

Woman and Islam — from a Contemporary and Comparative Religious Perspective - II

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The mortality among females is high in developing countries. 80-90% of total maternal deaths in the globe is contributed by developing countries of the world. The South East Asia alone is contributing to 40% of total maternal deaths. 5,855,000 women deaths in the globe and 200,000 maternal deaths result from lack or failure of contraceptive services. The anemia among 15-49 years is around 52% which is carried over and aggravated during pregnancy among Indian women where up to 87% of mothers can be anemic including 32% as severely anemic. The anemia prevalence is also high during lactation (67%) though lower than in pregnancy.

Throughout the world 45 million pregnancies are unwanted resulting in abortion and only 30 million pregnancies are wanted resulting in live births out of which 70,000 die because of unsafe abortion. Unknown numbers suffer infections and other health consequences, like injuries, bleeding etc. Many of the estimated 20 million unsafe abortions could be avoided if safe and effective means of contraception were freely available. In India of the 11.6 million abortions 60% are induced (6.1 million). For every one legal abortion there are 10 to 11 illegal abortions resulting in 11% maternal deaths because the abortion was done unprofessionally, executed with unhygienic and crude means. 15% women between 15-44 years in developing countries lose their health /life as a result of STD's. HIV/AIDS infection is the 21st century catastrophe that affects every one and women are the second largest group in terms of numbers and prevalence.

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Globally out of 36.1 million affected (2001) 7,500,000 are women. In India 21.23% are women whereas about 78.72 cases are males.

Around the world at least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced in to sex or other wise abused in her lifetime. In nearly 50% women report hit or otherwise physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives. Physical violence in intimate relationship is accompanied by psychological abuse and in one third to over one half by sexual abuse. In 6 states survey in India among 15-49 years of age an intimate partner in previous 12 months. Physically assaulted 14% of adult women and 40% had been ever abused. 30-40% had responded for physical abuse by intimate partner in current relationship in U.P State. In a verbal autopsy in maternal death in 400 villages and 7 hospitals in 3 districts of Maharashtra it was revealed that 16% of all deaths during pregnancy were due to domestic violence.¹

The over dose of sexuality on the media has landed the world in the loveless corporal relationships .The commercialization of sex and the nudity at the cost of women's chastity and modesty has moved the proponents of so called romantic love. The following editorial remark testifies the same fact.

Where has love gone? The question is now being asked by no less a person than the high priestess of romantic fiction, Dame Barbara Cartland. At 96, she remains the ardent advocate of romantic love that she always has been, and is quite angry at the level of morality in modern Britain and the attitude of some sections of the media for giving the public overdose of sex. She deplores the fact that the classical English gentleman has disappeared from the scene along with his commitment to love and romance. She also maintains that most people even today are less interested in raw sex than love.²

Despite the great strides made in the fields of science and technology the condition of women has not shown any dignified

change from the barbarian times when the female child was buried alive after their birth.

The traditional brutality employed to do away with female foetus has been replaced by scientific gadgets and techniques. Ultrasonography and amniocentesis have dominated the scene whereby the sex of the foetus is determined during pregnancy and the foetus is aborted if it happens to be female.

These and many other facts about femicide have been brought to the Supreme Court's notice with a plea to declare as an unconstitutional pre-natal sex selection and parental genetic dialogue (PGD). Several grounds have been cited for this, including that femicide has disturbed the male-female ratio in the country³.

What would be the long-term effect of these tests, if not prohibited now? When asked this, petitioner Sabu George said there may be more violence against women. And also with fewer women than men, the entire family character may undergo a drastic change.

Dr. George, trained in health and nutrition at the John Hopkins University School, Baltimore, and Cornell University, New York, is engaged in certain projects meant for the welfare of the children, particularly girls, in Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

According to 1991 census, the country's overall sex ratio was 929 women per 1000 men. This sex ratio is becoming more skewed day by day. Medical and scientific procedures are becoming more efficient and it has consequently become easier to get rid of the female sex. Despite enactment of Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 are in place, the situation of femicide continues to worsen. There are wide spread advertisements by various clinics providing pre-natal sex selection information. The understanding of pre-natal sex selection being given up and a narrow interpretation of the Act is

being forwarded, which gives a license to all doctors to conveniently adopt this technique without the fear of law⁴.

The other crimes against women are in their increase. With a rape being reported once in every 54 minutes, eve teasing every 51 minutes and dowry death every 17 hours, legal experts call for reviewing existing laws relating to women to protect them against growing incidents of crime and violence. According to the Supreme Court Justice A. S. Anand, "Mere legislation will not help, the laws must be implemented with sincerity".

"Notwithstanding the enactment of the laws relating to dowry, rape, violence against women, the factual position is rather distressing. ...They have all proved inadequate. Bringing a very important fact to our notice, Justice Anand says, "Mere legislation will not help; the laws must be implemented with sincerity". There fore women must be educated about their rights and changing societal perceptions Domestic violence does not only include harassment or cruelty at the hands of husband or in-laws but also include offences like, rape, abortion of female foetus and molestation.

To address the heinous crimes like rape of minor girls, Singhvi has suggested capital punishment, echoing the stringent Islamic laws pertaining to such crimes. Now modern man has to acknowledge the validity of Divine laws in case of human affairs, the neglect of which has landed humanity in this trouble and women are the most vulnerable section who have suffered the heaviest blow as the result of this neglect. He says, "While rape in general is reprehensible the category of child rape in my opinion certainly falls within the category of rarest of rare cases justifying the imposition of death penalty."

Singhvi once again supports a suggestion that an adulterer should be made to share the burden of the victim who has been rendered vulnerable to very crucial position after the rape crime

has been committed. The accused should be made to bear part of the monetary cost in addition to criminal punishment.

Sunita Abeseker, leading women's rights activist from Sri Lanka and UN human rights award winner says:

Mere legislation will not help. While we strive to reform and restructure our legal system to enable women survivors of domestic violence to seek justice with dignity, we must also transform our systems of belief and acceptance radically to enable violence against women to be perceived as the abhorrent act that it is.

It can be said that the best laws can be rendered ineffective and meaningless if the implementation of these is not done in proper sense.

There were more than 46,000 rape cases pending before the courts all over India in 1999. There were 27.4 percent of rape cases pending investigations and 83.1 percent pending trial⁵.

Women are being exploited in a more sophisticated way in the name of "Beauty Fairs", as it assumes the form of "business of big bucks". It involves more serious business of advertising and marketing a product. Actually there exists a multi-level marketing strategy behind organizing such an event, says Dimple Gupta, Senior Research Executive, Indian Marketing Research Bureau (IMRB). While women activists and psychologists call these fairs, as promotion of "a narrow sense of beauty," where as organizers advertise them as "self actualization workshops." The organizers of such fairs are not merely engaged in the business of selling their product but the whole concept⁶.

It is very difficult to decide whether a burn case is suicide or murder. In both cases the victim is doused from head to toe in kerosene and severely burnt. We feel that 80 percent of the cases that are brought to our notice are suicides. The husbands and in-laws are certainly culpable because it is their harassment which are because it is their harassment which drives the person to this act.

The Legal Acts and Laws passed for the upliftment of women, which endow women with constitutional rights are as follows:-

- The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 according to which daughters widows and mothers inherit equally with sons.
- The Special Marriage Act, 1956, further amended in raising the age of marriage at 18 years in case of girls and 21 in case of boys.
- The Special Marriage Act, 1955 giving women the right to divorce on exactly the same ground admissible to men.
- The Equal Wages Act entitling women workers to receive for a given type of work, the same wage as received by male workers.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, prohibiting the acceptance of marriage dowry.
- The special Marriage Act, 1954 entitling widowed and divorced women to remarry.
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1975 legalizing abortion with the consent of woman on medical grounds.
- The Act prohibiting child marriage.

While discussing the ineffectiveness of these acts Mrs. Snigdha Prasad comments:-

Looking at each Act, one by one, one can clearly see that these have no meaning for the rural women, even though they may deserve much more. "Although women work extremely hard whether on the family farm or for wages, the returns of their labour are not considered valuable. Their labour does not give them the status gain that a man receives in return for agricultural work or wage labour. Though, women's work is basic to production and reproduction of social life, it is not recognized as such.

It has been estimated that the rural women's actual daily working hours can be as high as 15-16, often considerably more

than those of men. They suffer from a double burden of exploitation as part of the rural poor; and in addition as members of the female sex. They "have to put up with poor working conditions, including lower wages for tasks involving hard physical labour."

These writings, go further to prove that the laws concerning fixed hours of work, minimum wages etc., do not affect the arduous, strenuous and monotonous life of rural women, especially those who are through the rigour of life alone. These laws and acts have not reached the village women who still go through the rigours of child-marriage, widowhood, abandonment, beating, cruel treatment and so on. She is just taken to be a child-producing machine by the men folk.

Islam provides a hope in this dark phase of history where womenfolk has been rendered once again vulnerable to the age-old oppression and cruelty under the garb of women's liberation and feminist agenda.

A grave situation is also witnessed with the increase in the process of trafficking of women as it is becoming wide spread with every passing day. Trafficking has been defined in various ways over the years and differently by different groups. However since the year 2000, a widely used definition is that which has been provided by the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (also known as the Palermo protocol), and it is becoming popular, as this document discusses the phenomenon as: "trafficking in persons is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat, or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation". Exploitation according to this document includes

“the exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery, or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of the organs”. Here we are interested only with trafficking of women and girls, as a worst and shameful form of atrocity.

Despite all the concern shown by the UN, the NGOs and other international organizations the picture is becoming grim day by day with no improvement in sight. Sex trafficking has assumed the dimensions of an international criminal industry with a very high demand for commercial sex. It has become one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises in the world affecting all nations. An estimated two million women and girls are trafficked annually around the world for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Europe North America, the Gulf States, India and most of the Asian countries are important destination points for trafficked victims. Very young girls are being trafficked and sexually exploited as safe sex objects, because of the fear of contracting AIDS, which is common in habitual victims. The trade is being operated by groups and individuals who target women and girls to meet the demand in national and international market. A sex trafficker is one who uses force, fraud or coercion to induce a victim into commercial sex act. Traffickers often are of the same nationality/community as are their victim, because it facilitates their operation within the community where they can generate more confidence among the prospective victims. They may be even family members, neighbours, boy friends etc. The victims are lured through fraudulent advertisements, false promises of legitimate job opportunities, mail order bride agencies and personal contacts. Various mechanisms of violence like torture and unlawful confinement are used by traffickers to maintain complete control over their victims. They are held in debt bondage which never gets liquidated. Traffickers operate both individually and as members of the organized criminal cartels with interstate

and international ramifications. Corrupt officials of law enforcement agencies play an important role in trafficking operation.

After this deep analysis of the factors which have led to the unfortunate decline in the status of Women throughout world in light of the above mentioned religious, secular and feminist perspective, it is most pertinent to see some glaring contribution made by Islam to raise the dignity of women for all times to come. One of the unique dimensions of Islamic treatment to womenfolk is that her temperament and constitution has been kept always in view while giving instructions touching upon her rights and duties. It is not fraught with the man made philosophies like feminism to fantasize the actual capabilities of women in contrast to man nor is it poised to view women always negatively as a gender as has had been the case with religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. It rather balances the extremes taken by these two antagonistic weltanschauungs .

What Islam can Give to Women?

The *Qur'ân* never prohibited women from going out of their houses for their needs. During the times of Prophet (S.A.W.), women went regularly to mosques, and said their prayers along with men, standing in a separate row. They also joined their husbands in the labour of fields, they even went along with the Muslim army, to the battle ground, whenever need was felt and helped fighting men in many other ways. They could even fight the enemy in an emergency. No occupation was prohibited to them, and they could do any work they choose. The only 'restrictions' on their liberty by Almighty Allah are mentioned in the following verses of Holy Qur'ân.

"Say to the believing men and women to turn away their eyes (from what is unlawful) and restrain their sexual desires. This will make their lives purer. Allah has knowledge of all their actions. Say to the believing women to turn their eyes away (from temptation) and to preserve their chastity: to cover their

adornments except such as are normally displaced..." (24: 30-31).

Now the real restriction contained in these verses is that both men and women should, when they meet each other, cast down their looks, but there is an additional restriction in the case of women that they should not display their ornament with the exception of "what appears thereof". The exception has been explained as meaning, "what is customary and natural to uncover". According to many commentators the exception relates to the face and the hands.

No other religious book and no other reform has done one-tenth of what *The Holy Qur'ân* or the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) has done to raise the position of women. Read the Qur'ân and you can find good, pious and righteous women being given the same position as good, pious and righteous men. Both genders are spoken of in the same terms. Further, wherever *The Holy Qur'ân* speaks of the great Prophets (PBUH) of Allah, it speaks of women in similar expression and words. For example, "And mention Abraham in the Book" (19:41) "And mention Moses in the Book" (19:51) and so on, women is spoken in exactly in the same terms. "And mention Mary in the Book" (19:16). No other religious book has given such a high spiritual position to woman."

The Qur'ân makes no difference between man and woman in the bestowal of reward for the good he or she does. The Qur'ân says, "Their Lord answers them, saying: I will deny no man or women among you the reward of their actions" (3: 194).

"...But the believers who do good works, whether men or women shall enter paradise". (4:124) "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 shall surely grant a happy life; We shall reward them according to their noblest actions". (16:97)

"...But those who have faith and do good works, both men and women shall enter the Garden of Paradise and receive

blessings without number". (40:40) "For Muslim men and women for believing men and women who are patient, for men and women who give charity; for man and women who fast; for men and women who guard their chastity and for men and women who remember Allah much ... for them all has Allah prepared forgiveness and a great reward: (33:35) The mention of good women along good men, enumerates every good quality as being possessed by women exactly as it is possessed by men, and ends with the words, "Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward". With Allah, therefore, according to the Qur'ân, there is no difference between men and women, and morally and spiritually they can rise to the same eminence". So far as the education of women in Islam is concerned, unfortunately, the Muslims under various pretexts have neglected it. The manual work at homes by the women folk, who are not being assisted by their male counterparts, is one substantial reason. Secondly, the false notion that woman has been created inferior to man in all respects of physiology and mentality and who has to serve men at the cost of her personal development.

In every period of history – amazingly even today in most of the developed countries less stress is being given on women's education while as, Islam has given great importance to women education. There is famous saying of the Prophet (S.A.W.) that the acquisition of knowledge is the duty of all Muslims. All Muslims include men and women. It is likewise the duty of Muslim women. Thus Islam has made it obligatory on the part of women to acquire knowledge within the purview of *Shariah*, therefore Muslim community must take serious, in fact immediate, steps to open primary schools for Muslim women and separate schools should be introduced earnestly, where they can be trained in several arts and crafts also like cooking, stitching etc. Though the education of Muslim boys and girls at primary stage has a separate syllabi, yet the doctrinal aspects of Islam is same for both.

They need to be taught at this state of their education, so that a thorough perspective of Islam's worldview is acquired, which helps one to make his or her life truly spiritual and dedicated. It will also protect them from the evil exposure of various polytheistic and pagan beliefs.

Islam has presented practical examples of the ideal women to be emulated by the women of the world rather the dry and dead philosophies about femininity which are either not practicable or lack the seriousness the delicate issues related women are concerned.

A glaring example of the status given to woman by Islam is found in the personage of Aisha, the wife of the Prophet (S.A.W.), who stands as an ideal character to be emulated by the women of the modern world.

Hazrat Aisha (RA): Islam's Ideal Women

Historical records bear ample testimony to the fact that Aisha (RA) was a genius. Anas bin Malik (RA) reported Allah's Messenger (May peace be upon him) as saying: The excellence of Aisha (RA) over women is like the excellence of *Tharid* over all other foods." (Muslim)

"*Tharid* is a popular dish of Arabs consisting of every thin bread soaked in a broth of meat or sometimes in vegetables. This comparison with *Tharid* shows that the preference of Aisha (RA) here referred to, consisted in the Prophets' (S.A.W.) love for her, because there was no woman in the whole history of Islam who so deeply understood its teachings and so convincingly explained them to others as Aisha (RA) did, and it is possible that the Prophet (S.A.W.) has alluded here to this fact.

Aisha (RA) studied under the Prophets' (S.A.W.) guidance for nine years. The result of this strenuous training and education was that even the great companions of the Prophet (S.A.W.) used to consult her in religious and doctrinal matters. Hazrat Abu Bakr

(RA) used to take assistance from her when he faced same ticklish legal or religious issue.

Abu Musa Ashari (RA) says that whenever, we the companions, of the Prophet (S.A.W.) faced any problem in the matters of knowledge, our approaching to Ashia (RA) for help has never proved in vain. Ata Ibn Asir-Riyah (RA) says that Aisha no doubt had the most excellent legal expertise, sound knowledge and candid opinion among all the companions. Abu Salma (RA), the son of Abdur Rahman Ibn Auf (RA), the son of Abdur Rahman Ibn Auf (RA) gives witness that there was no other person, more knowledgeable about the traditions of the Prophet (SAW), astute jurist and the knower of the conditions of the Qur'anic verses (*Shan-i-Nazool*) and Islamic obligations and their requirements than Aisha (RA). Urwa bin Zubayr (RA) says "I have not found any comparison to Aisha (RA) in the matters related to Law, poetry and medical science. Masruq (RA), who was also the disciple of Aisha (RA), says that I have seen that the great companions (RA) were asking questions to her relating to religious obligations (*Faraiz*). Imam Zuhri (RA) says that if knowledge of all men and the holy wives of the Prophet (S.A.W.) is brought together, still the knowledge of Aisha (RA) will supersede all. It is, perhaps, for the same reason that the Prophet (S.A.W.) has said that people should get instruction of a part of their religion from this noble lady (Aisha), it may perhaps be the knowledge related to the problems of women. Because the scholars are in announcing that had Aisha (RA) not spread this part of the Prophetic (S.A.W.) teaching in the Muslim community, the complete information about this aspect would have been wanting.

The adults, younger boys, and elderly persons all used to ask questions to Aisha (RA). Since the elderly women were feeling shy when asking about matters related to women, they did it sometimes through the help of young children. Still the problems

couldn't be explained. Therefore, Aisha (RA) told them: "I am young mother, therefore, don't hesitate and ask from me your queries afterwards, Aisha (RA) used to solve the problems and used to say:

"Allah is more respectful, still He has explained the implicit matters. Therefore, you must ask the queries relating to religion more openly".

The result was that the very unresolved problems and pitchy questions were solved. Some important disciples of Aisha (RA) are:

Abu Musa Ashari (RA), Umra Ibn 'Aas (RA), Abdullah Ibn Abbas (RA), Abdullah Ibn Zubayr (RA), Abdullah Ibn Umar (RA), Abu Huraira (RA), Rabiah Ibn Umra al-Jarshi (RA), Zayd ibn Khalid Juhani (RA), Harith ibn Abdullah (RA), Sayib ibn Yazid (RA), etc.

Hazrat Aisha (RA) worked as 'Mufti' during the period of Hazrat Abu Bakr's (RA) rule and continued on this position during the reign of Umar and Usman (RA). During the reign of Mnawiyah (RA), a person was sent to Aisha (RA) for resolving the disputes of Syrian scholars on religious matters.

Hazrat Aisha (RA) was well versed with medical sciences and poetry as well. She used to accompany the Prophet (SAW) in the battle fields and cured the injured. During the battle of Ahud, along with other women, Aisha (RA) took care of the injured. On seeing Aisha's (RA) treatment of the injured, a person remarked:

"I was not surprised when I found you at home in poetry and historical records, because your father was master of these subjects. But I was really surprised to see your expertise in medical science?" Aisha replied. "The medical men of Arab used to come to see the Prophet (SAW) about these matters".

She was also well versed with the customs and rituals of the pre-Islamic Arabs, apart from knowing their genealogical accounts. It is for the same reason that whatever information we find in Ahadith about the pre-Islamic customs and rituals, has

been recorded in the authority of Aisha (RA). Aisha (RA) has portrayed the social and cultural patterns of Pagan society of Arabs. The marriages of pre-Islamic Arabs, their divorce system, the matrimonial ceremonies, the marriage says, their rites performed on dead bodies, Hajj performances, fasting procedures etc all of Aisha. The conditions of Medina the battle of Buath and the events, which took place after revelation was given to the prophet (S.A.W.), are all mentioned by Aisha (RA).

Thus 'Aisha (RA) was a great historian of her period. She was also well versed with poetry and its conditions. She had good comprehension of poetry, the requirements of its similes and metaphors etc. As a result master poets of Arabic approached her with their poetry to get instructions from Aisha (RA). A famous Arab poetess Khansa (RA) presented her poetry to 'Aisha (RA). Hassan ibn Thabit (RA) used to approach her of and on. Aisha (RA) used to suggest them corrections. Musa Ibn Talaha (RA) says that there was no one more eloquent than Aisha (RA). Ahnaf Ibn Qais (RA) Amir Mawiyah (RA) and other companions of the Prophet (S.A.W.) have praised Aisha's (RA) oratory and mastery over language. She was well versed with the poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia and used to explain various Qur'anic verses by the help of criticism at times as has been reported by her disciples, Abdullah Ibn Rawahah's poems were memorized by Aisha (RA) The poems of Hussan Ibn Thabit (RA) Kaib Ibn Malik (RA) Khansa (RA) etc were learnt by heart by Aisha (RA). According to Muhammad Ali Sabooni, Aisha (RA) was prepared by the Prophet (S.A.W.) to become a Scholarly model for Muslim women.

Today people think that women are liberated in the West and that the women's liberation movement began in the 20th century. Actually, the women's liberation movement was not begun by women but was revealed by God to a man in the seventh century by the name of Muhammad (peace be upon him), who is known as the last Prophet of Islam. The Qur'an and the

Traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W.) (Hadith or Sunnah) are the sources from which every Muslim woman derives her rights and duties.

Islam, fourteen centuries ago, made women equally accountable to God in glorifying and worshipping Him - setting no limits on her moral progress. Also, Islam established a woman's equality in her humanity with men.

In the Qur'ân, in the first verse of the chapter entitled "Women," God says, "O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it its mate and from them both have spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom you claim (your rights) of one another, and towards the wombs (that bore you). Lo! Allah has been a Watcher over you." (4:1)

Since men and women both came from the same essence, they are equal in their humanity. Women cannot be by nature evil (as some religious believe) or then men would be evil also. Similarly, neither gender can be superior because it would be a contradiction of equality.

In Islam, a woman has the basic freedom of choice and expression based on recognition of her individual personality. First, she is free to choose her religion. The Qur'ân states: "There is no compulsion in religion. Right has been made distinct from error." (2:256)

Women are encouraged in Islam to contribute their opinions and ideas. There are many traditions of the Prophet (S.A.W.) which indicate women would pose questions directly to him and offer their opinions concerning religion, economics and social matters.

A Muslim woman chooses her husband and keeps her name after marriage. A Muslim woman's testimony is valid in legal disputes. In fact, in areas in which women are more familiar, their evidence is conclusive.

The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: "Seeking knowledge is a mandate for every Muslim (male and female)." This includes knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadith as well as other knowledge. Men and women both have the capacity for learning and understanding. Since it is also their obligation to promote good behavior and condemn bad behavior in all spheres of life, Muslim women must acquire the appropriate education to perform this duty in accordance with their own natural talents and interests.

While maintenance of a home, providing support to her husband, and bearing, raising and teaching of children are among the first and very highly regarded roles for a woman, if she has the skills to work outside the home for the good of the community, she may do so as long as her family obligations are met.

Islam recognizes and fosters the natural differences between men and women despite their equality. Some types of work are more suitable for men and other types for women. This in no way diminishes either's effort nor its benefit. God will reward both sexes equally for the value of their work, though it may not necessarily be the same activity.

Concerning motherhood, the Prophet (S.A.W.) said: "Heaven lies under the feet of mothers." This implies that the success of a society can be traced to the mothers that raised it. The first and greatest influence on a person comes from the sense of security, affection, and training received from the mother. Therefore, a woman having children must be educated and conscientious in order to be a skillful parent.

A right given to Muslim women by the Almighty more than 1400 years ago is the right to vote. On any public matter, a woman may voice her opinion and participate in politics. One example, narrated in the Qur'an (60:12), is that Muhammad (pbuh) is told that when the believing women come to him and

swear their allegiance to Islam, he must accept their oath. This established the right of women to select their leader and publicly declare so. Finally, Islam does not forbid a woman from holding important positions in government. Abdur-Rahman Ibn Auf consulted many women before he recommended Uthman Ibn Affan to be the Caliph.

The Qur'ân states: "By the creation of the male and female; Verily, (the ends) ye strive for are diverse." (92:3-4)

In these verses, God declares that He created men and women to be different, with unique roles, functions and skills. As in society, where there is a division of labor, so too in a family; each member has different responsibilities. Generally, Islam upholds that women are entrusted with the nurturing role, and men, with the guardian role. Therefore, women are given the right of financial support.

The Qur'ân states: "Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend of their wealth (for the support of women)." (4:34)

This guardianship and greater financial responsibility is given to men, requires that they provide women with not only monetary support but also physical protection and kind and respectful treatment.

The Muslim woman has the privilege to earn money, the right to own property, to enter into legal contracts and to manage all of her assets in any way she pleases. She can run her own business and no one has any claim on her earnings including her husband. The Qur'ân states:

"And in no wise covet those things in which Allah hath bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others; to men is allotted what they earn, and to women, what they earn; but ask Allah of His bounty, for Allah hath full knowledge of all things." (4:32)

A woman inherits from her relatives. The Qur'ân states: "For men there is a share in what parents and relatives leave, and

for women there is a share of what parents and relatives leave, whether it be little or much - an ordained share." (4:7)

The Qur'ân states: "And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves that you may live in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between you; verily, in that are signs for people who reflect." (30:21)

Marriage is therefore not just a physical or emotional necessity, but in fact, a sign from God! It is a relationship of mutual rights and obligations based on divine guidance. God created men and women with complimentary natures, and in the Qur'an, He laid out a system of laws to support harmonious interaction between the sexes.

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

Clothing provides physical protection and covers the beauty and faults of the body. Likewise, a spouse is viewed this way. Each protects the other and hides the faults and compliments the characteristics of the spouse.

To foster the love and security that comes with marriage, Muslim wives have various rights. The first of the wife's rights is to receive mahr, a gift from the husband which is part of the marriage contract and required for the legality of the marriage.

The second right of a wife is maintenance. Despite any wealth she may have, her husband is obligated to provide her with food, shelter and clothing. He is not forced, however, to spend beyond his capability and his wife is not entitled to make unreasonable demands. The Qur'an states: "Let the man of means spend according to his means, and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him." (65:7)

God tells us men are guardians over women and are afforded the leadership in the family. His responsibility for

obeying God extends to guiding his family to obey God at all times.

A wife's rights also extend beyond material needs. She has the right to kind treatment. The Prophet (S.A.W.) said: "The most perfect believers are the best in conduct. And the best of you are those who are best to their wives." God tells us He created mates and put love, mercy, and tranquillity between them.

Both men and women have a need for companionship and sexual needs, and marriage is designed to fulfill those needs. For one spouse to deny this satisfaction to the other, temptation exists to seek it elsewhere.

With rights come responsibilities. Therefore, wives have certain obligations to their husbands. The Qur'an states: "The good women in the absence of their husbands guard their rights as Allah has enjoined upon them to be guarded." (4:34)

A wife is to keep her husband's secrets and protect their marital privacy. Issues of intimacy or faults of his that would dishonor him, are not to be shared by the wife, just as he is expected to guard her honor.

A wife must also guard her husband's property. She must safeguard his home and possessions, to the best of her ability, from theft or damage. She should manage the household affairs wisely so as to prevent loss or waste. She should not allow anyone to enter the house whom her husband dislikes nor incur any expenses of which her husband disapproves.

A Muslim woman must cooperate and coordinate with her husband. There cannot, however, be cooperation with a man who is disobedient to God. She should not fulfill his requests if he wants her to do something unlawful. A husband also should not take advantage of his wife, but be considerate of her needs and happiness.

The Qur'ân states: "And it becomes not a believing man or a believing women, when Allah and His Messenger (Muhammad)

have decided on an affair (for them), that they should (after that) claim any say in their affair; and whoso is rebellious to Allah and His Messenger, he verily goes astray in error manifest." (33:36)

The Muslim woman was given a role, duties and rights 1400 years ago that most women do not enjoy today, even in the West. These are from God and are designed to keep balance in society; what may seem unjust or missing in one place is compensated for or explained in another place. Islam is a complete way of life.

References and End Notes

¹ *Ibid.*, Patel, 1997, *Ibid.* p. 186.

² *Ibid.*, Ahmad, 1980.

³ *Ibid.*, p-187 in Niroj Sinha, *op.cit.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Excerpts from Mohammed Rabat Hasan Nada, *Tameer-i-Hayat*, Lucknow, November 1998, p. 13.

⁶ Abdul Hamid. Siddiqi, Tr. *Sahih Muslim*, Kitab Bhavan, New Delhi, vol.4, 1991, p. 1279.