

STATUS OF WOMEN AS SEEN FROM THE QURAN



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Chapter 1

PREFACE

Status of women in Islam has often been a subject of controversy. Among many, the image of a Muslim woman is viewed as one under oppression and domination of males, confined within the boundaries of her home, not having the opportunity to express herself or take part in public life.

Such misconceptions are due to the fact that non-Muslims are seldom presented with the Qur'anic directives concerning the rights and responsibilities of women and usually their perception of Islam is based on the traditions and cultural practices of certain individuals specific within a locality, which are then stereo-typed as legitimate Islamic practices.

This grave situation results due to the fact that the Muslim world of nowadays has distanced itself from Allah's Book, and the majority of those who may identify themselves as Muslim, are themselves unaware of its contents, and instead blindly follow the doctrines of the sect in which they are born into, assuming them to be consistent with the Qur'an.

It should be understood that when we say something is Islamic, then what exactly is the authority for that matter? Is something Islamic, just because people who may apply the label of a Muslim on them selves are practicing it?

Even a mere superficial study of the Qur'an makes it evident that the final authority for all matters of Islam lies with the Book of Allah. Whatever is confirmed by the Qur'an, is valid as Islamic practice, and what is refuted or resented by it, is not.

Hence the following article presents what is that status that the Qur'an has given to women.

The Qur'anic directives for this matter should be considered as the final authority, and opinions or actions of those who label themselves as Muslims or associate themselves with Islam should be judged in the light

of the Holy Qur'an, and should not be accepted as 'Islamic' if they are refuted or resented by the Qur'an.

Chapter 2

THE ORIGIN

The Qur'an declares that the male and the female are equal in status and utility as both have been created by Allah. Unlike the Bible, which states that Eve (woman) was created from Adam's rib (See Genesis 2:4, 3:24), the Qur'an informs us that both the male as well as the female were created out of one single source material called "Nafsin wahida".

"O Mankind! be careful of (your duty to) your Sustainer, Who created you (all humans, men as well as women) from a single Self and created from it, its complimentary pair and spread from these two, many men and women; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, by Whom you demand one of another (your rights), and (to) the ties of relationship; surely Allah ever watches over you." (4:1) "He it is Who created you (o human beings) from a single self , and made from her, her complimentary pair, that she may find peace in her.." (7:189)

Discarding the Biblical story where Eve is held responsible for Adam's temptation and expulsion from Heaven (See Genesis 2:3), the Qur'an states that both Adam (man) as well as his pair (woman) were equally tempted by Satan, both of them tasted of the forbidden fruit, both of them were equally admonished for their forgetfulness, and both repented and their repentance was accepted by their Sustainer. This is stated in the following verses of Sura Al-Araaf:

"And (We said): O Adam! Dwell you and your pair in the garden; so eat from where you desire, but do not go near this tree, for then you will be of the unjust. But the Shaitan made

an evil suggestion to both of them that he might make manifest to them what had been hidden from them of their evil inclinations, and he said: Your Sustainer has not forbidden you this tree except that you may not both become two angels or that you may (not) become of the immortals.

And he swore to them both: Most surely I am a sincere adviser to you. Then he caused them to fall by deceit; so when they (both, Adam and his pair) tasted of the tree, their evil inclinations became manifest to them, and they both began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden; and their Sustainer called out to them: Did I not forbid you both from that tree and say to you that the Shaitan is your open enemy? They said: Our Sustainer! We have been unjust to ourselves, and if Thou forgive us not, and have (not) mercy on us, we shall certainly be of the losers." (7:19-23)

Earlier in Sura Al-Baqara, it was also said that both man and woman, were tempted by Satan:

"But Shaitan made them both fall from it, and caused them to depart from that (state) in which they were.." (2:36)

Thus it is clear from the above that the Qur'an maintains that both men as well as women were created out of one source material called "Nafsin wahidatin", i.e 'A Single Self', and both man and woman were equally responsible for their expulsion from the Garden. The Qur'an does not harmonize with the view that the first woman was created from a man's rib or that she was the one who caused humankind to be expelled from Heaven.

Chapter 3

WOMEN' TREATMENT BY UNBELIEVERS

In a society which is governed by superstition, ignorance and self interest of the elite, the female gender is oppressed to the fullest extreme and she is always considered as a lowly being in comparison to men. Her rights are usurped by the influential class and she seldom has the opportunity to voice her grievances.

The Qur'an detests such a mentality which considers females to be of a lower worth than males, for we are clearly told that in the sight of God, every human child, regardless of race, gender, or social affiliation is equally honored and worthy of respect:

"And indeed We have honored every Human Child.." (17:70)

The Qur'an informs us that in a society of unbelievers, the female gender is despised and a son is preferred over a daughter. In Sura Al Nahl their mentality is identified:

"When news is brought to one of them of (the birth of) a female (child) his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain it on (sufferance and) contempt or bury it in the dust? Ah! what an evil (choice) they decide on?" (16:58-59)

In such a society, the female gender is not only despised, but she is also deprived of the nourishment that was to be meant equally for her as well as her male counterpart. The

unbelievers are identified to restrict females from the sustenance that was meant for the consumption of both the genders, on the basis of self made traditions:

"They say: "What is in the wombs of such and such cattle is specially reserved (for food) for our men and forbidden to our women; but if it is still-born then all have share therein. For their (false) attribution (of superstitions to God) He will soon punish them: for He is full of wisdom and knowledge." (6:139)

Such is the treatment imparted by the unbelievers to the feminine gender. In any society, where males are preferred over females, where females are deprived of their essential nutrition, such should be identified as a society of disbelievers in the divine values, for Allah has informed us in His Book, that the birth of a male or a female is in accordance with His laws of nature and not something to raise discrimination against:

"Allah's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; He creates what He pleases; He grants to whom He pleases daughters (in accordance with His laws) and grants to whom He pleases sons (in accordance with His laws). Or He makes them of both sorts, male and female; and He makes whom He pleases barren (in accordance with His natural laws) ; surely He is the Knowing, the Powerful." (42:49-50)

A child is born not only of a father, but also a mother, therefore it should not be subjected to any bias on account of its birth:

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." (49:13)

Now let us proceed to see what would be the status of women in a society which is governed by Quranic principles.

Chapter 4

RIGHT TO ACQUIRE EDUCATION

The Qur'an has stated that the acquisition of education is compulsory for all the believers. About the messenger it is stated that he taught the Book of Allah to his audience, which included men as well as women:

"He it is Who raised among the inhabitants of Mecca a messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His verses and provides development to their personalities, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, although they were before certainly in clear error." (62:2)

For imparting knowledge, no fee was charged:

"Say: I do not ask you any reward except that any who wills, may take the way to his Sustainer." (25:57)

In the acquisition of knowledge, women are also included, as the wives of the Nabi (S.A.W) were commanded:

"And keep to mind what is recited in your houses of the communications of Allah and the wisdom; surely Allah is Knower of subtleties, Aware." (33:34)

Thus the Qur'an has stipulated that women should also be educated and trained to know the realities of life.

Chapter 5

RIGHTS OF EXPRESSION

The Qur'an informs us that women in a Qur'anic society not only have the right to express themselves freely but she is in such a position that she may even argue and hold discussions with the head of the community.

The messenger of Allah (p) who was not only the divine emissary to his people but also the first head of the Islamic state, gave so much freedom in society that the people, including women were in a position to argue with him. The Qur'an records this in the Sura titled "Al-Mujadilah" (the title of the Sura itself means "the woman who argues"). We are informed:

"Allah indeed knows the plea of her who argues with you (O messenger) about her husband and complains to Allah, and Allah knows the contentions of both of you; surely Allah is Hearing, Seeing." (58:1)

Women are also to take an active part in public life. In Sura Al-Mumtahina we are informed of their public allegiance to the Prophet (See 60:12). Along with men, women were also included in these public discussions with the office bearers of the Islamic state: (See 60:10).

Right To Select A Life Partner

For the subject of marriage, the Qur'an has provided detailed guidance. We are told that marriage is the name of a contract between consenting adults who are believers in the divine values. It is clarified that women cannot be forced to get married and thus they have the right to express their will. The following verse tells us:

"O you who believe! You are FORBIDDEN to inherit women AGAINST THEIR WILL. Nor should you treat them with harshness that you may take away part of the dower you have given them -except where they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If you take a dislike to them it may be that you dislike a thing and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good." (4:19)

In Sura An-Nisa, the believing man is also given the permission to marry women of his choice, thus he too can exercise his free will. As reminded;

"If you fear that it will not be possible to find an equitable solution of the problems of 'Yatama' (widows and orphans in society) otherwise, then marry women of your choice among them, by twos, threes or fours (as the situation demands), but if you fear that you will not do justice, then marry only one.."(4:3)

Thus both believing women as well as men have been given the right to have a say in their marriage, i.e. women cannot be married forcefully and men also have been given the right to marry women of their choice, as the expression in Arabic reads, "fankihu maa ta'aba lakum" (4:3)

Then again in (4:21), regarding marriage it is stated that women have taken a 'meesaq' (contract) from men;

"And how could you take it when you have gone in unto each other and they (Your wives) have Taken from you a solemn covenant? <.meesaq'an ghaliza>"(4:21)

A contract or covenant ("meesaq" in Arabic) requires the free consent of both parties in agreeing to that contract.

An agreement in which a person is forced to do something against his/her will does not constitute a "meesaq". If the woman has been forced into getting married or the will of the man has been manipulated by coercion then such an agreement does not become a contract or "meesaq". Thus for a contract of marriage to come about, both parties, i.e. the man as well as the woman have to use their free will in coming to terms and agreeing to live the rest of their lives with each other. If out of these two any one is forced or does not have their free will involved then such would not constitute a "meesaq".

Chapter 6

HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONS

The main purpose of maintaining relations as a married couple is that love, compassion, and tranquility should develop between man and woman. In this way they live a life of harmony and become a source of solace to each other. The Qur'an says:

"And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion; most surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect." (30:21)

The Qur'an has used the Arabic word "Zawj" for the husband-wife pair. This is an Arabic word which means such a pair which is complimentary to each other, and with the absence of one of its halves the other gets incomplete. Therefore the husband and wife should be as such that they provide fulfillment to each other's personality and become a source of nourishment for each other.

Thus the husband-wife relationship is not that of a boss and his servant, but one of mutual companionship and comradeship. To bring about such compatibility, it is essential that man and woman have a unified outlook of life and maintain a coordinated stance for various matters.

Such a life, in which the life-partners are in harmony with each other will definitely be a life of exhilaration, and situations where people of conflicting tastes, views and ideologies are bound together, may result in kindling the fires of discontentment. That is why the Qur'an has stated that believers should

be paired with like minded persons only, as otherwise if they selected spouses from the opposing camps, then that would cause discord. Thus we are reminded:

"And do not marry 'Mushrik' (Polytheist) Women until they believe, and certainly a believing maid is better than a 'Mushrik' (Polytheist) woman, even though she should please you; and do not give (believing women) in marriage to 'Mushrik' men until they believe, and certainly a believing servant is better than a 'Mushrik' man, even though he should please you; these invite to the fire, and Allah invites to the garden and to forgiveness by His will, and makes clear His revelations to mankind, that they may be mindful." (2:221)

The Qur'an has likened the husband and wife pair as "Garments" to each other, signifying the type of relations a Believing couple maintains:

"..They (your wives) are your garments and ye are their garments.." (2:187)

Thus as nothing comes between us and our garments, then such should be the outlook that believers are to maintain towards their spouses. A garment also protects us from the variation of climate and guards our shame, similarly a couple which considers the divine values as guidance for life, should protect each other from the harmful effects of society and guard each others weaknesses. The Believers are instructed that they should treat their spouses with mercy and compassion and should not be harsh on them, even though something about their wives may seem displeasing to them:

"O you who believe! It is not lawful for you that you should inherit women forcefully. Nor should you treat them with harshness that you may take away part of the dower you have given them , unless they are guilty of manifest indecency, and treat them kindly; then if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing while Allah has placed abundant good in it." (4:19)

POLYGAMY

The Quranic laws are not meant for just one individual but they are intended to provide betterment to the whole society at large.

In a community there might emanate a situation when the relaxation of the rule of one-man, one woman as a married couple becomes a necessity in the overall interest of the society. For example, prolonged war or some natural calamity may reduce considerably the number of young men in the society thereby leaving a large number of widowed women, generally with children and un-married girls unprovided for.

These women and children must be protected and looked after in the fulfillment of their needs without the expense of lowering their dignity and honor. Establishing orphanages, old homes or even making these destitutes otherwise economically independent is no remedy to such a situation.

The problems like these are much deeper in nature and call for the support and assistance of the whole society. In view of this the Qur'an has relaxed the condition of monogamy, but it should be noted that it is for such instances only. Polygamy, is not for satisfaction of lust or ego boosting of man but it is linked with a special situation of society and that being to provide assistance to the widowed and destitute women. The following verse informs us this situation and the conditional rule linked to polygamy:

"If you fear that it will not be possible to find an equitable solution of the problems of 'Yatama' (widows and orphans in society) otherwise, then marry women of your choice among them, by twos, threes or fours (as the situation demands), but if you fear that you will not do justice, then marry only one.."(4:3)

The above verse needs our attention. It says two things.

(1) Marrying more than one wife is conditional if it is feared

that (which in Arabic means widowed and orphaned people in society, i.e. those left in isolation.) are not being provided for equitably in society.

(2) If one feels that he cannot do justice between his wives then he has to marry only one wife. Hence polygamy is in direct relation to justice and fair treatment of wives, otherwise the man is called to marry only one woman.

It should be clear that polygamy is not an obligation, but it is a marriage under special conditions and if a man is not able to do justice then he has to marry only one woman. People may argue that nowadays there may rarely be any woman who might be willing to have another woman brought as a rival into her home.

This argument may seem valid in the present pattern of life where personal interests come first, but it loses ground when a person has his ideal of life revolutionized by the Quran and which makes his or her mental outlook of life to such a way that his or her thinking becomes like that as described in the following verse:

"The Believers prefer others over themselves though they might have to undergo hardships."(59:9)

In communities marred by conflict and calamities, polygamy would be a way out to give the helpless women protection and assistance in a dignified manner. In a society where the number of men are reduced due to some reason, and there is a surplus of women of marriageable age, then would it not be gesture of mercy on that woman who has no where to go, if any man were to provide her shelter in his home and his first wife were to accommodate her new unfortunate sister?

HOURIS

One of the objections raised against Islam is that it informs us of some beautiful maidens known as "Hoor" which will be reserved for the men of paradise as objects of luxury. Quite often, the Clergy, under the influence of the literature which was compiled and authenticated in those days when true Quranic government of Muslims was overtaken by that of the despotic rule of Monarchs and Theocracy, characterizes some verses of the Qur'an where the word "Hoor" occurs, to be as such.

However, it should be understood that the Arabic word "Hoor" which occurs four times in the Qur'an is plural of "Ahwar" which is for the masculine gender and "Hawrau" which is for the feminine gender. Thus the word "Hoor" is not restricted to the female gender only, but represents both men as well as women. Its basic meaning is the whiteness of the eye (Lane's Lexicon, Qamus, Muhammad Asad: "The Message of the Qur'an")

, and also signifies a clean and pure intellect of a person, free from vile intentions. From this word also comes the word "Al-Hawariyun" which has been used in the Qur'an for the disciples of Jesus Christ (p), as they were persons having purified souls. In the Qur'an, where it is mentioned for the believers in a state of heaven:

"..and We shall pair them with companions of pure eyes.." (52:20)

Then it does not imply a relationship as a husband and wife, but simply means that in "Jannah" the believers will have companions of pure intellect, which will include, men as well as women.

Chapter 7

WHAT TYPES OF DRESS CODE IS PRESCRIBED FOR WOMEN?

Women have been identified in the Qur'an as a "zeenah" i.e. adornment and beauty for all mankind.

"Adorned for the people are the worldly pleasures, such as the women, having children, piles upon piles of gold and silver, trained horses, livestock, and crops. These are the materials of this world. A far better abode is reserved with Allah." (3:14) Since women are termed an adornment or attraction (zeenah), they are required to cover certain parts of their bodies. It should be noted that a woman being an adornment for mankind is quite evident all over the world in all societies.

The media is one example where she is quite abundantly promoted and made as an attraction in place of men. Now since women are an open attraction to mankind because of her bodily features, she is required to cover some parts of herself in public. But before we see what are the physical ingredients of her dress, let us see what Qur'an identifies as the best dress.

WHAT IS THE BEST DRESS?

"O Children of Adam ! Surely We have sent down to you a garment that would cover your shame and be a good vesture. And the garment of Piety that is the best. That is from the Ayat (Signs) of Allah that they may take reminder." (7:26)

Above verse says that the best dress is the garment of "taqwa" or piety. Before wearing any physical garment we should adorn ourselves with the garment of "taqwa" as without it we become prone to the vile intentions of satanic people. (see 7:27)

Chapter 8

INGREDIENTS OF WOMEN'S DRESS IN PUBLIC

The areas of body which are to be covered by women in public, are mentioned in 24:31. Allah informs us through His messenger:

"And say to the Believing Women, to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. And they should not display their adornment save what is apparent therefrom. And they should place their covers over their bosoms. And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their fathers or the fathers of their husbands or their sons or the sons of their husbands or their brothers or their brother's sons or sister's sons` or their women or those whom their right hands possess or Those under their authority other than skillful men or small children who are not aware of women's nakedness.

And they should not strike their feet so as to make known what they hide of their adornment. O Believers turn you all together to Allah so that you may be successful."(24:31)

From the above verse the following points are derived: 1. Women have two types of "zeenah" i.e. beauty and adornment. (a) "ma zahara minha" What is already apparent from their adornment and beauty. (b) "ma yukhfaina min zinata hunne" That which is hidden from their adornment.

2. She is to cover her whole self publicly except those areas which are apparent from her adornment. These areas are the exposed areas which if covered will restrict daily work and

have to be uncovered for performing ablution. (see 5:6). The other type of or adornment of a woman identified in the above verse is that which has been called as "ma yukhfaina min zinata hunne" That which is hidden from their adornment.

This type of adornment is the one that becomes apparent when a woman strikes her feet or walks. Allah has ordered that this type of adornment be covered at all times. Thus the dress should be loose enough so as not to reveal the shape and features of the body which get obvious when the woman strikes her feet or walks. 3. They are to place their covers or shrouds over their bosoms. In Sura 33:59 they are also ordered to bring over them their over garments while going in public:

"O Nabi! Say to your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers that they bring their over-garments nearer to themselves (while in public); this will be more proper, that they may be recognised, and thus they will not be given trouble; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful." (33:59)

In public she is to take "Jilbaab" or over garment over herself according to above verse. 4. With her bosoms covered well, and dress loose enough so as not to reveal her hidden adornment, she is to maintain this type of dress in public in front of all relations. The only exceptions are:

1. Husband
2. Fathers (Includes Grandparents as well).
3. The Fathers of their husbands.
4. Their sons.
5. The sons of their husbands.
6. Their brothers.
7. Their brother's sons.
8. Their sister's sons`.
9. Their women.
10. Those whom their right hands posses. (i.e. those who were freed from some tyrannical rule and are now under the care and guardianship of believing men and women)
11. Those under their authority other than skillful men.
12. Small children who are not aware of women's nakedness.

Chapter 9

HOW ARE BELIEVING WOMEN TO BEHAVE WITH UN-RELATED MEN?

In talking with un related men or strangers the believing women are informed about the type of behavior they should maintain. Allah informs us through the Nabi:

"O Women of the Nabi! You are not like any other of the women; If you will be on your guard, then be not soft in (your) speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease yearn; and speak a recognized utterance." (33:32) With unrelated men, a woman may engage in a conversation but it should be within the limits ordained by the divine code and should not be directed as complacent speech.

CONFINEMENT

Contrary to the claim of traditionalists, who maintain that a woman should be confined within the boundaries of her house, the Qur'an states that the confinement of women within the four walls of the house is a punishment for lewdness and obscenity. In other words, they might not have fornicated, but outwardly acted in a way or enticed men which might lead to illegal sexual acts. This is said in the following verse:

"And as for those who are guilty of an indecency from among your women, call to witnesses against them four (witnesses) from among you; then if they bear witness confine them to the houses until death takes them away or Allah opens some way for them." (4:15)

Quite often the reason for confinement is justified by misinterpreting a verse in Sura Al-Ahzaab. However this verse which is misinterpreted to justify the confinement of women within the boundaries of their homes, contains the Arabic word "qarna", which simply means 'to be joined or linked, or connected with something or someone', and plainly refers to the injunction for women in general and the wives of the Nabi in particular, to maintain a link and connection with their homes and families, such that they do not become neglectful of their domestic responsibilities and does not justify the practice of confinement.

"And be linked with your houses and do not display your finery like the displaying of the ignorance of yore; and establish Salat, and give Zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the House! and to purify you a (thorough) purifying." (33:33)

Thus according to the Holy Qur'an, confinement is not the norm for women, but a punishment for certain offences. A woman may engage in activities outside of the house, but she has to maintain a link with her home and family and should not be neglectful of the responsibilities laid down for her by the divine code.

"NIQAB" NOT MANDATORY

While identifying the parts of a woman's body which should be covered, the Qur'an also gives us evidence to refute the claim of those who associate "Niqab" (Veils, 'Ninja style' face covers) as an ingredient of a women's dress code ordained by Allah.

Chapter 10

THE EXAMPLE OF MARY

Mary the mother of Jesus (p) is mentioned in the Qur'an as the woman chosen and purified above all the women of all the worlds. "And when the angels said: O Mary! surely Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of all the worlds." (3:42)

She has been called as an example for the believers and her conduct is called to exemplify:

"And Allah sets forth an example to those who believe ... Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our inspiration and she accepted the truth of the words of her Sustainer and His books, and she was of the obedient ones. (66:11-12)

In observing her behavior mentioned in the Qur'an, we see that as she appears from seclusion with young Jesus, her people recognized her. Now had she been wearing a "Niqab" to cover her face, her people would not have identified her immediately as she had appeared from seclusion. This informs us that she was not covering her face i.e. not wearing a "Niqab", as mentioned in the following verses:

"And she came to her people with him, carrying him (with her). They (having recognized her) said: 'O Mary! surely you have done a strange thing. O sister of Haroon! your father was not a bad man, nor, was your mother an unchaste woman.' But she pointed to him. They said: 'How should we speak to one who was a child in the cradle?' He (Jesus) said: 'Surely I am a

servant of Allah; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet." (19:27-30)

Mary's recognition by her people indicates that she was not wearing a "Niqab" to protect her face from being seen.

In the Qur'an there is further evidence which negates the practice of wearing "Niqab". After Allah informs Nabi (SAW) about marriage with certain relations He further reminds:

"It is not allowed to you to take women afterwards, nor that you should change them for other wives, though their beauty be pleasing to you, except what your right hand possesses and Allah is Watchful over all things." (33:52)

In the above verse it is clearly mentioned that Nabi (SAW) was also in a position to see the "Husn" i.e. Beauty of women and this clearly establishes that women not related to the Prophet did not wear "Niqab" or veils to cover their faces when they used to appear in front of him. We must realize that attributing anything to Allah which He has not ordained is a very serious action on our part. Allah has informed us through His messenger that attributing anything to Allah which He did not make as an obligation is "haraam" i.e. Forbidden, as the following verse states:

"Say: Surely my Sustainer has prohibited (made haraam) indecencies, those of them that are apparent as well as those that are concealed, and sin and rebellion without justice, and that you associate with Allah that for which He has not sent down any authority, and that you say against Allah what you do not know." (7:33)

"Niqab" has not been made mandatory by any verse of the Qur'an, it is a cultural practice of pagan tribes and unbelievers. The Qur'an also identifies unbelievers who used to cover themselves up with their garments. Allah informs us through Noah:

"And whenever I have called them that Thou mayest forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, cover themselves

with their garments, and persist and are puffed up with pride."
(71:7)

Chapter 11

WHAT ABOUT HIJAB?

The term 'Hijab' has become synonymous these days for a specific dress pattern of women, which is considered as an Islamic dress by many. However the Qur'an does not use this word to denote any kind of dress pattern for women. The type of dress code prescribed by the Qur'an for women (and men) has been discussed earlier, and this term does not occur in the Qur'an in that aspect. The Arabic word 'Hijab' comes from the root word (H-J-B) and it carries the meaning of:

A screen, Curtain, To hide, To conceal, Block from view, Wrap, Mask, To make inaccessible etc.

In the Qur'an this word has occurred only in the following verses in its root or derivative form:

This word has occurred in the Qur'an in the above verses only, and in none of the verses does it refer to any specific garment or dress for women or refer to any dress pattern for women. Following are translations of some of these verses:

"When thou dost recite the Qur'an We put between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter a veil (HIJAB) invisible:" (17:45) Yusuf Ali's Translation They say: "Our hearts are under veils (concealed) from that to which thou dost invite us and in our ears in a deafness and between us and thee is a screen (HIJAB-UN): so do thou (what thou wilt); for us we shall do (what we will!)" (41:5) Yusuf Ali's Translation

"Between them shall be a veil (HIJAB) and on the heights will

be men who would know every one by his marks: they will call out to the Companions of the Garden peace on you : they will not have entered but they will have an assurance (thereof)." (7:46)

It should be understood that the term 'Hijab' or any of its derivatives has not occurred in the Qur'an as a designation for any specific ingredient or pattern of women's dress.

We should strive to in-form and re-form our selves through Qur'anic guidance.

Chapter 12

CAN WOMEN TALK TO MEN TO WHOM THEY ARE NOT RELATED (NOT MARRIED)?

In the Qur'an we have the example of Moses (p) as he is shown to hold a conversation with two women who are not married to him yet. This conversation clearly indicates that women can talk to men who are not related to them, provided it is for important tasks only and not complacent speech, as complacency in speech is not allowed by verse 33:32. The following verses identify the conversation of Moses with the two women who are not related to him.

"And when he came to the water of Madyan, he found on it a group of men watering, and he found besides them two women keeping back (their flocks). He said: What is the matter with you? They said: We cannot water until the shepherds take away (their sheep) from the water, and our father is a very old man. So he watered (their sheep) for them, then went back to the shade and said: My Sustainer! surely I stand in need of whatever good Thou mayest send down to me.

Then one of the two women came to him walking bashfully. She said: My father invites you that he may give you the reward of your having watered for us. So when he came to him and gave to him the account, he said: Fear not, you are secure from the unjust people." (28:23-25)

The above example which depicts the conversation of a messenger of Allah with two un-married girls is a clear indicator that women can talk with men who are un related to them

provided it is for important tasks only and is done within the limits ordained by Allah.

Chapter 13

THE TESTIMONY OF A WOMAN

In Sura 2, verse 282 it is stated:

"O you who believe! when you deal with each other in contracting a debt for a fixed time, then write it down... and get two witnesses out of your own men and if there are not two men then a man and two women such as ye choose for witnesses so that if one of them gets confused or perplexed the other can remind her... " (2:282)

Why the need for two women? The verse explains the reason by stating: "...if one of them gets confused or perplexed the other can remind her.." Here the question that comes to mind is, as to why there should be two women instead of one man? And why is it said that the women could become confused or perplexed while giving testimony? The traditionalists imply that the reason for this is that, women are less reliable and of lower mental ability than men, however this reasoning of theirs has no support from the Qur'an and is an opinion borrowed from Jewish tradition. (See Deuteronomy 22:13-21 and Numbers 5:11-31)

As far as the reliability is concerned, the Qur'an has required even of men to be two as witnesses instead of one. Does that imply that Allah does not consider men to be reliable such that the appearance and testimony of one man was not considered enough? Are both men to give evidence? This is required only so that if one of them (the men) misses any detail then the other could fill the missing information and support the testimony. In other words, it is a legal way of supporting evidence.

The requirement of two men as witnesses does not imply that men are of low reliability or have deficient mental abilities. Two witnesses are required just to consolidate the evidence. Similarly, when two women were required as witnesses instead of one man, the implication should not be unreliability. It is only a way of consolidation of the evidence and not that women are less reliable.

The Quran in other situations accepts the testimony of a woman as equal to that of a man. In fact the woman's testimony can even invalidate the man's. The Qur'an ordains that if a man accuses his wife of indecent and un-chaste behavior, then he should solemnly swear five times as evidence of the wife's guilt. If the wife denies and swears similarly five times, she is not considered guilty and her testimony will invalidate that of her husband. This is stated in the following verses:

"And (as for) those who accuse their wives and have no witnesses except themselves, the evidence of one of these (should be taken) four times, bearing Allah to witness that he is most surely of the truthful ones. And the fifth (time) that the curse of Allah be on him if he is one of the liars. And it shall avert the chastisement from her if she testify four times, bearing Allah to witness that he is most surely one of the liars. And the fifth (time) that the wrath of Allah be on her if he is one of the truthful." (24:6-9)

Regarding the question, as to why a woman can become perplexed or confused while giving evidence in public (the word used in 2:282 is which carries the meaning of perplexion or confusion.) it should be considered that in pre-Quranic societies, women were brought up in such a manner that they were incapable of expressing themselves and were inexperienced in civil affairs. The unbelievers had raised their girls in trinkets and ornaments and they were void of the ability to express themselves. The Qur'an identifies this situation:

"When news is brought to one of them of (the birth of) what he sets up as a likeness to (God) Most Gracious his face darkens

and he is filled with inward grief! Is then one brought up among trinkets and unable to give a clear account in a dispute (to be associated with God)?" (43:17-18)

Even today, women in many societies are raised up in such a manner that they are incapable of expressing themselves and are very likely to get perplexed and confused if they were to appear before a court to bear testimony. It is for such a situation that the Qur'an required two women against one man to bear testimony.

Furthermore, women should not be brought up and raised in such a manner that they become incapable of expressing themselves and face the trials and tribulations of life, instead they should be well educated and conditioned to the affairs of the world so that if they are required to bear testimony, they will not become confused or perplexed and the second woman will not be required to interfere.

The interference of the second woman as a partner in testimony is conditional to the first one getting perplexed. If the first woman is able to express her self eloquently then the second woman will not be required, as is evident from the following portion of the verse under discussion:

".. IF ONE OF THEM gets confused or perplexed THEN the other can remind her.."

If the first one gets confused, it is only then, that the other one is required to remind her. If the first one does not get perplexed then the other will not be required to interfere.

The above should clarify that a woman's testimony is not equal to half that of a man's. But the Qur'an considers her testimony to be equal to that of a man's and the requirement of two women against one man is conditional to certain situations only.

Chapter 14

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

The Qur'an states that one of the most important duties of the organization of Believers which enforces the Qur'anic laws is to "order that which is recognized by the divine laws and forbid what is unauthentic".

The Qur'an has a specific term for this duty which is known as "amr bil maruf wa nahy an il munkar". This means ordering all things recognized by the law of Allah as right and forbidding all that which is un-authentic. This was among the functions of Nabi (SAW) as he was the first leader of the Islamic state:

"He orders them with Al-Maruf (what is recognized by the divine laws) and forbids them from Al-Munkar (that which is termed unauthentic by the divine laws), and makes lawful to them the good things and makes unlawful to them impure things, and removes from them their burden and the shackles which were upon them." (7:157)

This function of ordering with Al-Maruf and forbidding from Al-Munkar, is not just a matter of mere sermons from mosques only, but the Qur'an states that this is the duty of an Islamic government:

"Those who, if We establish them in the land, establish Salat and give Zakat and order with Al Maruf (what is recognized by the divine laws) and forbid from Al-Munkar (that which is termed unauthentic by the divine laws); and Allah's is the end of affairs."(22:41)

In this most crucial responsibility of an Islamic government, the Qur'an has included men as well as women:

"And (as for) the believing men and the believing women, they are guardians of each other; they order with Al Maruf and forbid from Al Munkar and establish Salat and give Zakat, and obey Allah and His messenger; (as for) these, Allah will show mercy to them; surely Allah is Mighty, Wise." (9:71)

Thus both men as well as women run the government together in a state which is established on Qur'anic principles. Women are also to take an active part in running the affairs of the state. The Qur'an has also narrated the example of Queen Saba, who was the leader of a Nation and this implies that women are capable of being equal participants in government along side with men. See Sura 27:23-44.

Chapter 15

GIRL'S SHARE IN INHERITANCE

Often it is cited that Islam discriminates against women by giving them a lesser share in inheritance than their male counterparts. However this view is not quite correct. The Qur'an has given equal share to women with the exception of the daughter of the deceased. For just this instance we are informed by the Qur'an that the share of a son is equal to that of two daughters:

"Allah enjoins you concerning your children: The male shall have the equal of the portion of two females.." (4:11)

To comprehend the reason for this division, it should be understood that the Qur'an establishes a society in which responsibility of acquiring livelihood lies with the men and it is not an obligation on women to provide for her husband and family. A woman is also incapacitated during certain periods due to her natural disposition (pregnancy).

It is thus apparent that a man should get a larger portion from the division of resources, as he has been laid with the responsibility of the provision of maintenance to his family. That is why, in inheritance, boy's share has been kept twice as much of a girl.

Daughters have neither been made responsible for their own, nor their family's expenditure. But on the other hand, a son has to maintain not only himself, but his wife and family as well. As such, he should be vested with a larger share.

Where the dispersion of inheritance is amidst the people of the same generation, as is the case of a brother and sister (in case the deceased was issue-less and parents were still living) each of them gets one sixth (equal).

"..and if a man or a woman leaves property to be inherited by neither parents nor offspring, and he (or she) has a brother or a sister, then each of them two shall have the sixth.." (4:12)

For parents, it is again one sixth each for mother and father.

"..and as for his parents, each of them shall have the sixth of what he has left if he has a child.." (4:11)

Therefore, it is not correct to state that the Quran has made a general rule that the woman's share is half of the man's; it is only so for sons and daughters, members of the future generation or others where the situation is similar that the male is allotted more than the female.

On the other hand, in a situation in which men are neglecting this duty of theirs and it is feared that the woman would be rendered impoverished, the Quran gives authority that, in a will, a person can divide his property as he pleases according to the dire straits of the circumstances.

The division of inheritance as given in the Quran is only applicable if a person dies without leaving a will, or if his will does not cover all his whole property. Thus it is evident that apportioning a lesser share for a daughter neither lessens her rights nor degrades her status in the society as against the man.

Chapter 16

ARE MEN A DEGREE ABOVE WOMEN?

People having a narrow look at the guidance of Allah's Book, are often seen intimating that men are superior to women. They back up this statement just by a portion of verse 2:228 of Sura Al-Baqara, and do not present the whole context, but rather reach this short sighted conclusion and imply that Islam maintains the superiority of men against women.

It is an irony that the very verse which equates rights and obligations of gender is usually quoted to say that men are superior to women.

What they fail to realize is that in matters of biological construction men and women are different and have certain rights related to that aspect (i.e. maternity leaves are for women, not men) but apart from biological disposition, both men and women are equal according to Qur'an and both are equally capable and responsible for developing those qualities in themselves which the Qur'an has said are essential for believers. The Qur'an says:

"..And they (women) shall have rights similar to the rights against them in a just manner.." (2:228)

In other words, for every responsibility given to them, they acquire a right. This is the equality they have been granted. Thus men and women have same rights as each other. The above verse continues to say:

"..and they have rights similar to the rights against them in a

just manner, and the men are a degree above them.." (2:228)

It would be contradictory to conclude from the statement: "li Rijaale alayhenaa darja" "men are a degree above them" that men are superior to women, as at one hand the verse says that women and men have rights similar to each other, and the implication that men are superior, will contradict this impression..

One gender cannot be superior to another if their rights and obligations are equal. The word used by the Quran is "Daraja" meaning "degree". This "degree" can be understood easily by reviewing the whole verse. The context of this verse informs us that it deals with the conditions attached to remarriage after divorce. The verse is:

"And the divorced women should keep themselves in waiting for three courses; and it is not lawful for them that they should conceal what Allah has created in their wombs, if they believe in Allah and the last day; and their husbands have a better right to take them back in the meanwhile if they wish for reconciliation; and they have rights similar to those against them in a just manner, and the men are a degree above them, and Allah is Mighty, Wise." (2:228)

The context of the verse makes it clear that Divorcees should refrain (from remarriage) for three menstrual cycles, so that whatever has been created by Allah becomes pronounced etc, then it goes on to say that men have one advantage. This advantage given to men is that they can remarry right away and women have to wait almost three months, or more if found to be pregnant, before they can re-marry).

Obviously, an advantage in a peculiar situation does not mean one is superior than the other. It is only for this reason only that men have one degree above women, because of their biological construction they do not have to wait for a stated period ("Iddah") for the purpose of getting married again upon divorce or if their spouse dies. Only in the matter of "Iddah", that

men have a degree higher than women, but apart from this both have equal rights.

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