shy about sitting with the men on the camel and that I had also remembered his sense of honour. To this, Zubayr replied, ‘By God, your carrying date stones home on your head is harder for me to bear than that.’” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5224)

Such instances of how women toiled during their stay in Madinah are numberless. At that time, women worked in their homes and outside. This was because their menfolk were so preoccupied with preaching Islam that there was little time left to discharge their household responsibilities. It was then left to the women to deal with both internal and external duties. They even tended the animals, did the farming, and worked in the orchards.

## CHAPTER 5

# HIJAB IN ISLAM

These days, many Muslims use the term hijab as equivalent to burqa, but the word hijab is not used in the Quran in this sense. Hijab literally means ‘curtain’. The hijab is used in the Quran seven times, but not in the sense that is prevalent among Muslims today. Instead, it is used in its literal sense of ‘curtain’. Regarding women’s purdah, two words have been used in the Quran: jilbab (33: 59) and khimar (24: 31). But again, these words are not used in their present connotation. It is a fact that both words have a similar meaning, that is, chaadar or dupatta, which is something that covers the body of a woman and not her face. So, it is apparent that the present burqa and hijab are not Quranic terms; both are part of Muslim culture and not part of Quranic commandments. The concept of hijab, as understood in the popular sense today, has emerged from *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence).

In reality, Islam talks about adopting simplicity and modesty. In terms of outfits, the Shariah prescribes that

women cover their bodies with clothing that does not fit tight and is not meant to attract others.

It is noteworthy that the well-known Arab scholar Sheikh Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani clearly endorses the position mentioned above of the Shariah in his book on this subject, *Jilbab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was Sunnah* (The Veil of Muslim Woman in the Light of the Quran and Sunnah). He goes on to say that it is clear from the Quran, the Hadith, and the practice of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad and the Tabiun (Companions of the Prophet's Companions) that whenever a woman steps out of her home, she should cover herself so as not to show any part of her body except the face and the hands.

### HERE'S THE TRUTH BEHIND THE VEIL

The '*Burqa*' or *Purdah* is generally considered an integral part of Islam, but this is not so. In reality, the '*Burqa*' is a part of Muslim culture and not a part of Islamic teaching. There is a significant difference between the actions of Muslims and the teachings of Islam. Wearing a '*Burqa*' or veil is not part of Quranic teaching. The source of Islam is the Quran and not the Muslim culture. Muslim culture is a social phenomenon, while the Quran is the Book of God as revealed to the Prophet of Islam.

According to linguistic history, the word '*Burqa*' was used in Arabia before the advent of Islam in the first quarter of the seventh century. At that time, the word '*Burqa*' meant

a piece of clothing used as protection, especially in winter. The well-known Arabic dictionary *Lisan al-Arab* gives us two examples of its use during the pre-Islamic period: the first, as a cover for animals during the winter season and the second, as a covering or '*chaadar*,' like a shawl for village women. Although the word '*Burqa*' existed in the Arabic vocabulary at that time, the Quran did not use the word '*Burqa*' for women's veil.

History shows that the present veil or '*Burqa*' first came into vogue in Persia. When Islam entered Persia, an advanced civilization was already in existence there. Persian culture introduced many things into Islamic culture—for instance, the word '*Khuda*' instead of '*Allah*' and '*namaz*' instead of '*salat*.' Similarly, under the influence of Iranian culture, the '*Burqa*' was adopted by Muslims. Gradually, it was Islamised and became a part of Muslim culture.

At present, Muslims use the term '*Hijab*' as equivalent to '*Burqa*,' but the word '*Hijab*' is likewise not used in the Quran in this sense. '*Hijab*' literally means curtain. '*Hijab*' is used in the Quran seven times, but not in the sense prevalent among Muslims today; that is, it is used in its literal meaning of '*curtain*.'

Regarding women's veil, the Quran has used two words: '*Jilbab*' (33:59) and '*Khimar*' (24:31). But again, these words are not used in their present connotation. It is a fact that both words have a similar meaning, that is, *chaadar* or *dupatta*, which covers the body of a woman and not her face. So it is evident that the present '*Burqa*' or '*Hijab*' are

not Quranic terms; both are part of Muslim culture and not part of Quranic commandments.

According to the Hanafi and Maaliki school of *fiqh*, three parts of a woman are exempted from *satr* (body covering). These three are '*wajh*' (face), '*kaffain*' (hands), and '*qadmain*' (feet). According to the Shariah, women are required to cover their bodies with clothing that is not tight fitting and not meant to attract others. (*Tafsir Usmani*)

It is noteworthy that the well-known Arab scholar, Sheikh Muhammad Naasiruddin al-Albani, clearly endorses the position mentioned above of the Shariah in his book on this subject, '*Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah*' (The Veil of a Muslim Woman in the Light of the Quran and Sunnah). He goes on to say that it is clear from the Quran, the Hadith, and the practice of the Companions and the Tabiun (companions of the Prophet's Companions) that whenever a woman steps out of her home, it is incumbent upon her to cover herself entirely so as not to show any part of her body except the face and the hands (and feet).

The religion of Islam focuses on the spirit rather than on form. It emphasizes pious thinking and value-based character. According to Islam, Muslims must purify themselves in terms of ethics. Muslim women must develop themselves in terms of spirituality; they must build their feminine personality and must play a constructive role in society rather than become objects of entertainment.

During the Prophet's time, Muslim women were active in agriculture, horticulture, religious affairs, and social

work. But at the same time, they constantly preserved their feminine character and modesty. In the early history of Islam, many such incidents show that a woman has equal freedom as a man. In this respect, there is no difference between the two. A woman enjoys the same freedom as a man in Islam. Islamic literature mentions some pious women who have played a highly creative role in their society, like Hajira, the wife of the Prophet Abraham; Mariam, the mother of Jesus Christ; Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet of Islam; and Aisha, the wife of the Prophet of Islam. These women, accepted as models in the society of believers, are good examples for the women of today.

It is noteworthy to add two relevant references: One from the Quran and the second from the Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet). The Quran refers to men and women in these words:

“You are members of one of another.” (3: 195)

This means men and women, although created differently in gender, are complementary. Let us take the further reference. The Prophet of Islam said:

“Men and women are two equal halves of a single unit.” (*Sunan Abi Dawud*, Hadith No. 236)

This is the best expression of gender equality.

To understand the prevalence of the Hijab in Muslim society in the present times, it is necessary to keep in mind

that there is a difference between Islam and Muslims. Islam is the name of an ideology, while Muslims are a community that has its own culture, which keeps changing owing to various circumstances. In such a situation, Muslim tradition will be judged in the light of the original teachings of Islam instead of regarding this culture as Islam itself.

### HIJAB IN THE LIGHT OF THE QURAN AND HADITH

The present article is based on an authoritative Arabic book titled *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* by Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, a famous scholar and traditionist. This writer translated it and initially published it in condensed form in the quarterly *Islam and the Modern Age*. (*Islam aur Asr e Hazir*, Urdu Edition, New Delhi, January 1973)

The third edition of the original work, with some additions, is before me. The question of hijab (veil), or purdah in Urdu, the author tells us, has been discussed in the light of the Quran and Hadith.

From the author's point of view, a woman's face is not included in the parts of the body that need to be compulsorily covered. He suggests, however, that it is better to cover it. He agrees with those who, despite holding the view that the face is not to be covered as a rule, nevertheless advocate the covering of the face in order to discourage mischief in view of the general moral degradation in present-day

society. Here is one of the traditions he refers to in order to support his argument.

“Aisha says that Muslim women used to attend the morning prayer led by the Prophet wrapped in a sheet of cloth. Afterwards when they returned home, it was so dark that they could not be recognized.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 578)

This narrative makes it clear that their faces were not covered. Had their faces been covered, the question of their being recognized would not arise. The phrase “because of the darkness, they could not be recognized” makes sense only if the faces by which individuals are recognized were uncovered.

Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani takes a similar stand as regards the covering of a woman’s hands, quoting a famous tradition narrated by Ibn ‘Abbas that once the Messenger of God addressed the women to urge them to give alms (*sadaqah*). Afterward, Bilal ibn Rabah, a Companion of the Prophet, spread a sheet on which the women began throwing their rings.

After quoting this tradition, the author quotes Ibn Hazm: “Ibn ‘Abbas saw the hands of women in the presence of the Prophet. This proves that the face, as well as the hands, are not included in the parts of the body to be covered. Indeed, all other parts except these have to be veiled.” (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], p. 31)



He further writes: “My heart bleeds to see the way many women of today adorn themselves, crossing all limits of decency. But the remedy does not lie in declaring forbidden what God has permitted.”

He goes on to say that it is clear from the Quran, the Hadith, and the practice of the Companions and Tabi‘un (companions of the Prophet’s Companions) that whenever a woman steps out of her home, it is incumbent upon her to cover herself entirely so as not to show any part of her body except the face and the hands. (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], p. 7)

According to Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani’s findings, the following rules of hijab are applicable:

1. The whole body should be covered except for the exempted parts.
2. But any veil that becomes an attraction is to be avoided.
3. Garments should not be semi-transparent.
4. The dress should not be tight fitting.
5. Garments should not be perfumed.
6. The form of dress should not resemble that of men.
7. Garments should not reflect worldly honour.

Note: Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* (1914), p. 13.

The first rule of hijab has been derived from the following passages of the Quran:

“Say to the believing women to turn their eyes away (from temptation) and to preserve their chastity; to cover their adornments except such as usually are displayed; to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their finery except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their step-sons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons, their sisters’ sons, their women-servants, their slave girls, male attendants lacking in natural vigour, and children who do not know sex. And let them not stamp their feet when walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets. Believers, turn to God together in repentance, that you may prosper. (Quran, 24:31)

The second verse in this connection is as follows:

“O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and wives of the believers that they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments [when in public] so as to be recognized and not harmed. God is most forgiving and most merciful.” (Quran, 33:59)

The author interprets the wording in Quran Chapter 24 verse 31 as “to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed,” to mean that the hands and face are

exempt from covering. He draws his argument in support of this from the Hadith.

After studying many hadith in connection with the verse from chapter 24 of the Quran, he writes: "It is clear from the instances drawn from the Quran and the Hadith that, although it accords with the shariah and a woman should cover her face, she does not need to do so. It would be better if women followed this practice, but there is no harm if they do not." (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], p. 31)

The second rule of hijab, according to Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani's research, is that hijab in itself should not be a source of attraction. It should not become a display of finery referred to in the Quran as *tabarruj*:

"Stay in your homes and do not flaunt your charms as in the former times of ignorance. Attend to your prayers, pay the zakat and obey God and His Messenger. Women of the [Prophet's] Household, God seeks only to remove all impurity from you and to make you completely pure." (33:33)

According to the author, the intention of this verse is that a woman should not display her beauty and attraction in such a way as to produce carnal desires in the hearts of men. Since the purpose of the gown (jilbab) is to hide such attractions, it is, therefore, unimaginable that the gown itself should become a source of attraction. (Muhammad

Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], 31)

He states, moreover, that in Islam, the displaying of feminine attractions is a habit so essential to avoid that it has been bracketed in the scriptures along with such unlawful things as polytheism, adultery and theft. He has collected a number of traditions to support his argument.

The third rule of the hijab, according to the writer, is that the garment should not be thin because a thin cloth can never provide cover. A diaphanous garment only accentuates a woman's attraction and becomes a potential source of mischief. (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], 56)

This tradition is self-explanatory.

The fourth condition set by the writer is that the garment should be loose-fitting. He again supports his argument by quoting various sayings of the Prophet. Finally, he has given an instance where Fatimah (the Prophet's daughter) expressed her disapproval of a dead woman being wrapped in such a shroud as might display her body as being a woman's. He writes: "See for yourself how the dearest daughter of the Prophet considered the use of such a cloth detestable as would not properly drape feminine parts of a dead woman's body. Certainly, such a garment for a living woman would be far worse." (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], 63)

The fifth condition of hijab is that the garment should not be perfumed (while going out). There are many traditions that forbid women from wearing perfume when going out. After quoting a few traditions, he writes: "Ibn Daqiq al-'id writes that in this hadith, a woman is forbidden to go to the mosque wearing perfume because it stimulates carnal desires in men. So when it is forbidden for women to wear perfume to go to the mosque, their use of perfume when they go out shopping or for any other purpose is all the more sinful. Al-Haythami writes that going out wearing adornments and perfume is a sin, even if it is done with the husband's permission." (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], 65)

The sixth condition of the hijab is that a woman's garments should not resemble those of men. Here is one of the traditions he has quoted to this effect:

The Prophet has condemned men who imitate women and women who imitate men. (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], 67)

From this tradition, the writer concludes that a garment that in most parts resembles those of men is not permissible for women, even if it covers her adequately. (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* (1914), 77)

The seventh rule of hijab is that it should not resemble that worn by non-believers. Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani

says that any similarity to non-believers must be avoided in matters of worship, festivals and dress. (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], 78)

The Quran states this briefly, but the Sunnah provides the details. One of the verses of the Quran on which he bases this argument states that it is “so that they should not become like those who were given the Book before them, ...” (57:16)

He quotes Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathir, who construe this verse as meaning that imitation of non-believers is not allowed in Islam.

Then he quotes the tradition in which the Prophet forbade adopting the ways of non-believers in prayers, funeral prayers, sacrifice, food, dress, etiquette, etc. (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], 80)

The eighth rule of the hijab is that a woman's garments should not reflect worldly honour. Here is a hadith to this effect:

“One who wears the mantle of fame in this world will be made to wear the robe of dishonour in the hereafter.” (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar'ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], 80)

His concluding remarks are: “The garment should cover the entire body of a woman except the face and hands and should not become an attraction in itself. Neither should

it be thin nor tight. It should not accentuate the body. It should not be perfumed or resemble those worn by men or non-believing women. It should not suggest fame.” (Muhammad Nasiruddin al-Albani, *Hijab al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah fil Kitab was-Sunnah* [1914], 110)

### The Translator’s Views

The Quran says: “Say to the believing women to turn their eyes away (from temptation) and to preserve their chastity; to cover their adornments except such as are normally displayed.” (24:31)

The wording of the verse, “except such as are normally displayed,” gives rise to the question of what it is that has been exempted here from being covered. The theologians and the commentators have two views on the subject. These two views are based on the fact that beauty is of two kinds—one natural (by birth) and the other artificial (the use of make-up, etc. acquires that). One group says that the word ‘beauty’ here refers to both kinds of beauty, whereas the other group believes that it is artificial beauty which is referred to in this verse.

Ibn Mas‘ud, Hasan, Ibn Sirin, and Abul Jawza’ have interpreted this verse as referring to the kind of beauty that depends on clothes, ornaments, etc. They are of the opinion that when a woman goes out, she should not display these deliberately. However, if any part of such adornment is unintentionally exposed, for instance, if a gust of wind

displaces the covering sheet momentarily, this is deemed excusable.

The other point of view finds support from ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, ‘Ata,’ ‘Ikrima, Sa‘id ibn Jubayr, Abu ash-Sha‘tha,’ Dahhak, Ibrahim Nakh‘i, etc. They infer from the Quranic phrase, “what is normally apparent thereof” (24:31), the exemption of face and hands.

This interpretation is based on the tradition recorded by Abu Dawud in his Sunan: Aisha says that once Asma bint Abu Bakr came wearing a thin garment. The Prophet turned his face away from her and said: “Asma, it is not proper for a woman after having reached puberty to expose any part of her body except these.” Then he pointed to his hands and face. (*Sunan Abi Dawud*, Hadith No. 4104)

That is why there are two theological schools of thought. The Hanafis and Malikis believe that the face and hands are not to be covered, while the followers of Imam Shafi‘i and Hanbali maintain that a woman has to be entirely veiled. In this view, natural and acquired beauty have to be entirely veiled. It is unlawful for a woman to unveil any part of her body when she goes out. To them, what is exempted is that which gets exposed unintentionally. They will be excused for that. Thus, the face and the hands are the parts that are forbidden to be exposed unnecessarily. (Muhammad ‘Ali as-Sabuni, *Rawai‘ al-Bayan*, [Beirut, 1980], 2/155)

Maulana Shabbir Ahmad ‘Usmani gives the following commentary pertaining to this verse of the Quran:



“To this writer, the interpretation of beauty as adornment would be more appropriate and comprehensive in this context. The word adornment encompasses all kinds of beauty, whether natural or acquired, whether inborn beauty or that of beautiful garments or make-up. In short, a woman is forbidden to display adornment of any kind before anyone not permitted by the shariah. If a woman cannot keep these parts veiled as ordained for reasons beyond her control or any compelling reason, she cannot be held responsible for that (provided it is not likely to generate any mischief.)

It is evident from the Hadith and Athar (the sayings and deeds of the Prophet’s Companions) that the face and hands are exempted in the light of the Quranic phrase, “what is normally apparent thereof” (24:31). Because it is not possible to keep them covered while performing various chores of daily life and even religious rites. If they are ordered to be strictly covered, it will create significant difficulties for women in carrying out their jobs. The theologians have also considered the feet to be exempted parts. It must be clearly understood, however, that unveiling is permitted in the Quran strictly on the basis of necessity. Men are forbidden to set their eyes on them. Perhaps this is why, before exempting women from covering their faces and hands (chapter 24, verse 31), men are commanded to lower their gaze and guard

their modesty in chapter 24, verse 30. Thus, the permission to unveil a part of the body does not give licence to others to set their eyes on them.” (At-Tafsir al-‘Uthmani, Bijnor, 1950, p. 458)

## In Conclusion

From the above discussion about the hijab in the light of the Quran and Hadith, we can say that whenever she steps out of her home, it is incumbent upon her ‘to cover herself entirely so as not to show any part of her body except the face and the hands.’ It is incumbent upon Muslim women to observe the following rules of Hijab:

1. The whole body, except for the exempted parts, should be covered.
2. But any veil which in itself becomes an attraction is to be avoided.
3. Garments should not be semi-transparent.
4. Dress should not be tight-fitting.

The exemption of face, hands, and feet, derived from verse 31 of chapter 24, is extremely important. This shows that Islam does not intend to stop women from going out to receive education or to work but rather desires them to observe the Islamic culture known as the Hijab. A hijab requires a dress that adequately covers the body, for she is obliged to observe the rules of modesty.

## HIJAB: A COMPREHENSIVE TERM

The Hijab has become a topic of debate, discussion, and serious contention in print and television media. Through social media, the public has taken an active interest in the discussion of the Hijab. It is pertinent that we understand the meaning and connotation of the Hijab. The hijab is a comprehensive concept. It is not the name of a scarf or a veil. The idea of the Hijab starts from simplicity in one's attire and then extends to the person's behaviour and character. Its primary purpose is to lay the foundation of pure societies. It is a concept to guard the security and sanctity of relationships. It is to ensure that everyone operates within their sphere, and when it comes to relationships, no one should misuse their freedom to infringe upon others' rights. Human beings do face temptations and desires for various things. Islamic teachings guide their followers to keep control over such desires. To this effect, it gives clear commandments meant to help us not to go near temptation. Islam prohibits indecency and immoral acts and those things that may lead one to commit indecent acts. This is known as the principle of *Sadd al-Dharaa'i*, that is, blocking the means to evil (or prohibiting seemingly harmless acts that eventually lead to grave sins).

The Quran, while laying the foundation of a pure society, talks of the following:

“Believers, avoid much suspicion. Indeed some suspicion is a sin. And do not spy on one another and do not backbite.” (49:12)

The verse mentioned is of a general kind so that we all stay pure in our dealings with others. More specific injunctions are given for various aspects, leading to societal wrongdoing and evil. It is the Hijab that I would like to draw your attention to.

The physical attraction between males and females is a part of nature. However, granting unrestricted freedom to the opposite sexes will lead society to a situation where the family institution will become weak.

The goal of Islamic teachings is the prevention of such situations. Both men and women have specific physiological and psychological traits. They are guided to follow certain principles that ensure a modest appearance and behaviour. These guidelines assure respect for relationships with their elders, youngsters, relatives, friends, neighbours, and those they are eligible to marry. Different rules are laid out clearly for each category.

The principles and set of guidelines are elementary to follow. The following verses of the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad outline the fundamentals of Hijab:

“Tell believing men to lower their gaze and remain chaste. That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do.” (24:30)

“Say to believe women that they should lower their gaze and remain chaste and not to reveal their adornments—save what is normally apparent

thereof, and they should fold their shawls over their bosoms.” (24:31)

At the end of the above verse, believers are asked to ‘turn to God, every one of you, so that you may prosper. There are two other verses of the Quran in this regard:

“Do not flaunt your charms as in the former times of ignorance.” (33: 33)

“men and women who guard their chastity, men and women who are ever mindful of God—God is ready with forgiveness and an immense reward.” (33:35)

There are broad principles for a modest dress code for both men and women in Islam. Additionally, there is practical advice regarding those actions that threaten the quality of modesty among people. Islam is strict about the free mixing of men and women in an atmosphere of partying and entertainment, as it is a cause of promiscuity that leads to permissiveness. In such a society, one’s loyalties keep changing. Hijab is pivotal to this.

Hijab in Islam extends to our character and thinking, which no one can know except God. The Prophet Muhammad said, “Only a man of noble character will honour women, and only a man of base intentions will dishonour them.” (Ibn Asakir, *Tarikh Dimashq*, Vol. 13, p. 313) In another of his teachings, the Prophet encouraged believers to select their spouses based on piety. Simplicity, dignified behaviour,

and refraining from relationships outside marriage are all integral to Hijab. The learned amongst the Muslims should guide the community on these crucial issues of the Hijab and maintain peace and dignity in the society.



## CHAPTER 6

# MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

The coming together of a man and a woman in marriage is one of the most unique events in the universe. All the things created in the universe are created in pairs, but the compatibility between a man and a woman cannot be found in any other created thing. When a man and a woman come together as partners for life, it is evident that they have been made for each other through a conscious plan.

Marriage is not simply a social institution. In Islam, it has a far more significant importance than this. According to the Islamic concept of life, God Almighty created an ideal world, Paradise. Paradise is a perfect and eternal world. God wants to select those women and men who may qualify to settle in this highly refined colony of Paradise. God provided men and women with free will for this selection or test whilst settling them on earth.

Adjustment is the only formula for a successful married life. But this is not adjustment for the sake of adjustment;



it is adjustment for a higher purpose, that is, to create a normal environment in which it will be possible to achieve the real purpose of married life. Married life is not simply co-travelling; it is rather co-sharing. Both partners, after married life, are born with different qualities and need to share them with each other so that both partners may develop their personalities in a better way.

Life is like a cogwheel. If the man has one cog, the woman has the other cog, and both need communion so that a joint effort may be possible. Being aware of this fact, both are willing to adjust for the sake of mutual sharing. This leads to a successful married life.

### SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

Nature demands that men and women lead their lives together. According to Islamic law, the ideal way of leading such a life is within the bounds of marriage. It was to give this relationship legal sanction that the institution of marriage (*nikah*) was established. Marriage is a matter of mutual consent. The consent of both the man and the woman is sought to solemnize the *nikah* ceremony. The willingness of the woman is especially desired. Therefore, in Islam, marriage is a social contract entered into by mutual consent of the bride and groom. It is a sacred bond to which great religious and social importance is attached. As an institution, it is a cohesive force in society and worth protecting and preserving. To that end, detailed injunctions

have been prescribed to maintain its stability and promote its betterment.

The state of marriage lays the foundations for family life and provides a training ground for individuals to contribute to society positively. When a man and woman prove to be a good husband and wife, they will be good citizens in the broad spectrum of their social group. This has been aptly expressed in a Hadith:

“The best of you is one who is best for his family.”

(*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 3895)

After presenting the Islamic view about marriage, let us now understand the principles that should govern one’s married life as derived from the Quran and the life of the Prophet.

We are living in a world created by God Almighty. He has made this world and sustains it according to a definite plan. This is known as God’s creation plan. Any deviation from this by man will result in disorder in the smooth functioning of life on earth.

The principles from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet lay a foundation for a pure society—a society where there is sanctity in all relationships, interactions, and dealings. Fear of accountability to God makes a person view every interaction as an interaction God Almighty is witnessing. With such an understanding, we will know

what is to be accepted in society and what is to be strictly shunned.

If followed, the following teachings of the Quran ensure that either spouse will not fall into the evil ways that threaten their marriage. One will not misuse one's freedom and feel a great sense of responsibility toward maintaining the sanctity of married life.

“Tell believing men to lower their gaze and remain chaste. That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do. Say to believe women that they should lower their gaze and remain chaste and not reveal their adornments—save what is normally apparent thereof, and they should fold their shawls over their bosoms. Believers, turn to God, every one of you, so that you may prosper.” (24:30-31)

“Live with them in accordance with what is fair and kind; if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something which God might make a source of abundant good.” (4:19)

“Do not covet the bounties which God has bestowed more abundantly on some of you than on others. Men shall be rewarded according to their deeds, and women shall be rewarded according to their deeds. You should rather ask God for His bounty. God knows all things.” (4:32)

‘Lord, grant us joy in our wives and children and make us a model for the righteous.’ (25:74)

“Bear in mind all that is recited in your homes of the revelations of God and wisdom. God is all-pervading and all aware.” (33:34)

“Let the man of means spend in accordance with his means; and let him whose resources are restricted, spend in accordance with what God has given him. God does not burden any person with more than He has given him. God will soon bring about ease after hardship.” (65:7)

“If you fear any breach between a man and his wife, appoint one arbiter from his family and one arbiter from her family. If they both want to set things right, God will bring about a reconciliation between them: He is all-knowing and all-aware.” (4:35)

“To those who have attained to faith, We shall unite their offspring who have also followed them in faith, and We shall not let any of their good deeds go unrewarded;” (52:21)

The gist of the above teachings is motivation towards modesty and being content with what one is blessed with. It calls people to seek joy in what has been granted and not to look at what is given to others. There is a commandment to make the home a place for learning and intellectual development instead of following a materialistic culture. People are advised to live according to their means, which inculcates frugality. On the other hand, vying for

more wealth to live a luxurious life is sometimes a cause of deviation from Islamic principles in family life. God promises His rewards to those who live with faith in Him and as per His commandments.

The following teachings of the Prophet further show the way of living harmoniously with one another.

“No believing man should hate a believing woman, for if any habit of hers displeases him, there will be some other habit of hers that pleases him.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1469)

“Beware, your women have rights over you, and you have rights over your women” (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 20695).

“They have found all the good of this world and the Hereafter who have a heart that gives thanks, a tongue that remembers God, a body that is patient in the face of hardships, and a wife who can be trusted to remain chaste and refrain from misusing her husband’s wealth. A woman is married for four things: for her wealth, for her lineage, for her beauty, or her piety. Select the pious; may you be blessed.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5090)

Virtuous men and women are considered a great treasure for each other. They are helpers in managing life, trustworthy partners, and friends to each other who are always available. All this is possible only within the framework of

marriage. Any other arrangement does not have a congenial atmosphere for such companionship to flourish.

A marriage to be successful requires trust and loyalty, which have to be nourished continuously by both husband and wife.

Islam is also very strict about preventing the free mixing of men and women in an atmosphere of partying and entertainment as it is a cause for promiscuity, which leads to permissiveness. In such a society, one's loyalties keep changing. In a segregated society, where interaction between men and women is restricted and strictly work-related, one associates with one's spouse, which keeps them away from forming new loyalties, while in a free society, one comes upon new faces every day, one better than the other. In such a scenario, loyalties keep shifting, leading to social evils.

What is the way to reform individuals or the building of a better society? In this regard, the Islamic approach addresses individuals to change their mindset, not by holding demonstrations or protests. "Win the mind, and you will win the battle." After all, a group of upright individuals makes a good society.

### SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE

It is generally understood that marriages are solemnized between families of equal status for practical reasons. In such situations, it is believed that adjustments would be easier

and would, thus, ensure a happy family life. However, in reality, this is just a supposition. If we look closely, we can find that marriages among equals suffer as much. Equality, therefore, does not assure success in nuptial relations. A successful marriage depends more on learning the art of management.

It is also commonly held that marriages do not work for couples who come from different educational backgrounds and where there are regional differences, disparity in economic status, etc. This is also a wrong assumption. A home is similar to a full-fledged institution. Like other institutions, a home also has many departments. The easiest way to run this institution is to have a division of labour between men and women. Men and women should take up different departments in accordance with their different capabilities and run the department independently, without interfering with one another. Thus, in this division of labour, the problem of inequality will be solved.

### DOWER (*MAHR*)

After marriage (*nikah*), the first obligation upon a man with regard to his wife is to give her a fixed amount at the time of marriage. The Quran states:

“And give the women (on marriage) their dowers willingly.” (4:4)

At the time of marriage, the groom gives the bride a sum

of money, *mahr* (dower), as a token of his willingness to accept responsibility for bearing all necessary expenses for his wife. This is the original meaning of *mahr*. There are two ways of presenting *mahr* to the bride. One is to hand it over at the time of the marriage, in which case it is known as *mahr mu'ajjal* or promptly given dower. (The word *mu'ajjal* is derived from '*ajilah*, meaning 'without delay') During the time of the Prophet and his Companions, giving promptly was the accepted practice, and the amount fixed was generally relatively minimal.

Another way of giving dower, according to Islamic law, is to provide it after a certain period of time. This has to be settled at the time of the marriage. This form of dower is called *mahr mu'ajjal*, or dower given after a period of time. This has often been wilfully misinterpreted as implying an indefinite postponement of the giving of dower.

The dower mentioned above, however, can take the form of some service performed by the husband. When Moses left Egypt for Madyan, he married Safoora, the daughter of the Prophet Shuayb. His dower was settled and paid off by binding himself to the service of his elderly father-in-law for a period of ten years. Only after performing this service for a full ten years did he leave Madyan for Egypt.

## No Heavy Burden

The dower, in cash or kind, has to be fixed, keeping the bridegroom's position in life. It should be affordable to him, be it a lump sum in cash or some article of value. The



jurists have different views to offer on what the minimum amount should be, but all agree that it should be substantial enough for something to be bought against it. There are no traditions that encourage an increase in the dower, whereas some argue for fixing smaller dowers. In all such cases, Islam lays down guidelines rather than issuing strict commandments. It is left to the circumstances of the groom. There is a well-known saying of the Prophet Muhammad that “the best woman is one whose dower is the easiest to pay.” (*Sahih Ibn Hibban*, Hadith No. 4034)

Another saying refers to such a bride as “the most blessed woman.” (*Mustadrak al-Hakim*, Hadith No. 2732). “The state of blessedness,” according to a third saying, resides in “her being easy to deal with and the acceptance of dower according to the capacity of the husband.” (*Sahih Ibn Hibban*, Hadith No. 4095)

The second Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, while addressing a gathering, asked them to refrain from fixing heavy dowers in marriage. Hearing this, a woman addressed the Caliph, quoting the Quran, “If you have given much wealth to your women, do not take anything from it.” (4: 20). In response, Umar withdrew his words, saying, “The woman is right, Umar is wrong”.

### HAZRAT FATIMAH’S DOWER

There is a saying of the Prophet that “The best marriage with the most blessings is the easiest in terms of provision. (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 24529)

In the second year after Hijrah, the Prophet married his daughter, Hazrat Fatimah, to Ali ibn Abi Talib. Early records show that the “dower” fixed by the Prophet of Islam for his daughter Fatimah is exemplary in this regard. The following words of Hazrat Ali explain this further:

Hazrat Ali said, “The Messenger of God asked me, “What brought you here? Is there something I can do for you?” I remained silent, but he said, “Have you perhaps come to become engaged to Fatimah?” “Yes, I have,” I replied. “Do you have something to give her in marriage?” he asked. “No, O Messenger of God, I do not,” I replied. He then enquired, “What did you do with the armour I provided for you in the Badr?” “Now I swear by Him who holds ‘Ali’s soul in His hand, it was just an armour, not worth four dirhams.” I replied, “Yes, I have it.” “Then I marry her to you for it; send it to her as her Mahr,” he said. This, then became the dower paid for Fatima, daughter of the Messenger of God.” (*Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah*, Vol. 4, p. 162)

Hazrat Ali sold that piece of gold to Hazrat Uthman for 480 dirhams and presented the amount before Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet then instructed to utilize the amount for perfume and arranging clothes. The belongings given by the Prophet in dowry were as follows: a simple mattress, a leather pillow filled with tree bark, a grinding stone, a water skin, and two clay pots.

It is mentioned that when Fatimah left for Ali’s house,

it was quite unfurnished except for a flooring of sand, a pillow of date palm bark, a pot of water and a drinking vessel. Even the sheet that Fatimah was given had to be divided in two so that one half could be spread for sleeping on and the other half could be worn. Such a dowry would be considered unbecoming to most people today.

### THE COMPANIONS AND THEIR MARRIAGES

In the first era of Islam, marriage was a simple affair without pomp or ostentation. Expenditure being minimal, it did not burden either family. There is a saying of the Prophet that “The greatest marriage with the most blessings is the easiest in terms of provision.” (Musnad Ahmad, Hadith No. 24529)

The simplicity of marriage in the Prophet’s days is well illustrated by Abdur Rahman ibn Auf, one of the Prophet’s foremost Companions. He married in Madinah with as little ceremony as possible, not even thinking it necessary to invite the Prophet or the Companions. Imam Ahmad narrates how the Prophet came to know of this. Abdur Rahman ibn Auf came to the Prophet with the scent of saffron upon him. When the Prophet asked him about this, he said, “I have married.” The Prophet then enquired as to how much dower he had given his bride. “Gold equal in weight to one date stone,” he replied. (Musnad Ahmad, Hadith No. 12685)

## STABILITY IN MARRIAGE

Presently, the Islamic spirit has almost vanished from the responsibilities of arranging and performing a marriage. Muslims nowadays prefer to follow local customs rather than the guidelines of Islam. A misguided practice is the fixing of heavy dowers—by the brides’ families, which is considered to be safeguarding the girls’ interests. The Dictionary of Islam says: “The custom of fixing heavy dowers, generally beyond the husband’s means, especially in India, seems to be based upon the intention of checking the husband from ill-treating his wife, and, above all, from his marrying another woman, as also from wrongfully or causelessly divorcing the former. For in the case of divorce, the woman can demand the full payment of the dower.

Fixing a substantial dower rests on the supposition that it has to be fixed at the time of marriage but not handed over on that occasion. This gives it a “deterrent” value, not otherwise possible, i.e., if it was immediately paid.

What parents try to achieve—unsuccessfully—through the fixing of heavy dowers is stability in their daughters’ marriages. Stability in marriage cannot come from manipulation of the dower or other material considerations. Stability in marriage comes out of the girl’s appreciation of the realities of life, for which a keen awareness of the root cause of familial and societal problems is essential. The commonest manifestation of these are quarrels with in-laws and sometimes even the breaking up of the home.

The bride comes from her parents’ home, where she has

had unstinted affection. This relationship and the place in the family are usually taken for granted. She is unaware that these valuable elements in family living are not hers for the taking when she enters her new home as a married woman. They have to be earned. She has to show that she deserves the kind of love and regard she has as a matter of right in her parents' home. This lack of awareness is often the cause of major rifts in her married life.

There is unconditional love in the case of blood relationships. Her parents love her, whether she is good or bad, active or idle, or helpful, regardless of the circumstances of her life and her character. With no such blood relationship with her in-laws, love from them will never be unconditional. It will be directly related to the impression her character and abilities make upon them in daily living. For the bride, entering the marriage bond is like undergoing a series of tests, the outcome of which will determine whether her married life will be stable and happy. Wise parents will warn their daughters to mould themselves to new sets of circumstances.

A woman who enters marriage with a correct appreciation of what is required of her will make the transition with ease. Through her character and accomplishments, she will earn the same honourable position in her in-laws' home as she had in her parents' home. Daughter-in-Law does not consider her in-laws' house as her own home, which results in the in-laws' family members also failing to accept her as part of their family. The girl ends up paying the price

by needlessly suffering in her in-laws' home, putting herself through psychological torment unnecessarily. Such conflicts are the price of one's own lack of awareness, which naive girls often attribute to their in-laws.

Such a situation is invariably aggravated when her parents attempt to intervene. In a clash between the weak and the strong, it is always the former who suffers, and of course, within the bonds of marriage, it is always the woman who is in the weaker position. Parents do not realize the damage they do to their own daughter's life by waging an unending war against her in-laws.

The parents-in-law's home is a kind of training and testing ground in which the girl must be willing to learn, to adapt, and to prove her mettle. She must leave behind her the fairy tale existence of her parent's home. It is the girl who is prepared to look at the hard facts of life in the face which will make her marriage a resounding success.

### BREAKING THE CONDITIONING MOULD

When a man and a woman come together in marriage, it is the joining of two different personalities. Each is different from the other in many respects. They are both conditioned to their various ways of upbringing and lifestyle.

When a child is born, he is conditioned by the environment he grows up in. The environment inside the home and outside moulds him into what he eventually grows up to be. This stays with him throughout his life. As a result,

he starts to consider his way of thinking to be correct. When one begins to think in this manner, it is the result of conditioning. This happens to almost everyone.

And so, when a man and a woman come together in marriage, this type of conditioning becomes a problem. The woman looks at things from a different angle from the man. This can result in disagreements, which can blow up to great proportions.

The only solution to this problem is to de-condition one another. This can happen only when one opens up and engages in intellectual discussion with the other. A prerequisite for deconditioning is that one must be willing to admit one's mistakes. Admitting one's mistakes and trying to change oneself is the only successful way to de-condition oneself.

One way to decondition is given here. Before marriage, a boy and a girl live with their respective blood relations. These gradually become comfort zones for them. But, after marriage, they have to live in a non-blood relationship. This becomes, unconsciously, if not consciously, a non-comfort zone for both of them. They must understand that living in one's comfort zone is not based on reality. It is only a psychological state which may be interpreted as a comfort zone. When they understand this fact, they will regard their situation as an issue of management and not a reaction.

## POSITION OF WOMAN IN ISLAMIC SHARIAH

The Quran and Hadith give detailed commandments regarding women and lay down clear guidelines for the relationship between men and women. The following quotations from the Quran and Hadith highlight the most essential aspects of feminine virtue and the standing that a woman should have vis-à-vis her husband and father:

### Verses from the Quran

“Live with them in accordance with what is fair and kind; if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something which God might make a source of abundant good.” (4:19)

“The wives have rights corresponding to those which the husbands have, according to what is recognized to be fair, but men have a rank above them. God is almighty and all wise.” (2:228)

“Men shall have a share in what parents and relatives leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and relatives leave behind, whether it be little or much. This is ordained [by God].” (4:7)

“Another of His signs is that He created for you from among yourselves spouses so that you might find repose in them, and He created between you affection and kindness.” (30:21)



“Whoever does evil will be requited with evil; but whoever does good, whether male or female and is a believer, will enter the Garden; where they will be provided for without measure.” (40:40)

“Anyone who performs good deeds, whether it be a man or woman, provided that he is a believer, shall enter Paradise. No one shall suffer the least injustice.” (4:124)

“To whoever does good deeds, man or woman, and is a believer, We shall assuredly give a good life; and We will bestow upon them their reward according to the best of their works.” (16:97)

“The believers, both men and women, are friends to each other; they enjoin what is good and forbid evil, they attend to their prayers and pay the alms and obey God and His Messenger. On these, God will have mercy, for God is almighty and wise.” (9:71)

“I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labours. You are members of one another. I will certainly forgive the sins of those who emigrated and were expelled from their homes, who suffered persecution in My cause, who fought and were killed. I will certainly admit them to Gardens through which rivers flow, as a reward from God: with God is the best reward.” (3: 195)

## Words of the Prophet Muhammad

The first four of the following sayings of the Prophet Muhammad stress the high standard of conduct which a man is meant to maintain in his relations with women:

“Only a man of noble character will honour women, and only a man of base intentions will dishonour them.” (Ibn Asakir, *Tarikh Dimashq*, Vol. 13, p. 313)

“The best among you is he who is best for his family. For my family, I am the best of all of you.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1977)

“No believing man should hate a believing woman, for if there is any habit of hers that displeases him, there will be some other habit of hers which pleases him.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1469)

“The most perfect man of religion is one who excels in character. The best among you is he who gives the best treatment to his womenfolk.” (*Sunan At Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 1162)

“According to Abu Hurairah, the Prophet considered a woman good if she was a delight to her husband’s gaze, obeyed his wishes when something had to be done for him, and placed her person and her wealth entirely at his disposal.” (*Sunah An-Nasa’i*, Hadith no. 3231)

The following traditions give a clear indication of the position that a woman occupies in Islam.

“Shall I not tell you what the best form of wealth is? It is a pious woman who is a delight to her husband’s eyes, obeys when asked to do anything, and looks after his interests when he is away.” (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Hadith No. 1664)

“Next to piety itself, the best thing that a believer can find is a pious wife. She should be such that if he asks her to do anything, she obeys, and when he looks at her, she should make him happy. When she swears upon him, she should fulfil her pledge, and, in the absence of her husband, she should devote herself earnestly to keeping his wealth and preserving her chastity.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1857)

“They have found all the good of this world and the hereafter who have these four things: a heart that gives thanks, a tongue that remembers God, a body which is patient when persecuted, and a wife who can be trusted to remain chaste and refrain from misusing her husband’s wealth.” (*Al-Tabarani, Al-Mo’jam al-Awsat*, Hadith No. 7212)

“Fear God in respect of women.” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 3074)

## The Qualities of A Believing Woman

Umm Salmah, the Prophet Muhammad's wife, once remarked to the Prophet, 'I hear of God mentioning men but not women.' It was in this context that the following verse was revealed to the Prophet:

"I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labours. You are members, one of another." (Quran, 3:195)

This makes it clear that, although males and females differ biologically, they are equal in terms of human status, they have a definite partnership with one another, and there is no distinction between them regarding their respective rights. They are, in fact, each other's lifetime companions.

## The Principle of the Division of Labour

Within the social framework, however, Islam—to the extent that it is both natural and practical—has adopted the division of labour in respect of the sexes, the man's field of activity being external to the home, while the woman's field is domestic. This division, however, has never been intended as a form of discriminatory treatment. Its primary purpose has always been to preserve the distinctive characteristics of both sexes while deploying their respective talents and skills in the most socially useful manner.

This enables both sexes to make the best use of their innate capabilities without causing undue disruption in the family

or society. In modern parlance, this is a form of managerial optimization rather than sexual discrimination. For this principle to be effective, the spheres of activity of men and women have had to be quite different and, of course, separate from each other. That is to say that the man's field of activity is in the outside world, while the woman's is in the home.

Men and women can be likened to a cart running on two wheels. Each of the wheels contributes equally to the running of the cart. Even if only one of the wheels goes out of order, the cart will stop. The way a cart traverses its path with the help of the two wheels, precisely in the same way, with the cooperation of men and women, the life system can be run efficiently.

### ADJUSTMENT IN MARITAL LIFE

Under the directions for marital life, the Quran enjoins as follows:

“Live with them in accordance with what is fair and kind; if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike something which God might make a source of abundant good.” (4:19)

In this world of God, the only effective principle by which to lead a successful married and social life is for every man and woman to realize that if one does not appreciate some trait in the other, it is just possible that there may be some

other quality in the same person which would be to their liking or advantage. It is, therefore, prudent for everyone to scrupulously overlook the disagreeable feature of the concerned man or woman and accept him or her based on appreciable qualities. This Quranic teaching does not concern only husband and wife but all human relations in general.

Realistically, nobody in this world is perfect. Everyone has some inherent shortcomings or the other. The man or woman who comes into direct contact with us gets exposed to us and has no means of concealing this shortcoming, whereas one who remains out of our practical life is less vulnerable because he escapes this scrutiny. Thus, we imagine and presume that all the others are good except the one associated with us, though, with closer acquaintance with others, it becomes evident that the latter are not very different from our partners in marriage.

The attitude of leaving one and grabbing another is not correct, and, in any case, the quest for perfection is unlikely to succeed. The right approach is to inculcate the mentality of adjustment, for it is this quality of adjustment that makes a person capable of living peacefully with all kinds of people and permits him through a fruitful association with others to shape a successful life for himself.

Here, we have a fundamental principle of life. It can be put in one word—adjustment. Adjustability is the key to success in life for individuals, families, society, and nations. We can define adjustability as taking into account the needs

of others besides one's own. In this world, success comes the way of one who is able to see both sides of a coin and look at matters from another's point of view as well as from his own. Those who only know what they want and go all the way to achieve it, irrespective of others' needs, will find their path through life strewn with obstacles and pitfalls, and it will be little wonder if they come to grief. Success in marriage and social life can only take place by following this principle of adjustment.

### PRINCIPLE OF ADJUSTMENT

Adjustment is the only formula for a successful married life. But adjustment for what? It is not adjustment for the sake of adjustment. It is an adjustment for a higher purpose, that is, to create a normal environment in which it will be possible to achieve the real purpose of married life.

Married life is not simply co-travelling. It is rather co-sharing. After married life, both partners possess something unique, and each needs to share that with the other. Everyone is born with different qualities, and each one needs a share from one's partner so both partners may develop their personalities better.

In married life, both partners are givers and takers simultaneously. So, both partners need favourable conditions in which it may be possible to benefit from each other.

Life is like a cogwheel. If the man has one cog, the woman

has the other cog, and both need communion so that a joint effort may be possible.

I know many marriages in which both parties, being aware of this fact, tried to make adjustments. But they were quite conscious that their doing so was not merely for adjustment but mutual sharing. Thus, their marriage proved to be successful.

One essential aspect of marriage is what I call intellectual partnership. Every day, we face problems; every day, there are some new issues; every day, we have to make some decisions; every day, we want to explore some new area in the world of ideas. This is important for everyone, man and woman. Every one of us needs to have an intellectual partner with whom we can have verbal exchanges, have a dialogue, and try to discover better options. And according to my experience, the best intellectual partner is your spouse.

Everyone has adopted what may be called the adjustment culture—the businessman with his customers, every working man or woman with his or her boss. I think this is good, although the goal of this adjustment is only the money to be earned. However, this adjustment culture is also essential for husbands and wives. Adopting this adjustment culture in married life means making something far more important than money.

My personal experience is that conversing with your partner is bound to give rise to new ideas. In this sense, the process of intellectual partnership leads to intellectual



development. And intellectual development is the most significant goal for every man and woman.

Man is an explanation-seeking animal. So when discussing adjustment in married life, both the partners could ask, “Why adjustment?” So you have to give a good explanation. Otherwise, any talk of adjustment will not have the right impact on them. They may agree with your sermon on adjustment but will not follow it in their practical life. Adjustment should be for a higher purpose. By following the principle of adjustment, each will reap the reward of intellectual development.

One’s spouse is an ever-ready intellectual partner. They are available at all times, day and night. Discover this aspect of married life, and any sacrifice for adjustment will seem to be insignificant.

## MARRIAGE: INTELLECTUAL PARTNERSHIP

The second chapter of the Quran says: “Your wives are a tilth for you. Go then, into your tilth as you will Do good deeds, and fear God and know that you shall meet him. And give good tidings to believers.”(2:223)

This verse’s words ‘do good deeds’ summarise the basic theme. This central idea explains the whole verse, which means that one should be engaged in activities that benefit the future. Man must prepare himself for all the different tests in life to gain a place in the world to come. This should be the goal of a person in life. The verse further says that

one should try to understand how a woman relates to this goal in life. God has created women to support man in life, just as the field supports the farmer in the subsistence of life.

This verse of the Quran was revealed in Makkah at a time when people debated the role of women in life. People in those days knew only two things about women: sexual satisfaction and the continuation of the human race.

But the Quran says that over and above those two things, a woman extends a supporting hand in building a successful life. Therefore, man should utilize this provision, be gifted by nature, and work at building successful lives for themselves. Any other concept of a woman—less dignified than this—belittles a woman's position. A man and a woman come together in marriage so that they may unitedly play their part in building a more significant role in human life.

When a man is born into this world, he is like iron ore, raw in form. Nature has produced him like ore, and he must develop himself on his own. Nature produces ore; man has to convert it into steel. This means he has to develop his personality through intellectual and spiritual development to make it a developed personality.

Intellectual and spiritual development is of the utmost importance in this development process. In developing one's personality, the most important thing is for man to broaden his mind by awakening his consciousness. Three things are required to awaken one's consciousness: study,

observation, and intellectual exchange with other people. Books are the most significant source of knowledge, and studying them is always beneficial. The world of nature is the most excellent source of observation. In intellectual learning, man needs to form the habit of learning from others and continue in this learning process.

In the case of married people, they are each other's immediate intellectual partners, as they are always available for each other. From this point of view, marriage is an excellent opportunity for intellectual development, as both can interact and progress together intellectually. Intellectual development is essential for everyone. Marriage offers an ideal opportunity to commune with one another. One condition to succeed in this venture is to prioritize intellectual development and make it a part of one's daily life. In this way, the best way to describe the relationship between husband and wife is 'intellectual partnership.'

### EMOTIONALISM VS EGOISM

When a man and a woman tie the knot in marriage, it is a coming together of two opposite personalities. A woman is emotional, while a man is egoistic. These traits are a part of their nature.

There are positive and negative aspects to both these traits. If they are used positively, they will be a boon to humanity. But if they are put to harmful use, it will be a bane for humanity.

The positive aspect of egoism in man is that it is one of the driving forces in working steadfastly for a cause. A man bereft of this quality will be weak, lacking in willpower, and fail to accomplish any task requiring determination and perseverance. However, the negative aspect is that it will make him arrogant. Therefore, one must be very careful and not allow one's ego to sway one towards the negative side, as this would be counterproductive.

Similarly, a woman tends to be on the emotional side. This trait has its positive as well as negative aspects. The positive aspect is that she is more sensitive and, therefore, more gentle and compassionate, which is, without doubt, a positive quality. However, the negative aspect is that it can give her an obstinate personality, thus making her stubborn even when a flexible approach is necessary. If a woman allows this aspect of her nature to go unchecked, it will be detrimental to the wholesome development of her personality.

A man and a woman should understand the natural traits they are born with. They must consciously strive to use their positive aspects and sedulously refrain from taking any negative course. The secret of success in both men and women lies in this self-control.

### COMPANIONSHIP OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

The 30th chapter of the Quran says, "He created for you from among yourselves spouses so that you may find repose in them." (30:21)

‘Repose’ or ‘comfort’ here does not only mean comfort in a marriage; it also refers to the positive contribution a spouse can make in helping one play a significant role in life.

A unified effort alone enables great tasks to be accomplished in this world. A solitary person cannot perform any remarkable feat. The first and most natural form of united effort is for a man and a woman to come together in marriage. This brings two souls together, and this unity of the two souls is the only unity that produces mutual trust and love.

The coming together of a man and a woman in marriage creates the most extraordinary companionship in this world. If both the husband and wife realize this and take it as a blessing from God, they can unitedly perform such incredible feats that no other human companionship can ever accomplish.

Take the example of the famous French couple Pierre Curie (d. 1906) and Mary Curie (d. 1934), who unitedly performed extraordinary feats in modern science. Their work was acknowledged, and they were duly awarded the Nobel Prize in 1903 and 1911. This same potential is also waiting to be discovered in other men and women. Any couple can achieve success in their particular fields and help shape history.

Nature has endowed men and women with extraordinary capabilities. Anyone who recognizes his role and works hard can succeed in his field. Unfortunately, the Western

or Eastern world has not fully recognized the superior role of women.

## MUTUAL TRUST

When any task is assigned to two people, mutual trust is required to complete the task successfully. Mutual trust between a husband and wife is essential to build a home successfully. No good home is ever made without mutual trust between a husband and a wife.

One may ask why most couples lack mutual trust. It is because neither is wholly committed towards the other in their relationship, despite being married. Such a relationship that is lacking in commitment results in the formation of a psychological barrier between husband and wife. Therefore, both are responsible for this lack of mutual trust in their relationship.

The woman's fault lies in her failure to adapt to and identify with her new family— her husband's. She continues to cling to her parents. Her failure to adapt to her new family is reflected in her words and actions, which naturally creates resentment on the part of her husband.

On the other hand, the man's failure lies in his obsession with the concept of the 'ideal woman.' He often finds his wife falling short on many counts when he measures her by the parameters of the 'ideal woman.'

These are the obstacles mostly inherent in a man and a woman that come in the way of building mutual trust

between them. Both must undertake introspection to diagnose and correct their weaknesses individually to acquire mutual trust. Once both the husband and the wife take such corrective measures, they will be able to live their lives in a practical manner. The psychological barrier between them will be removed, and they will be able to build mutual trust, enabling them to lead a positive and successful married life.

### QAWWAMIAT OR 'BOSSISM'

In the 4th chapter, the Quran states that men are women's protectors (*Qawwam*). (4:34) The word used by the Quran is '*Qawwam*,' and it has the same connotation as the word 'boss' used today.

The word 'boss' seemingly appears to convey that one is the ruler, and the other is ruled. But *Qawwam* has a different meaning. *Qawwam* refers to administration rather than 'ruling' or being 'superior' to a woman.

Today, the concept of 'boss' or 'bossism' is widely known. We can understand the concept of *Qawwamiat* with this example. *Qawwamiat* means that a man is the head of the family, just as there is a head in an institution or a company. This 'head' or 'boss' runs the company's administration, but this does not mean he 'rules' it. The common adage goes, "The Boss is always right." This does not mean that the Boss is superior, but that for an organization to function

successfully, someone with authority and responsibility is needed at its helm.

The Quran gives an example of the Queen of *Sheba*, who ruled over men (27:23) without disapproving of her rule. This shows that rulership or '*Qawwamiyat*' is not man's monopoly. A woman can be a ruler over men if she has the capabilities to do so, and the Quran has testified to it. A capable woman can be in charge and shoulder such responsibilities.

Similarly, a home is also an institution. Likewise, a head or a boss is required to run this institution successfully. In this regard, the Quran has called the man a *Qawwam*.

The '*Qawwam*' of a household acts as an administrator among its equal members. Not acknowledging this principle will only result in every home falling into anarchy.

Being a Boss means having responsibility for, not superiority over another. Similarly, *Qawwamiyat* is also a responsibility. It fulfills administrative needs rather than exercising superiority over others. If the difference between this practical need and ideological authority is fully understood, then the concept of *Qawwamiyat* will be easy to understand.

### THE BOSS AT HOME

On a journey to the USA, I learned of an American lady who married a Pakistani Muslim, Naseer Ahmad Mirza, living in Utah. In the course of an interview she gave to an American journal, she made the following observation:



“While most Americans are under the impression that Muslim wives are oppressed, I did not find that to be true. ‘It’s just a different division. Outside the home, my husband’s the boss. But in my house, I’m the boss.’”

Several such incidents have come to my knowledge. Certain American women are wary of marrying for fear of divorce taking place at any time. This is why some women prefer marrying Muslims, preferably those who come to America for education. In this way, such marriages have become a means of conveying the message of Islam. When the newspapers ask them about Islam, they defend their newly acquired faith excellently, as quoted above.

Islam does not degrade the status of women as compared to that of men. Instead, the system of separate workplaces has been established on the principle of equality. Islam has divided the affairs of life into two fields, one outdoor and the other indoor. According to Islam, a man is in charge of the outdoor departments of life while a woman attends to indoor matters. She very aptly represented this principle of Islam in the light of her own experience.

This division is very appropriate for both genders. In this way, the man can devote his maximum energy to one department while the woman can give her full attention to indoor affairs. This makes for greater efficiency in both spheres.

This division, while giving independent status respectively to the husband and the wife, makes them both cogs in the great wheel of the family machine. And unless the wheels all

smoothly interlock, the machine will come to a standstill. For the family to function as an efficient unit, there must be full cooperation between husband and wife. Otherwise, it would mean the end of family life and, ultimately, of all social relations. Humanity as a whole would suffer.

The division of labour relates not only to men and women but is also a general principle upon which the whole system of nature is based.

When you establish a business house where many people work, you have to assign some people to look after the office work, while some people have to be sent out to look after the fieldwork. This division of labour is necessary to run any business efficiently and successfully. If the workers of any factory or organisation are unwilling to accept this arrangement, that enterprise will undoubtedly fail.

The same is true of everyday life. God has planned things so that men and women together will make them work. Then, He has created men and women with the unique abilities necessary to perform the jobs assigned to their sphere.

Now, both reason and Islam demand that each gender should be willing to remain in their sphere and perform the assigned tasks. Men should not try to imitate women, and vice versa.

Those men and women who show their willingness to make this arrangement a success will, with the help of God, be rewarded in this life as well as in the next.



## CHAPTER 7

# POLYGAMY AND ISLAM

Chapter 4 of the Quran allows a man to have four wives (4:3). This does not mean that every man should have four wives. This rule is an exception and is not to be taken in a general sense. The general rule is to have only one wife, but in a case of absolute necessity, a man can have more than one wife.

This need refers to a situation where, by some unfortunate incident, there is a disparity between the number of men and women in society. When there are more women than men, there is sexual anarchy. To overcome this evil, in exceptional cases, men are allowed to have more than one wife.

The truth is that a natural way of marriage is between one man and one woman. A man is naturally biased against the second wife in most cases. This suffices to prove that monogamy is the natural way, while polygamy is permitted in exceptional circumstances by the law of necessity. There

are exceptional laws of this kind that cover other cases as well. However, exceptional laws are exceptional laws, and they cannot be applied in general.

### THE ISSUE OF POLYGAMY IN ISLAM

Regarding the birth rate, men and women are almost equal in number. But subsequently, for various reasons, the number of men in society decreases, leaving an excess of women. Now, the question arises as to what the solution to this problem should be. Given the inevitability of this imbalance, how can a healthy relationship between the sexes be established? The choice for us, therefore, is not between monogamy and polygamy but rather between the lawful polygamy of Islam or the illicit polygamy of non-Islamic peoples.

One of the commandments given in the Quran as a matter of social organization concerns polygamy, which is permission for a man to marry up to four women:

“If you fear that you cannot deal fairly with orphan girls, you may marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then only one ...” (4:3)

This verse was revealed after the Battle of Uhud that took place in 625 CE, in which seventy Muslims were martyred. Suddenly, seventy homes in Madinah were bereft of all male

members, and the question arose as to how all these widows and orphans were to be cared for. This was an acute social problem. It was solved by the revelation of this verse asking the people who could afford it to care for the orphans by marrying the widows and keeping their orphaned children under their guardianship.

The background and wording of this verse appear to express a commandment that should be only temporary in effect. It applied only to a particular state of emergency when, due to the loss of men in battle, the number of women exceeded the number of available men. However, the Quran, despite being revealed at a particular time and place, is universal in its application. One of the outstanding characteristics of the Quran is that it describes eternal realities concerning temporal issues, and this commandment is typical of this exceptional quality of the Quran. The permission to practice polygamy in Islam was not given to enable men to satisfy their carnal urges. It was designed as a practical strategy to solve a particular problem.

One point that needs clarification is that in marrying more than one woman, the initiative does not lie solely with any individual man. There is always the condition—an inescapable one—that whatever the society, the women should outnumber the men. Suppose the earth was inhabited by one billion people, of which 500 million were men and 500 million were women. It would not be possible for a man to have more than one wife in such a situation. A second, third or fourth wife would be obtained only by

force. But in Islam, a forced marriage is not considered lawful. According to the Shariah, the willingness of the bride-to-be is compulsory.

Looked at from a practical angle, the above commandment of the Quran can be complied with only if that particular situation exists in the society in Madinah after the Battle of Uhud—that is, there is a disproportion in the ratio of men and women. In the absence of such a situation, this commandment of the Quran would be inapplicable. However, studies of human society and its history have shown that the situation in ancient Madinah did not exist only at a particular point in time. It is a situation that has almost always been prevalent worldwide. That emergency is, in fact, the general situation of humanity. This commandment is yet another proof of God's omniscience. His commandment, seemingly elicited by an emergency, became an eternal commandment for the whole of our world.

### THE INEQUALITY IN NUMBERS

Records show that male and female births are almost equal in number. However, a study of mortality shows that the rate is higher for men than for women. This disparity is evident from early childhood to extreme old age. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica: "In general, the risk of death at any given age is less for females than for males." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984), Vol. 7, p. 37)

The proportionately higher numbers of women in society can be traced to various causes. For instance, when war breaks out, most casualties are men. In the First World War (1914-18), about 8 million soldiers were killed. Most of the civilians killed were also men. In the Second World War (1939-45), about 60 million people were either killed or maimed for life, most of them men. In the Iraq-Iran war alone (1979-1988), 82,000 Iranian women and about 100,000 Iraqi women were widowed. All in the space of ten years.

Another drain on the availability of men in society is imprisonment. In the US, the most civilized society of modern times, no less than 1,300,000 people are convicted daily for one crime or another. A number of them—97% of whom are men—are obliged to serve lengthy prison sentences. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984), Vol. 14, p. 1102).

The modern industrial system, too, is responsible for the lower proportion of men in society; death by accident has become a matter of daily routine in present times. There is no country where accidents do not occur daily on the streets, in factories, or wherever human beings handle sophisticated, heavy machinery. In this modern industrial age, such accidents are increasing, so much so that a new discipline has become safety engineering. According to data collected in 1967, in that year, a total of 175,000 people died as a result of accidents in 50 different countries. Most of these were men. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984), Vol. 16, p. 137)



Despite safety engineering, casualties from industrial accidents have increased. For instance, the number of air accidents in 1988 was higher than ever. Similarly, experimentation in arsenals continues to kill people in all industrialized countries, but the death toll is never made public. Here again, it is men who have the highest casualty rate.

For reasons of this nature, women continue to outnumber men. This difference persists in even the most developed societies, e.g., in America. According to data collected in 1967, there were nearly 7,100,000 more women than men. This means that even if every man in America got married, 7,100,000 women would be left without husbands.

The following figures taken from Encyclopaedia Britannica (1984) show the ratio of men to women in several Western countries:

<b>Country</b>	<b>Male (%)</b>	<b>Female (%)</b>
Austria	47.70	52.93
Burma	48.81	51.19
Germany	48.02	51.89
France	48.99	51.01
Italy	48.89	51.01
Poland	48.61	51.30
Spain	48.94	51.06
Switzerland	48.67	51.33
Soviet Union	46.59	53.03
United States	48.58	51.42

From the above data, it is seen that the ratio of women is more than that of men. When there is a disparity between the number of men and women in society, instead of choosing sexual anarchy, Islam gives the exceptional commandment of taking more than one wife. While the natural way of marriage is between one man and one woman, the way of monogamy, while polygamy is permitted in exceptional circumstances by the law of necessity. It should be emphasized that exceptional laws are exceptional laws, and they cannot be applied in general.

### THE WILLINGNESS OF WOMEN

The presence of a greater number of women in a society is not the only prerequisite for polygamy. It is, in addition, compulsory that the woman who is the object of the man's choice should be willing to enter into the married state. This willingness on the woman's part is a must before a marriage can be lawful in Islam. It is unlawful to marry a woman by force. There is no example in the history of Islam where a man has been allowed to force a woman into marriage.

The Prophet Muhammad's view that "an unmarried girl should not be married until her permission has been taken" had been recorded by both al-Bukhari and Muslim (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5136, *Sahih al-Muslim*, Hadith No. 1419). 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, one of the Prophet's Companions and a commentator on the Quran, narrates the story of a girl who came to the Prophet complaining

that her father had her married off against her wishes. The Prophet gave her the choice of either remaining within the bonds of wedlock or freeing herself from them. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Hadith No. 2096)

Another such incident narrated by ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas concerns a woman called Barira and her husband, Mughis, who was an enslaved Black person. Abdullah ibn Abbas tells the story as if it were all happening before his eyes: “Mughis is following Barirah through the paths of Madinah. He is crying, and his tears are running down his beard. Seeing him, the Prophet said, ‘O ‘Abbas, are you not surprised at Mughis’s love for Barira and Barira’s hate for Mughis?’ Then the Prophet said to Barira, ‘I wish you would take him back.’ Barira said to the Prophet, ‘Is that a command?’ The Prophet replied, ‘No, it is only a recommendation.’ Then Barira said, ‘I don’t need your recommendation.’” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 5283)

There was an interesting case of polygamy that took place during the Caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab. A certain widow, Umm Aban bint ‘Utbah, had four suitors for marriage. All four—‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib, Zubayr, and Talhah—were already married. Umm, Aban accepted the proposal of marriage made by Talhah and, of course, refused the other three; after that, she was married to Talhah. (Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidayah wa an-Nihayah*, Vol. 7, p. 153).

This happened in Madinah, the capital of the Islamic State. Among the rejected suitors was the reigning Caliph. But

no one expressed even surprise or dismay, the reason being that in Islam, a woman is entirely free to make her own decisions. This is a right that no one can take away from her—not even the ruler of the day.

These incidents show that the Islamic commandments permitting one to marry up to four women does not mean having the right to seize four women and shut them up inside one's home. Marriage is a matter of mutual consent. Only that woman can be made a second or a third wife willing to be so. And when this matter rests wholly on the woman's willingness, there is no cause for objection.

The present age gives great importance to freedom of choice. This value is fully supported by Islamic law. On the other hand, the upholders of 'feminism' want to turn freedom of choice into restriction of choice.

### SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM RATHER THAN A GENERAL COMMANDMENT

The above discussion makes it clear that the difference in the number of men and women is a permanent problem in war and peace. Now, the question arises as to how to solve this problem. What should those women do to satisfy their natural urges when they have failed to find a husband in a monogamous society? How do they secure an honourable life in that society?

One way—hallowed in Indian tradition—is for widows to burn themselves to death so that neither they nor their

problems survive. The alternative is to allow themselves to be turned out of their homes onto the streets. The state of Hindu society resulting from adherence to this principle can be judged from a detailed report published in *India Today* (New Delhi, November 15, 1987) entitled “Widows: Wrecks of Humanity.”

Now, there is no need to discuss this further because it is inconceivable that, in present times, any sensible person would advocate this as a solution.

The other possible ‘solution’ in the ‘civilized’ society of the West is the conversion of unwillingness to become a second wife into willingness to become a mistress, often of more than one man.

During the Second World War, in which several Western countries, such as Germany, France, Britain, etc., took part, a large number of men were killed. As a result, women far outnumbered men at the end of the hostilities. Permissiveness then became the order of the day, to the extent that boards with such inscriptions as “Wanted: A Guest for the Evening” could be seen outside the homes of husbandless women. This state of affairs persisted in Western countries in various forms, even long after the war, and is now largely prevalent.

## Unlawful Polygamy

People who would outlaw polygamy have to pay the price. That is, they are forced to tolerate men and women having illicit relations, which is undoubtedly a much more unsavoury

state of affairs. Failure to control a natural process whereby the male population dwindles, leaving “surplus” women, coupled with the outlawing of polygamy, has given rise to the evil of the “mistress” (defined by Webster’s Dictionary as “a woman who has sexual intercourse with and, often, is supported by a man for a more or less extended period without being married to him; paramour”). This, in effect, sets up a system of illegal polygamy.

The system of keeping a mistress is prevalent in many countries where there are legal constraints on polygamy or where polygamy is looked down upon socially. In such a situation, the real problem is not whether or not to adopt polygamy. The real issue is whether or not to legalize its adoption. The problem of surplus women in society can be solved only by polygamy, whether we choose to consider it legal or not.

Monogamy is the rule in Islam. However, in exceptional situations wherein the number of women outnumbers men, as an option to sexual anarchy, Islam gives the commandment for polygamy. Therefore, polygamy is given as a solution to the problem rather than a general commandment.

## THE ISLAMIC WAY

As the solution to the problem where the number of women exceeds men in society, Islamic *Shariah* gives permission to men, under special conditions, to marry more than one

woman. This principle of polygamy, as enshrined in the Islamic Shariah, is designed to save women from the ignoble consequences mentioned above. This commandment, although general in application, was given only as a solution to a specific social problem. It provides an arrangement whereby surplus women may save themselves from sexual anarchy and have a proper, stable family life. That is to say, it is not a question of adopting polygamy rather than monogamy. The choice is between polygamy and sexual anarchy.

If the commandment to practice polygamy is seen in the abstract, it would appear to be biased in favour of men. However, when placed in the context of social organization, it favours women. Polygamy is both a proper and a natural solution to women's problems.

The permission to practice polygamy in Islam was not given to enable men to satisfy their sexual urges. It was designed as a practical strategy to solve a particular problem. Marrying more than one woman is possible only when there are more women than men. Failing this is out of the question. Is it conceivable that Islam, to satisfy man's desires, would give us a commandment that is neither possible nor practical?

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984) aptly concludes that one reason for adopting polygamy is the surplus of women. Among most people who permit or prefer it, the large majority of men live in a state of monogamy because of the limited number of women. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1984), Vol. 8, p.97)

To have more than one wife is not an ideal in Islam. It is, in essence, a practical solution to a social problem.

## In Conclusion

In normal situations, the birth rates of men and women are almost equal in number. Subsequently, the number of men in society decreases for various reasons, leaving an excess of women. Under such circumstances, by following the principle of monogamy, hundreds of thousands of women fail to find husbands for themselves and are thus denied an honourable place in society. Monogamy as an absolute principle may seem pleasing to some, but events show this is not entirely practicable today. The choice for us, therefore, is not between monogamy and polygamy but rather between the lawful polygamy of Islam and the illicit polygamy of non-Islamic peoples. The latter system leaves “surplus” women to lead lives of sexual anarchy and social destruction. On the other hand, the former permits them to opt for their own free will in marriage to anyone who can give fair treatment to more than one wife.





## CHAPTER 8

# DIVORCE IN ISLAM

Islam allows for only one sort of physical relationship between men and women, and that is in the form of marriage, which is announced and publicly known. Differences will inevitably arise between the spouses. According to Islam, the way out is not by seeking to wipe out these differences but, rather, to accept them, to seek to reconcile them or for the spouses to continue to live together despite their differences.

Yet, it sometimes happens that the spouses are unable to manage their differences properly and so decide to go in for a divorce. Divorce has been accepted in Islam as something that can be resorted to in extreme circumstances. However, Islam frowns upon divorce. According to a Hadith, although divorce is permissible, it is the most hateful of the permissible things.

The Quran says that a man can give two revocable utterances of divorce, after which he can retain his wife and

stay together on equitable terms or else leave her gracefully (2: 229). This method of divorce over a period of three months was devised so that considerable thought could be given to something as serious as divorce. This ensures that utterances of divorce are a planned step where all possible means of reconciliation are considered.

### THE ISSUE OF DIVORCE

When a man and a woman bind themselves together by tying the knot of marriage, they cherish the hope of living together for the rest of their lives. Then, when nature blesses their union with a child, it strengthens the marriage bond, guaranteeing its greater depth and stability. Based on data collected in Western countries, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1984 confirms this with the statement that “childless couples tend to have a higher divorce rate than couples with children.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1984], Vol. 7, pp. 163-164)

A divorce court judge in the West holds that “every little youngster born to a couple is an added assurance that their marriage will never be dissolved in a divorce court.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1984], Vol. 7, pp. 163-164)

Despite these favourable psychological factors and natural, traditional attachments of parents and children, the rising incidence of divorce is a new and observable phenomenon in the modern world. One of the most important contributing factors is the ease with which women can make a living.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says: "Industrialization has made it easier for women to support themselves, whether single, married, divorced, or widowed. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the Great Depression of the 1930s stopped the rise in divorces in the United States for a time." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* [1984], Vol. 7, pp. 163-164)

In the modern age, Western civilization has been beset by many problems, many of which are more artificial than real. Western society has adopted unnatural ways in many things, thus giving rise to unnatural issues. The matter has further been worsened by attempts to solve them unnaturally. Problems have, therefore, gone on increasing instead of decreasing. The problem of divorce is one of them. The initial stimulus of the women's liberation movement in the West was not wrong, but its leaders did not care to define its limits. In a bid to make a free society, their efforts culminated in the creation of a permissive society. Affairs between men and women knew no limits, and this had the effect of weakening the marriage bond. Men and women were no longer husbands and wives. In the words of the Prophet, they became sensual, pleasure-seeking people. This state of affairs was boosted by industrialization, as a woman could easily procure an independent livelihood. This had never before been possible. Because of this, she has frequently refused to live under the guardianship of men, which, in consequence, has created a large number of social problems, leading to significantly increased rates of divorce.

The Western philosophers who wanted to check divorce

advocated legal curbs upon men, which would legally bind them to provide maintenance to the wife after the divorce. This maintenance sum was fixed according to Western living standards so that, in most cases, divorce meant that the man had to part with a fair amount of his hard-earned money for the rest of his life.

Lord Bertrand Russell, one of the most intelligent and outstanding intellectuals of his time, was a victim of this unnatural state of affairs. Soon after his marriage, he discovered that his wife no longer inspired any feelings of love in him. Although realizing this incompatibility, he did not seek an immediate separation. Despite severe mental torture, he tried to bear with this situation for ten years. He refers to this period as one of “darkest despair.” Finally, he had to separate and remarry, but he was not satisfied even with the second match, and he married for a third time. Two divorces were a costly bargain. According to English law, the amount of alimony and maintenance he had to pay his wives upset him greatly. He writes in his Autobiography:

“...the financial burden was heavy and rather disturbing: I had given Pounds 10,000 of my Nobel Prize cheque for a little more than Pounds 11,000 to my third wife, and I was now paying alimony to her and to my second wife as well as paying for the education of my younger son. Added to this, there were heavy expenses in connection with my elder son’s illness, and the income taxes, which

for many years he had neglected to pay, now fell to me to settle.” (Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography*, [London, 1978], pp. 563-564).

Such a law had been passed to ensure justice for women who had to resort to divorce. But when people began to realize that divorce inevitably led one into financial straits, the marriage bond began to be dispensed with altogether. Men and women started to live together without going through the formality of the marriage ceremony. Now, more than fifty percent of the younger generation prefer to live unmarried.

It was only natural that a reaction should have set in against a law that so patently disfavoured men and brought corruption, perversion, and all kinds of misery in its wake. Children—even newborn babies—were the greatest sufferers.

Now, take the situation prevailing in Hindu society, in which the extreme difficulty of divorce acts as a deterrent. This was a bid to reform, but this has only aggravated the matter. The ancient Indian religious reformers held that separation was illegal: they even prohibited women from remarrying so that they would be left with no incentive to seek divorce. The laws were made so that once marriage ceremonies were finalized, a man could not divorce his wife, nor could a woman remarry after leaving her former husband.

However, such reformations were unnatural and have

been generally detrimental to individuals in Hindu society. When a man and a woman cannot satisfy one another, their lives are passed in great bitterness because there is no provision for remarriage. They are doomed to continue to live a tormented life alongside partners with whom they have nothing in common. I shall cite here only one of the hundreds and thousands of such instances reported in newspapers almost every day, leaving aside those unreported cases. Manu, 25, was a cousin of Khushwant Singh. He has written in detail about her tragedy in his “Malice” column. (*The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, October 12, 1985.)

Manu had a flourishing business selling ready-made garments in Los Angeles. As she did not want to marry a foreigner, she decided to come to India to find a husband and return to the States with him. She found her husband in a tall, handsome, powerfully built Hindu boy who was anxious to go abroad. The marriage took place with all pomp and splendour in a five-star hotel. It took her some months to arrange for her husband’s visa, during which time she maintained him and paid for his passage. The marriage was a disaster. The boy turned out to be an alcoholic, prone to violence, and averse to doing any work. Manu sought her parents’ consent to wind up her business, divorce her husband, and return to India. Her parents travelled to America and tried to persuade her not to be hasty. A few days after her mother returned to Delhi, Manu’s husband strangled her and dumped her body in a deserted spot. He collected all he could in the house and was planning to flee

the United States when the police caught up with him. He was taken to jail on a charge of murder.

Manu was not careless in selecting her partner. She travelled from America to find a suitable match in her birthplace. But all that glitters is not gold. Our human limitations make it impossible to understand every facet of a person's character before entering into a relationship with him. The question arises whether, after such revelations, one should feel forced to respect a marriage bond even at the cost of one's life. When society considers separation taboo, or the laws on this show no human leniency, the only alternative left for such incompatible couples is either to commit suicide or waste away the whole of their lives in the "darkest despair." Even when one dares to surmount the hurdle of divorce, it is challenging to get remarried in societies where divorcees are looked down upon. One can, at best, marry someone beneath one's social status. But in Islam, remarriage is not a taboo: the Prophet himself married a widow. The provisions of Islam are, thus, a great blessing to couples who realize only too late that they have erred in choosing a partner. Islam provides them with a way to separate amicably in a spirit of goodwill.

### SATAN'S GREATEST WEAPON

According to Jabir ibn 'Abdullah, the Prophet once observed: 'The throne of Iblis (Satan), the chief of the devils, is situated above the seas, whence he sends his bands to lead human beings astray. To Iblis, the worthiest of the



devils is the one who causes the greatest wickedness. The devils visit him as their chief to report their deeds to him,' and Iblis gives a hearing to all of them. On one occasion, Iblis remained unimpressed with their achievements until one of the devils came and told him that he had pursued a husband and wife until he managed to separate them. He had achieved this by causing doubts and misgivings about one another. Iblis was so overjoyed to hear this that he drew him in a close embrace, saying, 'Yes, you did it,' meaning that he had managed to lead human beings astray.' (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 2813)

This tradition of Prophet Muhammad shows that Satan's greatest weapons in perverting human society are the conflict and discord that he creates between a husband and wife, resulting in their separation.

In ancient times, this phenomenon was not widespread, with only a few people afflicted by the evil of separation. However, in modern times, the whole human race has come to be affected by exposure to new and misguided ideas about the freedom of women and the unnatural equality of the sexes. It is as a result of these artificial concepts that the marital state has come to be looked down upon in developed societies, and men and women have begun to opt increasingly for divorce, even on the most minor provocations. In the wake of such divorces, several evils have followed, not the least of which is their baneful effect on the children, who, in a state of bewilderment at the separation of their parents, often join gangs of criminals or

fall prey to other negative activities. Then, the discarding of family bonds has given rise to a general atmosphere of permissiveness, which in turn has resulted in the spread of fatal diseases. The widespread loosening or even destruction of family bonds has become the most significant problem afflicting modern societies.

Society is affected when the rot of perversion sets in at home, and ultimately, the entire nation has to bear the brunt of it. The only reason for this widespread moral degeneration is the violation of the sanctity of marriage, which has come to be regarded as an unwelcome bond.

Keeping these things in mind, people should consider the importance of maintaining the institution of marriage in society.

## DIVORCE IN ISLAM

Nature demands that men and women lead their lives together. According to the shariah, the ideal way of leading such a life is within the bonds of marriage. In Islam, marriage is a civil contract entered into by mutual consent of the bride and groom and a highly sacred bond to which great religious and social importance is attached. As an institution, it is a cohesive force in society and worth protecting and preserving for that reason. To that end, detailed injunctions have been prescribed to maintain its stability and promote its betterment.

However, knowing that an excess of legal constraints can

lead to rebellion, such injunctions have been kept to a realistic minimum and formulated to be consistent with normal human capabilities. Moreover, their enforcement is less relied upon than the religious conditioning of the individual to ensure the maintenance of high ethical standards and appropriate conduct in marital affairs and family life.

The state of marriage lays the foundations for family life and provides a training ground for individuals to adjust to society positively. When a man and woman prove to be a good husband and wife, they will undoubtedly be good citizens in the broad spectrum of their social group. This has been aptly expressed in a hadith: "The best of you is one who is best for his family." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1977)

The family is the preliminary unit for the training of human beings, and its disintegration has an injurious effect on society. Those human beings must individually make a positive contribution if, collectively, they are to form a good and just nation. If the family no longer exists, the whole of humanity suffers.

Once a man and a woman are tied together in the bonds of matrimony, they are expected to do their utmost till the day they die to honour and uphold what the Quran calls their firm contract, or pledge (4:21). To this end, the entire thrust of the Shariah is levelled at preventing the occurrence of divorce; the laws it lays down in this regard exist primarily, therefore, as checks, not incentives.

Islam regards marriage as a highly desirable institution, hence its conception of marriage as the rule of life and divorce only as an exception to that rule. According to a hadith, the Prophet Muhammad said, "Marriage is one of my Sunnah (way). One who does not follow it does not belong to me." (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1846)

While marriage is the rule of life, and divorce is only an exception, the latter must also be accepted as a reality. Indeed, commandments already exist to deal with such cases in both divine and human laws. The only true, authentic representation of divine law now exists in the form of the Quran, preserved in its entirety and free from all human interpolations. In the Quran and the Hadith, there are various commandments regarding divorce, the main point being that divorce should be sought only under unavoidable circumstances.

Although Islam permits divorce, it lays great emphasis on its being a concession and a measure to be resorted to only when there is no alternative. The Prophet spoke of it as being the most hateful of all the lawful things in the eyes of God. (*Sunan Abi Dawud*, Hadith No. 2018), According to the Quran, when it does take place, it should be done in an atmosphere of goodwill. In no way should one harbour ill will against the other (see the Quran, 2:229-233).

When a man and a woman live together as husband and wife, it is natural that they should have their differences; it is a biological and psychological fact that each man and woman born into this world are quite different. That is why

the sole way of unity in this world is to live unitedly despite differences. This can be achieved only through patience and tolerance, virtues advocated by the Prophet not only in a general sense but, more importantly, in the particular context of married life. Without these qualities, there can be no stability in the marriage bond. According to Abu Hurayrah, the Prophet said, “No believing man should bear any grudge against a believing woman. If one of her ways is not to his liking, there must be many things about her that would please him.” (*Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 1469)

It is accepted that everyone has their strengths and weaknesses, plus and minus points. This is equally true of husbands and wives. In the marital situation, the best policy is for each partner to concentrate on the plus points of the other while ignoring the minus points. If a husband and wife can see the value of this maxim and consciously adopt it as the main guiding principle in their lives, they will have a far better chance of their marriage remaining stable.

However, it sometimes happens, with or without reason, that unpleasantness crops up and increases between husband and wife, with no apparent indication of their ability to smooth things out by themselves. Their thinking about each other in a way conditioned by their maladjustment prevents them from arriving at a just settlement of their differences based on facts rather than opinions. In such a case, according to the Quran (4:35), the best strategy is to introduce a third party who will act as an arbiter. Not

having any previous association with the matters under dispute, he will remain dispassionate and will be able to arrive at an objective decision acceptable to both parties.

For any arbiter to be successful, however, the husband and wife must also adopt the correct attitude. Here is an incident from the period of the four pious Caliphs that will illustrate this point.

When 'Ali ibn Abi Talib reigned as the fourth Caliph, a married couple complaining of marital discord came to him to request a settlement. In the light of the Quranic guidance (4:35), 'Ali ordered that a board of arbiters, one from the husband's family and one from the wife's family, be set up, which should make proper inquiries into the circumstances and then give its verdict. This verdict was to be accepted without argument by both sides.

As recorded by the famous commentator, at-Tabari, in his commentary *Jami' al-Bayan*, the woman said that she consented to the book of God, whether the verdict was for or against her. But the man protested that he would not accept the verdict if it were for separation. 'Ali said, "What you say is improper. By God, you cannot move from here until you have shown your willingness to accept the verdict of the arbiters in the same spirit as the woman has shown." (*Tafsir al-Tabari*, Vol. 8, p. 320-321)

This makes it clear that a true believer should wholeheartedly accept the arbiters and their verdict by the Quranic injunctions. Once their verdict is given, there should be no further dispute.

## TWO WAYS OF DIVORCING

While staying in the bond of marriage is preferable, it must be conceded that life does not always function like a machine. Despite all safeguards, it sometimes does happen that a couple reaches a stage of such desperation that they become intent on separation. Here, the Shariah gives them guidance in that it prescribes a specific method for separation. The Quran expresses it thus:

“Divorce may be pronounced twice, and then a woman must be retained honourably or released with kindness.” (2:229)

This verse has been interpreted to mean that a man who has twice given notice of divorce over a period of two months should remember God before giving notice a third time. Then, he should keep his spouse with him in a spirit of goodwill or release her without doing her any injustice.

This method of divorce prescribed by the Quran, i.e., taking three months to finalize it, makes it impossible for a man seeking divorce suddenly to cast his wife aside. Once he has said to his wife (who should not at this time be menstruating), “I divorce you,” both are expected to think the situation over for a whole month. If the man changes his opinion during this period, he can withdraw his words. If not, he will again say, “I divorce you” (again, his wife should be in a state of “purity”), and they must again review the situation for a further month. Even at this stage, the husband has the right to revoke the proceedings

if he has had a change of heart. If, however, in the third month, he says, “I divorce you,” the divorce becomes final, and the man ceases to have any right to revoke it. Now, he is obliged to part with his wife in a spirit of goodwill and give her full rights.

This prescribed method of divorce has ensured that it is a well-considered, planned arrangement and not just a rash step taken in a fit of emotion. When we remember that, in most cases, divorce is the result of a fit of anger, we realize that the prescribed method places a tremendous curb on divorce. It considers that anger never lasts—tempers necessarily cool down after some time—and that those who feel like divorcing their wives in a fit of rage will indeed repent their emotional outburst and wish to withdraw from the position it has put them in. It also considers that divorce is not a simple matter: it amounts to breaking up the home and destroying the children’s future. It is only when tempers have cooled down that the dire consequences of divorce are realized, and the necessity to revoke the decision becomes clear.

When a man marries a woman, he has to say only once that he accepts her as his spouse. However, the Quran requires three months for divorce to be formalized. One utterance is enough for marriage, but three utterances are needed for a divorce to be finalized, between which the shariah has prescribed a long gap. The purpose of this gap is to give the husband sufficient time to revise his decision and to consult the well-wishers around him. It also allows time for



relatives to intervene to persuade both husband and wife to avoid a divorce. Without this gap, none of these things could be achieved. That is why divorce proceedings must be spread out over a long period.

All these preventive measures allow frayed tempers to cool so that the divorce proceedings need not reach an irreversible stage. Divorce, after all, has no saving grace, particularly regarding its consequences. It simply amounts to ridding oneself of one set of problems only to become embroiled in another set of problems.

Despite all such preventive measures, it does sometimes happen that a man acts in ignorance or is rendered incapable of thinking coolly by a fit of anger. Then, on a single occasion, in a burst of temper, he utters the word “divorce” three times in a row, “talaq, talaq, talaq!” Such incidents, which occurred in the Prophet’s lifetime, still happen even today. Now, the question arises regarding how the would-be divorcer should be treated. Should his three utterances of talaq be treated as only one, and should he be asked to extend his decision over three months? Or should his three utterances of talaq on a single occasion be equated with the three utterances of talaq made separately over three months? A hadith was recorded by Imam Abu Dawud and several other traditionists who can guide us in this matter: “Abd Yazid Abu Rukana said “talaq” to his wife thrice in a row. Then, he was despondent at the step he had taken. The Prophet asked him exactly how he had divorced her. He replied that he had said “talaq” to her three times

in a row. The Prophet then observed, “All three count as only one. If you want, you may revoke it.”(*Sunan Abi Dawud*, Hadith No. 2196)

A man may say “talaq” to his wife three times in a row, in contravention of the Shariah’s prescribed method, thereby sinning, but if he was known to be in an emotionally overwrought state at the time, his act may be considered a mere absurdity arising from human weakness. His three utterances of the word talaq may be taken as an expression of the intensity of his emotions and thus the equivalent of only one such utterance. He is likely to be told that, having transgressed a Shariah Law, he must seek God’s forgiveness, regard his three utterances as only one, and take three months to arrive at his final decision.

In the first phase of Islam, however, a different view of divorce was taken by the second Caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab. Imam Muslim thus described an incident that illustrates his viewpoint.

In the Prophet’s lifetime, then under the Caliphate of Abu Bakr and during the early period of the Caliphate of ‘Umar, three utterances of talaq on one occasion were taken together as only one utterance. Then it occurred to ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab that even though a system had been laid down which permitted the husband to withdraw his first or even second talaq, men still wanted to rush into divorce. He felt that if they were bent on being hasty, why should not a rule be imposed on them binding them to a

final divorce on the utterance of talaq three times in a row? And he proceeded to impose such a rule.

This act on the part of the second Caliph, apparently against the principles of the Quran and sunnah, did not change the shariah's law. To think that this led to any revision of Islamic law would be to misunderstand the situation: the Caliph's order merely constituted an exception to the rule and was of a temporary nature. This aptly demonstrates how the Islamic Shariah may make concessions by circumstances.

Each Shariah law may be eternal, but a Muslim ruler can make exceptions for specific individuals in exceptional circumstances. However, such a ruling will not take on eternal law. It will be purely temporary in nature and duration.

Various traditions in this connection show that the second Caliph's treatment of certain persons did not align with the shariah. His rulings on these occasions were like executive orders consistent with his position as a ruler. If he acted in this manner, it was to punish those who were being hasty in finalizing the divorce procedure.

It is a matter of Islamic historical record that when any such person was brought before 'Umar for having uttered the word talaq three times on one occasion, he held this to be rebellious conduct and would order him to be flogged on the back. (*Sunan Sa'id ibn Mansur*, Hadith No. 1073)

Perhaps the most important aspect of this matter is that when 'Umar gave his exceptional verdict on divorce being

final after the third utterance on a single occasion of the word *talaq*, his position was not that of a powerless ‘alim (scholar) but of a ruler invested with the full power to punish—as a preventive measure—anyone who went against Quranic injunctions. This was to discourage haste in divorce. By accepting a man’s three *talaqs* on one occasion as final and irrevocable, he caused him to forfeit his right to revoke his initial decision, thus leaving him with no option but to proceed with the divorce.

On the other hand, the Caliph had the power to compensate any woman affected by this ruling fully. For instance, he was in a position to guarantee her an honourable life in society, and if, due to being divorced, she needed financial assistance, he could provide her with continuing maintenance from the government exchequer, *Baitul Mal*, etc.

Today, anyone who cites ‘Umar’s ruling as a precedent to justify the finality of a divorce based on three utterances of the word *talaq* on a single occasion should remember that his verdict will remain unenforceable for the simple reason that he does not have the powers that ‘Umar, as Caliph, possessed. ‘Umar’s verdict was that of a powerful ruler of the time and not just that of a commoner. It is necessary at this point to clear certain misunderstandings about the extent of agreement that existed on ‘Umar’s ruling. Of all the Prophet’s Companions at Madinah then, perhaps the only one to disagree was ‘Ali. As a result, certain ‘ulama have concluded that the Prophet’s followers (*Sahabah*) had

reached a consensus ('ijma) on this matter. (*Rawai' al-Bayan*, Vol. 1, p. 334)

However, the consensus reached was not on the general issue of divorce but on the right of Muslim rulers to make temporary and exceptional rulings, as had been done by 'Umar. The Companions of the Prophet could never have agreed to annul a Quranic injunction or to modify for all time to come to a prescribed divorce system. All that was decided upon was that exceptional circumstances warranted exceptional rulings on the part of the Caliph. He was entitled to punish anyone who digressed from the shariah in any manner he thought fitting. This right possessed by the ruler of the time is established in the shariah. Many other instances, not necessarily relating to personal disputes, can be cited as his exercise of this right.

### THE CASE OF WOMEN

How can a woman seek divorce under Islamic law? When a woman wishes to divorce her husband, she has to put her case before a religious scholar or a body of religious scholars. They then consider her circumstances in the light of the Quran and the Hadith, and if they find reasonable grounds for separation, they decide in her favour. The woman must have scholars to act on her behalf because women are more emotional than men—as has been proved by scientific research—and it is to prevent hasty and ill-considered divorces taking place that she is, thus, advised. If we seldom hear of Muslim women committing suicide or

being murdered by their in-laws, it is because they have the alternative—separation.

Separation, of course, is strongly advised against minor provocations. Are we not commanded by God to be tolerant and forgiving? It is meant only as a last resort when it is unavoidable.

### THE MEANING OF PROVISION

In Islamic jurisprudence, the material arrangements that a man makes for his divorced spouse are termed “divorce provisions.” There is a consensus among Muslim scholars that this provision in no way means life-long maintenance, there being absolutely no basis for this in the divine scriptures. The concept of maintenance for life is, in fact, a product of the modern civilization. It was never enshrined in divine laws, either Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. In material terms, ‘provision’ takes the form of a gift handed over by the man on parting so that the woman’s immediate needs may be catered for, and in all cases, this is entirely commensurate with his means.

But the Quran makes it explicit that the parting must, above all, be humane and that justice must be done:

“Provide for them with fairness, the rich man according to his means, and the poor according to his. This is binding on righteous men. Do not forget to show kindness to each other. Reasonable provisions should also be made for divorced

women. That is incumbent on righteous men.”  
(2:236)

When divorce takes place before the dowry's settling and the marriage's consummation, even then, the man must give the woman money or goods as a gesture of goodwill. In this instance, the question of his repaying dowry money does not arise. The Quran is also quite explicit on t

“Believers, if you marry believing women and divorce them before the marriage is consummated, you are not required to observe a waiting period: make provision for them and release them in an honourable way.” (33:49)

This “waiting period” (iddah) applies to a woman who has been married for some time and who may, after the divorce, discover that she is pregnant. This statutory waiting period of three months makes her position clear, and then the man must pay her additional compensation if she is expecting his child. But again, there is no question of maintenance for life, for the Quran seeks a natural solution to all human problems. It would, therefore, be wholly against the spirit of the Quran for a woman to be entitled to life maintenance from the very man with whom she could not co-exist. Such a ruling would indeed have created a negative mentality in society. The Quran again has the answer:

“If they separate, God will compensate each of them out of His abundance: He is Munificent, Wise.” (4:130)

The munificence of God refers to the vast provision that God has made for his servants in this world. In various ways, God helps such distressed people. For example, when a woman is divorced, it is but natural that the sympathy of all her blood relations should be aroused. As a result, without any pressure being put on them, they are willing to help and look after her. Besides, new willpower is awakened in such a woman, and she sets about exploiting her hidden potentialities, thus solving her problems independently. Furthermore, previous experiences have left her wiser and more careful, and she feels better equipped to enter into another marital relationship with more success.

### AFTER DIVORCE

The question immediately after divorce is of ways and means to meet one's necessary expenses. One's answer is to resort to the Islamic law of inheritance. If women were to be given their due share according to Islamic law, there would be no question of a woman becoming destitute. But, sad to say, the majority of Muslim women fail to get their due share of inheritance from their deceased fathers and husbands as stipulated by Islamic law. This would be more than enough to meet such emergencies if they could do so.

However, Islam has not just left women's financial problems to the vagaries of inheritance because parents are not invariably in possession of property that can be divided among their children. Further arrangements have been made under the maintenance law, but this has no



connection with divorce law. Therefore, the answer to this question must be sought in the Islamic maintenance law. Here, we shall briefly describe some of its aspects:

1. In case the divorced woman is childless or the children are not earning, according to Islamic law, the responsibility for her maintenance falls on her father. That is, her situation will be the same as before marriage.

To quote from Fath al-Qadir (A standard book on Islamic Law):

“The Father is responsible for bearing his daughter’s expenses until her marriage if she has no money. The father has no right to force her to earn, even if she can. When the girl is divorced and the period of confinement is over, her father shall again bear her expenses.” (Ibn Hummam, *Fath al-Qadir ala al-Hidayah*, Vol. 4, p. 410)

2. If the divorced woman has a son who is an earning family member, the responsibility for her maintenance falls entirely upon him.

All that rightfully belongs to a wife will be the duty of the son to provide, that is, food, drink, clothes, house, and even servants, if possible. (Ibn ‘Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar ‘ala ad-Durr al-Mukhtar*, Vol. 2, p. 733)

3. In the case of the father being deceased, and where even her children cannot earn, her nearest relatives, such as brothers or uncles, are responsible for her upkeep. Without

even this third form, the Islamic Shariah holds the State Treasury (baitul mal) responsible for bearing her expenses. She will be entitled to receive the money for her necessities.

Because of the number of provisions made under Islamic law for women, it has never been the case in Islamic history that Muslim divorced women have been cast adrift, helpless, with no one to look after them.

Indian columnist Khushwant Singh has remarked that we do not hear of Muslim women committing suicide or being tortured like Hindu women, which is proof that Islam has already given them adequate liberty and has made enough provision for them to be supported in times of emergencies.

A new dimension has been added to the issue since the women of this day and age can leave their homes to work and are, therefore, not as entirely dependent on men as they used to be in the past: there is no need then to make laws which provide for them at the expense of their menfolk. What is the point in making such a law when earning like men? Only in exceptional cases, indeed, do they need to be looked after, and ways and means of doing so can generally be worked out satisfactorily on a personal level.



## CHAPTER 9

# SHAPING THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

According to a tradition of Prophet Muhammad, “The best of you are those who are best to their families, and I am the best among you to my family.” (*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 3895)

Families are fundamental units of society, collectively shaping its fabric. If families are in good order, society will follow suit. Conversely, if families sink into a low moral state, society cannot prosper. Every person is born into a family, where he experiences his first lessons about home, family, and society. Therefore, to improve society, we must improve the quality of family members.

Everybody receives their first education within their families and homes. Those who receive a positive upbringing within their homes will likely exhibit similar societal behaviour. They will actively promote goodness, overlook unfavourable situations, and sincerely appreciate positive

attributes in others. These individuals exemplify the highest moral character and contribute to the betterment of society.

Preparing the next generation is a mother's responsibility. The human generation is like a flowing river, where the water is continually replaced. In human beings, too, the new replaces the old. And a mother plays a crucial role in preparing this new generation. The responsibility of supplying good human beings to every generation devolves upon her. If a mother understands her responsibility and prepares herself to fulfil this role, she can play a pivotal role in not only shaping the lives of her children on spiritual lines but, in turn, she will be able to shape society on positive lines.

Women play a pivotal role in shaping the character of individuals in a family. If mothers can develop goodness and high moral character in their children, they will be able to contribute to the betterment of society. It is indeed true: better home, better society.

### WOMEN'S SPIRITUAL ROLE IN EARLY MUSLIM SOCIETY

The studies tell us that women have been gifted by nature with the qualities required to bring peace and harmony to society in times of conflict. These include gentleness, selflessness, compassion, mildness, and a spiritual approach to life. A study of history tells us that women have always played this role, albeit mainly on the home front.

It is a matter of common knowledge that women have significantly contributed to pacifying and normalizing the tensions and conflicts at home. This shows their capability in this regard. Their soft approach to the problem is what is required on such occasions. The softness of their approach helps to pacify situations and eliminate stress.

When we look at Islamic history, the first instance we find in this regard is that of Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet. When Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation from the angel in the cave of Hira, which was a new experience for him, he trembled in fear of what he had seen and heard in the cave. Upon reaching home, he related the incident to Khadijah. She did her best to assure him that no harm would come to him, as he always spoke the truth, helped people experiencing poverty, honoured the guests, and helped those in distress. She successfully calmed him with these reassuring words, employing all nature's gifts: gentleness, sympathy, understanding, and selfless love.

Another example is that of Aisha, the wife of the Prophet. Having gained full knowledge of Islam from the Prophet, she was able, after the death of the Prophet, to perform the task of teacher and guide to the Muslim community. Such traditions tell us that the Prophet's conversations with his wife, Aishah, were aimed to educate her. Aisha says that when the Prophet Muhammad would get up at night after a few hours of sleep, he would converse with her at length in that peaceful atmosphere. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 1161; *Sahih Muslim*, Hadith No. 743) She benefited

greatly from this course of informal education, continuing uninterruptedly, even while travelling.

After the Prophet of Islam left the world, significant differences arose. During his life, all such matters were referred to him. After the Prophet, his wife Aisha, who had been under his training for a long time, played a very positive role. Having fully grasped the spirit of Islam, she used it to guide the Companions of the Prophet, both men and women. In this way, she successfully resolved many differences. Aisha became the most distinguished authority on religious knowledge. It is said that Aisha herself handed down to posterity a substantial portion (2210 traditions) of the vast majority of Islamic knowledge. Her house served as a school of religious learning. Abdullah ibn Abbas, a Companion of great stature and one of the best commentators of the Quran, was one of Aisha's pupils.

The most prominent name in the Sufi tradition is that of Rabia Basri (713-801 AD). She was born in Basra in 713 AD in a poor family. She devoted her life entirely to worshipping God and serving people. A large number of disciples gathered around her. She lived a life of extreme asceticism. Her mystical sayings have become proverbs: Once, she said: "I am going to light a fire in Paradise and pour water in hell so that both veils may completely disappear from the spiritual pilgrims, and they may worship God without any object of hope or motive of fear."

In her time, Muslim society was torn by significant religious differences. Her strong spiritual personality

exerted a powerful influence; once again, people forgot their doctrinal differences and rallied around her. She emphasized pure divine love, which alone could minimize all these differences.

The above examples show the nature and extent of the contribution that can be made by believing Muslim women to the cause of Islam.

Just as men function on different planes of religiosity, so do women have their separate spheres of religious effectiveness. Preserving their femininity, innumerable Muslim women participated in various religious and worldly activities.

### WOMEN'S SPIRITUAL ROLE IN LATER MUSLIM HISTORY

Islam established gender equality in society. Of men and women, the Quran states: "You are members, one of another." (3:195) According to a tradition, the Prophet of Islam observed: "Men and women are two halves of a single unit." (*Sunan Abi Dawud*, Hadith No. 236)

Such teachings in the Quran and Hadith ushered in a new age of gender equality in the Muslim world of the time. With this freedom, women could play a significant role in society, particularly the women who belonged to the royal families. They had more opportunities and more exposure. They were also highly educated according to the standard of the time. One of these was Maryam Zamani, Emperor Akbar's mother.



Once, Mulla Abdun Nabi, Akbar's teacher, insulted the emperor in the court. Akbar was enraged and wanted to punish him, which could even have been a death sentence. However, his mother, Maryam Zamani, intervened and calmed him down. She told him his pardon would go down in history in these words. "An emperor having all the power at his disposal forgave the offender."

Such incidents abound in history, but usually, these are related to either a 'mother' like Maryam Zamani, a 'daughter' like Jahan Ara, or a wife like Noor Jahan. This is why people fail to see these roles beyond this framework. They could not extend their roles to general situations in society.

Studies in biology and history show that women have been specially gifted with the qualities required for normalizing situations in times of crisis.

The need of the hour is for more women to recognize their spiritual abilities to perform their roles far more effectively and on a far grander scale. Once this feminine potential is realized, the world will be a better place for all to live in.

### PARADISE LIES AT THE FEET OF THE MOTHER

The Prophet of Islam said, "Paradise lies at the feet of the mother." (*Musnad Al-Shihab*, Hadith No. 119)

The above Hadith is generally understood in a way that is opposite to its actual meaning. It is taken as a Hadith

discussing the high position a mother is accorded. This is not the right approach.

In all its teachings, Islam places the onus on the individual to fulfil one's duties, irrespective of what others do. The Prophet laid the foundation of a duty-conscious society. This is mentioned in the following Hadith of the Prophet, in which he says:

“A believer should be duty-conscious, and as far as his rights are concerned, he should ask for them from God.” (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 7052)

This Hadith emphasizes the importance of a mother's role in her children's lives by training them in duty consciousness and in leading a principled life.

Children are constantly in the company of their mothers. In the initial period of their life, they observe and follow her. They are exposed to her way of thinking in their day-to-day life. As the children follow the path she is treading, a mother should be highly conscious of the path she walks on. The path to Paradise is a path of hard work, learning, discipline, positivity, and virtue. Such understanding of the above Hadith puts the entire weight on a mother's role in grooming a child toward a good life by training them on duty-conscious lines, which is crucial. This Hadith is a serious call to mothers to develop their personalities along positive lines so they become models for others to emulate, as the children tend to follow them.

## SHAPING FAMILY AND SOCIETY ON SPIRITUAL LINES

The Quran calls Islam a religion of nature. This is because Islam is, in fact, based on the laws of nature. The commands of the Quran are a direct expression of those laws which have operated in the world of nature since its creation.

Islamic law regarding women is rooted in this system of nature. According to Islam, men and women are equal as regards honour and status, but physically, biologically, and psychologically, they are different. To maintain the social system of nature between men and women, Islam advocates that women should work in their capacity while remaining within the bounds of modesty and piety, thereby ensuring their safety in every way.

The system of the human world is divided into two departments of equal importance: one is represented by the 'home' and the other by the 'office.' Just as four walls do not confine an office in this context but represent a centre of activity, similarly, 'home' is not marked by a boundary, being also a complete practical centre of activity. Under this division, men and women have been assigned different fields of activity. All tasks are of equal importance, being neither superior nor inferior.

Women can play a significant role in this campaign for education by shaping their families and, in turn, society by preparing the coming generations through both informal education within the home and formal education outside of it. For instance, educated women can train their children

at home. The literate woman's ability to read to her young children and the example she sets in her quest for knowledge are the most potent stimuli in their educational progress. They can use the time they spend with their children as opportunities to prepare them to become better human beings. As individuals in a family are shaped on positive lines, society, in turn, will be shaped on positive lines.

Outside the homes, women can be better teachers than men when teaching children. For women, this will not amount to a change in the workplace but will be an extension of the home, broadening the practical activity centred on child-rearing assigned to her by nature. They can also avail other opportunities outside their homes within the parameters set by Islamic injunctions.

By playing this role effectively, women can prepare the next generations, which is the greatest need of the hour. In this way, they can equip an entire generation with standard education. They would then have every opportunity to receive education in the higher institutions of their choice and be more confident of finding productive employment afterward. If women stand up for this cause, they can become instrumental in preparing the new generations to become aware, duty-conscious, and principled individuals. This will be the beginning of shaping the family and society on spiritual lines.

## FAMILY: MICROCOSM OF SOCIETY

Family represents a microcosm of the broader human community—the society, encapsulating all its situations on a larger scale. Each individual is offered an invaluable education within a family, acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for a successful life. However, one crucial condition must be met: individuals should avoid falling victim to blind family attachment and instead view their family members like any other human being.

The reality is that the diverse array of character types found in the world is mirrored within one's own family. A family reflects a spectrum of moral examples. By observing their family and relatives, individuals can gain life experiences and make realistic plans for their own lives.

Unfortunately, only a few people genuinely benefit from this proximity. The reason for this is the absence of objective thinking among individuals. People often succumb to bias when thinking about their family members. They overlook their family's mistakes while adopting an unsympathetic attitude towards those outside the family. They view outsiders from one perspective and their family members from another, resulting in an inability to learn from their own experiences or seek guidance from the lives of others.

Each individual is offered an invaluable education within a family. If one looks objectively at one's family, one can learn important lessons, acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for a successful life, and contribute to the development of a positive society.

## BETTER HOME, BETTER SOCIETY

According to a narration attributed to Hazrat Aisha, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: “The best among you are those who are best to their families, and I am the best among you to my family.” (*Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, Hadith No. 3895)

Families are fundamental units of society, collectively shaping its fabric. If families are in good order, society will follow suit. Conversely, if families sink into a low moral state, society cannot prosper. Every person is born into a family, where he experiences his first lessons about home, family, and society. Therefore, to improve society, we must improve the quality of family members.

There are two forms of education: formal and informal. Formal education equips individuals with skills for employment, whereas informal education focuses on fostering better individuals for society. Schools and colleges represent formal educational institutions, while families are informal educational establishments.

Everyone experiences both positive and negative aspects. In a family, however, all these experiences remain confined within the boundaries of the home. Within the house, individuals, regardless of gender, learn the importance of alleviating the distress of family members and wholeheartedly acknowledging the benefits bestowed upon them.

Those who receive such upbringing within their homes will

likely exhibit similar societal behaviour. They will actively promote goodness, overlook unfavourable situations, and sincerely appreciate positive attributes in others. These individuals exemplify the highest moral character and contribute to the betterment of society.

Families and homes are schools of informal education. Preparing the next generation is a mother's responsibility. The human generation is like a flowing river, where the water is continually replaced. In human beings, too, the new replaces the old. And a mother plays a crucial role in preparing this new generation. The responsibility of supplying good human beings to every generation devolves upon her. If a mother understands her responsibility and prepares herself to fulfil this role, she can play a pivotal role in not only shaping the lives of her children on spiritual lines but, in turn, she will be able to shape society on positive lines.

Women play a pivotal role in shaping the character of individuals in a family. If mothers can develop goodness and high moral character in their children, they can contribute to the construction of a positive and congenial contribution to society. It is indeed true: better home, better society.

### A MOTHER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Preparing the next generation is a mother's responsibility. The human generation is like a flowing river, where the water is continually replaced. In human beings, too, the

new replaces the old. And a mother plays a crucial role in preparing this new generation. The responsibility of supplying good human beings to every generation devolves upon her. If a mother understands her responsibility and prepares herself to fulfil this role, she can play a pivotal role in not only shaping the lives of her children on spiritual lines but, in turn, she will be able to shape society on positive lines.

How do you define a good person? A good person dares to face life; one who is endowed with a positive attitude, who is constructive and makes a positive congenial contribution to society.

It is commonly believed that one born into a wealthy family is fortunate, while one born into a low-income family is unfortunate. Here, too, a mother's role is to make her child feel privileged no matter what the circumstances, and even if one was not born with the proverbial silver spoon in one's mouth, one still had the 'incentive spoon'! She should also show her children how most successful people are where they are today because they struggled and worked hard to achieve what they have achieved today.

Likewise, a mother should teach her children not to divide people on the basis of the 'haves' and the 'have-nots.' It is often seen that although certain individuals have been born into deprived families, they have risen to become members of the privileged classes! Therefore, the dichotomy is not between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' but between 'potential haves' and 'actual haves.' Consequently, it is



important to have courage in life, coupled with a positive attitude. Every generation must imbue the next generation with the courage and maturity to face the realities of life.

According to the law of nature, there is always a positive aspect of every negative experience. The only condition is that one should not become negative or succumb to despair. Life is full of unpleasant experiences. There is no escaping them. But negative experiences are not evil phenomena. They are, in fact, a blessing, a kind of intellectual challenge. In such situations, it is better to wait rather than opt for a reactive approach. If you save yourself from becoming the victim of negative experiences and do just one thing, that is, do nothing and let nature take its course, it would serve as a positive factor for your mind. It will certainly increase your thinking capacity and unfold your intellectual treasure.

If you have developed a strong personality and an intellectually awakened mind, then every shock will prove to be a positive shock for you. You would automatically become capable of availing the shock as a new opportunity. This is because the law of nature stands above all else, and when you choose to remain un-offended by an unpleasant experience, you invite the law of nature to come to your rescue and initiate a process to compensate for your loss.

Life is full of opportunities. Even if someone takes away something that has been given to you, what nature gives you can still not be taken away. For example, if a person gave you a man-made torch and he took it away, he can still

not take away from you the divine torch, that is, the sun. Knowing this principle brings about immense hope.

The only fit response when you find yourself in a negative situation with others is to forget the unpleasant external experience and, on your own, make a fresh decision to improve your ability. Very soon, you will find that you have gained more than you had lost.

There is no full stop in life, only commas. No event is the final chapter of your book. Every day, you are in a position to add a new chapter to it. This is due to the enormous capacity of the human mind. It would help if you did not underestimate your mind. It is an underestimation of the mind that breeds frustration. If you discover the capacity of your mind, it will give you great courage and unending strength. You will be able to take a new leap into your future from the point where, apparently, your life's journey has come to an end.

### FAMILY CULTURE: A NARROW OUTLOOK

Many people—and this is particularly so in the East—know only one sort of culture. This is what can be called ‘family culture.’ This ‘culture’ is about earning money and meeting the insatiable demands of family members. For many people, this is their only purpose in life.

The most significant damage this ‘family culture’ causes is severely narrowing people's vision. Their interest and concern are limited just to their families. The only thing

they think about is how to satisfy the material desires of their families. They do not ever consider it necessary to think beyond this. Not many will, for instance, spend time reading or meeting people other than their relatives, learning and intellectually benefiting from them. If they leave their homes, they generally go to their workplaces, entertain themselves, or shop. They have no interest in doing much else. Intellectual development is the farthest thing from their minds.

From the materialistic point of view, people stuck in the morass of this narrow 'family culture' might appear to lead a comfortable life, but they are victims of intellectual backwardness. If you try talking to them on any serious topic, you will immediately discover they have no intellectual depth. They know little if anything at all, of the realities of the world and the fundamental problems of life. They may look like humans, but they are just well-dressed animals. The foundation of family life should facilitate intellectual growth rather than becoming a constant obstacle to mental development.

## THE FAULTY ROLE OF PARENTS

A mother's greatest concern should be to make her children succeed in life. But mothers are naturally attached to their children, and therefore, their hearts rule their heads. In matters regarding their children, they do not follow reason and try to fulfil all the demands of their children. By nature, every child is born pure. But as he grows up, he

deviates from his true nature. It is a mother's duty to play a constructive role in bringing up her children so that they do not deviate from the true nature they were born with.

Mothers, in their love for their children, try to fulfil all their demands, and this makes them think that all of their wishes should be fulfilled. But when the child grows up and comes into contact with the outside world, he learns the opposite. This contradiction can yield negative results in young minds. He realizes that while he is loved and protected within the confines of his home, the outside world is bad and full of hostility. This can confuse him and make him unable to comprehend reality.

God has imbued the mother with immense love for her child, and the purpose of this love is to enable them to train their children with love and patience, show them the right path, and give them the strength to face all odds. But most mothers have turned their love to pampering their children and so have led them astray from the nature God had intended for them. Mothers should use their God-given capabilities to train their children in the realities of life and help them become duty-conscious and contributing members at home so that they can become contributing members of society at large.

### THE HARM OF PAMPERING

Some parents feel, out of love, that since their daughter shall have to do household chores after marriage in her new

home, they exempt her from doing any work at home. And so, when the daughter eventually does marry, she is not accustomed to taking care of her new house or taking up new responsibilities. This kind of love is not true love.

Such parents usually start preparing for their daughter's dowry right after she is born. In most cases, this dowry is not put to any good use and becomes a means of temporary display. The dowry does not, in any way, help the daughter to establish her life in her new home. Dowry has nothing to do with the role the daughter has to play in her in-law's house.

The real task of the parents should be to prepare their daughter for the future, not just prepare her dowry. She should be given an education and proper training in social etiquette so that she has the wisdom and fortitude to make her life a success.

Pampering, a part of the culture in many homes, is expressed in many ways. Parents tend to pamper their children by trying to fulfil all their desires. They often ignore the faults of their children, hoping that they will outgrow them. Where things go wrong, they mostly hold their children innocent and lay the blame on others. Some pamper their children at the cost of their health, giving in to all their fancies about food and drinks and in how they dress, too. Demonstrating one's love in these ways is not commendable, for, as a result of this, children are not aware of the realities of life and grow up spoilt. Pampering should

be avoided at all costs as it develops unrealistic thinking in children.

## THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

A certain person had special arrangements made for the training of his children. A Maulvi would come daily to give them religious education, while he would urge them to say their prayers regularly. Every day, he would spend some time with them to help them memorize the basic Islamic creed, kalima, and the verses of benediction from the Quran. He would attempt to impart such moral values as respecting their elders, behaving with propriety towards others, etc.

Nevertheless, when his children grew up, they were no different from the average worldly and clever person whenever his interests were at stake. Their early training had little effect because it had been little better than lip service. It had all been so many empty words—empty because the role model presented by the father was that of a man of the world. When it came to mere words, he could be described as religious. But when it came to actions, all the aura of religiosity fell away from him. Creating a genuinely religious atmosphere within his home was impossible for such a man.

For example, there was a neighbour for whom he felt nothing but the deadliest antagonism. Having once imagined himself insulted by this man; his ego fanned the flames of

revenge. Out of sheer spite, he reviled his supposed enemy at home and did his best to defame him publicly. He even tried to destroy his means of livelihood by going to court and filing false cases against him.

These reprehensible activities went on for fifteen long years. His children would, of course, hear of religious values from his lips, but all the while, they would be breathing in an atmosphere that his destructive activities had poisoned. And wherever the atmosphere does not match the pious utterances made in it, a set of double standards is bound to be the result. We should never forget that actions speak louder than words.

Most parents, no matter how religious-minded they imagine they are, tend to make this mistake. While they talk to their children about spiritual and moral issues, they divert practically all their attention to worldly affairs. They will speak of the next life, but they will set up their homes so that the great goal of their lives degenerates into the mere piling up of things of worldly importance. They will extol the virtues of a righteous life, but instead of donating their wealth to good causes, they spend it fulfilling their children's worldly ambitions.

This is not religious training; it is but a mockery of it. Uttering religious words does not achieve religious training; they call for the sedulous building up of a religious atmosphere. In a home where there is no all-pervasive atmosphere of religion, it is not possible to instill moral values simply by letting fall a few religious-sounding phrases. Spending

part of the family income on religious matters would not suffice; conversations, family interests and daily activities must all be rooted in religion. Only then will it be possible to inculcate a genuinely religious way of thinking in one's children?

The deeds must conform to the words. But all too often, they do not. Why should this be so? Why should there be such shortcomings when putting words into action? The reason is that making any statement only means mouthing a few words, whereas many problematic factors complicate action. If a man pledges himself to a particular course of action but then shows himself unwilling to make concessions to some or all of these factors, he cannot be said to have spoken in right earnest.

Putting principles into practice is not a simple matter. Only half the battle is won by getting up on a platform and addressing an audience. It is not too difficult to make high-sounding speeches on the moral values of Islam. All one needs to do is gather enough information from books on the subject, and, of course, it helps to have an extensive vocabulary. But practising what one preaches is a different affair. It is seldom that action can be taken without encountering various kinds of obstacles on the way to one's objective. Putting words into action means, inevitably, putting up a struggle.

Another inhibiting factor is the egoism of certain individuals. Even when they have demonstrably erred, they cannot utter the words, "I have erred" or "I was wrong,"



far less make amends. This would be too damaging to their prestige. This is why we find innumerable people ready to bear witness to the fault of others but who cannot or will not acknowledge their shortcomings.

It is all too easy to recount anecdotes about the acknowledgement of truth by Islamic personalities of bygone days because telling such tales does not detract from one's own moral standing. But when it comes to making an avowal of one's errors, that is a very different matter because it shows up one's personality in an unattractive light. Thus, a man who successfully projects another's acknowledgement of the truth is a total failure when acknowledging his own mistakes.

This is mainly why people formulate principles but do not act upon them. They feel that in acting upon principles, their interests are harmed. The ego comes under attack, much unpleasantness ensues.

This is undoubtedly a challenging task. However, creating an atmosphere at home that suggests that there can be no compromise on principles is the only effective way to train children. Suppose you do not put principles into practice in your private and public life. In that case, nothing can prevent your children from receiving bad influences—even if you keep reciting the Quran day and night and even send them to the most prestigious Islamic schools for their education.

## CULTIVATING A RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT AT HOME

I met an educated Muslim. He enthusiastically shared his daily practice of gathering his family members every morning to recite a section of a religious book. Many individuals believe that this approach fulfills their religious obligations. However, this method is undoubtedly underestimating human nature, as people are not influenced solely by formalities.

Teaching family members through reciting religious books is only one aspect of the overall responsibility. The other essential component is cultivating a conducive religious environment within the home. Without a suitable environment, mere recitation will not yield the desired result.

Presently, the environment in many households has become entirely materialistic. Complaints against one another prevail within the home. Negative news remains the subject of discussion. Conversations related to human welfare are absent, replaced by an atmosphere of self-centeredness and a lack of empathy. Topics of discussion primarily revolve around food, clothing, money, business, and jobs.

Reading and reciting religious books at home is indeed a commendable act. However, for it to be effective, it is crucial to cultivate a conducive religious environment within the home. The same atmosphere described in the book should prevail in the house before and after reading the book. Creating a genuinely religious home requires

complete sincerity. Such actions alone cannot fulfil the guardians' responsibility without establishing a spiritual environment at home.

I want to give an example in this regard. In August 1996, I travelled to America and attended a gathering at Mountain Valley Mosque in New Jersey. The event primarily involved women, and the focus of the speech was on the Islamic upbringing of children in American society. My message to them was that imparting Islamic upbringing to the next generation requires more than merely appointing a religious scholar to teach religious studies every evening or relying on distributing religious messages in the names of one's children or exposing them to cultural practices. The solution lies in Islamizing your home. If you genuinely want to instil Islamic values in your children, make religion the centre of conversations at home, prioritizing it over worldly matters. Pivotal in this is the role of the mother.

### HOME-SCHOOLING: A HUB OF INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITIES

“A woman once approached Prophet Muhammad and asked, ‘O Messenger of God, men seem to have more opportunities to earn rewards in the Hereafter, especially through jihad. What about us women?’ The Prophet responded, ‘Convey this to the women you meet: Living with your husband righteously and obediently is equivalent to all the virtuous deeds performed by men, including the one you mentioned.’” (*Musnad Al-Bazzar*, Hadith No. 5209)

In modern times, home management is considered inferior to work outside the house. From the above tradition, we can see that Islam gives the same honour to both kinds of work, as both are equally important. The home serves as a natural training ground for individuals. If one displays good character within the limited circle of the house, one can exhibit good character within the wider circle of society.

The upbringing within the home is of utmost importance. The Prophet said, “The best among you is the one who is best to his family members” (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith No. 1977). This implies that someone who treats his family members well will also excel in interactions with others outside the family. The home serves as a natural training ground for individuals. Interactions within the home occur within a confined sphere, whereas in society, interactions occur on a broader scale. Therefore, displaying good character within the limited circle of the house will translate into exhibiting good character within the wider circle of society. Good training within the home enables individuals to become better human beings in a broader context.

There is a story of a family from Hyderabad. It was a religious family in the traditional sense. However, religion was not the topic of discussion in their home. All of their discussions centred around complaints, as is the case in most homes. Then, a senior religious cleric advised the head of the family to initiate the process of home-schooling in his family so that the complaining mindset could be

changed on positive lines. Homeschooling is the practice of educating children at home on informal lines. I advised him to learn English with his wife and children and read books on positive thinking.

They assiduously followed this method. He described his situation to me over the phone a few days later. He said everyone's life in his house had become meaningful. Everyone in the family, parents and children, was beginning to understand their role. This was not the case before. He shared an experience in this regard, saying he wanted to read an Urdu book in English, so he asked his children to translate it. The subject of the book was God's creation plan.

The children translated the book with total devotion and earnestness. This is how the father got the English translation, and the children learned about God's creation plan. His wife said she had not encountered any home where children understood their role. She also said parents complain that their children do not listen to them. However, with this new beginning, a new trend helped their children understand their positive role.

Now, the atmosphere of negative talk and complaining in their house has become a thing of the past. Instead, topics related to positive thinking and God-realization are being discussed. Thus, the atmosphere of the home has changed completely. The children have adjusted to the new environment. In this way, their knowledge increases, and they develop constructive and positive thinking. This

exemplifies an extension of this verse of the Quran: “Set aside for your people some houses in the city and turn them into places of worship, and be constant in prayer!” (10:87)

### MOTHER AS A ROLE MODEL

Akash Ambani, 24, the son of Mukesh Ambani, had his first media interview published in ‘Hello’ magazine of The Times of India on July 20, 2014. During this interview, Akash Ambani spoke of some of the healthy traditions of his family. For instance, during his school days, his mother, Nita Ambani, gave him very little pocket money, a pittance compared to what his friends got. Second, there was the advice given to him by his grandfather, Dhirubhai Ambani: “Money lost can be earned again, but lost time is lost forever. So use your time judiciously.” These two items are basic to a successful life.

A small amount of pocket money means a simple life. It serves as a regulator in that it restrains you from going astray and indulging in unwanted activities. It becomes a compulsory check that saves you from developing bad habits, engaging in distractions, having an easy-going life, and ending up with an unhealthy character. It prevents you from following that pattern of life in which you pursue only your self-interest.

Thus, less pocket money saves a person’s nature. It saves a person from ruining his natural qualities. It makes one Mr. Nature rather than Mr. Artificial. There is no doubt

that being true to one's nature is the source of all good, and turning away from one's nature is the source of all evil. Less pocket money prevents you from leading an unnatural life for the simple reason that you are unable to pay its price. The truth is that adhering to one's nature develops good character while turning away from it develops bad character.

Nature, as described by the Creator Himself, is the right framework for any individual. For any human being, the secret of life is following one's nature. Doing so leads to the right development. A person who departs from his true nature cannot correctly develop his personality.

The second important principle is: "Money lost can be earned again, but lost time is lost forever." After his nature, the greatest asset of a person is time. Success comes to one who utilizes his time. One who wastes his time will fail in life.

But adopting this way of life is not very simple. It requires a wise teacher to instruct one. Akash Ambani found that teacher in his mother. His mother serves as a role model for other women. Everyone is born with two great assets. Internally, it is his God-given nature, and externally, it is that precious thing called time. One who recognizes these two divine gifts can ensure success.

When you follow the path set by nature, the cogs on your wheel will connect with those of nature's wheel. So you move along smoothly. If you deviate from the course of nature, you will fail to connect your cogs with the cogs on

nature's wheel. Such a person is left unsupported and can never be successful. The same is true of time. Time is the prime asset that is required for successful planning. If you fail to make good use of your time, you will be deprived of that sole basis, after which there is no other basis for success.

Success is the outcome of the right planning. There are two basic factors in right planning: internally, it is the nature with which you are born, and externally, it is that period in which you organize all your activities. If you are lacking in either of these, it will lead to disaster.

Success comes from planning, and planning is the wise utilization of these two gifts—natural wisdom and time.

Akash Ambani learned these lessons by discovering his mother as a role model. His mother serves as a role model for other women.

## WOMAN AT THE BEGINNING OF ALL GREAT THINGS

A maxim says: A woman is at the beginning of all great things. One example in this case is that of Nancy Alwa Edison (d. 1871), the mother of Thomas Alwa Edison (1847-1931), the famous scientist whose scientific discoveries number more than 1000. A school teacher, Nancy Edison, worked hard to add the name Thomas Edison to the list of the world's most outstanding scientists.

Edison's hearing was impaired from birth. He could not



hear properly and was thus expelled from school. But his mother was not one to give up easily. She was responsible for educating her son, home-schooling him, and arranging his educational requirements. Edison's mother played a constructive role in shaping her son's future. She implanted the idea in her son's mind that he was not retarded, and that this impediment was a challenge. She made Edison's education her mission and encouraged her son to use his natural abilities to overcome obstacles. The result is that Edison's name is now recorded in history as that of a great scientist and inventor! Edison acknowledged the role of his mother in his life: "She instilled in me the love and the purpose of learning."

Everyone can be like Edison's mother. Every woman is endowed with the capacity to play this role, provided she understands the abilities God has given her and utilizes them determinedly. However, the most excellent quality required for this job is patience. The Creator creates the capability, but the person concerned must pay the price of patience. Like Edison's mother, a woman who can deliver this price can play a significant role. Using spiritual insight and faith, she can not only shape the lives of her own family but also, in turn, shape society on positive lines.

*I*n Islam, men and women possess equal rights and spiritual standing, guided by principles of 'equal respect, different roles.' Symbolized as a cart's two wheels, both are crucial for maintaining balance and progress. Women, characterized by qualities like compassion and patience, are pivotal in nurturing future generations, recognized as humanity's builders. Together, their complementary roles ensure societal harmony and advancement.

This concept emphasizes the importance of gender cooperation in fostering a balanced, forward-moving civilization, highlighting the collective effort required for the well-being and growth of society.

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