

## Discourse Six: The Social Status of Women

From the day the human race appeared upon this globe and lived in a community, it needed the female sex for both the survival of social life and natural generation. Men were never able to do without women.

Human societies—both savage and civilized—have continually followed a course of communal life with a series of regulations that have included customs and traditions, and just or cruel laws. Hence, in every tribe and every nation, specific regulations have been carried out regarding women.

Just as all laws and traditions in human societies stem from a series of natural factors and conditions (such as precedents in climate, regional, and environmental demands), the law of evolution that reigns over nature also manifests itself in and has an effect on social law which is an offspring of nature.

Prevailing laws regarding women are not an exception and evolve in the course of human life and follow—albeit slowly—the course of perfection.

The status of women in societies and its evolution may be summarized in three stages:

### **Woman, a humanlike animal!**

Stage one: In many nomadic human societies, women were not considered a part of the human society and had no social status or value. Transactions with women were like transactions with dumb beasts.

Because of the mentality of utilization and exploitation and in order to resolve their needs, humans employ wild animals that live in their environments, use them to pursue their natural aims and take possession of them for their mortal interests.

They use the meat, skin, fleece, fur, bones, milk, blood, power, abilities, and even the droppings of these animals. However, although they give them a place in their society and nurture them, they do not allow them any rights.

If humans provide domesticated animals the necessary instruments for eating, drinking, and coupling

and resolve their needs, it is for the purpose of obtaining the benefits that they expect of them, not because they are living beings that, like humans, possess understanding and rights.

If a domestic animal employed by humans is mistreated or hurt and the offender is rebuked or punished, it is because the offender has violated the rights of the owner of the animal—a criminal act—not because the animal in question has any rights in the human society.

In addition, in order to achieve welfare and ease, humans kill billions of harmful microbes and insects using chemical toxicants and in order to eat and resolve their other needs, they slaughter millions of birds and herbivores and in doing this they feel not the slightest bit of remorse.

In primeval human societies, women had the same situation. As various segments of history reveal and is also manifest from the remnants of this practice among some tribes, many ages have passed in the life of humankind—maybe millions of years—where women had the status of a parasite and were not awarded membership in human societies.

The thought was that the sole reason for their existence in the society was to meet a series of needs of the society not so that they could enjoy their own social rights. Thus, ‘lowly’ and ‘worthless’ tasks were given to women, such as carrying chattels during the tribe’s migration between summer and winter settlements, carrying firewood, catching fish, serving men, training children, and nursing the sick.

As long as a woman lived in her father’s or guardian’s house, not only did she not own anything, she was the sole property of the man. Even her clothes and ornaments belonged to the master of the house.

Any kind of policy or reprimand—even murder—regarding a woman could be carried out with impunity. She was given to others as a gift, as a loan, or to flatter a dignitary. As soon as she was transferred to her husband’s house—which was in the form of a transaction (a remnant of which is still the custom that endures in some places) that gave money to the bride’s family as payment for nursing her—after having been taken advantage of in her father’s house, she had to appease the desires of her husband.

Even now, in the civilized society of modern times, one hears that in some advanced cities, just as public lavatories are necessary for expelling bodily wastes, public brothels are also necessary for discharging the sexual fluids.

These establishments exist so that those who cannot form a family or are temporarily deprived due to various factors, such as distance from their spouse, may release the fluids of lust that have gathered within them. This too is one of the practices of primeval humans, remaining to this day.

In ancient societies, men had no restriction in the number of their wives, whereas women did not have such a privilege. Men had the right to divorce, but women did not. Women had to continually live under the authority of men and had to absolutely devote themselves to the whims of men—to such an extent that in widespread famines the flesh of women was known to be eaten.

In short, in primitive human societies, women were considered only human in form, but were treated like domestic animals.

## **Woman, liberated in chains!**

Stage two: In a stage of the social life of women, civil laws appeared within civilized nations. Such as the system of Hammurabi of Babylonia and the laws of ancient Rome, Greece, Egypt, China, and Persia which were similar to modern civil laws.

Even though these systems and laws were very different from each other, a similarity may be found among them: women had rights as a human in society, but they were viewed as a weak type of human that could not run their lives by themselves.

In these societies, women had to be under the authority and guardianship of men. They lived out their lives as followers and had no independence. They were not given the freedom to choose their path in life nor possess property.

They were not given independence of action so that they could ascribe deeds to themselves and enjoy the proprietary rights or profits of the actions. They did not have the right to sue or bear witness in court, and they had no authority whatsoever.

In such societies, as long as a woman lives in her father's house, she must obey her father. A father could do anything he wanted regarding his daughter; he could marry her off to any person or give her away or take up any policy he desired.

In these societies, women generally did not possess an official familial relationship—with men or other women—entailing inheritance and other rights. They only possessed natural kinship which sometimes prevented marriage with their father, brothers, and sons.

In ancient Persia, marriage with immediate family was acceptable. In China and the Himalayas, natural relationship came from the woman and lineage was focused on women. As a result, one woman could have several husbands. This custom still prevails among some people. Instead of tracing ancestry from fathers, the line of mothers is delineated.

Among these clans and nations, woman could possess no property except in rare cases where they worked with the permission of their guardians or were given a marriage gift and their guardians did not take it away. A woman's life was managed by her guardian. For this reason, a father or husband had the right to punish their women in any way. They even had the right to murder them if they saw fit.

Also, the hardest of times for a woman was when she was suffering her monthly periods—in such cases she was shunned as an unclean creature—or when she gave birth, especially when she delivered a girl!

If a woman did something good, its benefit and praise went to her guardian and if she performed badly or unbecomingly, she herself was responsible and was chastised accordingly. Exceptionally, through fatherly affection or spousal warmth, she might be willed or gifted with some property or given special privileges. Even so, women were accorded no autonomy, determination, nor accomplishment.

For example, the condition of women within these nations was like that of a young child that is unable to manage its own life and must live under the guardianship of its custodians. For although young children are human, in view of the fact that their wills and intellects are undeveloped, they would cast the social system into a state of turmoil and incapacitate the society if they were given autonomy.

Therefore, they must live under the guardianship of their elders and obey them until they are experienced and worthy of membership in the society.

In these societies, an analogy may be made between women and prisoners who live out their lives in slavery and are deprived of freedom of will and action, as a slave fallen into the hands of a conquering enemy.

Even though they are human and possess all human existential faculties, in the view of the victorious population they are foes and their self-determination would harm the cornerstones of the society. Therefore, they should be divested of their freedom, dominated, debased, and possessed so the subjugating society may go on living as normal.

Likewise, because of their feeble-mindedness, capriciousness, and strong emotions, they are enemies of the society and their autonomous entrance into the society would bear nothing but paralysis of society and enduring regret.

These were the common grounds among the policies and laws of all ancient advanced societies regarding women. In addition, the status of women in the society according to Jews and Nazarenes and their divine books—the Torah and the Christian Gospel—was the same as in aforementioned ancient civilized societies.

This was because even though the Torah and Evangel contain recommendations regarding friendship and moderateness with women, it is evident that these divine books assume that women will never be as good as men and women's social and religious status is much lower than that of men.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in non-divine religions, the religious actions of women have no considerable value or no value at all.

## **Women and Islam**

Stage three: (This is an abbreviated account.) Islam regards women as human individuals and unconditional parts of the human society. Islam gives women the full value that can be given to any human individual as regards the results of their will and actions.

In order to understand the view of Islam regarding women, it is important to note that we live in an environment subject to opposing political gales and contrary propagandistic tidal waves that amplify anxiety and panic, divesting us of the desirability of correct thought. In the name of following independent and correct thought, these environs have transformed our innate and God-given logic into blind imitation.

Furthermore, in the centuries of illogical teachings, coercion, and despotic and unrestrained methods of the Church in the Middle Ages multitudes of correct thoughts were massacred and millions of humans were undeservedly tortured to death.

In order to preserve the power and status of its feeble and baseless institution, it accused Islam—which it identified as its most dangerous and intractable rival—of anything it possibly could and introduced Islam to its followers with every possible unbecoming belief and method.

It misrepresented the beautiful truths of this pure religion in the form of the most monstrous of features. The imprudence and bombast of the Church went on until in recent years the West—due to the independence of thought they found within themselves as a result of their industrial revolution—rounded up the power of the Church and fenced it in within the walls of the Vatican.

The reaction to the Church's many centuries of pretentiousness, tyranny, and imposition of beliefs adversely affected the people's thought to such an extent that they no longer consider religious truths as anything but a bunch of superstitions from the Age of Myths and they equate 'religion' with 'blind imitation'.

Evidently, if they think of their own holy religion in this manner, it is clear after extensive negative propaganda what they would think of other religions, including Islam.

Furthermore, with the awe-inspiring power gained through scientific and industrial advancement, European nations used everything in their power to control the other continents and expand their political and economic hegemony.

Their complete success convinced advocates of this system of their theoretical and practical superiority and assured them that non-European life has no value and is nothing except imitation of ignorant and unenlightened ancestral superstitions. They declared that all sensible humans must throw away their God-given logic and unquestioningly and specifically take up the European lifestyle.

Western propaganda was completely successful in planting the seed of the following logic: that which can truly be called the world is the Western world. That which can truly be called human is the Western human, and the life that entails human happiness is a Western style life.

As a result of these inculcations, the logic of our own intelligentsia—no less—is that our antiquated religious precepts and social laws do not conform to the modern world, and as a result we require world-

approved laws the style of which the civilized world of today goes by (in these sentences by world is meant the West and Westerners).

In addition—with utmost grief—we must confess to the truth that due to a thousand years of internal strife and contention and the selfishness and capriciousness of rulers and officials, we have completely lost our intellectual independence and converted our free thought and God-given logic into a series of racial prejudices and vain inflexibilities.

A result of the conjunction of these factors was that in the name of achieving freedom of thought and breaking the shackles of imitation, we threw away our God-given logic and wholly imitated Westerners, choosing no path save that of keeping to their words and deeds.

For instance, we looked to them to explain and interpret for us our own truths, spirituality, and teachings. We learned knowledge that belonged specifically to us from them, whereas their knowledge of the truths of Islam is limited to their previous acquaintances and unworthy memories from the Middle Ages and the strange studies of orientalists.

After examining the writings of these scholars, because of their extensive mistakes, one must emphatically bless the priests and writers of the Crusades! For example, some orientalists write that Muhammad married Khadījah at seven, that ‘Alī became caliph after ‘Umar, that the eleventh Shā‘ah Imām is buried in Kāzimayn, and numerous other erroneous accounts.

Based upon the above logic, these more-loving-than-a-mother nannies—no less—identify the social status of women in Islam thus: in Islam women live in captivity and absolute lack of social rights. They are bereft of freedom in will and action, and their value in inheritance and testimony is half of a man’s and even that only in name not in practice.

Women are imprisoned within their houses and deprived of literacy. If they leave their house for an emergency, they must wrap themselves in a long black veil so that their fronts cannot be distinguished from their backs!

In light of this situation and its detriments, our mission and responsibility is clear. We must rationally and logically refer to Islam’s explications in this regard, and with regard to other religious issues, and refrain from probing just anywhere or listening to just anyone. We must discover the interrelations of rights with one another and their factual rationales.

## **The common foundations of Islamic laws**

Without doubt, the mark of distinction separating us from animals is our intellect, which generalizes the products of our senses, orders them and induces general laws to discover the unknown.

Even though humans possess many inner feelings and emotions—which they use greatly in the course

of their lives—considering the enduring human distinction, they must all produce their effects under the management of reason, for all animals possess these same feelings and emotions, and in some aspects they may even be stronger than humans.

In many verses, the Holy Qur'an reminds humans of the gift of intellect and holds humans responsible for their perceptions and intellect:

﴿ قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴾

***“Say: ‘It is He that created you and appointed for you ears, eyes, and hearts; how little you give thanks.’”2***

﴿ وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا ﴾

***“And adhere not to that which you have no knowledge. Verily, ears, eyes, and hearts are responsible (before Allah).”3***

Based on this principle, Islam considers the human society dependent upon reason and delegates social laws to the discernment of the intellect, not the desires of feelings and emotions.

Hence, Islam deems binding only those laws and precepts that reason considers right even if they contradict the inclinations of the majority because, on the path to happiness humans should choose a destination that their intellects judge to be the point of happiness not where their animal urges favor.

﴿ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْحَقِّ وَإِلَى طَرِيقٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ... ﴾

***“The Qur'an guides people towards Truth and a straight path.”4***

﴿...وَلَوْ اتَّبَعَ الْحَقُّ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ لَفَسَدَتِ السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ ﴾

***“And if Truth had followed their caprices, the heavens and the earth and all in them would surely have been thrown into confusion and corruption...”5***

Islam views humanity as a superior unit, and men and women as equally human. Even though they are different in their femininity and masculinity, they are no different in their humanity, since all humans—whether man or woman—come into being by the procreation of two individuals: a woman and a man.

﴿...أَتِي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ...﴾

***“I shall not leave unrewarded the work of any agent among you, whether man or woman; you are all members of the same race...”<sup>6</sup>***

﴿...يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ﴾

***“O people! Surely, I have created you as males and females and have made you into [diverse] races and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble among you before Allah is the most pious of you...”<sup>7</sup>***

Accordingly, Islam presents women—like men—as complete members of the human society and equally considers each to be joint elements of the community. It has decreed freedom of will and action for women; the same as it has done for men. However, being a complete member of the society does not necessitate that all members of the society have identical rights and privileges.

This is because, with regard to membership, the differences between individuals and members in their social benefit entail differences in civil rights.

To the testimony of history, even though there have been numerous societies throughout the history of humanity where men were members, the rank of a scientist has never been given to an ignorant person, the responsibilities of an able and experienced man were never given to an inexperienced and incompetent person, and an unrestrained persecutor has never been given the position of a just and virtuous person.

It is true that all members of the society must be equal before the law yet this equality is equality regarding the execution of the law—i.e. benefiting from justice—not equality in social value and determined rights. How can it be possible for ruler and subject; adult and child; intellectual and ignorant; sage and fool; or oppressor and righteous person to be equal in all social privileges without the community falling apart?

Therefore, membership in the human society is one thing and the manner of membership is another and these two must not be confused with each other. In order to give the human society its due consideration, social justice must completely be observed among its members and each person must benefit from rights fit for them.

## **The status of women in Islam**

As we pointed out, before the sun of Islam rose above the azure horizon of this world and brightened the world and its inhabitants with its brilliant radiance, the world was divided into two groups:

The first group consisted of the civilized nations, such as the Roman Empire, the Persian Empire, and other nations such as Egypt, Abyssinia, India, and China. In these societies, women were the same as captives—meaning that they were completely deprived of autonomy and the general privileges of society.

They did not receive inheritance. Their deeds were not respected. They did not have any freedom or independence in food, clothing, residence, marriage, divorce, socialization, property, and many other things. Their every breath and every step had to have the approval of men. If they were oppressed, they had to take their case up with courts governed by men where their litigation, testimony, and words were not heeded.

The other group was comprised of backward tribes and peoples such as tribes in Africa. Among these peoples, women were not even considered human but were parasites of the society in rank with exploited animals.

They carried loads, fished, served men, trained children, nursed the sick, appeased the lusts of their husbands, or whoever their husbands chose, and so on. This was the general situation of the world at the advent of Islam.

The specific environment where Islam emerged was the Arabian Peninsula. Its people were generally Bedouin due to its vast deserts. It was surrounded on the outside by the great nations of Rome, Persia, Abyssinia, and Egypt and on the inside it were associated with the Jews of Yathrib, the Nazarenes of Yemen, and what is now known as Iraq.

The majority religion was Wathanīyyah—a type of dualistic worship.<sup>8</sup> Their customs and traditions were an amalgam of the traditions and regulations of their surrounding nations.

Similar to Rome, Persia, and other nations, women were deprived of rights. Men kept them under absolute custody and no social respect was given them.

Apart from the fact that they fundamentally considered women a cause of shame and loathed daughters, the tribe of Banī Tamīm even buried their daughters alive. Thus, the Qur'an specifically remonstrates against these two problems:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ \* يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ  
﴿ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ أَلَّا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴾

***“And when one of them was given the good tidings of the birth of a girl, their face would darken in repressed anger. They would hide from the people because of the bad news they received asking themselves whether they should keep it in disgrace or bury it in the earth. Ah! Evil is that which they judge.”<sup>9</sup>***

﴿ وَإِذَا الْمَوْؤُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ \* بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ ﴾

**“And when the infant daughter that was buried alive is asked for what crime she was killed.”<sup>10</sup>**

Within the environment that we have described, Islam made women true and complete members of the society, released them from their captivity, and granted them autonomy. In Islam, like men, women have a share in the legacy left by the departed. They inherit from their fathers, brothers, uncles, spouses, etc.

They are free to have any legitimate work and good lifestyle they choose. Their deeds have value and social respect. They can directly approach qualified and legal authorities. If their rights have been encroached upon they can take legal action and also bear witness. In all these phases, whereby the generalities of a woman’s life are completely ensured, men have no dominance, charge, or command over women.

﴿...فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ... ﴾

**“The responsibility of what women do within the confines of religious law and custom is not yours (and they are free)...”<sup>11</sup>**

﴿ وَالنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِمَّا تَرَكَ الْوَالِدَانِ وَالْأَقْرَبُونَ مِمَّا قَلَّ مِنْهُ أَوْ كَثُرَ نَصِيبًا مَفْرُوضًا ... ﴾

**“And women have a share in what their parents and family leave; be it slight or considerable.”<sup>12</sup>**

The practice of the Holy Prophet (S) is full of fine points in this matter; however, we cannot give a detailed account in this article.

## **Comparison and contrast of the rights of women and men**

1. Regarding inheritance, on the whole, women receive half that of men just as the Qur’an states:

﴿...لِلذَّكَرِ مِثْلُ حَظِّ الْأُنثِيَيْنِ ... ﴾

**“To the male an equivalent of the share of two females (must be given)...”<sup>13</sup>**

Even though in this aspect women have a lower position than men, this deficiency has been resolved in another place. That is, the nafaqah (financial support) of women is on the shoulders of men. The Islamic fundamentals behind this law are examined elsewhere.

Doubtless, a woman’s natural emotional and sentimental disposition holds sway over that of her intellect.

All the states and actions of women are manifestations of various elegant and exquisite emotions and sentiments whereas men, according to their nature, possess an opposite mentality.

As we noted at the start of this discussion, in organizing the affairs of the human society, Islam has given reason superiority over emotions. If we consider the entirety of the human populace, in each age the wealth in the world belongs to the population of that same age. They benefit from their wealth as long as they live and, after they die, they pass it on to their family—the ensuing stratum.

As soon as the current stratum is extinct and the surviving stratum—generally consisting of an equal distribution of men and women—comes into office; so to speak, men receive two thirds of the wealth and one third is withheld from them. The two thirds belonging to men is used equally by both men and women; therefore, two thirds of the world’s wealth is used by women and one third by men.

﴿...وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ...﴾

***“The precepts that have been ordained to the advantage of women are equal to those that are against them...”<sup>14</sup>***

According to this type of division, regarding ownership, administration, and cultivation of property, men control the majority of the world’s wealth.

On the other hand, regarding its utilization and benefit, women control and benefit from the majority of wealth. Social justice necessitates that the protection and administration of wealth be in the hands of reason and benefiting from it be in the hands of emotions and sentiments.

2. In connection with respect for deeds and property, Islam gives complete autonomy to women in making use of the products of their deeds. In this case, women possess freedom of will and action without being under the supervision of men.

3. As regards legitimate and correct social interaction, they are not the least different from men. They are free to socialize on the condition that they refrain from showing off their adornments, flaunting themselves, flirting, and inflaming the lusts of men.

﴿...فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ...﴾

***“The responsibility of what women do within the confines of religious law and custom is not yours (and they are free)...”<sup>15</sup>***

4. With respect to religious deeds and privileges, the only source of difference between people in rank is their piety and respect before God. There is no difference between women and men.

﴿...أَتِي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ...﴾

***“I shall not leave unrewarded the work of any agent among you, whether man or woman; you are all members of the same race...”*** [16](#)

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ اتَّقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

“O people! Surely, I have created you as males and females and have made you into [diverse] races and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble among you before Allah is the most pious of you. Truly, Allah is All-knowing, All-aware.” [17](#)

In an area where no privilege is given to any class and the only mark of distinction is piety and Islamic religious service, men and women are not different and one devout woman is more respectable and preferable to one thousand impious men.

5. As regards the issue of marriage, women are free to marry anyone they want. However, considering that the precepts regarding inheritance and marriage are based upon genealogy, a woman can under no circumstances have sexual relations with anyone save the one husband she has chosen. Nevertheless, a man can take more than one wife on the condition that he is able to behave justly and equitably with all his wives.

It is evident, however, that Islam has not necessitated polygyny rather it has merely given permission for men to marry up to four women and this precept requires background. This means that the situation must be such that social order is not threatened by a shortage of women and congestion of men.

One thing that is clear for men is that because the residence and living expenses of women and children are the responsibility of men and in view of the fact that justice and equity are stipulated, taking such action is feasible for a limited number of men, not all. In fact, nature and external incidents often provide more women fit for marriage than men.

The validity, purposefulness, and reasonability of this precept is made clear by contemplation of the true nature of human societies and unexpected incidents. Supposing an equal proportion of men and women in the world—something that is usually statistically valid—if we set a certain year as starting point and separately add up male and female births, in the first year that the young men reach natural maturity or legal age we would be faced with a much greater number of marriageable girls.

In the sixteenth year the number of women fit for marriage would be seven times that of available men. In the twentieth year, the fit women to fit men ratio would be 11:5, and in the 25th year, which is the average age for marriage, this ratio would be 16:10. In this case, if we assume the ratio of men that have

more than one wife to be one fifth, 80% of men would have one wife and 20% would have four and in the thirtieth year, 20% of men would have three wives.

Apart from this, uncontrollable events such as brutal wars and dangerous occupations cause the deaths of countless men. This leads to an abundant population of marriageable widows and women who—if polygyny was forbidden—would have no course but to give up their chastity perhaps even bringing illegitimate children lacking guardianship into the world.

The two recent world wars proved this fact beyond doubt such that the population of spouseless women in Germany requested that—in accordance with Islamic law—the government permit polygamy and in this way appease the population of single women. Regrettably, due to the opposition of the Church, their request was denied.

This incident demonstrates that the opposition of women to polygyny is based on habit not the exigency of nature and fitrah and it was the best answer to censure the assessment within Islam that, ‘The decree of polygyny has hurt the feelings of women and dispirited them. It has instigated their desire for vengeance and causes many deplorable incidents.’

This event and similar ones prove beyond doubt that when there is need and a shortage of eligible men, all these opposing thoughts transform into acquiescence.

In addition, polygamy was practiced for ages before Islam without any limit in the number of wives and in Islam with a specific delimitation and it never caused disorder or chaos in the society. Women who went to a wedded man as their second, third, or fourth wife did not grow from the earth or fall from the sky; rather, they were these same women who according to critics, are naturally opposed to polygyny.

Aside from the fact that Islam has not made polygyny obligatory, but has made it permissible—on the condition that the man is not afraid he might act unjustly and is fit to behave equitably—there are methods in Islamic jurisprudence whereby a woman may prevent her husband from marrying another man unless he is willing to divorce her first.

The same thing also exists in the matter of divorce. Even though the authority for divorce is in the hands of the man, in accordance with the shar‘ah, women can resort to methods to separate from their husband or may predict necessary situations and obtain this right so they may enjoy peace of mind and contentment.

The existence of divorce in conjugal life and the fact that it has been entrusted to men on the basis of the shar‘ah is a hallmark of the holy religion of Islam. Even so, there are special ways whereby women can obtain divorce under specific circumstances.

Due to a great deal of suffering and lengthy conflict, civilized nations and legitimate governments all over the world were finally forced to sanction divorce.

However, since they gave the power of divorce directly to both women and men, the rise in the divorce rate—especially as requested by women—has weakened these governments and they are continually seeking a solution to this problem. Some of the reasons that women provide as basis for their divorce which are broadcast in newspapers and mass media especially ratify the correctitude of this Islamic view.

## Rule of reason or sentiments?

What is understood from preceding discussions is that women are not inferior to men in affairs of life and social privileges. In all conditions they retain their autonomy and are not under the control of men. However, one thing that is certain is that a woman must obey her husband in matters of marital relations.

The threefold restriction that women, who are full of love and sentiment, have in Islam are in the domain of rationality which Islam devolves to men, who have a greater tendency for rational thought and decision-making, and must be separated from the environment of sentiments and feelings. These three matters are: leadership, judicature, and jihād.

According to the religious statements and practice of the Holy Prophet (S), women cannot hold governance and leadership in the Islamic society, cannot act as a judge and cannot directly participate in jihād and supervise battles.

﴿ أَوْ مَنْ يَنْشَأُ فِي الْحِلْيَةِ وَهُوَ فِي الْخِصَامِ غَيْرُ مُبِينٍ ﴾

***“Are then those who have been brought up amid adornments and who by nature cannot show their true aims in times of hostility to be considered daughters of Allah and given governance of affairs of state?”<sup>18</sup>***

Therefore, men are responsible for these threefold aspects:

﴿ ... الرَّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ ﴾

***“Men are the protectors and supervisors of women.”<sup>19</sup>***

The relationship of these three issues with reason and their impairment by the interference of feelings and sentiments is so clear that there is no need for discussion and research and a decisive trial will leave no room for doubt.

I’ll never forget early in the recent World War, when the battle came upon French soil and extreme hostilities continued, while fire fell from the skies and blood seethed on the earth, according to the newspapers a high-ranking female member of the French army general staff designed a beautiful

female hat with a scissor mark at the front![20](#)

- [1.](#) In 586 C.E., after much discussion regarding the issue of women, the Religious Assembly of France ordained that women were human although they had been created to serve men. Until approximately one hundred years ago, in England women were not considered part of the human society. Additionally, most ancient religions did not consider the deeds of women accepted by God. In ancient Greece it was even said that women were a wickedness created by the Devil.
- [2.](#) [Sūrat al-Mulk 67:23.](#)
- [3.](#) [Sūrat al-Isrā' 17:36.](#)
- [4.](#) [Sūrat al-Ahqāf 46:30.](#)
- [5.](#) [Sūrat al-Mu'minīn 23:71.](#)
- [6.](#) [Sūrat al-'Imrān 3:195.](#)
- [7.](#) [Sūrat al-Hujurāt 49:13.](#)
- [8.](#) Advocates of Wathanīyyah believed in one God as Creator; however, the reason that this creed is considered a type of idolatry is that its adherents deemed beings other than God worthy of veneration. Even so, they did not ascribe divinity to their idols, which were representations of prophets, angels, stars, etc. (Extracted from the “Dictionary of Dehkhodā”) [trans.]
- [9.](#) [Sūrat al-Nahl 16:58–59.](#)
- [10.](#) [Sūrat al-Takwīr 81:8–9.](#)
- [11.](#) [Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:234.](#)
- [12.](#) [Sūrat al-Nisā' 4:7.](#)
- [13.](#) [Sūrat al-Nisā' 4:11.](#)
- [14.](#) [Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:228.](#)
- [15.](#) [Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:234.](#)
- [16.](#) [Sūrat al-'Imrān 3:195.](#)
- [17.](#) [Sūrat al-Hujurāt 49:13.](#)
- [18.](#) [Sūrat al-Zukhruf 43:18.](#)
- [19.](#) [Sūrat al-Nisā' 4:34.](#)
- [20.](#) From the yearbook, “Maktab-e Tashayyu”.

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