

# **Women between Islam and customs of Muslim society**

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### **1. THE VERDICT OF FAITH**

In the religion of Islam, a woman is an independent entity, and thus a fully responsible human being. Islam addresses her directly and does not approach her through the agency of Muslim males. A woman would assume full capacity and liability once she has attained maturity and has received the message of Islam.

Moreover no woman is said to have truly accepted the message of Islam unless she does so out of original and independent will. Admission to faith is entirely a personal matter; indeed, faith cannot be adopted by proxy. Nor does a woman become a Muslim merely because of her relationship to father, husband or any other male. All Muslims used to present their oath of allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) personally and independently. Women, just like men, would come to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and pledge their own allegiance to Islam and the Prophet.

God Almighty commanded the Prophet (peace be upon him) in the following words: "O Prophet! When women believers come to you to make a covenant with you that they will not associate anything with God, nor steal, nor fornicate, nor kill their own children, nor slander anyone, nor disobey you in any fair matter, then make a covenant with them and seek God's forgiveness in their favour. Indeed God is extremely Forgiving and most Merciful". (Al-Mumtainah, 12).

Male and female relatives may assume different stands over the religious option. For instance, a woman like Fatima the daughter of Al Khattab, embraced Islam although her brother Umar was still an unbeliever. Ibn Abbas is reported to have asked Umar about the manner in which he embraced Islam. Umar said, "three days after Hamza had embraced Islam, I went out of my house, to meet by chance a man of the Makhzumi tribe whom I asked: "Do you prefer Qur'anic's faith over that of your own forefathers?" The Makhzumi said: "One who is more closely related to you than myself has also done so". I asked him, who it was. Your sister and your brother-in-law, replied the Makhzumi. I hurried back and found the door of my sister's house bolted from within; and I heard some humming inside. Later, when the door was opened, I entered the house and asked: What is it that I am hearing? My sister replied: "You heard nothing". We were exchanging words when I struck her on the head, whereupon she stated defiantly: "We do that whether you like it or not". I was filled with remorse when I saw her bleeding, and said to her: "Show me the scripture". Umar narrated the whole incident. (Al-Isabah Fi Tamyeez Al Sahaba, by Ibn-Hajar Al Asqalani, hereafter cited as Al-Isabah).

Similarly a woman, like Umm-Habiba, the daughter of Abu Sufiyan, embraced Islam, though her father was still a pagan. When Sufiyan went to Madina, he visited his daughter, Umm-habiba, then wife of the Prophet Qur'anic (peace be upon him). He was about to sit on the Prophet's bed but his daughter did not allow him to do so and rolled up the mattress. Abu Sufiyan, who felt grieved at her attitude, said to her, "Was it that the mattress is not worthy of me or that I am not worthy thereof"? Umm-Habiba curtly replied to her father, Abu Sufiyan, "But this is the Prophet's mattress, and you are an impure polytheist, I did not want you to sit on it." When he heard that, Abu Sufiyan felt annoyed and reprimanded her, "During my absence something has gone wrong with you." (Tabagat, Ibn-i-Saad).

A Muslim woman might have a husband who was still an atheist. Take, for instance, Zainab, the daughter of the Prophet himself (peace be upon him). She was married to her maternal cousin Abu Al-A's bin Al Rabee. She entered the fold of Islam though her husband held on to his original religion. In the battle of Badr, he fell prisoner of war. Zainab, however, offered a ransom for his release. He was, therefore, allowed to go free on the engagement that on his return he would let her free. Consequently, when he returned to Mecca, Zainab migrated to Madina. Her husband, Abu Al-A's, however, once again fell in the hands of Muslims as a prisoner of war. On this occasion Zainab provided him with asylum, and took him under her own protection. He finally returned to Mecca to settle his business and then embraced Islam.

Umm-Saleem bint Mahan was another such lady. She married Malik bin Al Nadir before the advent of Islam but was among the earliest converts to Islam. Her husband, Malik disapproved of that rather furiously and went to Syria to die there. (Al-Isabah)

Umm-Hani bint Abi Talib was married to Hubairah bin Amr. She was the daughter of the Prophet's uncle, Abu Talib, and embraced Islam on the occasion of the conquest of Mecca. This change of religion separated her from her husband, Hubairah, who fled to Najran. (Al-Isabah)

Hawa bint Yazeed was yet another woman who acceded to Islam and patiently endured distress and torture at the hands of her husband, Qays bin Al Hateem, who was also a well-known poet. The Prophet (peace be upon him) happened to meet him in the market (Souq dhi'l-Majaz) and asked him to embrace Islam. He claimed that since he was too busy with war, he had little time to consider the proposal. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said to him, "I have been told that you are not treating your wife, Hawa, nicely ever since she renounced your religion. So fear God and in this matter keep me too in regard, don't bother her." He promised to oblige; then went to his wife and said to her, "O Hawa, I met your fellow Qur'anic, who asked me to bear him in mind in matters concerning you. I swear by God I shall do so, I would leave you alone and do you no harm." She, then, declared her faith which she had so far kept secret. People talked to him about the matter, but he refused to do her any wrong. (Tabqat).

Another woman, Umm-kulthoom bint Ugba bin Abi Mait embraced Islam, though her whole family were still holding on to their original polytheistic religion. She migrated to Madina. Ibn Ishaq, a well-known historian, said that Umm-kulthoom migrated to the Prophet at Madina while the peace settlement of Hudaibia was still operative. In fact she was the first lady to follow the Prophet (peace be upon him) to Madina. She left Mecca unaccompanied by any one. Her brothers, Amara and al Waleed went to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and asked him for her repatriation as provided in the agreement between the Prophet and Quraish at Hudaibiya. But the Prophet refused to extend the terms of the agreement to women. (Tabqat).

A woman could singly adopt Islam and suffer from torture for that. Harithah bint Al Muammil, the sister of Umm-Ubais who was known as Zunairah Al Romiyah, was a slave girl. She was among the earliest believers in Islam and was one of those women who were tortured for their faith. Abu Jahal used to beat her severely; so did Umar before he embraced Islam. After embracing Islam the poor woman suffered so much torture that she lost her sight. The Meccan polytheists used that misfortune as an excuse for stigmatizing her for embracing Islam. They, used to say, "al Lat and Al Uzza (two deities which the Meccans used to worship in the holy Kaba) have rendered you blind". But she would always say, "They are lying, by the truth of God these idols bring no benefit nor harm." She ultimately recovered her sight.

Sumayah bint Khubat, a martyr, was the mother of Ammar bin Yasir, and was the seventh person to embrace Islam. The Al Mughira clan used to torture her. People used to pass by and witness her being tortured by the side of her son

and husband in the hot sands of Mecca. The Prophet (peace be upon him) would console her by saying, "O the Yasirs, bear this suffering patiently, for God has given you the promise of heaven". She was aged, and weak too. Abu Jahl was also among those who used to torture her. She succumbed to the excessive torture and died to become the first person ever to suffer martyrdom in Islam. (Al Isabah)

Umm-habibah, the daughter of Abu Sufiyan was a lady who in exile firmly held on to Islam while her husband had converted to Christianity. Her husband Ubaid-ullah bin Jahash migrated to Abyssinia, along with his wife to escape persecution for their Islam. But there he renounced Islam and adopted Christianity, the religion of the Abyssinians. He tried to persuade her to do the same, but she steadfastly held on to Islam on top of all the suffering which as an exile she had to bear. (Tareekh Al Tabari)

Muslim women, on the strength of their unshakable personal faith, used to work for the propagation of Islam. Many of them helped to promote the cause of Islam within their respective family circles, through discussion and debate. Arwa bint Abdul Muttalib was one such lady who used to support the Prophet (peace be upon him) and to argue in his favour. She always urged her son to help the Prophet (peace be upon him) and to do whatever he asked him to do. Another such lady was Um Shuraik who used to move secretly among the ladies of Quraish to solicit and convert them to Islam. She had converted many before she was exposed. The people of Mecca warned her that she would have suffered but for her kin. (Al Isabah)

Among Muslim ladies were some who invited their suitors to embrace Islam and made that a precondition for marriage. Umm-Saleem was one such lady. She said to Abu Talha, who asked her hand in marriage, "By God one like you can not be rejected, but you are a polytheist and I am a Muslim Woman. It is not at all lawful for me to marry you. If you embrace Islam, I would take that as my dowry from you". Anas bin Malik is reported to have said that Abu Talha had proposed to Umm-Saleem before embracing Islam. So she said to him, "Abu Talha don't you know that the God you worship grew from the earth"? Abu Talha replied, "Yes, indeed". She would then say: "Don't you feel ashamed to worship them? but if you embrace Islam I won't ask you anything else in dowry". Abu Talha asked her to wait till he looked into the matter, and went away. Later he returned and proclaimed, "There is no deity but God and Mohammad is his messenger". Thereupon Umm-Saleem cried out, "O Annas arrange the marriage of Abu Talha". And he married her. (Al Isabah)

If embracing Islam by a woman is an entirely personal matter in the Islamic tradition and can not be done through proxy, so are all obligations and duties which Islam enjoins on her. No one else can do them on her behalf. She performs her acts of worship purely on the basis of her own intention; and as such these are treated in Islam as her personal achievements. For God has

proclaimed, "I do not allow the achievement of a worker, from amongst you, whether he be male or female, to go to waste. You all belong to one another". (Al-Imran 195). "A male or female, who is a believer and performs good deeds, we shall give him a goodly life. And ultimately a fine reward for what they had been doing". (Al Nahal 97)

On the basis of her own action, a woman earns reward or punishment. No man is allowed to plead or intercede for a woman, nor is he held responsible for her actions and their consequences. The doctrine of ultimate accountability does not take the family as a unit for collective responsibility; rather, each individual male or female, is an autonomous unit of reckoning in front of God, and is held directly responsible for his or her actions or his or her share in joint acts. "For, on the Day of Judgement, every one of them will come to Him singly". (Maryam, 96)

The judgement in the hereafter may not necessarily bracket husband and wife together; neither could relieve the other of his charge or appropriate his due. Nor will a believer be treated unfairly merely for his sex. God treats all mankind on an equal basis. "The Day a man will run away from his own brother, his own father, his own wife and his children. On that day every one will be in a state which will engross him completely". (Abasa, [35-38])

The individuality of a woman is a principle of religion, "For the disbelievers, God gave the example of Noah's wife and Lot's wife. Both of them were under two of our righteous bondmen. Both acted disloyally towards them, but (their esteemed husbands) could in no way protect them from God. And both were commanded to enter the fire (of hell) along with all others following the same course. And for those who believed, God gave the example of Pharaoh's wife, when she prayed: "O Lord, put up for me a home in heaven, and save me from the Pharaoh and his practices and save me from the transgressing people". And Mary the daughter of Imran who guarded her chastity, wherein we breathed of our Spirit. And she attested to the commandments of her Lord as well as his scriptures, and was one of the truly devout. (Al Tahreem, 10-12)

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## 2. THE VERDICT OF JURISPRUDENCE

The verdict of Islamic jurisprudence is just the practical expression of the dictates of the faith. Women, according to Shariah, are counterparts of men. And in Islamic jurisprudence, there is no separate order of regulations for them. There are, however, few limited secondary regulations where a distinction is drawn between the two sexes. But these are intended purely to enable both of them to give a genuine expression of their faith in accordance with their respective human nature. But the Shariah (or Islamic law) is essentially the same, and its general rules are common for both the sexes; it is addressed to both without any distinction. The underlying presumption in the Shariah is that sex is immaterial, except where the text makes the distinction or where proof can be adduced to that effect. Thus personal religious services for a woman in Islam, for instance, are the same as for a man. She has to perform her prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to the Holy Kaaba and remember God.

Just like men, women have to observe the general religious standards relating to personal conduct, social dealings and moral behaviour - like being truthful, fair altruistic, beneficent, righteous and well-mannered. Islam does not provide different moral codes for men and women. Even in matters of public life they, too, are expected to do their part and endure the sufferings of life as patiently as men are supposed to do. They too are expected to show solidarity with the community of believers and to forsake the comforts of their home and hearth to migrate to the state of the Muslims, to wage jihad with them, and to promote the well-being of their society. In all these matters there is no distinction between Muslim men and women. For God has proclaimed, "And the believers, men and women, are allies, of each other, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, establishing prayer, giving alms and obeying God and his messenger. As for these God will have mercy on them, God is Mighty and Wise". (Tawba, 71)

Women have an equal opportunity and incentive to share in every aspect of religious virtue: "God has got ready forgiveness and tremendous rewards for the Muslim men and women; the believing men and women; the devout men and women; the truthful men and women; the patiently suffering men and women; the humble men and women; the almsgiving men and women; the fasting men and women, the men and women who guard their chastity; and the men and women who are exceedingly mindful of God". (Al Ahzab, 35)

Tradition has it that Umm-Salmah said to the Prophet, "O Messenger of God! The Qur'an speaks of men but does not speak of us, women". As a consequence, the above-cited verses of the Qur'an were revealed.

Islam assigns a Muslim woman a due role to play in discharging collective responsibilities which preserve the essence of the religious society in general.

She must, therefore, assiduously apply herself to fulfill her part; for if all Muslims neglect to discharge these collective responsibilities, she would have to answer for that default like every man. Some special obligations like maintenance of the family, attendance of group prayers, and the levy or mass general conscription for war are too onerous for the ordinary female. Islam has relieved women from attending to these as a matter of original, personal responsibility, if Muslim men can sufficiently attend to them. That does not mean that a woman is barred from doing any of these things. She may very well participate in all such activities even when there is no dearth of men to do them. However if men are not fulfilling their due obligations in this regard, it would be her duty to compensate their default or complement their effort.

None and nothing in Islam may stand in the way of a woman contributing to the general good and competing for religious achievement. The equal personal responsibilities of women in Islam are evident and clearly established. That collective duties are commonly borne by men and women is shown in the practice of the Prophet (peace be upon him), who commanded women to act charitably and give for the sake of God, and in that women used to respond.

In his collection of authentic traditions, Al-Bukhari narrates on the authority of Ibn-Abbas, who said: "I attended the prayer of Eid-ul-Fitr along with the Prophet, (peace be upon him) and Abu Bakr and Uthman. They offered the prayer before the sermon. Later the Prophet (peace be upon him) delivered his Eid address and then moved ahead making his way through the people, till he reached the ladies, accompanied by Bilal. The Prophet (peace be upon him) read out the following verse from the Holy Qur'an: 'O Prophet, when believing women come to you to offer their oath of allegiance that they will not associate any thing with God, nor will they commit theft, nor indulge in fornication, nor murder their children, nor slander any one, nor disobey you in whatever that is fair, do accept their oath of allegiance and beseech God to forgive them. Indeed God is the most Forgiving and most Kind'. [Al Mumtahinah, 12]

"When the Prophet had finished with these verses, he said to them: 'Are you all committed to that? One of the ladies replied, (while others kept silent), 'yes'. The Prophet (peace be upon him) did not, at that time, know which of them did so! The Prophet (peace be upon him) went on to ask them to make their donations. Bilal spread out his shirt and said: 'Donate, my parents be sacrificed for you ladies'. And they all dropped their rings, studded with precious or ordinary stone)".

Throughout the period of the Prophet's ministry, women used to offer their prayers, even the early morning and late evening ones, along with the congregation of Muslims in general. In his collection of authentic traditions Bukhari narrated: "I (the Prophet) like to prolong the prayer but when I hear a child weeping I make it shorter for I loathe to make any inconvenience to the

child's mother". Similarly, Muslim, another prominent authority on traditions, narrated in his own collection of authentic traditions: "If your women ask for permission to visit the mosques, do allow them to do so". On the authority of a report by the Prophet's wife, Sayyidath Aishah, it is stated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to offer the morning prayer whence the ladies would disperse completely covered in their dresses and they could not be recognised in the darkness. (Bukhari)

Muslim Women used also to participate in military expeditions bringing water to the thirsty combatants, treating the wounded, and carrying them to safety, and sometimes engaging in active warfare. The Qur'an refers to this and other exploits of men and women, "And their lord responded to them: I suffer not the work of any worker male or female to be lost. You proceed one from another. So those who fled and were driven forth from their homes and suffered harm for my cause and fought or were slain, verily I shall remit their evil deeds and shall bring them into gardens underneath which rivers flow as a reward from God, and God offers the fairest of rewards". (All-Imran, 195)

Even the Prophet's own wife, Sayidah Aishah, actively participated in such military services. Anas stated, "In the Battle of Uhud when the Muslims were routed and were put to flight from the Prophet, I saw how Aisha bint Abu Bakr and Umm-Saleem were extremely busy carrying waterskins on their backs and emptying them into the mouths of the Muslims". (Bukhari)

There were other prominent ladies who equally participated in the war effort: Umm-Sinan Al Aslamyah, and Ummiyah bint Qais (as reported by Tabaqat). Hamnah bint Jahash was one of those ladies who pledged allegiance to Islam and participated in the battle of Uhud, bringing water to the thirsty, transporting the wounded to safety and giving them the necessary treatment. (Al Isabah). Al Rabee bint Mua'weth, also known as Laila al-Ghifariah, used to accompany the Prophet (peace be upon him) in his military campaigns, treating the wounded and looking after the sick. (Al-Isabah). Bukhari gives the following report from her: "We were with the Prophet (peace be upon him), giving water to the thirsty, treating the wounded and bringing the dead bodies of the Muslims to Madina". Umm-Dhahhak bint Masoud also accompanied the Prophet in his military campaign of Khaiber. The Prophet gave her the same share of spoils there as he gave to man. (Al-Isabah)

Safiyah bint Abdul Mattalib, too, was one of those women who actively participated in the battles: "When the people took off for the military campaign of Al Khandaq, the Prophet (peace be upon him) placed his women in a small fortress called Fari, and Hassan bin Thabit was also left with them. Later a Jew came and climbed up the fortress till he was in a position to command a full view of all. Saifyah belted herself around the waist, took a pole and descended upon him striking him with the pole till he died". (Al-Isabah) Nusaybah bint Ka'b is another lady who witnessed the battle of Uhud. She



intended to bring water to the wounded, but she in fact took an active part in the fighting, and on that day brought great havoc to the enemy and wounded twelve of them severely. When the Muslims pulled back and exposed the Prophet, she stood her ground firmly in his defence. (Tabaqat). The Prophet (peace be upon him) appreciated her much and praised her. When she heard the news that her son Habib was killed in battle, she swore either she would die in front of Musailamah, or kill him. She participated in the battle of Al Yamamah along with Khalid bin Al Waleed. Her son Abdullah, too, was with her. He was killed in battle while she as well lost one of her arms. (Al-Isabah)

Another case is Umm-Haran bint-Malhan. The Prophet (peace be upon him) went to the daughter of Malhan and stood by her side and then laughed. She said to him: "Why are you laughing, O Messenger of God?" The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Some of my people would sail on the Green Sea (the Mediterranean) for God's sake". She said to him: "Please pray that God may include me with them". The Prophet (peace be upon him) prayed for her. (Bukhari). About Umm-Saleem bint Malhan, Sahih Muslim reports that, in the battle of Junain, she had a dagger which she carried about.

From the preceding exposition, it is evident that in defence and other collective duties and obligations of public life Muslim women may participate. But they are not duty-bound to do so, except when the urgency is such that their participation becomes mandatory. The Mother of Believers, Aisha, is reported to have requested the Prophet (peace be upon him) for permission to participate in Jihad (fighting). The Prophet (peace be upon him) said to her, "Haj is your Jihad".

According to Ibn-Batal, a commentator, the tradition of Aisha mentioned above proves that participation in fighting is not binding on women, but the statement that Haj is their Jihad does not bar them from volunteering for Jihad. Bukhari seems to express the same opinion.

On the basis of the uniform principles of Islamic jurisprudence, a Muslim Woman enjoys the same capacity and freedom enjoyed by a man. She too can propose to a man for marriage, orally or in writing, she can freely choose her spouse, reject a suitor she does not like or obtain divorce from an estranged husband against his will. But a male relative normally formalises the marriage contract, and marriage dissolution or divorce on a woman's initiative is only granted by a judge.

Umamah bint Abi'l-As was one lady companion of the Prophet (peace be upon him) who proposed for marriage in writing. She sent a message to Al Mugheerah bin Naufal saying: "If you feel you stand in need of us then proceed forth". He then sought her hand in marriage from Al Hasan, her cousin, who duly solemnised the marriage. (Al-Isabah)

An account about Sahal bin Saad Al Saidi in the books of authentic traditions tells about a Muslim woman who proposed verbally to the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself. She told him: "I present myself to you". She then waited for quite some time while the Prophet kept looking at her. A man said to the Prophet: "If you don't need her please marry me to her". The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked him: "Do you have anything to offer as dowry?" The man replied: "I don't have anything except this loin cloth". The Prophet (peace be upon him) said to him: "If you give her your loin cloth you will remain without one, look for something else". The man said: "I can't find any". The Prophet (peace be upon him) then advised him, "Try to find even an iron ring". He tried in vain. The Prophet (peace be upon him) finally asked him: "Do you know anything from the Qur'an (learnt by heart)?" The man replied: "Yes, such and such Surah of the Qur'an", and he named the Surahs. The Prophet (peace be upon him) then declared: "I solemnize your marriage with her with whatever verses of the Qur'an you have as dowry". (All Six Reporters of Tradition)

Regarding the making of marriage proposals to women, one may read the provisions of the Qur'an about proposing to a woman whose husband has died, while she is spending the period of transition, "Iddah". God says, "There is no harm to you if you make a hint of an offer of betrothal to women or hold it in your hearts; God knows that you cherish them in your hearts. But don't make a secret engagement with them, except in terms indirect and honourable, nor resolve the bond of marriage till the term prescribed is fulfilled. And know that God knows what is in your hearts. So take heed of Him. And know that God is most forgiving and most forbearing". (Al Baqarah, 235).

Regarding the freedom of marital choice of a woman, one may read the provisions of the Qur'an about not preventing a woman, by force, from marrying: "And when you divorce women, and they fulfil the term of their Iddat, either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms. But do not take them back to prejudice them or to take undue advantage thereof. Whosoever does that, indeed, he harms his own self". (Al Baqarah, 232).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered that a woman should not be married but with her own authority and consent. The Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered: "Do not marry a non-virgin except on her instruction, nor marry a virgin except with her permission; and her silence may go for permission". (Bukhari). Whether a girl is a virgin or not, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would not allow their marriage under compulsion. Ibn-Abbas stated that a virgin girl came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and told him that her father had got her married without her approval. The Prophet (peace be upon him) gave her complete freedom to choose whichever course that pleased her. (Reported by Abu Dawoud, Ahmed, and Ibn-Majah). Another girl came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and complained that her father had married her to his nephew against her wish, the Prophet gave her the choice of rejecting

the marriage. But she said to the Prophet (peace be upon him), "I endorse what my father did, but I wanted to show women that parents have nothing to do in the matter". (Ibn-Majah).

The dissolution of marriage and the grant of divorce by the judge on the wife's application is normal practice in personal law. A wife can have whatever creed of scriptural religion at variance with her Muslim Husband without any compulsion. She can and should acquire any education without any limit or hindrance. It is reported that Prophet (peace be upon him) strongly recommended the good education of girls. Abu Bardah Ibn-Abi Musa quoted his father as saying that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, three people will be doubly rewarded by God. Any one from among the people of the scriptures who believed in his own Prophet as well as in Prophet Qur'anic (peace be upon him), a slave who endeavours to meet his obligation towards God as well his masters and anyone who has a slave girl and strove to educate her and teach her well and then gives her freedom and marries her. (All the six reporters of tradition). It is worthy of note that women have been attending the general assemblies for learning held by the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Women are entitled to full freedom of expression of their proper views. Sayidah Aisha is famous for going all-out to advance her juristic opinions. Muslim ladies used to venture their views in the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him) as well his successors, the Caliphs. Ibn Al-Jauzi narrated the virtues and merits of Umar bin Al-Khattab (God bless him) in the following words: Umar forbade the people from paying excessive dowries and addressed them saying: "Don't fix the dowries for women over forty ounces. If ever that is exceeded I shall deposit the excess amount in the public treasury". As he descended from the pulpit, a flat-nosed lady stood up from among the women audience, and said: "It is not within your right". Umar asked: "Why should this not be of my right?" she replied: "Because God has proclaimed: 'even if you had given one of them (wives) a whole treasure for dowry take not the least bit back. Would you take it by false claim and a manifest sin". (Al Nisa, 20). When he heard this, Umar said: "The woman is right and the man (Umar) is wrong. It seems that all people have deeper insight and wisdom than Umar". Then he returned to the pulpit and declared: "O people, I had restricted the giving of more than four hundred dirhams in dowry. Whosoever of you wishes to give in dowry as much as he likes and finds satisfaction in so doing may do so".

According to Islamic jurisprudence a woman is competent to own property and dispose of it in any manner. The Shariah generally provides for an equitable and fair role for women in the economic life of Muslim society. Just as much as they share in the management of family affairs, they can contribute to the support of the family, although they are not legally bound to provide maintenance. A woman can share outdoor work with the man to earn a common living. Asma bint Abu Bakr is said to have narrated that when Al Zubair married her, he had no land property, nor a slave, nor anything else, except a

camel and a horse. She said: "I would give fodder to his horse, draw the water, patch his water skin, knead the flour. I was not good at baking and preparing bread; but I had some sincere Ansar neighbouring ladies who used to help me with the baking. I used to bring, on my head, fruit kernels from the land which the Prophet (peace be upon him) had given to Al Zubair. That land was at a distance of three farsakhs (about ten miles). One day I was on my way home with a load on my head when I met the Prophet with a number of Ansar. the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked me to ride, behind him on the camel, but I felt shy of joining the company of men. The Prophet (peace be upon him) realised that I was feeling shy and, therefore, continued his journey without me. Later I came to Al Zubair and told him how I met the Prophet (peace be upon him) with a company of Ansars, and how I declined his offer when he bade the camel to kneel so that I might ride behind him. I told Al Zubair I felt shy and remembered your jealousy over your self-respect and honour. On hearing that account Al Zubar said, 'By God your carrying fruit kernels is far more distressing for me than riding the camel with the Prophet'. Later Abu Bakr sent me a servant to save me the trouble of looking after the horse and I felt as if I had been relieved of the bondage of slavery". (Bukhari).

Muslim couples are supposed to cooperate and consult over matters relating to their family, even after divorce. The Qur'an so provides that "Mothers shall breastfeed their babies for two complete years, if a father desires that the term be completed. The father of the baby shall provide them food and clothes in the established manner. None shall be charged more than his capacity. No mother shall be prejudiced with respect to her child, nor father with respect to his. The same is the responsibility of them. If both spouses decide, by mutual consent and consultation, on weaning, there is no blame on either. If you want to have your babies breastfed by a foster mother you are not doing anything blame-worthy provided you pay to the foster mother what you had agreed to offer, in accordance with the established manner. Fear God and know that God is aware of what you are doing". (Al-Baqarah, 233).

In an Islamic Society women also take part in the appointment of counselling and control officers responsible for the public affairs of society. This may be done either through the process of election or consultation. The account of the Shura process following Umar's death firmly establishes this matter. Muslim ladies did actually participate in that general consultation. Ibn Katheer, the historian, told, "then Abdur Rahman bin Auf undertook to consult the people about (the candidates) Uthman bin Affan and Ali bin Abi Talib. He was collecting and collating the general opinion of the Muslims through their leaders. he consulted them singly as well as collectively; privately as well as publicly. He even reached to the Muslim ladies in their privacy". (Al Bidayah Wa-Nihayah).

The tradition of early Muslim society was for women to attend all public

meetings and festivals. Authentic reports about life with Prophet (peace be upon him) give account of women going to attend the two Eid (festive days) prayers. Even those who were excused from prayer, would also come to attend the congregation. Hafsa, the Prophet's wife (God bless her) is reported to have said: "We used to forbid young girls to go out to attend the Eid prayers. But a woman came to visit and stayed in Qasr Bani Khelf, and told about her sister, whose husband had participated in twelve military campaigns of the Prophet (peace be upon him), her sister took part in six thereof". She said: "We treated the wounded and looked after the sick. I asked the Prophet (peace be upon him): would there be any harm in not going out if we do not have jilbabs (wide loose gowns)?" The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied, "Let her friend lend her a jilbab so that she may attend the blessed occasion and the preaching of Islam". Hafsa went on: "when Umm Salma came I asked her (to confirm): 'Did you hear the Prophet (peace be upon him)?' she replied, 'Yes indeed I heard him say: all girls, young, screened or in their monthly periods should go out to attend the Eid congregation and witness the blessedness and publicity of social Islam. The menstruating ladies should however stand by during the prayer'". Hafsa asked: "The menstruating ladies too?" she replied: "Don't you see that they attend the congregation in Arafah for pilgrimage?". (Bukhari).

Another aspect of women in Apostolic society was revealed by an account of Sayidah Aisha about how she attended a spectacle of the Ethiopians: "By God the Prophet was by my chamber's door while the Ethiopians were showing their spear games in Al Haram. The Prophet (peace be upon him) covered me with his shawl so that I may too watch their feats. I was watching them from behind his shoulder. He would pose there for my sake till I choose to break off". Aisha suggests: "you should fully appreciate a young girl's interest in fun". (Bukhari).

Excepting those specific tasks of public life which are obligatory on men and only voluntary to women, male Muslims in an Islamic Society have no exclusive prerogative or specialisation.

They have no power or authority over women except in the context of conjugal relationship. That relationship itself is established and dissolved with the consent of the female party, and should be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect, consultation and conciliation. The man is in charge of the family, but that amounts only to responsibility for financial maintenance and authority for direction and discipline exercised in a reasonable manner. Both spouses should share in the management of family affairs, and have equal authority over their sons and daughters.

Public life is no stage where men alone can play. There is no segregation of sexes in public domains which call for joint efforts. Thus both men and women are supposed to participate in congregational prayers. The Prophet, (peace be

upon him) is reported to have said: "Don't stop women from going to mosques at night". A son of Abdullah bin Umar, on hearing this statement, said to his father: "We would not allow women to go out of the house at night for fear of any abuses". Ibn-Umar reprimanded his son: "I say the Prophet (peace be upon him) said so, and you still say you won't allow it". (Muslim).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the Prophet's directive is for women to go out publicly to frequent mosques even at night, and to attend and offer Eid prayers. It is also recognised that pilgrimage (Haj), despite its displacements and thick crowds, is a function performed in common by men and women. Some over-scrupulous Muslim rulers endeavoured to introduce some modification in this respect with a view of segregating men and women in the Tawaf (going round the holy Kabah). But scholars who upheld the Sunna and favour strict adherence to Tradition, opposed any change in the practice current in the Prophet's own times. Consequently, the traditional practice of Tawaf in common remained established and the change fell through. That was when Muhammad bin Hisham, the governor of Mecca, stopped ladies performing tawaf alongside men. Ata, the famous scholar of tradition objected: "How do you stop them when the Prophet's own wives did Tawaf of Kaba alongside men?" The practice had continued without any change even after the introduction of the restrictive regime imposed on the Prophet's wives, although they used to steer clear of the men around them, while all other women used to mix with men and huddle to touch and kiss the Black Stone in the wall of Kabah (Bukhari). Educational assemblies, too were attended by men and women jointly.

The Prophet (peace be upon him), in teaching the Muslims, used to address men and women together even where he was giving instruction, relating to conjugal matters. Once he was lecturing Muslims after prayer about tales they would tell the morning following their conjugal activities. Abu Hurairah is quoted to have reported this as follows: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) had just finished his prayer with us, when he directly turned and asked us to keep sitting, and then asked: 'Is there amongst you any who would shut doors and draw curtains when he approaches his wife, but would later go out and tell every body how he did so and so?' all men present kept silent. Then the Prophet (peace be upon him) turned to the ladies and said: "Does any one of you openly discuss her conjugal matters with other women?" A young lady in the audience, when she heard this, knelt up on one knee and craned her neck so that the Prophet (peace be upon him) might see her and hear her speak. She said: 'Yes by God, all men discuss these matters among themselves and so do all women, too'. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Do you know whom does one doing that compare to?' 'Indeed it is like two satanic couples who meet on a high street and indulge their sexual desire in full view of the people'. (reported by Ahmed, Abu Dawwod, and Albazar).

In another mixed audience, a woman intervened during a sermon the Prophet

(peace be upon him) was delivering to a congregation of Muslims by publicly asking: "Why do you reckon most women would go to hell?". This was reported by Ibn-Umar who quoted the Prophet (peace be upon him) saying: "O women! Give alms, and beseech God excessively for his forgiveness, for I see that most of the inmates of hell will be from amongst you". Some of the ladies present in the congregation asked: "What it was that made women outnumber the male inmates of hell?". The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "Because you curse excessively and are ungrateful to your partners. I haven't seen anything so deficient in wisdom and religion". The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "The testimony of two women equals that of one man; further, she has to abstain from the prayer for days" (Meaning that limited experience and abstinence from prayer during her period may impinge on her proper conduct and judgement). (Muslim).

Separate meetings exclusively for ladies were sometimes convened, but that was for practical reasons, mostly the dominance of men, sitting close to the Prophet (peace be upon him) after prayer and the inability of women sitting behind to hear him well. Bukhari narrated, in a chapter titled, 'Is a day set aside exclusively for the education of women?', that women told the Prophet, "men have dominated us around you", the Prophet (peace be upon him) promised to give them a separate day. He would meet them on the scheduled day and deliver his lecture and instruction. It is in such a session that he once told them: "Any woman who loses three children would find it a barrier from hell". A woman said, "and what about two?" The Prophet (peace he upon him) replied, "even two". (Bukhari).

On the authority of Ibn Abbas, Bukhari stated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was on his way after delivering his Eid address and Bilal was with him. He felt that the ladies attending the congregation did not hear his lecture. He therefore went to preach to them especially and to ask them to give alms.

A woman is quite entitled to go out for any need. She may go to the market to do business or otherwise; even though this may entail someone inconveniencing her. After the Prophet's wives were curtained away and segregated, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would still permit them to go out of their houses for their needs. Sayyidah Aisha is quoted as saying that after the introduction of segregation "Saudah went out of her house to pursue some need. She was a bulky lady and anyone who knew her could easily recognise her. Umar bin Alkhatib saw her once and said, 'O Saudah you are not unrecognisable to us. Just see how you have come out?' when she heard that, she withdrew and returned. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was at that time in my (Aisha's) house for his dinner. Sauda entered and said to him, 'O Prophet of God, I went out of my house for some need and Umar said to me so and so'" Sayyedah Aisha Said, "Then revelation came from God and later, when it was over, the Prophet (peace be upon him) regained his hand and said to Sauda, 'God has permitted you to go out of your house for your needs'". (Bukhari).

The following verse of the Qur'an clearly bears out that ladies can go out of their houses: "O Prophet! tell your wives and daughters and the women of the believers to lower their outer garments on their persons. That is likely to allow them to be recognised and by consequence, not be molested, and God is most Forgiving and most kind". (Al Ahzab, 59). The occasion for the revelation of these verses of the Qur'an was the fact that some rogue individuals would inconvenience ladies in the streets of Madinah. Explaining the meaning of: "To lower their outer garments on their person", Mujahid (a famous early authority on the exegesis of the Qur'an) said, "they covered themselves with their outer garments so that it is known that they are free-born women of good social standing and no depraved person may level at them undue words or suspicions".

The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught Muslims, if they had to sit by the road, to lower their gaze as women pass by. Abu Saeed Al-khudri quoted the Prophet (peace be upon him) as saying, "try to avoid sitting by the roads and paths". The Muslims said, "O Prophet! sitting by the roads is unavoidable for us". The Prophet (peace be upon him) then said, "If you insist on sitting there, then give the highway its due". The Muslims asked, "what is that?" the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "lowering of your gaze, desisting from hurting any one, exchange of greetings, asking others to do good, and warning others off anything foul". (Muslim).

Women can engage in business and commerce. Take the case of Qailah Umm-Bani Atmar, one of the merchant ladies. She said, "I am a woman who buys and sells". (Al Isabah). Umar Ibn Al Khattab entrusted the supervision of administrative market affairs to Shaff'a bint Abdullah bin Abd Shams. Umar used to seek her counsel, pay due regard to her and hold her in high esteem. (Al-Isabah). In this regard the dialogue between Abu Al-Yasar and a woman who came to purchase dates from him, is also significant to show how women went about shopping (Trimithi).

Islam does not call for segregation between men and women. A woman may, therefore, receive the family guests, serve and entertain them. Consider the story of Ibraheem (Abraham) (peace be upon him), when he received the angels in the guise of (human) guests who told him, "We were sent to the folk of Lot". And his wife, standing by, laughed. They gave her good tidings of the birth of Isaac and after Isaac of Jacob. She said, "O woe to me, shall I bear a child when I am an old woman and this is my husband an old man? This is a strange thing?" (Hud, 70-72)

There were some elderly ladies whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to visit, regularly. He might take meals in their places and pray there, and when they fell sick he would call upon them to console them. Take, for instance, Umm-Aiman. She migrated from Mekkah to Madinah walking all the way on foot with none to keep her company and in extremely hot weather. The prophet



(peace be upon him) used to honour her with his social visits (Seerat Ibn-Hisham).

Khaulah bint Qais is another such lady. According to Al Tabrani, Ibn-Harith heard Khaula hint Qais say: "the Prophet (peace be upon him) and I took meals in the same dish". (Al-Isabah). Al-Shaffa bint Abdullah was one of the wise and prominent ladies of Madinah. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to visit her and took his mid-day nap in her house. She arranged a bed and a sheet for him to sleep in. (Al-Isabah)

Al-Shaykhan (i.e Bukhari and Muslim) give an account of Maleekah Al Ansariah on the authority of Anas who said that his grandmother Maleekah invited the Prophet to meals which she herself had prepared. The same tradition relates how the Prophet (peace be upon him) offered his prayers in their houses: Anas said, "An orphan and I would stand behind him, and the old lady behind us". (Al-Isabah)

Lubabah bint Al-Harith, it is stated, was one of the first ladies after Sayyedah Khadijah, to embrace Islam. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to visit her and take his mid-day nap in her house. Umm-Waraga was a lady that the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to visit. The Prophet (peace be upon him) allowed her to pray at home and to lead her staff, male and female, in prayer (Abu Dawoud). It was she who, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) conducted the battle of Badr, requested him to allow her to accompany him so that she might treat the patients and that perhaps God might bless her with martyrdom. (Al-Isabah). Fatimah bint Asad bin Hashim was a very pious lady. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to visit her and take his mid-day nap in her house. (Tabaqat)

Umm al Fadhl bint Al-Harith was the first woman to embrace Islam after Sayyedah Khadijah. The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to visit her and take his mid-day nap in her house. (Tabaqat). All these were women of social distinction worthy of the Prophet's consideration.

Even a bride may undertake to serve guests personally. Sahal bin S'ad Al Ansari stated that Abu Saeed invited the Prophet (peace be upon him) to his wedding feast. His bride Umm-Saeed was the one who prepared the meals and served the guests too. She put some dates in a stone vessel to soak in water. When the Prophet (peace be upon him) had finished the meal she crushed the dates with her own hand and gave the prophet (peace be upon him) to drink, as a special favour. (The Shaikhan, Bukhari and Muslim).

The practice of family visits was also common in the early period of Islam. For instance, the visits of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to Al Rabee bint Muawiz and her husband Ilyas bin Al Kabeer, were well-known. Abu Dawoud, At-Tirmizy and Ibn-Majah quoted a number of traditions on the authority of

Ibn-Aqeel. Al Rabee bint Muawiz gives a description of the Prophet's ablution. She said that the Prophet (peace be upon him) used to come to them and say, "please pour water so that I may do the ablution (wadu)". (Al-Isabah)

So far as the familiar Hijab is concerned, it refers to the special regulation pertaining to the Prophet's wives due to their status and situations. They occupied a position different from all other women, their responsibility is thereby stiffened. God has ordained that their reward as well as punishment be double that for any other woman. "O wives of the Prophet whoever of you commits a vile deed will have her punishment doubled. And that, for God, is quite easy. And whosoever of you serves God and his Prophet devoutly and acts righteously, we shall give her double reward. And we have prepared for her honourable sustenance in the hereafter". (Al-Ahzab, 30-31).

The verses of the same Sura ordained that the wives of the Prophet (peace upon him) draw a curtain (to ensure privacy in the Prophet's room which naturally attracted many visitors of all sorts), and that they dress up completely without showing any part of their bodies including face and hands to any man; though all other Muslim women were exempted from these restrictions. Thus the Qur'an goes: "O you who believe don't enter the Prophet's homes except when you are invited for a meal and don't come too early awaiting its preparation. But when you are invited, do enter (the prophet's home). When you have finished the meal, disperse, without (lingering) for familiar talk. Such behaviour used to inconvenience the Prophet who was too embarrassed shy (to ask you to disperse). But God is not embarrassed to say the truth. And when you ask the Prophet's women something ask, them from behind a curtain. This is purer for your hearts as well as for theirs. It is not proper for you to annoy the Prophet. None of you will at all marry the Prophet's wives after his death. God considers that an enormously great sin". (Al-Ahzab, 53).

The text of this commandment is evidently restricted to the Prophet's house, dialogue with his wives, and impermissibility of their remarriage after his death. The circumstances surrounding the revelation of the commandment confirm that the provisions of the commandment are so confined. An authentic tradition demonstrates that this commandment vindicated a specific suggestion advanced by Umar bin al Khattab. Sayyedah Aishah is quoted as saying that Umar bin Al Khattab asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) to confine his wives. She said, "but the Prophet (peace he upon him) did not do so. Then God sent down the verses relating to confinement". (Bukhari). Anas reported that Umar said: "My Lord granted me three wishes: I asked the Prophet (peace be upon him), 'how about adopting the spot of Prophet Ibraheem for prayer?' and later the verse, 'Adopt the spot of Ibraheem for prayer' was sent down. I said to the Prophet (peace be upon him), 'O Prophet the pious as well as the dissolute enter your house to meet your wives. How about ordering them to withdraw

themselves?' Subsequently the verses of confinement were sent down. Similarly the wives of the Prophet (peace be upon him) conspired, out of jealousy, against the Prophet (peace be upon him), and I said to them what was later sent down the verse, 'God may, if he divorced you, give him in exchange wives better than you". (Al Tahreem, 5) (Musand Al-Imam Ahmed Ibn-Hambal).

The verses may directly concern the prolonged stay of the guests who came to attend the wedding to Zainab bint Jahash. Ibn-shihab reports that Anas bin Malik gave him the following account: "When the Prophet (peace be upon him) arrived in Madinah, I was a boy of ten. And I spent 10 years serving him. None knows more than myself about the revelation related to the confinement of his wives. Ubai bin K'ab used to ask me about the Prophet's marriage to Zainab bint Jahash. The Prophet (peace be upon him), as bridegroom, invited the people in the morning to feast. Most took the meal and went away. A group of them, however, remained with the Prophet (peace be upon him) and stayed rather long. The Prophet (peace be upon him) stood up and went out. I followed him out so that they might likewise go. The Prophet (peace be upon him) walked up to the threshold of Sayyedah Aisha's room, and thought that by that time they might have left. But when he returned, with me after him, to Zainab's, that group was still sitting and had not dispersed. The Prophet (peace be upon him) returned, and again I followed, till he reached threshold of Sayyedah Aishah's room that they might go. It was only when we returned that they had just gone out. As a consequence the verses relating to confinement were revealed. A curtain was then lowered between me and the Prophet's private quarters". (Bukhari).

A further confirmation of the foregoing conclusion in respect of the scope of the confinement rule is that those women who were separated from the Prophet (peace be upon him) before consummation of marriage, were not given the title of Mothers of the Believers nor was confinement imposed on them. Some did, in fact, remarry after the Prophet's death. Take, for instance, Asma bint Al Numan. There is consensus over the fact that the Prophet (peace be upon him) did marry her; but there is some controversy about the circumstances surrounding his separation from her. Some said that she remarked, "I seek refuge in God from you". The prophet (peace be upon him) said, "You sought sure refuge and God has granted you protection from me". He, therefore, divorced her. (Al-Isabah). Another example is the case of Qeelah bint Qais whom the Prophet (peace be upon him) married in the tenth year A.H., shortly before his death, and died soon after. He did not receive her; and the marriage was not consummated. It is also said that he married her only two months before his death. It is said that he married her during the illness that led to his death. It is reported that the Prophet's instructions were that if she liked she might be confined and abstain from remarriage. Otherwise she might marry whomsoever she liked. She opted to marry Ikrimah in Hadramaut. When the news of the remarriage reached Abu Bakr, he threatened to burn their house. but Umar told him that she was not reckoned among the Mothers of the

Believers, and that the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not consummate his marriage with her, nor was she confined. (Al-Isabah).

The commandments regarding confinement were sent down in the month of Dhul-Qaidah of the fifth year of Hijrah. It did not affect the position of the generality of Muslim ladies.

Life in Islam is oriented towards God. If it allows men to come into contact with women that is indeed a test. A Muslim should make such association an opportunity for furthering the aims of worship and gratitude to God. At least he should observe the limits of what is permissible in that association. There can be no legitimacy in exploiting the relations between persons of opposite sexes as an occasion for illicit sexual enjoyment in contravention of God's commands and in deviation from the proper system for conjugal relations. There is no scope in religion for licentious sexual pleasure, which reduces man to a situation of slavery to passions, instead of to God, or to which man dedicated his time and exploits his total energies as ultimate purpose in life. There is no room for unbridled and uncontrolled passions outside the bounds of marriage.

Fornication, therefore is strictly forbidden; and as commanded by the Qur'an, no man is allowed to approach a woman with that intention. "Don't get close to fornication. it is indeed atrocious and a bad way". (Al-Isra, 32).

One should even avoid any perverse sight or touch that may excite sex. Abu Saeed Al-Khudri reported that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "No man should look at another man's private parts, nor a woman at another woman's. No man or woman shall rub skin with another in the same dress". (Abu Dawoud, At-Tirmizy, Muslim).

It is not permissible for a man and a woman not tied by marriage to seek privacy - the two of them alone hidden from the view of other people. Indeed in such a situation the temptation of sex would be dominant and would engross one's thoughts, whereas in larger company one is more likely to be oblivious of sex and preoccupied by the pursuits and affairs of the community. Ibn-Abbas says that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Keep it in mind that in the absence of a mahram (real father, real brothers, real uncles, etc. to whom a woman can not be lawfully married) no man shall be alone with a woman". (Bukhari and Muslim). Abdullah bin Amr bin Al-A'as said a number of men of the tribe of Bani Hashim came to see Asma bint Amees. In the meantime Abu Bakr Also came. She was at that time his wife. When Abu Bakr saw those people, he did not approve of their being in his house. He told the Prophet (peace be upon him) about it and said, "I did not see anything wrong", the Prophet said, "God has acquitted her of that suspicion". Then the Prophet ascended the pulpit and said, "In the absence of her man, no woman shall meet a man but in the presence of another man or two". (Muslim)

In public, however, man and woman can confer privately at a distance from others. Anas reports that a woman who was slightly abnormal said to the Prophet (peace be upon him) "O Messenger of God! I need you for something". The prophet said, "O mother of such and such, look which way you want to go, that I may arrange your need". He went with her along some path till all what she required was over. (Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawoud)

The story of Moses (peace be upon him) and the two daughters of Shuaib, as narrated by the Qur'an, is very instructive: "and when he came onto the water of Madian, he found there a group of people watering, and he found apart of them two women holding back. He said: 'what is the matter?' They said: 'we cannot water until all the shepherds leave, and our father is an old man.' He watered for them and withdrew to the shade... shortly afterwards, one of the two maidens came to him and said: 'my father calls you that he might reward you for watering for us...'. One said, 'O my father, hire him, for the best you can hire is one who is strong and trustworthy'". (Al-Qasas, 22-28)

A man should not gaze at a woman nor a woman at a man so fixedly that temptation is stimulated. Instead, whenever any such thing strikes the mind, one must desist from looking on. "Tell the believers to lower their looks and guard their private organs. This is purer for them. God is fully aware of what they are doing. And ask believing women to lower their looks and to guard their private organs...." (An Nur, 30-31)

In the traditions, Jabir bin Abdullah is reported to have said, "I asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about looking at some woman by chance, the Prophet (peace be upon him) told me to divert my looks".

The Prophet (peace be upon him) advised Ali, "O Ali, you must not gaze at a woman. You are allowed the first look but not the subsequent". But Ali's report does not mean that looking at a person of the opposite sex is absolutely forbidden. It is only when one seeks sexual pleasure or finds and relishes it. Indeed, in the model society of Islam, Muslims used to assemble freely and frequently; they were mostly acquainted with each other, men and women; they conversed and interacted intensively. But all those activities, were undertaken in a spirit of innocence and in the context of a virtuous society.

The meaning behind the prohibition of some looks at women is borne out by the correlation between such looks and sexual intercourse: "Allah decreed for every human being his unavoidable share of sexual intercourse. The eye partakes of that by looks, the tongue by speech the soul aspires and craves, and the genital organs fulfil or deny the final act". (Bukhari and Abu Dawood). Similarly Abdullah bin Abbas reports that the Prophet was riding a camel with Al-Fadhl, Abdullah's brother, behind him. A beautiful woman came to ask the Prophet about the Haj of her father. Al Fadhl began to stare at her; her beauty impressed him a lot. The Prophet (peace be upon him) having noticed this

while Al Fadhl was busy looking, put his hand behind and turned his face away from her hither and thither as she went along with them. Al Abbas said to the Prophet, "you are twisting the neck of your nephew!" The Prophet replied, "I noticed that both the boy and the girl were young; and I feared that Satan may intervene". (At-Tirmizy and Bukhari).

When assembled men and women must not be crammed in such a manner that breaths and bodies are very close to each other. If the practical exigencies demand, they may, however, get closer, as for instance during Hajj. And wherever there are men and women in homes, streets, meetings or public occasions, it is advisable that some distance between the two sexes be maintained. It is on the basis of the same principle that men and women occupy conspicuously separate rows in prayers. During the prayer, sitting or standing, people take up their position in a very compact manner; and while praying one should be completely detached from everything that may divert one from attending fully to God. The Prophet (peace be upon him) designated a door exclusively for ladies to enter and leave the mosque. Ibn-Umar reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "may we restrict this door for ladies only". (Abu Dawoud).

Similarly, on the highway, men and women must maintain some distance. Hamza bin Sayyed Al Ansari cited his father as saying that he heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) ask the ladies, "you stay apart, for you can not walk in the middle of the road; you bear to the sides of the road". "A Lady", he added, "would walk so close to the walls along the road that her clothes would touch the walls". (Abu Dawoud). The Prophet (peace be upon him) used to defer his departure so that the ladies might leave the mosque first. (Bukhair). Umm-Salama reported that when the Prophet (peace be upon him) finished with his prayer, the women would immediately get up from their places to leave, while he would remain in his place for a short while, and then would rise to go. The dress of a man or a woman should be modest. By no gesture, word or appearance should man or woman deliberately tempt the other. God says: women shall not show their adornment except what is naturally visible. They should draw their scarves on their bosoms. And they must not show their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers or the sons of their brothers or the sons of their sisters or their women slaves, or male servants uninterested in physical needs, or small children who are not sexually aware. Nor will they kick with their feet, to announce whatever is invisible of their adornment. (An-Nur, 31). "O Prophet tell your wives and your daughters and wives of the believers to lower their outer garments on their persons. That is likely to make them known, and, as a consequence, not be molested. And God is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful". (Al-Ahaab, 59).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) directed that excepting face and hands no other part of a woman's body should be exhibited. Sayyedah Aisha is said to

have reported that Asma bint Abu Bakr came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) wearing a dress made of thin cloth. The Prophet (peace be upon him) turned his face away and said to her: "when a girl matures it is not appropriate for her to show but such and such", pointing towards his face and hands. Abu Dawoud quoted this tradition, And the majority of Muslims have accepted it in practice.

Thus temptation is the basic criterion on which these rulings rest. "For women of advanced age who do not expect to be married, there is no harm if they set aside their outer garments provided they do not play up their charms. But it is better for them if they abstain from doing so. And God is All-seeing and All-knowing". (An-Nor 60). The Prophet (peace be upon him) prohibited women from passing by men after perfuming themselves. He warned women in these words: "after using scents no lady should attend Isha prayer with us" (Muslim). Abu Musa Al Ashari reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "any woman who, after perfuming herself, passes by the people so that they may find her smell, is a fallen woman". (Musnad Imam Ahmed). The Prophet (peace be upon him) warned against women who walk swinging ostentatiously and temptingly: "two categories of the inmates of hell I did not see before: a group of people holding whips resembling cow tails lashing at people, and women, half dressed and half naked, walking swingingly to all allure, with their heads like inclined humps of camels. They shall never enter Heaven nor get the inclined nor get the smell thereof, even though its smell can be felt from such and such distance". (Muslim)

Any relationship or situation which may be instrumental to temptation or illegal sexual contact between men and women, is thus not permissible. God says, "Don't approach fornication. It is indeed a vile deed and what an evil practice it is". (Al Isra 32) That is the standard which determines cases which we did not mention. Thus Islam tolerates that one may greet women or talk to them in decent and chaste language and with good intent. The Prophet used to do so. Asma bint-Yazeed reported that one day the Prophet (peace be upon him) passed through the mosque where a group of women were sitting. He greeted them by waving his hand. (At-Tirmizy). In the chapter Kitab ul-adab of his collection of traditions, Abu Dawoud gave the following account on the authority of Asma: "the Prophet (peace be upon him) passed by us and greeted us". Imam Bukhari has given a chapter in his collection of authentic traditions under the title, "Greeting Women by Men". Ibn-Hazim reported that his father cited Sahal, why so? he said, an aged lady used to send me some goods. She would take the roots of salaq (a salad) and put them in a pan, and then prepare some barley bread. After offering Juma prayer we would go and greet her and she would serve us those dishes, which gave us a lot of joy. On Fridays we always took our meal and mid-day nap after offering Juma prayer. (Bukhari)

Asma bint-Yazeed narrated that, "the Prophet (peace be upon him) passed by us, the women, and greeted us". (Al-Tirmizy)

When greeting a lady, shaking hands in a spontaneous manner may be permissible, especially if it is a customary practice in a chaste setting. One may find in Islamic texts strong admonition against touching strange women. But the word "touch" or the like is, in this context, a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

Whenever women came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) for the oath of allegiance, it is reported that he would not shake hands with them. This is obviously a reservation unique to him. It is quoted by Al Bukhari that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "I don't shake hands with women". Other reports say that the Prophet (peace be upon him) did shake hands with the ladies covering the hand with a garment. (Abu Dawoud cited that on the authority of Al Shaabi and Abdul Razzaq). Sometimes the Prophet (peace be upon him) would deputise Umar for that function (Al Tabrani).

So long as the conditions already mentioned are observed, family gatherings and joint meals, both at home or elsewhere are permissible. Abu Hurairah (may God be bless him) narrated that a man came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said, "I am completely exhausted with hunger". The Prophet (peace be upon him) sent a message to one of his wives. She told him, "by God, who sent you with the truth, I don't have anything except water". The Prophet (peace be upon him) then sent the message to another of his wives. She, too, told the same thing. It was the same with all the rest of his wives: "By God, who sent you with the truth, I don't have anything except water". "By God, who sent you with the truth, I don't have anything except water". The Prophet (peace be upon him) then said, "whosoever takes this man as his guest God will grant him mercy". An Ansari of Medina stood up and said, "O Messenger of God, I shall take him as my guest". He, then took him to his dwelling, and said to his wife, "Do you have something?" "Nothing except the meal for my children", she replied. He said to her, "you distract them with something: when our guest arrives, put out the lamp, and show him that we, too, are eating". He narrated how they all sat down and the guest took his meal. Next day when the Ansari went to the Prophet (peace be upon him) the latter said to him, "God appreciated so much the treatment you extended to your guest last night". (Muslim)

More than anybody else, it is permissible for those who are seeking each other's hand in marriage or are divorced, to see or talk to each other. Mughirah bin Shubah stated that he proposed to a woman for marriage. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told him, "Have a look at her, that some affection might develop between you two". Mughirah went to the girl's parents and told them about the Prophet's instruction. It was as if they were reluctant. The lady, who was in her private room, having overheard this, called out, "If the Prophet has ordered you to see me, then do so". Mughirah said: "I saw her and married her". (Ahmed, Ibn-Majah, At-Tirmizy, Ibn-Habban and Al-Darimi).



A case in point is the famous story of Mughith who used to go after his ex-wife Burairah through the streets of Madinah. He would try to appease her with tears flowing from his eyes in order to bring her back; but she would refuse to do so. When Burairah was set free, her husband, a negro, was a slave of Bani al Mughirah. "By God" Ibn Abbas said, "I still recall how he followed her all over the streets of Madinah with his beard bathed in tears trying to please her in vain". The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself tried to intercede but the girl declined as long as the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not order her to reconcile (At-Tirmizy).

The application of the standard of temptation depends subjectively on what a person finds in his soul - that is what he experiences by way of feeling in the case. This is naturally a function of his religious education and integrity. Objectively, it would depend on the seriousness of the affair in any association of men and women such as would distract them from thinking of sex, and partly on the innocence of the particular social context.

The juridical principle is sound: that the avenues and approaches of wrongdoing should be closed by barring acts innocent in themselves for fear of what might ensue. But over-caution may inhibit legitimate conduct on the pretext that it exposes to the risk of temptation and vice. This may lead to the distortion of the general social system of Islam which is based on the full participation of men and women in everyday life with piety and chastity. Indeed, segregation and isolation may well protect a woman from temptation, but it essentially denies her the benefits of the communal life of Muslims.

It denies and abrogates her legitimate role in the social process of cooperation in the promotion of knowledge and good work, in the mutual counselling of Muslims to do all that is beneficial and avoid all that is objectionable, in their solidarity for the maintenance of their well-being and the defence of their establishment. God says, "The believing men and women, are associates and helpers of each other. They (collaborate) to promote all that is beneficial and discourage all that is evil; to establish prayers and give alms, and to obey God and his Messenger. Those are the people whom God would grant mercy. Indeed God is Mighty and Wise". (Al-Taubah, 71)

The benefits drawn from that communal life of Muslims more than outweigh any preventive considerations in the segregation of sexes in ways not ordained or clearly implied in the formal text of the Shariah.

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### 3. WOMEN IN MUSLIM SOCIETY

The Muslims in history have experienced a significant deviation from the general ideals of life as taught by Islam. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that their loss is equally great in the area of social guidance which Islam offered regarding women. Whenever weakness creeps into the faith of Muslim men they tend to treat women oppressively and seek to exploit them. This is natural and is amply demonstrated by the fact that most of the rulings of the Qur'an regarding women were sent down as restrictions on men with a view to preventing them from transgressing against women, as is their natural disposition and their actual practice in many societies. Only a few of the Qur'anic injunctions impose restrictions on women.

We here quote some of those rulings that guarantee a fair deal for women. "When you divorce women and they fulfill the term of their Iddat, then retain them in kindness or release them in kindness. But do not retain them to prejudice them or to take undue advantage. Do not take the revelations of God as a laughing matter. Remember God's grace upon you and that which he has revealed upon you of the scripture and of wisdom to exhort you. be pious and know that God is aware of all things. When you divorce women and they fulfill their term do not prevent them from marrying their former husbands, if they agree on equitable terms. That is an admonition for him among you who believes in God and the day of judgement and God knows, but you do not know". (Al-Baqarah, 231). "O you who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will [by maliciously retaining them captive in formal marriage till death], nor to put constraint upon them to take away part of what you have given them unless they be guilty of flagrant lewdness. Consort with them in kindness for if you hate them it may happen that you hate something wherein God has placed much good". (Al-Nisa, 19). "When they have fulfilled their term, there is no blame on you if they [women] dispose of themselves in a decent and reasonable manner. And God is well aware of what you do" (Al-Baqarah, 234)

Most if not all of the verses of the Qur'an regarding oath (of abstinence from sex), divorce and Iddat (term of transition) were revealed to bring an end to the oppressive traditions and customs according to which a woman was retained in formal marital captivity and for long periods of time while her fate remained in suspense. The same is true of the verses concerning inheritance which restored rights which had been denied to her by guaranteeing her a definite share. Other verses were revealed which criticized the pessimism and dejection that used to attend a female birth and the abominable practices of female infanticide. The Qur'an says, "When any of them receives the tidings of the birth of a female his face becomes dark and he is filled with sulkiness. He keeps hiding from people because of the unfortunate news, [wondering] whether to hold on to it as a contemptible thing or just bury it in the soil. O!

what a foul judgement". (Al-Nahal, 58-59). "When the [female] buried alive will be questioned: for what fault was she murdered?" (Al-Takwir, 8-9).

There are furthermore, many traditions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) which warn menfolk against meting out an ill-treatment to women, beating or detaining them. The Prophet said, "None of you will flog his wife like a donkey and later towards the end of the day have intercourse with her". (Bukhari). He once warned: "A large number of women have come complaining about their husbands. Those husbands are not the best amongst you". (Riad Us-Saliheen). The Prophet's traditions encourage the Muslim to care for the good upbringing and education of women, and for their well-being in general: "The best of you is one who is best towards his family and I am best towards the family". (At-Tirmizy). "None but a noble man treats women in an honourable manner. And none but an ignoble treats women disgracefully". (At-Tirmizy).

Weak commitment to religion tends to cultivate unjust and hostile treatment of women. For unlike man, a woman is created and brought up gentle and delicate. Performance of her natural functions keeps her away from the toughening experience of everyday public life. Man, uncultured by religion, tends to oppress her as is common in many a human society. Men normally purposefully keep women weak, and the jealousy which they entertain in respect of women induces them to multiply the means for restraining and monopolising them. They like to dominate the property and life of the female with a view to assert their vanity and arrogance.

Male jealousy is but one aspect of masculine capricious tendencies which only godly men are immune from and which inculcated the myth that women, by nature, suffer from excessive incapacity. Men use that fantasy as an excuse to ban women from active participation in the broad spectrum of human life and to deprive them of experience and training - thereby devitalizing and debilitating them in fact, and finding reason for further ill-treatment and prejudice. These male tendencies and the appending customs and ways are manifest in many societies where male arbitrariness runs amok with no religious or human limitation.

Take, for instance, the Arab, Persian and Indian Societies. Although the message of Islam has spread in these societies from early times, the teaching and inculcation of Islamic cultural values was not coextensive with the horizontal expansion. Consequently some pre-Islamic values and prejudices have continued to persist, despite the domination of Islamic forms. In some cases there was manifest historical religious decline and a relapse to anterior social ethos and mores.

This phenomenon has sometimes occasioned an even more serious development. New or degenerate Muslim societies would sometimes, out of ignorance, attribute their un-Islamic legacy or custom to Islam itself. By

attaching an Islamic value to these practices they seek to give them legitimacy and sanctity, the values of Islam being accepted as sacred and supreme. This explains the unabated influence on the minds of many otherwise good Muslims of attitudes abhorrent to Islam, especially in the sensitive area of sex relations where passion is strong and custom is sacrosanct.

Many latterly juristic rules and stratagems have been adopted to qualify the Shariah to suit cherished customs and traditions. For instance, with a view to do this, express provisions of the Shariah are sometimes compared and contrasted, not to give relative effect to all, but to claim the abrogation of provisions purporting to extend rights, immunities or liberties to women; or to restrict their general scope almost to a vanishing point. Another tricky approach is to read liberally and broaden the scope of rules granting authority to men, while reading literally and strictly those imposing limitations on women. This discriminatory attitude of interpretation is very widespread. Yet another aspect of this tendentious jurisprudence is to generalise the provisions of the Qur'an and the Sunna that were meant to apply exclusively to the Prophet or his wives due to their unique position.

But the most popular anti-feminist argument derives from the abuse of the juristic principle that means and preliminaries assume the value of their ends and results. Thus the maximum precautionary prohibitions have to be observed to bar approaches to sexual temptation and avoid its undesired consequences. But the proper jurisprudential judgement in the absence of an express provision is to balance in consideration the risks of temptation with the positive merits of the integration of men and women in Muslim society, and not to forfeit all freedom for some necessary reserve in social intercourse.

The traditional Muslim Society, which is over-impressed by its historical decline, had developed a general preference for circumspection and cautiousness over the demands of positive pursuits. It has become unduly conservative for fear that freedom of thought would lead astray and divide the community; and that freedom of women would degenerate into licentious promiscuity - so much that the basic religious rights and duties of women have been forsaken and the fundamentals of equality and fairness in the structure of Muslim Society, as enshrined in the Shariah, have been completely overlooked.

Pseudo-religious arguments have been advanced for justifying a complete metamorphosis of the patterns of social life initiated by the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself under the guidance of the Qur'an. The most popular is the claim that the magnificent Qur'anic and Sunnic regulations had relevance for the virtuous society which prevailed during the Prophet's own life. Later however, it is argued that people have changed and corruption became the order or succeeding societies and latter days. Hence the necessity to correct this degenerative tendency by adjusting the norms of social conduct in the sense of greater circumspection. This would be a liberal manner of

interpretation that underlines the spirit and purpose rather than the letter of the law, in order to allow for a progressive application thereof. But this is not the prevailing manner of thinking among Muslims who advance conservative views on female affairs. They are normally very literal in their understanding of texts; but they tendentiously opt for an understanding that suits their prejudice. Islam is not a matter of a single rule that can be flexibly understood; it is a whole order of norms that establish the entire way of life or social structure of Islam, and is not liable to variation.

Furthermore, the claim is based on a pious but excessive overvaluation of the society of Madinah. In fact not all its members were like the rightly-guided companion of the Prophet; some elements were hypocrites or new converts not yet free of Jewish or pre-Islamic Arabic influences and manners. The very verses of the Qur'an that prescribe proper dress for ladies refer to the presence of hypocrites and rumour-mongers (Al-Ahzab 59-60). Whatever the comparative character of our present-day society the proper reform policy is to reshape it by changing its deviant ways and re-establishing Islamic social practices and institutions from the sunnah. It is not sound social policy to submit to the dominant ways of the de facto historical society and then either to forsake Islamic institutions in an attempt to save some of the ideals in that alien social context.

The thought and practice of Muslims have come lately to misrepresent most of the doctrinal and normative teachings of Islam on female affairs. The female is hardly ever religiously addressed except through the mediation of the male and as an addendum to him. In the fallen society of Muslims, women have little freedom to marry the person she likes, or to separate from a husband she loathes. Nor is she, as wife, entitled to full consultation and gracious companionship by her husband. In many cases she hardly enjoys an equal opportunity to earn and own property, or the full capacity to manage her property or to dispose thereof. All sorts of subterfuges are employed to deny her inheritance. Her role in private life has been reduced to that of a housewife chosen not for her personal merit, for she was denied the education or the opportunity to acquire merit, but for the merit of her menfolk.

In the domain of public life she is not allowed to make any original contribution to the promotion of the religious quality of life. Whenever she was allowed to work towards the material development of life that was likely to be in a context of exploitation or as mundane work with little spiritual satisfaction or significance.

The greatest injustice visited upon women, is their segregation and isolation from the general society. Sometimes the slightest aspect of her public appearance would be considered a form of obscene exhibitionism. Even her voice was bracketed in the same category. Her mere presence at a place where men are also present was considered shameful promiscuity. She was confined

to her home in a manner prescribed in Islam only as a penal sanction for an act of adultery. She was so isolated on the pretext that she might devote herself exclusively to the care of her children and the service of her husband. But how could she qualify for attending to domestic family affairs or to the rearing of children in a satisfactory manner without being herself versed through education or experience, in the moral and functional culture of the wider society?

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#### **4. THE RESURGENCE OF WOMEN**

The traditional customs and practices of the historical Muslim Society could not have endured long in the face of challenges posed by alien cultures and unconventional patterns of life. The external influences are represented mainly in the ideological inroads of western civilization which have swept the whole of Muslim World. The Cultural domination of Muslims by the West has shattered their confidence in almost the whole legacy of ideas, Islamic and traditional. Furthermore Muslims have imbibed and assimilated cultural attitudes and modes which are very liberal with regard to women. This trend of women's liberation constituted a serious temptation for the downtrodden Muslim women.

The western liberal tendency has itself been a revolt against a sickly religious tradition which maltreated women in ways which closely resembled the aberrant traditional ways of the Muslims. In early European Society women were not equated with men in humanity or religion, in fundamental rights or obligations, nor in legal capacity or social consideration. The revolt of the new European society against religion and convention was universal. It was in particular a complete departure from the absolute homogeneous and monotheist order that once prevailed under the authority of the Church. Society became secular and humanistic in its values and therefore heterogeneous and free, pursuing no single ultimate end in life and tending to nonconformism and libertarianism. Thus, politics, economics, science and arts - all became free and autonomous. Likewise the petrified traditional forms of social life relating to sex relations and conduct broke down towards promiscuity, permissiveness and sexual indulgence. Like power, pleasure, knowledge and beauty, sex almost became an object of total uninhibited devotion. As a consequence the woman, once again, began to lose her primacy and autonomy as a human being, to become an object for physical pleasure and commercial promotion. Her purpose in life became more to realize her femininity than to fulfil her humanity. She would fake her natural physical aspect by all sorts of artificiality and cosmetic treatment or surgery: and waste her energy, wealth and time simply to maximize her seductiveness in the eyes of men. She would dress up, adorn herself and go out simply to attract, charm and excite, by her tempting nudity, beautiful form, sweet scent, delightful colours and sex appeal. This she would do to invite the fixed attention of men, to entice some to seek her privacy. Similarly the man, when overcome by the wanton pursuit of carnal pleasure would relate to women only as male, and would affect looks and conduct simply to attract them. He might waste all energy and wealth in satisfaction of his base desires. The privacy of sex is thereby shattered in society, matrimonial relations are subverted and the institution of family is undermined as the special stable milieu for nursing, rearing, and educating the child.

This way of life has become universal in the West; but some aspects of it have swept over most of the modern sectors of our Islamic societies, just as much as economic materialism and political secularism have spread to break some Muslims loose of their solid religious moorings and thereby to weaken the norms of social control in their life. This was brought about by the dominance of western culture and the debility of the Muslim society that has become prone to adulteration and blind imitation.

On the other hand, economic and social developments in Muslim lands have precipitated the destruction of the old social order. That order, with all its conventions and traditions was rooted in the past and could not withstand the change of circumstances. Neither man nor woman was holding on to the values of the past consciously, it was merely a legacy received from historical custom giving way to practices and developments of new times. Religion was hardly present in people's minds, and then only as a cultural value to sanctify custom. Anyway, religious values were waning as religious institutions which used to promote them date and die away.

As consciousness of the growing economic needs spread in the impoverished society of Muslims, and as they became less resistant to material temptation and more deprived of the close social ties of economic solidarity, the strong pressures for a better life swept away the reservations of the past. Fathers and husbands came to encourage daughters and spouses to go out, not in pursuit of knowledge or good works, but to earn a living and supplement the family income. Women took advantage of this new-found experience and power to assert their freedom from the vanity and authority of men. This was not so much a full choice of a new and better way of life, but a liberation from the old order: a revolt against control and a fancy of the permissive model of the West. Furthermore, increased urbanisation brought more people into a new and impersonal social context with little of the close community ties of acquaintance, kinship and solidarity, that used to cultivate regard for the norms of public decency or for family honour, and that was a deterrent to acts of indecency and ignominy. The crowded urban conditions brought about much more direct contact and, as a result, many occasions for temptation between men and women. The old-time institution of 'harem', the barrier of female privacy, was dismantled for practical considerations, with no compensating development of personal piety or moral barriers. The new urban attitude was one of indifference and emancipation. in lieu of the considerate, reserved attitude of before. Under the impact of cultural change and alien domination, the traditional society of Muslims is falling apart. No lamentations by conservatives over the changing times or tenacious clinging to the past would save much. The fate of the traditional way of Muslims would not be different from that of the European old orders when its theoretical and material foundations collapsed and new social values and structures were ushered in by the revolution. If conservatives hold on to rigid customary forms of the past and fail to direct the process of change according to Islamic guidance, the



change will come to pass all the same; and even faster and more tragic than in the case of Europe, if only because the European example has become so compelling.

A revolution against the condition of women in the traditional Muslim societies is inevitable. The Islamists are urged by their own ideals to reform the traditional society and to close the gap between the fallen historical reality and the desired model of ideal Islam. This is even more urgent with respect to the present state of women. Contemporary social trends in an ever closer world require an early initiative to take the direction of change in hand before it takes its free course, when the alien trends take root and are assimilated, and it becomes too late to undertake right-guided Islamic reform. The Islamists should beware of an attitude that seeks refuge from the invading liberating western culture in the indigenous past as a lesser evil that should be preserved with some accommodation. Conservation is a wasted effort. The Islamists are worthy of the leadership of the movement of women's liberation from the traditional quagmire of historical Islam, and that of their resurgence towards the heights of ideal Islam. They should not leave their society at the mercy of the advocates of westernization who exploit the urgency of reform to deform society and lead it astray. The teachings of their own religion call upon Islamists to be the right-guided leaders for the salvation of men and women, emancipating them from the shackles of history and convention, and steering their life clear of the aberrations of mutative change.

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