

The Status of Woman in Islam

by
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I. INTRODUCTION

The status of women in society is neither a new issue nor is it a fully settled one.

The position of Islam on this issue has been among the subjects presented to the Western reader with the least objectivity.

This paper is intended to provide a brief and authentic exposition of what Islam stands for in this regard. The teachings of Islam are based essentially on the Quran (God's revelation) and Hadeeth (elaboration by Prophet Muhammad).

The Quran and the Hadeeth, properly and unbiasedly understood, provide the basic source of authentication for any position or view which is attributed to Islam.

The paper starts with a brief survey of the status of women in the pre-Islamic era. It then focuses on these major questions: What is the position of Islam regarding the status of woman in society? How similar or different is that position from "the spirit of the time," which was dominant when Islam was revealed? How would this compare with the "rights" which were finally gained by woman in recent decades?

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

One major objective of this paper is to provide a fair evaluation of what Islam contributed (or failed to contribute) toward the restoration of woman's dignity and rights. In order to achieve this objective, it may be useful to review briefly how women were treated in general in previous civilizations and religions, especially those which preceded Islam (Pre-610 C.E.). Part of the information provided here, however, describes the status of woman as late as the nineteenth century, more than twelve centuries after Islam.

Women in Ancient Civilization

Describing the status of the Indian woman, Encyclopedia Britannica states:

In India, subjection was a cardinal principle. Day and night must women be held by their protectors in a state of dependence says Manu. The rule of inheritance was agnatic, that is descent traced through males to the exclusion of females.

In Hindu scriptures, the description of a good wife is as follows: "a woman whose mind, speech and body are kept in subjection, acquires high renown in this world, and, in the next, the same abode with her husband."

In Athens, women were not better off than either the Indian or the Roman women.

"Athenian women were always minors, subject to some male - to their father, to their brother, or to some of their male kin.

Her consent in marriage was not generally thought to be necessary and "she was obliged to submit to the wishes of her parents, and receive from them her husband and her lord, even though he were stranger to her."

A Roman wife was described by an historian as: "a babe, a minor, a ward, a person incapable of doing or acting anything according to her own individual taste, a person continually under the tutelage and guardianship of her husband."

In the Encyclopedia Britannica, we find a summary of the legal status of women in the Roman civilization:

In Roman Law a woman was even in historic times completely dependent. If married she and her property passed into the power of her husband . . . the wife was the purchased property of her husband, and like a slave acquired only for his benefit. A woman could not exercise any civil or public office . could not be a witness, surety, tutor, or curator; she could not adopt or be adopted, or make will or contract. Among the Scandinavian races women were:

under perpetual tutelage, whether married or unmarried. As late as the Code of Christian V, at the end of the 17th Century, it was enacted that if a woman married without the consent of her tutor he might have, if he wished, administration and usufruct of her goods during her life.

According to the English Common Law:

...all real property which a wife held at the time of a marriage became a possession of her husband. He was entitled to the rent from the land and to any profit which might be made from operating the estate during the joint life of the spouses. As time passed, the English courts devised means to forbid a husband's transferring real property without the consent of his wife, but he still retained the right to manage it and to receive the money which it produced. As to a wife's personal property, the husband's power was complete. He had the right to spend it as he saw fit.

Only by the late nineteenth Century did the situation start to improve. "By a series of acts starting with the Married women's Property Act in 1870, amended in 1882 and 1887, married women achieved the right to own property and to enter contracts on a par with spinsters, widows, and divorcees." As late as the Nineteenth Century an authority in ancient law, Sir Henry Maine, wrote: "No society which preserves any tincture of Christian institutions is likely to restore to married women the personal liberty conferred on them by the Middle Roman Law."

In his essay *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill wrote:

We are continually told that civilization and Christianity have restored to the woman her just rights. Meanwhile the wife is the actual bondservant of her husband; no less so, as far as the legal obligation goes, than slaves commonly so called.

Before moving on to the Quranic decrees concerning the status of woman, a few Biblical decrees may shed more light on the subject, thus providing a better basis for an impartial evaluation. In the Mosaic Law, the wife was betrothed. Explaining this concept, the Encyclopedia Biblica states: "To betroth a wife to oneself meant simply to acquire possession of her by payment of the purchase money; the betrothed is a girl for whom the purchase money has been paid." From the legal point of view, the consent of the girl was not necessary for the validation of her marriage. "The girl's consent is unnecessary and the need for it is nowhere suggested in the Law."

As to the right of divorce, we read in the Encyclopedia Biblica: "The woman being man's property, his right to divorce her follows as a matter of course." The right to divorce was held only by man. "In the Mosaic Law divorce was a privilege of the husband only"

The position of the Christian Church until recent centuries seems to have been influenced by both the Mosaic Law and by the streams of thought that were dominant in its contemporary cultures. In their book, *Marriage East and West*, David and Vera Mace wrote:

Let no one suppose, either, that our Christian heritage is free of such slighting judgments. It would be hard to find anywhere a collection of more degrading references to the female sex than the early Church Fathers provide. Lecky, the famous historian, speaks of (these fierce incentives which form so conspicuous and so grotesque a portion of the writing of the Fathers . . . woman was represented as the door of hell, as the mother of all human ills. She should be ashamed at the very thought that she is a woman. She should live in continual penance on account of the curses she has brought upon the world. She should be ashamed of her dress, for it is the memorial of her fall. She should be especially ashamed of her beauty, for it is the most potent instrument of the devil). One of the most scathing of these attacks on woman is that of Tertullian: Do you know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that forbidden tree; you are the first deserters of the divine law; you are she who persuades him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert - that is death - even the Son of God had to die). Not only did the church affirm the inferior status of woman, it deprived her of legal rights she had previously enjoyed.

III. WOMAN IN ISLAM

In the midst of the darkness that engulfed the world, the divine revelation echoed in the wide desert of Arabia with a fresh, noble, and universal message to humanity: **"O Mankind, keep your duty to your Lord who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate (of same kind) and from them twain has spread a multitude of men and women" (Quran 4: 1).**

A scholar who pondered about this verse states: "It is believed that there is no text, old or new, that deals with the humanity of the woman from all aspects with such amazing brevity, eloquence, depth, and originality as this divine decree."

Stressing this noble and natural conception, the Quran states:

He (God) it is who did create you from a single soul and therefrom did create his mate, that he might dwell with her (in love)....(Quran 7:189)

The Creator of heavens and earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves ...Quran 42:1 1

And Allah has given you mates of your own nature, and has given you from your mates, children and grandchildren, and has made provision of good things for you. Is it then in vanity that they believe and in the grace of God that they disbelieve? Quran 16:72

The rest of this paper outlines the position of Islam regarding the status of woman in society from its various aspects - spiritually, socially, economically and politically.

1. The Spiritual Aspect

The Quran provides clear-cut evidence that woman is completely equated with man in the sight of God in terms of her rights and responsibilities. The Quran states:

"Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds" (Quran 74:38). It also states:

...So their Lord accepted their prayers, (saying): I will not suffer to be lost the work of any of you whether male or female. You proceed one from another ...(Quran 3: 195).

Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily to him will We give a new life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the their actions. (Quran 16:97, see also 4:124).

Woman according to the Quran is not blamed for Adam's first mistake. Both were jointly wrong in their disobedience to God, both repented, and both were forgiven. (Quran 2:36, 7:20 - 24). In one verse in fact (20:121), Adam specifically, was blamed.

In terms of religious obligations, such as the Daily Prayers, Fasting, Poor-due, and Pilgrimage, woman is no different from man. In some cases indeed, woman has certain advantages over man. For example, the woman is exempted from the daily prayers and from fasting during her menstrual periods and forty days after childbirth. She is also exempted from fasting during her pregnancy and when she is nursing her baby if there is any threat to her health or her baby's. If the missed fasting is obligatory (during the month of Ramadan), she can make up for the missed days whenever she can. She does not have to make up for the prayers missed for any of the above reasons. Although women can and did go into the mosque during the days of the prophet and thereafter attendance at the Friday congregational prayers is optional for them while it is mandatory for men (on Friday).

This is clearly a tender touch of the Islamic teachings for they are considerate of the fact that a woman may be nursing her baby or caring for him, and thus may be unable to go out to the mosque at the time of the prayers. They also take into account the physiological and psychological changes associated with her natural female functions.

2. The Social Aspect

a) As a child and an adolescent

Despite the social acceptance of female infanticide among some Arabian tribes, the Quran forbade this custom, and considered it a crime like any other murder.

"And when the female (infant) buried alive - is questioned, for what crime she was killed." (Quran 81:8-9).

Criticizing the attitudes of such parents who reject their female children, the Quran states:

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

Far from saving the girl's life so that she may later suffer injustice and inequality, Islam requires kind and just treatment for her. Among the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (P.) in this regard are the following:

Whosoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favor his son over her, God will enter him into Paradise. (Ibn Hanbal, No. 1957).

Whosoever supports two daughters till they mature, he and I will come in the day of judgment as this (and he pointed with his two fingers held together).

A similar Hadeeth deals in like manner with one who supports two sisters. (Ibn-Hanbal, No. 2104).

The right of females to seek knowledge is not different from that of males. Prophet Muhammad (P.) said:

"Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim". (AlBayhaqi). Muslim as used here including both males and females.

b) As a wife:

The Quran clearly indicates that marriage is sharing between the two halves of the society, and that its objectives, beside perpetuating human life, are emotional well-being and spiritual harmony. Its bases are love and mercy.

Among the most impressive verses in the Quran about marriage is the following.

"And among His signs is this: That He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest, peace of mind in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are signs for people who reflect." (Quran 30:2 1).

According to Islamic Law, women cannot be forced to marry anyone without their consent.

Ibn Abbas reported that a girl came to the Messenger of God, Muhammad (P.), and she reported that her father had forced her to marry without her consent. The Messenger of God gave her the choice . . . (between accepting the marriage or invalidating it). (Ibn Hanbal No. 2469). In another version, the girl said: "Actually I accept this marriage but I wanted to let women know that parents have no right (to force a husband on them)" (Ibn Maja, No. 1873).

Besides all other provisions for her protection at the time of marriage, it was specifically decreed that woman has the full right to her Mahr, a marriage gift, which is presented to her by her husband and is included in the nuptial contract, and that such ownership does not transfer to her father or husband. The concept of Mahr in Islam is neither an actual or symbolic price for the woman, as was the case in certain cultures, but rather it is a gift symbolizing love and affection.

The rules for married life in Islam are clear and in harmony with upright human nature. In consideration of the physiological and psychological make-up of man and woman, both have equal rights and claims on one another, except for one responsibility, that of leadership. This is a matter which is natural in any collective life and which is consistent with the nature of man.

The Quran thus states:

"And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above them." (Quran 2:228).

Such degree is Quiwama (maintenance and protection). This refers to that natural difference between the sexes which entitles the weaker sex to protection. It implies no superiority or advantage before the law. Yet, man's role of leadership in relation to his family does not mean the husband's dictatorship over his wife. Islam emphasizes the importance of taking counsel and mutual agreement in family decisions. The Quran gives us an example:

"...If they (husband wife) desire to wean the child by mutual consent and (after) consultation, there is no blame on them..." (Quran 2: 233).

Over and above her basic rights as a wife comes the right which is emphasized by the Quran and is strongly recommended by the Prophet (P); kind treatment and companionship.

The Quran states:

"...But consort with them in kindness, for if you hate them it may happen that you hate a thing wherein God has placed much good." (Quran 4: 19).

Prophet Muhammad. (P) said:

The best of you is the best to his family and I am the best among you to my family.

The most perfect believers are the best in conduct and best of you are those who are best to their wives. (Ibn-Hanbal, No. 7396)

Behold, many women came to Muhammad's wives complaining against their husbands (because they beat them) - - those (husbands) are not the best of you.

As the woman's right to decide about her marriage is recognized, so also her right to seek an end for an unsuccessful marriage is recognized. To provide for the stability of the family, however, and in order to protect it from hasty decisions under temporary emotional stress, certain steps and waiting periods should be observed by men and women seeking divorce. Considering the relatively more emotional nature of women, a good reason for asking for divorce should be brought before the judge. Like the man, however, the woman can divorce her husband with out resorting to the court, if the nuptial contract allows that.

More specifically, some aspects of Islamic Law concerning marriage and divorce are interesting and are worthy of separate treatment.

When the continuation of the marriage relationship is impossible for any reason, men are still taught to seek a gracious end for it.

The Quran states about such cases:

When you divorce women, and they reach their prescribed term, then retain them in kindness and retain them not for injury so that you transgress (the limits). (Quran 2:231). (See also Quran 2:229 and 33:49).

c) As a mother:

Islam considered kindness to parents next to the worship of God.

"And we have enjoined upon man (to be good) to his parents: His mother bears him in weakness upon weakness..." (Quran 31:14) (See also Quran 46:15, 29:8).

Moreover, the Quran has a special recommendation for the good treatment of mothers:

"Your Lord has decreed that you worship none save Him, and that you be kind to your parents. . ." (Quran 17:23).

A man came to Prophet Muhammad (P) asking:

O Messenger of God, who among the people is the most worthy of my good company? The Prophet (P) said, Your mother. The man said then who else: The Prophet (P) said, Your mother. The man asked, Then who else? Only then did the Prophet (P) say, Your father. (Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

A famous saying of The Prophet is "Paradise is at the feet of mothers." (In Al'Nisa'l, Ibn Majah, Ahmad).

"It is the generous (in character) who is good to women, and it is the wicked who insults them."

3. The Economic Aspect

Islam decreed a right of which woman was deprived both before Islam and after it (even as late as this century), the right of independent ownership. According to Islamic Law, woman's right to her money, real estate, or other properties is fully acknowledged. This right undergoes no change whether she is single or married. She retains her full rights to buy, sell, mortgage or lease any or all her properties. It is nowhere suggested in the Law that a woman is a minor simply because she is a female. It is also noteworthy that such right applies to her properties before marriage as well as to whatever she acquires thereafter.

With regard to the woman's right to seek employment it should be stated first that Islam regards her role in society as a mother and a wife as the most sacred and essential one. Neither maids nor baby-sitters can possibly take the mother's place as the educator of an upright, complex free, and carefully-reared children. Such a noble and vital role, which largely shapes the future of nations, cannot be regarded as "idleness".

However, there is no decree in Islam which forbids woman from seeking employment whenever there is a necessity for it, especially in positions which fit her nature and in which society needs her most. Examples of these professions are nursing, teaching (especially for children), and medicine. Moreover, there is no restriction on benefiting from woman's exceptional talent in any field. Even for the position of a judge, where there may be a tendency to doubt the woman's fitness for the post due to her more emotional nature, we find early Muslim scholars such as Abu-Hanifa and Al-Tabary holding there is nothing wrong with it. In addition, Islam restored to woman the right of inheritance, after she herself was an object of inheritance in some cultures. Her share is completely hers and no one can make any claim on it, including her father and her husband.

"Unto men (of the family) belongs a share of that which Parents and near kindred leave, and unto women a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be a little or much - a determinate share." (Quran 4:7).

Her share in most cases is one-half the man's share, with no implication that she is worth half a man! It would seem grossly inconsistent after the overwhelming evidence of woman's equitable treatment in Islam, which was discussed in the preceding pages, to make such an inference. This variation in inheritance rights is only consistent with the variations in financial responsibilities of man and woman according to the Islamic Law. Man in Islam is fully responsible for the maintenance of his wife, his children, and in some cases of his needy relatives, especially the females. This responsibility is neither waived nor reduced because of his wife's wealth or because of her access to any personal income gained from work, rent, profit, or any other legal means.

Woman, on the other hand, is far more secure financially and is far less burdened with any claims on her possessions. Her possessions before marriage do not transfer to her husband and

she even keeps her maiden name. She has no obligation to spend on her family out of such properties or out of her income after marriage. She is entitled to the "Mahr" which she takes from her husband at the time of marriage. If she is divorced, she may get an alimony from her ex-husband.

An examination of the inheritance law within the overall framework of the Islamic Law reveals not only justice but also an abundance of compassion for woman.

4. The Political Aspect

Any fair investigation of the teachings of Islam o- into the history of the Islamic civilization will surely find a clear evidence of woman's equality with man in what we call today "political rights".

This includes the right of election as well as the nomination to political offices. It also includes woman's right to participate in public affairs. Both in the Quran and in Islamic history we find examples of women who participated in serious discussions and argued even with the Prophet (P) himself, (see Quran 58: 14 and 60: 10-12).

During the Caliphate of Omar Ibn al-Khattab, a woman argued with him in the mosque, proved her point, and caused him to declare in the presence of people: "A woman is right and Omar is wrong."

Although not mentioned in the Quran, one Hadeeth of the Prophet is interpreted to make woman ineligible for the position of head of state. The Hadeeth referred to is roughly translated: "A people will not prosper if they let a woman be their leader." This limitation, however, has nothing to do with the dignity of woman or with her rights. It is rather, related to the natural differences in the biological and psychological make-up of men and women.

According to Islam, the head of the state is no mere figurehead. He leads people in the prayers, especially on Fridays and festivities; he is continuously engaged in the process of decision-making pertaining to the security and well-being of his people. This demanding position, or any similar one, such as the Commander of the Army, is generally inconsistent with the physiological and psychological make-up of woman in general. It is a medical fact that during their monthly periods and during their pregnancies, women undergo various physiological and psychological changes. Such changes may occur during an emergency situation, thus affecting her decision, without considering the excessive strain which is produced. Moreover, some decisions require a maximum of rationality and a minimum of emotionality - a requirement which does not coincide with the instinctive nature of women.

Even in modern times, and in the most developed countries, it is rare to find a woman in the position of a head of state acting as more than a figurehead, a woman commander of the armed services, or even a proportionate number of women representatives in parliaments, or similar bodies. One can not possibly ascribe this to backwardness of various nations or to any constitutional limitation on woman's right to be in such a position as a head of state or as a member of the parliament. It is more logical to explain the present situation in terms of the natural and indisputable differences between man and woman, a difference which does not

imply any "supremacy" of one over the other. The difference implies rather the "complementary" roles of both the sexes in life.

IV. CONCLUSION

The first part of this paper deals briefly with the position of various religions and cultures on the issue under investigation. Part of this exposition extends to cover the general trend as late as the nineteenth century, nearly 1300 years after the Quran set forth the Islamic teachings.

In the second part of the paper, the status of women in Islam is briefly discussed. Emphasis in this part is placed on the original and authentic sources of Islam. This represents the standard according to which degree of adherence of Muslims can be judged. It is also a fact that during the downward cycle of Islamic Civilization, such teachings were not strictly adhered to by many people who profess to be Muslims.

Such deviations were unfairly exaggerated by some writers, and the worst of this, were superficially taken to represent the teachings of "Islam" to the Western reader without taking the trouble to make any original and unbiased study of the authentic sources of these teachings.

Even with such deviations three facts are worth mentioning:

1. The history of Muslims is rich with women of great achievements in all walks of life from as early as the seventh century (B.C.)

2. It is impossible for anyone to justify any mistreatment of woman by any decree of rule embodied in the Islamic Law, nor could anyone dare to cancel, reduce, or distort the clear-cut legal rights of women given in Islamic Law.

3. Throughout history, the reputation, chastity and maternal role of Muslim women were objects of admiration by impartial observers.

It is also worthwhile to state that the status which women reached during the present era was not achieved due to the kindness of men or due to natural progress. It was rather achieved through a long struggle and sacrifice on woman's part and only when society needed her contribution and work, more especial!; during the two world wars, and due to the escalation of technological change.

In the case of Islam such compassionate and dignified status was decreed, not because it reflects the environment of the seventh century, nor under the threat or pressure of women and their organizations, but rather because of its intrinsic truthfulness.

If this indicates anything, it would demonstrate the divine origin of the Quran and the truthfulness of the message of Islam, which, unlike human philosophies and ideologies, was far from proceeding from its human environment, a message which established such humane principles as neither grew obsolete during the course of time and after these many centuries, nor can become obsolete in the future. After all, this is the message of the All-Wise and all-

knowing God whose wisdom and knowledge are far beyond the ultimate in human thought and progress.

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The Muslim Woman's Dress

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This paper is based on Muhammad Nasiruddin Al-Albani's Hijabul-Marat-il-Muslimah Fil Kitab Wassunnah, 3rd Printing, Al-Maktab-ul-Islami, Beirut, Lebanon 1389 A.H. (1969).

Other sources checked include "Tafsir" of the Quran including those by Ibn-Kathir, Yusuf Ali, and Sayyid Qutb; authorities in Fiqh including Sayyid Sabiq's Fiqh-us-sunnah and Yusuf Al-Qaradawi's Al-Halal Walharam Fil-Islam, and a reference on Hadith from Mishkat-ul-Masabeeh.

INTRODUCTION

To some as a subject the Muslim women's dress may sound trivial. The shari'ah, however, assigns it moral, social, and legal dimensions.

One basic requirement to be a true believer according to the Quran is to make one's opinions, feelings, and inclinations subservient to whatever Allah and his Messenger have decided:

It is not befitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Apostle to have any option about their decision: if any one disobeys Allah and His Apostle, he is indeed on a clearly wrong path. Surat-ul-Ahzab (33) 36

Placing, therefore, one's personal opinions, feelings, or inclinations above or at the same level as the commandments of Allah is the ultimate of human pride and vanity. This means, in effect, that a mortal is responding to Allah's guidance saying: "O my creator! Your Law is Your Own opinion. I have my own opinion, and I know best what is good for me." This attitude is befitting for unbelievers and hypocrites, but not for a believer no matter how imperfect (all are!) one may be in implementing Islam in one's life. (2) The exposition of truth in an honest and straight forward way may thus cause some unease even to good and sincere Muslims. It may seem safer and diplomatic to avoid the issue altogether, or to present it in a diluted and vague way. It is even safer and more 'diplomatic' to

(2) A distinction should be made between, a) the acceptance of Allah's word as true and supreme in itself while not succeeding to implement it fully in one's life hoping and trying to reach that goal, and b) regarding one's own opinions or other social values and pressures as

more valid than Allah's injunctions and trying to find various excuses to justify one's breaking of the law of Allah. It is the latter attitude which is not only blameworthy but akin to unbelief.

Explicitly or implicitly condone each others' infractions, to help each other find excuses and to rationalize our disobedience to Allah subhanahu wata'ala. This attitude is neither new nor it is without consequences. As the Quran presents it:

Curses were pronounced on those among the children of Israel who rejected faith, by the tongue of Dawood (David) and of Esa (Jesus) the son of Mary: because they disobeyed and persisted in excesses.

Nor did they (usually) forbid one another the iniquities which they committed: evil indeed were the deeds which they did. Surat-ul-Maidah (5) 81 -82

REQUIREMENTS IN DRESS

THE FIRST REQUIREMENT: Extent of Covering

The dress must cover the whole body except for the areas specifically exempted. The Quran states:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O you believers! Turn all toward Allah that you may attain bliss. Surat-un-Nur (24) 30-31

These 'ayahs contain, among other thing, two main injunctions:

1. A Muslim woman should not display her beauty and adornment (zeenah) except for "that which must ordinarily appear of it" (3) (ma dhahara minha), or "that which is apparent." (4) The word zeenah (5) lends itself to two related meanings: a) natural or bodily beauty, (6) and, b) acquired adornment such as rings, bracelets, and clothes. The part of zeenah, exempted from the above injunction, was interpreted in two ways:

a. The face and the hands. This is the interpretation of the majority of the jurists, past and present. (7) This interpretation is confirmed by ijma' (consensus) that a Muslim woman is allowed by Islam to uncover her face and hands during pilgrimage and even during the prayers, while the rest of her body is regarded as 'awrah (that which should be covered). (8) This interpretation is based on the authority of Prophet Muhammad (Allah's blessing be upon

him), especially the hadith in which he says: If the woman reaches the age of puberty, No (part of her body) should be seen but this - and he pointed to his face and hands."

b. Whatever appears of the woman's body owing to uncontrollable factors such as the blowing of the wind, or out of

(3) Yusuf Ali, op. cit. p.904.

(4) M.M. Pickthall, The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, p 25.

(5) According to Lisan-ul-'Arab (Dictionary of Arabic language), the term *zeenah* includes "all that which beautifies," quoted in (Mrs.) Ne'mat Sidqy. At- Tabarruj, 17th Printing. Dar-ul-l'tisam, Egypt, 1975 pp.20-21.

(6) The term *zeenah* is used in the Quran to refer to children, wealth, and natural beauty in Allah's creation. See example Quran 17:47, 16:8, 37:6 and 3:14.

(7) This is the interpretation of Malik, Ash-Shafi'i, Abu Hanifa and a version of Ahmad b. Hanbal. See Al-Albani op. cit., pp.41.42.

(8) Al-Albani provides ample evidence that the covering of the face and hands is not required. Suffice it to say that the woman is allowed to uncover her face and hands during such spiritual acts as the prayers and pilgrimage. See pp.25-46.

(9) necessity such as the bracelets or even the outer clothes themselves.

2. The headcovers (*khumur*) should be drawn over the neck slits (*juyoob*). *Khumur* is the plural of the Arabic word "*khimar*" which means a headcover. (10) *Juyoob* is the plural of the Arabic word "*jaiyb*" (a derivative of *jawb* or cutting) refers to the neck slit (of the dress). This means that the headcover should be drawn so as to cover not only the hair, but it should also be drawn over the neck and to be extended so as to cover the bosom.

THE SECOND REQUIREMENT: Looseness

The dress must be loose enough so as not to describe the shape of a woman's body. This is consistent with the intent of the 'ayahs cited above (24: 30-31) and is surely a crucial aspect of hiding *zeenah*. Even moderately-tight clothes which cover the whole body do describe the shape of such attractive parts of the woman's body as the bustline, the waist, the buttocks, the back and the thighs. If these are not part of the natural beauty or *zeenah* what else is?

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) once received a thick garment as a gift. He gave it to Osamah b. Zayd, who in turn gave it to his wife. When asked by the Prophet why he did not wear it, Osamah indicated that he gave it to his wife. The Prophet then said to Osamah "ask her to use a *gholalah* under it (the garment) for I fear that it (the garment) may describe the size of her bones." (11) The word *gholalah* in Arabic means a thick fabric worn under the dress to prevent it from describing the shape of the body.

A highly desirable way of concealing the shape of the body is to wear a cloak over the garment. The Prophet (PBUH), however,

(9) One weakness with this more stringent interpretation is that "uncontrollable" factors are automatically forgiven without any need for specification. The fact that Quran 24.31 exempts from all "zeenah" that which is regarded as "ma dhahara minha" is itself an indication of a concession. This concession is confirmed by the Hadith (related to Asma' as will be seen in the discussion of the third requirement. See Al-Albani, Ibid., pp.25-46.

(10) According to Al-Albani., this meaning of "khirmar" was explained in such authorities as Ibn-ul-Atheer's An-Nihayah and Tafseer-ul-Hafiz Ibn-Kathir and others. Al Albani reports that he knows of no difference on this point. See Al-Albani, Ibid, pp.33-34. (11) This Hadith appears in Musnad Ahmad, also in Al-Bayhaqi, and is confirmed in other sources of Hadith such as Sunan Abi-Dawood. See Al-Albani, Ibid, p.59-63.

indicated that if the woman's dress meets the Islamic standards it suffices (without a cloak) even for the validity of prayers. (12)

THE THIRD REQUIREMENT: Thickness

The dress should be thick enough so as not to show the color of the skin it covers, or the shape of the body which it is supposed to hide. The purpose of 'ayah (24:31) is to hide the Muslim women's body except ma dhahara minha (the face and hands). It is obvious that this purpose cannot be served if the dress is thin enough so as to reveal the color of the skin or the shape or beauty of the body. This is eloquently explained by **Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): "In later (generations) of my ummah there will be women who will be dressed but naked. On top of their heads (what looks) like camel, humps. Curse them for they are truly cursed."** In another version he added that they "will not enter into paradise or (even) get a smell of it." (13)

At one occasion Asma' (daughter of Abu-Bakr) was visiting her sister 'A'ishah, wife of the Prophet. When he noted that Asma's dress was not thick enough he turned his face away in anger and said, "If the woman reaches the age of puberty, no part of her body should be seen, but this, and he pointed to his face and his hands." (14)

THE FOURTH REQUIREMENT: Overall Appearance

The dress should not be such that it attracts men's attention to the woman's beauty. The Quran clearly prescribes the requirements of the woman's dress for the purpose of concealing zeenah (adornment). How could such zeenah be concealed if the dress is designed in a way that it attracts men's eyes to the woman? This is why the Quran addressing the Prophet's wives as the examples for Muslim women says:

"Bedizen not yourselves with the bedizenment of the Time of Ignorance... " (15)

(12) See Sayyid Sabiq's Fiqh-us-Sunnah, Dar-ul-Kitab-il-'Arabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 1969, vol.1. p.127.

(13) At-Tabarani and Sahih Muslim. See al-Albani, op. cit., p.56.

(14) At another occasion when the Prophet (PBUH) saw a bride in a thin dress he said, "she is not a woman who believes in Surat-un-Noor who wears this. "Surat-un-Noor is the Surah where the main requirements of the Muslim woman's dress are outlined. Still on another occasion some women from the tribe of Bani Tameem came to visit 'A'ishah in thin clothes. Upon seeing them, the Prophet (PBUH) said, "If you are believers, then these are not believers' clothing." See Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, op. cit, p.180.

Additional Requirements (16)

In addition to the above four main and clearly spelled out requirements, there are other requirements whose specific applications may vary with time and location. These include:

1. The dress should not be similar to what is known as a male costume. **Ibn 'Abbas narrated that "The Prophet (PBUH) cursed the men who act like women and the women who act like men." (17)**

2. It should not be similar to what is known as the costume of unbelievers. This requirement is derived from the general rule of Shari'ah that Muslims should have their distinct personality and should differentiate their practices and appearance from unbelievers.(18)

3. It should not be a dress of fame, pride and vanity. Such fame may be sought by wearing an excessively fancy dress as a status symbol or an excessively ragged dress to gain others' admiration of one's selflessness. Both motives are improper by Islamic standards.

The Prophet (PBUH) says:

"Whoever wears a dress of fame in this world, Allah will clothe him with a dress of humiliation in the day of resurrection, then set it afire." (19)

(15) The term used in the Quran is tabarruj which means displaying of beauty. Another derivative of tabarruj is burooj which is used in the Qur'an (e g 4:77, 15:16, 25:61, 85:1). Burooj means towers because of their clear visibility. Clear "Visibility" of the woman may result from the type of dress, the way she walks, or the way she behaves. (16) According to Al-Albani, a further requirement is that the dress should not be perfumed. In fact, this requirement extends beyond dress. There are several ahadeeth which make it clearly forbidden for a Muslim woman to wear perfumes when she goes out of her home even if she is going to the mosque. See Al-Albani. Op. Cit., pp. 64-66

(17) Al-Bukhari, Abu-Dawood, Ahmad, Ad-darimi. For this and other ahadeeth on the same subject see Al-Albani, Ibid, pp.66-69

(18) For an excellent discussion of this principle on the basis of Quran and Sunnah, see Al-Albani, Ibid, pp.78-109.

(19) For this and other versions of the hadeeth see Al-Albani, Ibid. pp. 110-111

REQUIREMENTS OF MUSLIM MEN'S CLOTHING

It should be noted that the basic requirements of the Muslim woman's dress apply as well to the Muslim man's clothing with the difference being mainly in degree. This can best be understood by looking into what Islam defines as 'awrah which refers to the part of the body that should be covered at all times unless there is an expressed exception. The covering of 'awrah is also a condition for the validity of prayers for both men and women.

It has been agreed among jurists on the basis of the Quran and Sunnah that 'awrah for the woman is defined as the whole body except for the face and hands. For the man, the 'awrah is defined as the area between the navel and the knees. (20)

Within the definition of 'awrah for men and women, all the four basic requirements discussed in this paper are essentially the same:

1. Man should fully cover his 'awrah.
2. Men's clothes should be loose enough so as not to describe what he is covering (his 'awrah).
3. They should be thick enough so as not to describe the color of the skin or the parts required to be covered.
4. They should not be designed in a way to attract attention. The basic rule of modesty and avoiding "showoff" applies to all believers' men and women.

The three other additional requirements discussed under the Muslim woman's code of dress apply to men's clothes as well:

- 1. They should not be similar to what is known as the female dress.**
- 2. They should not be similar to what could be identified as the dress of unbelievers.**
- 3. They should not be clothes of fame, pride, and vanity.**

In addition to the above limitations on the Muslim man's clothes, men are not allowed to wear silk and gold. This does not apply to women.

(20) Difference exists, however, among jurists whether the knees and the thighs should be included in the definition of the man's 'awrah. For a good discussion on the evidence related to both views, see Sayyid Sabiq's Fiqh-us-Sunnah, op. cit, vol. 1, pp.125-127

CONCLUSION

There are surely many other issues pertaining to the subjects that are not covered in this paper. Its main focus is on the documented injunctions of Allah (subhanahu wat'ala) as derived from His word (the Quran) and as explained by the chosen Messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him). These injunctions are to be complied with by all Muslim men and women; and in case of transgression, they will be held accountable in the hereafter. Truly husbands, fathers, and mothers do have an obligation to remind, exhort and help each other achieve the pleasure of Allah and to avoid His wrath. In the final analysis, however, it is not coercion or force which is likely to bring about obedience to Allah. It is but, the love of Allah, the acceptance of His guidance as the supreme Truth even if contrary to one's personal opinions, that will bring about the change.

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For Muslim men and women, - For believing men and women, For devout men and women, For true men and women, For men and women who are Patient and constant, for men And women who humble themselves, For men and women who give In charity, for men and women Who fast (and deny themselves), For men and women who Guard their chastity, and For men and women who Engage much in God's praise, - For them has God prepared Forgiveness and great reward.

For Muslim men and women, - For believing men and women, For devout men and women, For true men and women, For men and women who are Patient and constant, for men And women who humble themselves, For men and women who give In charity, for men and women Who fast (and deny themselves), For men and women who Guard their chastity, and For men and women who Engage much in God's praise, - For them has God prepared Forgiveness and great reward Quran, Al-Ahzab 33:35