

Translator's Foreword

Praise be to Allah with all the hymns by which He is praised, by the Angels who are the nearest to Him; by His creatures who are most honourable in His Sight; and by those adorers who are best approved by Him. A praise that excels all praise in the same way that the Lord excels all of His creations. May His blessings be upon His Messenger Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy, and upon his pure progeny who are the lanterns in the darkness, the brilliant minarets of guidance and the high lofty standards of the religion.

May His special blessings be upon His last deputy and His remaining emissary, the expected Mahdi – may Allah hasten his advent and include us among his adherents.

The status of women in the world has been one of the hottest issues of debate for many years. Several organizations whose goal is 'women's liberation' have been formed around the globe and who strive – day and night – to liberate the 'oppressed women' from the clutches of fanaticism and oppression. Freedom, equality, equity and fair justice for women are the slogans of such organizations that endeavor to give women their lost status in society and to portray her independent identity so that she may walk alongside men and execute all of those tasks which men perform and even those that which some men dare not to perform!

Religion is condemned for limiting women's involvement in all affairs of the society and barring them from reaching their goals. Islam, in particular, has been continuously criticized for its 'bias against women' confining them within the four walls of their house, hidden under the 'ugly black veil' and considering them as a 'door-mat' – thus hindering their progress.

Western organizations are at the forefront in the criticism of Islam for this 'injustice' and have succeeded in gathering around them a multitude of 'liberated Arab and Muslim women', who have most passionately responded to their calls for 'freedom'.

Before discussing the status of women in Islam, let us have a look at the status which women enjoyed in the past (and the present as well) in the other major religions of the world and 'progressive nations'.

Christianity, which is considered to be the most liberal religion in the world has been far more rigid in its stance against women. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his monumental work, *Discovery of India*, writes:

Bad as the legal position of women was in ancient India, judged by the modern standards, it was far better than in ancient Greece and Rome, in early Christianity, in the Canon Laws of Medieval Europe, and indeed right up to comparatively modern times at the beginning of the 19th Century.[1](#)

In the early ages of Christianity when the religion of the people, of a high and low societal status, ignorant and educated, consisted only of the adoration of the mother of Jesus, the Church of Christ had placed the sex under a ban. Priest after Priest had written about the enormities of women, their evil tendencies, inconceivable malignity and considered them to be a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic peril, a deadly fascination, and a painted evil!

St. Tertullian (circa 155 ce – 225 ce) represented the general feeling in a book in which he addressed women saying:

Do you not know that each of you is an Eve? The judgement of God on this sex of yours lives even in this age and the guilt (associated with it) must, out of necessity, also live on (and continue to exist). You are the Devil's gateway; You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree; You are the first deserter of the Divine law; You are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desertion, even the Son of God had to die.[2](#)

St. Augustine (354 ce – 430 ce) wrote the following to a friend:

What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman ... I fail to see what use woman can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children![3](#)

Martin Luther (1483 ce – 1546 ce), the German theologian and Church reformer says:

If they [women] become tired or even die, that does not matter. Let them die in childbirth, that's why they are there.[4](#)

The Orthodox Church excluded women from the exercise of all religious functions except the lowliest. They were completely excluded from society, were prohibited from appearing in public and were forbidden from going to feasts or banquets. They were directed to remain in seclusion, observe silence, obey their husbands, and apply themselves to weaving, spinning and cooking. If they ever went out, they were to be clothed from head to foot.

In the 19th century, after long discussions, religious leaders of France decided, "A woman is a human being, but she is made to serve man."

In England it was not until about 1850 that women were counted in the National Population Census. It

was in 1882 that a British law, unprecedented in the country's history, for the first time in its history, granted women the right to decide how their own earnings should be spent instead of handing them over directly to their husbands! Until then, even the clothes on their back had been their husband's property.

In his days, Henry VIII had even forbidden women to study the Bible when the first English translations appeared.

The Reformation Statement on the role of women declares:

In the beginning God made man, male and female. He made Adam first, and then made Eve from Adam's rib. This order of creation subordinates wives to their husbands in marriage, and women to men in the church. As an act of submission to their Creator, women are commanded to submit to their husbands and to male leadership in the church. Women are not allowed to teach or have authority over men in any formal capacity in the church.[5](#)

Female infanticide among earlier Hinduism was common. A woman was barred from studying the Vedas – the most sacred of the Aryans texts; or participating in the oblations to the Manes; or in the sacrifices to the deities. The wife's religion was, and still is to serve her husband, her Lord and her eternal happiness depends on the strict performance of this duty.

Child marriages of daughters as young as 5 and 6 years old was common due to the custom of the dowry and to avoid scandals.[6](#) Law books prescribed that the best partner for a man was one-third his age and thus a man who was 18 years old should marry a girl six years old! It has been stated that:

A man, aged thirty years, shall marry a maiden of twelve who pleases him, or a man of twenty-four a girl of eight years of age; if (the performance of) his duties would otherwise be impeded, he must marry sooner.[7](#)

This system still prevails in many parts of India.

An Aryan (Hindu) husband could at any time accuse his wife of infidelity and if the wife protested her innocence, the council of village elders would order a trial by fire. The accused woman would be required to pass through a blazing flame. Not just death, but any signs of burns would be taken as a sign of guilt and the wife would then have to undergo the penalty for infidelity.[8](#) Adultery carried the death sentence in Aryan law – either way she would have to pay with her life for her husband's or elders' mere suspicions.

The ideal role model for this custom was Sita, the wife of Rama. She was required by her spouse, the most adored of Hindu Gods, to pass through the fire ordeal after her return from Lanka where she had been abducted by the king Ravana.

The death penalty was prescribed for Aryan women guilty of infidelity and the Manu Smriti, the most authoritative Indo-Aryan law-book states:

When a woman, proud of her relations [or abilities] deceives her husband (with another man), then the king should [ensure that] she be torn apart by dogs in a place much frequented by the people![9](#)

Not only that, but adultery was defined as the simple touching of clothes and even conversing with men:

He who addresses the wife of another man at a pilgrimage site outside the village, in a forest, or at the confluence of rivers, suffer (the punishment for) adulterous acts.[10](#)

A wife, a son, and a slave – these three were declared to have no property; the wealth that they earned was (acquired) for the man to whom they belonged.

The Aryans, upon their invasion of India circa 1,500 bc, introduced the horrific custom of sati, meaning that the faithful wife would sacrifice herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband! The woman performing this ‘noble act’ found a niche in the hearts of all the votaries of Hinduism as one of the best and noblest of her sex and often became herself the object of worship. It is sanctioned by the Hindu’s most sacred texts, and was practiced from the fall of the Semito–Dravidian Indus Valley civilization to the modern age.

The most sacred of Aryan scriptures are the Vedas, and the Rig Veda, the oldest Veda, mentions the custom of sati. The following famous ‘Sati Hymn’ of the Rig Veda was (and still is) recited during the actual immolation of the widow:

Let these women, whose husbands are worthy and are living, enter the house with ghee[11](#) (applied) as collyrium (to their eyes). Let these wives first step into the pyre, tearless without any affliction and well adorned.[12](#)

If women do not perform sati, then they will be reborn into the lowly body of a woman again and again until they perform sati.[13](#)

It is the highest duty of the woman to immolate herself after her husband.[14](#)

Thus, it is evident that the Aryans introduced the custom of sati because it was encouraged in their scriptures and many goddesses even performed the act. Several of Krishna’s (one of the most venerated Hindu gods) wives performed sati upon his death, including Rukmini, Rohini, Bhadra and Madura.[15](#) Madri, the second wife of King Pandu considered an ‘incarnation’ of goddess Dhriti, and performed sati.[16](#)

Sati still continues to this day and in 1990, more than 50 widows were burnt alive in sati.[17](#)

Another aspect of women’s suppression in Hinduism is the ‘Devadasi system’ that prevails even until today. Since the Hindu divinities loved music and dancing, a large number of dancing girls are attached to the temples, who are by no means vestal, and whose services are at the disposal of the ministrants of the cult. Devadasi (lit. servant of God) originally describes a Hindu religious practice in which girls are

‘married’ to a deity or temple. In addition to taking care of the temple, they learn and practice classical arts and dances. Some scholars are of the opinion that the custom of dedicating girls to temples became common in the 6th century ce, as most of the Puranas containing reference to it have been written during this period. Several Puranas recommended that arrangements should be made to enlist the services of singing girls for worship at temples.

The dedication ceremony of the devadasi is far more interesting. It initiates a young girl into the devadasi profession and is performed in the temple by the priest. In the Brahminical tradition, marriage is viewed as the only religious initiation (diksha) permissible to women. Thus the dedication is a symbolic ‘marriage’ of the pubescent girl to the temples’ deity.

In these ceremonies, the devadasi-initiate consummates her marriage with an emblem of the god borrowed from the temple as a stand-in ‘bridegroom’. In practice this often means that the priest will have sexual union with her in addition to the other nuptial rites that are performed at a typical Hindu wedding. From then onward, the devadasi is considered a ‘nitya sumangali,’ meaning that the woman is eternally free from the adversity of widowhood. She would then perform her ritual and artistic duties in the temple.

The puberty ceremonies are an occasion not only for temple honour, but also for community feasting and celebration in which the local elites also participate. The music and dance and public display of the girl also helps to attract patrons.

Patronship in a majority of cases is achieved at the time of the dedication ceremony itself. The patron who secures this right of spending the first night with the girl can pay a fixed sum of money to maintain a permanent liaison with the devadasi, and pay to maintain a relationship for a fixed amount of time, or terminate the liaison after the deflowering ceremony. A permanent liaison with a patron does not bar the girl from entertaining other clients, unless he specifies otherwise. In case the girl entertains, then the other men have to leave the girl’s house when her patron comes.

In modern India the tradition has become associated with commercial sexual exploitation, as described in a recent report by the National Human Rights Commission of the Government of India. [18](#)

According to this report, “after initiation as devadasis, women migrate either to nearby towns or other far-off cities to practise prostitution.” A study from 1990 recorded that 45.9% of devadasis were prostitutes. [19](#)

Buddhism and Jainism were both protest movements against the Vedic system. However, they did not lead to any major changes in the status of women. This was due to the emphasis placed by these religions on asceticism. Thus, although these reformers opposed certain cruelties against women, yet they were considered as hurdles on the path to salvation. The Buddha was very strict in his insistence on asceticism. He left his home and his wife to attain nirvana (spiritual enlightenment) and considered women as a hindrance to reach that goal. Buddha is said to have induced his disciples not to look at a

woman or even talk to her.[20](#)

Never was the condition of women so bad, never was she held under greater subjugation, a slave to the caprice of man, than under the Mago-Zoroastrians. In relation to the sexes, the Persians recognized no law but that of a man's own will. He could marry his nearest kindred and divorce his wives at his pleasure. The system of female seclusion was not confined to the Persians alone as among the Ionic Greeks, women were confined within the Gynaikonitis, often kept under lock and key and never allowed to participate in public life. In Persia, the custom of employing eunuchs [a castrated man, in particular, one castrated early enough to have major hormonal consequences] to guard the women prevailed from the remotest antiquity.[21](#)

Now, let us turn to Arabia, the birth place of Islam.

The position of women in the pre-Islamic days was no better than our contemporary society. Arabia was a male dominated society in which women had no status of any kind other than as sex objects. The number of women a man could marry was not fixed; and when a man died, his son 'inherited' all of his wives, except his own mother.

A savage custom of the Arabs was to bury their female infants alive. Even if an Arab did not wish to bury his daughter alive, he still had to uphold this 'honourable tradition', being unable to resist social pressures. The Qur'an speaks out against this atrocity in clear words:

And when is announced unto (any) one of them a daughter, darkened becomes his face and he is filled with wrath. He hides himself from the people due to the bad the tidings given to him, (he ponders whether) he shall keep her with disgrace or bury her (alive) in the dust, behold (how) evil it is what they decide.[22](#)

At another place it is quoted:

And kill not your children for fear of want, We sustain them and yourselves (too), Verily killing them is a great sin.[23](#)

Also Allah says:

And when the female-baby buried (alive) shall be asked, for what sin (of hers) was she put to death?[24](#)

Imam al-Bukhari, on the institution of marriage in Arabia before Islam, quotes from al-Zuhri, who says that 'Urwah b. Zubayr informed him that 'Ayesha told him that marriage in the pre-Islamic period was of four types:

(1) One was the marriage of people as it is today, where a man betroths his ward or his daughter to another man, and the latter assigns a dower to her and then marries her;

(2) Another type was when a man said to his wife when she was purified from her menses, “Go to X and have intercourse with him”, her husband then stays away from her and does not touch her at all until it is clear that she is pregnant from that man with whom she sought intercourse. When it is clear that she is pregnant, her husband has intercourse with her if he wants. He acts thus simply from the desire for a noble child. This type of marriage was known as ‘Nikah al-Istibda’, the marriage of seeking intercourse;

(3) Another type was when a group of less than ten men used to visit a woman and all of them had to have intercourse with her. If she became pregnant and bore a child, when some nights had passed after the birth she sent for the men and all had to come to her. When they had come together in her presence, she would say to them, “All of you (men) know the result of what has taken place – I have borne a child and he is the child of ... ” – naming whoever she wanted to choose from the group of ten men. Her child would then be attributed to that man and he was not allowed to refuse this;

(4) The last type is when many men frequent a woman and she does not keep herself from anyone who comes to her – these women were the prostitutes. They used to set banners up at the door of their house and were called “ladies of the flags.” Whoever wanted them, went in to their house. If one of these women conceived and bore a child, all of the men who had been with her gathered together and summoned the physiognomists. Then they attributed her child to the man whom they thought was the father, and the child remained attributed to him and was called his son and no one was permitted to object to this course. When the Prophet Muhammad came preaching the truth, he abolished all of these types of marriages of the Pre-Islamic era except that which people practice today.

Unfortunately, the West has not given Islam a fair chance. Every opportunity is utilized to denigrate and blaspheme the true Islamic point of view. Due to blindly and gullibly swallowing the filth that is fed to them day and night by the Western media, even Muslims have become adversely affected by such falsehood and have begun to doubt the true Islamic standpoint.

How remarkably Ayatullah Sayyid Ruhullah al-Khomeini stated it when he described a woman in Islam by saying:

From the Islamic viewpoint, women have sensitive roles in the formation of an Islamic community. Islam promotes a woman to the extent that she is able to recover her human status in the community and cast off her status as an object, and commensurate with such growth, she can assume responsibilities in developing the Islamic government.[25](#)

In several places, the Noble Qur’an discusses the equal position that a woman enjoys alongside man:

Verily the Muslim men and Muslim women, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obedient men and the obedient women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the alms-giving men and the alms-givings women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard (their private parts), and the men

who remember Allah much and the women who remember Allah (much), for them has been prepared forgiveness and a great recompense.[26](#)

At another juncture, Allah says:

Whosoever does good, whether male or female, and is be a believer, then We shall certainly make that person live a good and pure life, and certainly We will give them their return with the best of what they were doing.[27](#)

In yet another verse we read:

And whosoever does deeds of righteousness, whether male or female, and is a believer, then these shall enter Paradise and they shall not be wronged (even) to the husk of a date-stone.[28](#)

Each of the five pillars of Islam is as important for women as it is for men, and there is no differentiation in their reward:

And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves, mates, that you may dwell (inclined) unto them, and He placed love and compassion between the two of you. Indeed in this are signs for a people who reflect.[29](#)

This is a very apt definition of the relationship between man and woman as they are not bound together only by a physical relationship, but rather are brought together by love and mercy and such a definition and description comprises mutual care, consideration, respect and affection.

The Qur'an states:

They (your wives) are an apparel for you (the husbands) and you (the husbands) are an apparel for them.[30](#)

As an apparel gives protection, warmth, comfort and decency, so too a husband and wife offer each other intimacy, comfort and protection from adultery and other vices.

Allah also states:

I will not suffer the work of any of you that works to be lost, be he male or female, the one of you being from the other.[31](#)

Every man or woman should pursue his or her education as far as it is possible. One of the main aims of acquiring knowledge in Islam is to become Allah-conscious, and in the history of Islam, we find that there were women who were narrators of hadith, mystics, scholars, authors, poets and teachers in their own right! They utilized their knowledge within the precepts of Islam.

Indeed, Islam was founded with the rights of women inbuilt within the tenets of the Shari'ah and

therefore a Muslim woman is totally liberated and independent and within the limits of the Shari'ah, she can stand side by side men! Today in many Muslim countries, we find women in various professional fields gaining excellence and reaching their goals with modesty and virtue.

Islam is criticized for two reasons which are considered to be 'injustice against women'; namely the hijab (Islamic covering for women) and polygamy. In reality, hijab does not hamper the socio-psycho-economic growth of women – in fact a woman wearing the hijab commands more respect and is treated as an individual and not as an object of lust.

Rana Kabbani, a modern day author, writes in her book:

The wearing of Islamic dress gives these women greater – rather than less – freedom and mobility, for in such austere garb and with the mentality that accompanies it, they are much less likely to be closely monitored by their families. Wearing the hijab can be a form of liberation, freeing women from being sexual objects, releasing them from the trap of Western dress and dictates of Western fashion. Just as feminists in the West have reflected on the connection between 'feminist clothes' and female oppression, so Muslim feminists reject the outward symbols of sexual allure. In favour of the hijab, it can be said that by distancing its wearer from the world, it enriches spiritual life, grants freedom from material preoccupations, and erases class differences by expressing solidarity with others in the same uniform. Since all women look the same in it, it is a most effective equalizer, and since it camouflages rich clothing, it is in keeping with the Islamic injunction against ostentation.[32](#)

Frankly, what freedom and equal status has the Western civilization give to women? Prostitution, massage parlors, lesbianism, illegal mistresses, one-night stands, nudity and whamelessness! These are only some of the 'rights' that the 'Western world' has given to women. It has made women the cheapest commodity on the face of the Earth – from a car to a pack of candy, everything sells with the picture of a nude or semi-nude woman. The body of this cheap woman is the property of one and all. Every lusty and lecherous man is at full liberty to cast his filthy gaze upon her anatomy and commit everything evil and profane in his mind and heart. How cheap and despised is this woman on show!? How cheap is this woman the West has created!

On the contrary, the woman in Islam is a precious jewel not to be viewed by all. She is far too respectable than to be viewed and exhibited to any lecherous man. Her beauty and charms are reserved for the only person that truly appreciates and loves her – her husband. Thus, she is highly protected and covered at all times, unlike the cheap, shameless woman of the West, who has become the playmate of thousands, but loved by none for who she truly is.

In countries that have given women the so-called rights of freedom and equality and left them free to do as they wish, they are now shedding tears of remorse over the pathetic plight of their degeneration and disintegrating societies. Their women being economically and socially independent are no longer faithful and dedicated daughters, wives, sisters and mothers.

Marriage has become outdated and old-fashioned. Instead they prefer companionship, which becomes a relationship with no commitment binding upon the man or the woman. Children of such parents become delinquents and drug addicts – in summary, the whole society begins to decay and disintegrate so fast such that we see today, many countries have reached a point of no return.

Will Durant, the famous sociologist, says:

City life prevents men from observing the seasons, while sexual passions increase and conditions make indulgence easier. A civilization that makes marriage economically impossible before the age of thirty, drives a man to sexual deviation, weakens continence, and reduces purity from its original esteem as a virtue to distant lip-service as an impractical dream. Art enhances human beauties, man cease to count their sins. Women, claiming equality with men, fall prey to passions. Love affairs unlimited and premarital cohabitation becomes the rule rather than the exception. The streets may be free of prostitutes – but not through fear of the police! It is because women have bankrupted prostitutes by taking over their business for free.[33](#)

Before the advent of Islam, a man had no limit in regards to the number of their wives that he could keep. Islam imposed a limit and allowed plurality of marriage with the idea of abolishing adultery and although it allowed polygamy, it laid down strict rules so as to be safeguarded from misuse.

The Qur'an states:

Then marry those who seem good to you, two or three or four, and if you fear that you shall not deal justly (with so many) then (marry) one only.[34](#)

In another verse we are told:

And even if due to some circumstances divorce should take place among them, the woman should under no circumstances be wronged. And for the divorced women (too) (shall) be a provision in fairness, (this is) a duty on those who guard themselves (against evil).[35](#)

Allah also mentions in the Qur'an:

O Prophet! (Say to the people) When you divorce (your) women, divorce them at their prescribed period, and reckon the iddah (prescribed waiting period), and fear (the wrath of) Allah your Lord, and turn them not out of their houses, nor shall they (themselves) go out, unless they commit any indecency. These are the limits of Allah, and whosoever transgresses the limits of Allah, then indeed he does injustice to his own self. And when they reached their iddah (the term prescribed), then either retain them with fairness or part with them with kindness.[36](#)

History is full of examples that prove that polygamy existed, rather ruthlessly among the major religions of the world long before the advent of Islam.

The Sasanian king, Khusroe Pervez had 3,000 wives and 12,000 slave girls who were musical performers.^{[37](#)} In China the Li Ki law gave every man the right to have upto 130 wives. In Israel one man could have several hundred wives. Charlemagne had 400 and Ardeshir Babekan had about the same number. Nor did the Gospel, following the Torah, abrogate or condemn this practice or utter a decree to ban it such that up until the second half of the 8th century ad and the time of Charlemagne, polygamy was customary in Europe and was not condemned by the Church!

Among all Eastern nations of antiquity, polygamy was a recognized institution. Its practice by royalty, which bore the insignia of divinity, sanctified its observance to the people.

Among the Hindus, polygamy, in both its aspects, prevailed from ancient times. Krishna, the most revered of Hindu deities, is believed to have had 16,108 wives! Dashratha, the King of Ayodhya and the father of Rama – another of the revered Hindu deities, married three wives.

Apparently, among the ancient Medes, Babylonians, Assyrians and Persians, there was no restriction as to the number of wives a man could take.

Polygamy existed among the Israelites, before the time of Prophet Moses, and it continued after him without any limit on the number of marriages that a Hebrew husband could contract. In later times, the Talmud restricted the number of wives a man could have through the ability of the husband to maintain them properly, and although the Rabbis counseled that a man should not take more than four wives, the Karaites differed from them and did not recognize the validity of any limitation.

To the Persians, religion offered a premium on the plurality of wives.^{[38](#)}

Among the Syro-Phoenician races, whom the Israelites displaced, conquered or destroyed, polygamy was degraded into bestiality.

Among the Thracians, Lyndians, and the Pelasgian races that settled in different parts of Europe and Western Asia, the customs of plurality of marriages prevailed to an inordinate extent, and dwarfs all comparison with the practice prevailing elsewhere!^{[39](#)}

As for the Athenians, the most civilized and the most cultured of all the nations of antiquity, the wife was a mere chattel, marketable and transferable to others and a subject of testamentary disposition. She was regarded as being evil however indispensable for ensuring the orderliness of the household and for the procreation of children. An Athenian was allowed to have any number of wives, and the Demosthenes glorified in the possession by his people of three classes of women, two of which furnished the legal and semi-legal wives.^{[40](#)}

Among the Spartans, though the men were not allowed, unless under special circumstances, to have more than one wife, the women could have and almost did have more than one husband.^{[41](#)}

History proves conclusively that until very recent times, polygamy was not considered so reprehensive

as it is now. St. Augustine himself seems to have observed in it no intrinsic immorality or sinfulness, and declared that polygamy was not a crime if it was in the legal institution of a country.

Considering the exploitation of woman in the name of liberation, numerous non-Muslim scholars too voice their support in favour of the institution of polygamy.

Dr. Annie Besant says:

When we see thousands of miserable women who crowd the streets of Western towns during the night, we must surely feel that it does not lie in Western mouths to reproach Islam for its polygamy. It is better for a woman, happier for a woman, more respectable for a woman, to live in Islamic polygamy, united to one man only, with the legitimate child in her arms surrounded with respect, than to be seduced, cast out into the streets, perhaps with an illegitimate child outside the pale of law – unsheltered and uncared for, to become a victim of any passerby, night after night rendered incapable of motherhood, despised by all.

In nations in which multiple marriages is legal, it is made possible for practically all women to have a husband, children and a true family life which meets their spiritual needs and satisfies their feminine instincts.

Unfortunately Church laws in Europe have not allowed multiple marriages and left many women to a life of spinsterhood. Some died unsatisfied; some were driven by their desires or by the need to earn their livelihood into immorality; some perished with qualms of conscience and broken hearts.

Nor can I understand, after giving much thought to the matter, why a man, whose wife falls ill of a chronic or incurable disease or proves barren or unable to bear a living child, should not take a second wife alongside the first. This is a question the Church should answer – unfortunately it cannot.

Good laws are those which ensure a happy life when obeyed, not those which deprive people of happiness or bind them hand and foot in the trammels of unnecessary bondage or which incite people to despise them and so to rush to the other extreme of corruption, prostitution or other kinds of vice.[42](#)

It has also been stated by Dr. Gustave Le Bon that:

Nothing has been more criticized in Europe than Eastern customs of multiple marriages. No view held in Europe has shown the same amount of ignorance and error as this criticism. Surely the legal multiple marriage of the East is better than the hypocritical secretive multiple marriages of the West. The clandestine nature of the illicit relationship is degrading to both parties. The legalization of multiple marriages is far more seemly in every respect.[43](#)

It is true that today, far too many women in the East lead an unsatisfactory way of life and face humiliation, neglect and deprivation. But this is not due to Islam's regulations – rather it is due to the neglect of religious precepts in political, social and economical institution by Muslims themselves. Nonetheless it is far better than the degradation and exploitation of women in the West under the pretext

of liberation.

In the autobiography of Bertrand Russell, who was one of the most headstrong opponents of polygamy, we read that in his early life, apart from his mother, two women created a great impression upon him. One of them was Alys, his first wife, and the other one was his friend lady Ottoline Morell, one of the well-known women of that period and a friend of many of the early 20th century writers.

It seems that it was his love affairs that brought an end to his relationship with his wife. Russell himself wrote that one afternoon he resolved to ride to the country houses near the city on a bicycle, and that “all of a sudden I felt that I no longer loved Alys!”

The Bible also allows polygamy, to cite a few examples, “He (Solomon) had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines.”⁴⁴ At another place it is quoted, “If he take upon him another wife, her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage, shall not diminish her.”⁴⁵

We now turn to the vision of Islam and its teachings on women. The best and the most perfect example of a woman’s excellence and significance in Islam can be found in the glorious and peerless personality of Sayyidah Fatimah, the only daughter of Prophet Muhammad and Lady Khadijah. She was also his most beloved daughter and was the wife of Imam ‘Ali and the mother of eleven infallible leaders (Imams).

She combined in herself all the noble qualities, merits and ideals that even the most virtuous of men have failed to achieve. Her unparalleled wisdom, excellent traits, unfaltering character, lofty morals and firm belief in Allah reigns superior such that she stands unequalled in the annals of history.

What more excellence could Islam bestow upon a woman when we find a woman in an immaculate personality of Fatimah! And who else, except the Noble Prophet could praise his daughter suitably. Several times he declared, “Fatimah is a part of me; whoever delights her, delights me; and whoever enrages her, enrages me.”

Islam has produced numerous virtuous ladies who were peerless in their age, but none could attain the lofty position that Lady Fatimah did.

Prophet Adam’s wife Hawwa; Prophet Ibrahim’s wives Hajra and Sarah; The Pharaoh’s believing wife Asiyah; Prophet Isa’s mother Sayyidah Maryam; some of Prophet Muhammad’s wives, at the head of which was Sayyidah Khadijah, his mother Aminah b. Wahab, the mother of Imam ‘Ali, Fatimah b. Asad, etc. were ladies of lofty characters, but it was Fatimah alone who was declared as the “Mistress of the women of the worlds”, from the beginning until the end of time.

Her eminence is evident at several occasions when the Prophet himself would stand up to greet her whenever she came into his presence, and this was not due to a father’s love for his daughter, but rather

due to her own identity and her distinction. Indeed, tongues fall short of words to describe her eminence, and pens lack the ability to note down her merits.

Numerous books have been written by Shi'a and non-Shi'a scholars upon the life of this eminent personality, to name a few:

1. Fatimah al-Zahra Ummul Imamah wa Sayyadatun Nisa written by Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Naini
2. Fatimah al-Zahra minal Mahd ilal Lahad written by Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim al-Qazwini
3. Fadak fil Tarikh written by Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr
4. Fatimah al-Zahra: Umme Abiha written by Ayatullah Sayyid Fadhil al-Milani
5. Wafat al-Siddiqatuz Zahra written by Sayyid 'Abdul-Razzaq al-Muqarram
6. Fatimah al-Zahra: Qudwah wa Uswah written by Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Modarresi
7. Fatimah al-Zahra al Mar'ah al Namuzajiiyyah fil Islam written by Ayatullah Shaykh Ibrahim Amini
8. Fatimah al-Zahra written by Ayatullah Sayyid Dastaghaib Shirazi
9. Balagatul Fatemiyyah minal dawha al Muhammadiyyah written by Sayyid Jasim al-Shabbar
10. l'ilamu Anni Fatimah written by Shaykh 'Abdul-Hamid al-Muhajir
11. Al-Batul al-Azra written by Muhammad Husayn Shamsuddin
12. Al-Batul Fatimah al-Zahra written by Dr. 'Abdul-Fattah Muhammad al-Halu
13. Ummul Hasnain binte Akram Rasul as-Sayyidah Fatimah al-Zahra al-Batul written by Ahmad 'Abdul-Mun'im 'Abdus-Salam al-Halawani
14. Al-Sugur al-Basemah fi Fadha'il Fatimah written by Jalaluddin Suyuti
15. Al-Islam yuqif ila janibil mar'ah wa yukarrimoha fi shakhsiyyatiz Zahra written by 'Abdul-Rasul 'Ali Khan

The book in your hands, *Baytul Ahzan Fi Masaib Sayyadatun Niswan*, (The House of Sorrows relating to the sorrows of the Mistress of the Women) is authored by the celebrated scholar Shaykh 'Abbas al-Qummi.

This book focuses on the glorious life of Sayyidah Fatimah and also discusses in detail the heart-breaking episodes of Saqifah and Fadak which took place after the death of the Noble Prophet.

Wherever I have found it necessary, I have annexed notes to the translation to further understanding and clarification, and the readers are requested to refer to these notes.

This book is the third in the translation series of the works of Shaykh al-Qummi's books – the first being Manazilul Akhirah which focuses on the life in the next world after this life; and the second one being Nafasul Mahmum concerning the tragic event of Kerbala.

‘Arabic being an eloquent and lucid language, it is usually impossible to translate certain words or phrases into any other language, thus it becomes necessary at some places to quote the original ‘Arabic words.

Notwithstanding whatever knowledge and effort put in such work, it remains far from being perfect, for perfection is the essence of Allah. I therefore request the readers to write in, should they feel it necessary, to raise any point or make any remarks in so far as the translation is concerned and not the actual text of the book.

For the translation of the sermon of Sayyidah Fatimah, I have referred to the book of Ayatullah al-Uzma Shaykh Husayn ‘Ali Muntazari that explains her sermon in detail, rather than translating it myself, for it is impossible for an ordinary person like me, to comprehend the eloquence of the words of the Infallibles. His explanation on her sermon was given in his ‘Ba’thul Kharij’ lectures (highest level of lectures in the Islamic seminary) delivered by the Ayatullah to the students of the Islamic seminary and have been compiled into a book.

As for the Qur’anic verses, I have referred to the English translation and Commentary by Ayatullah Shaykh Mahdi Pooya Yazdi and S.V. Mir Ahmad ‘Ali, published by Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an Inc., Elmhurst, NY.

May Sayyidah Fatimah accept this humble service of mine seeking her pleasure and the pleasure of Allah, and may Allah exalt the position of the author of this informative book, Shaykh ‘Abbas b. Muhammad Ridha al-Qummi, and offer him refuge under His Emphyrean on the Day of Resurrection and count him among the slaves of the Ahlul Bayt.

May Allah hasten the auspicious reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi, the one who will fill the earth with justice and equity as it is filled with injustice and oppression; and may Allah include us among his slaves and adherents.

Aejaz-Ali Turab-Husain (al-Husainee)

aejazali@hotmail.com [1]

Baqirul Uloom Islamic Library and Research Centre – Mumbai, India

17th August 2007 ce

3rd Sha’ban 1428 ah

- [1.](#) . Jawaharlal Nehru, "Discovery of India", Oxford University Press (1982)
- [2.](#) . Karen Armstrong, "The Gospel According to Woman: Christianity's creation of the sex war in the West", Elm Tree Books (1986); Nancy Van Vuren, "The Subversion of Women as practiced by Churches, Witch-Hunters, and other sexists", Westminster Press.
- [3.](#) . Karen Armstrong, "The Gospel According to Woman: Christianity's creation of the sex war in the West", Elm Tree Books (1986)
- [4.](#) . H. Ellerbe, "The dark side of Christian History", Chapter 8, Endnote 103, Page 136
- [5.](#) . Reformation Fellowship of the East Valley, Mesa, AZ (circa 1995)
- [6.](#) . L.C. Nand, "Women in Delhi Sultanate", Vohra Publishers and Distributors, Allahabad (1989); B.N.S. Yadav, "Society and Culture in Northern India in 12th century", Allahabad (1973); A.S. Altekar, "The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization", Delhi (1973); G.R. Banerjee, "Some Aspects of the Position of Women in Ancient India"
- [7.](#) . Manu Smriti, IX:94
- [8.](#) . Encyclopedia Britannica, 8:986 'ordeal'
- [9.](#) . Manu Smriti 8:371
- [10.](#) . Manu Smriti 8:356
- [11.](#) . Ghee is a Sanskrit word for a clarified butter used primarily in Indian cuisine. Traditional ghee is produced from the milk of buffalo indigenous to the regions of India and Pakistan, but it can also be made from any other milk-producing animal.
- [12.](#) . Rig Veda X: 18:7; M.P.V. Kane, "History of Dharmasashtra", Vol.. IV, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (1953)
- [13.](#) . Garuda Purana II: 4: 91-100; M.P.V. Kane, "History of Dharmasashtra", Vol.. IV, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (1953)
- [14.](#) . Brahma Purana 80: 75; S. Sheth, "Religion and Society in The Brahma Purana", Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., N.Delhi (1979)
- [15.](#) . Mahabharata, Mausalaparvan, 7: 18
- [16.](#) . Mahabharata, Adiparvan, 95: 65
- [17.](#) . Sonali Verma, "Indian women still awaiting Independence", Reuters, 12 Aug. 1997, New Delhi
- [18.](#) . P.M. Nair, IPS, "A Report on Trafficking in Women and Children in India 2002-2003", National Human Rights Commission, Government of India (July 18, 2004)
- [19.](#) . Jogan Shankar, "Devadasi Cult – A Sociological Analysis (Second Revised Edition)", Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi (2004)
- [20.](#) . N.N. Bhattacharya, "History of Indian Erotic Literature – Sacred Books of the East", Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi (1975)
- [21.](#) . Justice Ameer 'Ali, "The Spirit of Islam"
- [22.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Nahl (16):58-59
- [23.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Surah Bani Isra'il (17):31
- [24.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Takwir (81):8-9
- [25.](#) . Ayatullah Khomeini, "Pithy Aphorisms: Wise sayings and counsels"
- [26.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Ahzab (33):35
- [27.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Nahl (16):97
- [28.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Nisa (4):124
- [29.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Rum (30):21
- [30.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Baqarah (2):187
- [31.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Surah Ale 'Imran (3):195
- [32.](#) . Rana Kabbani, "Letter to Christendom", Virago Press, London (1989)
- [33.](#) . Will Durant, "Pleasures of Philosophy"
- [34.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Nisa (4):3
- [35.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Baqarah (2):241
- [36.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Talaq (65):1-2

- [37.](#) . Hamza Isfahani, “Sani Mulukul Arz”
- [38.](#) . Dollinger, “The Gentile and the Jew”
- [39.](#) . Encyclopedia Universelle, art, “Marriage”; Dollinger, “The Gentile and the Jew”, vol. II
- [40.](#) . Dollinger, “The Gentile and the Jew”, vol. II
- [41.](#) . Grote, “History of Greece”, vol. VI
- [42.](#) . Authur Schopenhauer, “Some words about women”
- [43.](#) . Dr. Gustave Le Bon
- [44.](#) . 1 Kings, 11:3
- [45.](#) . Exodus 21: 10

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/house-sorrows-life-sayyidah-fatimah-al-zahra-and-her-grief-shaykh-abbas-qummi/translators-foreword#comment-0>

Links

[1] <mailto:aejazali@hotmail.com>