



Encyclopaedia  
of  
**Islam**

Dr. (Mufti) M. Mukarram Ahmed

**ENCYCLOPAEDIA  
OF  
ISLAM**

# **ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF ISLAM**

**Vol. 14  
Women in Islam**

*Editor-in-Chief*

**Dr. (Mufti) M. Mukarram Ahmed**

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# **WOMEN IN ISLAM**

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## PREFACE

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**I**slam stands for peace—peace for all, not for the Muslims, alone. In fact, Islam, when defined, incorporates in its fold, safety and security for the whole mankind. Holy Quran, the divine scripture addresses all humanbeings, not only the Muslims. Prophet of Islam, Hadrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) is known as the benefactor of mankind. Thus, Islam's message is for the whole universe and Allah (God) is the Lord of all the worlds. Islam is universal in its nature, essence, belief, philosophy, ideology approach and practice.

Surprisingly, Islam—despite being the most progressive, logical and scientific religion, on this planet—is also the most misunderstood religion. This confusion about Islam has recently increased, due to certain eventual reasons. Militant struggles by groups of staunch followers of Islam, against oppressive regimes in their respective lands—Palestine, Iraq, Russia, China, Philippines and an ongoing conflict in Sudan, to name a few—and to top all of these, the attack on World Trade Centre of New York, and inspite of subsequent fall of the Taliban, the still existing resistance in Afghanistan—have collectively contributed in deteriorating the situation, further. But, there is always a blessing in disguise. Resultantly, the said misunderstandings have instantly diverted the minds of people towards it and resulted into a deep interest in knowing Islam. Now, more and more people want to know about Islam, the religion, which has once again stirred the world community. Islam however, from its early days, advocates non-violence, peace and fraternity, but ironically, today it has been made known merely for militancy and terrorism. Islam which, on the very first day had raised the banner of reasoning and enlightenment in a

dark age, on the one hand and humanity, equality and fundamental rights on the other, is today termed as an orthodox and autocratic faith. But, again, it has increased the anxiety and quest for awareness about this wonderful religion, among educated people, from all walks of life, the world over, in general and the West in particular.

Ironically, one prefers to ignore millions of Muslims, living in harmonious and peaceful (multi-racial) societies like India, Malaysia, Lebanon, South Africa and Mauritius and on the contrary, he or she loves to frequently talk about Muslim militant forces at war with various regimes. They symbolise Islam with dogmatism and terrorism.

The need of the hour is to correct the situation and to eradicate this feeling and tendency, prevailing all over and to depict the true picture of Islam. Hence, this bold and courageous endeavour, to bind the whole world of Islam in the form of a series, spanning over 101 books and titled as Encyclopaedia of Islam. This study also explores the relevance of Islam in the contemporary world.

One may believe it or not, today Islam is the fastest developing religion, which is spreading—through voluntary preaching and invitation—in the whole world and in West, including USA at a faster pace, than ever. Over the past few years, the popularity of Holy Quran and other authentic Islamic books has touched new heights. Islam is perhaps seen as the last bastion of spirituality, morality tradition and religious values, leading to real salvation.

For a comprehensive study of Islam, one intelligent reader requires exclusive, authentic and exhaustive books to satisfy their urge, answer their quest and convince them on all counts. This voluminous study is aimed at the same goal. These 101 books are in fact a grand treasure of knowledge and awareness about Islam and as well as a window, leading to Islamic wisdom. Further, it ascertains the honourable status of Islam as a perfect social and political system in the new world order.

No doubt, interpretations and explanations are essential for making any subject comprehensive for the readers—students and scholars alike. But original sources always form the best material to quench the thirst of a seeker of knowledge and convince a questioning brain.

That's why, the Compilers and Editors of these volumes have banked upon the scriptures, original interpretations and old authentic classics. We have simply reproduced the authenticated texts, with introductory and linking notes and paragraphs, in order to make the text-matter easier to understand. We have not tempered with any material, it is either reproduced or presented in compact form. That's all. To support the matter, authentic extracts have been taken from Holy Quran and certified Traditions only. All efforts for maintaining utmost objectivity, have been made. In order to evade any possible controversy, all disputed matters have been avoided.

The honest intention of the Editors and Compilers is focused on projecting Islam in totality and in nutshell—bringing the whole world of Islam in the fold of one voluminous book. Peculiarly, every volume of this vast study is a comprehensive book in itself and covers a particular aspect or dimension of Islam. To make it straight, all the 101 volume make one exhaustive huge book on one hand and each volume is a separate book on the other. Hopefully, this research-based work would fill the vacuum, for a book of knowledge on Islam and prove to be a source of information and reference for all scholars, researchers and general readers, coming from amongst the Muslims, Non-Muslims, orientalist and of course those Western scholars and researchers, who may require a good source in an international language. For knowing Islam in totality and for discovering the treasures of Islamic wisdom and knowledge, they may easily refer to this multi-volume.

—Editors

# ONE

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## HISTORICAL BACKDROP

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### THE BACKGROUND

First of all, prior to studying about the status of women in Islamic society and before dealing with the position of women under Islam, it would be well to examine how the question of women's rights and their claim for complete equality with men came to the forefront in modern times and what the underlying causes were which added strength to women's claim for freedom and equality. Such an analysis is called for in order to ascertain how far women's movement in modern history flourished out of a scientific and rational understanding of their powers, faculties and social functions and how far it represented merely a blind revolt against tradition, custom and artificial social restrictions and was prompted by desires untinged with altruism. It is necessary to make a dispassionate search for rational as well as non-rational factors in the modern women's movement, because otherwise our conclusions are likely to reflect the partisan spirit of one or the other side in the bitter controversy that has raged over women's demands.

An American writer, Mary R. Beard, sums up three divergent viewpoints on the subject of women's place in society in her book, *Woman as Force in History*. She says:

One is the view that 'the women's problem,' a definition inspecting woman's place in society satisfactory to herself, can only be solved by complete equality with men, and that this equality can only be established under Communism. A second view is that woman must find her greatest happiness and contribute most to the state by limiting her ambitions to domesticity and still more narrowly to child-bearing, in order that the population rate may be high enough to keep a given nation secure against crowded societies on its borders, and strong enough within for aggressive action when desired against neighbours or more distant communities; this is the ideology of Fascism. The third view is that woman must have the right to choose her way of life even to the point of self centered interests; this is one among the ideologies of democracy.

Let us now see the actual historical circumstances which gave birth to these three viewpoints on the subject of women's place in society. We shall first deal with the democratic viewpoint which is historically prior to the ideology of fascism and communism.

The eighteenth century was a period of great social and intellectual unrest in Europe. The rising intelligentsia, and the middle classes of Western countries found themselves encumbered with a host of social barriers, economic restrictions and intellectual fetters which were blocking the path of progress in every direction. They were legacies of an age of feudalism which was already past. The feudal landlords, the Catholic Church with its vast power over men's bodies and souls and the Pope, headed the Church organisation, had a vested interest in perpetuating age-old customs and artificial social restrictions which the new spirit was seeking to break through. In these circumstances, it was not unnatural that, for the rising bourgeoisie of European countries, freedom and liberty should acquire a sanctity out of all proportion to their importance in the total scheme of human values. Thus, in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, liberty and freedom became exclusive sovereign values. The importance of all other ideals was lost sight of and the complementary values of order, discipline and responsibility, without which there could be no real liberty, were ignored and brushed aside as of no moment in the lives

of-nations. History bears witness to the fact that when some powerful idea takes root in a civilisation, it permeates every sphere of human life and activity. The same thing happened with the notion of liberty which, extending from the domain of politics, invaded the social sphere and expressed itself in a demand for the readjustment of sex relations. Powerful voices were raised on behalf of the rights of the female sex which had long suffered from innumerable legal and social disabilities. Freedom and equality of, the sexes became accepted principles with the new social reformers.

In France, which was the centre of all revolutionary ideas, the Romantic school of literature and poetry first made an organised drive to popularise the ideal of sex equality. George Sand, who headed this school, was a woman of loose sexual morality. She proved unfaithful to her husband who was driven to separation. Thereafter she led the life of a libertine forming promiscuous sexual relations with a number of men, among whom was Alfred Musse, a French poet of some renown. In her novels, *Lelia and Jacques*, she severely criticised the institution of marriage and advocated free love. George Sand was followed by another group of poets, novelists and dramatists among whom Alexander Dumas and Alfred Naquet stand out as the most prominent. These writers laid emphasis on the natural birthright of men and women to indulge in free sexual relations without the encumbrances of marriage. Mention must also be made of Mary Wollstencraft who wrote her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, in 1702. She reflected a more rational outlook which was coloured more, by the altruistic desire to serve the cause of women than open the floodgates of license. In this pioneer work she protested against the unjust and unequal treatment of women and condemned the whole system of law and custom that governed the relations of men and women. Her influence on the women's movement in France was deep and widespread. These tendencies were reinforced by the Neo-Malthusian movement in England and France which sought to limit the growth of population by popularising the use of contraceptives. The Industrial Revolution in England, by throwing upon the crowded cities a vast army of peasants and rural craftsmen, unable to support their families, further accentuated this process and brought women into the economic field for the first time in history. The radicals and

philanthropists of the 'fifties and 'sixties like Robert Owen, Ruskin, Bentham, and John Stuart Mill gave further impetus to the women's movement. In 1861 Mill wrote his famous book *Subjection of Women* in which he argued, with great precision and logic that the subjection of women was the product of age-long custom and did not testify to any inherent inferiority in the female sex. Mill contended that the distinctions between men and women which went to show the inferiority of women in the domains of mental and intellectual productions; were not natural but artificial, that is, a product of subjecting environment. The education and external circumstances in which women were being brought up were, according to him, responsible for their seeming inferiority; all other talk of her innate inferiority, he pointed out, was logical perversion and psychological misunderstanding. Under the stress of these social changes and intellectual movements, family ties loosened and domesticity lost its importance for women who were forced into the economic field by circumstances beyond their control. The ideal of sex equality came nearer, fulfilment than ever, though in ways which boded ill for the happiness, of individuals and the moral health of the community. In the Great War of 1914, a vast majority of the male population in European countries had to join the war services and many of non-military occupations, hitherto regarded as the closed preserve of the male sex, were thrown open to women who became more and more convinced of their ability to compete, with men on equal terms in all fields of life.

In 1941 when America entered the Second World War, millions of American women were taken into the armed forces, placed in uniform, disciplined by officers of their own sex working under naval and military authorities, accorded official ranking and honoured with decorations for bravery under fire; to relieve men for fighting, thousands of uniformed women worked as secretaries, clerks and officials. With skill and courage, women served as doctors and nurses in the battle areas and in war hospitals at home; and many were killed at the fronts while working near or under fire. In all the drives to raise money in aid of the armed services, American women assumed leadership and served in the ranks. They laboured to uphold the morale of the services at home and abroad. They toured the war areas and fronts as entertainers of the men under arms. They entered the war-

production plants by millions and made possible the output of munitions and other war supplies on a scale that astounded the whole industrial world.

At the end of the war, American men and women alike in general hoped for a return to civilian life, and this meant a heated debate over public policies to be adopted with regard to 'equality of rights' in the distribution of employments, in the competition for places and rewards in economy and society. The old debate over women's place in society was reopened with added intensity. When in 1944 the War Department of United States issued its booklets for the education of soldiers at round table forums, it included one manual to invite a pointed argument: 'Do you want your wife to work after the war?' In this discussion one side argued that times have changed, that it is good and fitting for women to work that they are competent in any kind of job, hanker after economic independence, and are likely to hang on to a cash nexus for dear life. On the other side were those who argued that woman's place is in the home that her function is child-bearing and rearing and that men will not stand her competition with returned veterans.

So far we have examined the circumstances in which the democratic ideal of equality of sexes arose and gathered strength. Now let us turn to the Communist ideal. The leader of Communism in Russia, V.I. Lenin was ably supported and encouraged throughout his period of struggle by his wife, Krupskaya. When Lenin climbed to power in Russia, Krupskaya who had been a zealous champion of sex equality, helped to drive home, the issue of women's rights as one of the basic issues of the, revolution.

Lenin and his wife both knew very well that the Communist movement could have little prospect of success without the active support of women. And to win their full support, recognition of their right to full participation in the Communist regime was immediately given. In a speech delivered in September 1919 at the Fourth Moscow City Conference, Lenin declared: "The Soviet Government has applied democracy to a greater extent than any other country, by the fact that in its laws not the slightest hint for any inferiority of women is left. I repeat, not a single state and no democratic legislation has done even

half of what the Soviet Government did for women in the very first months of its existence.' In a conversation with Klara Zelkin, a prominent German socialist Lenin elaborated the doctrine that 'real freedom for women is possible only through Communism.' Women must appreciate this and throw their energy into the Bolshevik Revolution/ he insisted. 'The Communist women's movement must itself be a mass movement, a part of the general mass movement. There can be no real mass movement without women. Unless millions of women are with us we cannot exercise the proletarian dictatorship, cannot construct on Communist lines. We must find out our way to them, we must study and try to find that way.' In Krupskaya's introduction to a Pamphlet by Lenin on Women and Society, the double power of women's revolutionary agitation and the Communist theory of its underlying importance were brought out. Krupskaya wrote, 'Ever since the beginning, of the Soviet rule, equal rights for women have been an object of interest, not only for women but for men as well.' As a result of these ideas, which impressed themselves on youthful minds, Russian women in great numbers agitated and organised at home and abroad for the realisation of their objects. They secured positions in Russia with the secret police and both judged and punished opponents of the Communist Party. After German troops invaded Russia, women who were not members of the Communist Party rushed like members of the party to defend their country. The Russian women, Communists as well as non-Communists, engaged in all phases of armed combat with the foe.

Like the Russian Soviet Revolution, the Fascist Revolution in Italy, Germany and Spain was also confronted with the necessity of winning women's support and their active cooperation in the struggle for Fascist ascendancy. The Fascist attitude to women was explained by Professor Maria Castellani in a volume on Italian Women, *Past and Present*, in which she said, 'Fascism recognises women as a part of the life-force of the country, laying down a division of duties between the two sexes, without putting obstacles in the way of those women who by their intellectual gifts can reach the highest positions.' Adolf Hitler, leader of the German Nazis, formulated the attitude of his movement towards women in a speech at Nuremburg on 15 September 1934, when he said, 'Woman has her battlefield. With each child that she

brings to the nations, she fights her fights for the nation.' Such women as Sophie Rogge-Boemer, who called for the military training of women, were suppressed by Hitler and Goebbels in favour of women who devoted their strength and interest to child-bearing. Young women in large numbers responded enthusiastically to indoctrination on this point and entered the numerous maternity homes founded by the Nazis.

We have seen how the Democratic, Communist and Fascist viewpoints about the rights of women and their place in society were in part moulded by certain historical conditions and in part by political expediency designed to secure a larger following by enlisting the support of women. As far as the democratic viewpoint is concerned, it was free from the taint of political expediency but there was present in it from the very beginning a negative urge to sweep away age-long restrictions. Democracy failed, as in other fields, to develop a positive doctrine of women's rights and duties and continued itself to the removal of old abuses.

In contrast with the above-mentioned attitudes towards the problem of sex relations, Islamic teachings in regard to the position of women can be traced to neither of the sources. There was no political necessity for the Prophet of Islam to gain the favour of the fair sex, because the social conditions of Arabia were such that women's influence on the larger affairs of life was bound to be negligible. Nor was the Prophet of Islam confronted by the necessity of enlisting women for fighting a national war of defence or aggression against foreign countries. Therefore unlike Hitler and Mussolini, he had no motive to define women's rights and duties with an eye on the requirements of military defence or aggression. Again, in contrast to democracy, which was the outcome of a negative urge, to sweep away old restrictions that blocked the way to progress, Islam was more concerned with bringing some sort of discipline to a race of wild, freedom-loving Arabs who knew no respect for law and order and obeyed no central authority. The problem, therefore, for Islam was not so much the loosening of artificial bonds, as creating law, order and discipline among a people steeped in license and unacquainted with healthy social or moral restrictions. For all these reasons, Islam treated the question of sex

equality and women's rights on its own merits and defined its attitude to sex relations on the basis of human nature rightly interpreted. Islamic teachings on this subject, therefore, spring from the ultimate facts of human nature in its social context. Military necessity, political expediency or merely blind revolt against the past did not in any way affect Islam's solution of the sex problem.

The question of the relationship between man and woman and their respective rights and duties is really a part of the larger socio-economic problem of man. Its solution depends on the way in which this larger problem is dealt with by a civilisation. It is wrong, therefore, to study the question of woman's rights and her place in society in isolation from the total context of human relationships in all their aspects. Before we pass any judgment on the particular way in which a civilisation deals with the sex problem, we should consider its total approach to human existence, so as, to, enable us to view its specific solution in their larger and total setting. But for this, we shall have to define the basic attitude of a civilisation towards life in general. In the next chapter, therefore, we shall attempt to define the basic approach of Islam towards human existence, in contrast with that of the Western civilisation, because this approach has decisive bearing on the way in which Islam grappled with the problem of sex equality and the rights of women.

Because of the pressure of many forces every country of the Moslem East, as we have seen, shows some trend of change in the relationship between religion and life. The control of Islam as an iron clad system of rules and traditions is giving way to a more individual interpretation of religion. Since this new spirit of religious liberalism deeply affects the life of women, one constantly feels the desire to know the personal attitude of Moslem women toward their religion, and their share in determining the new religious thought in Islam.

The older generation as a whole in every country tends to be conservative in all religions but this is especially true of Islam. This unquestioning adherence to the literal interpretation of the teaching of their religion is especially characteristic of women in the middle and lower levels of society, regardless of age, and also of the village women of Asia. This great majority of Moslem women, who have

remained untouched by Western influence, have been little conscious of any changes in Islam, and have themselves undergone no change in their religious outlook. In fact, they constitute very often a distinct deterrent to change, opposing any deviation from established social customs, which are in their minds identified with religious sanctions. It is very often the orthodox wife or mother who maintains the rigid conservatism of the home, however lax men may become in their observance of religious customs outside the home.

The full meaning of Islam for the devoted Moslem woman is difficult for a mere outsider to understand. This is one veil of Moslem life which the Western observer cannot lift. Accustomed to a different form of religious experience, one from the West may easily draw a false conclusion regarding the relationship of Moslem women to their religion. The small number of women in the mosques in most countries — Turkey is an exception-which offers a striking contrast to the usual predominance of women in churches in the West, might be interpreted as a lack of worship of Moslem women, if one did not know that it is not the public prayers in the mosque but her private prayers at home which have primary significance for the Moslem woman. In her home the orthodox woman will pray, with her face turned towards Mecca, five times daily in the name of the Prophet to the one God, and will cherish the devout hope as a constant follower of Muhammad, that she may make the pilgrimage to the Holy City.

The keynote of the Moslem woman's religion is complete acquiescence to fate; to protest against a lack of privileges is quite foreign to her nature. Islam may have deprived her of privileges but not of responsibilities. Her primary obligation is to accept as the will of Allah, whatever is written on her forehead as her fate. This spirit of fatalism has insured the undisturbed control of Islam over the destiny of Moslem women through the centuries. Today, although the great majority of Moslem women have remained unchanged in their personal attitude toward their religion, a small minority of women has begun to question the relationship between the accepted teaching of Islam and the demands of their modern world. Education inevitably is undermining the characteristic attitude of fatalism toward religion and life. One begins to find in the different parts of the Islamic world

Moslem women expressing an independent opinion of the interpretation of Islam, in order to bring religion into accord with modern needs.

Speaking on purdah in a public address, Lady Abdul Qadir, one of the outstanding Moslem leaders of India, said: "Purdah, as observed among certain classes of Indian Mohammedans, is far beyond anything enjoined by Islam and requires modification according to the needs of the day and the rapidly changing times." Another interesting illustration of the modern approach to Islam by a Moslem woman in India is the aggressive challenge to the Ulamas, the authorities of Islam, made by Begum Habibullah, an enlightened Moslem leader in Lucknow in a newspaper article, in which she showed that the Koran does not teach educational inequality and segregation of women.

Indian women are deeply imbued with religion, but their religious devotion today does not cloud the vision of the educated minority, nor even of a larger number, so that they cannot discriminate between religious and social questions. The widespread testimony against child-marriage gathered from Indian women of all classes *bxj the Age of ass came as a great surprise Consent Commission*, doubtless to many in India and elsewhere who had not realized that there is a Growing spirit of religious freedom among Indian women. The All-India Women's Conference, representing as it does the inter-communal effort of women leaders to release social reform from the bonds of religious tradition, has repeatedly given utterance to the new religious liberalism. In India, more than in any other country of the East, women have been impelled to protest individually and collectively against social handicaps. The active promotion and support of the Child Marriage Act, and the repeated resolutions against polygamy passed by the All-India Women's Conference, are exerting a powerful force toward the freedom of Hindu and Moslem women from these and other social customs, hitherto regarded as determined by religious sanctions.

The fact that women have challenged the inviolability of these sanctions is perhaps no less important than the social reforms themselves. Some Indian leaders are especially concerned to keep their endorsement of social advance in harmony with religious teaching. In

the discussion on polygamy at a recent All-India Conference, one of the Moslem delegates explained that she favoured the abolition of polygamy, but she wished to call attention to the fact that "it was permitted by their religion only in case of strictest necessity arising, as for example, in the event of there being no issue from the first marriage."

Syria offers an interesting example of an interpretation of the social teachings of the Koran, made by a young Druse girl Nazira Zainud-Din, in her book, *As-Sufur-Weel- Hijab* (Unveiling and Veiling), which evoked much comment. This book was translated into several languages, widely circulated, and brought the author a trunkful of clippings from all over the world. The Islamic teaching concerning the veil was discussed also in an oratorical contest at the American University of Beirut by Madame Ihsan Shakir El-Kousy, to whom reference has already been made. In her address, which received the second prize, she showed that the Koran does not prescribe the veil. Thus, incidentally she justified her own presence unveiled in a large university.

These two examples, however, are not typical of the women of either Syria or Egypt as a whole but less so of Syria. There is very little evidence of any analysis of Islam and very little articulate expression on religion by women in Syria: a very small minority of Egyptian women is actively interested in the relation of religion to reform. The attitude of Madame Sharawi Pasha, to whom reference has already been made as the outstanding Moslem woman leader in Egypt, shows general conformity to the prevailing policy in Egypt as regards the promotion of social advance. She has carefully based her demands for social reform on the spirit of the Koran and has not promoted reforms which do not have Islamic sanction. For example, her claims for equality of education for girls have been based on the teaching of the Koran. She has urged a law prohibiting polygamy. Reference has been made to her very effective protest against polygamy in a public lecture at the American University in Cairo last year. But while protesting against polygamy she recognizes the exceptions for polygamy which are granted by the Koran (adultery, childlessness and incompatibility). One has the feeling that this policy

of maintaining a careful balance between Islamic teaching and social reform, which is followed by Madame Sharawi and the Feminist Union, is dictated more by political expediency than by religious conservatism.

Among the women of Palestine no deviation from the conventional attitude toward Islam is evident. Moslem women simply reflect the prevailing religious conservatism. However, the interesting feature in the situation, to which reference has already been made in another connection, is that Moslem women pay the price for this conservatism, of which the veil is the symbol, willingly and with a sense of pride; since by retaining the characteristic Islamic customs they feel that they have a certain distinction in contrast to the Zionist community. It is worth recalling the incident showing the counter-influence of Arab national feeling in reference to the veil, when the group of Arab women unveiled made a protest against Zionism. But as already explained, the veils were later resumed when the habitual spirit of conservatism reasserted itself. The great majority of Moslem women in Palestine, as elsewhere, are not aware of the new conflicting currents of thought.

The attitude of women in Iran and Iraq toward religion, as toward social advance, is one of passive acquiescence. Changes in Turkey have aroused much interest in both countries, and the Turkish method of drastic social and religious reforms has been little questioned in reference to its having an adverse effect on religion. The women of Iraq and Iran have been primarily interested in the achievement of Turkey. Very often in Iraq I heard the statement: "We need a Kamal Ataturk." In Iran the hope was frequently expressed at the time of my visit several years ago, that the Shah would follow Kamal Ataturk's example and issue an order to remove the *chaddur*. In Iran as elsewhere it was erroneously believed that unveiling in Turkey had been made compulsory. This hope has now been realized and, it is interesting to note, that the definite regulations against the *chaddur* have not apparently caused a widespread religious shock among the women of Iran. Even the conservatives are accepting the new freedom, I have been told, as they accepted the former social restrictions, in an attitude of acquiescence.

In marked contrast to the attitude of women in Iraq and Iran toward Turkey, Moslem women in India have repeatedly asked me with deep solicitude whether Turkey had cast aside Islam. "Have Turkish women lost their religion?" was the question that came alike from the student group and from conservative older women. The new freedom of Turkish women, if secured at the sacrifice of religion, would seem to Moslem women in India to have cost too high a price.

In Turkey women have regarded religious changes together with all other changes, as merely a natural part of the general transformation taking place in Turkish life. There has been remarkably little analysis of the new situation in reference to the effect on religion. During the first crucial years of change the conservatives retained the veil, which older women doubtless associated with religion. But by this time the veil has, I believe, for the great majority lost any religious significance it may have had. However, recent municipal legislation of Adana and some other cities, has doubtless brought a shock to those who still have the feeling of the relationship between the veil and Islam. But they will probably accept the enforced change philosophically, as did a conservative Turkish woman in Adana, whose comment on the new regulation was: "Well, the sin will be charged against those who issued such an order and not against us, because they are forcing us to do this against our wills." This idea that unveiling is an actual sin, is probably held by very few Turkish women today.

The viewpoint of these orthodox Turkish women can scarcely fail to be affected unconsciously by the modern atmosphere, which has become steadily more natural, even in the smaller towns of the Interior. The new type of preaching of the *hodjah* has also had its effect. As a simple Turkish woman in Talas told me several years ago, "They tell us different things about religion today. The hodjahs formerly taught that women must always be veiled and their voice never heard in public. But they say now that these things are not religion." Thus, the most orthodox women have been steadily exposed to the new idea, that social customs are not necessarily, identified with religion.

The educated Turkish woman has adopted such new ideas as a logical part of the modernization of Turkish life. Before the recent period of reform this educated minority was already progressive in

religious thinking for, as has already been mentioned in the discussion of Turkish education, the social- religious revolution in Turkey was preceded by a gradual period of preparation. Today due to many forces there is said to be a decline in the formal practices of Islam. "Many people no longer pray five times a day. Everyone is too busy," was the comment of a young Turkish business woman. A young teacher explained why comparatively few young people go to the mosques. "We must make our worship more modern to suit our modern clothes and customs. Praying without shoes and with many genuflections was a good thing in the Prophet's day but does not suit our present kind of life."

Although the private prayers of the formal type are still continued by many Moslem women in the homes and to a lesser extent in the mosque, as has always been the case among women, the turning away from the ritualistic worship by the younger generation is undoubtedly a marked present-day tendency. However, this should not, as has been said before, be interpreted merely as a trend toward irreligion, but perhaps it may indicate the genuine urge for a reform in worship, so that it may be something more than a prescribed ceremonial. "We are beginning to recognize the difference between essentials and nonessentials," a thoughtful Turkish woman said. "The religious forms and social restrictions are not suitable today. These can be changed without destroying our fundamental belief".

Another Turkish leader, talking with a Moslem woman from Jerusalem, who had expressed the belief that Turkey had sacrificed Islam, said, "We have separated religion from externals and made it personal. Religion is not a matter of clothes-the veil and the *fez*. It is not based on form but feeling. The repudiation of Islamic formalism therefore does not mean giving up Islam. The women of Palestine may be more outwardly religious in the orthodox sense of Islam but not necessarily more truly religious in the inner meaning of the term than are the women of Turkey."

In regard to this transfer of emphasis from the external to the more individual idea of religion, a young Turkish woman student in Istanbul University expressed the opinion that there is need now for a more positive interpretation of religion. "Most of the younger Turkish girls

will grow up with very little idea of Islam," she said, "since nothing positive has taken the place of the old forms, which have lost their appeal, and since very little attention these days is paid to religion." The need for a more definite constructive idea of religion is probably not as yet generally recognized by the younger generation in Turkey, which associates religion merely with a peaceful existence of quiet contemplation in the shade of mosque walls and not with an intensely active modern life.

However, a number of thoughtful Turkish leaders, both men and women, but perhaps especially women, are beginning to realize the need of a new relationship between religion and life. It is, I believe, not too much to expect that Turkish women, who have gained so much from the social and religious reforms in Turkey, may now make some special contribution to the rethinking of religious values. Their voice, and the voice of Moslem women in other countries, which have been so little heard in shaping religious thought in the past, may help to answer the crucial question in the East today, as to whether the present spirit of religious liberalism in the Moslem world will mean the disintegration of Islam or the beginning of a new era of more vital faith.

## **FUNDAMENTAL APPROACH**

Islamic attitude towards life has been defined by the Holy Quran in the following verses:

Blessed is He in Whose hands is the kingdom and He has power over all things, Who created Death and Life-that He may fry you-which of you is best in conduct.

(lxvii. 1-2)

And He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and His throne was on water that He may fry you - which of you is best in conduct.

(xi. 7)

Lo! He produceth creation, then reproduceth it that He may with justice recompense those who believe and do good works.

(x. 4)

Life, for the individual, according to the above verses is an opportunity, provided by nature, to bring out the best and most spiritual in him by being placed within a network of human relationships which constantly put him on trial in respect of his social sympathies and sense of justice towards his fellow-men. The purpose of life, therefore, is the spiritual betterment of man. Nature secures this end by placing individuals in a social situation where they may develop their altruistic self and restrain their egoistic desires. The response of the individual to the requirements of this situation is a measure of his spiritual progress and an index of his success or failure in the trial spoken of by the Holy Quran.

It is clear from the verses quoted above that Islam does not judge civilisation by its mechanical efficiency, technical progress or productive capacity. A society may achieve phenomenal success in any or all of these aspects and still remain spiritually bankrupt, if in the distribution of material wealth and the products of technical development, it betrays an insufficient regard for social justice and human equality. On the other hand, there may be civilisations lacking in material productivity, yet marked by a high sense of fellow-feeling and greater regard for human values. The test of a civilisation, from the Quranic viewpoint, lies in the harmony of relations between its component parts, whether horizontally as affecting the different national groups which inhabit its sphere of influence or vertically as, reflected in the mutual attitude of the different economic classes whose total productive efforts sustain its material existence. That is the meaning of the Quranic statement that 'God created Death and Life in order to try which, of you is best in conduct.' The primary value of civilisation, according to this attitude, lies in the moral conduct of its individuals as reflected in their beliefs, institutions and class and sex relations, etc. Here, and not in its mechanical development and technical efficiency, should be sought the criterion of its success or failure.

That social conduct in its various manifestations is the main concern of the religious spirit, has been further emphasised by the Holy Quran in the following verses:

The love of desires, of women and sons and hoarded treasures of gold and silver and well-bred horses and cattle and tilth is made to seem fair to men: this is the, provision of the life of the lower level, and Allah is He with Whom is the higher goal (of life).

Say: Shall I tell you of what, is better than these? For those who guard (against evil) are Gardens with their Lord, beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them, and pure mates and Allah's pleasure: add Allah sees His servants.

Those who say: Our Lord! surely we believe, therefore forgive us our faults and keep us from the chastisement of fire.

The patient and the truthful, and the obedient, and those who spend (benevolently) - and those who ask for forgiveness in the morning times

(iii. 13-16).

Here the Holy Quran presents two alternative ways of life. First, the-lower way, which is distinguished by the predominance of acquisitive desires, the love of sexual pleasure, the pride of family, wealth and other kinds of material acquisitions and, secondly, the life of creative social sympathies marked by the pursuit of higher ideals which call forth our powers of patience, philanthropy, and remind us of our duties to our fellow-men. The Holy Quran declares its preference for this latter way of life and holds out the prospect of a rich reward for those who follow it. Here again Islam emphasises, social values other than those which lead merely to greater abundance; of material goods without in any way ennobling and harmonising human relations.

Further evidence of this attitude towards human social existence is provided by the following statement:

Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made, because they are oppressed ... those who have been expelled from their homes without a just cause ... those who, should We

establish them in the land, will keep up prayer and pay the poor-  
due and enjoin good and forbid evil.

(xxii. 39-40)

The Holy Quran describes here the distinctive qualities of a party which comes into power as the result of a successful struggle against the forces of evil. What is significant is that we miss here any emphasis on purely physical valour, military preparedness, technical efficiency and mechanical skill — qualities which, by any test of fitness, are necessary for those who wish to come out successful in a military struggle. Instead, the virtues recommended by the Holy Quran are those which tend to, harmonise and ennoble human relations—deference to the claims of the downtrodden, humility in a state of power and success manifested in efforts to establish prayers, and an active desire to stamp out evil and injustice in all forms, at reforming zeal to encourage virtuous behaviour leading towards improved human relations. For a group engaged in a life-and-death struggle for survival, these qualities seem rather inappropriate, since a state of struggle calls for just the opposite qualities of physical valour, mechanical efficiency and technical superiority. The only explanation for this seeming paradox is that, according to the Holy Quran, the latter virtues are the necessary but secondary products of a struggle whose inspiration comes exclusively from a spiritual vision of life. The main object of human existence is the continuing improvement of human relationships. But this object requires for its successful accomplishment the secondary qualities of material strength and mechanical efficiency, etc. A civilisation which inverts this natural order and sets up material progress and technical skill, etc., as ends in themselves runs the grave risk of disintegration from within by social conflicts arising from the deteriorating relations of its component parts.

In passing judgment on Islamic teachings with regard to sex relations and the ideal of sex equality, it is necessary to keep in mind this aspect of the matter. As against Western civilisation which regards the abundance of material wealth, technical skill and mechanical efficiency as of primary importance and which subordinates, as of instrumental value and secondary importance, the ideal of social

justice and other spiritual values. Islam puts primary emphasis on just those qualities of the soul which lead to greater social harmony and prevent class conflicts. Material wealth and the human qualities which tend to increase it are not belittled by Islam. They are allowed only a rank of secondary importance. This difference in the two systems of values alters the perspective in which human and social problems are tackled respectively by Islam and Western civilisation. Islamic civilisation stands midway between ancient ascetic cultures, which negated life and matter and looked upon the things of this world as having a soul-degrading effect, and the materialistic culture of the modern West, which has turned material wealth and economic prosperity into objects of idolatrous worship. From the Islamic viewpoint, economic wealth and the qualities which help its furtherance are good only in so far as they subserve spiritual interests and make for greater social harmony. When raised to the level of primary importance, they become the agents of the devil.

#### **BEFORE THE ADVENT OF ISLAM**

Man is a combination of contradictions. He is an embodiment of virtue and evil, love and hatred, good and bad. He is, on the one hand, the best of the creation, the vicegerent of Allah on earth, the most exalted-personages, called prophets (peace be upon them), belonged to the human race. On the other hand, tyrants, like Haman, Shaddad, Pharaoh and Namrud, whose atrocities send a shiver through our bodies even today, were also born into this race. But The Almighty in His Infinite Mercy made the arrangement to reform humanity and eradicate sin and vice, and sent Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the last of the Prophets, the mercy for the worlds among mankind and vouchsafed him the Holy Quran; the complete code and constitution for our guidance. It embraces all aspects of human life.

Almighty, the Exalted, has made sexual intercourse as a means of protection and perpetuation of the human race. He has created two sexes called man and woman having irresistible charm and attraction for one another. One sex is badly in need of the other and is a source of

satisfaction for the other and vice versa. The life of one without the other is incomplete and devoid of any purpose and meaning.

This is the reason why a man as a complete man cannot do without a woman and likewise a woman, as a woman, cannot lead a peaceful and comfortable life without a man. But man is by nature rash and hasty. He has proved to be extravagant even in this respect and has transgressed the lawful limits in the satisfaction of his sexual desires. This trend is fatal for humanity and the human race.

Just as Islam does not permit man to transgress the lawful limits in other spheres, it does not allow him to deviate from a natural, balanced course in the matter of sex. A permanent moral code has, therefore, been given to us so that we may mould our lives according to it. Those who fear Allah and the Hereafter and have love and respect for His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) will be able to reform themselves by reading this book.

*Status of Women and their Degeneration* : There is no denying the fact that when Islam promulgated the rules and regulations concerning moral conduct and behaviour, people had forgotten the real purpose and significance of marriage. The peace and happiness which conjugal life gives to the husband and wife were not enjoyed by them. The mutual love and affection which brings the two souls and their two families so near and inculcates mutual love and cooperation between them, no longer existed, nor did there remain any good and wholesome influence from such marriages. Even modesty and chastity, which are the essence of marriage, were cast to the winds. Only the custom existed, but the real spirit and purpose of marriage did not exist.

In every part of the world woman was subjected to unbearable tortures by man, who treated this weak and delicate creature like a beast of the jungle. Women were purchased and sold like cattle and household goods. Men did not hesitate to beat women to satisfy their lust. They were even compelled to prostitution. So these wretched creatures not only satisfied the lust of their husbands, but earned for their husbands through nefarious trafficking.

Before the advent of Islam woman was considered a creature between human and beast whose main function was to bear children and to serve man. Due to this very reason, the birth of female babies was considered to be disgraceful and to bury them alive at their very birth was taken as a laudable action. The information which is gleaned from the pages of the Holy Quran about this evil practice of the days of Ignorance is pathetic and heart-rending.

*Effect of the Birth of a Female Child* : The Holy Quran explains how the news of the birth of a female child affected the feelings and sentiments of a father:

When if one of them receiveth tidings of the birth of a female, his face remaineth darkened and he is wroth inwardly. He hideth himself from the folk because of the evil of that whereof he hath had tidings, (asking himself): Shall he keep it in contempt, or bury it beneath the dust.

(16:58-59)

The Holy Quran has alluded to this incident at another place:

And if one of them hath tidings of that which he likeneth to the Beneficent One, his countenance becometh black and he is full of inward rage.

(43:17)

The Holy Quran refers to the idiosyncrasies of the people of the Days of Ignorance. On the one hand, those people called the angels the daughters of God in other words, they believed in female deities, and on the other hand, they could not bear the disgrace of being called the fathers of daughters. The Holy Quran points out this contradiction:

Hath your Lord then distinguished you (O men of Mecca) by giving you sons, and hath chosen for Himself females from among the angels? Lo! verily you speak an awful word!

(17:40)

The Holy Quran has mentioned at another place:

And they assign unto Allah daughters. Be He glorified! And unto themselves what they desire.

(16:57)

Such were the feelings and sentiments of the people about those poor creatures in the Days of Ignorance. It is, therefore, easily comprehensible why people often killed their daughters to save themselves from disgrace. The Holy Quran says about these hard-hearted people:

And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked: For what sin she was slain.

(81:8,9)

Besides the feelings of shame and disgrace attached to the birth of daughters, people committed this heinous crime due to baseless fear of poverty. The Holy Quran ordains:

Slay not your children because of poverty-We provide for them and for you.

(6:151)

Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty, We shall provide them and for you. Lo! the slaying of them is great sin.

(17:31)

Due to these evil practices, the number of women in the Days of Ignorance decreased and heavy amount had to be paid to purchase one.

*Degeneration of Morality* : Some light is thrown on the status of women in the Days of Ignorance by the rules and regulations relating to moral conduct and behaviour which were enforced by the Holy Quran:

Force not your slave-girls to whoredom that ye may seek enjoyment of the life of the world, if they would preserve their chastity.

(24:33)

A Tradition in "Sahih Bukhari" reveals that women were mortgaged to men in the Days of Ignorance. Muhammad b. Musailama reported that when he went to Kaab b. al-Ashraf and asked him to lend corn, he said:

"Mortgage your woman to me." (The borrower): "How can we do so when you are the most handsome of Arabs?"

The above incident shows the sad plight of the women of those days. How cheap was their modesty and chastity! The custom of marriage was in vogue; but the various forms in which it existed were nothing short of adultery. It is a fact that no value was attached to the modesty and chastity of women.

*The Marriages* : It has been reported by Hadrat Aishah (Allah be pleased with her): There were four practices of marriage in the Days of Ignorance:

1. The practice which is in vogue today.
2. The husband said to his wife: 'After menstruation when you have taken a bath, go to such and such a person and have sexual intercourse with him.' The husband remained aloof from his wife till her (his wife's) pregnancy was established. Thereafter, the husband could go to his wife if he desired; but he did not generally do so, so that the child may be of a noble descent. This marriage is called 'Nikah Istabda', -that is, 'the marriage for the sake of getting seed'.
3. The third tradition of marriage was that a number of men came to a woman to have sexual intercourse with her, but their number did not exceed ten, when she became pregnant and delivered a child, she sent for all those men through a messenger after a few days. No one could refuse. When all of them were present, she would say: You used to come to me for sexual intercourse. I have delivered a child and it belongs to you. Now you should give some name to the child as you like, so the child went to the person whom the woman identified. He could not refuse to take the child.

4. There were some women who had hoisted flags. These were prostitutes. Anyone who desired could have sexual intercourse with them. When anyone of them delivered a child, a physiognomist was called, and he judged on the authority of his knowledge, as to whom the child belonged. That person could not refuse to accept the child.

When the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sent with the True Faith, he banned all such marriages of the Days of Ignorance. He allowed only that marriage which is in vogue today.

It is clear from the above that in the Days of Ignorance, the modesty and chastity of a woman had no value in the eyes of the people. The derisive attitude of the people concerning female modesty can be judged from the fact that the husbands voluntarily sent their wives to strangers to get seed (offspring) of noble descent. This was due to the wrong notion that the husband considered his wife his personal property which he had acquired on payment of dower. After the death of her husband, she was, therefore, treated as inherited property.

*Attitude of Other Communities* : The above was the treatment of the Arabs with their womenfolk in the dark Days of Ignorance. Now let us discuss the attitude of other nations towards their women. In this connection, excerpts from the book of a famous non-Muslim scholar, Gastauli Ben, are reproduced below.

The Greeks considered the woman as low creation. If a child was born to a woman in an unnatural position, they killed her. In Sparta, the unfortunate woman who could not give birth to a soldier was put to death. When a woman delivered a child, she was in the national interest, temporarily lent to serve another person to beget child from his seed (race). The Greeks did not respect their women even in their most civilized times, except at the time of circumambulation.

It has been mentioned in the Chapters 'Sermon' of the Old Testament.

He who loves God must shun woman. I found one out of one thousand men whom God loves, but there is none among the women of the world whom God loves in Rome. The husband's

attitude towards his wife was cruel. She enjoyed no share in the social activities. He had every right to claim even her life. The same was the position of the Greeks.

(Arab Civilization: 372,373)

*Law of Judaism* : It has been mentioned in the Torah, Chapter 25, Verse 5- 10:

'If two brothers live together and one of them dies childless, the wife of the deceased should not be married to a stranger, but her husband's brother should have sexual intercourse with her in privacy, treating her to be his wife and fulfil the right of being her husband's brother as the child which will be bom to her would be called the child of his deceased brother. Thus his name will not be effaced from Israel. If he refuses to act as her husband, his brother's wife should draw out shoe from her feet and spit on his face before the judges saying: "who does not care for his brother's home, deserves such treatment." His name would become notorious among Israel as being the house of one where a shoe has been drawn out.'

It has been stated in the Bible, "Woman is more bitter than death."

*Law of Hinduism* : What protection or safeguard the Hindu Law provided for female morality can be judged from the following excerpts from *Satyarath Parkash* edited by Sawami Dayanand Saraswati Ji Maharaj which are reproduced below:

'Marriage is of eight kinds: 1. Braham, 2. Dev, 3. Arish, 4. Parjapat, 5. Asur, 6. Gandharb, 7. Rakshash and 8. Paishaj. Their details are given below:

1. When the bride and bridegroom are pious and chaste and of excellent moral character and have been tied in wedlock on their mutual consent, the marriage is called Braham.
2. To give over the girl in gold ornaments to the bridegroom in a ceremonious way, is called Dev.
3. Where the parents receive some money before giving the hand of their daughter, it is called Arish.

4. Where the couple marry to promote the cause of faith is called Parjapat.
5. Arrangements of marriage after giving something to the bride and bridegroom is called Asur.
6. Irregular and haphazard meeting and contact of a man and woman by their mutual consent is called Gandharb.
7. Seizure of a girl by force or allotment is called Rakshash.
8. Forced sexual intercourse with a sleeping, drunk intoxicated or mad girl is called Paishaj.

The keeping of a common wife in a family or among a few brothers was also in vogue in the ancient times. An extract from *Manu Samriti* p. 59 is given below:

'Nayug is a custom among the Brahmans according to which, if the woman is childless, she can, with the permission of her grandfather, have sexual connection with her relatives or her husband's brothers to get offspring according to her desire.'

It has been mentioned in *Satyarth Parkash*: 'If the woman is barren (she does not become pregnant for eight years) or she gives birth to dead babies or she delivers female babies only, her husband should wait for eleven years. But so far as the woman who uses bad language is concerned, her husband must forsake her immediately and have Nayug (sexual intercourse) with another woman to get offspring.

Likewise if the husband is very cruel; the woman should leave him and get children by having sexual connection with the husband of another married woman, who will be his inheritors. When the husband is rendered impotent, he should give permission to his wife in the following words:

"O fortunate woman who desires children! Now seek another husband besides me as I am lacking in sufficient strength to produce children." Then that woman would have sexual union (Nayug) with another man; but serve her large-hearted husband. In the same way when the woman is rendered unfit to bear children due to illness, she should permit her husband to have sexual union with some widow to produce children

Many other practices of Nayug have been mentioned in this book. So much about marriages; now let us see what their views about women were.

According to the Hindu Law, luck, storm, death, hell, poison, poisonous snakes, none is more harmful than woman!

According to Manu Law, a woman should remain under the care of her parents, in youth under her husband and after him, under her sons. If she has no sons, she should remain under the care of her relatives, as no woman can lead an independent life.

Before the advent of Islam, ancient Indian history is full of incidents of non-reliance on woman. For instance, in order to level the charge of adultery against any woman, it was sufficient to say only that she remained with another man for the time during which an egg can be fried.

*Law of Christianity* : Tartaulian was the spiritual leader of the early Christians. He explains the Christian view in the following words:

"She is a gate through which Satan enters. She allured man to the forbidden tree. She is a breaker of Divine law. She spoiled man, the image of God."

A renowned Christian leader says about woman:

"An inevitable evil, an hallucination, a pleasant hardship, a domestic trouble, a destructed charm, a decorated scourge.

(Purdah, Madudi)

*Current Proverbs* : The current proverbs about women throw light on the degrading view of men towards women:

There is a Russian proverb: A horse may be good or bad, it needs beating. Similarly a woman, good or bad, cannot do without beating. There is a proverb in the Spanish: one should shun an ugly woman but one should never rely upon a beautiful face.

*Relations in Other Religions* : Before the advent of Islam, the union of husband and wife was considered as harmful for morality and spirit,

as it hampered their development. Sayyed Salman Nadwi in his famous book *Sirat-un-Nabi* Vol. VI has written:

'Before the advent of Islam, the relation between husband and wife was considered disastrous for morality and spiritual development. In India the followers of Buddha, Jain, Veda, Jog and Sadhus held the same view. In Christianity celibacy and abstinence from woman was regarded as the height of spiritualism.'

The above excerpts have been given so that the readers may know the derisive attitude of the followers of various religions towards women and female morality and chastity.

*Efforts of Islam for Amelioration* : In this dismal darkness, the resplendent sun of Islam rose and its brilliant rays illuminated every nook and corner of the world. This trampled and downtrodden humanity was accorded due respect and honour and its status was raised in society.

Extravagance and aggression were put to an end and Islam taught the lesson of a balanced systematic life. The rights were given to their rightful owners.

Islam vehemently supported the cause of the oppressed and downtrodden women, tenaciously safeguarded their honour and chastity and prohibited all acts which led to immodesty and adultery. Rules and regulations regarding the moral conduct and behaviour of husband and wife were framed and unlicensed sexual unions were banned. Islam imposed rules for the balanced and healthy satisfaction of sex and perpetuation of the human race. It enforced stability and discipline in household life and insisted on maintaining a healthy and wholesome atmosphere. Instead of being a curse, the woman is considered to be a harbinger of blessing and prosperity. Asceticism was discouraged and instead of adopting celibacy, the necessity of leading a married life was stressed.

*Determination of the Status* : It was declared in the first Quranic charter determining the rights and status of women:

"O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women."

(4:1)

In other words, man and woman are waters of the same spring. As regards 'humanity', differentiation between the two is based on a mere superstition or supposition and it has no reality.

The above verse repudiates the view that woman is not of the humankind and says that both man and women have the same origin and have been born from a single soul. They are not separate creatures and are like men. Due to this very reason they should respect each other and be proud of each other. The well known Quranic verse:

"O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct."

(49:13)

Besides other things this also alludes to the fact that in the birth of man, woman has her share. When man is not born of his own accord, what right does he possess to treat man with honour and respect and degrade woman? The human body is a compound of both man and woman; but according to medical research, it is woman who creates the major part of the human structure. It is woman who bears the burden of a child during pregnancy, then delivers, suckles and rears the child. Just think, what does man do for his child? Is it not a sheer folly on our part that we should hate the existence of a woman who gives us shape and form during pregnancy and is responsible for our existence? It is woman who reared us, trained us, enabled us to walk and speak and provided our needs at the time when we could not express. It is she who served us till the age of competency. And in spite of all this sacrifice we treat her with hatred and contempt. Woe be upon the people who entertain and express such ideas concerning woman.

The above, and other verses of the Holy Quran bear out the fact that woman is not a low creation, but she is equal to man in the matter of

respect and honour. Treating women like animals and forcing them to earn through prostitution, and adultery is shameful for men and mankind.

*Purpose of Creation* : Despite common 'human' elements between man and woman, there are some physical differences between the two sexes, which everyone knows. The real wisdom behind these differences is known to Allah only:

"Unto Allah belongeth the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. He createth what He will. He bestoweth female (offspring) upon whom He will, and bestoweth male (offspring) upon whom He will; or He mingleth them males and females, and He maketh barren whom He will. Lo! He is Knower, Powerful."

(42:49,50)

There is no reason to be wroth and to feel annoyance at the birth of a female, it is sheer folly on the part of man that he considers a blessing a curse. If these female babies should not grow up and become women and you do not marry them off, wherefrom will you get hale and hearty soldiers?

When the mother of Hadrat Maryam (Mary) (peace be upon her) vowed a vow and she gave birth to a female instead of a male, she said in deep sorrow, 'My Lord! I am delivered of a female' (3:36). It has happened against my hope. I have vowed unto thee that which is in my belly as consecrated and a female is not accepted.'

Allah heard the pathetic voice and said, "Allah knew best of what she was delivered-the male is not as the female."

(3:36)

The Almighty knows better than you, and He, the All Knowing, knows that a male cannot be like this female. The reward and blessing, the honour and prestige which this girl would bring would not be brought by a male. You thought in your own human way and thinking so felt dejected. The work which Allah proposes to take from this girl is hidden from your sight.

The world knows that the birth of Mary became a blessing and means of salvation. Mary gave birth to Christ, who preached the true Faith and delivered humanity from the doom of Hell. It is strange that the followers of Christ should consider woman as the gate through which Satan enters and as an inevitable evil.

*Prohibition of Killing* : Islam prohibited the killing of daughters, removed the unfounded fear of poverty from their hearts and inculcated the feeling of reliance on the absolute power of the Provider and Sustainer. It has been mentioned in the Holy Quran.

"Ye slay not your children because of penury - We provide for you and for them."

(6:152)

"Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty. We shall provide for them and you. Lo! the slaying of them is a great sin."

(17:31)

In the above verses, killing of children, male or female, is strictly prohibited. It is unlawful in the Shariah to kill anybody. It is a heinous crime.

Islam removed the unfounded fear of poverty from the hearts of people and stated that Allah is the sole Provider and Sustainer. Have you ever thought who provides your livelihood in penury? Whenever any soul comes, He provides for his sustenance beforehand. If there exists no provision in the Divine budget or decree, and God goes on multiplying His population, it would be inferred that it is not God, the Gracious, but a Nawab or Raja whose treasury is empty and cannot pay the salaries of people. When Allah has guaranteed sustenance to everyone, we should not consider ourselves to be the providers for our children.

"And there is not a beast in the earth but the sustenance thereof depends upon Allah."

(11:6)

*In Olden Days* : The mankind began its journey with the union of man and woman. It also spread the human race and evolved science and art, trade and industry and civilization and culture. All other relations amongst mankind are either the outcome of the union of man and woman or are the result of external causes and circumstances in the absence of which no such relations could be evolved. A neighbour loves another neighbour, a companion embraces another companion, a traveller joins another traveller; similarly a student associates with another student and a trader cooperates with another trader, because they have mutual interest. But as soon as their interests cease, they fall apart and become strangers to each other. But this is not the case with the union of man and woman. Their union is based on the natural feeling and attraction which keep them united in spite of their range of action and interest being quite separate.

A woman, no doubt, nurtures the human race with her blood and looks after the affairs of her home, but she finds it difficult to work in the field and defend herself against the enemies, for, she has no sufficient strength to do so. Her heart is the abode of only love, sympathy and sacrifice; whereas man is hard and sturdy, therefore, his duties include hunting, farming, trade and defence.

This difference of strength between man and woman has been the matter of grace and disgrace in periods of history. Man has physical power and strength; what he can do, a woman cannot do because of natural weakness, so man was considered superior and woman inferior. Hence, the countries which were well-known for their justice, character-building and grant of human rights, considered man as superior to woman.

*In Greece and Rome* : To some extent, detailed knowledge of the ancient, history of the Greeks and the Romans is available. Their culture, civilization and knowledge of science and arts considerably flourished, so much so that on their bases many cultures came into being. But in spite of all these, the place of woman was very low in their societies. They would regard her only a burden on human being. Her only purpose was to serve man in the house like a maid servant.

In spite of all their lofty ideas and rationalism, the Greeks had very ridiculous concepts about women. They used to say:

"There is a cure for burning by fire and snake-bite but there is no cure for a woman's mischief."

She had to live under the subjugation of her parents in childhood, of her husband in youth and of her children in widowhood. On the other hand the rights of her male relatives were always superior. Though the law provided her with the right of divorce but practically, it was of no avail because the act of going to court of law was considered a matter of shame and disgrace in the Greek society. No doubt Plato pleaded for the equal rights for man and woman but this was no more than a theoretical preaching and was nowhere in practice. The purpose of marriage was just political, that is, to produce strong and healthy children for the defence of the country. It was laid down in the law of Sparta that, the husbands who were not fully young or weak, should offer their young wives to healthier and stronger young men to enable them produce sturdy soldiers for the army.

The Roman Law kept the status of woman very low for a long time. The head of the family, either or husband, had full authority over his wife and children. He could turn out his wife at any time he wanted. There was no system of dowry. The father had the right to give his daughter in marriage to anybody at his sweet will. He could also break the marriage. Later on, this right was transferred to the husband who could even kill his wife if he so desired. The system of divorce was unknown for about 520 years.

In Roman society, the purpose of woman was like that of slaves. Man used to marry woman only for his own benefit. She was never considered fit for any post or even able to give evidence in any matter. She had no legal rights whatsoever; only some facilities were granted to her because of her physical weakness. Of course, the woman was given some rights by the Romans in later period, yet she was not treated equal to man.

When if one of them receiveth tidings of the birth of a female, his face remaineth darkened, and he is wroth inwardly.

(Holy Quran)

*In Europe* : In modern world, Europe claims to have given all the rights to woman. But the same woman was the victim of man a century ago and there was no law to prevent a male from tyrannizing the woman. The husband had full right over the wealth and property of his wife. There was no law of maintenance of wife. She could not sue her husband. He could even deprive his wife of her right to property.

Woman was not free to deal in any matter whatsoever. She had no right to sign any contract. She was neither allowed to spend money earned by her nor to marry a man of her choice.

Daughters were the property of their parents. Marriage was nothing but a trade because they used to sell their daughters to whomsoever they liked.

Before the advent of Christianity, man was the master of woman. There were no rules and regulations for the control of a man. Even after Christianity, woman had no equal rights.

At the time of nuptial she is asked to swear before the priest to remain obedient to her husband for whole of her life in all circumstances. She can do nothing without his permission. She has no right to own her property because it, automatically becomes the property of her husband. Thus her position is worse than a slave.

*In Arabia before Islam* : The woman was thought as a cause of disgrace and shame in ancient Arabia. The birth of a daughter would make the Arabs sorrowful and sad. They would feel pride in having sons but felt ashamed of having daughters. The Holy Quran has perfectly described their feelings in this regard.

"When one of them receiveth tidings of the birth of a female (daughter), his face remaineth darkened, and he is wroth inwardly. He hideth himself from the folk because of the evil of that whereof he hath had tidings, (asking himself): Shall he keep it in contempt or bury it beneath the dust. Verily evil is their Judgement".

(16:58-59)

The Holy Quran further depicts the feeling of the father of the Age of Ignorance in respect of the news of the birth of a daughter in these words:

"And if one of them hath tidings of that which he likeneth to the Beneficent One, his countenance becometh black and he is full of inward rage."

(43: 17)

Thus, before the advent of Islam, a large number of Arab fathers buried their newly born daughters alive in order to escape their whimsical and superstitious disgrace. Moreover, they had no feeling of kindness and love for woman, and they buried their daughters alive. A man related his own action during the days of ignorance to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) :

"I had a little daughter who loved me very much. Whenever I called her, she came running happily towards me. One day I called her, as usual she came running and then followed me. I took her to a nearby well and pushed her in. At that moment she cried, "Father, father." The Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.) was shocked to hear it and his eyes were filled with tears."

(Sunan Darimi)

It is stated that Qais bin Asim had buried alive about eight daughters during the days of Jahiliyya.

(Tafseer Ibn Kaseer)

Even if the Arabs kept their daughters alive, they deprived them of all their rights. There was no limitation for marriage. They married as many women as they liked. When Wahal Asadi (R.A.A.) embraced Islam, he had ten wives.

(Abu Daud)

Similarly Gheelan Saqfee also had ten wives at the time of his conversion to Islam.

(Tirmidhi)

Likewise, there were no restrictions on divorce, man was free to divorce his wife any time and any number of times and reunite at will.

(Mustadrak)

The wife had to serve her husband during his life-time and after his death, his heirs had full rights-over her. They were free to marry their step-mothers themselves or got her married with anyone they liked. They were also authorised to prevent her from marrying anyone. In order to misappropriate the wealth and property of the widow, they did not allow her to re-marry. If she were a minor, her marriage was delayed, so that they may marry her themselves.

Allama Abu- Bakr Jassas writes:

"It was a common practice to marry step-mothers during the days of ignorance.

(Ahkamul Quran)

Whenever, an Arab happened to be the guardian of a pretty and wealthy girl, he would himself marry her and paid no dower.

(Bukhari).

In pre-Islamic Arabia, woman had no right of inheritance. After the Battle of Uhud, the wife of Sabit bin Qais complained to the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) that her husband had been martyred and she had two daughters. But Sabit's brother had misappropriated everything. Now, how would she arrange for their marriage?"

(Abu Daud).

When Islam granted woman the right of inheritance, the Arabs were wonder struck and asked the Prophet of Islam (S.A.W.), "O Prophet of Allah! how can a woman inherit half of the property when she cannot ride a horse nor defend herself?"

(Tafseer Ibn Kaseer)

*In Modem Era* : Woman was victimised for a long time. When her agony reached its climax, the situation became very serious. The modem age brought revolution in every aspect of life and changed the

status of woman. Formerly she was slave but now she is 'free'. The Industrial Revolution in Europe helped woman achieve her 'Freedom'. She broke the chain of 'slavery', and came in the open field. The doors of employment were opened for her which helped her to revolt against man.

Woman desired freedom not for the betterment of her lot but for vengeance. She went to such an extent in this process that she herself took the place of man. She forgot the fundamental principle that woman can't take the place of man. Both are quite different in their capabilities and characteristics. Man and woman are physically and psychologically quite different from each other.

The main difference between man and woman is of sex and this difference cannot be removed by means of education, training or environment. They differ in their very nature. What a man can do, a woman cannot do it; and what a woman can do, a man cannot do. But the West accepted the equality of man and woman not because it has proved their natural differences wrong but simply because it found it the only solution for the freedom of woman from 'man's tyranny'.

It is explicitly clear that the West has created its own standard of respectability. According to this criteria, only the characteristics and strength of man have been taken into consideration and the nature of woman has been neglected. She has been invited to bring herself to that standard if she wants to be honourable in the society. In fact, she ought to have been assigned the task according to her nature and capabilities. Then, she would have not resorted to the artificial means to acquire dignified position in the society.

The Western thinkers maintain that present concept of the nature of woman is nothing but an artificial state created by man's constant tyranny. Her talents have been suppressed. Had she been free to act, she would have achieved better position even in the fields reserved for man.

As far as intellect and reasoning are concerned, it is wrong to say that man and woman are equal in these respects. They think woman would have performed her duty better if she had been free to act. But it

is also possible that she would have remained at the same position where she was before, despite her freedom to act. Hence it is false to say that she can also fulfil the responsibilities of man.

The history shows that woman had opportunities, in different periods, to struggle along with man, but she failed to achieve the status of man owing to her natural weaknesses. Besides, the modern world has provided her freedom along with man for over the last one century, but her freedom has brought no change of any sort in her feminine nature.

Another stand that Western thinkers take, is that if woman is removed from civil and social work, the advancement in the field of modernization would be reduced to fifty percent and the progress of fifty years will take one full century. This argument is absolutely false and baseless, as society is not a technical institution for the progress of one particular technique. On the contrary, it came into existence due to the association of various departments of human life. Some of these departments belong to woman also. If these departments are abolished, the whole society will suffer. Hence, evolution of society means progress of every department to achieve overall higher standard of life.

Despite all facilities, woman has not been proved as useful as expected in the assigned fields. A less qualified man has been proved more useful than a highly qualified woman. The reason is that woman wants to do the work of man but her nature does not allow her to succeed in her efforts. Her natural characteristics forbid her to follow the modern trend, This struggle has put her in such a condition that worries even the West. Now, it is a proven fact that Western way of living has failed to provide a dignified status to woman in the society, while all talk of women lib remains mere sloganeering.

*Women of Different Nations* : Let us first peep through the window pane of civilisation, and see how women were treated and what rights they had, so that we may have a better perspective of how Islam dealt with this problem. Turning to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, we come across the following:

*In Ancient India:* In ancient India subjection was a cardinal principle. 'Day and night women must be kept by their protectors in a state of dependence', says Manu. The rule of inheritance was agnatic, that descent traced through males only to the exclusion of females. She was regarded as the source of sin and moral and spiritual depravity. A wife used to call her husband: "My Lord" or even "My God", as he was regarded as her earthly god. She never ate with him. She had to follow a few yards behind him when both walked together. She was to worship her husband. She had to serve her father, be a chattel of the husband and submit to her children. A woman became a plaything for animal passion. Indians looked upon sex relations between man and woman as loathsome and evil; whether they contract legally or illegally. They used to regard a good wife as a woman whose mind, speech and body are kept in subjection, and so acquires high renown both in this world; and in the next, the same abode with her husband. So much so about India.

*In Ancient Greece:* Let us now see how the ancient Greek civilization, treated its women. The woman was forced to marry without her consent, as her consent was not regarded as a necessity. The parents made her submit to their wishes. She was supposed to accept a husband and lord, chosen by her parents, even though he were a complete stranger to her. She had to obey. The Greek women were always looked down upon as minors, and were to obey blindly their male kinsmen: that is to say, father, brother or to some extent their uncles. During the prime of Greek civilization a chaste woman was a precious thing. Greek women observed some sort of, Purdah. They had the Harimlek (women's apartment). Later on the house of a prostitute became the focus of attention of all classes of the Greek society, and all national decisions were taken under her influence. Her house became the place of worship as she represented Aphrodite: the goddess of love and beauty who betrayed her husband god and made love with three other gods. Women in Greece were of three types: (1) The prostitutes who were for men's satisfaction only. (2) The mistresses, and their main task was to look after the body and health of their lords, massaging, etc. (3) The third group was the wives whose duty was to bear and bring up children and look after them in the same way as nannies nowadays do. Their status never rose higher than that.

*In Rome:* Coming to their next door neighbours the Romans ;we find that they used to regard a wife as a babe, a minor, or award; therefore she must be looked after. She must be continuously under the protection and guardianship of her husband.

During those days if a woman married, she and her property passed into the power of her husband. Not only that, but he also exercised every right over her. When she did anything wrong it was he who had full right of passing judgement on her. He had the right of even sentencing her to death. A Roman wife was something like a purchased property of her husband's. Thus, she was like a slave acquired solely for her lord's benefit. She was not allowed to take part in any civil or public affairs: that is to say; she could not be a trustee, a witness or stand surer)' for another or even be a tutor. She was just like a piece of furniture to decorate a man's abode. When her husband died her sons or in laws especially brothers-in-law; had the legal right over her.

*In Slavonic Tribes:* If we read the history of Slavonic Tribes and go very deep we come across something very interesting about the status of their women. It suffices to read extracts of a book being published by its author Ossolineum when translated to English it becomes *The Upturned Anchor*. The extracts were published in the Fakty 76 of September 76 under the title "Jok Oni Kochali" (How they loved).

The extracts read :

"At the beginning of the 12th Century, Kosmos, the author of the Chronicle of the Czechs wrote that a hundred years earlier it was possible for Pommorian man to marry more than two wives, and it was not a Violation of the law for a man to take another man's wife."

Nearly at the same period we come across the Polish king Bolestaw Smialy (the brave) punishing the unfaithful wives whose husbands used to spend long years away from home, because those wives were not faithful to their husbands. They had committed adultery during the absence of their husbands. A German chronicler Thietmar tells us that Slavonic wives were killed after their husbands' funeral in order to share their, fate. This type of killing a wife after the death of her

husband reminds us of the Sati in India where they used to burn the wife alive together with her dead husband. Bolestaw Chroby enacted that whoever dared to seduce another man's wife he was to be taken to the market bridge and fixed to it with a nail. It is also said that Slavonic girls used to have premarital relations before they got married. It sometimes happened that a husband expelled his newly wed wife just because he found her a virgin. To preserve a woman with her honour (virginity) was regarded as a sign of the low value of the girl as nobody had wanted her before. The consequences and reactions of such a treatment of expelling a newly wed wife who was found virgin was that she used to be a prostitute; and when she gave birth to a baby girl; she generally buried her alive.

The Slavonic women were not the only ones who used to kill their daughters. We see that Prussian women killing their fatherless daughters or better still the illegitimate girls. The state of killing young girls alive made it easier for the Christian bishop to buy the girls, educate them, and using them to give chorus to Christian missionaries who used to go from place to place propagating Catholicism. Kosmos tells us also that a Czech prince, Brzetyslaw by name, used to sentence to banishment unmarried women and widows who got pregnant. He gave the following reason for his act: "None forbids them to contract legal marriage. So why on earth! do they do this thing illegally, and then they procure abortion which is worst sin of all crimes?"

*In Scandinavia:* Scandinavian women were under perpetual tutelage, regardless of their being married or otherwise. This state of affairs went on for a long period. No woman was to marry without first getting the consent of her tutor, otherwise he could use his for her property during her powers and make use lifetime if he wished so.

*In China:* The position and status of a woman in China was far worse than in any other part of the world.

Let us quote one example: One of the Chinese ladies said, "We women are given the lowest position in the human society. We must perform most of the tasks as our share in the society."

It is also said: What a pity! The woman is the most unlucky being. There is nothing in the world less inferior than a woman. Boys would stand in front of the doors as if they were gods fallen from high heavens. No father was happy when he was told that his wife gave birth to a baby girl. When a girl matured, then she hid herself in her room so that she might not look at anybody's face. And when she died nobody wept about her.

We quote the following from *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

"Unmarried women were members of their natal families, but on marriage a woman moved to the family of her husband and was afterwards subject to the authority of her husband's parents and seniors. Any property brought by the bride, apart from such items as personal ornaments, was transferred to the ownership of her husband's family. The position of a bride who became a daughter-in-law, was largely weak, and she could rely on the physical protection of her natal family, only if she could risk disfavour. In practice, however, the wife's position strengthened with time more particularly after the birth of sons and performance of mourning for her husband's seniors."

"Marriage was arranged by formal agreement between the heads of the family concerned, after negotiation usually conducted through a go-between according to the generally accepted forms."

A husband could divorce his wife on specific grounds such as adultery; provided that her parents were willing to have her back, otherwise she will go to the streets. A wife who was left by her husband might report to court asking the magistrate to look into her case.

*Women's Status in Various Religions : In Arabia:* Coming to Arabia, or better still, to Mecca, the cradle of Islam we meet with the pre-Islam Arabs burying their daughters alive.

A Jahilivya (Pre-Islamic) Arab considered a woman as an inferior creature. When man was told that his wife had given birth to a baby girl, he was really grieved. His face darkened. What was he to do then?

He ran away from people because of the shame of giving birth to a baby girl.

The Jahiliyya Arabs accepted the girl in two different ways. Many of them buried the girls alive and with them, they thought, they buried all the shame that might encounter them, had they brought up those girls. Others used to act quite differently, they brought up the girls on sufferance and contempt.

A Jalr'lyya Arab wife was inherited just like chattel. Al-Bukhari narrates that when a man died his son had every right upon his wife. One of them might marry her for himself, if he wished to; or they might marry her to anyone they desired. They might even stop her from getting married. If she wanted to get married, then she had to pay them money as her ransom.

*In Judaism:* Some of the Jewish faith regarded a woman as a much more inferior creature than her counterpart the man. Others considered her to be even lower in grade than that of the servants. She never inherited anything from her parents, if she had a brother or brothers. Her father had every right of selling her if she were under the maturity age. When a woman got married all her possessions were transferred to her husband. He used to exercise full right over her possessions during their joint life. If a Jewish wife caught her husband in bed with another woman; she was to keep silent and not complain. This was so because he had every right over her. He could do anything he liked. If a wife complained that her husband made love with her in an immoral and unnatural way, the reply was "We cannot do anything because you are his property." In Public Prayers there should be at least ten men. If it happened that there were nine men and a lot of women, no prayers were conducted because women were looked upon as nothing and were not counted. It was not encouraged to commit adultery with a Jewish woman, and was permissible with a non-Jewish. The heaviest burden for maintaining the daily requirements of the Mosaic dietary laws falls on the woman, as she is much inferior to man. She is to see that meat and other daily foods are not mixed with forbidden things. She is not to touch pickles, wine or meat soup if she hasn't been ritually cleansed.