

GUIDING LIGHTS

Spiritual Role of
Women in Islam



MAULANA WAHIDUDDIN KHAN

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STATUS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

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)

The two have no difference regarding status, rights, and blessings in this world and the Hereafter.

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 spread countless men and women [throughout the earth]. Fear God, in whose name you appeal to one another, and be mindful of your obligations in respect of 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. Looked at in 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.

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 Angel 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; you always help the weak; take care of whoever crosses your threshold; give solace to the weary; speak the truth." (*Al-Seerah al-Nabwiyah*, Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, pp 385-86)

So, we see that Islam gives women equal status as that of 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.”

In Islam, therefore, 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.

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 normalising 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 emphasised pure divine love, which alone could minimise all these differences.

Another woman who made a signal contribution to the spread of religious learning in Muslim history is that of 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.

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.

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. 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 and have demonstrated not only the vast arena that Islam affords them for the performance of noble and heroic deeds but also the exaltedness of the position accorded to women in Islamic society.

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.

Another example concerns Hajra, Prophet Abraham's wife. Hajj, regarded as the greatest form of worship in Islam, entails the performance of Sai, 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.

INHERITANCE OF PROPERTY

Islam recognises equal status of man and woman in the eyes of God. Therefore, women have their legal personality 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 a share in the properties of their relatives in proportions fixed by the Quran and 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 or parents] but has left a brother or a sister, they shall each inherit one sixth, but if they are more than two, they

QAWWAMIYAT OR 'BOSSISM'

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)

QAWWAMIYAT 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 *Qawwamiyat* with this example. *Qawwamiyat* 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 organisation 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

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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 any home has the position of a manager or an administrator, standing above members of equal position. A house could become prey to anarchy if this principle were not accepted.

Being a Boss means having responsibility for, not superiority over another. Similarly, *Qawwamiyat* is also a responsibility. It fulfills the administrative need rather than exercising superiority over one another. 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.

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. However, maintaining modesty in dress and demeanour is essential.

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 in use 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 civilisation 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 Qur’an 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). 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 religion of Islam focuses on the spirit rather than on form. It emphasises 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; Khadija, the wife of the Prophet of Islam and Aisha, the wife of the Prophet of Islam. These women,

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accepted as models in the society of believers, are good examples for the women of today.

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.

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 solemnise the nikah ceremony. The willingness of women is especially

desired. Therefore, in Islam, marriage is a social contract entered into by mutual consent of the bride and groom and 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 believing women that they should lower their gaze and remain chaste and not to reveal their adornments—save what is normally apparent thereof, and they

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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 has knowledge of 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 of 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.

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,

COMPANIONSHIP OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

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.

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 realise 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.

ADJUSTMENT IN MARRIED LIFE

Nature has endowed men and women with extraordinary capabilities. Anyone who recognises his role and works hard can succeed in his field. Unfortunately, the Western or Eastern world has not fully recognised the superior role of women.

ADJUSTMENT IN MARRIED LIFE

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.

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 prioritise 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.'

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. But this adjustment culture is also essential between husband and wife. 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

EMOTIONALISM VS EGOISM

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.

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 tends to be emotional, while a man tends to be 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. But 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 too has its positive as well as its negative aspects. The positive aspect is that she tends to be more sensitive and, therefore, more gentle and compassionate, which is, without doubt, a positive quality. But 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.

MUTUAL TRUST

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.

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 mutual trust is lacking between most couples. 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.

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 arousal 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.

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.

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.

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 practised in almost all Muslim communities well into the 20th century when the modern education system took over this function.

PARADISE LIES AT THE FEET OF THE MOTHER

As modern-day research tells us, women are better with words than men. It is perhaps this reason that 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.

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 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 fulfill 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 emphasises 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.

WOMEN'S SPIRITUAL ROLE IN MUSLIM HISTORY

Islam established gender equality in society in the complete sense. 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 Zaman, 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 establishing normal relations.

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.

The need of the hour is for more women to recognise their spiritual abilities to perform their roles far more effectively and on a far grander scale. Once this feminine potential is realised, the world will be better for all.

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 system of nature between men and women socially, 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 of 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.

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. Home-schooling 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. But 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)

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

utilises them determinedly. But 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.

CONCLUSION

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. 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. 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)

CONCLUSION

We see that Islam makes 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, therefore, 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 life following the principles, ‘equal in respect and different in roles.’

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. Possessing qualities of gentleness, compassion, patience, and emotional connection, women have been bestowed by the Creator the role of normalizing

stressful situations and shaping future generations of human beings.

According to Islam, therefore, men and women are equal as regards honour and status, but physically, biologically and psychologically, they are different. To maintain the system of nature between men and women socially, 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 human world system 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, the '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.

In the early period of Islam, both sexes were fully active in different fields of life, from housework to

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agriculture and horticulture and from worship in the mosque to the battleground. Everywhere, women were visible and active. 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.

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.

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 loss to society. 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 practised in almost all Muslim communities well into the 20th century when the modern education system took over this function.

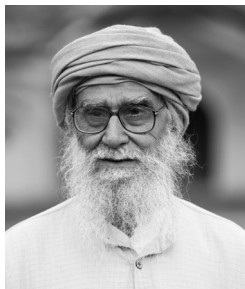
Women can play a significant role in this campaign for education by shaping their families and, in turn, society by preparing the coming generations through informal education within the home or formal education outside of it. For instance, educated women can train their children at home. The literate 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. And as individuals in a family are shaped on positive lines, society, in turn, will be shaped on positive lines.

They can also avail other opportunities outside their homes within the parameters set by Islamic injunctions. Women can choose from the various jobs available based on their capabilities while remaining within the bounds of modesty and piety, ensuring their safety in

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every way. An important field to choose from is that of education. Women can be better teachers than men when it comes to teaching children. For women, this will not amount to a change of workplace but will be an extension of the home, broadening the practical activity centred on child-rearing assigned to her by nature.

Preparing the next generations is the greatest need of the hour. Women can prepare an entire generation with standard education if they choose this field. If women stand up for this cause, they can become guiding lights by preparing the new generations to become aware, duty-conscious, and principled individuals. This will be the beginning of shaping the family and society along spiritual lines.



Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (1925-2021) was an Islamic scholar, spiritual guide, and ambassador of peace. His English translation of the Quran and its Commentary are widely appreciated for their simplicity, clarity, and ease of understanding. He has authored over 200 books; and two magazines, Spirit of Islam and Al-

Risala; and recorded thousands of video and audio lectures. Demonstrating the relevance of Islam in the modern idiom, this material delves into Islam's spiritual wisdom, the Prophet's non-violent approach, its relationship with modernity, and other contemporary issues. For his seminal contributions to world peace, Maulana received numerous national and international awards. The Government of India honoured him with the 'Padma Vibhushan Award' (2021), and the 'Padma Bhushan Award' (2000) for his contributions to spirituality. In 2001, Maulana founded the Centre for Peace and Spirituality International which is actively carrying his legacy forward by distributing copies of the Quran and peacefully conveying the spiritual message of Islam at a global level.

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www.cpsglobal.org

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Islam gives equal status, rights, and blessings to men and women in this world and the Hereafter. In the early period of Islam, women were fully active in different fields of life, from housework to agriculture to business and from worship in the mosque and outside work. The modern world offers plentiful opportunities for women to choose from while remaining within the bounds of modesty and piety. As educators, they can equip an entire generation with standard education and as mothers, they can inculcate ethical training at home. Women can become guiding lights by preparing the new generations to become aware, duty-conscious, and spiritual individuals.

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