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# A Proposal for a Community Development Training Program for Afghan Women in Exile as Agents of Change

Rahela Sakhi Kamyar

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A PROPOSAL FOR A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRAINING PRGOGRAM  
FOR AFGHAN WOMEN IN EXILE AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

A MASTER PROJECT PRESENTED

by

RAHELA SAKHI KAMYAR

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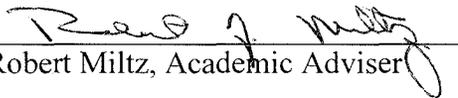
A PROPOSAL FOR A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRAINING PROGRAM

A Master Project Presented

by

RAHELA SAKHI KAMYAR

Approved as to style and content by:

  
Robert Miltz, Academic Adviser

## DEDICATION

To my sister, Fatima, a source of inspiration,

my innocent patient nieces

and

all women of my war torn town of Kabul

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A PROPOSAL FOR A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRAINING PROGRAM  
FOR  
AFGHAN WOMEN IN EXILE AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

ABSTRACT

It is illegal in today's Afghanistan if a strange male hears a woman's voice or the sound of her footsteps. The man will be provoked and it is the fault of the woman and she should be punished. This is an example of misinterpretation of Islam being enforced by the Taliban in Afghanistan since 1996.

Afghan women suffer from disparity in terms of education, employment and participation in their country's development process. Traditionally, women in Afghanistan have had an important symbolic role as the core or heart of the society. Women have been seen as the primary vehicle for passing Islam from one generation to the next. Above all, women in Afghanistan symbolize honor. However, Islamic extremists believe that educating women or allowing them to move freely in public engulfs the nation in sexual anarchy, destroys the family and brings dishonor to the society. These declarations have been proclaimed in the name of holy Islam and the rich culture of the Afghans. Islam is an important part of Afghans' lives, as it defines their roles and lays out the principles for leading one's life. However, due to the lack of Islamic knowledge by self-declared Afghan religious leaders, there exists in Afghanistan today a distorted version of the religion. Under the Islamic laws, a woman has the right to education and to work outside her home.

The restrictions on women's status and movement in Afghanistan are due to the country's political instability during the past two decades. With the advent of political conflict and religious movement, women's development issues and gender policies have been changing frequently within radical Islamic and liberal ideas since 1970s. The status of women has been perceived to be a great socio-political problem. With the flight of half of the Afghan population in exile, the issue of women is taken outside of the country.

Away from the culture of oppression, there must be ways and means to challenge patriarchal ideology. I believe a process of social change including community mobilization in favor of women's empowerment is needed to sustain their participation and over-come resistance. Thus, to this participation, the Afghan women in exile must shoulder the responsibility to take action and critically quest the silence of causes and effects of oppression. As an Afghan woman, having been displaced for more than two decades, and based on my field experience, I believe there is a need for strong movement through community organization to promote Afghan women's active participation in the restoration of the legitimate rights, which they enjoyed before.

I propose a program of nonformal education for community development for a group of Afghan women in exile as agents of change. The program will be conducted in the form of a pilot workshop with the assistance of an international organization, which is committed to the Afghan Women's Organizations in Pakistan, the neighboring country of Afghanistan.

The activities of the training program will be carried out according to short-term and long-term objectives. This program will be offered as an alternative approach to the Western paradigm of women's development. Formulation of this program will be based

on Islamic knowledge, the Holy *Quran and Hadith* (the sayings of Prophet Mohammed) that will foster and support indigenous knowledge.

I begin by looking at the socio-cultural background of Afghanistan. I describe the frequent political changes and highlight the main problems interfering in the process of social and economic development in the country. Then, I review traditional community history and look at the process of women's development and gender policy in Afghanistan. Against these perspectives, I try to explore an alternative solution for the empowerment of Afghan women through nonformal education. I am seeking a suitable approach and search for useful lessons in order to bring change and sustainability in the condition of the lives of Afghan women. Because the main focus of this program is on the empowerment of women, I discuss this topic in order that the reader can see different visions of empowerment in the context of the West and a traditional society like Afghanistan.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Change means different things for different people. In its broadest meaning, change is development. "Development means to bring to a more advanced or effective state, to cause to grow or expand to bring into being or an activity, to come gradually into existence or operation and to become evident or manifest." (The Random House Dictionary, 1978.) Change for development in the context of this paper is the liberation of human potential: to have basic needs met, to explore one's identity, and to be able to choose, act and decide. Selener (1997, 23) defines development in a community as an organizing process that prepares the oppressed to stand for their rights. This movement is an effort to address immediate needs and institutionalize the community's activities as an on-going process.

The main interacting elements in this process which affect the state of development in a society are the composition and size of population, the social and economic conditions, and the political environment. In fact, the strategies adopted and the problems faced in the process vary from country to country. The key elements for development are the formation of an organization for change, the linkage between the organization and its inhabitants and their feelings. Therefore, organizations cannot achieve effectiveness, unless its formation is based on shared values, individual and communities' needs and feelings. Studying community within these dimensions brings about the notions of power distribution, lines of communication, and styles of decision making in the context of a specific society. The structure and function of a society is determined not only by rationality, but by rationality that varies according to the cultural

environment through its influence on the distribution of power and through its influence on the value of the dominant coalitions and through the formulation of rules and regulations. Thus, the issues of change are complex and involve all levels of a society. The problem at each level varies depending on the degree of disruption of normalcy in a community and this varies from community to community in the course of a conflict. In the process of change for development, people are affected, be it politically, economically, or, in religious practice in a society. The rate of change and its impact call for bringing balance in equality among communities, especially those disempowered in the name of culture or religion.

Generally speaking, interpretation of change for equality is contingent upon many factors. Type, and composition of population and socio-cultural characteristics of a society have a great effect on the process of change. In Afghanistan, individuals, families and communities tend to put great pressure on each other to conform to social norms and traditional values. So, a negative reaction from these sources to the attempts to change the status of women would be expected. Adequate knowledge about these factors by the service providers, outsiders or insiders will serve as the basis for formulation of a training program. The status of Afghan women is also affected by environmental factors. The environment of immigration has created better opportunities and abilities for these women. We can see significant shifts in the level of cultural and social norms, and a general improvement in the status of women. These shifts also tend to alter individual, family and community responses. Structural shifts in the social norms, economic pressure and, change of environment have forced change in the status of Afghan women. To take the environment of immigration as an opportunity, there is a need for organized

community mobilization for the empowerment of these women through nonformal education. The intention of this Master project is to propose a community-training program for a group of Afghan women as agents of change in exile. In addition to its introduction, the paper is organized around six chapters. Chapter two gives a profile of the background of Afghanistan, then highlights the great and continuing influences which the socio-cultural characteristics and political conflicts have had on the process of change for development. Chapter three defines specific problems that mitigate against the development of the status of Afghan women and presents a brief justification of the training program. Chapter four presents a review of literature on Women In Development, highlights the emergence of Women In Development, examines gender policies in Afghanistan, reviews traditional community activities in the country, and discusses the concept of empowerment with the vision of empowerment in the contexts of the West vis-à-vis a traditional society like Afghanistan. Keeping in mind, the socio-political and cultural context, the chapter presents the over-all goal, and short-term, and long-term objectives of the program. Chapter five shifts its focus on the role played by nonformal education as an intervention for empowerment of Afghan women in exile. In the light of these perspectives, the writer speaks about process and strategy, and proposes a careful needs assessment of the program. Chapter five also examines the role of facilitators and the issues of insider/outsider from an anthropological perspective. Chapter six describes the process of implementation and delivery of the training program. and suggests a training activities, with an overview of project description, and management. Evaluation, monitoring and reporting of the training program are set out in the chapter seven. Chapter eight presents the concluding comments

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND, THE PEOPLE SOCIO-CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS & POLITICAL CHANGE IN AFGHANISTAN

#### The People

Afghans have had a rich cultural and historical background since the formation of the country in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Located on a crossroads between south, west, and central Asia, the people of Afghanistan draw their heritage from all of these regions. The one common factor is Islam, but Islam also has many different interpretations and it is a faith, which divides as well as unites. The total population is estimated between 15 to 17 million people. There are about 30 languages in Afghanistan; the two official languages used for teaching and administration are Persian and Pushto. Language and religion are the main determinants of group identity. Pushtons are the inhabitants of the east and south part of the country. They claim to be the founders of the Kingdom and have been dominant since the formation of a Pushtun monarchy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century... Tajiks are the next largest group of the population. They are mainly found in the northeast and the west and in the capital, Kabul. They are not organized along tribal lines; they are mostly Persian (Dari) speakers. The Uzbeks and Turkmen are the two largest Turkic groups in Afghanistan. Along with the Pushtons and Tajiks, they live on the plains north of the country. Another major groups are the Hazaras who live mainly in the central highlands. Their origins are Mongol. They speak a dialect of Persian. Other smaller groups include Nuristanis, Baluchi, Aimaqs, Arabs and, Kizilbash, and other Persian speakers. (Johnson, 1998, 5-7.)

## Socio-Cultural Characteristics in Afghanistan

Problems of social and economic development in Afghanistan are directly related to its traditional social structure and political instability. Social groups in Afghanistan are mixtures of old and new affiliations. Afghans are staunch Muslims, however, even though they share the same religion and nationality, this heterogeneous population is strongly divided along tribal, social class and ethnic lines. Although there are clearly described trends toward the formation of economic and academic classes, such as professional, skilled labor and, intelligentsia, these are individuals who find their personal loyalties pulled in different directions because of the persistence of strong attachments to family, clan or tribal affiliations. It should be mentioned that the stresses within the Afghan society are not caused by a clash between oriental traditionalism and western modernism, but they are basically the product of indigenous social forces which tend to reinforce horizontal class divisions and gradually to de-emphasize vertical kinship and ethnic affiliations. This trend may fracture tribal, clan and family loyalties in favor of ties with horizontal economic or social groups. (Majotti, 1992, 7)

### Analysis of Cultural Dimensions

From a symbolic anthropological viewpoint, culture is seen as “a system of group meanings and values that needed to be interpreted, read or deciphered in order to be understood (Uma, S & Corla, R 1985.) Thus, not only rationality, but also rationality that varies according to the cultural environment determines the structure and function of a community. I would like to see Hofstede’s, (1983) cultural dimensions and compare this framework within the context of the Afghan society. Hofstede, (1983) looks at how society and culture impact the interior culture of a community. He applies an ecological

correlation by four organizationally relevant dimensions of culture. Hofstede, (1983) called these four dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity and individualism-collectivism. According to Hofstede, (1983), masculine cultures emphasize monetary gains, performance, growth, bigness and fastness, achievement and excellence in performance. Feminine cultures value quality of life, social welfare, community formation, smallness and slowness.

In the current cultural context of the Afghan society cultural and power systems are categorized as highly centralized. The flow of information is vertical rather than horizontal; decisions are made at the top, mostly individually or within the peer group. Responsibility rests at the top and is shared with the associated peer group; conflicts are handled by consultation with the peer group or involvement of a trusted party. There is a power group at the top hierarchical levels in organizations, where decisions are made and implemented without much questioning by the people at the lower levels. This is a centralized and rigid decision-making process. The flow of communication is weak, the structure of organizations is not clear and control is strong, and asserted by force at the top level. The dimension of uncertainty avoidance (UA) refers to how the cultural group is stressed by an unknown future. The culture of Afghan extremists falls within the high (UA) with low tolerance, ambiguity and a high level of stress. This situation puts all Afghan society under an uncertain or unknown future. Along the individualism/collectivism dimensions, Afghan culture can be placed under collectivism. Members of certain tribes or political groups are loyal to their tribes and language groups. These members share responsibility within their groups, and the group protects them. Some other issues intensify the problems for change in Afghanistan, one is that financial

assistance is often time bounded and pre-planned. Another issue is that most of the rehabilitation projects present the result of their work by vague figures rather than by showing quality or quantity achievement in the status of the project beneficiaries. The third issue is the lack of responsible institutions to provide goods and services, which will be responsive to local needs.

### Socio-political Change and Conflicts

Afghanistan had a monarchical system from 1734 until 1973, when Mohammed Dau'd, overthrew, his cousin, the King Mohammed Zahir Shah. Da'ud abolished the Kingdom, declared a republic, and announced himself as the president of Afghanistan. In 1978, the Marxist Government overthrew the President. The country closed a long chapter of its history and entered a completely new era. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The collapse of Soviet backed Government in 1992 brought a new destabilizing force in the region, the Islamic extremists, Mujahideen. These forces began fighting and restlessly competing for power among themselves and do so until today.

In November 1996, basic human rights and the rights of women deteriorated when the most extremist Islamic group, backed by Pakistanis, the Taliban (religious students) brought harsh consequences for the women and young girls in Afghanistan. Immediately, after the 'Taliban' gained control, female schools and educational institutions were closed. Female government employees, doctors, judges and engineers were prevented from going to their offices or institutions. Under present orders from Pakistan and the Taliban, a woman cannot venture outside the home, unless a male accompanies her. The male must prove that he is the husband, brother, father, or uncle of the woman. Because of the advent of rapid political changes within the country,

women's movements developed outside the country. As a result, Afghan women have been subjected to severe restrictions, and the dress code was imposed on them.

During the past two decades, a peculiar mixture of war, culture, politics, and religious conflicts have caused confusion and threatened the lives of Afghan people, especially, the lives of women. The flight of millions of the country's population into exile has damaged the whole infrastructure and normal social life in the country. The collapse of the Soviet backed Government in Afghanistan did not put an end to the atrocities of Afghans; instead, it unleashed a new destabilizing force in the country. The political backdrop, since 1992 has created a situation whereby the country's destiny has been dictated not by the masses, but by those at the top who have chosen to assert their will on others through force. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the Afghan society was split into two extremes, Islamic religious extremists and the communist-backed government in the central parts of Afghanistan. The socialist government in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, started to launch socialist reforms, including women's liberation through education and provision of employment opportunities. They started to pick-up words and verses from Holy *Quran* emphasizing the concept of socialism. The educational system and social institutions were changed to in ways, which were not acceptable to the values and cultural norms of the Afghan people. The reaction to this change, was the excessive restriction on women in the country and in Pakistan, by the extremists in the rank of anti-Communist movements.

Afghanistan became the final front of the cold war by formation of the Mujahideen (holy warriors) groups along the border of the neighboring country, Pakistan. The United States countered the Soviet move into Afghanistan by working against their

invasion of Afghanistan. In the end, Afghanistan suffered and became the victim of competition between the two powers, the US and the former Soviet Union. After the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in 1989, Afghanistan abandoned. The country was left in ruins, and its people in misery. Afghanistan had regained its independence, but entered a new decade, without a central government or functioning infrastructure. Since then, ethnic differences have been emphasized and exploited by religious leaders. Along with ethnic ties, language and regionalism play important roles in the daily conduct of the Afghan population. These elements have affected negatively the formulation of internal and external policies and the administration of the whole country. As a consequence, Afghan women have become the victims of these conflicts in the name of religion and culture. They lost their legitimate rights to vote and to run for political office, rights, which the constitution of 1964 guaranteed to them. With the flight of more than half of the Afghan population into exile, the norms for defending the honor of women became a critical test and challenge for the Afghan male. To protect the family, the tribe and the women, an Afghan man will sacrifice his wealth for his head, but his head for his honor. Homes and herds he might lose, but not honor. Protecting their honor by protecting the women gives stature to Afghan men (Majatti, 1992, 45.)

## CHAPTER III

### PROBLEM STATEMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAM JUSTIFICATION

Traditionally, Afghan women have been seen as the primary vehicle for passing Islam from one generation to the next. Above all, women in Afghanistan symbolize honor. With the advent of rapid political changes in Afghanistan, women's development issues and gender policies have been footballs bouncing between radical Islam and liberal ideas during the last two decades. The status of women has been perceived to be a great socio-political problem. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, 1979-92 brought drastic changes in the status of women in the country. The changes were rejected by traditional opinions, and they enhanced the growth of religious movements in the country.

In the process of these changes, the movements of the Afghan women have become more restricted in terms of clothing and their ability to exist in society outside the home. Thus, Afghan women have found themselves caught up in the political machinations of Afghan religious leaders, the war lords, the leaders of Pakistan, and donors with Islamic fundamentalist convictions. They have become pawns of them all.

In the environment of emigration, there has been a range of responses amongst Afghan women to the role of Afghan women within Afghan society and within Islamic law. The Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association (RAWA) takes the middle ground in advocating that women should play a full role in the political life of the country and have the same access to education, training, and employment that men have, while remaining within the Islamic fold. The organization expects women to conform to an appropriately decorous form of dress but does not insist on the veil. The debate as to how women should behave and participate in society has been going on for two decades and it has perhaps been the cause of more controversy than any other issues. The life in exile

exposed Afghan women to other cultures. At the same time, the condition of life in exile created a sense of security and confidence in them. Though women in exile have been more constrained in their mobility than is the norm within the Afghan traditional society, they have taken steps and initiatives to raise their voices for justice, equality and peace. I believe that training of women possessing a sense of commitment and competence will enable the refugee women as a group to meet the quantitative and qualitative educational challenges when they go back home. Equipped with relevant skills and knowledge, refugee women would be prepared to stand-up against gender inequity in education and help bring partial change to the current situation. Some of the international training programs for Afghan refugees are not designed to support women, and they undermine indigenous structures and knowledge. On the contrary, some of the international agencies seek to replace the local knowledge with modern and Western ones. Training that includes a forceful fusion of indigenous cultures will enable women to change their conceptions and the conception of a chaotic and confused society deprived of its identity, and which is rapidly approaching its demise.

Islam is an important part of the essence of Afghan people, as it defines social roles and lays out the principles for leading their lives. However, due to the lack of progressive Islamic knowledge by the extremists themselves, there exists today in Afghanistan a distorted version of the religion that tends to place men as superior to women. This is one of the results of the male Islamic preachers who are not learned scholars on the religion, and who preach their misinterpretations of Islam to promote the dominance of men. Under the Islamic laws, a woman has the right to obtain an education and to work outside her home. Lack of knowledge about the genuine teachings of the

religion is also due to the fact that it is not taught in local languages in schools. The second reason is that people do not have access to books in their own languages on Islam, as a result they depend on oral information from the local *Imams* (Islamic religion preachers) who provide them with inaccurate knowledge on the religion, as they are not certified scholars on the subject. The actual teachings of Islam promote the concept of community; the equal participation of women and men. It insists on unity, self-help, and brother/sisterhood and provides basic principles and ways of leading ones life. As Islam dominates and defines the lives of people in Afghanistan, a better and renewed understanding of Islam can lead to women's prosperity and empowerment and will eradicate dependency on foreign sources with their political agendas.

I think nonformal education, as an intervention will create an increased awareness among the Afghan women in exile. I am exploring and applying a durable and flexible approach and useful lessons for bringing change and sustainability to the lives of Afghan women. Indeed, what is needed are types of changes that are compatible with the Afghan cultural and traditional norms. I think reviewing women's development in the context of cultural, social values and political development in Afghanistan, will tell the reader how these elements have affected women's status in the country. In addition, we will see how vital these variables are in shaping the women's lives under specific norms and values.

## CHAPTER IV

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Emergence of Women In Development

This literature review on Women In Development (WID) provides a historical and theoretical context for this study. This literature review includes two related topics; the first one gives some basic understanding of the emergence of Women in Development from a historical or theoretical basis. The other part gives the reader direct guidelines for political, socio-cultural and economic issues and the effects of these elements on gender policies and the process of women's development.

To understand the emergence of Women in Development, it is necessary to place it within a historical context. The 1960s and 1970's were seen as times of liberation struggles and movements for political independence, which added to the United Nations membership list. The United Nations first Economic Development Decade, 1960-70 ended with a call for a new development approach. In fact, this was a shift of policy from economic development to focusing on social components. Throughout the 1970s, the aim of development was modified to mean the development of people, not just things. Then, the social development decade (1970-80) the New Directions Program shifted to human resource development. Attention was directed to the basic human needs and redistribution of development benefits within the nations. The Third Development Decade (1980-90) calls for the redistribution of resources and power between the North and the South. Worldwide social and economic structural changes have caused unequal economic relations between nations (Maguire, 1984, 7.) The economic development efforts did not improve the status of women. There was the need to integrate women as

active participants on an equal basis with men in the development process. The depressing figures set forth below in Table 1, demonstrate the reality of the oppression of women in the world.

Table 1: Indicators of Women as Participants and Recipients of Economic Development

World Population	Labor force	Hrs of work	Illiterate	World income	Property
52%	33%	67%	60%	10%	1%

Source: (World Bank, 1980, ISIS, 1983)

From an economic point of view, women are major, often predominant contributors, particularly in agriculture, to the basic productivity of their communities. Yet, their economic contribution is not reflected in national statistics or in the planning and implementation of development projects (Boserup, 1970.) Information on women frequently comes from men. Women like men are social actors seeking power, security and prestige and a sense of worth and value. Women can be actors for change, using whatever strategies are available to them to cope with and alter their personal situations. At the same time, change in the economic policy and development movements has had a positive impact on women all over the world. The women around the world came together to share a sense of common purpose for equal participation of women in the development efforts of their countries, both as contributors and beneficiaries. Women activists continue to expose and work against the structural and ideological mechanisms of male domination over women. The origins and causes of female subordination were different yet similar across cultures. Issues of time, race and, class were explored. These movements gave birth to the WID initiatives. The WID movement urged the development planners, leaders and practitioners to realize that the development plans and

projects of 1950s and 1960s failed to make a substantial and lasting impact on the living standards of the poor majority. Gradually, awareness dawned that the key to understanding and solving the contradictions between men and women's participation was the overlooked economic role of women as producers (Newland, 1991,9.)

The growing realization of women's role in development coincided with the rise of feminism in Europe and North America. Simone de Beauvoir was one of the influential pioneers of feminism. Her masterpiece "The Second Sex " in 1949 set forth a view of the oppression of women everywhere, which helped women around the world to recognize the common roots of their discriminated positions. Because of de Beauvoir and other feminists such as Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer, the women's movement in the West took a distinct feminist turn. The demand for women's rights required deeper analysis of the psychological, social, sexual and cultural roots of discrimination. This development had great resonance for women in the Third World. The search for political solution for the failure of development and the growth of feminism based on more systematic assessment of the roots of discrimination turned the WID movement into a transnational movement (Moser, 1996, 72-79.)

In 1973, US law was amended to allocate a portion of the US Agency of International Development (AID) funds for specific activities benefiting women. This was called the Percy Amendment. Consequently a Women in Development Office was established in the USAID. In 1975, the United Nations established the Institute for Training and Research for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) which became a Fund for Women and Development (UNIFEM). In 1977, the World Bank created the post of adviser for women as an effort to monitor the impact of the Bank's activities on

women's role in development. Resources were made available to fund projects that addressed women's problems and eliminated the obstacles to the advancement of women.

In spite of all these movements, women remained marginalized within their societies and institutions and were unable to redirect development policies. This had a positive effect in that it encouraged the formation of coalition, strengthened the transnational character of the movement and, put a brake on the cooperation of WID activities dominated by male priorities which ignored the interests and needs of women. Women's solidarity around the world was magnified by the diversity of political systems, ideologies, economic levels and cultural background. (Maguire, 1984, 10.)

Designation by the United Nations of (1975) as International Year of the Women (IYW) was an important symbolic event. It provided an umbrella of legitimacy for women's rights issues. The event prompted many governments to revise part of their legal codes, pass new legislation and establish new departments to attend to women's issues. It revealed powerful statistical figures to uncover the facts that women constitute half of the world's population. The demand from women's activists prompted the UN to declare an International Decade for Women (1976-85) the key events of the decade were: The Mexico City Conference in 1975, the Copenhagen Conference in 1980 and the Nairobi Conference in 1985. The effects of the UN umbrella over the women's movement resulted in a transnational coalition of women's groups, academics, marginalized national and international civil servants, trade unionists, peasant organizations, and urban cooperatives (Newland, 1991, 64.) The original WID approach was in fact the equality approach. It was recognized that women are active participants in the development process through their productive and reproductive roles providing

critical contribution to economic growth. During these events, the theme of equality was identified and discussed. It was found that equality meant different things for women from different continents. For the First World Women, the term meant development, while the Second World Women saw development as peace and freedom, and the Third World Women identified economic development that would increase women's status as their main concern (Stephenson1982.)

A further advancement to women's development was the empowerment approach. Its purpose is to empower women through greater self-reliance. Women's subordination involved men and also colonial and neo-colonial oppression. This approach seeks not only women's empowerment but also looks at the causes, dynamics and structures of women's oppression. It is popular with the Third World Women's NGOs and their supporters. The origin of empowerment approach is derived from the emergence of feminist writings and grassroots organizational experiences of The Third World Women. Empowerment places emphasis on increasing women's status in relation to men and seeks to empower women through the redistribution of power within as well as between societies. (UNAPCWD, 1979) United Nations Asian and Pacific Center for Women and Development. This recent advancement however is still not recognized or documented as an approach.

The Development Alternative with Women for a New Era (DAWN) is another formation of women groups set-up in Nairobi. Thus, another diverse array of women's networks and alliances had grown up. The purpose has been to analyze women's condition in the world and formulate a vision of an alternative future: a society that is free from class, gender and race discrimination. In this ideal society, basic needs are basic

rights with no poverty. Men and women enjoy the same opportunity to develop their full potential and creativity. All this requires that women's role be redefined. Equality, development and peace are linked together for transformation of the institutions that subordinate women. They all can be achieved through the self-empowerment of women (DAWN, 1985.) DAWN distinguishes between long-term and short-term strategies. Long-term strategy includes new laws that break down the structure of inequality between genders, classes, and races, and that promote national liberation from colonial and neo-colonial domination. Short-term strategies are needed to provide ways in responding to crises (Moser, 1996, 6.)

However, the challenging nature of empowerment leaves it unsupported by either national governments or bilateral aid agencies and created a backlash in the Third World. The requirement for the transformation of the structures of women's subordination could be inimical to culture, religion or social values of certain societies. It is a very sensitive issue; the national government, traditional religious leaders, and traditional women would resent changes in the law, civil code, and property rights. Instead of justice, it may cause more pain or regress for women and minorities with the notion of foreign imposed ideologies. The current disastrous condition of Afghan women could be a witnessing example of the impact of an immature and uncalculated change after the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979. To understand women's issues for development in Afghanistan, we will review its history and changes in the process of political change in the country.

## Women's Development and Gender Policies in Afghanistan

Women's issues in Afghanistan need to be looked at in the context of the country's cultural, social values, and political development. Women's development policies and the different forms that gender policies have taken within radical Islam and liberal ideas will be looked at from the beginning of the twentieth Century.

*"Women in Afghanistan are not just the biological reproducers of the nation, but also its cultural reproducers, often being given the task of guardians of culture who are responsible for transmitting it to the children and constructing the home in a specific cultural style". (Nira Yuval-Davis, 1997)*

Women in Afghanistan have had an important symbolic role as the core or heart of the family, also of the society. Protection of women is bound up with the protection of society. Also, the honor of society is dependent on the honor of the women. But, it should be mentioned that, there are differences between women in Afghanistan based on ethnicity, religion, and access to income and urban or rural settlements. Within the Pushtun tribal code, if a woman has been violated or assaulted by a member of another tribe, the tribe to which she belongs has the right to exact revenge. In the rural areas women have been accorded the roles of wives and mothers with important economic roles covering certain aspects of the agricultural routine, particularly planting and weeding, animal husbandry and craft production. Men have covered other parts of the agricultural process and have also played a role in childcare. In the urban areas and center of Afghanistan, other traditions have dictated the mobility of women. Urban women gravitated towards more Western styles. The women in the urban centers of Afghanistan are seen as decadent and corrupt. By extension, foreign agencies or women who work with them are seen as beyond the pale.

Women's emancipation started in Afghanistan in the 1920s. King Amanullah's reforms to change gender-related customs and to improve the position of women and girls offended conservative opinions. The King attempted to modernize Afghanistan through the education system. He banned child marriage, transferred the regulation of family affairs from the clergy to the state, outlawed polygamy among civil servants, and permitted women to discard the veil. In 1928 a hundred women, led by the queen, appeared at a public function unveiled (My mother was one of these women). A growing number of girls benefited from secondary and higher education. In 1929 the conservatives with the help of 'Ulema' (Muslim scholars) resented the King's reforms. After a short time, the King was overthrown. In the 1950s to 1970s, under King Nadir Shah and his son King Mohammed Zahir Shah some further initiatives were taken to improve the position of women. In 1957, female singers and actors were heard on the national radio. Later, the government sent a group of women delegates to the United Nations in New York. Gradually women were employed as hostesses and receptionists at the national airline and were unveiled, and this in turn provoked a reaction from the 'Ulema, (Muslim scholars) who argued that the expansion of non-traditional education was eroding the morals of the young and undermining traditional social values. They drew ideological justification from the work of the same Pakistani Islamic theorists, who insisted that women should be fully veiled when leaving the home, and that men and women should be segregated. The King was helped by the global intellectual movements of the 1960s, which challenged existing thinking and resulted in pressure from some quarters for women to be accorded greater rights and freedoms. (Dupree, 1991, 28-30.)

Historical evidence shows that informal education of upper class women can be traced back as early as the eighteenth century in Afghanistan. King Amanullah established the first formal primary school for girls in 1921. The relatively moderate policies of King Nadir Shah in the early 1930s and the more advanced educational programs introduced during the reign of King Zahir Shah (1950 –1973) led to substantial expansion of educational opportunities for both men and women. The later period also introduced co-education at both primary and university levels. (Marsden, 1998,92.)

However, according to Islamic law and the Afghan constitution of 1964, assessment of women's status encompasses four areas: social status, political rights, rights to education, and rights to employment and security. With regards to social status, the social system in Afghanistan is patriarchal and fosters women's dependence on men. Girls are under the protection of fathers or male guardians and after marriage, this responsibility for protection is transferred to the husband. The mobility of women, especially in the rural areas, is influenced by the traditional seclusion of women. In recent years the rigidity of this system has been increased because of political conflicts.

With regards to political rights, women in Afghanistan are eligible to vote and run for political office. The voting rights are seldom exercised by women because of the lack of political awareness and submission to male instructions in connection with the choice of political party.

As to the rights for education, due to the restriction on women's movements, the level of literacy is much lower than that of men. Although the constitution and the Islamic religion treat men and women equally, the educational level of women is lower than that of men. In addition to that, the Afghan religious extremists in control deny all

women's rights. Early marriage and childcare are among the main issues affecting women's education after primary or secondary grades.

Despite the guarantee in the constitution, women in Afghanistan have had very little access to employment. If employment was provided, it was politically motivated ignoring social and cultural norms. The proportion of females in the various occupational categories, academic institutions, and even in the areas of the army, was at its highest during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. Before the 1970s, the status of women had not been perceived to be a great socio-political problem.

#### 'Shura', Afghan Traditional Community Activities

The Arabic word '*Shura*' literally means unity or association. Community activities have had a long history in this diverse society, but only for men. So, due to male domination, community work and volunteer activities out of the family and home were foreign and unknown to Afghan women. Therefore, community work was associated only with the males in the villages. In the remote villages, collective activities and group formation are the backbone of the village's community. A fiercely independent bevy of men gather; they sit cross-legged in a circle, sharing fruits, or dry fruits in the winters, and tea on carpets spread beneath ancient trees. A council of village men, a '*Shura*' in the local political vernacular is an ancient Afghan custom. '*Shura*' is a ruling body of elders that resolves disputes and governs daily life. These men meet once a month or sometimes as often once a week. They meet to weigh the most pressing matters of the day. These men debate, they advocate, they argue, sometimes for hours. By the end of each session, they draw up a list of tasks they would like to see accomplished, i.e. a new culvert needs to be built, a well dug, a road widened (Andrew,

1997, 12-13.) In spite of a need, there is no such community involvement for women. No matter what happens to women in the village; these councils are for the concern of men only. Islam defines the Afghans' roles and lays out the principles for leading their lives. However, due to the lack of adequate knowledge about real Islamic principles, a distorted version of Islamic religion exists in Afghanistan. This tends to place men as superior to women. It should be mentioned that the actual teaching of Islam promotes the concept of community '*Umah*', the participation, encourages sharing in the process of self-help activities insisting on the promotion of sister/brotherhood in a community.

### The Concept of Empowerment

Empowerment in terms of its goals is a process aimed at transforming existing social interrelationships, particularly as they affect the most oppressed women, those disempowered on the basis of gender, sex or role. (Patel, 1986) Batliwala (1986, in Patel) defines empowerment as control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. Thus, empowerment can be understood to imply a process of gaining influence in decision-making over the distribution of material resources, knowledge and the ideology governing social relations. In this context, empowerment is a means and an end, a process and the result of the process. The term of empowerment in this context ranges from self-validation to working actively to change prevailing conditions.

Women's liberation empowers men, on both material and psychological levels: as women are strengthened in terms of new skills and knowledge, new insights and leadership, their struggle for material resources and knowledge also benefits men, children, the family and the community. We acknowledge that the notion of empowerment varies between the Western and the Third World societies. Therefore, the

term empowerment must have no meaning prior to its construction within the specific cultural context. There must be investigation and appreciation of cultural values to the fullest extent possible. We know that culture is the basis for knowing what empowerment is for women in different situations. We also agree that inquiry into indicators of empowerment requires more than the translation of the concept. It requires facilitation of naming that gets at what Afghan women mean by power, its sources, its nature and the ways women exercise it. In the real context of Afghan culture, women enjoy power in certain aspects of social life. In the past history of Afghanistan, women performed great tasks and contributed to the maintaining of the rich Afghan cultural values and traditions. There are still areas, where women enjoy considerable power within the family or in social life. However, social change for development led to disempowerment of women in Afghanistan. Outside forces have weakened the tradition as a source of women's power and men now make decisions, not only without women's consensus, but they deny women's legitimate rights.

Politicization of the status of women in Afghanistan have caused confusion and threatened the lives of Afghan women. These women have faced challenges of unfamiliar cultures and the feeling of otherness, and have felt alienated. This feeling of otherness forced Afghan women and men to leave their comfort of customary daily routines and to run from the culture of oppression. Afghan men and women are still to struggle against their own people, who have been influenced by outsiders with strong religious convictions and have become fanatically reactionary to the notion of the westernization of social values.

As we know those who are in power politicize religion. Al Saadawi, an Egyptian feminist (1986, 67.) views religion in general, and believes that all religions are more or less the same. They all have a general human call for equality of people regardless of color, race or sex. The concept of equality can be found in all of the religions. But, when we come to the daily lives of men and women, rich and poor, one race and another, the general sense of equality does not seem to be in evidence. Here we find oppression, including oppression of women. So, we must not have illusion about religion, because religion is used, and those in power abuse it. Present situation in Afghanistan can be an example of the use of power for personal desires in the name of Islamic religion.

#### Vision of Empowerment, Western vis-à-vis Traditional

In the West empowerment refers, to visibility, being heard, making individual decisions, promoting individual choice, assertiveness, strength in pushing for choices to be accepted. Power is understood in terms of position, being ‘on top’ or ‘getting on the top’, and enjoying the effects of leadership. Attaining power means one must exercise it in the public. A code of rights exists objectively and women become empowered to know their rights, exercise them, and insist on them. Empowerment is understood to be something ‘acquired’ that women must struggle to achieve and construct for themselves as individuals first, then within their families, and within the society (Kinsey, et. el, 1993)

Appreciating the Western concept of empowerment, we better identify ways in which empowerment is socially constructed in the context of the Afghan culture. Then, we also have to consider how empowerment is understood in the Afghan cultural context. What is appropriated and what is objectionable about the concept as it is meant for change? The sources of power in Afghan society are the individual, the elderly, the

family, the tribe, the clan and the community. Power is exercised within the family first and then moves outside the family; it depends on the condition and social status of the region. Power is very hierarchical within the families. It is exercised according to age, seniority and gender, men before women. Families make up the community and women in the community are protected by a supernatural source of power. This force protects the weak (women and children) and enhances the personal power of the individual within the family and the community. The community guarantees that women are not mistreated. Men are obliged to consult with women before making decisions.

In the context of Afghan culture, women's power is not seen as the exercise of domination but rather as the ability to get one's needs met or one's wishes fulfilled. This includes satisfying the needs of and all the family members. Thus, in the Afghan context empowerment has much less to do with power/domination and more to do with power/well being. It should be mentioned that this pattern differs among different ethnic groups, and the urban and rural contexts.

CHAPTER V  
NONFORMAL EDUCATION AS AN INTERVENTION FOR  
EMPOWERMENT OF AFGHAN WOMEN

In the absence of a national education system for women and young girls in Afghanistan, this program intends to address the desperate situation faced by the Afghan women. The status of education inside Afghanistan is dire and the *Taliban* authorities are banning women from going to school, teaching, or working outside their homes. The continuing hostilities are fuelled by bored young women who are restricted to their homes. The challenge for this program is to use immigration as an opportunity and support oppressed women in acquiring academic skills and knowledge that will enable them to become effective members of their communities in exile.

There is a need to promote women's participation in community activities. Without such efforts these women will remain discriminated against and oppressed by different forces. There must be ways and means to challenge patriarchal ideology in order to empower refugee women to restore their legitimate rights. One of the alternative solutions is to train a group of refugee women as agents of change. The proposed program is to broaden women's awareness and stimulate their desire to serve as group leaders or agents of change. The overarching goals and objectives summarized below are to promote awareness of women about their oppression, their life condition, and their rights under Islamic principles. Involving refugee women in community activities will provide the opportunity for them to learn how to form community networks and to be prepared to participate in civil society and the process of reconstruction of war devastated Afghanistan.

Nonformal education is an instrument that will enable communities to bring about change, i.e. eradication of inequality and smoothing power relations between men and women. Change in the status of women in the context of this paper is to improve women's position by provision of opportunities for nonformal education (NFE.) This opportunity will increase the women's bargaining power in the family decision-making and paves the way for their participation in decision making at the national level.

Nonformal education is a non-school learning, where both the source and the learner have conscious intent to promote learning (Evans, D., 1981, 28.) Nonformal education is a non-authoritarian pedagogy, facilitators and participants work together with similar status, and are linked through a pedagogical dialogue. Nonformal education is also resists to links with the state and the bureaucratic organizations. Moreover, NFE is more linked to the needs of communities and responds more easily to the demands of communities with a flexible curricular. Finally, the result of NFE is immediate, and has proved to serve as a great instrument of mobilization and development of political consciousness in diverse situation. The educational practice is based on collective and individual previous experiences. The objective of NFE programs is to arouse pride, a sense of dignity, personal confidence, and self- reliance among the participants (Evans, D. 1981, 8.). I believe that, nonformal education for community development would create a sense of awareness among the Afghan women in exile about their situation.

### Over-All Program Goal

The proposed program seeks to empower Afghan refugee women through community mobilization and community organizing. The program's short-term and long-term objectives are as follows:

#### Short-Term Objectives

The short-term objective is to hold a training workshop on Community Development for a group of 15 Afghan women as agents of change in exile. Formulation of the program will be based on Islamic knowledge, the Holy *Quran* and *Hadith* (the sayings of Prophet Mohammed.) It will recover, foster and support basic Islamic and cultural indigenous knowledge. The workshop is offered as an alternative approach to the Western paradigm of women's development. The program will be conducted as a pilot women's nonformal education program leading to community mobilization and organization. The program is to be held in Peshawar or Islamabad of Pakistan for a duration of three weeks. These two cities of Pakistan, which neighbor Afghanistan, are flooded with foreign and humanitarian aid programs. Most of those programs tend to undermine and dismantle vernacular knowledge. This program is offered as an alternative to present women development schemes on the basis that it is an integral component of the indigenous culture and also a code of life. Women will gain better knowledge of religion, by reading and translating the Holy *Quran* rather than receiving oral misinterpretations through the foreign-trained Islamic preachers with their political convictions. The immediate objectives of the workshop include

- to study the situation of Afghan women and the feasibility of implementing women's projects for community development in exile

- to build rapport and trust among Afghan refugee communities, by conducting informal meetings, dialogue and formulation of committees
- to identify problems and seek solution for the problems
- to conduct need assessments of Afghan refugee women
- to help women understand and redefine their roles in the community based on Islam and Afghan culture
- to develop training materials based on Islam
- to set up objectives for program proposals, making plans for NGO projects for larger women's community mobilization and organization
- to train a group of 15 women as agents of change, who will initiate community sessions for community development
- to utilize the trained group to conduct an evaluation at the end of the program
- to enable the participants to gain knowledge about the Islamic code of life through reading and translating from Arabic into local languages
- to provide assistance to the refugee community members in ways that can meet their needs

It is hoped that the participants will gain a better understanding and perception of their condition, discover their rights through real Islamic principles and will seek ways to help and sustain the community in accordance to Afghan culture and religion.

Training sessions will include topics such as, women's rights in Islam, respecting local traditions, principles of community development, effective communication, gender awareness, and basic principles of management: financial, resource and personnel management. These skills and knowledge will prepare the women

to learn about techniques of need assessment, participant selection, training program facilitation, program monitoring, and evaluation techniques.

The facilitators will provide help and support in organizing the community in setting up local committees to deal with their future needs. The aim of this pilot workshop would be to extend the program to the national level.

### Long-Term Objectives

The over-all purpose of this program is to empower Afghan refugee women through community building and to train them as agents for change. From this specific target goal, the program sub-goals or tentative objectives will be identified. The activities will be carried out according to the planned objectives. It is hoped that the Afghan women community movement can be a step in building a sense of awareness, an awareness which could result in calls for the reopening of female schools, offices, educational institutions, and other national agencies for all Afghans equally.

The intention of this program is to develop a form of action that is non-violent without confrontation. The activities of the program will be carried out with consultation and involvement of refugee groups in Pakistan. The program management will define problems, present them to local refugee communities, invite their comments and suggestion in formulation of program activities and decision making. The vision is that the dreams and inspiration of this woman's group would grow through community networking. The process would result in formation of women's community groups at the national level and would be recognized by international organizations. The training program is to develop an approach that leads to inclusion of grass roots Afghan refugee women in participatory planning, implementation, and evaluation by themselves. These

women are to be able to maintain their standards of living, community safety nets, being guardians of Afghan culture, and their identities, through clothing and Afghan social and traditional values.

The long-term objective of this program is to establish an institution that will sustain and support indigenous structures and knowledge systems. This institution may serve as a vanguard to develop a sense of awareness in every Afghan woman, and serve as an instrument for creating awareness in Afghan women about their lives and wake them up to demonstrate the condition of their oppression. Nonformal education, using a participatory form of action, would enable women to discover their rights through Islamic principles. Community activity is a learning process. These women will learn from each other during the training by sharing their personal stories and experiences. Direct involvement of refugee women in community activities will provide the opportunity for them to learn how to form community networks and to be prepared to participate in civil society and the process of the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The training program would provide an opportunity to make Afghan women visible and serve as a process of encouraging them to work together and harness everyone's energy towards a common purpose.

Another goal of the training program is to awaken up on everybody's capacity for compassion and joy of Islamic unity, "*Umah*" brother/sisterhood. Since Islam is a religion that defines the ways one leads his/her life, this training proposes to empower Afghan women by improving and strengthening their Islamic knowledge system through nonformal education and community activities.

## Strategy and Process

The program will support, strengthen, and improve the vernacular structure and knowledge of refugee communities; it will not seek to change or replace them. The process will not impose any activity or program content that is offensive to the traditions of the Afghan community. Due to the concept of the veil, dress code or covering of the head, it has been chosen to train women in seclusion. Change in this context does not mean importing technology, or obtaining foreign aid, but to use humane support in raising awareness, “waking up” on every level: personal, spiritual, cultural, and economic. This program will be based on a holistic view of social change, which is deeply inspired by true Islamic liberal teachings and Afghan culture.

In Islam, there is absolutely no difference between men and women as far as their relationships to *Allah* are concerned. Both are promised the same reward for good conduct and the same punishment for evil conduct. The Holy *Quran*, in addressing the believers says: “O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit a woman against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness; live with them with kindness and equity. (4:19, Holy *Quran*.) These aspects are emphasized by Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). He said “Among my followers, the best of men are those who are best to their wives, and the best of women are those who are best to their husbands. Among my followers, again, the best of women are those who assist their men in their work, and love them dearly for everything, save what is a transgression of *Allah's* laws”, to men and women set down a reward equivalent to the reward of a thousand martyrs (Islamic *Sharia*.) ‘*Sharia*’ is Islamic law and is the third source of reference for Muslims. Prophet Mohammed, (p.b.o.h.) was full of praise for virtuous and chaste women. He said. “The

world and all things in the world are precious, but the most precious thing in the world is a virtuous woman. '*Hadith*' (sayings of Prophet Mohammed)

The Islamic version of extremism denies all these rights for women and emphasizes the male ego and a sense of superiority over women. These misinterpretations have been expressed through the concept of women as the weaker sex, who need to be protected. Political change in Afghanistan brought the country's faith and its population into the hands of warlords and Islamic extremists who have become fanatically reactionary to the notion of westernization, especially in respect to the status of women. Here, we can see the flexibility of Islamic religion, and how the ones who enjoy power at the top can manipulate the concept of religion. In Islam, '*Ijtihad*' (interpretation) regulates change, and it opens the door for flexibility and change within an Islamic society. Now, the question comes, who changes religion? And how does it change? Who is responsible for '*Ijtihad*'? Those who have the power change religion according to their own interests, not according to the interests of the majority (Asghar, A. 1992, 35.) So, should I call this process change for development in Afghanistan? Is it development or backwardness? I would like to call it backwardness, because *Taliban* (religious students), claimed that "We are very proud to have taken Afghanistan back 1000 years to its real Islamic roots (UNICEF, 1996.) Since then, the Afghan women have been stripped not only of their natural possessions, but also of their dignity and self-esteem. Needless to say this led to the seclusion of women by use of force with a view to protect them.

The Afghan women must understand that Islam accords high respect to women. All that the Holy *Quran* requires of women is that they should not display their sexual charms, but dress in a dignified manner. (Asghar A., 1992, 5.)

According to Islamic liberal principles, a suitable ideological position may be inferred, and theoretical questions can be raised and discussed, all in a tentative way. Community education for conscientization is not only a matter of imparting knowledge, but at a larger part; it is enabling women to discover the truth for themselves.

#### Methodology

is as important as the content. It involves the development or rediscovery of values by the women and other community members themselves in the context of their daily lives (Chambers, 1997, 133.)

The starting point in generating a grass-roots process is the stimulation of the oppressed to get together to inquire why they are oppressed and deprived through social investigation and analysis on their own. This will promote critical self-awareness of the women and their environment. The participants will be encouraged to meet periodically in the form of workshops in order to review their experiences, to undertake investigation of their environment. Community building implies participation, and its principle is based on action-reflection, and on sharing experiences, knowledge and value judgement. Therefore, a proper selection of a durable approach is essential. In the selected approach, the professional's action and reflection is viewed and based on what they do and how they learn. This approach uses dialogue and participation to enhance oppressed groups' awareness and confidence, and empower their action.

The concept of empowerment through action reflection owes much to the work of Paulo Freire (Pedagogy of the Oppressed.) The essence of knowledge and learning has been induced from practice and what has been found to work, not deduced from a priori principle. This approach seeks to:

- ❖ empower women, the weak, and the vulnerable and to make power reversals real
- ❖ make sure that the behavior/attitude of the outsiders who facilitate are not dominant
- ❖ shift the existing norms from closed to open, from individual to group, from verbal to visual, and from measuring to comparing (Chambers, 1997, 106.)

My view of empowering Afghan women is to struggle in a peaceful way without confrontation. Struggle for what? Struggle for restoration of Afghan women's rights by community mobilization at the group-level. The process needs the women to be equipped with proper skills and knowledge for their participation in decision-making, and policy formulation. In addition, the process has to allow them to review the extent of how much sharing; tolerance, consideration, and responsibility are needed in the context of the Afghan culture and belief system. Therefore, the process of empowerment is a spiral involving change and consciousness, locating areas for change, planning strategies, acting for change, and analyzing the outcome. It is a learning process that affects everyone involved: the change agents, the experts, the collective and the community and it cannot be a top-down relationship. All involved, training participants, facilitators, refugee communities, project management team, outsiders, insiders must play a role in shaping it.

Given an awareness that the term empowerment in the context of Afghan culture is highly sensitive, the term must be constructed according to the Afghan refugee

women's perception of power and the power relation between males and females. Two decades of war has totally devastated social, economic and intellectual life in Afghanistan. Therefore, it is necessary not only to struggle for recovery of what has been destroyed, but also to make-up for the growth that has been forgone during these years. As agents of change, the Afghan women must act in a manner that other refugee communities form a positive impression about them and they can easily reconcile formation of this group in their traditional and socio-cultural values

The participants must be provided with the skills and abilities to advocate for their visibility through designing training programs for women's groups on topics, which are related to women's development. This training should not only be for women, but for all disadvantaged/deprived Afghans. Afghan women must have a vision of a better future and be able to articulate it. Achieving this goal will not be possible, unless the participation of half of the population of Afghanistan, the women, is taken into account.

Before implementation of the program there will be a participatory needs assessment done in the Afghan refugee community to find out what the needs are and what the refugees seek for the fulfillment of their needs. Another purpose of the needs assessment is to find out what the participants expect from the training program. Ongoing and final evaluations will be included in the program to see how the renewed Islamic knowledge has affected the participants' perceptions. The program will provide support to the refugee community in meeting these needs.

#### Needs Assessment

Careful assessment of the causes of oppression/poverty of women will lead to a highly decentralized, participatory, and self-reliant approach to reversing the decline

Afghan women experienced during the refugee life. I believe a well designed program and effective training will produce successful results under many adverse conditions. At the initial stage, a careful study of the complexities of social values and social conditions will be conducted to understand what is the Afghan women's perception of change for development. The program's commitment is mainly to alleviate oppression, through empowerment of women for social and economic change. Conducting informal discussions at traditional gatherings will help to identify the major concerns of the target group and to single out those with leadership potential. The focus will be on examining gender issues as a primary field within which power is articulated in the communities. This will help to build group action and eventually, construction of a community center. Careful assessment will lead to problem identification. To identify and select problems, these questions are to be raised in the process:

- What is the problem in terms of Afghan refugee women?
- What are the current symptoms of the problems?
- What is the existing situation compared to the previous and desired situation of Afghan women
- How have the effects of war been changing the life condition of Afghan women?

From these perspectives, the main issues will be diagnosed and barriers to resolution of the problems will be identified. After identifying problems and problem solutions, by a pedagogic technique, the participants will get together to recount their oppression and life experiences. Then, they will discuss the commonality of these

experiences to move towards appreciation of the structure of their environment and to do collective decision-making and action.

### The Role of Facilitators

Planning and implementation of community building and mobilization require trained and efficient expertise from local people as well as from international agencies. The outsiders' role as catalysts is to train a group of refugee women by formulating a dynamic model in which the participants learn of the complexity and inter-relatedness of the issues of various problems. Understanding the issues, the participants will be able to meet and solve problems. The participants will learn about each other, about their community, their concerns, and about themselves. These women should be able to draw maps, and charts to locate the sources of violence against women in order to identify problems and plan actions for solving them. All this can be possible if these women are encouraged and trained efficiently by a group of experts who are aware of cultural and social values of traditional societies like Afghanistan. The facilitators are to learn from the 'insiders' perspectives on what is needed and what is feasible for bringing change in the quality of oppressed women's lives. It is also clear that international assistance for development cannot be expected to alleviate the immediate problem. However, if programs under international assistance are carried out with compassion, full commitment, and strong determination, it could be possible to contribute significantly to a more sensible world in the long run.

### The Concepts of 'emic' and 'etic, Insider & Outsider

In anthropology a distinction is made between 'emic' and 'etic' views of reality. The first refers to people's subjective perspective about what they are doing, saying or

believing, while the second attempts to reconstruct, from an outsider or objective perspective, what is being done, said or believed. In other words, the concept of 'emic' is to build local knowledge, the knowledge that can be learned by the outsider in order to act like an insider. The concept proposes a set of description, which set norms and standards for building views and shaping certain behaviors that are appropriate and acceptable to the insider. The concept of "etic" refers to the theoretical or scientific knowledge of the people. This concept describes a set of theoretical or scientific principles that are examined and analyzed as a method of studying and determining the essential knowledge. The scheme must be examined critically and subjected to analysis. The "etic" account can be validated if it meets the standards of logic, comprehensiveness, and independence from the observer's cultural values and personal views and is subjected to scientific evaluation. Then, it can be cross culturally applicable (Headland, et.al 1990, 35.)

Under the prevailing condition, change in the status of Afghan women may be a long way off. Communities often resist change because change may threaten some of their interests, and security. Change is often uncomfortable. The extremists have been thinking of Islam as a political rather than a spiritual entity. Any talk of justice for women infuriates them and they take it as an attack to Islam from enemies. Therefore, under-taking programmes for bringing change in the status of women in the unstable political system of Afghanistan may sound ideal. But, in the environment of immigration it seems to be working with direct involvement of the Afghan refugee community. In the process of change, the outsiders act only as facilitators. Refugee women need to chose their own program and contribute actively in setting realizable goals. So, the outsiders'

task is to try to find a way to work in spite of rigid views. It is hoped that gradually the status of women can be addressed.

As an Afghan woman and based on my own experience, I have learned that a civil society and democratic institutions cannot be imported. Grassroots developmental agents, dealing with people on daily issues, must be fully involved in the process of change. Otherwise ideals will never become reality. Outsiders can act only as facilitators, providing resources for grassroots efforts. Foreign ideas alone cannot define the problems nor can they propose solutions. A solution to an internal conflict cannot be achieved, unless the whole population is treated equally, give the chance to participate, to dialogue and to make decision that brings positive change.

## CHAPTER VI

### PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY

An international agency or a NGO (Non-governmental Organization) will be sought to sponsor the program. A budget proposal will be prepared and submitted to the concerned authorities. The budget components will be broken down into different budget lines with allocations for different program activities in connection with the planned objectives. (see Table 2: Budget Proposal for Pilot Workshop, p. 47.) The long-term objective of this proposal is to find the feasibility of replicating an organization, NGO (Nongovernment Organization) for Afghan women in exile that will implement training programs for the empowerment of women. The trained group of women could be agents of change and stand up for the restoration of Afghan women's rights. The NGO will conduct a pilot training workshop for Afghan women in exile in Pakistan, the country neighboring to Afghanistan for a duration of three weeks. The pilot workshop is offered as an alternative to present women's development schemes. The workshop will attempt to increase the participants' knowledge of women's rights in the Islamic religion, by reading and understanding rather than by receiving oral misinterpretations of the extremists' version of Islam. It is hoped that the pilot workshop would create a sense of awareness among the Afghan women community in exile, who will gain a better understanding and perception of their rights and conditions. These women also will seek ways to help and sustain the community based on liberal Islamic principles and Afghan culture. The exact time and date of the workshop will be arranged, and negotiated with the sponsoring organization and community.

### Training Activities

Community organizing or mobilization is an educational process itself. Through collective action, the participants teach themselves to make decisions, to plan their work, and discover their capabilities and power within the tenet of Islam not through personal desired interpretations. The oppressed possess the knowledge but this is to be transformed into knowledge for liberation. The synthesis of knowledge produced by participants and the knowledge contributed by the outsider may lead to a holistic contextual and accurate interpretation of social reality (Selener, 1997, 29.) The activities and formation of this program are independent from political parties, tribal connections, and elite domination. The main activities of the training program will be carried out in the form of a workshop that will consist of modules on different topics. Each module will contain details of training activities, reading materials and handouts in connection to the objectives (For details please see Appendices A-H). The participatory approach constitutes the praxis of the facilitators and the local people. The two processes are rooted in the respective traditions and accumulated wisdom of the two parties in these interactions. The training program activities will follow the principles of action reflection in its initial stage to the extent possible. In its activities, the workshop will be searching for the positive, for successes, and for examples of what works for the well being of refugee women. The Afghan refugee population should easily reconcile formation of this group, in their traditional and socio-cultural values. This small group can become an instrument of change to the advantage of oppressed women and the group itself. At the end of the workshop, the participants will have:

- Opened communication and dialogue within the refugee community in Pakistan
- Created a sense of confidence on the part of Afghan refugee women to identify their immediate needs and organize themselves to solve problems
- Strengthened knowledge about the term 'empowerment' and change
- Learned skills by doing, exchanging experiences, developing communication skills and developing a sense of awareness
- Reviewed and discussed basic principles of management
- Strengthened and practiced administrative skills in daily office procedures
- Read and discussed techniques for managing: human, financial and supply resources
- Developed a spirit to do what is required/desired by refugees
- Designed activities of basic services for the elimination of oppression
- Provided participatory action reflection activities through appropriate techniques
- Increased choices and opportunities for active participation
- Been able to apply all their acquired knowledge, when undertaking training programs for women's larger groups
- Been able to take charge of future projects for women's participation in developmental activities.

#### Project Description

The pilot workshop on Community Mobilization and Organization will provide training for a group of 15 Afghan women as agents of change in exile. The workshop will be conducted in one of the Afghan Women's Organizations in Peshawar, (RAWA) Revolutionary Afghan Women's Association, or in Islamabad, (AWEC) Afghan Women's Educational Center, for a duration of three weeks.

The participants of the workshop will be selected either from above mentioned Afghan Refugee Women Organizations or some of other Afghan women groups, where there are women, who are active in women's movements. In addition to the 15 participants, a group of five competent women will be selected to serve as local administrative support staff and co-facilitators.

### Project Management

The project management team includes two international staff, one director, one consultant, five local personnel, mentioned before, and a board. The consultant and the director will arrive in Pakistan two weeks before the starting of the program. By the first week, a board will be formed which will include a leader selected from the Afghan refugee community and one representative from each of the Afghan woman's organization in Pakistan. The five local personnel will consist of three refugee women, as co-facilitators, and two women as administrative support personnel: one accountant and one administrative assistant. The board members will outline the policy and strategies of the workshop. The board members will then select the three co-facilitators to help in conducting the training workshop and serve as the program coordinators. Consulting with the two international staff members, the board members will also select a competent accountant and one administrative assistant for the program.

The project management policy will be based on consultation and inviting opinions of all parties involved in the process of implementation of the program. The project management team will define problems; present them to local communities, invite their comments and suggestions, and make decisions in formulation of program activities and the implementation process. The project management team also defines and limits

policy within which participants share or assume decision-making power. The project management team is responsible for the over-all management of the project.

**The Board:** The Board will be responsible for the general policies, conduct and design of the activities of the project. There will be frequent democratic meetings between the board members and the other project management team to incorporate changes in the design of the program or policy in carrying out the activities.

**Facilitators:** There will be two international staff: one consultant and one project director. These two persons are responsible for the smooth running of the project's daily administrative tasks and training activities and for the logistics of the training group in relation to the objectives of the program. The director and the administrative assistant will be responsible for overseeing the financial administration of the program. They will disburse the funds in an appropriate time, after the reconciliation of the expenses incurred for planned training and other activities. The consultant will be responsible for designing training programs, providing technical support for the general progress of the training, advising on training material design, and for making any changes and revisions that are necessary based upon on-going evaluation. S/he will also be responsible for preparing and submitting activity, progress, initial, financial, and final reports. The training co-facilitators will provide an essential link between the board and the management team as they coordinate the supervision of the training program. The co-facilitators will also be responsible for the training sessions. The accountant will be responsible for book-keeping and for obtaining and keeping records of all purchases and expenses. She will also be responsible for maintaining the imprest account ( p. 61, Basic Financial Management, Financial Forms # 1-5) of the daily small cash expenditures.

The topic and material of the training can be determined or suggested by the outsiders, but the insider's role is to initiate a process. The outsiders will hand over control and the insiders will determine the details of the agenda. Information is built up cumulatively and mutually (Chambers, 1997, 107.)

**No. of trainees:** The training is being designed with 15 participants in mind. The exact number of trainees will be decided on the project's site. The project budget proposal is as follows:

Table 2: Budget Proposal for Pilot Workshop

Budget Line	Purpose	# of Days & # of People	Amount in US \$	Total
01	Salaries	1 month each, 2 international staff	4,000 each	8,000.00
002	Travel	2 international staff	2,000 each	4,000.00
003	Housing	2 international staff	1,000 each	2,000.00
004	Salaries	15 days, 5 support personnel staff	400 each	2,000.00
005	Stipend	15 days, 15 trainees	200 each	3,000.00
006	Local Travel	1 month, all staff	2,000	2,000.00
007	Training mat	For the whole period	2,000	2,000.00
008	Misc.	Hospitality	1,000	1,000.00
009	Sundry exp.	-	1,000	1,000.00
Total	-		-	25,000.00

## CHAPTER VII

### EVALUATION, MONITORING AND REPORTING

#### Evaluation

My view of evaluation is to assess the achievement of or results of a designed program and to check whether the program achievements are to the desired standard or fall outside allowable limits of the designed training program. In this training program, evaluation will focus on:

- ❖ Selection of standards to compare the actual performances of participants to the expected ones
- ❖ Collection of information about program performances
- ❖ Comparison of the actual performance against a standard
- ❖ Identification of the cause of excessive deviation
- ❖ Taking corrective action, if excessive deviation occurs

The evaluation should find out how to reconcile the needs for short-term education with the needs to create a long-term educational program; a type of training program that can provide conditions for freeing women from oppression. This program should inform women about gender issues, and encourage them to initiate a long-term awakening process. Conducting self-evaluation, the participants can evaluate themselves, and determine what they want in the training. To measure the level of achievement of this program, periodic and a final participatory evaluation will be conducted. The procedures will include oral and written feedback from participants after each activity. The periodic evaluations would include asking analytic questions, and writing analytic memos throughout the life of a program. Periodic evaluations make final analysis and evaluation

easier and less daunting. The training facilitators and program evaluators should coordinate closely with the program coordinator and Board of Directors. They should keep in mind the following points in the process of evaluation:

- ❖ Keep your questions in mind; remember what you are trying to learn about the refugees and stay connected to the community
- ❖ Modify your data gathering and information, based on what you are learning, not by chance. Ask analytic questions as you go along
- ❖ Write all the time, note hunches, thoughts, and impressions; write analytic memos
- ❖ Keep a journal and re-read it from time to time
- ❖ Share your ideas and thoughts with people, develop a critical friend or talk with the participants and the refugee community
- ❖ Be creative, create images, draw pictures, use visual images, and draw concept maps.
- ❖ Think about how you might characterize what you are learning; what is it like? What images does it evoke? (G. B. Rossman & S.F. Rallis, 1998,4.)

At the end of the program, it will be useful to seek the opinion of the participants about the effectiveness of the program. The purpose of the on-going evaluation is to improve the program efficiency and to be reflective of the participants' needs. Monitoring techniques will be used to measure both the qualitative and quantitative progress of the program.

This evaluation will not be sufficient to assess if the training has effectively improved the skills or attitudes of the participants. It is, therefore, necessary to have

some form of systematic follow-up programs of training, which address the issues of women's participation in the development programs for reconstruction of Afghanistan. Also, the participants should be encouraged by their communities or influential people to appreciate the values of the training. The facilitators and program evaluators have to check from time to time the effects of training on the participant's work performance and compare the results after the training by conducting different forms of evaluation which include a close monitoring system and regular submission of reports.

### Monitoring

Monitoring of the over-all training program is also a part of the training plan. Access to the training program, achievement, and the overall functionality of the training program should be monitored using the following types of indicators:

- ❖ Availability of funds and facilities
- ❖ Ratio of participants to facilitators
- ❖ Willingness of participation
- ❖ Availability of training materials and facilities
- ❖ Number of trained and non-trained participants
- ❖ Level of performance during training (UNHCR, 1994.)

During the training program, there will be a daily evaluation of the training by the facilitators, trainees and program coordinators. The opinions of the trainees will be assessed by the training facilitators and program evaluators. Before the training sessions, there will be a general discussion and review based on the opinions of the trainees. In order to find out whether the trainees are making progress and gaining competency, there will be close observation of the training sessions and the use of a checklist of the

achievement of the training objectives. The board members will also visit and evaluate the training sessions by observing the progress, rapport, and the methodology of the trainers.

### Reporting

The main purpose of submitting reports is to state the status of work in progress and confirm that the objectives of the program are being achieved. To achieve the planned objectives of the program, work plans are prepared for different activities within a specific duration of time. For example, what types of training activities are carried out during a specific period of time? What types of equipment are bought during the training period? What was the purpose of the purchase of the equipment? Those are some of the reasons for submitting periodic, progress and other reports. These reports convey the proper use of time and money, the money spent for what purpose of what activity?

Styles and types of reporting take different forms from one organization to another. The reporting type depends on the policies and procedures followed by the specific organization. Generally, financial and performance reports are to be submitted during a specific period of time. The program coordinator and the consultant are responsible to prepare and submit required reports. These reports will normally be sent regularly to organizations, which have sponsored the project. The purpose of these reports is to explain how the individual donations have been spent. The performance report indicates the main activities carried out during the period. It highlights technical or administrative issues faced, and makes detailed assessment of the implementation of the objectives of the project. These reports also give information about the over-all impact of

a specific program, future activities to be carried out, and the follow-up programs to be conducted for the special needs of a specific program.

The project consultant and coordinator are required to make sure the prepared reports explain:

- ❖ The expenditures incurred and to reflect the transactions of the project on a cash or cheque basis
- ❖ The disbursements incurred by budget line item during a specific period of the project's life.
- ❖ Indicate the balance available in the budget as of a given date

To strengthen managerial/administrative capacity of the participants for satisfactory specific technical and administrative performance, the pilot workshop will train the participants on policies and procedures followed by the donor agency. The program intends to introduce different modalities of basic financial and administrative/management principles in order to stimulate and support the participants in taking more active roles in the process of managing future projects.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The development of a community is complex and involves all levels of a society. The problem at each level varies depending on the degree of disruption of normalcy in a society and this varies from community to community in the course of a conflict. How best to convene and facilitate community groups is strongly linked to personal commitment and sensitivity on the part of facilitators. I believe these are the main keys for success. We acknowledge that community mobilization cannot compete with the heavy weaponry of armed factions to prevent further conflict in Afghanistan. Within a short span of time, the formation of women's communities can manage to repair much of the uncountable damage and to restore a sense of commitment to the community by setting-up appropriate interventions. This will help to prevent further oppression. In many cases investment for development or promotion of women's empowerment can be the difference between life and death in the context of a sensitive culture like that of Afghanistan. One of the greatest obstacles to development and the meanest aftershocks of the war in Afghanistan is the development of terrorism. Hundreds of innocent women were abducted, and tortured. In addition, buildings were exploded in the name of holy Islam and Afghan culture. Therefore, change may be a long way off, but to invest in rebuilding is the best chance to invest in peace. 'Peace should be viewed as a product of and not a precondition to bring change for development' (UNDP, 1997.) The rate of change and its impact call for bringing a balance of equality within certain communities, especially those disempowered in the name of culture or religion. Thus, the training programs and the training providers should be effective in their choice of policies;

strategies and process of trust building among the local people. Appreciation of these elements calls for efficient use of resources, effective trainers, good cross-cultural communicators, and people experienced in human relations. Communities often resist change because change may threaten some of their basic needs, security and sense of belonging. Some communities may fear criticism, inability to cope, loss of authority, loss of status, or the inability to learn new skills. Change is often uncomfortable. We can get people to accept change if we recognize these obstacles and help train, and involve those affected.

## APPENDIX A: DAILY TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Main activities of the training program will be carried out according to five training modules. Each module contains details of training activities and exercises in connection to the set-up objectives of the pilot workshop. Tentative activities of the program is set forth below:

First day	09:00-09:45	Opening session
	09:45-12:00	Official registration
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon and participants' acquaintance
	01:00-02:30	Discussing objectives of the workshop
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Primary assessment of participatory learning approach
Second day	09:00-10:45	Introduction to Basic Principles of Management
	10:45-11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-12:00	Continuation of the session
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Managerial functions
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
Third day	03:00-04:00	Training and learning activities and exercises
	09:00-10:30	Personnel Management
	10:30-12:00	Field trip to some international organization
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Reports on field trip
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
Fourth day	03:00-04:00	Group discussion and exercises
	09:00-10:45	Introduction to Financial Management
	10:45-11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-12:00	Budgetary Rules and Procedures
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Exercise on the use of budgetary forms
Fifth day	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Group discussion, homework assignments
	09:00-10:45	Principles of Supply/Equipment Management
	10:45-11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-12:00	Procurement Procedures, use & exercise of forms
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
Fifth day	01:00-02:30	Equipment/Supply Classification
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Financial Reports, accounting preparation

## Second week

First day	09:00-10:45	Importance of Communication, use of Internet
	10:45-11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-12:00	Types of Communication, Advantages & Disadvantages of verbal & written communication
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Group working, group members responsibilities
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Principles of Community Development
Second day	09:00-10:45	Basic Women's Rights in Islam and community activities
	10:45-11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-12:00	Continuation of the session
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Afghan women's visibility and community mobilization
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Sharing life experiences, stories and learning activities
Third day	09:00-10:30	Discussion on Women in Development
	10:30-12:00	Field trip to some Afghan Women's Organization
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Reports on field trip
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Group discussion and exercises
Fourth day	09:00-10:45	The Concept of Empowerment
	10:45-11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-12:00	Vision of Empowerment in Afghan Culture
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Cultural Sensitivity, case study
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Group discussion, homework assignments
Fifth day	09:00-10:45	Application of strategies and tools
	10:45-11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-12:00	Women & men power relationship in the context of Afghan culture
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Promoting the concept of participation, Audio visual and feedback
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Application of strategies & group discussion

### Third week

First day	09:00-10:45	Introduction to Gender and Gender Awareness
	10:45-11:00	Coffee Break
	11:00-12:00	Role changes of Afghan women, home and in exile
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Cultural and social biases
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Gender issues identification
Second day	09:00-10:45	Continuation of the session
	10:45-11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-12:00	Application of strategies and tools
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Gender and personal biases
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Training activities and role playing
Third day	09:00-10:45	Group discussion on gender & problems
	10:45 -11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-`12:00	Training activities and audiovisual
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Sharing groups discussion
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Evaluation and feedback of the session
Forth day	09:00-10:45	Arrangements for Informal meetings with Afghan refugee groups
	10:45:04:00	Field trips and contacting Afghan refugees
Fifth day	09:00-10:45	Discussion & sharing experience of informal Meetings
	10:45:11:00	Coffee break
	11:00-12:00	Case studies
	12:00-01:00	Luncheon
	01:00-02:30	Group working and sharing of case studies
	02:30-03:00	Coffee and 'Zuhur' praying break
	03:00-04:00	Summary, feedback and evaluation
	7:00-9:00	Cocktail and Dinner and closing ceremony

## APPENDIX B:

### MODULE 1: BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MANAGEMENT

#### Reading Materials

##### A. Objectives

At the end of the session, participants should be able to:

1. Define management and describe its main functions,
2. Identify the skills of an effective manager/administrator, basic principles of management, and gain basic knowledge in different fields of management.

##### *A. B. Definition of Management:*

What is management?

There are many definitions for the term 'Management'. We do not think of management as meaning the people in the upper stratum of an organization. Nor do we use management in the sense of forcefully controlling a situation in this program context. Management might be simply defined: "Management is getting things done through other people." :

This definition is based on two principles

1. Commitment to achievement, manager sees that objectives are specified and then these objectives are achieved. Getting things done means engaging people in purposeful action,
2. The importance of the people, this means that people are the most important resources for getting things done. This definition should not be read to mean only that manager commands and the others execute.

In its broader meaning management is defined: "Management is the process of using organizational resources to achieve organizational objectives through the function

of planning, decision making leading, organizing and controlling. (Andrew J. & Dubrain R. 1986

In carrying out his duty of getting things done, the manager performs the following functions:

Planning, implementing, and evaluation.

#### C. Types of Management

Managerial functions fall within three different fields of management. These fields are Personnel Management, Financial Management, and Equipment/ Supply Management. We will discuss each of the field of management and see the different functions, procedures and tasks carried out in these different fields.

#### Personnel Management

Personnel management deals with the hiring and firing of staff members in organization. The main function of this field is to see that all the staff members get their benefits, like salary, leaves, holidays etc. Personnel management also keeps personal records or files for all the staff members. For example, information about job description, starting date, salary, benefits, promotions, vacation days taken and evaluation of employees work performance. Personnel management is also to make sure that staff members get the training they need to become more skilled employees.

#### D. Training Activities, experience hands on practice

The participants will review the process of recruitment from the starting point hiring to final stage firing or retirement. To make participants understand the types of communication used in the process of recruitment of different level of employees, the

facilitators will demonstrate and work out practically with the individual participant this process. The participants will be requested to take out personal files of staff members in Afghan Women's Educational Center (AWEC) and study carefully each file in terms of information, following procedures and use of different correspondence to different sources. The contents of these files will be compared with that of required listed documents, which should be kept in the files. The main highlighted points will include:

- Policies, rules and regulations followed by each step,
- Purpose of job description,
- Responsibilities and commitments of employees,
- Contract procedures, duration of contract, extension of contracts and change of terms and conditions.
- Employee's benefits,
- Leaves, sick leave, maternity leave, annual leave and vacation
- Salary entitlement,
- Keeping personal files
- Starting date,
- Duration of service
- Date of salary raises
- Level of education,
- Evaluation,
- Promotion,
- Training
- Salary raise

After reviewing these procedures, the participants will be requested to take out personal files of staff members and study carefully each file in terms of information, following procedures and use of different correspondence to different sources.

## APPENDIX C: MODULE 2: FINANCIAL & SUPPLY MANAGEMENT

### A. Objectives:

At the end of the session, participants should be able to:

- Strengthen their financial and supply management/administrative capacities ,
- Prepare participants for satisfactory execution of specific technical and administrative operations, and
- Stimulate participants in taking more active role in the school management.

### B. Financial Management and Reading Materials:

The money the organization uses to achieve program goals is financial management. Financial management controls the finance of an organization, and it is responsible for planning how to spend the money within an specific time. This section keeps records of how the money to be spent and when to submit financial reports, stating the purpose of expenditures and reasons for expenditures. Financial management also controls the money, which comes into the organization and prepares summaries of financial transactions. Financial management often makes decision based on the information obtained from expediters of the program. Based on this information, the organization management prepares work plans stating specific time and targets. The time dimension and targeted areas for carrying activities are in line with the set up objectives of the program. The details of activities in terms of financial management include:

- Study the rules, regulations, and procedures to be followed-up in handling financial activities,
- Source of receiving funds,
- Allocation of funds for different purposes,

- Establishing accounting system,
- Use of accounting standard forms, Request for Payment (Hand out # 1)
- Make summaries of expenditures,
- Keeping records of account, Request for Petty Cash (Hand out #2)
- Use of Standard Financial forms, Disbursement Voucher (Hand-out # 3)
- Imprest Account Balance Sheet (Hand-out # 4)

#### C. Equipment/supply Management

Supply management deals with the organization's goods including raw materials, office space, office supplies, teaching materials etc. This part of management controls and leads the proper use and distribution of such physical resources to different offices or classes in an organization as computers, typewriters, text books, stationery, office space, heating supplies, lighting supplies, and other supplies.

#### D. Practical Training Activities :

- Study procurement and purchasing procedures,
- Equipment classification,
- Expendable equipment,
- Non expendable equipment,
- Keep records of information about the equipment and supplies,
- Use of standard forms, prepare inventories, Equipment/Stock Registering Sheet (Hand out # 5)

#### D. Reporting and its Purpose :

The main purpose of submitting reports is to state the status of work progress and confirm that the objectives of the program are achieved. To achieve the set up objectives

of the program, work plans are prepared for different activities within a specific duration of time. For example, how many training activities are carried out under the covering period of three months? What types of equipment are bought during the period? What was the purpose for purchase of the equipment? Those are some of the reasons for submitting periodic, progress and other reports. These reports convey the proper use of time and money, the money spent for what activity?



HAND OUT NUMBER 2: USE OF FINANCIAL STANDARD FORMS,  
REQUEST FOR PETTY CASH

TO: Program Director

FROM: -----

DESIGNATION

I am pleased to request for an amount of ----- for petty cash for the period of ---  
----- for necessary local expenses in ----- office

Present Balance is -----

Last Balance was -----

Cash amount from last period -----

Thanking you,

Signature

Date

HANDOUT NUMBER 3: USE OF STANDARD FINANCIAL FORMS,  
DISBURSEMENT VOUCHER

Voucher No.  
/99

Payee:		DEPT & TITLE:			
S.N	DESCRIPTION	B.L	UNIT	TOTAL PRICE	CHEQE/CAS NUMBER
TOTAL :					
APPRVED BY :		CERT IFIED BY		RECEIVED B	
DATE :				:	

HANDOUT NUMBER 4: EQUIPMENT/STOCK REGISTERING SHEET

Register number	Specification	Unit price	Name of company	Total price

Received By:

Date:

Designation:



## APPENDIX D: MODULE 3: COMMUNICATION AND GROUP WORKING

### *A. Objectives*

At the end of the session participants should be able to:

- Understand the importance of communication
- Recognize and define different types of communication
- Develop and improve their communication skills
- Describe the concept and basic principles of group working, and
- Recognize and define the various roles required in group working
- Develop a sense of office procedure organization

### *B. Reading Material and Importance of Communication*

Communication is a vital tool of transmitting messages. By communication we know people, understand what they can and cannot do. The importance of communication is to see that: It is educational, the right information gets to the right people at the right place, at the right time. Through communication we can exchange ideas and information between individuals or group, we can co-operate, we can consult, we can maintain relationship with different people, and we can solve problems. Communication provides better understanding of an organization's role and policies, quicker reaction to orders, accurate transmission of messages gives improved results, develops better relationships between members of a community, and results in higher moral and job satisfaction for all. (S.Kanani, J. Maneno)

#### D Definition of Communication:

Communication is the exchange of information, feelings and thoughts between two or more people. Communication can also be defined: The transmission and reception of messages or any means by which a thought may be transferred. Communication provides better understanding of organization's role and policies. All forms of communication have a communicator and a receiver (receivers). Effective communication must be two ways—there must be feedback. In communication the following five essential points should not be neglected: A message should be: Clear, concise complete, convincing, and capable of being carried out. (S. Kanani, J. Maneno & P. Shluter)

#### E. *Types of Communication*

Types of communication include written and verbal communication. Verbal communication or spoken communication includes Face to face conversation, telephone communication, communicating in a group, in a meeting or in a group working. Written communication consists of writing reports, letters or other correspondence, like fax, telegram, telex and e-mail. There are advantages and disadvantages of both types of communication.

E. Advantages and Disadvantages-advantages of Different Types of Communication:

Type of Communication	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b><u>Verbal/Spoken Communication</u></b>		
1. Person to person conversation 2. Telephone conversation  3. Meetings and settings	1. Immediate response 2. Two-way communication  3. Save time	1. No confirmation in writing 2. No time to think so people may change their mind 3. Telephone calls are expensive 4. Facts can be taken-up wrongly, if not written 5. Waste of time sometimes
<b><u>Written Communication</u></b>		
1. Letters 2. Memos 3. Notices 4. Messages	1. Confirmation in writing 2. Thoughts are more organized 3. Save time 4. Facts are taken correctly 5. Can communicate the same information to many people	1. Takes time for response 2. Cannot be discussed 3. One – way communication

**G. Group Working:**

Definition: The combined action of different individuals or a team of workers on a specific activity is called group working. For example, the action of a hospital staff or a school team is group working.

1. Benefits of Group work
  - a. Workers actively take part in the work,
  - b. Workers develop their communication skills,
  - c. Workers gain confidence in voicing their opinions, and
  - d. Previous experiences of workers can be utilized.
2. Factors Help Facilitate Group Working:
  - a. Mutual co-operation,
  - b. Appropriate communication takes place,
  - c. Sharing of ideas, and
  - d. Selection of a representative for the group.

3. Factors Have Negative Affect on Group Working:

- a. diversity of opinions,
- b. Lack of communication,
- c. Lack of independence of opinions,
- d. Problems with decision-making,
- e. Lack of mutual cooperation,
- f. Lack of work distribution in the group, and
- g. Lack of group leader.

4. Requirements of Group Working:

- a. Clear objectives and criteria,
- b. resources and materials,
- c. Identification of group problems and reporting them beforehand,
- d. Selection of a group leader for the group,
- e. Coordination and organization of group work, and
- f. Collecting the opinions of group members.

Duties of A Group Member in a Group

- a. Awareness of the group work objectives,
- b. Feeling of responsibility,
- c. Listening to the other members ideas,
- d. Producing rational opinions,
- e. Acceptance of reasonable criticism, and
- f. co-operation.

## HANDOUT NUMBER 6: COMMUNICATION & GROUP WORKING EXERCISE

### Training activity on Communication and Group Working

The purpose is to help identify the progress that was made. You should answer by putting a mark in the appropriate place and amplify (where necessary) by adding your comments.

A. How free did you feel to participate and contribute in your own way?

0%    20%    40%    60%    80%    100%  
(Not at all)    (Somewhat)    (Completely integrated)

comments:

B. Identify the helping factors, indicate how you can strengthen these factors.

C. Identify the hindering factors, indicate how you can remove these factors.

D. List main responsibilities of group members, which you consider most important.

E. Review these responsibilities in your group and agree as a group on the most important responsibilities.

## APPENDIX E: MODULE 4, BASIC WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ISLAM

### Objective:

- To create a sense of awareness about women's rights in real Islamic principles and Afghan culture among the Afghan women's group in exile
- To enable the participants to gain knowledge about the Islamic code of life t
- through reading publications on liberal Islamic laws
- To help Afghan women understand and redefine their roles in the community based on Islam and Afghan culture
- To prepare this group of women for training other Afghan women on the subject

### Basic Rights of Women in Islam

#### **Reading Materials**

The Legal Status of Women in Islam

Islam and Women's Education

Women and Marriage in Islam

Women and Political Action

    Ideal Wife in Islam

The True Quality of A Good Wife



# 1 The Legal Status of Women in Islam

## THE STATUS OF WOMEN BEFORE ISLAM

It is a well-known fact that the condition of women in general before Islam was dismal. The history of human civilisation testifies that the woman, who gives birth to man as mother, was humiliated, treated harshly and reduced to the position of being 'a maid' rather than a dignified woman.<sup>1</sup> Women were held in bondage to their husbands, who could keep them or divorce them at their will and pleasure.<sup>2</sup> Women were viewed as the embodiment of sin, misfortune, disgrace and shame, and they had no rights or position in society whatsoever. Indeed, society was confused about the very nature of women and even questioned whether God had granted them a soul.<sup>3</sup> Hence, they were deprived of all opportunities to develop their personalities and their individualities, and make full use of their abilities to the benefit of their society. Women in those societies were also denied all rights of inheritance and ownership. Rather, they were considered as objects of inheritance. A woman was classed not as a person but as a thing, divisible like property; she was an object of scorn and contempt.<sup>4</sup> These inhuman practices were prevalent at the time in most ancient societies.<sup>5</sup>

However, in the Arabian peninsula (the birthplace of Islam), the situation of women prior to Islam was markedly worse.<sup>6</sup> Women in this time of ignorance before Islam (*Jahiliyya*) were in subjugation either to their kinsmen or their husbands. They were considered a chattel to be possessed, to be bought, to be sold or to be inherited.<sup>7</sup> Men had absolute domination over them. They were not individuals themselves, they either belonged to their father or to their husband. The widow(s) of a man were very often inherited by his sons just like any other property. After inheriting them from their father the sons could then easily marry them.<sup>8</sup> Women had no independence or power over issues relating to their well-being and they were excluded from any active role in the social and political affairs of their society. It has been stated that 'at annual gatherings and fairs women were made to dance naked and poets sat around composing poems on various parts of their body and movements'.<sup>9</sup> In other words, they were treated as sex objects with no respect at all for their dignity.



Women in pre-Islamic Arab times were also considered to be a heavy burden on the family. The birth of the daughter was embarrassing for the father, who considered it a disgrace and a matter of shame. Therefore, the Arabs of that time practised widely 'female infanticide': burying their female child alive. This custom was common among the Arabs and it was even viewed as a generous act.<sup>10</sup> The Quran described the mentality of ignorance underlying such a practice as such: 'When the birth of a girl is announced to one of them, his face grows dark and he is filled with inward gloom. Because of the bad news, he hides himself from men; should he keep her with disgrace or bury her under the dust? How ill they judge!'.<sup>11</sup> 'When the sun is folded up; when the stars fall down and the mountains are blown away; when camels big with their young are left untended and the wild beasts are brought together; when the seas are burning and men's souls are reunited (with their bodies); when the infant girl, buried alive, is asked for what crime she was slain; when the records of men's deeds are laid open and heaven is stripped bare; when Hell burns fiercely and Paradise is brought near: then each soul shall know what it has done'.<sup>12</sup>

One of the social reasons for such an attitude was that, in pre-Islamic times, there were often inter-tribal blood feuds, which demanded male members to defend their tribes. Hence men were in much greater demand than women. In addition, in the tribal conflict, the enemy always aimed at capturing women and taking them as prisoners so that they could collect heavy ransoms. Failing to do so, they would keep them as slaves. In both cases women were considered a liability to their own tribes. For if they paid ransom, they would lose money, if not, then the chastity of their women as well as their honour were at stake.<sup>13</sup> 'The Arabs did not welcome the birth of a baby girl, and this was so because of the nature of their society. Wars and invasions never ceased and taking revenge never stopped. All these things depended on the male, but a woman was unable to do any of these tasks, in addition to it, she was the desired loot for (the) service (of the enemy) in the eyes of the enemy, or she was for his entertainment'.<sup>14</sup> For these reasons, the Arabs believed that their own daughters constituted a heavy burden on them and the easiest way to get rid of them was to kill them immediately after they were born.<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, men in the *Jahiliyya* society enjoyed an absolute right over women in matters related to marriage and divorce. He, the man, had unlimited rights of marriage and divorce. He could take as many wives as he wished and could discard a wife at will.<sup>16</sup> The idea of a fixed institution of marriage was absent from the pre-Islamic era. There were only different kinds of sexual union<sup>17</sup> which were characterised by the looseness of marriage bonds and the lack of any defined legal system: 'If one takes

into consideration the preceding facts in conjunction with other factors such as the absence of any contract or legal guardian, the exclusion of the wife from her husband's inheritance, the easy methods of divorce, the lack of a period of seclusion after divorce and widowhood – the *idda* (waiting time) – the conclusion must be reached that there was no fixed institution of marriage and that marriage ties were in no sense regarded as binding'.<sup>18</sup> The result was that a man was at liberty to contract as many marriages as he wished: al-Tabari mentions that men in Arabia before Islam used to marry four, five, six, or even ten women simultaneously and nobody could ever stop them from marrying more than that!<sup>19</sup> 'Before Muhammad, the capacity of the Arab's purse would appear to have provided the only limitation to the number of his wives, and though there were established conventions about the status of the women he married, there were neither conventions nor laws to dictate to him how many they should be'.<sup>20</sup> When Islam emerged, the issue of marriage was regulated. It encouraged men to have one wife, but reluctantly allowed them to have up to four wives under special circumstances.<sup>21</sup> Men before Islam also used to force their women, especially their slave girls, into prostitution (*Zina*).<sup>22</sup>

With regard to divorce, there was no formula for severing the marriage relationship. The husband, in general, enjoyed absolute power over the divorce issue<sup>23</sup> and this led to constant abuses. As there was no check on the powers of the husband to dissolve the marriage tie, Arab men used to divorce their women very often and for any reason,<sup>24</sup> even if it was a trivial one such as, for example, speaking highly of their family or tribes. However, the most obvious ones mentioned by the historians of the *Jahiliyya* were: the man could not find the love he was expecting in his wife; the couple were unable to establish friendship and intimacy or a man thought that he was marrying a young and beautiful woman who turned out to be otherwise.<sup>25</sup> The pagan Arabs also used to revoke the divorce and resume the marital relationship. A man, for example, would pronounce the formula 'I divorce you'<sup>26</sup> many times and then take his wife back; he could then divorce her again and yet could still take her back. When women were divorced or widowed there was no fixed period<sup>27</sup> for *idda*. Some women had to wait for a year before they would be able to re-marry, others contracted marriages immediately after the separation.<sup>28</sup> Divorced women had no right to claim for maintenance, men were exempted from any financial responsibility and endured no legal punishment for their actions.<sup>29</sup> This inhuman treatment had contributed to the degradation of womanhood insofar as the woman herself believed that she should not be more than a servile and submissive creature, and had no right to expect any respect and honour in the world. Such a deplorable situation illustrated that the rights



and the liberties of women in those ancient societies were not only trampled upon, but were entirely denied them.

It must be stressed that some scholars have argued that women in pre-Islamic Arabia had some rights, citing the case of Khadija, the Prophet's first wife, who was a highly successful business-woman. Our response is that Khadija was an exception, one among a small elite of that society, and we believe that her case does not genuinely reflect the general condition of women in that society, which was one of subjugation. This view is shared by B. Stowasser<sup>30</sup> who writes 'we hear of publicly visible, independently wealthy women who are active in their own right. The best-known example here is, of course, Khadija, Muhammad's first wife ... (but) aside from such rare figures of public visibility, involvement and independence as Khadija, the majority of pre-Islamic urban women appear to have lived in a male-dominated society in which their status was low and their rights were negligible. Most women were subjugated to male domination, either that of a male relative, or that of the husband. The men's rights over their women were as their rights over any property. This seems to have been so not only in marriages by capture, where the captured woman was completely under the authority of her captor, but also in marriages by purchase or contract. Here, the suitor paid a sum of money (the *mahr*) to the guardian of the bride-to-be (and possibly another sum, the *sadaq*, to the woman herself),—thereby purchasing her and making her his exclusive property. The marriage contract, in other words, was a contract between husband and guardian, with the bride the sales object. Furthermore, neither conventions nor laws seem to have existed to put a limit to the number of wives that a man could have simultaneously, so that the only restrictive considerations were economic ones. As to divorce in the *Jahiliyya*, it was a matter entirely up to the will of the husband who, having purchased his wife, could discharge his total obligation to her by payment of any portion of the *mahr* that might remain due to her father or guardian, and be rid of her by pronouncement of the formula of dismissal. This formula, pronounced three times, was effective instantly. Finally, there is some indication that women in pre-Islamic Arabia were not allowed the holding, or in any case the uncontrolled disposal, of their possessions'.<sup>31</sup>

#### WOMEN IN ISLAM

With the advent of Islam, the position of women was radically redefined. Firstly, it prohibited the practice of 'female infanticide' and restored the birth rights of women.<sup>32</sup> Hence Islam elevated them to the status of being

as worthy of human dignity as were men. Both men and women were henceforth to be regarded as equal in humanity. The Quran says 'Allah created you from a single soul, and from the same soul created his mate'.<sup>33</sup> It also says 'O mankind, we created you all from a male and female, and made you into races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God fearing of you'.<sup>34</sup> The prophet is reported to have said 'All people are equal, as equal as the teeth of a comb. There is no claim of merit of an Arab over a non-Arab, or of a white over a black person, or of a male over a female. Only God-fearing people merit a preference with God'.<sup>35</sup>

In relation to the absolute, woman is equal to man in all essential rights and duties; God makes no distinction between man and woman. They are to be equally rewarded or punished for their deeds.<sup>36</sup> The Quran says: 'Their Lord answers them, saying: I will deny no man or woman among you the reward of their labours. You are the offspring of one another'.<sup>37</sup> 'For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women; for devout men and women; for men and women who are patient; for men and women who humble themselves; for men and women who give charity; for men and women who fast; for men and women who guard their chastity; for men and women who remember Allah much – for them all has God prepared forgiveness and a great reward'.<sup>38</sup> 'We shall reward the steadfast according to their noblest deeds. Be they men or women, those that embrace the faith and do what is right We will surely grant a happy life; We shall reward them according to their noblest actions'.<sup>39</sup> And again 'The true believers, both men and women, are friends to each other. They enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil; they attend to their prayers and pay the alms-tax and obey Allah and His Apostle. On these Allah will have mercy. He is Mighty, Wise. Allah has promised the men and women who believe in Him gardens watered by running streams, in which they shall abide forever. He has promised them goodly mansions in the gardens of Eden. And what is more, they shall have greater favour from Allah. That is the supreme triumph'.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, *Surah* 40 (the Forgiving one) verse 40:30 'O my people, the life of this world is nothing but a (passing) comfort, but the life to come is an everlasting mansion. Those that do evil shall be rewarded with like evil; but those that have faith and do good works, both men and women, shall enter the Gardens of Paradise and receive blessings without number'.<sup>41</sup> In terms of moral responsibility, both men and women are equally accountable for their actions. For example, the Quran decrees that the same punishment has to be applied on the thieving men as well as the thieving women.<sup>42</sup> Also, both the adulterer and the adulteress have to suffer the same punishment.<sup>43</sup> In fact, in a situation



where the husband accuses his wife of committing adultery, her oath weighs more heavily than his accusation and hence Islamic law would work in her favour.<sup>44</sup>

To rehabilitate the status of women in society, Islam denounced the old myth of Eve as temptress and source of evil, as the cause of original sin and the fall of humankind.<sup>45</sup> According to the Quran the woman is not responsible for Adam's first mistake: both were equally wrong in disobeying God. Both asked for forgiveness and both were forgiven. Indeed in one verse Adam was portrayed as solely responsible for the whole episode: 'But Satan made them slip from it and caused them to depart from that in which they had been. Go hence, We said, and be enemies to each other. The earth will for a while provide your dwelling-place and sustenance. Then Adam received commandments from his Lord, and his Lord relented towards him. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful'.<sup>46</sup> 'To Adam He said: Dwell with your wife in Paradise, and eat from whatever you please; but never approach this tree or you shall both become transgressors. But the devil tempted them, so that he might reveal to them that which had been hidden from them of their shame. He said: your Lord has forbidden you to approach this tree only to prevent you from becoming angels or immortals. Then he swore to them that he would give them friendly counsel. Thus he cunningly seduced them. And when they had eaten of the tree, their shame became visible to them, and they both covered themselves with the leaves of the garden. Their Lord called out to them, saying: did I not forbid you to approach that tree, and did I not warn you that the devil was your sworn enemy? They replied: Lord we have wronged ourselves. Pardon us and have mercy on us, or we shall surely be among the lost. He said: Go hence, and may your descendants be enemies to each other. The earth will for a while provide your sustenance and dwelling-place.<sup>47</sup> There you shall live and there you shall die, and thence you shall be raised to life'.<sup>48</sup> 'But Satan whispered to him, saying: shall I show you the Tree of Immorality and a kingdom which never decays?.... Thus Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray. Then his Lord had mercy on him; He relented towards him and rightly guided him'.<sup>49</sup>

Islam also changed the mentality of both men and women and created a new relationship between them based on respect and mutual understanding; taking care of the woman and respecting her were also emphasised.<sup>50</sup> The status of women was also raised in Islam by granting her the legal right to enter into contracts, to run a business, and to possess property independently from her husband or any kinsmen.<sup>51</sup> From the beginning, Islam stressed that women, as half of the society, should be offered all opportunities which could enable them to develop their natural abilities, so

that they might participate effectively in the development of society. It also emphasised that women should be allowed to attain to the highest ranks of progress materially, intellectually and spiritually.

It is within this context that Islam has granted women broad social, political and economic rights, education and training rights and work opportunity rights. To protect these rights from being abused by men, Islam provided firm legal safeguards.<sup>52</sup> In theory, therefore, a Muslim woman is entitled to the following.

(1) *The Right of Independent Ownership.* This involves the right to manage her own money and property independently. She is at liberty to buy, sell, mortgage, lease, borrow or lend, and sign contracts and legal documents. Also, she can donate her money, act as a trustee and set up a business or company.<sup>53</sup> 'For men is a portion of what they earn, and for women is a portion of what they earn. Ask Allah for His grace. Allah has knowledge of all things'.<sup>54</sup> This right cannot be altered whether she is single or married. When she is married, she enjoys a free hand over the dower while she is married and after divorce.<sup>55</sup> This independent economic position is based on Quranic principles, especially the teaching of *Zakat*, which encourages women to own, invest, save and distribute their earnings and savings according to their discretion. It also acknowledges and enforces the right of women to participate in various economic activities.<sup>56</sup>

(2) *The Right to Marry Whom She Likes, and to End an Unsuccessful Marriage.* Islam regards marriage as a meritorious institution and attaches great importance to its well-being. Marriage in Islam is a union between two consenting adults. Its aims are to perpetuate human life and achieve spiritual and emotional harmony.<sup>57</sup> The Quran says<sup>58</sup> 'And of His signs is that He created you from dust and behold: you became men and multiplied throughout the earth. And of His signs is that He gave you wives from among yourselves, that you might live in tranquillity with them, and put love and kindness in your hearts. Surely there are signs in this for thinking people'.<sup>59</sup> Also, the Prophet is reported to have said 'women are the twin halves of men'.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the consent of the two partners is essential to start a happy and stable family. Hence Islam is against the idea of forcing women to marry against their wishes. On the contrary, it encourages women to choose their spouses. According to the Prophet, 'A widow (or divorcee) is not to be married before her consent is sought' and 'No virgin girl is to marry without first consulting her, and her approval is her keeping silent'.<sup>61</sup> This freedom to choose her partner is guaranteed by the law which insists that the dowry has to be paid to the bride and not to the parents. The Prophet emphasised that although parents were to be



consulted and obeyed, the fact remained that the woman's individuality and independence had to be recognised and respected. Hence the marriage contract has to reflect the interests of the woman in the first instance and be designed to meet her specific needs. The woman has to express her desire and impose conditions if necessary to secure her position.<sup>62</sup> A Muslim woman, therefore, cannot be forced to enter into marriage without her agreement; indeed she has the right to revoke a marriage to which she did not agree in the first place. The Prophet set a precedent for Muslim women when he invalidated marriages which were imposed on daughters by their parents. Let us see the Prophet's response when he heard that a girl was forced by her father to marry against her will: Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Prophet complaining that her father had forced her to marry against her wishes. Upon hearing the story the Prophet granted her the choice between accepting the marriage or invalidating it. Also, Khaddam, Khansa's father forced her to marry a man she did not like; soon afterwards she complained to the Prophet. The Prophet respected her will to marry a man of her choice, so, he revoked the marriage and freed Khansa from her marital obligation.<sup>63</sup>

As a woman has the right to have a say on issues concerning her own marriage, equally she has the right to initiate divorce if the partnership proves to be unsuccessful. If the marriage contract states that she has the right to divorce her husband, she could divorce him instantly; otherwise, she would have to resort to the court to dissolve the marital relationship. Overall, the Quranic legislation concerning divorce allows time for reflection and insists on kind treatment of the woman. For example, whilst in pre-Islamic times a woman could easily be repudiated and thrown out by her husband, under the Quranic legislation he is no longer allowed to do so. If divorce takes place, the husband has to pay her back the deferred dowry and a reasonable sum of money as maintenance.<sup>64</sup> He has to support her throughout the *idda* period (three months and ten days) to determine whether she is pregnant. If so he is legally obliged to support her until she delivers and nurses the baby to a certain age.<sup>65</sup>

(3) *The Right to Education.* Both the Quran and the Sunnah advocate the rights of women and men equally to seek knowledge. The Quran commands all Muslims to exert effort in the pursuit of knowledge irrespective of their sex. It constantly encourages Muslims to read, think, contemplate and learn from the signs of Allah in nature: 'Are the wise and the ignorant equal? Truly, none will take heed but men of understanding'.<sup>66</sup> 'Allah will raise to high ranks those that have faith and knowledge among you. He is cognizant of all your actions'.<sup>67</sup> 'Say: Lord, increase me in knowledge'.<sup>68</sup> The Prophet moreover encouraged education for both males and females

and even ordered that slave girls should be educated. He made it clear that seeking knowledge was a matter of religious duty binding upon every Muslim man and woman. His teachings were widely sought by both sexes and at the time of his death it was reported that there were many women scholars.<sup>69</sup> So in Islam there can be no restriction of knowledge to one sex at the expense of the other. Today, however, family circumstances, together with the traditions and customs of specific Muslim countries, may work to the detriment of the girl, in terms of depriving her of education, for reasons which have nothing to do with Islam.<sup>70</sup>

(4) *The Right to Keep Her Own Identity.* A woman in Islam has always been entitled, by law, to keep her family name and not take her husband's name. Therefore, she is always known by her family's name as an indication of her individuality and her own identity. So, in Islam, there is no process of changing the names of women be they married, divorced or widowed.

(5) *The Right to Sexual Pleasure.* In Islam lawful sex (that is, within the context of a marriage relationship) has always been held in high esteem and regarded as an act of religious devotion for which rewards in the hereafter are acknowledged. It is meant to lead to a healthy way of human reproduction, release tensions, meet natural and psychological needs and strengthen the marriage ties between spouses. Here are some *Hadiths* that have been attributed to the Prophet in this regard: 'When a husband and his wife look at each other lovingly, God will look at them with His merciful eye. When they hold hands their sins will fall away from between their fingers. When they engage in coitus they will be surrounded by prayerful angels. For every sensation of their delight there is a counterpart of reward for them in paradise as huge as a mountain. If the wife conceives, she will have the rewards of a worshipper who is constantly engaged in prayers, fasting and in the struggle in the way of God. When she delivers a child, only God knows the magnitude of the rewards stored for the parents in paradise'. 'Once a companion having heard the Prophet praising coitus with one's wife as a charitable act for which a Divine reward was to be awaited, retorted: "O you, the Messenger of God. Would a person satisfy his lust and anticipate Divine reward for it?" The Prophet said, "would he be punished if he (or she) does so with the wrong partner? In the same way, fulfillment of sensual satisfaction in the legitimate way shall be rewarded".<sup>71</sup> Contrary to the present situation in which talk about legitimate sex has disappeared from religious thinking and writing and has become a matter of shame and stigma which ought to be suppressed, early Muslim scholars were fascinated by the idea and were quite open about it.

They wrote chapters on the subject in which they elaborated on issues such as the anatomy of sex, the religious merits of lawful sexual activities, the intimate theme of coitus, its initial foreplay and its proper conclusion. They cautioned against an abrupt coitus and crude departure at the end of the act. Instead they advised an initial gentle approach and a slow courteous departure. Moreover, they emphasised the fact that the husband should be considerate and gentle, never too rough and that he should prolong sufficiently for his wife to attain climax. A wife is encouraged to take the initiative and not be content with the role of being submissive.<sup>72</sup> In their writings those early Muslim scholars were guided by the following traditions which have been attributed to the Prophet: 'It is a rude manner of a man to proceed to have intercourse with his wife without first playing with her'. 'Let not any of you fall upon his wife in the manner a male animal suddenly jumps upon his female partner. Let there be a messenger (to go) between them' (said the prophet). He was then asked: What is the Messenger, 'O you Messenger of God?' He said: 'kissing and endearing speech'. 'When one of you copulates with his wife, let him not rush away from her, having attained his own climax, until she is satisfied'. 'Wash your clothes, brush your teeth. Trim your hair. Keep always clean and tidy. A nation before you neglected themselves, thereby driving their women into adultery'. It is a vice in a man 'to assault his unprepared wife, seeking to satisfy his own lust and leaving her before she could achieve her own fulfilment'.<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, if a woman feels that she is not sexually satisfied or her husband is impotent she has the right to seek divorce.

(6) *The Right to Inheritance*. The Quran has allotted a share for the woman in the inheritance of her parents and kinsmen. Her share is guaranteed by law and it is completely hers. No one can have any claim on it. The Quran says 'Men shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave; and women shall have a share in what their parents and kinsmen leave; whether it be little or much, it is legally theirs'.<sup>74</sup> However, very often in reality the culture of specific Muslim countries subject women to social pressure to renounce their shares to the immediate male members of the family. This constitutes a gross violation of the Quranic verses concerning inheritance.

(7) *The Right of Election and Nomination to Political Offices and Participation in Public Affairs*. Islam encourages women to be active politically and to be involved in decision-making. In fact Islam is the only religion which acknowledges a political role for women.<sup>75</sup> In early Islam women were given every opportunity to express themselves, to argue,<sup>76</sup> and to speak their mind in public.<sup>77</sup> They led delegations,<sup>78</sup> mediated and granted refuge and protection.<sup>79</sup> Their judgements on political matters

were highly valued and respected and they exercised great influence in shaping their own societies. Aisha and Umm Salama (the wives of the prophet) are clear cases in point. Umm Salama was a shrewd political adviser to the Prophet and very often acted as *imam* for women. Aisha, on the other hand, played a dominant part in the political arena she lived in. She lodged complaints, criticised the policies of the rulers and led opposition groups. Together with Umm Salama she played a crucial role in compiling the traditions of the Prophet, which are considered one of the main sources of Islamic Jurisprudence. For a considerable time she acted as a judge correcting and guiding the leaders of her time.

(8) *The Right to Respect*. Islam regards women to be equal to men as human beings; hence it emphasises mutual understanding and respect between the two sexes. From the Islamic viewpoint, women as human beings and as half of the society should be treated with care, tenderness and affection. Indeed, the Prophet insisted on kind and gentle treatment of women and demonstrated this not only through his attitude towards his wives but also in his teachings to his followers. He constantly encouraged them to be kind, civil and considerate when dealing with women: 'The more civil and kind a Muslim is to his woman whether wife, daughter or sister the more perfect in faith he is' he declared.<sup>80</sup> In his farewell pilgrimage he delivered a famous speech (*Khutba*) on the Mount of Mercy at Arafat in which he reminded his followers of their duty towards women and ordered them to be kind and respectful to them. He said 'Fear Allah regarding women. Verily you have married them with the trust of Allah, and made their bodies lawful with the word of Allah. You have got (rights) over them, and they have got (rights) over you'.<sup>81</sup>

So, from the authentic Islamic perspective, a woman is 'an individual worthy of dignity and respect, an independent human being, a social person, a legal person, a responsible agent, a free citizen, a servant of God, and a talented person, endowed, like a male person, with heart, soul and intellect; and has a fundamental equal right to exercise her abilities in all areas of human activities'.<sup>82</sup>

Within the context of family ties, the legal status of Muslim women can be considered at different stages:

(1) *As a Daughter*: Before the advent of Islam, daughters were very disfavoured and considered to be social and economic liabilities. Boys, on the other hand were favoured and sought after (one may add that even today in some Muslim countries boys are considered preferable to girls). Islam stopped such cruelties and insisted on equal treatment between the two

sexes. The Prophet asserted the right of a female child to be treated on an equal footing with her brother. He urged parents not to make any differences between the children and to be kind to them, particularly young girls. Here are a few *Hadiths* in which he encouraged Muslims to be gentle and caring to their daughters: 'If a daughter is born to a man and he brings her up affectionately, shows her no disrespect and treats her in the same manner as he treats his sons, the Lord will reward him with paradise'. 'Girls are models of affection and sympathy and a blessing to the family. If a person has one daughter, God will screen him from the fire of the hell owing to his daughter; if he has two daughters, God will admit him to paradise; if he has three daughters, God will exempt him from the obligations of charity and Jihad'. 'If a person has three daughters whom he provides for and brings up, God will surely reward him with paradise'. 'If a daughter is born to a person and he brings her up, gives her a good education and trains her in the arts of life, I shall myself stand between him and hell fire'.<sup>83</sup> Not content with moral exhortations which aimed at ensuring the equal rights of young girls, the prophet himself set an example for Muslims to follow. He treated his four daughters with parental love and compassion.<sup>84</sup> He played with them, looked after them and carried them when they were young. When they were grown up and got married, he continued to care for their well-being. Fatima, the youngest, and the only one who survived her father, was very close to him, and often he used to visit her, invite her with her family to a meal with him, and would take her warmly between his arms and offer her his seat. He used to say that Fatima was 'A part of me; who wrongs her wrongs me and who pleases her pleases me'.<sup>85</sup>

(2) *As a Mother*: Women as mothers enjoy great respect and affection. The Quran advises Muslims to show love, gratitude and consideration for parents, particularly mothers. It says 'And We enjoined man (to show kindness) to his parents, for weakness after weakness his mother bears him and he is not weaned before he is two years of age. We said: Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me shall all things return'.<sup>86</sup> 'your Lord has enjoined you to worship none but Him, and to show kindness to your parents. If either or both of them attain old age with you, show them no sign of impatience, nor rebuke them; but speak to them kind words. Treat them with humility and tenderness and say: Lord be merciful to them. They nursed me when I was an infant'.<sup>87</sup> The prophet taught his followers how to look after their mothers and obey them. Disobeying parents, especially mothers, is one of the greatest of all sins. The Prophet is reported to have said the following *Hadiths* regarding mothers:<sup>88</sup> 'Do not leave your mother unless she gives you permission or death takes her, because that is the greatest (deed) for your reward'. 'Whoever kissed his

mother between the eyes is protected from the fire'. 'If I became aware of my parents, or one of them, and I had begun the *Isha* prayer and recited *Surat al-Fatihah*; then, my mother called me: O Muhammad! I would have answered her'. 'Verily Allah has forbidden rudeness to mothers'.<sup>89</sup>

(3) *As a Sister*: A Muslim is required to have a close relationship with relatives, especially the immediate members of the family such as sisters, cousins, aunts, and so on. The Prophet instructed his followers to visit them, be kind to them and to help them if they needed help. He said 'He is not of me who severs or breaks the ties of kinship'.<sup>90</sup> Within this context, the sister occupies a special position. She is to be treated with care, respect and due consideration. The Prophet did not have a sister but he did have female cousins and relatives whom he used to welcome properly and treat tenderly and kindly. Once he stated, 'whoever is ... taking charge of two sisters, and treats them well and patiently, he and I shall be in paradise'.<sup>91</sup>

(4) *As a Wife*: Good treatment of wives is strongly emphasised both in the Quran and the Sunnah. The Quran describes the relationship between the husband and wife as follows: 'they (your wives) are an apparel to you and you are an apparel to them'.<sup>92</sup> The Prophet laid great stress upon good treatment of a wife. He said 'The best of you are they who behave best to their wives'. 'A Muslim must not hate his wife, and if he be displeased with one bad quality in her, let him be pleased with one that is good'.<sup>93</sup> Apart from these recommendations,<sup>94</sup> the Prophet set a good example as the model husband who treated his wives with loving compassion and due consideration. He dealt with them on an equal footing, devoted a night to each in turn, helped them with the housework, mended his own clothes, shared with them the ups and downs of life, listened to their opinions and gave them the chance to develop their own individuality, independence and talents. For example, Sauda developed her skill in fine leather work and earned a good income therefrom; Zaynab was very much active in charitable works to the extent that she was renowned as 'the mother of the poor';<sup>95</sup> Umm Salama, bright and clever, acted as a political adviser to the Prophet, while Aisha, the youngest and wittiest, was regarded as a judge, and was very often consulted on religious affairs in the absence of her husband. The Prophet's example was followed by the early generations who were very much impressed by his attitude toward his wives.<sup>96</sup>

In a nutshell, then, Islam 'came to grant woman her rightful place in the society of man, raising her above the position of goods and chattels and (acknowledging her as) a respectful entity and a personality unto herself.

She was considered an independent social and economic unit functioning in her own individual right, if she so desired. For the first time she was given the right to education, the right to hold property in her own name, the right of inheritance, and above all, the right to vote and pray'.<sup>97</sup>

Under this bill of rights women, under the leadership of Muhammad, enjoyed full freedom to develop their individuality and personality and to take part in shaping their own society. Moreover, women took advantage of the liberty offered to them: they participated effectively in public life; took part in prayers at the mosque together with the men; acted as *imams* for women (and sometimes for both sexes in their household); joined their colleagues in military expeditions; granted protection in war and asylum to fugitives; devoted themselves to the study of theology, the Quran and the traditions; travelled widely, and moved freely and mixed with men with self-respect and dignity.<sup>98</sup>

However, this situation did not last long; with the death of Muhammad and the transformation of the early Islamic community into an empire, women's rights steadily underwent erosion. Slowly but surely the rights granted them and enjoyed during the time of Muhammad were taken away. They were discouraged from participating in public affairs; prevented from visiting the mosques; denied any opportunity to express their opinions; barred from developing their intellectual abilities; restricted in their movements and confined to their four walls at home. Gradually the bright picture of the free, courageous, independent, self-respecting and respected Muslim woman was replaced with that of secluded, lazy, ignorant and passive woman who had no role or impact on her own affairs let alone on society as a whole. The situation became worse with the political disintegration and the subsequent social demoralisation and the penetration of foreign ideas and customs.<sup>99</sup> This depressed situation has persisted more or less until the present day in various shapes and forms throughout the Muslim world. It is, therefore, hardly untrue to state that women in much of the Muslim world have long been subjected to both cultural and political oppression. While men have equally suffered from the latter, women generally have had to pay a double price: culturally as well as politically. It has long been argued that Islam liberated Muslim women by granting them full rights as citizens. It is certainly true that Islamic precepts offer women a full and positive role in society as well as personal rights, which should, in theory, leave little to be desired. The question arises, however, as to whether the reality of Muslim women's lives reflects the theory. To what extent have Muslim women been able to enjoy the rights the *Sharia* (Islamic Law) grants them without being subjected to strong countervailing social pressure?

In the contemporary Muslim world, everything has been taken out of its context. Women's rights are no exception. Women have in many cases been deprived even of the basic human rights advocated by Islam itself. Forced marriages, arbitrary divorces, female mutilations and other abuses are sadly common in the Muslim world, as are restrictions on women's education and on their role in the labour force. In order to better their position as dignified human beings we need to address these and other issues in the light of the contemporary situation. I am not suggesting that we should abandon the tradition – only those aspects of cultural oppression that go under the name of tradition; nor am I arguing for an acceptance of the rigid interpretation of the role of Muslim women as it has been defined in traditional societies. Rather, it is a question of appraising the reality of their suffering in the light of the authentic principles of justice and fairness, revealed in the Quran and practised in the early days of Islam by the Prophet and his Companions.

## 2 Islam and Women's Education\*

One of the most important rights granted to women by Islam is the right to education. To start to examine this issue, we should ask some questions. What is the position of Islam in relation to education in general and women's education in particular? What are their opportunities in relation to employment? Finally, what is the position of women in the contemporary period in the light of the authentic approach to these issues, as expressed both in the philosophy and in the practices of early Islam?

### ISLAM AND EDUCATION

Knowledge and education are highly emphasised in Islam. Both are integral parts of the Islamic religion. Islam encourages its followers to enlighten themselves with the knowledge of their religion as well as other branches of knowledge. It holds the person who seeks knowledge in high esteem and has exalted his position.<sup>1</sup> In reality, the entire aim of the Divine revelation and the sending of prophets to humankind has been stressed in the Quran as the communication of knowledge. The Book says: 'The Prophet recites unto people God's revelation; causes them to grow and imparts to them knowledge, and wisdom'.<sup>2</sup> The Divine desires every believer to be well educated in religion, to possess wisdom and broad intellectual knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Hence the purpose of raising a prophet in a nation is to teach and to impart knowledge. The Prophet said 'I have been raised up as a teacher'.<sup>4</sup> The Quran is full of verses which praise learned people, encourage original thinking and personal investigation and denounce unimaginative imitation. It also emphasises the importance of the study of nature and its laws. According to the Quran, learning is an unending process and the entire universe is made subservient to man, the agent of God, who has to abide by the truth and not by narrow notions of hereditary customs and beliefs.<sup>5</sup> 'We did not create the heavens and the earth, and all between them merely in sport. We created them only for just ends, but most of mankind do not understand'.<sup>6</sup> The verses in the

\* Some of the material in this chapter has been previously published in Haifaa A. Jawad, *The Education of Women in Islam*, Gulf Center for Strategic Studies, London, 1991, reproduced by kind permission of the publisher.

Quran which enjoin people to learn and observe nature outnumber all those related to prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage put together.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the first verse of the Quran was a command to the Prophet to read (*Iqra*): 'Read! In the name of your Lord Who created, created man from clots of congealed blood. Read! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, Who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know'.<sup>8</sup> Here the Prophet was told to learn, study and understand in the name of God, who, by His grace, has given man the ability to write with the pen, so that he could circulate knowledge broadly and preserve his cultural heritage generation after generation.<sup>9</sup> Other Quranic verses which advocate knowledge and learning are the following: 'Allah will raise to high ranks those that have faith and knowledge among you. He is cognizant of all your actions'.<sup>10</sup> 'Are the wise and the ignorant equal?'.<sup>11</sup> 'Say: Lord, increase me in knowledge'.<sup>12</sup>

In the *Hadith* literature, knowledge is highly appreciated and encouraged also. The Prophet Muhammad always emphasised the importance of knowledge to his followers and encouraged them to seek it. Learned people are regarded as the inheritors of the prophetic wisdom. In this connection, the following *Hadiths* can be quoted: 'The prophets leave knowledge as their inheritance. The learned ones inherit this great fortune'. 'Search for knowledge though it be in China'. The Prophet also said 'He who goes forth in search of knowledge, is in the way of Allah till he returns'.<sup>13</sup> 'To rise up at dawn and learn a section of knowledge is better than to pray one hundred rak'at'. 'To be present in an assembly with a learned man is better than praying one thousand rak'at'. 'To listen to the instructions of science and learning for one hour is more meritorious than attending the funerals of a thousand martyrs'. 'One hour's meditation on the work of the Creator in a devout spirit is better than seventy years of prayer'. The Prophet was asked: 'O Messenger of God, is it better than the reading of the Quran?'. He replied: 'What benefit does the Quran give except through knowledge'.<sup>14</sup> 'There are only two persons that one is permitted to envy: the one to whom God has given riches and who has the courage to spend his means for the cause of truth; and the one to whom God has given wisdom and who applies it for the benefit of mankind and shares it with his fellows'.<sup>15</sup>

It was in accordance with this Quranic guidance and the prophetic instructions that the Muslims started, from the very beginning, to seek knowledge. Studies were conducted in the Mosques, circles of discussion (*halaqat*) were set up; and teachers were simultaneously students learning from their superiors and, in their turn, teaching their own students.<sup>16</sup> Education was considered a matter of religious duty – a manifestation of the Muslim's submission to the will of Allah and an act of piety which could lead to a deeper knowledge of the Creator – the One.<sup>17</sup> Hence

we find that all members of society participated in that process. Since education was free of charge, opportunities were available to everybody, rich or poor alike. The Prophet said 'Treat equally poor and rich students who sit before you for the acquisition of knowledge'.<sup>18</sup> Gifted students were helped and highly encouraged to continue their education, so that they would be able to fulfill their aspirations. Moreover, the seeking of knowledge was not circumscribed by age limitations; the Prophet said 'Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave'. Therefore, we find that the companions of the Prophet sought knowledge even when they were at an advanced age.<sup>19</sup> Also, there was considerable academic freedom; in the classes, the students were entitled to ask questions and to discuss themes with the teacher – indeed, their reputation depended heavily on their success in such sessions of debate and discussion.<sup>20</sup>

### THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

Initially, the learning process of the Muslims started with the Prophet who himself used to teach his companions the principles of Islam. When he migrated to Medina, he immediately started the process of eradicating illiteracy. His mosque also served as a centre for Muslim learning. He was so interested in this matter that, soon after the victory of Badr, he instructed each of the Meccan captives, who were literate, to teach ten Muslims how to read and write as a condition for their release.<sup>21</sup> He also sent teachers and missionaries to different parts of Arabia so that they could teach the newly converted Muslims the principles of Islam.<sup>22</sup> He also set up circles of learned men to study and teach the Quran. Later, mosques were set up in every locality and since then have remained as the essential location for educational activities among the Muslims. The Prophet's example as a teacher constituted a sacred precedent for his followers. Hence they considered it their duty to set up mosques and schools in their domain. In the course of time, the simple pattern of the Prophet's school developed into a comprehensive and coherent educational system, fully integrated into the social and economic way of life.<sup>23</sup> This educational system was based on moral and spiritual qualities. It recognised no separation between sacred and secular. Indeed it 'breathed in a universe of sacred presence'. Whatever was known contained a profoundly religious feature, not only because the object of every type of knowledge is created by God, but also because the intelligence by which man knows is in itself a Divine gift. The education system therefore dealt with the whole being of the person whom it sought to educate. Its aim was not only the training of the mind

but also the entire personality of the student. The teacher in this system was the transmitter of knowledge as well as the trainer of souls. Even the term 'teacher' in itself gained the meaning of trainer. It was embodied with ethical connotations which in the modern world have almost disappeared from the process of teaching and the transmission of knowledge, especially at the higher levels of education. The Islamic educational system neither separated the training of the mind from that of the soul, nor regarded the transmission of knowledge or its possession to be legitimate without the possession of proper moral and spiritual principles. Indeed, the acquisition of knowledge without these principles was regarded as very dangerous both to individuals and society.<sup>24</sup>

However, despite the fact that the Islamic educational system encompassed the whole life of traditional Muslims, certain distinct phases can be discerned. The first stage started at home where both parents acted as teachers in matters such as religion, language, culture and social customs. This period was followed by the Quranic schools (*al-Kuttab*) corresponding to elementary school. The aims of these schools were to enable the child to read and write the Quran, and to master the language as well as learn other subjects such as proverbs, poetry and, later, arithmetic. These schools formed the preparatory stage for higher studies where the students could then attend the *Madrasah*. The *Madrasah*<sup>25</sup> often incorporated the *Jamiah* which can be said to correspond at one and the same time, to secondary school as well as to college and university education.<sup>26</sup> The activities of these *Madrasahs* were divided into two parts. The religious or the transmitted sciences, and the intellectual sciences. The religious sciences included the study of the Quran, the *Hadith*, linguistics and theology and they dominated the educational activity of most *Madrasahs*. The intellectual sciences included the study of logic, mathematics, and the natural sciences, as well as philosophy. These divisions of the sciences were reflected in the curriculum of the *Madrasahs* and were taught alongside each other. These *Madrasahs* enjoyed a high position in society and, in the course of time, they developed into fully fledged educational institutions performing an important role throughout the Muslim world, such as the *Qayrawan* in Morocco and *al-Azhar* in Egypt. Later on, we find the development of a university system with several campuses such as *al-Nizamiyyah* and *al-Mustansiriyyah* in Baghdad and *al-Nuriyyah* in Damascus.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the *Madrasahs* where theoretical learning was conducted, there were a number of observatories and hospitals. Some of them acted independently as institutions of scientific learning and experimentation, others were appended to the colleges. Al-Mamun's famous *Shamsiyyah* observatory was a most remarkable example. It was followed

in many other cities. Moreover, these higher institutions continually provided society with its intellectual elite, and socio-political thinkers. Member of this elite functioned not only as teachers in the intellectual sense, but also as models of moral behaviour. Finally, Islam, by means of its educational system, successfully managed to preserve the ancient Greek and Eastern learning and then transmitted it to the Latin West. Hence its definition as the 'intermediate civilization'.<sup>28</sup>

## EDUCATION OF WOMEN

Islam strongly encourages the education of women both in religious and social domains. Their education and cultural training were regarded as an integral dimension of social development.<sup>29</sup> There is no priority for men over women in relation to the right to education. Both are equally encouraged to acquire education, as already shown, 'from the cradle to the grave'.<sup>30</sup> Indeed all the Quranic verses which relate to education and which advocate the acquisition of knowledge were directed to both men and women alike. In accordance with the all-embracing concept of *Tawhid* – Oneness – when Islam elevated women physically by abolishing female infanticide, it could not overlook the need for their mental and spiritual elevation.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, Islam would view the neglect of these dimensions as virtually tantamount to murdering their personality. The Quran says: 'They are losers who besottedly have slain their children by keeping them in ignorance'.<sup>32</sup> Neither the Quran nor the sayings of the Prophet prohibit or prevent women from seeking knowledge and having an education. As already said, the Prophet was the forerunner in this regard, in declaring that seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman. By making such a statement, the Prophet opened all the avenues of knowledge for men and women alike. So, like her male counterpart, each woman is under a moral and religious obligation to seek knowledge, develop her intellect, broaden her outlook, cultivate her talents and then utilise her potential to the benefit of her soul and of her society. The interest of the Prophet in female education was manifest in the fact that he himself used to teach the women along with the men;<sup>33</sup> he also instructed his followers to educate not only their women but their slave girls as well.<sup>34</sup> The following *Hadith* puts it thus: a man who educates his slave girl, frees her and then marries her, this man will have a double reward.<sup>35</sup> The wives of the Prophet, especially Aisha, not only taught women, they taught men also and many of the Prophet's companions and followers learned the Quran, *Hadith* and Islamic jurisprudence from Aisha. Also, there was no limit-

ation placed on women's education. Women were allowed to learn all the branches of science. She was free to choose any field of knowledge which interested her. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that, because Islam recognised that women are in principle wives and mothers, they should also place special emphasis on seeking knowledge in those branches which could help them in those particular spheres.<sup>36</sup>

In accordance with the dictates of the Quran and the *Hadith* encouraging women to develop all aspects of their personality, it was believed that an educated Muslim woman should not only radiate her moral qualities in the environment of her home, but she should also have an active role in the broad fields of social, economic and political development. The Quran, in particular (9:71–72), commands men and women to perform their prayers, pay their poor-tax and enjoin good and forbid evil in all forms: social, economic and political. This means that both have an equal duty to accomplish these tasks. In order to do so, they must have equal access to educational opportunities. For how can a woman uphold good social and economic policies or disapprove them if she is intellectually not equipped for the task?<sup>37</sup> Following the injunctions of the Quran and the Sunnah concerning female education, early Muslim women seized this opportunity and laboured to equip themselves in all branches of the knowledge of their time. They attended classes with men, they participated in all cultural activities side by side with them and managed to win their encouragement and respect.<sup>38</sup> Early Islamic history is replete with examples of Muslim women who showed a remarkable ability to compete with men and excelled them on many occasions. The following is a brief summary of the role played by Muslim women in different domains.

## EARLY ACTIVITIES OF MUSLIM WOMEN

*Religious Studies.* This was the favourite subject for women in early Islam, and a considerable number of Muslim women managed to become notable figures among traditionists and jurists.<sup>39</sup> On top of the list was Aisha, the wife of the Prophet. She was a renowned scholar of her time. Her foresight and advice in the affairs of the Islamic community were regarded as highly important by the early Islamic rulers. She was credited with thousands of traditions received directly from the Prophet and is to the present day considered a great authority on Islamic Jurisprudence. Another famous name in this subject was Nafisah, a descendant of Ali who was a prominent jurist and theologian. It is mentioned that Al-Shaf'i, the founder of one of the schools of *Fiqh* used to attend her lessons and public lectures.<sup>40</sup> Shuhda as well was a

renowned name in the subject of tradition, especially *Hadith*, which is a branch of Muslim science which was thought to be exclusively for men.<sup>41</sup>

*Literature.* Muslim women proved their ability to master this subject and achieved a high reputation among their contemporaries. In the forefront was al-Khansa, the greatest poetess of her day. Her poetry has survived into the present period. She was admired by the Prophet himself when he said that her poetry was unsurpassed.<sup>42</sup> In addition one could mention Qatilah who composed a famous elegy on the death of her brother which, again, was praised by the Prophet.<sup>43</sup>

*Medicine.* The humanitarian duties were performed by women in all the battles fought in Islam.<sup>44</sup> It was a custom that Muslim women accompanied the troops, so that they could bandage the wounded, fetch the water, transport the casualties back to Medina and instil courage in the men whose spirits were flagging.<sup>45</sup> It is said that when the Muslim troops were preparing to conquer Khaiber, Umayyah bint Qays-al-Ghaffariyyah, with a group of women, asked to be allowed to accompany the army. The Prophet granted them his permission and they performed their duties well. In addition, Muslim women attained a high status as medical scholars such as Zainab of the Bani Awd tribe who was a prominent physician and an expert oculist. Umm al-Hasan bint al-Qadi Abi Jafar al-Tanjali was a renowned woman of broad knowledge in different subjects, and was especially famous as a doctor.<sup>46</sup>

*Military Service.* Muslim women proved to be good warriors and they fought side by side with men. They achieved a considerable degree of success, and on occasion played very important military roles. In this respect mention should be made of Nusaiba, the wife of Zaid Ibn Asim, who took part in the famous battle of 'Ohud'. In that battle she fought vigorously and in the critical time when the Prophet was left alone she fought alongside him and wounded 11 persons with her sword. In the same battle, Nusaiba bint Kab al-Mazinia headed the Prophet's army against the enemy forces and at a crucial moment managed to minimise the losses of the Muslim army. Of her the Prophet remarked 'Wherever I looked I saw her fighting before me'. Al-Yarmuk battle is another example in which Muslim women participated effectively. They were equal with men in the use of the sword. Hind bint Utbah was remarkable in this regard as was bint al-Harith Ibn Hisham.<sup>47</sup>

In addition, Muslim women also proved their ability to play a constructive role in other activities of the community. For example, they were involved in the political issues of the time and their opinions in political affairs

were highly respected. They often took part in the process of choosing the Caliph.<sup>48</sup> They also enjoyed full freedom to express their ideas and were encouraged to participate in the social life of the community. Public life was like a stage where both men and women were actively involved. In the early period of Islam women used to discuss and debate with the Prophet<sup>49</sup> and his companions and even protect their rights if they were breached. It is said that during the time of the second Caliph Omar, a woman expressed her disagreement with him publicly in matters relating to the women's dowry and managed to correct him.<sup>50</sup> The Quran encourages women to speak their minds and not to be silent; nonetheless we see today some fundamentalists propagating the unfounded slogan that 'the voice of woman is *A'wrah* (private parts to be covered up)<sup>51</sup> and therefore arguing that it is in her best interest to keep quiet. For how can a woman learn and grow intellectually if she is not allowed to speak and communicate with others? How can she widen her understanding of things around her and speak forcefully and impressively if she is prevented from debating with others publicly?

#### ISLAM AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

At a time when Muslim countries could benefit greatly from women's contribution to the development process, it becomes critically important to evaluate the position of Islam in relation to the employment of women. To start with, we can say that Islam does not forbid women to work and have a job outside the home so long as her external work does not interfere with her home obligations nor lower her dignity.<sup>52</sup> On the contrary, Islam granted woman the right to hold a job and to involve herself actively in trade and commerce. She is entitled to work outside her home and earn a living. During the early Islamic period women often helped men in their outdoor work and were allowed to move about freely among men.<sup>53</sup> Asma, the daughter of the first Caliph Abu-Bakr, used to help her husband in his field work.<sup>54</sup> The Prophet himself praised women who worked hard and well; he also encouraged women, including his wives and daughters, to engage themselves in gainful work. He used to say 'The most blessed earning is that which a person gains from his own labour'.<sup>55</sup> Women in early Islam even held formal posts of authority in the community such as al-Shafa' bint Abdullah who was appointed by the second Caliph Omar as superintendent of markets in Medina many times.<sup>56</sup> Hence, women can work as teachers, doctors, lawyers; they can work as employers or senior managers and they can work as Judges. It must be stressed that up until the

present time and in most Muslim countries with the exception of Tunisia and Malaysia, the position of Judge is still regarded as a male domain. Therefore, women in these countries have traditionally been prevented from assuming this position. The ban has no legal foundation in either the scripture or the Sunnah. On the contrary, Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, was the forerunner in undertaking the position. She acted as a Judge during the era of the first three Caliphs. Also, Abu Hanifa, the founder of one of the schools of law states that a woman might become a Judge and consider all matters except the ones that are under the penal code. Jarir al-Tabari, the famous commentator on the Quran, gives women the right to be appointed as Judge without any conditions.<sup>57</sup> However, despite the fact that the external work of the woman was allowed and respected, a housewife, unable to work due to domestic responsibilities, did not feel that her contribution was less honourable and less fruitful.<sup>58</sup>

#### THE DECLINE IN STATUS OF MUSLIM WOMEN

The high status granted to women by the Quranic reforms which prevailed during the early Islamic period did not last long. Firstly, certain pre-Islamic customs reappeared, especially during the Abbasid period; secondly, various social attitudes infiltrated Islamic culture from conquered peoples, and were assimilated as norms and then identified with Islam. Hence the status of Muslim women started to deteriorate. This was accelerated by catastrophic historical events such as the Mongol and Turkish invasions and the ensuing decline of the Islamic civilisation. The ambience generated by these conditions served to undermine the position of Muslim women who became less and less part of social life in general.<sup>59</sup> They were neglected and treated as sex objects, assumed heavy veiling and were confined to their small circle of womenfolk with no contact outside their homes; they were prevented from participating in the public life of the community and excluded from public worship in the mosque. But the worst deprivation of all was the denial of their right to receive education.<sup>60</sup>

It was believed that basic awareness of the religious rites and memorising part of the Quran was sufficient for women. Therefore, while girls were welcome to all religious instruction especially in the lower grades, they were prevented from having further knowledge and education.<sup>61</sup> In fact the opposition to female education reached its peak when condemnation was voiced against teaching women the art of writing: 'He the teacher must not instruct any woman or female slave in the arts of

writing, for thereby would accrue to them only an increase of depravity'.<sup>62</sup> Thus their role in society centred mainly on preparing them to be good and obedient wives and mothers.<sup>63</sup> Later, when modern education became available, women were denied access to it and only schools for boys were initially developed. Female education was constrained by inherited social customs. Education for women came to be viewed as being of secondary importance to keeping the home and the family.<sup>64</sup> 'A woman's mission is to be a good wife and a compassionate mother ... an ignorant rural woman is better for the nation than one thousand female Lawyers or attorney generals'.<sup>65</sup> Female education was viewed as a threat to the traditional customs and the way of life of these societies. Indeed, educated women were feared and mistrusted as they could communicate potentially destructive or innovative ideas. Educated women were considered to be obtrusive and assertive. They did not appeal to men who expected them to serve them obediently. In addition, leaving home to go to school was in contrast with the idea of women segregation. The Islamic ideal of women's education and intellectual development was thus distorted, confused and actively opposed. The result was a disaster. The illiteracy of Muslim women reached a peak and became a widespread phenomenon in the world of Islam.<sup>66</sup>

Consequently, women throughout the Muslim world became ignorant not only of outside affairs, but also of their legal rights in terms of marriage, divorce and inheritance. Very often due to their ignorance of these rights, they were cheated, deceived and misled. This rendered Muslim women unable to claim and defend the rights guaranteed them by Islam.<sup>67</sup> This situation continued up to recent times, until efforts were made to improve female education in different parts of the Muslim world. However, despite these efforts and the rapid progress which has been achieved in the past four to five decades, the opportunities for women's education in the Muslim world, especially in the Middle East, still lag far behind those for men. Nothing substantial has been achieved, despite the fact that all Muslim countries have encouraged the spread of female education, stated that their aim is to try and raise the educational level of women, and proclaimed their intention to attain universal literacy. The accomplishment of these goals seems very far off. The gap between female and male literacy rates in several places is increasing and the overall level of illiteracy is extremely high.<sup>68</sup> The Islamic world, especially the Arab world, is amongst the areas in the world which has the highest rate of illiteracy amongst women, the lowest level of schooling for girls and the smallest number of women in paid employment. In 1991, the illiteracy rate among females in Afghanistan was 86 per cent, in Pakistan 78 per cent, in Egypt 66 per cent and in Iran 56 per cent. Although women's

literacy varies enormously from country to country and also from area to area in any particular country, women in the Arab world are still a small minority among the student population. In every country the rate of male literacy is much higher than female literacy. Even in those countries which have initiated some reforms, there are still considerable disparities between male and female literacy,<sup>69</sup> as well as major discrepancies between the type of female education offered and the socio-economic needs of the various Arab countries.<sup>70</sup> This has been caused by many factors such as: family attitudes toward female education which still prevail, especially in the rural areas, where the majority of the Muslim population lives;<sup>71</sup> and the high female drop out rate due to the inequality between urban and rural education.<sup>72</sup> But the most important factor so far has been the historical interpretation of the jurists. This has taken the shape of a clear deviation from genuine Islamic principles by its strong opposition to female education. This factor is still very strong in Muslim society, particularly Arab society, and it influences government policy on education options and opportunities for women.<sup>73</sup> Saudi Arabia presents a clear example where Islam has been used to first deny and then discourage women's education.

#### SAUDI ARABIA AND FEMALE EDUCATION

In Saudi Arabia, a highly selective and narrow interpretation of Islam have had a restrictive impact upon the lives of women.<sup>74</sup> Traditionally, religion has been used as an excuse to justify the seclusion of women from the educational process. The rigid influence of the conservative theologians has played a critical role in suffocating female education for several decades through maintaining that girls should be prevented from all state primary and secondary schools.<sup>75</sup> Hence the low proportion of educated women in Saudi Arabia: in 1970, girls constituted about 30 per cent of elementary students, 20 per cent of secondary students and only 8 per cent of students in higher education.<sup>76</sup> In 1980, the literacy rate of male and female (15-year-olds) was 30 per cent to 2 per cent respectively. In 1985, the illiteracy rate among Saudi females was 57 per cent; in 1991 it was 51 per cent.<sup>77</sup>

The extremists argued that education of women would create immorality through corrupting their thinking and diverting their attention away from their essential role as good wives and mothers. They also voiced their fear that the outcome of the conflict of values brought about by such an educational transformation would result in discontent and instability both in the home as well as in society. It was under such pressure that public education for women in the Kingdom did not start until 1960.<sup>78</sup>

#### EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN SAUDI ARABIA SINCE 1960

Female education was introduced in Saudi Arabia in 1960, when the former King Faisal took the decision to set up schools for girls. Initially, the attempt met with strong opposition from the extremists who demonstrated their disagreement by gathering at the gates of the schools, expressing their displeasure with the new schools and with those who registered their daughters in them. National Guards had to be called to restore order. The opposition continued, unabated, until the government made two essential concessions: first, the government pledged that female education would be in line with Saudi customs, especially that of rigid segregation. Secondly, it set up a special body called the 'General Presidency for Girls' Education' to be responsible for girls' education. As a gesture of its commitment to preserve Saudi customs, the government placed this body under the control of the Saudi religious authorities who, since then, continue to supervise the education of girls in the Kingdom.<sup>79</sup>

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE EDUCATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

With this compromise, opposition to female education was finally mitigated and schools for girls were eventually established. The idea of schools for girls seems now to be accepted and the number of females enrolled in the educational process is increasing every year. However, despite the fact that female education in Saudi Arabia is becoming popular, and the statistics show that significant gains have been accomplished, equal opportunity between men and women is still far from being reached. This is even more the case in respect of female education in the rural areas, which is an elusive goal yet to be attained.<sup>80</sup> In fact the policy of female education in Saudi Arabia has been founded on limited bases, aimed more at discouraging than promoting the learning process; this process neither satisfies the needs of Saudi women nor corresponds to the socio-economic requirements of the country. In the elementary schools, for example, girls mostly learn those courses which are assumed to be suitable for them in their traditional role in Saudi society. These courses emphasise mainly the Arabic language, home economics, child caring and religious instruction.<sup>81</sup>

Although the elementary schools have been set up almost everywhere in the Kingdom, the proportion of female drop out after this primary level is still very high, and is a cause of great concern. As the level of education

increases, the opportunity for girls to advance or progress become fewer. This is due to the fact that not all levels of knowledge and education available are at the location where the girls happen to be living, and also because in Saudi society women are not allowed to live alone in a residential campus. Hence it is difficult for them to move close to the educational institutions. Secondary schools, for instance, are not available everywhere in the country, neither are colleges. Vocational education too has been extremely limited except for nursing schools and tailoring centres. As regard university education, the situation is no better. The universities in Saudi Arabia are mainly for males, although some of them have branches in their departments for females. In these branches there is strict segregation of the sexes in classes and all teachers are female. Sometimes, due to the lack of suitable female teachers, the learning process is accomplished through the use of closed-circuit television. This enables male professors to lecture and answer female questions, without coming into contact with them.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, females in Saudi universities are not allowed to pursue any subject they like, being formally deprived of certain kinds of education. Up to 1974, the dominant areas were commerce, humanities and education. In 1975, women for the first time were allowed to enter the faculty of Medicine. This was followed by the admission to the faculty of Dentistry in 1980.<sup>83</sup> Other subjects such as Geology, Law, Engineering and Petroleum Studies are available in Saudi Arabia only for males; women are denied access to these fields. Three out of seven universities in the Kingdom do not accept women to these fields.<sup>84</sup> Women also find it difficult to have easy access to the university facilities such as the library. Hence the quality of girls' higher education is much lower than that for boys. Therefore, young Saudi women barely think of continuing their education beyond what is available, let alone considering education as a means of entering a career.<sup>85</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In dealing with women's education from the Islamic perspective, it is recognised that wider issues pertaining to a modern Islamic curriculum have not been addressed. The latter is, indeed, a crucial issue, but our concern here has been one of the key questions of principle that should surely guide current attempts to formulate an authentically Islamic education system, namely the approach to women's education in such a system.

The case of Saudi Arabia was selected not to attack this particular system; there are a number of Muslim countries which could have been

criticised on this central issue. The reason for focusing briefly on Saudi Arabia is that this country is regarded as 'traditional' and ostensibly closer to Islamic cultural norms than the other Muslim countries. Therefore, I have felt it important to highlight the great discrepancy between, on the one hand, the genuine Islamic position vis-à-vis women's education, and, on the other, the policy expressed in Saudi Arabia.

To briefly recapitulate: we have found that women in the early Islamic period were not only socially active, but were encouraged in all the main branches of learning and indeed rose to positions of great eminence. In stark contrast to this, we have seen that in Saudi Arabia the picture is one of seclusion from society and exclusion from certain areas of learning and hence employment opportunities. These attitudes to women can be attributed much more directly to inherited socio-cultural norms – assimilated from non-Islamic cultures or re-emerging out of pre-Islamic practices, as has been argued here – rather than to any Islamic principles on this question.

The position of Islam on women's education, as on so many other issues, aims at a balance, a 'middle way' – (as Islam is so often called). That is, recognising that women are in principle wives and mothers whilst not allowing this recognition to block avenues of self-development for women as individuals in their own right; and conversely, the dignity and value of being a wife and a mother should not be diminished by the concept of equality of educational opportunity. In Islam, the choice is not an 'either-or' one; there is no necessary contradiction between affirming the sacred role of women in the home *and* respecting the right of women to participate in social activities outside the home. So long as the education system is governed by the spirit of Islam throughout, there will be a harmony between these two modes of social activity, permitting women to express themselves in accordance with their natural dispositions, and to be given the respect and honour which is so central to the real social message of Islam.

### 3 Women and Marriage in Islam

Marriage is without doubt one of the most important institutions of human society. As such, God has set rules and regulations to ensure that the attainment of marriage is possible for everyone. The Quran indicates that the real and natural way to gain peace and satisfaction in life is through a husband-wife relationship, just as Adam and Eve did beforehand; it is only through this arrangement that peace in married life can really be achieved and guaranteed. In human society, therefore, the main principle of matrimonial life is that the human race should live in pairs,<sup>1</sup> that is: a man and a woman should marry each other and live together in happy union.<sup>2</sup>

Islam assigns great importance to marriage. Indeed, it is highly recommended on religious, moral and social grounds.<sup>3</sup> Marriage in Islam is regarded as a strong bond and a total commitment to life, to society and to being a respectable human. It is a promise that the married couple make to one another and to God. This undertaking on the part of the married partners would allow them to find mutual fulfilment and self-realisation, love and peace, comfort and hope. This is because marriage in Islam is essentially a righteous act and an act of complete devotion. As such, celibacy is discouraged not only for men, but for women as well.<sup>4</sup> This is in consideration of the fact that their needs are equally legitimate and valid. Indeed, Islam views marriage as a natural course for women in the same way as it is for men, and probably even more so in view of the fact that marriage guarantees women some form of economic security. It must be stressed here that this benefit for women is in no way an indication that marriage in Islam is sheer economic transaction. Indeed, the economic factor is the least aspect of the whole enterprise; the emphasis has been always on the religious qualities<sup>5</sup> of the spouses.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARRIAGE IN ISLAM

Islam views marriage to be of benefit to both the individual as well as to society.<sup>7</sup> As such, the gains resulting from it outweigh any shortcomings.<sup>8</sup> From the collective point of view the most significant benefit is of course procreation, but not just the physical perpetuation of the human race;

rather, the institution of marriage ensures that this procreative function will be both sanctified and orderly, not vulgar and chaotic. From the specifically religious point of view, having children entails the following: the realisation of God's desire;<sup>9</sup> the fulfilment of the Prophet's call to marry and increase his followers' number; gaining the fruit of a child's prayer. Muslims believe that when parents die and leave a child (son or daughter – the gender issue in this context does not make any difference), his prayer would benefit the dead parents.<sup>10</sup> However, if the child dies before his parents, he would make intercession on his parents' behalf.<sup>11</sup>

Fulfilling one's sexual desire is another important aspect of marriage. Marriage, from the Islamic viewpoint, helps control sexual passion and channel it in the right direction. Also, it functions as a shield against committing adultery and fornication, both of which are forbidden in Islam.<sup>12</sup> Marriage, moreover, brings peace and tranquillity of spirit and implants love and compassion between the married partners. These are great supports for one's worship of God. Intimacy between spouses is viewed as catalyst for the development of their souls. In other words, the intimate relationship that develops between a husband and wife is crucial for relieving the heart from its burdens and thus enables the mind to better focus on accomplishing the Divine requirements. Al-Ghazali beautifully explains this point in the following account: "The third benefit of marriage is that the heart finds ease through intimacy with women, because of sitting and joking with them. This ease then becomes the cause of an increase in desire for worship. For diligence in worship brings weariness, and the heart contracts. But ease acquired in this way brings back the heart's strength. Ali said, 'Do not remove rest and ease completely from the hearts, lest they become blind'. It sometimes happened that the Prophet was overcome by such tremendous unveilings that his bodily frame was not able to tolerate it. He would take Aisha's hand and say, 'Talk with me, Aisha'. He wanted to gain strength so that he could carry the burden of revelation. Once he came back to this world and gained full strength, the thirst for that work would overcome him, and he would say, 'Give us ease, Bilal'. Then he would turn back to the ritual prayer. Sometimes the Prophet would strengthen his mind with a sweet aroma. That is why he said, 'Three things of this world of yours were made lovable to me: women, perfume and the coolness of my eye [as] was placed in the ritual prayer'. He put ritual prayer last because that is the goal. For he said, 'The coolness of my eye is in the ritual prayer', while sweet aromas and women are the ease of the body. Thereby the body gains strength to busy itself with prayer and to gain the coolness of the eye found therein'.<sup>13</sup>

Islam also sees marriage as an instrument which creates a comfortable home for both spouses. The marital link helps the partners to work together and co-operate amicably in the management of the domestic affairs of their house; hence sufficient time could be spared to meet the Divine commandments. Therefore, the Prophet is reported to have advised his followers to choose the right spouses who would help them attain Divine blessings. He said<sup>14</sup> 'Seek to have a grateful heart, a sweet tongue and a believing, righteous wife who would help you in your endeavour to succeed on the Last Day'.<sup>15</sup>

Marriage, in addition, is seen as an opportunity to develop for oneself a good and sound character as a result of the added family responsibility which both spouses have to endure during their married life. Hence, success in carrying out family commitments (which are equally regarded as divine duties) would ensure Divine reward. The Prophet said 'A man will be rewarded for what he spends on his wife, even for putting a morsel of food into her mouth'. Also, 'Whoever performs his prayers correctly, and spends on his children in spite of his modest means, and does not speak ill against others, will be in paradise as close to me as these [two fingers of mine]'.<sup>16</sup> Finally, marriage ensures social stability and a dignified form of living for both partners (the husband and the wife), probably even more for women since it guarantees their rights both as wives as well as mothers (of course alongside their rights as individuals).<sup>17</sup>

#### CONDITIONS OF MARRIAGE

Since Islam takes marriage seriously, its concern has been always to ensure that the marriage bond stays relatively stable and durable. To achieve these goals, it has laid down certain rules and regulations to meet these objectives. First, the couple have to be of proper marriageable age;<sup>18</sup> also, there should be no discrepancy between their ages. It must be stressed that the claim by some scholars that the groom has to be always senior in age so as to ensure a healthy marriage relationship has no religious grounds and in practical terms does not make any sense. In fact, it contradicts the practice of the Prophet, two of whose wives (Khadija and Sauda) happened to be older than him; despite this, the record shows that they lived in peace and harmony. Second, there should be a degree of compatibility between the two partners in terms of social status, educational standards and physical attraction (again the claim by some scholars that the bride has to be more beautiful and more attractive than her groom is a fallacy). Third, the dowry of the bride should be of a reasonable level: neither too high, which

could cause hardship for both of them, nor too low which might give the impression that the bride is of no worth. The dowry – which is in its essence a gift from the groom to the bride – should be affordable and manageable so as to ensure satisfaction and happiness on both sides. Fourth, the consent of the couple is crucial for the stability and durability of the marriage. Both have to enter into the wedlock with free will and without coercion. Compelling the couple (or even just one of them) to contract an unsatisfactory union would be detrimental to the interest of both sides and could lead to a disastrous end. Fifth, the prospective partners have to be pious and of good moral conduct.<sup>19</sup> Both have to be kind, sympathetic, considerate, patient and loving, caring to one another; this encourages peace and harmony in domestic life. Sixth, the two parties have to declare, from the beginning, their intentions to keep the marital bond as permanent as humanly possible. This commitment requires that the marriage contract should be free of any hidden agenda such as casual or temporary unions. Therefore, Islam is against all marriages that have been described as experimental, casual and temporary.<sup>20</sup> In a clear statement, the Prophet outrightly denounced those men and women who enjoy the frequent change of marital partners and warned against their unacceptable behaviour. Having stated the importance Islam lays on the permanency of marriage, it is essential to stress that in Islam there is no concept of 'indissoluble' marriage. Although Islam endeavours to keep the marital link stable and intact, this does not mean that the wedlock cannot be brought to an end if there are compelling circumstances. Indeed, Islam recognises that if the marriage is not working, it is in the interest of both sides to terminate it on good terms. Hence, divorce in Islam is a legitimate act, although it is discouraged by the Prophet.<sup>21</sup>

Islam, as we know, encourages both men and women to marry. Just like a man, a Muslim woman (virgin or non-virgin) has the freedom to propose to a man of her liking, either orally or in writing (I wonder how many Muslim women these days would dare to initiate an oral proposal, let alone put it in writing!). Listen to the following: 'Umamah bint Abil-As was one lady companion of the Prophet who proposed for marriage in writing. She sent a message to al-Mugheerah bin Maufal saying: "If you feel you stand in need of us then proceed forth". He then sought her hand in marriage from al-Hassan, her cousin, who duly solemnised the marriage'. Also, a Muslim lady made an oral proposal to the Prophet himself in the following account: 'I present myself to you'. She then waited for quite some time while the Prophet kept looking at her. A man said to the Prophet: 'If you do not need her, please marry me to her'. The Prophet asked him, 'Do you have anything to offer as dowry?' (The man

did not have anything to offer except his loin cloth, which after all he could not afford to give away. However, after lengthy enquiries, he offered to teach her the Quran). The Prophet then declared: 'I solemnise your marriage with her with whatever verses of the Quran you have as dowry'.<sup>22</sup>

The Muslim woman, therefore, has the freedom of marital choice: she is at liberty to choose her prospective husband, look at him and get to know him<sup>23</sup> without coercion on the part of the father or other relatives. If force or pressure takes place, she has the right to appeal to the court to redress the wrong.<sup>24</sup> Her consent is essential for the validity of the marriage contract. The Prophet is reported to have made the following statements: 'A previously married woman shall not be married till she gives her consent, nor should a virgin be married till her consent is sought'. 'A previously married woman is more a guardian for herself than her guardian, and a virgin should be asked permission about herself, and her permission is her silence'. 'A grown-up girl shall be asked permission about herself. If she is silent, it is her permission; and if she declines, there shall be no compulsion on her'.<sup>25</sup>

According to Islam, a divorced or widowed woman has the right to re-marry without any shame or denunciation. In fact, the Quran allows the betrothal of a divorced or widowed woman even during her period of transition (*idda*). 'It shall be no offence for you openly to propose marriage indirectly to such women or to cherish them in your hearts. Allah knows that you will remember them. Do not arrange to meet them in secret and, if you do, speak to them honourably. But you shall not consummate the marriage before the end of their waiting period. Know that Allah has knowledge of all your thoughts. Therefore take heed and bear in mind that Allah is forgiving and merciful'.<sup>26</sup> Also, neither age nor previous marriage would impede a woman from contracting perfect matches. Many are the examples which can be cited from the early Muslim community during which women were, very often, re-married after they were divorced or widowed, and this was done without stigma or discredit.

Take, for instance, Umm-Kulthum bint Aqba, an early convert from Mecca. She emigrated to Medina in defiance of her family, who tried to force her to return to Mecca, but to no avail. She stayed in Medina and married her first husband, Zaid bin Harith. When Zaid was killed in one of the battles she contracted a second marriage with Zubayr bin al-Awwam. Zubayr was rough with her, so she decided to part with him. After the separation, she married Abdel Rahman bin Awf, her third husband, and bore him two sons. Upon Abdel Rahman's death, Umm Kulthum once more contracted herself into marriage, to her fourth and final husband, this time

with the conqueror of Egypt, Amr ibn al-As. She stayed with him until she passed away.<sup>27</sup>

Atika bint Zaid is another good example. She was a woman of exceptional abilities who had managed to contract four marriages during her lifetime. Her first husband was Abdullah ibn Abu Bakr, son of the first Caliph Abu Bakr. He died, leaving her a fortune on condition that she would not re-marry. For a while she was content with the idea of living a celibate life, but later she decided to go against his wish and not to spend the rest of her life alone; hence her decision to accept Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph, as her second husband. When Umar was assassinated in 642 she married her third husband, Zubayr ibn al-Awwam. After his death in 656, she took her fourth husband, Hussein ibn Ali, son of the fourth Caliph Ali; by this time she was around forty-five years old.<sup>28</sup>

### Contract and Conditions

Marriage in Islam requires a contract between two equal partners. Hence, in Islamic terms, the woman is to be a subject rather than an object in the marriage contract. The contract, in sum, is a legal written document between two adults, which entails an offer by one partner and an acceptance by the other in the presence of two witnesses. The Qadi, or official, usually solemnises the marriage in a mosque or court or any other location. The consent of the prospective wife is crucial for the effectiveness of the marriage contract. Any force or blackmail on the part of the relatives would automatically render the contract invalid.<sup>29</sup> The bride, moreover, has the exclusive right to stipulate her own conditions in the contract. These conditions include mainly (though not exclusively) such issues as marriage terms (the right, for example, to have a monogamous relationship whilst she is still living with her husband) and divorce terms (the right, for instance, to dissolve the marital bond at her own initiative if she deems it necessary).<sup>30</sup> In addition, dowries – one initial and another deferred in case of divorce – must be specified and written down and they should be of substance. The dowry (or *Mahr*, in Islamic terms) belongs to the wife; it is her exclusive right and it should not be given away, neither to her family nor to her relatives.<sup>31</sup> The Quran says 'Give women their dowry as a free gift; but if they choose to make over to you a part of it, you may regard it as lawfully yours'.<sup>32</sup>

When the marriage is consummated, the couple assume a new relationship: that is, a husband-wife relationship. It is a kind of reciprocal and interdependent relationship. The Quran says 'And of His signs is that He gave you wives from among yourselves, that you might live in tranquillity

with them, and put love and kindness in your hearts. Surely there are signs in this for thinking people'.<sup>33</sup> The verse implies that in a marriage bond the two partners are a comfort to each other. They should find and enjoy peace and tranquillity in each other's company and be bound together not only by a sexual relationship but also by love, compassion and mercy. As such, both have to demonstrate mutual care, affection, respect and be prepared to make sacrifices. Also, there should be no servility on the part of either side, for they are two equal partners in a healthy, loving and caring relationship.<sup>34</sup>

The Quran eloquently illustrates this equal partnership in the following statement: 'They are an apparel to you, as you are an apparel to them'.<sup>35</sup> The verse explains that just as a garment covers a person completely and provides him/her with warmth, protection and decency, in the same way a husband and wife provide each other with the necessary warmth, comfort, intimacy and protection.<sup>36</sup> The realisation of these principles in actual life depends, mainly, on the way both partners react to each other. In this context, the Quran expects them to behave in the best manner toward each other. The husband, on the one hand, is commanded to treat his wife gently and with kindness, affection and consideration. The Prophet said 'The best of you is the best of you to his wife, and I am better than any of you toward my wife'.<sup>37</sup> He is to deal with her with dignity and in an equitable manner, not to hurt or injure her feelings. He is to show her that he loves her,<sup>38</sup> appreciates her good qualities and he is to give her the impression that he needs her and depends on her to attain happiness in life. Also, he is asked to ensure that his tasks as husband and father are fulfilled to the utmost. Besides, the husband has to meet his legal responsibility to provide full maintenance of the wife: a task which he has to accomplish with good cheer and gladness. The wife, on the other hand, is similarly required to reciprocate in kindness towards her husband, treat him with respect, admire his good qualities and express her love and affection to him. Also, she is called upon to ensure that her duties as wife and mother are performed to the best of her abilities.<sup>39</sup>

To maintain a happy conjugal relationship, both partners must be loyal, honest, direct, and trustworthy. They should be thoughtful, sympathetic and sensitive towards each other's feelings; in particular, they must avoid raising each other's suspicions and jealousy and try to maintain their integrity as husband and wife, united together in a matrimonial link. Concerning their sexual intimacy, both must be pleasing<sup>40</sup> and receptive. They should endeavour to attain and give maximum gratification. Moreover, in order to keep the marital link intact, stable and healthy, both partners have to demonstrate their willingness to share the burden of

looking after the welfare of the family. They must share the ups and downs of married life, be prepared to make sacrifices, pay attention to each other's point of view, consult each other and adopt joint decisions on important matters that affect the entire family.

These joint decisions have to be delivered or enforced by the husband since, in Islam, he is the head of the family. This is based on the following Quranic verses which give the husband the right to be in charge of the family: 'Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them, although men have a degree above women. Allah is Mighty and Wise'.<sup>41</sup> 'Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them'.<sup>42</sup> These verses were and still are a source of much discussion and debate throughout the Muslim world, generating a host of different interpretations. These interpretations range from liberal to moderate to conservative. Our view in this context is that the headship of the husband should on no account be a license for dictatorship; it should entail no absolute freedom on the part of the person in charge; if the husband mis-uses or abuses his status, the wife has the right to interfere to rectify the situation. After all, the whole issue of being a chair-person is to ensure the smooth running of the family. Any neglect on the part of the husband to fulfill the task which is designated to him justifies his replacement by the more able person (the wife).

However, God-conscious pairs would always act responsibly because they are aware of their commitments to God as well as to each other. Also, because they are conscious of the fact that if they live up to their promises and act rationally in their married life they would invoke God's pleasure, hence making their lives a perpetual joy and paradise. But, sadly, this kind of paradise, envisaged by the Quran and practised briefly during the Prophet's time, has hardly ever been realised. In fact, the case has nearly always been the reverse. Slowly but surely, attitudes towards women and marriage changed. The Quranic principles which bestowed honour, dignity, kindness and respect on women were gradually eroded and went into limbo. Customs, rather than Divine laws, shaped and continue to shape the social fabric of society and govern people's attitudes towards women and marriage. The outcome has been a steady deterioration in the status of women as far as their marital rights are concerned. Take, for example, the right to initiate a marriage proposal. This has been completely abandoned: not even in her wildest dreams would a woman dare to propose orally or in writing. The disappearance of this early practice has been so total that most women, even educated ones, are not aware of its existence, let alone practise it. The right to exercise her choice in selecting

a marriage partner has, in most cases, been forgotten. Most marriages that currently take place in Muslim societies are arranged unions, during which force and intimidation are quite often employed to obtain the girl's consent. Moreover, her freedom to sign the marriage contract has been considerably curtailed. The majority of Muslim marriages nowadays are contracted through agents (guardians, especially on the part of the woman), very often a male member of the family (father, brother, or uncle), who formalises and signs the contract on her behalf. In doing so, her opportunity and right to negotiate marriage and divorce terms are deliberately denied. In most cases, a woman is subjected to considerable pressure to avoid stipulating in her marriage contract a divorce right or any other rights which might be viewed as a constraint on the freedom of the husband. If she did so, the social pressure on her would be so tremendous that in the end she would be obliged to give up, otherwise she would be accused of endangering the whole enterprise. Divorce has become a stigma and women are always regarded as being culpable. The prospects for a non-virgin (divorcee or widow) getting re-married is dim. Indeed, in many cases they are forced to spend the rest of their lives cherishing the memories of their dead husbands and serving the male members of their own families.

Within the context of a husband-wife relationship, authoritarianism and dictatorship have replaced the ideal and equal partnership advocated by the Quran. The husband assumes the role of ruler, superior, controller, oppressor and master, while the wife, on the other hand, is reduced to a slave, a captive, a low, inferior and submissive creature. Listen to what the so-called Council of Ulama (that is, people with knowledge about Islam) of South Africa has to say about the relationship between the two spouses: 'She (the wife) should mould herself to wholeheartedly submit to his whims and fancies. His likes must become her likes and his dislikes, her dislikes. She should step out of her way to comfort him and to console him in his worries and distress. Her wishes and desires are subservient to his wishes and orders .... After all (God) has created her for her husband's comfort and peace'. The Council goes on to say 'The Shariah has accorded the husband the highest degree of authority over his wife. Likewise it will transpire that the wife has to offer the higher degree of submission to her husband ... with humility and patience she should tolerate his shortcomings and even his injustice ... men are the rulers of women and they have a superior rank ... (as such) it is the husband's right and role to dominate and dictate (and) it is the duty of the wife to submit and serve. The wife should understand that she can never conquer her husband by confrontation and seeking to set herself up as his equal or superior'.<sup>43</sup> Concerning the

financial arrangements between them, the Council stresses: 'It is significant that in spite of the wife remaining the sole owner of her wealth ... (she is encouraged) to put her wealth at his disposal and pleasure'. What about his money? 'She should not attempt to appoint herself as the controller of his finances. It is none of her business on whom her husband spends his wealth'. What if the husband fails to perform his duties properly? The Council emphasises: 'She must not adopt a legal stand and a technical attitude, demanding from her husband perfect and total fulfilment of her legal rights .... The wife has to remember that despite her husband's failure to fulfil his duties to her, she is under ... obligation to obey her husband .... obedience to the husband will ensure the everlasting happiness ... for her'.<sup>44</sup>

The mutual responsibilities on both sides to demonstrate to each other their loyalty, honesty and respect have become exclusively the wife's domain and obligations. The husband has been deliberately left out of the equation. So whether he is honest and loyal or a cheat it does not matter. What matters most (and this is important to him and to the male-dominated society) is the faithfulness and loyalty of the wife. There is no question of reciprocity between them in this matter. I have not read a single book (obviously those written by men) which considers faithfulness obligatory upon both sides. The emphasis has always been on the wife, as if she is a creature with no control over her sexuality. The reader might consider it disgraceful to have such a mentality at the end of the twentieth century, but sadly we still do. Listen again to what the Council has to say: 'The outstanding virtue of a true Muslim wife is her total faithfulness to her husband. Her mind, her heart, her gaze and her body are only for her husband .... It does not behove the Muslim wife to cast her eyes on any man other than her husband ... even a glance at another man is considered infidelity and an act of unfaithfulness ... entertaining thoughts of other men in the mind is infidelity in Islam; glancing at other men is infidelity, speaking to other men is infidelity. Infidelity and unfaithfulness to the husband are not confined to adultery'. In other words, she has to bury herself alive. But what if the husband happens to be unfaithful? Well, 'The woman of intelligence and understanding should face this delicate situation with great patience ... she should endeavour to win over his heart with love and tender tones ... if the husband rebuffs her, she should not give up hope. Leave the matter for a while and resume (the advice) respectfully, humbly and intelligently at another time when he is in a better mood'. What if he marries a second wife? '(She) should not behave as if her world and life has ended ... she should face the situation with ... maturity and patience. She should suppress her urges and never vent her

essential in this context. The husband cannot force her back, even if he regrets divorcing her. She must first give her consent before the couple can resume their matrimonial relations. In order for him to signal his intention to retain her, he may express this desire either explicitly or implicitly. The former is the preferred one, and is usually done by pronouncing the revocation of the repudiation. If, during the waiting period, one of the spouses dies, the other can still inherit the estate. If the husband allows the waiting period to elapse without reclaiming his wife, the repudiation becomes irrevocable or absolute (*bayan*). The wife henceforth becomes free to contract a new marriage, be it with her former husband or with someone else.<sup>30</sup>

(2) *Talaq al-Hasan*. This is a less approved form of divorce. Here the husband repudiates his wife three successive times over a period of three months, once each month during the period of *tuhr*. As with *Ahsan talaq*, the husband can revoke his divorce after the first or second repudiation, but after the third repudiation the divorce becomes absolute (*bayan*). The only difference is that the wife cannot re-marry her former husband until she has first married someone else and then dissolved that marriage.<sup>31</sup> The reason for adding this condition is to prevent a hasty repudiation on the part of the husband.<sup>32</sup>

(3) *Talaq al-Bid'ah* (innovative). This is the least approved method of divorce in the Muslim world but, unfortunately, it is the most widely used. It is highly condemned by women and civilised men and regarded as sinful. Nonetheless, it is considered legally effective once it is pronounced. This form of divorce 'is effected by three repudiations, which may be pronounced at any time (not merely in clean periods) and without definite intervals'.<sup>33</sup> It is an irrevocable form of *talaq* and the husband can only re-marry his ex-wife after she has contracted a new marriage with a second man and dissolved that marriage (after proper consummation).<sup>34</sup> *Bid'ah* divorce lacks any Quranic support. Also, it was strongly denounced by the Prophet, who is reported to have reacted angrily when he heard that somebody had divorced his wife by the triple pronouncement of *talaq* in a single sitting and said 'How would you play with the book of Allah while I am alive and amidst you?'<sup>35</sup> He then ordered the man to take back his wife. Nonetheless, this innovative divorce acquired legitimacy under the reign of the second Caliph Umar, who decided to make it legal in an attempt to prevent any careless use of the formula. However, his efforts in this context proved to no avail as his decree eventually produced counter-productive results. Since then it has remained lawful and legally effective among Sunnis (the Shia do not recognise this type of divorce), and men

have continued to make use of it to their own advantage. We are therefore strongly in favour of banning it outright. It is a bizarre and odd practice; most importantly, it is very degrading to the dignity of Muslim women. Also, it allows men to indulge their whims, completely unfettered, with no obligation to honour their family responsibilities.

It is interesting to notice that the great jurist, Ibn Taymiyyah, was against it. He stated that the erratic use of such a practice (triple pronouncement on a single occasion) was invalid and had no impact on the statutory position of a marriage. His aim was to protect women, as he thought that they were victimised by such a ruling (Umar's validation of *Bid'ah* divorce). It is a shame that his position has been forgotten and disregarded in contemporary Muslim societies.<sup>36</sup>

The dissolution of marriage by the wife takes two forms: (1) *Talaq al-Tawfid*, or delegated divorce. In this form of divorce the husband, at the time of marriage, agrees to delegate to his wife the power of pronouncing the *talaq*, thus allowing her to dissolve the marriage contract. It must be stressed here that once the husband consents to give his wife the right to divorce him, he is no longer in a position to reclaim it. *Tawfid* divorce is indeed a powerful weapon in the hands of the wife, since she can easily use it if the conditions in the marriage contract are violated by the husband. But I wonder how many Muslim women can afford to take advantage of it, considering the social menace and terror surrounding them in Muslim societies.<sup>37</sup> (2) *Khula*, also called ransom by some jurists.<sup>38</sup> Here, the wife initiates the divorce, but the husband has to agree<sup>39</sup> to free her in return for re-payment of part or all of the dowry or *mahr*.<sup>40</sup> A woman seeking *khula*, however, may lose her right to maintenance during the waiting period.<sup>41</sup> Women's right to *khula* was acknowledged and respected during the early Islamic era; they were very often allowed to exercise it without fear or intimidation. For a woman to request *khula* she does not have to quote any specific reason; the fact that she is unhappy with her husband would be enough to grant her separation under *khula*.

This point is clearly illustrated by the following incident that took place during the Prophet's lifetime: 'The wife of Thabit bin Qais came to the Prophet and said, "O Allah's Messenger! I do not blame Thabit for defects in his character or his religion, but I, being a Muslim, dislike to behave in an un-Islamic manner (if I remain with him)". On that Allah's Messenger said (to her), "will you give back the garden which your husband has given you (as *mahr*)?" She said, "yes". Then the Prophet said to Thabit, "O Thabit! Accept your garden, and divorce her once".'<sup>42</sup> *Khula* is hardly ever practised these days. Indeed, the majority of Muslim women are not aware of its existence, let alone allowed to make use of it. And even if

they know of it, alas, who dare to seek *khula* even if the husband looks like a monster or beast? It would certainly cause God's throne to tremble.

Divorce through mutual consent is usually called *Mubara'ah*. This form of divorce centres around an agreement between spouses to release each other from the marital link<sup>42</sup> with no exchange or payment on either side.

The final method of dissolving the marriage contract is through a judicial process, at the instigation of either the wife or husband. This can be obtained in the case of (a) *Lian* and (b) annulment.<sup>44</sup> *Lian* is a divorce by oath and it occurs when the husband accuses his wife of committing adultery without evidence.<sup>45</sup> The court, after studying the case and hearing particular oaths<sup>46</sup> from both spouses, would issue a decree allowing the marriage to be dissolved. This form of separation is irrevocable and the partners cannot re-marry each other again.<sup>47</sup> Annulment: the annulment (or *faskh*) of the marriage takes place when the wife lodges a complaint against her husband on the basis of the following: impotence, failure to fulfil the marital obligations, maltreatment, insanity and any other causes which might justify the annulment of the marriage. After investigating the complaint carefully, the judge would pass a court decree freeing the woman from the marital bond.<sup>48</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Although the Quranic legislation on divorce aims at protecting women and allowing them to free themselves from the marital bond if it becomes necessary, in today's situation, there is a huge gap between the Divine principles and the actual practice. For example, most women are hardly allowed to exercise their right to divorce because of the tremendous social and mental pressures to which they are subjected. To break these barriers, they would need enormous courage, and few of them have this capacity. Therefore, divorce has become an exclusive right of men. And this right has been grossly abused. Indeed, in most cases, it has been deliberately used to suppress, control and humiliate women. And it must be stressed that, despite some improvements in recent years in some countries, the overall situation still remains far from perfect. Hence, urgent reform on divorce proceedings in general is sorely needed, and particular attention should be directed to the investigation of the motives for divorce on the part of men.

## 8 Women and Political Action

From the Islamic viewpoint, human actions are all regarded as duties, which in turn can be divided into *far'd'ayn* (individual duty) and *far'd kifaya* (collective duty). Duties in general (whether *far'd'ayn* or *far'd kifaya*) are closely linked with human ability, that is, they are obligatory on people who are able to fulfil them for 'Allah does not charge a soul with more than it can bear'.<sup>1</sup> It follows that political actions are also viewed as duties and hence can be classified as *far'd'ayn* (such as *Bay'a* or oath of allegiance and *Shura* or consultation) and *far'd kifaya* (such as Jihad, public offices and enjoining good and forbidding evil). The obligatory nature of any actions (*Wajib*), including the political ones, is based on the concept of vicegerency or human representation of God on earth (*Khilafa*), which includes both men and women<sup>2</sup> and entails personal as well as corporate responsibility to fulfil God's commands on earth. Both then, as equal partners, share the onus or duty of running the political affairs of their society for they 'are friends (*awliya'*) to each other ... enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil'.<sup>3</sup> And, as we know, all the works of the Judiciary, Executive and Legislative powers are there to enjoin good and forbid evil. The Muslim woman, therefore, like her counterpart – the man – has a broad political responsibility and an important role to play in public life, a role that was put at the service of the nascent Islamic community in Medina and for a while thereafter in the early period of Islam. For women, especially during the Prophet's time, were very active socially and politically. They were allowed and even encouraged to participate in the process of building up the Medinan society and they proved to be up to the task.

### EARLY POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF MUSLIM WOMEN

Muslim women started their political activities the moment they embraced Islam.<sup>4</sup> They defended the new religion against fierce opposition from both their own families and society at large; they endured abuse and ill treatment<sup>5</sup> and when pressure mounted against them they decided to leave home, seeking refuge with their fellow Muslims rather than abandon their belief and faith.<sup>6</sup> All these actions are regarded as political activities in contemporary terms since they include a challenge to the old political

system, a protest against unjustified abuse and torture, and a rejection of suppression and denial of freedom of belief and expression. With the establishment of the Islamic state, the role of women in the political affairs of the new society gained momentum. They became part of the nation and effective members of the community, fully involved in public affairs. For instance, right from the beginning, women, like men, gave support and allegiance to the political system which was set up under the leadership of Muhammad. This was done through the so-called *bay'a*.<sup>7</sup>

But what is *bay'a*? *Bay'a* in Islam is an important political institution by which the nation or the Umma grants or ensures legitimacy for the political system. It includes a pledge by the nation to be loyal to the system and its leader as long as this leader upholds Islamic principles.<sup>8</sup> Hence it is a covenant (*mithaq*) entered into by three parties: the leader (who is to be given the pledge or recognition; the nation or Umma (which is to give its allegiance and loyalty);<sup>9</sup> and the Sharia (which is to be respected and upheld by both the leader as well as the nation). *Bay'a* moreover, is divided into *bay'a 'ayniya*, related to the political commitment (*iltizam*) to the system, and is compulsory on every Muslim man and woman, and *bay'a kayfiyya* related to particular duties and is obligatory on a particular group of men and women. During Muhammad's leadership, allegiance and loyalty<sup>10</sup> were given to him by both men and women without any difference in content or responsibility.<sup>11</sup> For he took a pledge from women, as from men, to support the state and obey him in enjoining good and forbidding evil (*bay'a 'ayniya*). Also, he received *bay'a kayfiyya* from some prominent women; among them was Nusaiba bint Kab, who gave her word to participate in Jihad and indeed she did take part in many battles alongside men. This illustrates her determination to fulfil the *bay'a* despite the fact that it was *bay'a kayfiyya*; for this kind of *bay'a* is mandatory on those men and women with special talents. As she thought herself to be one of them, she decided to go ahead and fulfil it. This indicates that women (like men) are under an obligation to realise their individual capabilities to the full, and thus to take up the specific duties related to these capabilities, whether these duties be individual or collective.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to *bay'a*, women also participated in *Shura* (mutual consultation) which is one of the foundations of the Islamic political system. The practice of *Shura* is obligatory on both the leader as well as the Umma. The Quran says, 'Take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs; and when you are resolved, put your trust in Allah'.<sup>13</sup> We also have the verse which praises those 'who obey their Lord, attend to their prayers and conduct their affairs by mutual consent'.<sup>14</sup> In these verses, it is clear that

the ruler is required to consult with the ruled, while the Umma is bound in its turn to offer counsel to the ruler.

*Shura* or mutual consultation is a tool by which the nation can achieve the objectives of the *Sharia*. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the nation to uphold it, protect it and under no circumstances allow it to be abandoned. The exercise of *Shura* can take place at different levels; hence the commitment to practise it by the individual members of the community varies according to the subject under consultation on the one hand, and on individual ability, on the other. For example, regarding legislative matters concerning *Sharia*, consultation is required with scholars or the *Ulama*; regarding technical issues, consultation is mandatory with experts in these fields; for general issues concerning the whole nation, some form of consultation with every member of the community would be ideal. This could take the shape of a referendum or general elections. Within this context, women can take part in consultation at various levels depending on the subject matter and on individual capability. For instance, they can participate in consultation at the legislative level, experts' level, or at the general public level as ordinary members of the community.

Women were consulted at all levels during the period of the Prophet's rule and that of his companions. They used to seek their advice (*mashwara*) before most important decisions were made. For example, the Prophet used to receive delegations of women presenting their cases to him. Among them was Asma bint Yazid al-Ansari, who was an outspoken woman. She used to speak and argue on behalf of her fellow Muslim women, and the Prophet used to encourage her and expressed his admiration for her strong personality.<sup>15</sup> His wives, especially Umm Salama and Aisha, never hesitated to ask searching questions and speak their minds when they felt it necessary; and the Prophet admired this questioning attitude. In fact, on one occasion, he had to rely on the advice (*mashwara*) of one of his wives, Umm Salama, to solve a problem that bewildered the Muslims at a crucial time of the Islamic history. Umm Salama with her wisdom, prudence and good judgement helped the Prophet to solve the predicament, thus avoiding a situation that could have divided the community and weakened Muhammad's mission.<sup>16</sup> Aisha, renowned for her wit and intelligence, was trained by the Prophet to question, discuss, argue and correct, to the extent that he recommended that the Muslims should learn from her knowledge and wisdom, especially in religious matters: take half of your religion from Aisha he said. By the time the Prophet passed away she had already become a great scholar and attained the position of a religious judge.<sup>17</sup> She was accepted as a religious authority during the caliphate of Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. Very often they used

to consult her and seek her advice if they were faced with difficult issues. If they disagreed with her, the judgement she recommended turned out to be the correct one and then it was gladly accepted. Also, she gave a verdict in favour of one companion against another and at a certain stage she criticised and corrected them.<sup>18</sup> Her eloquence and qualities were described in these words: 'I have heard the speeches of the Khulafa, Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman, and Ali. But the words which came from the mouth of Aisha had a quality and excellence which is not in the words of anyone else.'<sup>19</sup> Hafsa, the daughter of the second caliph Umar, and one of the wives of the Prophet, was also active in public affairs. Her insight and guidance were very often sought by the companions. For example, on one occasion her father had to consult her before he could take a decision regarding the time limit for a husband to be away from his wife. (Also, based on his consultation with other women, he either amended or cancelled decisions, which he thought would run contrary to the interests of women.) Hafsa, moreover, expressed her concern about the political situation following the assassination of her father. While he was on his death bed she urged her brother Abdullah to discuss the issue with her father and ensure a smooth and peaceful transition of power. Also, she played a crucial role in persuading her brother, who was unwilling to get involved in the conflict that erupted between Ali and Muawiyah, to attend the arbitration which was set up to discuss the conflict and solve the problem peacefully and amicably.<sup>20</sup>

Contrary to the traditional image of women being secluded and suppressed, women in early Islam participated in armed conflict either by organising food and water and taking care of the wounded or through playing a crucial part in the actual fighting when it was needed. Among the many examples of women who took active part in the battles was Safiyya, an aunt of the Prophet, who defended a fortress in Medina at the time of the Battle of the Trench. She noticed an intruder who had penetrated the defences of the fortress; she managed to manoeuvre and kill him before he was able to do any harm to the women and children.<sup>21</sup> Women also reached positions of high responsibility as was the case with al-Shafa' who was appointed by the second Caliph Umar as a market inspector in Medina. Their involvement in politics, furthermore, manifested itself by the fact that they were alert and actively opposed to any rulers who they thought were deviating from implementing Islamic principles and maintaining a just society. Two examples can be cited in this context. First, there is the case of the woman who publicly opposed Umar for passing a law restricting the dowries of women. He was forced, after admitting his mistake to repeal his decision.

The second case was that of Aisha who genuinely believed that it was within her right to oppose the fourth caliph Ali and fight him for failing to find the murderers of Uthman. She led an army which included prominent companions such as Talha and Zubayr and fought a battle that was to be named the Battle of the Camel, because of the camel she was riding. Women's influence in public affairs reached its climax when their action to protect or give immunity from punishment were sanctioned by the Prophet. He approved and accepted all the *Ijara* (protection) cases licenced by women, this being a clear indication by the Prophet and the early community, of the ability and capacity of women to judge wisely and act responsibly even in matters of great concern to the stability and security of the Islamic state. There are many examples in which women accorded protection or asylum (*Ijara*) and the Prophet gladly supported them. It has been reported that the Prophet never opposed or rejected any *Ijara* extended to enemies by women.

It must be stressed that the high level of political (as well as social) activities performed by women in early Islam could not have been achieved without the realisation of three important and interrelated factors: first, the recognition of the political ability or competence of women. As we noticed above, women were regarded as fully-fledged citizens capable of participating in all political activities (including *bay'a*, *shura*, granting asylums, taking part in Jihad and holding prominent positions) and indeed they were allowed to do so; second, this recognition or acknowledgement gained momentum when women became politically conscious or aware of their responsibilities in society. An awareness which Muhammad undertook to raise and promote among all women. This was accomplished through instructing women to gain knowledge and education and encouraging them to attend public gatherings (especially Eid celebrations, which often took place in mosques) even when they were menstruating this being an illustration that although women were at certain times relieved from the obligations of their daily worshipping, this did not lead to an automatic reduction in their duty to participate in annual public meetings. On the contrary, they were urged to attend Eid festivals and the congregational Jumah (i.e. Friday) prayers, which were regarded as general political meetings during which important issues concerning the whole nation were discussed and debated.<sup>22</sup> This provided the minimum level of political (as well as social) awareness needed for the majority of them, especially those whose domestic responsibilities prevented them from attending congregational prayers such as Friday prayers. To achieve maximum benefit for them, the Prophet, moreover, used to give them advice and guidance, especially when he learnt that they could not hear him properly during one of his Eid sermons.<sup>23</sup>

The Prophet actively supported those women with special abilities and a higher level of awareness and whose circumstances allowed them to attend the regular congregational prayers. In fact, he instructed men (their husbands or relatives) not to prevent them from doing so even if they wanted to attend the dawn and night prayers,<sup>24</sup> during which time the Quran used to be recited, explained and interpreted. Such sessions formed the basis for their religious education as well as their social and political awareness. In addition, in order to satisfy their intellectual needs, the Prophet designated a special day for this group of women in which he used to teach them the principles of Islam and other related issues.<sup>25</sup> This raised the self awareness of Muslim women and increased their understanding of their responsibility in society,<sup>26</sup> leading, consequently, to greater public participation; and third, the broad political participation of women which was conditioned by their abilities and their degree of self-awareness was practised in a favourable social setting that gave it its stimulus and momentum. This supportive environment was the result of determined efforts, by the Prophet, to eradicate any practices and habits that would hinder or resist the progress towards wider political engagement of women in society. Hence, he pushed ahead the process of social change and ensured that the community would accept and regard women's activity in the political sphere as an asset and a valuable contribution to a healthy society. This was fulfilled: firstly, through the Quranic injunctions and *Hadith* regulations, both of which encourage women to be energetic and creative, while at the same time, exhort men to help them fulfil their roles as active and equal members of the community; secondly, the example set by the Prophet in dealing with his family in particular and the companions (women) in general.<sup>27</sup> He constantly encouraged them to take part in all aspects of life: social, political, economic and religious. This support found its echo when women, especially the Ansari women, demonstrated their interest and eagerness to participate in all activities, thus, setting a role model for other women to follow.<sup>28</sup> In doing so, they pioneered the way for radical social change that allowed more space and greater mobility for women in society.<sup>29</sup>

#### THE RETREAT OF MUSLIM WOMEN FROM PUBLIC LIFE

Despite the clear-cut Quranic and *Hadith* instructions encouraging women to play an effective role in public life (alongside their private one), the general tendency, among Muslims, has been one which opposes women's involvement in politics. Most scholars prefer an interpretation that enjoins

women to stay at home and not to 'interfere' in public life. They argue that women are incapable of handling public affairs; therefore, it is better for them to perform the work they are good at – that is, to be mothers and wives only. According to them, women never participated in the politics of the Muslims throughout their history. And, it is argued that despite the fact that Islam gave women rights equal to those of men, Islam deems it necessary that women should stay at home and concentrate on their domestic affairs, in the interest both of women themselves and of society as a whole.<sup>30</sup> But one might object, what about the different social, political and economic activities played by women during the Prophet's time? The scholars then respond by insisting that those were mere individual cases which cannot be cited to legitimise the participation of women in political affairs. Anyone who thinks to the contrary is mistaken, they say, and does not comprehend history. As for Aisha who played a prominent role in politics, they argue that although she fought a famous battle, in the end she regretted her act (for she should not have left her home and taken part in that battle) and asked for forgiveness. Consequently, it cannot be claimed that her act is a proof for the participation of Muslim women in politics, for it was an individual act which proved to be a complete failure.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to stress that those who oppose women's involvement in politics differ among themselves regarding the level or degree of women's exercise of power. For example, while some are prepared to tolerate the idea that women can have limited access to politics (such as the right to vote and nominate persons for certain public offices), others deny them any political rights. However, they all agree that women cannot be allowed to hold ministerial positions or become prime minister or president of a state. They base their prohibition on the following:

(1) *Quran*: they maintain that Chapter 4, verse 34 of the Quran which reads thus: 'Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them', has virtually closed the door to women's advancement to higher positions. For them, this verse has sanctioned men's authority over women and made the domain of politics or power an exclusively male preserve. This is because men have strong leadership characteristics which entitle them to rule over women who tend to be weak and more emotional.<sup>32</sup> According to them, the verse is clear in entrusting men (not women) with the *Qiwama* or guardianship. It follows that since men are the caretakers (*Qawwamun*) of women, it is not possible for them to hold positions of authority which would allow them to exercise power over men. Moreover, they argue that even if they have to accept the view which states that this verse deals specifically with family affairs and

cannot be generalised to include male-female relations in public life, the proof (*hujja*) still stands: women cannot rule over men. For if they are unqualified to manage their family undertakings, by the same token, they are unfit to handle public matters.

However, we are of the strong opinion that this verse (4: 34) deals exclusively with family affairs and has nothing to do with the relationships between men and women in public life. This is because the verse is mentioned solely within the context of married life,<sup>31</sup> in which one party – the husband – is charged with the responsibility of being the head and caretaker of the family – bearing in mind that relieving the wife from such a responsibility is by no means an indication of her inability to do the job properly; on the contrary, she can easily replace him if he is absent (for whatever reason) or unfit to fulfil his duty. Therefore, it is not right to generalise the ruling of this verse (which handles only marital matters) to encompass the relationships between men and women in society, so as to deny women the opportunity to hold public offices.<sup>34</sup>

(2) *Hadith*: Two *Hadiths* are of particular importance in this issue. The Prophet is reported to have said 'O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women). They asked, why is it so, O Allah's Messenger? He replied, you curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious, sensible man could be led astray by some of you. The women asked, O Allah's Messenger! what is deficient in our intelligence and religion? He said, is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man? They replied in the affirmative. He said, this is the deficiency in her intelligence. Isn't it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses? The women replied in the affirmative. He said, this is the deficiency in her religion'.<sup>35</sup> This *Hadith* is used, by the opponents of women's rights in politics, to prove their point in saying that women cannot be trusted with handling public matters. They stress that the above *Hadith* makes it clear that women cannot have power over men because they are spiritually as well as cognitively deficient. They thus associate deficiency with womanhood and insist that women, by nature, are less prepared (rationally and emotionally) than men to cope with the pressure of public life. Therefore, God, according to them, has relieved them from certain duties (such as attending Jumah prayers and participating in Jihad) which are compulsory for men.<sup>36</sup>

However, there are those who see the *Hadith* differently: some do not accept it and consider it as fabricated or at best a weak *Hadith*, which

ought to be abandoned because weak *Hadiths* usually do not carry any legal effects;<sup>37</sup> others acknowledge the *Hadith* as authentic, but stress that it has been grossly misinterpreted. They argue that the deficiency mentioned in the *Hadith* does not refer to natural but rather specific deficiency. In other words, there are two forms of deficiencies: (a) natural or innate deficiency (*naqs fitri*), a form of natural defect which hampers the human intellect at various levels, the extreme one being madness. This does not include women categorically because they are regarded (from the Quranic viewpoint) as accountable and responsible human beings capable of fulfilling their duties; (b) specific deficiency (*naqs naw'i*) of two types: (i) casual defect (*aradi*), which can temporarily upset the natural disposition of a person, especially during menstruation and pregnancy. This form of frailty does not weaken or impair women's natural abilities; (ii) incidental defect of long-term effects which results usually from living in special conditions (such as confinement to four walls, constant engagement in pregnancy and childbirth, etc.) that are not conducive to contacts and interactions with outside world. This, in time, lessens women's social, political and economic awareness of their surroundings and reduces them to their private circle of ladies, with devastating consequences on their potential for playing an active role in public life. It must be stressed, however, that this form of deficiency can be remedied by altering the circumstances that lead to its existence.<sup>38</sup>

As for the link made in the *Hadith* between women's intellectual deficiency and their testimony in law, we might point out that the connection occurs only in one case, namely, the evidence which requires the testimony of one man and two women. This testimony is mentioned in the Quran in Chapter 2, verse 282, which deals solely with financial matters. And this is the only testimony in which the issue of gender is a dominant factor; in other testimonies the Quran stipulates justice rather than gender. Therefore, it is not right to use this verse in order to accuse women of being intellectually deficient. For it is no more than a guiding verse aiming at promoting justice when dealing with complicated financial issues. In other words, the verse is meant to give advice that if, under certain circumstances, men are not available to testify, the alternative is to accept the testimony of two women (who could be ordinary members of the public, having little or no experience with financial matters, or who could be undergoing temporary disturbances resulting from menstruation or post-natal conditions) as being equal to that of man; the aim here being to ensure that precautionary measures are in place when dealing with an area where women are less likely to be experts. Overall, the deficiency referred to in the *Hadith*, therefore, is not natural but rather contingent or casual

and does not necessarily contradict the fact that there are women who possess high qualities and enjoy special capacities in comparison with ordinary men and women. Indeed, in some cases there are those who are wiser, well-advised, and more intelligent than men.<sup>39</sup>

The second *Hadith* which is reported in Bukhari and reads as thus: Abu Bakra said 'when Allah's Messenger was informed that the Persians had crowned the daughter of Kisra (Khosrau) as their ruler, he said, such people as ruled by a lady will never be successful.'<sup>40</sup> This *Hadith* has been widely cited to block any attempts to give women the opportunity to wield power in society. The opponents argue that the Prophet in this *Hadith* advises Muslims not to follow in the footsteps of the Persians who appointed a woman as their leader and consequently led them to a disastrous end. For them, the *Hadith* contains a clear-cut warning (for Muslims) to be vigilant and not to allow women to overstep the line and enter into politics; otherwise, their fate would be the same as that of Persia before Islam: defeat and humiliation.<sup>41</sup> However, one has to disagree with this view for two reasons: first, the *Hadith* deals mainly with a specific case, namely, the situation of Persia at the time of the Prophet.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, it is no more than a prophesy (*bishara*) in which the Prophet predicted the fate of the Persian empire. As such, it has no legal ruling and therefore it cannot be generalised to include all women at all times; second, if the *Hadith* is to be accepted as general, it would surely contradict the Quran, and this cannot happen. The Quran, in chapter 27, speaks highly of the Queen of Sheba, Bilqis, who ruled over her people with wisdom and insight and led them to success and prosperity 'I found a woman reigning over the people. She is possessed of every virtue and has a splendid throne'. The only fault found with her, was not her position and authority as a woman, but her false faith 'she and her subjects worship the sun instead of Allah'. Later, the wise woman met Solomon, admitted her sin (for not worshipping God) and, along with her people, accepted Islam: 'Lord', she said, 'I have wronged my own soul. Now I submit with Sulayman to Allah, Lord of the creation'.<sup>43</sup> From the above, we can deduce that the *Hadith* is not general, but rather specific and is related to the episode of the people of Persia.

(3) *The practical experience of the early community*: the opponents point out that there is no precedent in early Islam which indicates that women were appointed to high positions, despite the fact that there were ample opportunities for such appointments. Neither the Prophet nor any of his companions invited women to take part in the administration of the state. Moreover, women themselves, and although there were many who

excelled men in their abilities, did not show any interest in holding public office. In response, one can mention the example of the second Caliph Umar, who appointed a woman (al-Shafa') as superintendent in a market in Medina. This position was, at the time, more of a political than a business office, as the market was not only a centre for trading but also a focal point for political activities. Also, the fact that few women were at the top of the administration does not reflect badly on the abilities of women to run public offices. Moreover, one has to bear in mind the nature of the social setting prevailing at the time, in which pre-Islamic customs were still competing and resisting any changes brought about by Islam.<sup>44</sup> So, although the social environment was favourable (due to the changes brought about by Islam) and allowed women greater mobility in society; yet it was still less willing and less amenable to the idea of entrusting women with governmental positions. However, social practices (*Adat*) should not be allowed to take precedence over Divine instructions. Most importantly, they should not be used as a pretext to continue to neglect or even (in some cases) abandon the Islamic principles, which oblige women to have their shares in public life and be active and effective in society. For social customs are subject to change: they change with time and place, while Divine principles are meant for all times and all places. As such, the emphasis should be on the Divine tenets not social customs.<sup>45</sup>

(4) *The Consensus (ijma)*: there are those who stress that there is an agreement among scholars on the so-called 'unsuitability' of women to hold public office. However, invoking the issue of consensus is no more than a fallacy since there is hardly any unity among them on this subject. For example, the position of Judge is regarded by some to be suitable for men only; Abu Hanifa, however, disagrees and allows a woman to be appointed as Judge and gives her the right to deal with all matters except those under the penal code. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, on the other hand, qualifies a woman for the post of judge without any restrictions. This renders the whole issue of the existing consensus among scholars suspicious and, in fact, a mere sham. Moreover, it is essential to bear in mind whether the *ijma* (on a particular question, and, in this case, the issue of women) takes into consideration the overall interest of the community. For if it runs counter to the social interest, then there is no use in accepting it in the first place.

(5) *Maslaha* (welfare): the opponents argue that permitting women to occupy public positions would be detrimental to both society as well as family. According to them, top jobs require courage, wisdom and strength,

and women, in general, lack these characteristics; they are feeble and can be easily misled. As such, they cannot be trusted with executive roles, especially leadership roles. For instance, a president or a ruler in an Islamic state needs to perform important and not merely ceremonial duties such as: conducting war, signing peace treaties, defending the country, delivering sermons, and leading people in prayers – all of which women cannot cope with, because of their fragilities and emotional vulnerabilities. Furthermore, they state that woman's advancement to executive power goes against her social function: that is to be a good wife and mother. They argue that if she is to assume an executive role – which is a full-time commitment – this would inevitably force her to neglect her household duties, with devastating consequences on the stability of the family in society. They point out that even if there are some women who can handle both roles, they are, in reality, exceptions; therefore, it is unwise to set up and accept rules on rare cases. It must be stressed, however, that those who think that female leadership would damage state-interest base their view on the assumption that women are, by nature, incapable of coping with public responsibilities. But this is not the case as we explained earlier; women, like men, are qualified to run state affairs. Also, the opponents view public positions, especially state leadership as a one-person responsibility, thus neglecting the *shura* principle, which makes state affairs a collective responsibility. Moreover, they regard the state system as more or less similar to that of the Medinan or tribal system with limited scope and structure, hence, confining the Islamic concept of state within a particular historical context. In doing so, they contradict the universal vision of the Islamic state.

As for the welfare of the family, the assumption is that only those women whose domestic responsibilities permit them to engage in public duties should do so. Having said that, domestic responsibility should not be taken as pretext (by both men and women) to discourage or prevent women, especially able ones, from involvement in public activities. In other words, women should strike a balance between their domestic and public commitments and try and avoid a situation whereby one commitment overshadows the other. This means that, in essence, only a few women would be able to qualify in terms of this criterion. Hence, the standard of judgement should be based on the few not on the majority as the opponents claim. This is because prominent jobs are usually based on ability and merit rather than on gender.<sup>46</sup>

(6) *Cut the pretexts (Sadd al-Dhārā'i)*: the opponents stress that leadership positions require public display and constant contacts with people.

This would inevitably facilitate mingling between the two sexes; an issue which is clearly prohibited in Islam. According to them, the Quran explicitly orders women to stay at home and avoid any public exposure; therefore, it is not appropriate for them to take on public duties, because this would expose them to all forms of public immorality. In response, we can say that this view is certainly out of context with both the Quran as well as the practical Sunnah of the Prophet. For instance, the Quran in Chapter 33, verse 32<sup>47</sup> ordered (solely) the Prophet's wives to stay at home and not to display any public appearance, because they were regarded as the mothers of the believers; other women were not included. For they used to take part in public worship, seek knowledge and education, participate in Jihad, enjoy wider social interactions, and attend vocational training. So, the verse deals with a specific case, namely, the status of the Prophet's wives, and therefore, it is not right to generalise it to include other Muslim women; in doing so, they reject the practical Sunnah of the Prophet, and this cannot be right. It must be made clear, moreover, that of all social interactions only *Khulwa* (seclusion), promiscuity, lustfulness, and extravagance or excessiveness are prohibited in Islam. Other societal activities, which are needed for the conduct of normal and respectable social life are allowed and encouraged. So, to use *fitna* (temptation) as an excuse in order to change a religious ruling is indeed unjustifiable. For women, especially nowadays, cannot perform their duties without meeting men. Also, it must be remembered that God, who is the legislator, knows better what the state of his creatures is in terms of their piety or corruption.

When Islam encouraged women to take part in public life, it did so by laying down certain rules of conduct, so as to curb any tendency towards *fitna* or corruption. It did not show any inclination to restrict or prevent women from mixing with men under the pretext of *fitna*. This is despite the fact that many unpleasant incidents occurred, especially during the Prophet's time, as a result of the wide social contacts that prevailed between the two sexes. Nevertheless, those incidents were regarded as exceptions, and they did not disturb or stop the normal course of social life.<sup>48</sup> To portray women as a source of temptation and corruption conveys a message which is based on lack of confidence in women themselves. Most importantly, it shows a complete disregard for their dignity as independent and rational human beings, and that is certainly against the very essence of Islam.

To conclude, it is clear that Islam has granted women full political rights. Contrary to the view which opposes women's involvement in politics, there is no evidence in the scripture which suggests that women are

not entitled to play an active role in politics. Also, an examination of the early history of Islam at the time of the Prophet, shows that women were not kept aloof from politics, rather they were encouraged to be at the forefront of the political affairs of their society. As for leadership positions, it is true that they require particular abilities, but it is equally true that there are women who have talents and skills and are capable – like men – of handling public offices, including ministerial and presidency offices. As such, there are no grounds or justification for those who oppose female leadership. In fact, their argument neither has a theological rationale nor is it in line with current reality.

## 9 Conclusion

It has become apparent from this study that contrary to the general misconceptions, women in Islam – at least theoretically speaking – are entitled to full rights as citizens. These rights were put into practice during the Prophet's time and in the period of the early Caliphate, during which women enjoyed the privilege of fulfilling their private as well as their public duties. Early Muslim society never embraced the concept of social division of labour between the two sexes. It entertained no such ideas as the differentiation between public and private roles, as far as women were concerned, nor the subordination, as is the case today, of public life to the private one. Indeed, both roles were equally valued, and women were expected to enjoy and excel in them. Whilst performing their public duties, women were not encouraged to be secluded, confined or constrained, nor were they forced to form a world of their own, separate, invisible and totally cut off from the so-called men's world. Both sexes mixed and worked together within the rules of conduct laid down by Islam in order to build up their society. In the process, they encouraged and helped each other irrespective of their sex or status. In their relations with one another, they transcended all evil thought currently prevailing in most Muslim societies: there were no ill-feelings, sexual temptation or lust. This atmosphere of peace, harmony and piety uplifted their spirits and transformed them into creative and resourceful human beings respecting and respected by others. In other words, it was a healthy society, primarily because women were highly revered and honoured, for they realised that the spiritual, material and intellectual progress of a society is closely linked with the position of its women, and that no society which enslaves its women would ever prosper.

This bright picture began to be clouded with the decline of the first caliphate. Like other aspects of Muslim lives, the position of women started to deteriorate. Slowly but surely their rights faded away: firstly, they were discouraged from taking part in public life; secondly, they were ordered to withdraw and hide behind four walls. This was done by separating the private from the public role and subordinating the latter to the former. Hence, and in time, women became passive, yielding and publicly less visible, with little involvement in public matters. It was left entirely to men, who were only too happy to take over, to decide their own destiny. For centuries women were forced to accept humiliation and exploitation.



To ensure they were kept under their whips, the ultra-conservatives used many misogynistic interpretations of Islam. Under the false name of Islam they virtually stripped women of every right: no to education, no to instigating divorce, no to travelling alone, no to leadership positions, no to work outside the house, and so on.

This form of repression was bound to create, eventually, rebellion, especially among the educated elite who had to rebel against the status quo and lead the liberation movement. But the secular feminists in their quest for change decided to break away with the tradition and fully embrace Western ideals. So convinced are they by the superiority of Western values that they see no way for the liberation of Muslim women other than via the Western model, to the extent that they believe that to be Western is to be free and to be Muslim is to be a slave. Content that they have chosen the right path for salvation, they launched a crusade against anything to do with Islam. For example, they have bitterly attacked and ridiculed the very foundations of Islam; expounded views which are alien and contradictory to the spirit of the Islamic faith; made a mockery of the Islamic principles; showed no sensitivity towards their own culture; formed a class of their own very much out of touch with the needs of ordinary women; tolerated no criticisms or dissenting views; presented women's case in a sensational way and used language often transcending all bounds of decency; demonstrated no sympathy or understanding towards the views of ordinary Muslim women. Indeed, they have displayed self-righteous and self-conceited attitudes, viewing themselves as superior to 'ordinary' Muslim women.

This approach is doomed to failure; indeed it has already backfired, since it alienates sections of Muslim women who want change but not at the expense of losing their religious identity (some have argued that the latter are a minority, but it should be stressed that they are a strong minority, mostly educated or living in the West, who have come to appreciate their own Islamic heritage). These women have become less receptive to the secular feminists' views and ideas and even questioned the validity of a model which did not, after all, provide adequate answers to their problems. Moreover, they have alienated a group of men whose support and co-operation is essential to achieve the expected change in society. There is no doubt that many misogynistic notions are prevalent in Muslim societies, but these can only be eradicated by advocating authentic Islam. It must be stressed, however, that propagating true Islam does not mean fundamentalist Islam; for the latter has nothing to offer other than a distorted image of Islam. Rather, the emphasis must be on the Islam of Aisha, Khadija, Fatima, and Umm Salama: all well-known Muslim figures and excellent role models for inspiration.

I am sure there is a great deal to learn from the West, but first and foremost any attempt to improve the position of Muslim women must come from within: 'God does not change the condition of a people until they change it for themselves' said Muhammad. It is only through the authentic Islamic way that Muslim women will achieve freedom and self-respect, and will be able to demonstrate the beauty of their religion and dispel the misconceptions surrounding the true position of Islam regarding women.



May Allah give us the strength to dissociate ourselves from burdensome and profane tribal customs smacking of pride and arrogance, give up false notions of prestige and follow the practice of the Holy Prophet down to the last minute detail. Ameen !

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## PART III

### IDEAL WIFE IN ISLAM

**T**HE foremost qualification of a bride is as the Holy Qur'an says : "Marry such women as seem good to you" (4:3). It appears therefrom that the bridegroom has to exercise this choice with greatest caution and consideration. The following Hadith is of utmost importance in making the correct choice ; otherwise the very purpose of marriage (domestic peace and happiness) is likely to be frustrated :

Abu Hurairah reported Allah's Messenger as saying :

"A woman may be married for four reasons : for her property, her status, her beauty and her religion ; so try to get one who is religious, and prosper."

(Bukhari & Muslim)

It is generally the worldly consideration which predominates the mind of man in making a choice for the woman to be contracted for marriage. The Holy Prophet exhorts his followers to make religious piety the first cause of choice of a lady. And there is no denying the fact that if a Muslim acquires piety and abstinence, it is mostly due to a virtuous wife who in the words of Holy Prophet again is "the best object of benefit of the world".

The ideal wifehood in Islam is love and affection. According to the Holy Prophet woman was not "an organ of the Devil"



but *Muhsanah*—a fortress against Satan. She is a safeguard against sin and transgression. She is a partner in life for peace and consolation. Allah states in the Holy Qur'an :

- (i) "And of His signs is this: He created for you helpmates from yourselves that ye might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo! herein indeed are portents for folk who reflect." (30 : 21)
- (ii) "And Allah hath given you wives of your own kind and hath given you, from your wives, sons and grandsons, and hath made provisions of good things for you." (16 : 72)
- (iii) "They (the women) are raiment for you and ye are raiment for them." (2 : 187)

And who does not know that raiment gives protection and security, charm and beauty, above all, warmth and intimacy—that great attribute of companionship which the Creator of man and woman ordained to subsist between the two?

Islam regards woman spiritually and intellectually equal to man. The only difference it makes is in the realm of physical conditions, and this difference is based on hard facts. The world, therefore, must know and accept the truth that no other faith has given the woman folk so many rights and has so preserved their honour and chastity as Islam has done. This is made plain in the following verses of the Holy Qur'an :

- (i) "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. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another, and toward the wombs (that bare you). Lo! Allah hath been a Watcher over you." (4 : 1)
- (ii) "Whosoever doeth right, whether male or female and is a believer, him verily We shall quicken with good life, and We shall pay them a recompense in proportion to the best of what they used to do." (16 : 97)

- (iii) "Lo! men who surrender unto Allah and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey and women who obey, and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth, and men who persevere (in righteousness) and women who persevere, and men who are humble and women who are humble and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their modesty and women who guard their modesty, and men who remember Allah much and women who remember—Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward." (33 : 35)

According to a saying of the Holy Prophet : "modesty and chastity are parts of faith." The picture of house wherein the wife is unchaste and impure is horrible to the extreme. The Holy Prophet has spoken of such a wife as the worst calamity in a man's life. In this connection the Holy Qur'an reminds us : "Vile women are for vile men and vile men for vile women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women." (24 : 26)

A woman is the guardian of her home, she is responsible for the comfort of her husband and children. It is her responsibility to keep the house in order. She should spend wisely. She must ensure that an atmosphere of piety prevails at home to help the moral growth and upbringing of her children. Likewise, she should see to it that no other man enters her home in the absence of her husband. She should guard her chastity.

One of the greatest advantage of marriage is to have children. Having children is one way of multiplying the number of Muslims. The Prophet said, the prayers of children profit their parents when the latter are dead. Children, who die before their parents, intercede for them on the Day of Judgment.

The Holy Qur'an defines the role of a Muslim man and woman :  
 "I have only created jinns and men that they worship Me." (51 : 56)



As a wife you should obey husband, nevertheless a woman should not obey her husband if he orders her to do something sinful. Many husbands may frown at this, but obedience to the laws of Allah should be held supreme in all circumstances. Such a problem will not arise if there is mutual love, trust and spiritual relationship.

Once the Prophet's wives complained to him about their poverty. There were many things they did not have, so they complained too much. The Prophet could do nothing about it, so he left them for one month, people thought he was divorcing them.

When the verse was revealed—If they wanted the glitter of this world they could have it . . . . (33 : 28 and 29)

He went to each one of them. Starting with Ayesha, he asked, "Do you want to be divorced, what is your choice?" Ayesha said, "How can I make a choice? Of course not, it is to be with you." And each of his wives said the same. They were not quick to ask for divorce, and were able to overcome many trials. This is the group, best in conduct and behaviour. Their lives are the best example to be followed.

Thauban reported that the Messenger of Allah said: "Whichever woman asks her husband for divorce without fault, the fragrance of Paradise is unlawful for her." (Ahmad & Tirmidhi)

The institution of divorce in Islam is a means of dissolving the contract of marriage in abnormal circumstances when the couple finds it impossible to live together in matrimonial bond. Thus divorce is not a passing whim but the result of a settled determination over a length of time. Though the institution of divorce has been kept as a sort of reservation in abnormal circumstances yet the *Shariah* condemns its free use in the most emphatic terms.

Ibn Omar reported that the Apostle of Allah said: "The most detestable of lawful things near Allah is divorce." (Abu Daud)

Thus, every Muslim male and female—should try his utmost to avoid it. The men have been exhorted to overlook the faults of the wives and the women have been instructed to seek reconciliation with their husbands, making the maximum sacrifice. But if, in spite of all these efforts, there is no chance of conciliation and they find no other alternative left for them but separation from each other, then they should not give themselves up to utter disappointment. They must keep this fact in their minds that All Powerful Lord can provide them better substitutes and can properly meet their needs and requirements, and can adequately provide them with sustenance.

According to the Holy Qur'an "men are the maintainers of women because of what Allah has made some of them excel others" (4 : 34). The superiority of the male in strength, activity and courage saddles upon him the responsibility of maintaining the family and so he enjoys supervisory status in the disposal of its affairs. Thus the precedence of man over woman apart from biological factors, is due to his great responsibilities, being the head of the family. This degree of precedence conferred upon man does not in any way give him the right to ill-treat the women, but it lays heavy responsibilities upon him that he, being stronger, should treat the woman kindly and behave to her with the tenderly feelings of love and affection and show magnanimity in his dealing with her. The idea behind the above quoted Qur'anic expression is that male and female are counterpart of each other and if a male enjoys superiority over female, it does not necessarily mean the inferiority of the female, for they both are the inseparable parts of each other.

This precedence has been stated in order to bring home the fact that the option to pronounce divorce or to rescind a provisional divorce rests with the husband. Men have an upperhand in this regard because they contract women in marriage by spending their means and as such the choice to part with their wives rests with them. This right (to divorce) has not been conferred on woman\*, otherwise she would have

\*However, the *Shariah* has given women the right of *Khula* or separation from husband in abnormal circumstances (i.e. oppression, ill-treatment,

[Contd.,



become very daring and embolden towards her husband. It is deplorable however that in blind pursuit of the West some Muslim countries like Turkey etc., has taken this right from men and gave it to the courts. This misguided step is decidedly against Qur'an and Sunnah. None is authorised to usurp the right from husband and delegate it to the courts. This is morally unjust and intellectually unsound. It can result in nothing else but enactment of shameful family episodes and scandals, the dreadful consequences of which are being witnessed in the West where only a court may decree a divorce after admonishing the parties to patch up relations, but still large numbers of divorces do take place there. In America alone the rate of divorce is 40% - the highest in the world.

The French legists Planiol and Ripert have explicitly emphasised Islam's point of view in regard to divorce in these words: "Divorce is a mischief. However, it is measure that cannot be avoided for the welfare of the community, because it is the only remedy for another harm which may be more dangerous. The prohibition of divorce, whatever harm it may imply, is like the prohibition of surgery, because the surgeon is compelled to amputate some of the limbs of the patient's body. However, there is no danger, whatsoever, in legislating for divorce (in accordance with the practice established by Islam) since it is not divorce that spoils married life and dissolves its sacred tie, but the misunderstanding that arises between the

mutual discord on account of wife's dislike of husband etc) by making the same compensation to the husband which has been mutually agreed upon. If husband is adamant because of mischief or selfishness, the woman can approach *Qadi* (Islamic Judge) for legal separation. Qur'anic verse 229 of Surah al-Baqara refers. It is our failing that in actual practice we have denied this right to woman which lead to many a heart-burnings and injustices for which the *Shar'iah* is not the least responsible. Even now if we restore this legitimate right of women in societies where they are denied this opportunity, many of our chronic conjugal problems can be solved as pent up grievances give birth to movements in the reverse direction. It should, however, be borne in mind that *Khul'a* is intended for genuine, hard and pressing cases and as such the free use or abuse of this facility is equally condemnable. The Holy Prophet has warned: "Women who withdraw themselves from their husbands and women who persuade their husbands to divorce them for a compensation are hypocrites." (Nasa'i)

married couple and hinders the strengthening of this (union by marriage) and demolishes it. Divorce alone puts an end to the hatred that may occur between the husband and his wife before it is aggravated and becomes an intolerable mischief to society" (quoted by Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, *Islam, Religious, Political, Social and Economic Study*, p. 274).

## DUTIES OF HUSBAND

The Qur'an devotes a Surah (chapter) entitled *An-Nisa* (the Women) depicting mutual rights and obligations of men and women. It says: "Consort with them in kindness, for if ye hate them it may happen that ye hate a thing wherein Allah hath placed much good." (4: 19)

A husband should not hate his wife for one bad trait in her, as there may be other good qualities in her as well. A husband should try to make some off-time enjoyments and sports with his wife as this strengthens the nuptial knot more firm.

Hazrat Ayesha (R.A.)<sup>1</sup> reported: I was playing in the pavilion in the presence of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.)<sup>2</sup> and I had some companions who were also playing with me. When the Messenger of Allah came in, we stopped it. He sent them to me and they played with me. (Bukhari)

"Wives should be allowed sometimes to mix with their friends and companions for purposes of recreation. The Prophet (S.A.W.) allowed it in case of Ayesha (R.A.). Husbands should also participate with their wives in their innocent sports."

Hazrat Ayesha (R.A.) reported that she accompanied the Messenger of Allah in a journey; She said: I had a race with him and overcame him (by running) on my feet. When I became fleshy, I had a race with him, and he overcame me. He said: This is because of that race. (Abu Daud)

Mark how the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) played with his

1. Radiallaho Anha. (Allah be pleased with her).
2. Sullallaho Alaihe Wasallam. (Peace be upon him).



wife at times in order to give her comforts and enjoyments. This example should be followed by all Muslims.

Hazrat Hakim-b-Muawiyah (R.A.) from his father reported : I asked : O Messenger of Allah ! what right has the wife of one of us got over him ? He said : It is that you shall give her food when you have taken your food, that you shall clothe her when you have clothed yourself, that you shall not slap her on the face, nor revile (her), nor leave (her) alone except within the house. (Abu Daud)

Here are some of the duties of the husband towards his wife. What greater and nobler teachings can be expected regarding mutual duties and obligations ?

Hazrat Abu Hurairah (R.A.) reported that the Messenger of Allah said : "The most perfect of the believers in faith is he who is the best of them in conduct, and the best of you are those who are the best to their wives." (Tirmidhi)

Hazrat Jāber-b-Abdullah (R.A.) reported that the Messenger of Allah said : "Fear Allah regarding women. Verily you have married them with trust of Allah and made their private parts lawful with the word of Allah. You have got (rights) over them that they entertain nobody to your beds which you dislike. If they do this, give them beating without causing injury. They have got (rights) over you in respect of their food and clothing according to means." (Bukhari)

Goodness towards women is the ever-recurring description of the Qur'an and Hadith. Wife and husband are bound by contracts at the time of marriage according to the laws of Islam. Beyond that, both have got independent rights. The Qur'an says : They have right similar to those against them in a just manner. (2 : 228).

Abu Hurairah reported from the Holy Prophet who said :

"When a man has two wives and he does not deal equitably between them, he will come on the Resurrection Day with a side hanging down." (Tirmidhi, Abu Daud & Nasai)

(The people would understand that he had two wives and he did not discharge the right of one of them.)

Love, which is a matter of emotion is beyond one's control. It is, therefore, too much to expect of a human being that he must observe perfect equity amongst his wives in regard to the sharing of his feelings for them. Allah has not, therefore, burdened His servants with this unbearable burden of maintaining balance between their wives in the case of emotions and feelings. He has saddled upon them a responsibility which they can undertake, viz., they should deal with their wives on the basis of equity and justice as regard their outward behaviour and practical treatment towards them, e.g., sharing days and nights, kindness, and providing them with maintenance.

Abu Bakr Siddiq (R.A.) reported from the Messenger of Allah who said :

"One who treats badly with those under their authority shall not enter Paradise." (Tirmidhi, & Ibn Majah)

Those who victimize or misbehave with their servants and subordinates will not enter Paradise in the beginning but they will enter it after expiation of sins. If this is the punishment meted out to the defaults in the above cases, then the lot of those who persecute their wives for minor faults and omissions can be well imagined.

Abu Hurairah reported Allah's Messenger as saying : "Woman is like a rib when you attempt to straighten it, you would break it. And if you leave her alone you would benefit by her, and crookedness will remain in her." (Muslim)

It means, if we want to get benefit from our wives, let us not attempt to radically change their modes of thinking and vision because that may end up in divorce. So a wise husband is one who benefits from his wife despite the incompatibility with her temperament.

Laqit bin Sabira told that he said, Messenger of Allah, I have a wife who utters foul speech ? He told him to divorce her, when he replied that he had a son from her and was a companion (for a long time), he said, Give her a command (meaning



give her an exhortation), and if there is any good in her she will accept it ; but do not beat your wife as you would beat your young slave-girl." (Abu Daud)

Umar reported the Prophet as saying, "A man should not be asked about why he beat his wife." (Abu Daud & Ibn Majah)

The wisdom of this commandment is manifest from the fact that a great many disputes between the married couples are caused by the intervention of a third person who spread false reports, slanders and thus adds fuel to their family quarrels. The fact that man is in charge and the maintainer of the woman necessitates that he should have the right to admonish his disobedient wife as the following verse very clearly shows :

"As for those (women) whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo ! Allah is ever High Exalted, Great." (4 : 34)

The above verse is very instructive. It also illustrates how penetrating an eye Islam has into the psychology of woman who being proud of her beauty and personal charm at times plays a coquette so much so that virtually it becomes an impudence. As such her separation to a bed apart means that the husband is impervious to her beauty, charm and coquetry. This may deflate a little her swollen pride and thus bring her back to her senses. But if all these means of correction fail to bring her round, then chastisement is the last resort. However, the Islamic Law has laid it down that the chastisement should be of a mild severity.

Chastisement is the last resort. The first is exhortation and persuasion—then suspending the conjugal relations, for a short time, exceeding not more than four months. And if those measures miserably fail then chastisement is allowed. The Holy Prophet is reported to have said : Beat your wives if you find it absolutely essential but the good amongst you would never beat them. (Ahkam-ul-Qur'an, Ibn Arabi)

The learned jurists say that a mild beating of wife is allowed in four cases : (1) when she does not wear fineries though

wanted by the husband, (2) when she is called for sexual intercourse and she refuses without any lawful excuse, (3) when she is ordered to take bath from impurities for prayer and she refuses and (4) when she goes abroad without permission of her husband. This mild beating though allowed was discouraged by the Holy Prophet in practice. At any rate, slap on the face is strictly prohibited.

The Holy Prophet advised us to win the hearts of our wives and to correct their defects by admonition and good treatment and not by beating ; because in the latter case there would be tension, hatred and strained relations.

Aisha (R.A.) reported Allah's Messenger as saying, "The best of you is he who is best to his family, and I am best among you to my family. When one of you dies speak no ill of him." (Tirmidhi & Darimi)

Same reported Allah's Messenger as saying, "Among the believers who show most perfect faith are those who have the best disposition, and are kindest to their families." (Tirmidhi)

A husband should also not cast aspersions on the chastity of his wife on false or flimsy grounds for harassing and ill-treating her. Islam has taken a very serious view of slandering women. If anything is said against a woman's chastity, it would be supported by evidence twice as strong as would ordinarily be required for business transactions, or even in murder cases, that is, four witnesses are required instead of two. Failing such preponderating evidence, the slanderer is himself treated as a wicked transgressor and punished with eighty stripes. Not only would he be subjected to this disgraceful form of punishment, but would be deprived of the citizens right of giving evidence in all matters of life, unless he repents and reforms, in which case he can be readmitted as a competent witness. This act of defamation or slandering and making false accusation especially of fornication is known as *Qadhaf* in the *Shari'ah*.

Abu Hurairah (Allah be pleased with him) reported : A beduin came to Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) and



said: My wife has given birth to a dark-complexioned child and I have disowned him. Thereupon Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) said: Have you any camels? He said: Yes. He said: What is their colour? He said: They are red. He said: Is there any one dusky among them? He said: Yes. Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: How has it come about? He said: Messenger of Allah, it is perhaps due to the strain to which it has reverted, whereupon the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him) said: It (the birth of the black child) may be due to the strain to which he (the child) might have reverted. (Bukhari & Muslim)

The colour of the child does not necessarily resemble that of the father. There are so many other factors, physiological, climatic and even psychological which determine the colour of the child.

### PROVISION OF DIVORCE

According to Islam, marriage is a civil contract; yet the rights and responsibilities consequent upon it are of such importance to the welfare of humanity that a high degree of sanctity is attached to it. But, in spite of the sacredness of the character of the marriage tie, Islam recognises the necessity of divorce in cases when marital relations are poisoned to a degree which makes a peaceful home life impossible. But Islam does not believe in unlimited opportunities for divorce on frivolous and flimsy grounds, because any undue increase in the facilities for divorce would destroy the stability of family life. Therefore, while allowing divorce even on genuine grounds, Islam has taken great care to introduce checks designed to limit the use of available facilities.

We have already seen that divorce is the most detestable of all things permitted. Islam, therefore, permits it as a last resort, when all efforts of peaceful living between the husband and the wife miserably fail. Islam exhorts both the husband and the wife to think a hundred and one times before making the final decision of separation, and it has, therefore, afforded all possible opportunities for reconciliation and provided ample time to

reflect calmly over the pros and cons of the matter. The Holy Qur'an has laid down some principles of divorce. The first principle that the divorce should be pronounced in the period of purity when menses are over. The idea behind it is that in this period man is inclined to resume conjugal relations and so far as woman is concerned she is in a rational frame of mind as menstruation has a disturbing effect on her mind. The Holy Qur'an says, "O people, when you divorce women, divorce them for their prescribed period" (65: 1). Then the second point is that the pronouncement of divorce should be spread over three periods (three monthly courses) and then the final decision should be made whether one is prepared to take her back or one has decided to bid her good-bye for ever. The Holy Qur'an says: "Divorce may be (pronounced) twice, then keep (them) in good fellowship or let (them) go with kindness." (2: 229) What it means is that divorce should be pronounced separately in two periods of *Tuhr* (purification). This is to be treated as *Talaq* (revocable divorce) after which the husband has the right to resume conjugal relations. But after the expiry of two periods of temporary separation, the final choice is to be made—either to take her back in love and amity or let her go finally and that too with grace and kindness.

The right of woman in demanding the dissolution of marriage is known as *Khul'a* (meaning, literally, the putting off or taking off a thing). It is a kind of facility provided to the wife in securing *Talaq* (divorce) from her husband by returning a part or full amount of the bridal gift (*Mahr*).

The Holy Qur'an says:

"If a woman feareth ill-treatment from her husband, or desertion, it is no sin for them twain if they make terms of peace between themselves, Peace is better, But greed hath been made present in the minds, (of men). If ye do good and keep from evil, Lo! Allah is ever informed of what ye do." (4: 128)

The peculiar Qur'anic verse denotes exhortation. If some reconciliation could be made between the husband and the wife by forgoing some of the demands on either side, it must be



made. The Qur'an, however, stresses that if both the parties honestly feel that it is not possible for them to get on together and there is no help to it, but separation then it should be done in a kind and graceful manner.

The standard procedure for this separation as already explained is that a man who wants to divorce his wife, he should pronounce one divorce in the period of purity after the monthly course of his wife, and then in the second period of purity, he should pronounce second divorce. Up to these two divorces, he is permitted to take his wife back, but at the end of third period of purity, the pronouncement of divorce would become irrevocable. It is reported that a companion of the Holy Prophet once asked him: The Qur'an has spoken of only two divorces, whence comes the third one. The Holy Prophet asked him to take into consideration the words, 'Or send them away with kindness,' meaning thereby that after the first two divorces the husband should honourably retain her or send her away i.e. divorcing her for a third time.

The husband is required to make full payment of the dower money if he takes the initiative in divorce. Moreover, he is not allowed to take from her anything out of this dower money or other gifts he had given to her. The Holy Qur'an says: "And it is not lawful for you that ye take from women aught of that which ye have given them; except (in the case) when both fear that they may not be able to keep within the limits (imposed by) Allah. And if ye fear that they may not be able to keep the limits of Allah, in that case it is no sin for either of them if the woman ransom herself. These are the limits (imposed by) Allah. Transgress them not. For whoso transgresseth Allah's limits: such are wrongdoers." (2: 229)

If the demand for separation is initiated by the wife, (as is the case set out in the last portion of the above verse) then she is required to return the dower which he received from her husband at the time of marriage; and in this payment there shall be no blame on either of them. This is known as *khul'a*. The scholars of Islam, have on the basis of the plural form of the verb as *خفتم* instead of the pair form as used before and after this in this part of the verse, concluded that the wife can get

*khul'a* only through the *Qadi* or judge or through those who are authorised to administer justice.

According to the Hanafis a woman is entitled to get, without the decision of the *Qadi*, *khul'a* in case the husband and the wife agree, but if the husband refuses, then the woman has to go to the court for seeking separation through *khul'a*.

The case of Jamila b. 'Abdullah, who was the wife of Thabit b. Qays provides a good illustration of *khul'a*. She came to the Holy Prophet and demanded a divorce from her husband on the ground that she had no liking for him, in spite of his good conduct and behaviour. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), granted her *khul'a* on the condition that she should return to Thabit the garden which he had given as her dower (*Mahr*) at the time of their marriage. (Bukhari, Nasai, Ibn Majah on the authority of Hadrat Ibn 'Abbas). Similar ahadith have been transmitted on the authority of Hadrat Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) relating to the *khul'a* of a woman called Hubaybah bint Sahl, and are found in Muatta' Imam Malik and Musnad of Ahmad.

It should also be borne in mind that *khul'a* is an irrevocable separation and thus it is absolute and final. The woman marries another person and not her previous husband at the expiry of her *'Iddat* (period of waiting). This principle has been laid down so that the people may divorce their wives after carefully taking into consideration its repercussions and not take it lightly. They should keep this thing before their minds that after the final separation the chances of remarriage are very few and far between. The only chance left is that the husband dies or the second marriage proves failure and the second husband, out of his own will, and not under any pressure, divorces his wife. Shah Waliullah, while explaining the significance of this injunction, has stated that the idea behind this command is that the people should not take the institutions of marriage and divorce as mere playthings. They should be fully aware of their responsibilities and obligations.

The tone of the subsequent verse 230 of *Surah Al-Baqara*



does not approve the shameful custom known as *halalah*, (temporary marriage), gone through with no other object but to legalize the divorced wife for the first husband. There must be genuine marriage—determination to unite as husband and wife as long as they live.

The Holy Prophet has condemned this type of marriage. It is reported on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud that Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) invoked curse upon those who resort to such practices. (Tirmidhi)

It should also be noted that marriage with another husband includes not only matrimonial contract but also sexual intercourse between them. The husband should therefore think a hundred times before making the final decision as divorce is not a fun but something very serious, and thus no one is allowed to ruin conjugal relations in a fit of rage. That is why the Holy Prophet time and again warned us not to become angry as "anger spoils faith as aloes spoil honey." (Baihaqi) Again he said, "If one restrains his anger, Allah will keep his punishment from him on the Day of Resurrection." (Baihaqi)

Abu Hurairah reported Allah's Messenger as saying, "The strong man is not the good wrestler; the strong man is only he who controls himself when he is angry." (Bukhari & Muslim)

Ibn Umar reported Allah's Messenger as saying, "No one has swallowed back anything more excellent in the sight of Allah Who is Great and Glorious than anger he restrains seeking to please Allah Most High." (Ahmad)

Abu Dharr reported Allah's Messenger as saying, "Anger comes from the devil, the devil was created of fire and fire is extinguished only with water; so when one of you becomes angry he should perform ablution." (Abu Daud)

May Allah enable us not to be carried by our passions and be kind and just to our wives as ordained by Allah and His Apostle. Ameen!

"And obey Allah and the Messenger, that ye may find mercy. And vie one with another for forgiveness from your

Lord, and for a Paradise as wide as are the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who ward off (evil), those who spend (of that which Allah hath given them) in ease and in adversity, those who control their wrath and are forgiving towards mankind; Allah loveth the good; And those who, when they do an evil thing or wrong themselves, remember Allah and implore forgiveness for their sins. Who forgiveth sins save Allah only? and will not knowingly repeat (the wrong) they did. The reward of such will be forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide for ever—a bountiful reward for workers!" (3 : 133-136)

## HUSBAND-WIFE SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP

In Islam the union of the sexes has been purified and the joy of the married relations secured by the absolute prohibition of every kind of extra-matrimonial connection. The Holy Qur'an stresses upon the people to marry as it is the most effective means whereby one can lead a virtuous life free from immorality and emotional inhibition. The Holy Qur'an says: "They (your wives) are as a garment to you, and you are as a garment to them" (2 : 187) The mutual relation of husband and wife is here described in words which could not be surpassed in beauty. Herein is the correct description of the relationship between the two. The husband and the wife are for mutual support, mutual comfort and mutual protection, fitting into each other as garments fit into each other.

The Holy Qur'an further points out that sexual gratification in the married life is not meant only for the satisfaction of the physical lust, but it must be directed to some higher ends. "Your women are tilth for you, so go into your tilth as ye like, and provide beforehand for your souls, and fear Allah and know that you are going to meet Him" (2 : 223) Here the wives are likened to the cultivable land which are ploughed for sowing and reaping the produce (in the form of offspring) and not merely for carnal indulgence. The concluding part of the verse refers to still higher and sublimer ends which tell that even in the height of carnal pleasure the moral and spiritual responsi-



The Jews used to come to their wives by the back i.e. by the rectum. This was made unlawful by the Holy Prophet. He directed men to come by the natural way (i.e. vaginal canal) in whatever position they like. Coition is an act of procreation whereas this unnatural practice is not only filthy, but quite unproductive, rather very harmful and injurious for health. The Holy Prophet has rightly cursed one who indulges in this abominable act.

Allah has not made the women a happy hunting ground for man, but the tilth in which they are required to sow the seed and reap the harvest. The simile of tilth used in verse 223 of *Surah al-Baqara* and repeated subsequently in order to stress the object behind this act of tilling—that is to get harvest (children) and not merely carnal pleasure. This simile also makes it clear that birth control is inconsistent with the teachings of Islam.

## PART IV

### THE TRUE QUALITY OF A GOOD WIFE

We read in the Holy Qur'an :

“Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded.”  
(4 : 34)

The above verse summarises some of the sterling qualities of a good wife : she is obedient and harmonious in her husband's presence, and in his absence guards his reputation and property and her own virtue as ordained by Allah. The good wife, remembering how Allah has given her a sheltered position does everything to justify the trust reposed in her.

The true qualities of a good and exemplary wife are further elaborated in the following *ahadith* :

1. Hazrat Anas reported the Messenger of Allah as saying, “When the wife says the five-times prayers, fasts for the whole month (of Ramadan), abstains from adultery and obeys her husband, she will be told to enter Paradise through any door she likes.”  
(Ahmad)

2. Hazrat Omar (R.A.) reported that the Messenger of Allah said : “Shall I not inform you about the best treasure



which a man should hoard?—a virtuous wife who pleases him whenever he turns his look towards her, and who obeys him whenever he orders her, who guards herself when he is absent from her.” (Abu Daud)

A virtuous wife is a man's best treasure according to the Prophet (S.A.W.) The object of treasures is to gain comforts; but nothing can give more comfort and solace than a virtuous and chaste wife. She is always a joy to her husband. Besides, a virtuous wife can make her husband and children virtuous. Mother has the greatest share in the formation of character of the children. A virtuous wife centralises love in her husband thereby keeping him in absolute check from extravagant mode of life. The mother is the queen of the household and unless the queen is pious and virtuous, the inmates cannot be expected to turn out good.

3. Hazrat Abu Omamah reported from the Messenger of Allah who used to say: “Next to fear of Allah, the believer finds nothing good for him than a virtuous wife. If he bids her, she obeys him; if he looks at her, she gives him pleasure; and if he is absent from her, she guards herself and his property.” (Ibn Majah)

4. Hazrat Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah was asked: “Who among women is the best?” He replied: “She who gives pleasure to him (husband), when he looks, obeys him when he bids and who does not oppose him regarding herself and her riches fearing his displeasure.” (Nasai)

The wife is expected to contribute to the success and peacefulness of the marriage as much as possible. Attentive to her husband's comfort and well being, she should neither offend him nor hurt his feelings. It would have been easy for the Prophet's first wife, Khadijah, to hurt his feelings when he first told her about the angel Gabriel coming to him and pressing him to his chest. When he narrated the event, he was trembling with fear, but she comforted him and put his heart at ease.

5. Uqba bin Amer reported that the Messenger of Allah

said: “Everything with which a man plays is unlawful except his shooting with his arrows, and his training his horse, and his sporting with his wife, and verily these are of the truths.”

(Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah & Abu Daud)

These three things are useful sports. The two are necessary in case of war or *Jihad* in the way of Allah, and the third thing is for domestic and conjugal happiness. Islam, therefore, recognises everything which is necessary for fighting in the way of Allah and which brings greater good than its injury. Games of chance have been made unlawful with the exception of three, as these are not needed in the way of Allah and bring more injury than good in the form of rancour, loss of time, dispute and quarrels. Playing with arrows, training of horses and sporting with wife should be made as they serve double purposes pleasure and physical exercise.

6. Thauban reported that the Messenger of Allah said: “The best of the property is a remembering tongue (about Allah), a grateful heart and a believing wife who helps him in his faith.” (Ahmad & Ibn Majah)

Such was Hazrat Khadijah—the widowed wife of the Holy Prophet who was the first of the Muslims believing in the truth of his mission. He got wonderful consolation from her at the time of extreme anxiety. From this, we can infer how virtuous wives can help us in struggle for the enforcement of *Shariah* in Muslim lands.

7. Hazrat Aisha (R.A.) told that Allah's Messenger said to her, “If you wish to join me (in the Hereafter), be satisfied with worldly things to the extent of a rider's provision, avoid sitting with the rich, and do not consider a garment worn out till you patch it.” (Tirmidhi)

This should serve as an eye opener to those of our sisters who don one attire in the morning and another in the evening!

8. Abu Umama Ilyas bin Thalaba reported Allah's Messenger as saying, “Listen, listen! wearing old clothes is a part of faith, wearing old clothes is a part of faith.” (Abu Daud)



9. Ibn Umar reported Allah's Messenger as saying, "He who wears grand clothes in this world will be made by Allah to wear humble clothes on the Day of Resurrection."

(Ahmad, Abu Daud & Ibn Majah)

10. The Messenger of Allah was quoted as saying, "He who gives up wearing beautiful garments when he is able to do so (out of humility), will be clothed by Allah with the robe of honour and he who marries for Allah's sake will be crowned by Allah with the crown of the kingdom." (Abu Daud & Tirmidhi)

11. Ibn Umar reported the Messenger of Allah as saying, "Whoso imitates other people becomes one of them." (Abu Daud)

Let those who wear or advocate wearing of Western dress ponder over this Hadith and determine their destiny for themselves!

12. Imran bin Hussain reported Allah's Prophet as saying, "The perfume used by men should have an odour, but no colour, and perfume used by women should have a colour but no odour." (Abu Daud)

13. Abu Hurairah said that he heard the Messenger of Allah say, "The prayer of a woman who has perfumed herself to go to the Mosque is not accepted till she bathes as she would (take bath) for sexual defilement." (Abu Daud)

14. Abu Musa reported Allah's Messenger, as saying, "Every eye is adulterous (when it cast glances with lust on strange women), and when a woman perfumes herself and passes a company, she is such and such"—meaning adulterous. (Tirmidhi)

It is high time that our sisters took heed of this warning and avoid using perfume while going out for genuine need as perfume attracts the attention of passersby who may be led to stare at such women with evil intentions.

15. Uqba bin Amir told that Allah's Messenger, used to restrain people who adorned themselves and wore silk, saying,

"If you want the adornment and silk of Paradise, do not wear them in this world." (Nasai)

Here it would also be worth-while to narrate the story of rigorous domestic duties performed by Hazrat Fatimah, the dearest and most beloved daughter of the Holy Prophet :

Hazrat Ali says: "Fatimah used to grind the grain herself which caused corns on her hands. She carried water for the house in a leather bag which caused scars on her breast. She cleaned the house herself which made her clothes dirty. Once some war captives were brought to Madinah. I (Ali) said to her, 'Go to the Prophet and request him for an assistant to help you in your home work'. She went to him but found many people round him. As he was very modest, she could not be bold enough to request the Prophet in the presence of other people. Next day the Prophet came to our house and said, 'Fatimah! What made you come to me yesterday?' She felt shy and kept quiet. I (Ali) said: 'O, Prophet of Allah! Fatimah has developed corns and scars on her hands and breast on account of grinding and carrying water. She is constantly busy in cleaning the house and in other domestic jobs, causing her clothes to remain dirty. I (Ali) informed her about the captives and advised her to go to you and request for a servant.' The Prophet said, 'Fatimah! Fear Allah. Acquire *Taqwa* (piety) and keep doing your service to Allah and attending to your domestic jobs. When you go to bed recite *Subhanallah* 33 times, *Alhamdulillah* 33 times and *Allahoakbar* 34 times. This you will find more helpful than an assistant: Fatimah remarked, 'I am content with Allah and His Prophet.'"

Look this is the life of the Prophet's dear daughter. In moderately rich families of our times the ladies think it below their dignity to attend to domestic work. They need assistance in each and everything. What a difference!

The main responsibility of ensuring that an Islamic way of



life is instituted in the home rests on the husband. Allah commands in the Holy Qur'an :

“O Believers ! Save yourselves and your families from the Fire.” And the only way of saving ourselves and our families from the Fire—the punishment of Allah—is in the obedience of Allah's Law and in emulation the life-example of the (last) Messenger of Allah.

### PLEASURE OF HUSBAND

A wife is the centre of activity at home. By her forbearance and her concern for everyone, she creates a relaxed and happy atmosphere. Here ability to listen with loving attention draws her closer to her children and to her husband. She is a source of consolation and comfort for them. The wife is not expected to be rude to her husband.

Hazrat Abu Bakr reported the Messenger of Allah as saying : “A woman who annoys her husband with her tongue, she incurs the reproach and wrath of Allah, all the angels and the human beings.” Similarly Hazrat Usman narrated that the Holy Prophet said : “A woman who says to her husband that she has seen no good in him, Allah blots her good deeds over a period of seventy years although she may have observed fast all along during the day and worshipped at night.” (Ibn Majah & Nasai)

Hazrat Abdullah bin Umar reported the Messenger of Allah as saying : “If all the earth turns into gold and silver and some woman takes it to the house of her husband and says boastfully that all this wealth is her's and that he (husband) has no share in it Allah thereat renders waste all her good actions although these may be plentiful.” (Ahmad)

Generally rich and resourceful women wedded to poor families make such a show of vanity and haughtiness which is highly contemptible in the eyes of Islam as it denudes one of her good deeds without any gain. It is a sin without pleasure. Our ladies should therefore guard themselves against abuse of tongue and slander which are the worst and most abominable of satanic attributes which exist in us.

Abu Hurairah reported the Messenger of Allah as saying, “Do you know the thing which most commonly brings people into Paradise ? It is the fear of Allah and good character. Do you know what most commonly brings people into Hell ? It is the two hollow things : the mouth and the private parts.”

(Tirmidhi & Ibn Majah)

Uبابa bin as-Samit reported the Prophet as saying, “If you guarantee me six things on your part I shall guarantee you Paradise. Speak the truth when you talk, keep a promise when you make it, when you trusted with something fulfil your trust, avoid sexual immorality, lower your eyes, and restrain your hands from injustice.” (Baihaqi)

There is a great lesson for us in the above quoted *ahadith* and it should not go unnoticed ; for a wilful disregard and abstinence on our part may spell disaster.

The only and the only solution and the best to ensure a happy home wherein all members of the family will flourish—wherein the husband-wife relationship and the parent-children relationship will be one of joy and happiness—is to adopt a purely Islamic way of life. For our family success and happiness it is essential that our lives be governed by the Sunnah of our beloved Prophet. The Holy Qur'an says : “Verily in the Messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much.” (33 : 21)

Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah said : “Islam is : To worship Allah alone, not to make anyone sharer of worship due unto the Lord to offer *Salat* properly (i.e. with devotion and at the prescribed time with *Jamaat*), pay *Zakat* and fast in the month of Ramadan, perform the Pilgrimage (to the House of Allah), enjoin right conduct and forbid the wrong and make salutations (*Assalam-o-Alaikum*) to the inmates of the house. Whoso forsakes any of these things, he harms one of the component units of Islam and if anyone abandons all these characteristics (of Faith), he has turned his back from Islam.” (Hakim)

The Qur'an also says the same thing in its inimitable style :



“O ye who believe! Enter into Islam whole-heartedly and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Lo! he is an open enemy for you. And if ye slide back after the clear proofs have come unto you, then know that Allah is Mighty, Wise.” (2 : 208, 209)

Asma bint Yazid Ansari came to the Prophet and said : “O Prophet of Allah! You are dearer to me than my parents. The Muslim ladies have deputed me as their representative to talk to you on their behalf. Verily you are the Prophet of Allah for both men and women. We ladies stay for most part of our time within the four walls of our houses. We remain pinned to our jobs of fulfilling the sexual desires of men, bearing children for them and looking after their homes. Notwithstanding all this, men excel us in getting reward for thing which we are unable to do. They go and say their daily *Salat* and weekly *Jummah* in the *Masjid*, visit the sick, attend the funerals, perform *Hajj* and above all fight in the way of Allah. When they go for *Hajj* or *Jihad*, we look after their property, bring up their children and weave cloth for them. Don't we share reward with them ?”

The Prophet addressing the *Sahabah* (Companions) sitting round him said : “Did you ever hear a lady asking a better question ?” *Sahabah* replied : “O Prophet of Allah! We never thought that a lady could ever put such a question.” The Prophet addressing Asma said : “Listen attentively and then go and tell the ladies who have sent you that when a woman seeks the pleasure of her husband and carries out her domestic functions to his satisfaction, she gets the same reward as men get for all these services to Allah.” Asma returned very happily after getting this reply to her question.

Obedience to and good behaviour towards husbands is a very great asset for the ladies provided they know its value.

The following is reported to have been said by the Holy Prophet in this connection :

- (1) “A woman whose husband is pleased with her at the time of her death goes straight to Paradise.” (Tirmidhi)
- (2) “One who sows seeds of discord between a woman and her husband does not belong to us.” (Abu Daud)

- (3) “There are three (persons) whose prayer is not accepted, nor their virtues taken above : The fugitive slave till he returns to his masters and places his hand in their hands ; and the woman on whom her husband remains dissatisfied, and the drunkard till he becomes sober.”  
(Baihaqi)

- (4) Hadrat Anas reported that the Holy Prophet had said : “For a woman her husband is Paradise as well as Hell.”  
(Ahmad and Nasai)

It means that if her husband is pleased it is Paradise for her but if he is displeased it is Hell for her.

- (5) Hadrat Aiysha reports that she asked the Holy Prophet whose right was greatest on the woman and the Holy Prophet said : Husband's. Then she asked: Whose right was greatest on man and the Holy Prophet said : His mother's. (Bazaz and Hakim)
- (6) Hadrat Ibn Abi Auafi reported that the Holy Prophet has said : “By Allah in Whose hand is my life, the woman who does not discharge her duties to her husband is disobedient to Allah, and the discharge of duties towards Allah depends on the discharge of duties towards the husband.” (Ibn Majah)
- (7) Hadrat Ibn Umar reported that the Holy Prophet had said : “Allah would not like even to look at the woman who is not thankful to her husband.” (Nasai)  
It means that wife is dependent on her husband in all matters and what would be greater ungratefulness if she does not thank him.
- (8) Hadrat Zaid bin Arqam reported that the Messenger of Allah said : “A woman will not discharge her obligation to Allah unless she discharges her obligation to her husband.” (Tabrani)  
That is to say, the discharge of obligation to Allah is dependent on the discharge of the obligation to the husband.
- (9) Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah said: “It was not permissible for any woman who believes in Allah to allow anyone to enter the house whose coming is not liked by her husband. And it is not permissible



## APPENDIX F

### MODULE 5: GENDER AWARENESS TRAINING

#### Objective

At the end of the training the women are to be able to:

- Understand the concept of Gender or what is gender?
- Start to look at women's role and stereotypes in a non-confrontation way
- Allow women to express and share some of their feelings and experiences
- Allow participants to discover some of the contradictions and complexities of their lives in exile

#### Reading Materials

The Concept of Gender, what is gender?

Women's Issues in the Context of Conflict

Gender Awareness and self-awareness  
Hand-out # 7, Building Gender Awareness

A Gendered Vision of Religious Fundamentalism

Gender, Culture, and Cautionary Tale, Case Study



## The Concept of Gender

The use of the concept gender helps to identify women and men's roles. Gender draws attention to the social character of the divisions of labor between women and men. It points out that differences between women and men are shaped not so much by biology as it is by cultural and economic forces. For example, while men cannot bear children they can take care of them after they are born. Conversely, women bear children; they also and often carry out tasks (such as agricultural production) which require skills different from those involved in child care.

## What Is Gender?

While sex refers to physiological differences between women and men, gender refers to the socially constructed roles played by women and men in a given society. Differences between women and men take on specific forms in various societies. These differences must be ascertained every time a development project is to be formulated. No presumption can be made on women's activities, needs, and priorities outside a socio-economic and cultural context. The only universal character of gender is that women's needs and priorities are not usually even/visible to men.

Source: Benerjee, H. Lina and Udong S, (1994), UNDP, New York, 1994.



## *The Impact of Conflict*

### **Identifying Women's Needs in Conflict**

1. Women's role in the survival of their families and communities is critical. Efforts to support women may be important for their own sake, but in conflict situations they are essential.
2. Women's ability to survive and support other must be seen holistically addressing issues of personal psychology protection of and by women, economic resources and activities, community support, and national and international issues of governance, representation and human rights.
3. Women's capacity to extend their economic performance depends not only on access to the means of production, but also to community for an in which their needs can be addressed, as equal and active community members.
4. Women's health issues have to be seen in a total context of collapse of services and support system as well as of the range and depth of suffering women experience in conflict. Women's health in conflict covers issues of psychological and social adjustment, personal integrity, and injury and disability as well as physical and reproductive health.
5. Conflict dramatically increases levels of violence against women, whether from the actual fighting or not. Personal violence is major threat to women's well being and hence to the integrity of communities. Violence against women must be addressed at different levels, locally, nationally, and internationally, and further research should be promoted into the factors, which enhance it.
6. Trauma is a largely unrecognized outcome of conflict for men, women and children. It needs to be researched and measures taken to help people recover from it at both personal and community levels. Men and women react to psychological stress differently, with women's needs for supportive social networks, frustrated by the lack of privacy and opportunities to have intimate conversations with friends and kin. Meeting men's needs in overcoming trauma may be of direct benefit to women if they lead to more egalitarian relationships.
7. Women's principal focus of identity tends to be the family. It is at the family level that conflict can cause women much distress and at the same time it is the family that may offer the most solace and security. Demographic imbalance-- more women than men, more female-headed households limits women's marriage prospects.



## **Women's Issues in the Context of Conflict**

### **1. women-headed households:**

Temporary, in the context of displacement until reunited with spouse in original place of residence or permanent in the context of death of spouse, or resettlement in a far away place without the spouse who may have decided to stay behind in the conflict area or join the armed forces.

### **Specific Problems:**

1. Increased burdens as women are left alone to care for children and the aged.
2. Issue of survival/increased marginalisation in a society where the sexual division of labor determines allocation of resources, rights and opportunities (statistics from third World country show that women-headed households tend to be the poorest.)
3. More vulnerable to sexual abuse (though women who have their spouses around have also been raped some in front of their defenseless and fearful spouses.)
4. Mental stress/psychological impact of war and its consequences; women have to attend to the needs of family members who have been scarred by war even while they suffer severe stress themselves, and the damage and vulnerability caused by conflict.

### **Sexual Abuse and Harassment, in the Context of the Following:**

1. Within area/community of conflict, during operations (civilians caught in the war local or international.)
2. under interrogation/detention by military
3. when seeking welfare assistance (e.g. evacuation, food, water, health services.)

### **Forms of Sexual Abuse Specific Problems:**

1. Rape, military/political rape (repeated rape by one man/multiple rape.)
2. Sexual harassment, threat of sexual abuse humiliation through verbal vulgarities and abuse by men; vulnerability to touching of sensitive/private parts by men
3. Sexual slavery, in the context of forced, regular sexual favors through the mistress system.
4. Military prostitution as an established institution/ clutter of patriarchy.



Severe condition of reproduction-related responsibilities among women civilians caught in the midst of military operations total war tactics and strategies

1. As food reproducers, procurers and prepares; increase hardship due to food blockades to man's land (limited mobility) food quotas, economic constriction, devastation of livestock crops  
Specific problems (outside sexual abuse and harassment, and as women headed households)
2. As household health managers increased hardship due to bombing and strafing resulting in deaths  
In the household, deaths of infants and children due to malnutrition and outbreak of epidemics, cutting –off of institutional support, limited mobility,
3. As child-carers, unimagined hardship due to all of the above, as managers of children during evacuation, bombing, etc.
4. As prepares and lactating mothers, malnutrition, physical and emotional stress.
5. Women's health there is a need to separate this as an issue since most often, it is only the health of children and mother which is addressed in the context of relief assistance during armed conflicts and in evacuation centers.

**Specific health problems:**

1. Malnutrition among women
2. Maternal health
3. Psychological/emotional stress or instabilities resulting from war and its consequences (death, dislocation, rape, etc.)
4. Physical disabilities/illnesses arising from war that make it difficult for women to carry out critical reproductive role. Sexual transmitted diseases and viral/ bacterial infection may be due to rape, inadequate/poor sanitation, often overlooked by women themselves; if unattended, may lead to more serious reproduction-related illnesses such as cancer.

Source: Gigi Francisco, Women's Resource and Research center, April 1991. In the Oxfam Gender training Manual, Oxfam UK and Ireland, 1994

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# Gender awareness and self-awareness

This section is in two parts:

- Building gender awareness
- Self-awareness for women and men

In this section we provide a number of awareness-raising activities for use with different kinds of groups. Please use those most suited for the level of gender awareness of your group, and to the kind of group you are training. It is, however, essential that any gender training course includes at least one of the gender-awareness activities in this section, so that the group has a shared understanding of gender before going on to gender analysis.

## Building gender awareness

The activities in the first part introduce the concept of gender, explore participants' emotions and ideas about gender relations, and begin to look at gender and development. Some of the activities are very basic, suitable for groups who are new to gender analysis and who have had no or very little exposure to gender training (e.g. The gender game, **Activity 16**). Others assume a familiarity with the concept (e.g. What is gender?, **Activity 17**). Some activities are controversial and should only be used after the first, basic activities or with groups who are familiar and comfortable with the basic construct of gender. Many of these activities throw up strong emotions, whether people are new to them or not, and facilitators should be prepared for this!

Before going through this section, we advise that you read through **Section A.2 Key Concepts** to refresh your memory if you haven't done very much gender training, or you have not done it recently. The activities are suitable for mixed-sex groups.

## Self-awareness for women and men

The activities in the second part are all potentially highly-emotional sessions. Activities such as Millie's mother's red dress **Activity 23** and Violence against women **Activity 31** are likely to touch some women very deeply. You should ensure that the feeling and atmosphere in the group are sufficiently supportive for women to be able to express their feelings without fear. The activities are for women-only or men-only. However, if you want to try them with a mixed group — and this could be very powerful and an important learning experience — it may work best to run the sessions concurrently with women-only and men-only groups, and then bring them together at the end for discussion.



### **Building Gender Awareness**

Please indicate whether the following statements are sex or gender:

1. Women give birth to babies, men don't
2. Little girls are gentle, boys are tough.
3. In one case, when a child brought up as a girl learned that he was actually a boy, his school marks improved dramatically.
4. Women can breastfeed babies, men can bottle-feed babies.
5. Most construction workers are men.(may not be applicable in some countries)
6. Men's voices break at puberty, women's do not.
7. In one study of 224 cultures, there were 5 in which men did all the cooking, and 36 in which women did all the house building.
8. According to UN statistics, women do 67% of the world's work, yet their earnings for it amount to only 10% of the world's income.
9. Boys will remain with parents; girls will get married and leave their parent's house.
10. Women can not live alone, they should live with their parents or siblings.
11. Women's production work is often less visible and less valued than men's.
12. In refugee camps, women are more exposed to the danger of sexual assault (e.g. rape,), men do not.

Source: OXFEM, Gender Training Manual)



Surge: Women and Fundamentalism  
Islam and Christianity  
by: Shahin Gerami  
Carnegie Publishing Inc.  
New York and London  
1996

## CHAPTER TWO

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# A Gendered Vision of Religious Fundamentalism

## Introduction

The surge of religious fundamentalism since the 1970s in culturally distinct areas of the globe has raised concern and interest among scholars and citizens. Regions of the world that have witnessed the rise of religious fundamentalism are as diverse as Algeria, Israel, the United States, Iran, and India. Indeed, the list goes far beyond these examples. Fundamentalism has been observed among the three major monolithic and many polytheistic religions of the world in countries in different stages of socioeconomic growth and diverse forms of political organizations. Both democracies and dictatorships have been affected by this phenomenon.

What is religious fundamentalism and under what sociohistorical conditions does it emerge? The following is a brief historical account of fundamentalism. Later, we will postulate a conceptual framework.

## Historical Antecedent

The origin of fundamentalism goes back to American Protestantism as practiced on the frontier in the late 1800s. The

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structural changes occurring in America unsettled many inhabitants of the frontier. Industrialization and urban growth brought new inhabitants with different life styles and unfamiliar cultures. The new Irish immigrants introduced a culture and religion that was unfamiliar and threatening. Urban growth meant a pluralistic society with divergent groups closely mixing in institutions such as schools and the workplace. Labor unrest challenged the ideology of a fair and free society in the new land. Many (Chalafant et al., 1987; Riesebrordt, 1993) have observed that fundamentalism was a frontier response to the encroaching city, with its alien sociocultural system that was viewed as heathen and threatening.

Also associated with urbanization was the economic transformation of American economy from agriculture to industry. The industrial growth fostered new ideas and a plurality of alternative beliefs. This had two consequences: the predominance of science and the spread of revisionism among biblical theologians. Biblical revisionists brought scientific techniques of evidence and verification to the Bible. On their examination table, the Bible became an historical document compiled through centuries, reflecting the cultural and historical markings of each revision, compilation, or translation. What was left was suitable for the urban intelligentsia. It was existentialist rather than spiritual (Bruce, 1992). It was disputable and disputed. The frontier Protestants had assumed the infallibility of the Bible. The cost of challenging the Bible in the face of other changes was serious.

"By 1910, the clash concerning nonliterary biblical interpretations, the Social Gospel ideology, and liberal theology had erupted into open controversy" (Chalafant et al., 1987:174). In an effort to stem the tide of revisionism, two wealthy California brothers, the Stewarts, arranged for the production and wide distribution of twelve pamphlets named *The Fundamentals*. These pamphlets, instead of diminishing the debate, widened its scope.

The impetus for the emergence of fundamentalism is attributed to the spread of modernism. "Fundamentalism came about as a self-conscious rejection of modernism in theology that sought to take into account the results of Biblical criticism,

scientific discovery, and the general condition of the modern culture" (Webber, 1987:96). The credence given to science as the only valid and acceptable source of information posed a serious threat to traditional knowledge. Nowhere was this displayed better than in the Scopes trial of 1925 when William Jennings Bryan went on a collision course with modernism, as defended and presented by Clarence Darrow. By itself it was a minor affair, in which John Scopes, a biology teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, was said to have taught the evolution of species according to Darwin. Scopes himself could not recall whether he had done so. His prosecution propelled the discord between science and nonscience, in this case religion, into the public scene. Bryan could not defend the integrity of religion against the fact-oriented presentation of science.

This public humiliation had two consequences for the evangelicals: It reaffirmed their belief in the inerrancy of the Bible and led to their withdrawal from the public scene. They withdrew into their churches and their closed communities. Speer suggests that "on the way to becoming a 'beleaguered sect,' the legitimations for political activity gave way to an almost exclusive emphasis on regeneration" (1984:30). This retreat lasted until World War II. National events, such as the diffusion of public schools infused with rationalism and the scientific investigation of nature and the international spread of socialism, provided impetus for another reawakening.

There is a debate about the exact coinage of the word "fundamentalism" (see Sandeen, 1970; Marsden, 1980; Caplan, 1987). Mostly it is attributed to an editor of a Baptist paper who called upon the faithful to defend the "fundamentals of Protestantism" (Sandeen, 1970:246). These fundamentals are (a) biblical inerrancy; (b) the virgin birth of Jesus; (c) His substitutionary atonement; (d) His bodily resurrection; and (e) the authenticity of miracles. This list varies depending on historical and denominational proclamation (Sandeen, 1970).

## Conceptual Framework

For our purposes here, I will adopt fundamentalism and dust off some of its popular appendages, beginning with a broad and general definition as the background for this research. I will first delineate the differences between fundamentalism and similar social phenomena.

**Fundamentalism is not orthodoxy.** Webster's New World Dictionary defines orthodox as "conforming to the usual beliefs or established doctrines as, in religion, politics, etc.; approved or conventional" (1978:1004). Fundamentalists claim to ascribe to the "true" essence of a religious doctrine. This is where the common ground between orthodoxy and fundamentalism ends. Fundamentalists are more than orthodox. Their political activism separates them from the orthodox. They are modern while orthodoxy is not (Lawrence, 1989). They are present and future oriented, whereas orthodoxy is past oriented. Fundamentalists use the legitimacy of past ideals to reshape the present and postulate the future. Orthodoxy is otherworldly while fundamentalism is this-worldly.

**Fundamentalism is not fanatic.** According to Webster, fanatic is "unreasonably enthusiastic, overly zealous . . . a person whose extreme zeal, piety, etc. goes beyond what is reasonable" (1978:505). The important word here is "unreasonable." Fundamentalists are also accused of being irrational, which "implies mental unsoundness" or "the utterly illogical nature of that which is directly contrary to reason" (ibid.:745). Being synonymous, they both imply "bad judgment, willfulness, (and) prejudice" (ibid.:745). The notion of rationalism is at the heart of the fundamentalism. For Barr, Protestant fundamentalism is rational and based on reason (1981). But he is in a minority. The hegemony of positivism, and its associated notion of equating science with reason and knowledge, degrades other forms of information. As Lawrence aptly puts it:

Technological discoveries, with their accent on commercial discovery and quantitative (not qualitative) output, emphasize reliance on only one kind of reason. A limited appreciation of reason was not common to all scientists, but it became the popular understanding of the

reason=common sense=usefulness=science seriatim equation. . . . (1989:56)

Irrational means fanatic and dangerous. The Scopes trial is often cited as an example of the fanatic and irrational nature of Protestant fundamentalism. In the spring of 1993, when a group of Muslim men were accused of bombing the World Trade Center in New York City, all the images associated with fanatical, irrational, and dangerous were conjured up in the public mind.

**It is not regressive.** When the Islamic revolution took place in Iran, many observers warned that Iran was going back in time, rejecting the achievements of modernization and Westernization. Given the fundamentalists' claim to the original doctrine, particularly in civil and family regulations, this may seem justified. The Muslims' return to *Shariat* and their rhetoric on gender segregation, and the Protestants' call for uniting God and country and rejection of the women's movement, reinforce such a description (Falwell, 1980; Chandler, 1984). It is this feature of fundamentalism that leads to its clash with modernism. For now, I will suggest that fundamentalism is selectively regressive and thus selective in its response to modernism.

After constructing a conceptual boundary for any fluid notion, we set ourselves up to be questioned and face deconstruction. For the purpose of this research, I will draw some loose boundaries around the notion of fundamentalism.

**It is contemporary.** It is a response to present-day issues. Marty suggests that "Fundamentalism occurs on the soil of traditional cultures" (1992:18). Lawrence maintains that fundamentalism has "historical antecedence" (1989:100). This historical tradition is recast to address "today" and now. Fundamentalists dwell on the past as long as it is relevant to the present. Their historical discourse is not merely intended to set the record straight; it is geared toward correcting the present deviation from the true path. The Protestant fundamentalists, by holding true that the Bible is the word of God and is inerrant, are hastening its application to the present. The five fundamentals that are considered nonnegotiable by Protestant fundamentalists

free the supporters from intellectual debate to engage in activism.

**It is active.** This is often cited as the hallmark of fundamentalism as compared to previous reawakening or revivalist movements. Compared to the quietism or retreatism of previous trends, fundamentalists are active and aggressive. After the Scopes trial in America, evangelicals retreated from public life and into the churches (Chandler, 1984; Speer, 1984). Similarly, in the Middle East, facing aggressive and militant secular governments, religious leaders who had participated in independence movements across the region retreated into the mosques and their *Madreseh* (theological centers). The new wave senses a dire challenge to its core and thus actively seeks power to halt the attack and reclaim its past glory.

**It is a response to a threat.** Whether actual or perceived, fundamentalists respond to an assault on their ideal normative system. Fundamentalists perceive their position as being a minority under attack from outside forces. Marty suggests that "threats may come from within, as when someone in a group turns innovator, experimenter, or adapter" (1992:19). For the fundamentalists, however, these revisionists are seen as lackeys of the enemy, duped or co-opted by the outsiders, not as true believers. An insider who revisits the core principles could not have been an insider but a fake.

The threat is defined in anti-faith terms, for example, secular humanism, imperialism, and Westernization (Caplan, 1987; Zubaida, 1987). The threat has access to the political apparatus and consequently to power. This power is the tool of evil and is doing Satan's work. Lawrence points out that fundamentalists are advocates of a pure minority viewpoint. "Even when the remnant/vanguard seizes political power, and seems to become the majority, as happened in Iran in 1979, they continue to perceive and project themselves as a minority" (1989:100). The point here is that fundamentalism, especially Islamic fundamentalism, is anti-Western and anti-imperialistic. This global focus of the movement allows it to perceive itself as under attack, surrounded, and a minority. While the Protestant fundamentalists are concerned with reviving American greatness, Islamic fundamentalists are focused on fighting

American hegemony, thus the attack on American establishments in America and abroad.

**It rejects skepticism.** For the fundamentalist, ideology and group membership come as a package, in toto. Participants are strongly discouraged to dismantle the package and pick and choose parts that appeal to their individual views. Since the decision is between God and evil, there is no room for compromise and doubters. To maintain group solidarity, fundamentalists resort to labeling, eternal damnation, psychological isolation, and the use of force. A devoted member of the Assemblies of God told the author that when she missed a Wednesday night service to care for a sick child, the pastor told her, "We choose our action and the Lord chooses our punishment."

The last two features of the group are closely interrelated. The more a fundamentalist group feels isolated and threatened, the stronger is the emphasis on in-group association and loyalty. Similarly, these two features are related to the next one, namely boundary maintenance.

To separate the in-group from the out-group, **fundamentalists develop a complicated behavioral and communication code** to make identification simple. These codes serve to locate the in-group and warn the out-group.

In terms of behavior, the members may practice identifying rituals, use dress codes and insignia, engage in body rituals (i.e., growing beards among Muslim men and speaking in tongues among the Protestants), etc. Douglas (1970) suggests that the more closed a group's ideology, the more bodily control it exerts over its members. Fundamentalists, like any other group, develop their own argot. Some extreme antiabortion fundamentalists in America insist on calling family planning clinics "abortion mills." This is intended to abhor outsiders while exposing them to the group's agenda. Stoning adulterers or carrying a dead fetus to a family planning center are public acts of boundary maintenance.

As a consequence of the above features, **fundamentalists are exclusionary groups.** They do not practice an open-door membership policy. In many groups, membership requires an ascribed characteristic, such as in the Khalsa movement among

the Sikh, Haredim among Jews, and Baptist fundamentalism among white Americans. While the fundamentalist group may align itself temporarily with an outside group for political or military exigencies, for example, Baptists and Catholics against abortion, they do not recruit among the outsiders. This is perhaps the most visible feature of fundamentalism, which leads to labels like prejudice, intolerance, and racism.

Next, I will address the regressive nature of fundamentalism.

### A Gendered Explanation

While permeating all aspects of social life and organizations, fundamentalist movements have paid more attention to politics and family. In other words, these areas have been the main target of religious fundamentalists to reformulate and reorganize. Following the above description, two issues demand particular attention with regard to this research:

What is a religious fundamentalist vision of social order? Is it ordained by God or maintained by citizens? How does this relate to the separation of God as a source of sacred power and the state as a source of secular power?

Is the family a microcosm of this larger ordained system? Is then the father's authority ordained by God? How does this affect sex roles in the society?

Fundamentalist discourse revolves around three interconnected circles of faith, family, and state. Other variants of similar combinations have been suggested (see Bradley and Khor, 1993). These fluid circuits overlap, change, and constantly create a new configuration. They are dynamic, and none can survive in isolation. Faith provides the ideological foundation for mobilization. McCarthy Brown suggests that fundamentalism is the "religion of the stressed and the disoriented" (1994:175). If so, religion provides direction for protestation, rebellion, and, if successful, premises for restructuring. The state should be the manifestation of ordained power. Finally, family is the building block of a godly society, structured after a divine formula.

These circles operate in a circumfluent fashion. Faith provides the instruction, the state the tools, and the family the building foundation for a godly system. Vigilance is required in all three circles, particularly the family because the family's anomie will spread rapidly to other social institutions and foster universal moral decay.

Women, being the central figure of the family, bear the brunt of holding the family together, preserving morality, and safeguarding continuity. Since they cannot be trusted to do this on their own wits or wills, mechanisms are in place to safeguard their morality and consequently the faith. Whereas self-sacrificing and submissive women, such as Mary or Fatimah, were crucial for the perfect societies of the past, modernity has fostered selfishness in women, which in turn has led the society to moral decadence.

A configuration of these circles cast in private/public dimensions presents a holistic system of faith, family, and state operating in a bi-spheric cosmos. None is exclusively concerned with one domain. As indicated in chapter 1, the state regulates the private aspects of family relations and draws its legitimacy from the enforcement of the ordained. In return, the family provides the state with a supportive constituency. It is the state's responsibility to safeguard the family against incursion of foreign values and practices. By doing so, it protects the faith and, as a consequence, safeguards its right to rule.

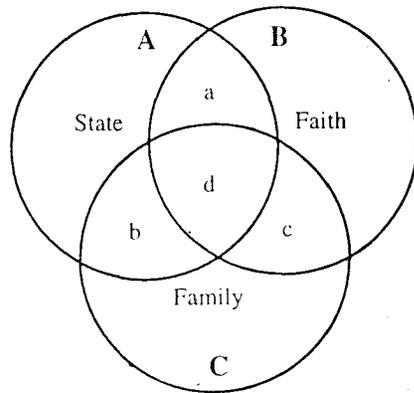
One needs to envision a continuously dynamic configuration of the circles. The three circles are always engaged, otherwise the system would disintegrate. They often overlap, may align in a synchronized fashion, or one may eclipse the other two. Fundamentalists start by suggesting that the three centers are disengaged, with the family and the state operating in a self-serving manner devoid of the ordained laws.

The debate about fundamentalism as being modern or anti-modern (see Barr 1981; Lawrence 1989; and Bruce 1992) ignores the point that fundamentalism can be, and is, both. When it concerns itself with the public domain—the economy and polity—fundamentalism is modern; when it looks toward the private domain—the family and women's status—fundamentalism is anti-modern or regressive.

The gendered vision of fundamentalism is more apparent in the overlapping areas. The double life of fundamentalism, cooperating and modern at the public level and traditional at the private level, is reflected in these interlocking circles, as shown in figure 2.1. Woman's realm is the family, or the C circle. Her involvement in the other domains of A and B should be an extension of her familial obligations. Accordingly, women's engagement in the two large circles of A and B, outside the overlaps and independent of the family, is strongly discouraged.

Ideally, the fundamentalists envision an eclipse of the other two circles by faith, regulating as well as conducting the affairs of state and family. In this case, the area denoted by *d* will be expanded under supremacy of the faith. In reality, however, fundamentalists strive to expand the *c* area and swallow family as much as possible. This configuration will reduce the *b* area and basically will leave faith and state to vie for managing social organization and formulating the normative order. In contrast, secularism will vie for subsuming faith under the state.

FIGURE 2.1 INTERLOCKING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATE, FAITH, AND FAMILY



- a: nuclear disarmament or Jihad;
- b: taxation;
- c: sexual obligations or family structure;
- d: education, reproduction, or child custody.

The discourse between religion and modernism is marred by patriarchy. Although cast in universal terms, science and religion are gendered entities, which detracts from their universal application. Comte "equated religion with childhood, philosophy and science with adulthood" (in Lawrence, 1989:11). Such a projection conveys a distorted image of historical trends. When religion, philosophy, and science emerged, their battle for dominion took place in a male-centered universe of discourse. These are conceptual stages in the life of a male entity, not a female entity.

The battle between modernism and fundamentalism demands a gendered explanation. We have drawn some delineating lines around what is fundamentalism. Modernism itself is one of those catchall cultural constructs that as soon as formulated begs for deconstruction. Generally speaking, modernism is associated with the supremacy of science, and the latter is closely linked with positivism, which holds as true the supremacy of reason over faith, observation over judgment, and detachment over passion.

According to Lawrence:

Modernism is the search for individual autonomy driven by a set of socially coded values emphasizing change over continuity, quantity over quality; efficient production, power, and profit over sympathy for traditional values or vocations, in both public and private spheres. At its utopian extreme, it enthrones one economic strategy, consumer oriented capitalism, as the surest means to technological progress that will also eliminate social unrest and physical discomfort. (1989:27)

The idea that modernism penetrates all areas of social life is noted by others. According to Bruce:

[T]he basic assumptions that inform modern industrial production—that all complex objects and procedures can be reduced to repeatable acts and replaceable components, that nothing is more than the sum of its parts, that everything can be measured and calculated, that nothing is sacred and that everything can be improved—cannot be confined to the world of work. The formal rationality

which dominates that sphere gradually invades all other areas of social action. (1992:63)

Fundamentalism is also defined as an all-encompassing social phenomenon responding to and rejecting modernism. For Lawrence, "fundamentalism is the affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute. . . ." (1989:27). When two hegemonic forces clash for dominion over formulation of social order and definition of legitimate citizenry, the battlefield is not evenly spread. Each suffers from a weak point that allows the other to prod and attack. In the battle between fundamentalism and modernism, this juncture is in the private domain.

These two forces are both pervasive and hegemonic. Modernism, in particular, is more predominant and inclusive. It permeates all aspects of social life, though unevenly. Its material dimension is more pervasive and more easily adopted than its normative system—modern values and norms. The lag between material adaptation and cultural transformation is more prominent in the private domain, which is the weak link in the modernization process.

Modernism as a whole stage—both in terms of material products and the normative order—is more readily institutionalized in the public than in the private sphere. Peripheral and subperipheral areas are incorporated into the capitalist world economy and produce for the capitalist world market. World system participation leaves very little unchanged in the economies of even the most remote societies. Research on the world-system incorporation indicate that economical and political structures of the participating societies change during and after incorporation (Dos Santos, 1970; Chase-Dunn, 1975, 1983; Evans, 1979). World system participation also affects the structure of the household. Women find employment in the formal labor market and access new products.

New technology, when available and affordable, modernizes the household even in traditional societies. However, the value system that made these new inventions and that regulates their utilization is either blocked or untiringly controlled. For instance, the new communication technology produces a major headache for what Riesebrordt (1993) calls radical patriarchal states or organizations. Video players, recorders or cameras, and

satellite technology that transfer modern and Western values into remote areas pose an unending challenge to social agencies committed to safeguarding some "unsoiled" tradition. Meanwhile, these agencies want and need the same technologies to reinforce the tradition, promote their ideology, and learn about others' agendas. In sum, modernism is more public than private. It promotes individual choice, change over continuity, and homogenization of the population. But it fails to deliver them evenly in both social spheres of life.

Change, when it comes to women's domain, is much slower than when it comes to men's. It takes modernizing and modern societies longer to grant women the franchise, offer them education, employ them in the public sector, provide them with health care, and guarantee their individual civil and human rights. It is not surprising, then, that in 1993 the United Nations for the first time considered rape as a war crime. In any society, areas can be easily identified in which women need to match men's gain. Women have to fight twice to gain the same rights as men: the first time for everyone's rights (which means men's rights), and then a second time to obtain the same rights for themselves. Examples can be found in the independence movements of various kinds. Women are mobilized to further the cause of national independence and are then told not to push too hard for their own rights, which may derail the movement. They are told to wait, that it is too early.

Bruce (1987:58) suggests that modernism offers alternatives. One needs to add a qualifier: mostly in the public domain. Women's alternatives are late in coming, limited in scope, and lower in social value. As indicated earlier, women's individual autonomy is delayed and granted piecemeal, and even then it lacks the intensity and enforcement of men's autonomy.

Since modernism penetrates the private domain slowly and marginally, fundamentalism can root there and have a stronger claim. Fundamentalism is more private than public. Where modernism is weak, fundamentalism is strong. In the public domain, fundamentalism gives more to modernism in order to further its own hegemonic goals.

"Fundamentalists seek authority" (Marty, 1992:20). Their claim to pursuing authority is toward an end: dominion of their faith. To this end (access to authority and its safeguard), they must and do utilize modern technology and social organizations. When in power, as in America in the 1980s and presently in Iran, they do not reshape the state apparatus according to the original authority structure. The Islamic Republic doubled the number of government ministries compared to the Shah's period. The New Christian Right (NCR) reinvented capitalism as a biblical premise (Falwell, 1980; Rubenstein, 1986).

Fundamentalists' thirst for new technology, particularly means of force, is well noted (Rubenstein, 1986; Marty, 1992). It is their selection and rationalization that at times are dumbfounding. The NCR advocated the use of nuclear bombs and Star Wars weaponry, but it opposes RU40 (the abortion pill). In the Islamic Republic, street posters advertise video players, though owning one is illegal. The rationalization fails one, unless the dualistic nature of modernism and fundamentalism is recognized. To revitalize the economy, the Rafsanjani government promotes free-market capitalism, but it cannot convince its radical colleagues in the *Majles* (the parliament) to relax regulation of private consumption. Video tapes, produced in America and watched in homes, promulgate the dreaded Western values; yet, advertising them earns the city and government revenue.

Let us digress here and briefly review Muslims' views of modernism. For Muslims, modernism is associated with Westernization and colonialism and thus is more suspected and resisted. Moghadam suggests that "Islamist movements are a product of the contradictions of transition and modernization; they also result from the North-South contention. What is unclear is whether they impede or accelerate the transition to modernity" (1993:138). Realizing they cannot revamp modernization, Muslims struggle to adapt it on a per-need basis. After independence, many Middle Eastern countries adopted available Western models—open-door capitalism or socialism—and aligned themselves with one super power (Zubaida, 1987; Saiedi, 1986). Nasser preferred socialism and the Shah adopted capitalism. Here we will refrain from debating the issue of free

choice in the selection process. Whatever the mechanism of adoption, the results were less than satisfactory. Rampant poverty and unemployment, increasing population, military defeats (whether a country was directly involved or not), and other seemingly insurmountable problems have left the people and the intelligentsia searching for an alternative (Ayubi, 1980; Esposito, 1992).

Among the Middle Easterners, as among other third world people or exploited minorities of Western societies, the legacy of colonialism and the experience of imperialism have left a deep sense of powerlessness and other-blaming. The failure of the Nasserites or the Pahlavis is due to the superpowers' intervention or to Western ways. There are few inward-looking collective efforts, except partly for the fundamentalists.

Muslim fundamentalists, too, place the blame for the current crisis in the region at the door of the West, which they also blame for the corruption of the Islamic ethos. They are looking inward insofar as calling for a return to the Islamic ways and expressing disdain for the Western methods. Since Westernization and modernization in the form of large government bureaucracies, new transportation, modern health care, or modern ideas about government by representation cannot be completely eradicated, the goal is selective adaptation of modernism. What is compatible with Islam will stay; what is not has to go.

It is in this selective adaptation of modernism to Islam that the private domain is singled out to be the bastion of the incorruptible Islam. Fundamentalists experiment with Islamic economy and the government of the *Ulama* (religious leaders). Some of these are pure window dressing, some are more genuine (Saiedi, 1986). Despite their rhetoric, they gradually go to the World Bank and ask for loans, accept the bank's preconditions, and pay the interest fees. Modernization in the public domain is cantankerous and unyielding.

But the private domain is all together a different story. Muslim fundamentalists sense a free hand in the protection of their household from the undesirable influences of Westernization and modernization. An extreme case is the resistance of Afghan men to education and employment of women

(Moghadam, 1992). Fundamentalists in other countries show varying degrees of resistance to the modernization of the private domain. In chapter 6, we will discuss how the Islamic Republic's militancy has adapted to practical considerations and has recognized modernization of women's status in some areas.

The clash of the fundamentalists with modernism is intended not to eradicate the latter but rather to control it. In this, fundamentalists are not alone. Liberal intellectuals debate the utility of unbridled modernism, particularly its technological growth. As Weber predicted, modernism has left a portion of humanity well fed and cared for but naked and isolated (Weber, 1946). The rage of secularism has severed our ties with the cosmos through a God, at the same time failing to provide as convincing and reassuring a link as a God.

Here we come back again to the issue of regression. To label fundamentalists as regressive can be misleading. It is mostly in the family issues that they hold fast to traditional practices, but when it comes to politico-economic structure, they give in little to the past. It is this interplay between fundamentalism and modernism that has escaped the attention of scholars as well as the public's mind. Recognizing the gendered nature of these phenomena allows one to conjure up a clearer picture of their shapes as they span the social landscape.

The interaction between these recalcitrant forces shapes the social definition of woman. Until recently, most of their discourse occurred in the male domain. More and more women participate and influence the contour of their interaction. This study proposes to debate these issues with women themselves. The author has had a unique opportunity to observe two distinct fundamentalist trends. During the past eleven years, I have been stationed at a Midwestern town in America with strong fundamentalist sentiment. Four Bible colleges and the headquarters for the Assemblies of God inform the texture of public opinion in the town. I have had conversations with women and men who strongly support fundamentalist premises and those who vehemently oppose them. Meanwhile, being a native of Iran, I have maintained close contact with that country and its middle-class urban groups. Going back and forth

between the two societies provided irresistible intellectual challenges.

During this time, Iran constituted an Islamic Republic, defended and fought an eight-year war with Iraq, and initiated an aggressive campaign to remove the residue of modernization from the family and women's status. At the same time in the United States, Protestant fundamentalists managed to propel an unlikely candidate to the presidency and maintained a strong presence in the public arena. The interaction between American conservatism and Iranian fundamentalism haunted three American administrations, and the juxtaposition continues.

Meanwhile, similar fundamentalist trends in other parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East, were destroying old alliances and challenging established assumptions. Fundamentalist movements from India to Algeria vie for attention. Modernized Egypt is struggling with one of these movements. There, fundamentalist groups are set to replace a secular, Western-oriented government with an Islamic one. Women's rights and roles are central to all of these cases. Women themselves are involved in the centrifugal forces, pro and con.

I was propelled by scientific curiosity and personal desire to gauge women's attitude toward these trends. A cross-cultural study was clearly the only plausible way. Iran is a third world country in which the fundamentalists have managed the forces of a national revolution to successfully enthrone an Islamic state. Despite daunting adversities, the Islamic Republic has managed to survive and thrive. In the United States of America, the fundamentalists managed to place presidents friendly to their cause in the White House. There, too, despite some setbacks and adverse publicity surrounding television evangelists, the fundamentalists are forming strong grass roots programs. Egypt is another Muslim third world country in which a resilient fundamentalist movement is bent on changing the course of postindependence Egypt. They utilize both peaceful means and violent tactics in their campaign.

These three countries provide a diversity of social scales for modernization, industrialization, and the evolution of fundamentalist movements. Comparing them is a task with

## Facilitator's Notes

1. This is a particularly useful exercise for people working in an unfamiliar cultural situation, where they may be tempted to make assumptions based on their own cultural values. It shows the danger of introducing inappropriate views of gender equity. It also shows clearly that good intentions are not enough!
2. It is interesting to compare the situation described in. The problems were similar, and were eventually resolved, after some difficulties. In this case, the approach was culturally-sensitive, and the women concerned were consulted and involved in the decisions that were made as the situation changed.



## A cautionary tale

### Objectives

- 1 To become aware of some of the complex cultural issues involved in trying to work with women.
- 2 To consider how development and relief agencies should deal with cultural barriers to working with women.

### Method

- 1 Explain the objectives of the activity. *(5 minutes)*
- 2 Divide the participants into groups of four or five and give each group Handout 85 (Part 1 of the case study). Ask them to read through the case and discuss the question on the handout. *(20 minutes)*
- 3 Hand out Part 2 of the Case Study (**Handout 86**) to each group. Ask them to read it.
- 4 Bring the group together again and discuss the following questions:
  - a. Are there any ways in which this situation might have been predicted or avoided?
  - b. What cultural issues does it raise for the implementing agency?*(20-30 mins)*

### Materials

**Handouts 85 and 86**

Pens

# Case study: Working with women — a cautionary tale

## Part 1: The Tale

### Introduction

This case study involves Afghan refugees living in a refugee camp in the North-west Frontier Province of Pakistan.

This camp is one of the oldest and largest settlements of refugees in the Province, with a total population in the region of 20,000. Numerous organisations have established a range of programmes in the camp, including health, education, water and sanitation, income generation, and shelter.

Programmes involving women were centred mainly around health (mother and child and basic health education) but also involved some income-generating projects.

### The widows' project

The organisation involved in this case study had established projects in the camp and felt that they should be doing more for women.

A large proportion of women living in the camp were widows. These women ranged in age from teenagers to quite elderly women; some with and some without children. The organisation targeted this group of women for a specific project because it was felt that they suffered especially from isolation in the camp. They had no male relatives and, therefore, no form of access to the external environment beyond their homes.

The aim of the project was to establish a widows' centre where these women could bring their children and escape from the home for a short time. The centre would run health education programmes, and a children's playground would also be set up in the centre.

The project had been running for a couple of months when the organization received a strong letter from one section of the camp community. The letter stated that women had been seen washing, and playing on swings, and that men, both Afghan and expatriate, had been seen entering the center. The letter stated that the center should be closed down.

The director of the organization consulted colleagues and it was felt that no action needed to be taken since other member of the community had not expressed similar feelings.

**Discussion Question:**

You are the director of the organization involved. What action would you take on receipt of the letter and why?



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## Part 2: The Outcome

The organisation received a total of three letters over a period of about six weeks. All were of similar strength and content. The organisation maintained its original stance and ignored the letters.

A short while later during Friday prayers in the camp, the mullah condemned the women's centre and the organisation involved. Feelings were such that after the prayers, approximately 5,000 refugees marched on the centre, threatened the guard and destroyed the building and its contents. The refugees did not stop at this. The organisation also had a concrete-making factory and vehicle workshop established in the camp, employing some 350 refugees. The workshop ran training courses in mechanics.

The factory and workshop were destroyed, 15 vehicles vandalised and workshop equipment destroyed. The total damage was estimated at \$5 million.

Two weeks later the organisation's concrete factory in Afghanistan was destroyed.

The director was held up by a road block in Pakistan and fired upon. Fortunately he was not injured.

A short time later the organisation completely withdrew from any involvement with Afghan refugee projects in Pakistan.



## HAND-OUT NUMBER 8: EVALUATION FORMS/QUESTIONIAR

Information for Facilitators: Inform the participants that we will now do an evaluation of the training program. Emphasize the need for the participants to be open and honest in answering the questions. The information may be used for further training programs. Distribute the evaluation forms, read over it make sure that everyone understands it. Collect the forms and complement the participants on their good work.

### Evaluation

Read each statement below about the training and indicate whether you agree or disagree with it by checking the appropriate box.

Please try to be specific in your answers.

- The content of the training program was useful.  
and relevant to the needs of refugee women.  Agree  Disagree
2. The content of training program was  
difficult to understand  Agree  Disagree
3. Because of the training, I feel better able to take a  
leadership role on empowerment of women.  Agree Why  Disagree Why not
4. The training has not changed my thinking  
in any important ways  Agree  Disagree
5. I have learned some things about myself through  
participation in the training. (if you agree, what  
have you learned?)  Agree  Disagree
6. How important the concept of empowerment is to you?  
Important  
Not important  
Very important
7. What tasks outside the home did you take responsibility for before?
8. What household chores do you take responsibility for?
9. Who-men or women make decision in you family?
10. Are there any topics you wish had been covered in the training but were not? If yes,  
please specify:
11. Please comment on the facilitators in terms of their knowledge, clarity, and devotion.
12. Please add any other further comments or observations you have about the training  
program



HAND-OUT NUMBER 9: GENDER AWARENESS EVALUATION  
FORM FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

The Afghan Women Center for Education in Exile in collaboration with the (Gender and Development Research Institute request your cooperation in answering this form. Please return the form to the training team by ( )

1. You are from
2. How satisfied are you, in general with the workshop you have just attended?  
 Not at all       Somewhat       Extremely
3. What was your objective in attending this workshop?
4. To what extent has this objective been achieved?  
 Not at all       Somewhat       Extremely
5. What factors facilitated the achievement of this objectives?
6. What factors hindered the achievement of this objective?
7. To what extent did other participants help you achieve your learning objectives?  
 Not at all       Somewhat       Extremely

Additional comments



## HAND-OUT # (10)

### Training Exercises

You are a group of top level advisors to the president of the an Asian country. The president is concerned with his nation's fast growing population. He wants to develop a policy that will help to better manage the growing population and a rationale for that policy that the people will accept. You are the group. The president is waiting for your advice.

#### Exercise # Two

You are a small group of international advisors sent to an Asian country's village community to help design and implement a program that will improve the "carrying capacity" of the village and its surrounding areas. You are the group. The community is looking forward to receiving your recommendations.



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1. The first step in the process of identifying a problem is to define the problem clearly and concisely.

2. The second step is to gather information about the problem and its causes.

3. The third step is to analyze the information and identify the underlying causes of the problem.

4. The fourth step is to develop a plan of action to address the problem.

5. The fifth step is to implement the plan and monitor the results.

6. The sixth step is to evaluate the results and make adjustments as needed.

7. The seventh step is to document the process and results for future reference.

8. The eighth step is to communicate the results to the relevant stakeholders.

9. The ninth step is to review the process and make improvements.

10. The tenth step is to ensure that the problem does not recur.

11. The eleventh step is to celebrate the success of the problem-solving process.

12. The twelfth step is to share the lessons learned with others.

13. The thirteenth step is to continue to monitor the situation for any changes.