

Introduction

The history of mankind overflows with instances of tyrannical acts perpetrated against the deprived and meek of the earth by oppressors and men of power. Every so often, it was the oppressed who, heeding the call of a venerable descendant of the family of the prophets and saints, rose up in anger against those practicing injustice and by sacrificing their lives and enduring immense hardships allowed the people of the world to enjoy a breath of the fresh air of justice and equity.

Before very long, however, the stench from the fetid water of pride and arrogance, diffused by riches, power and deceit, once again dispersed the sweet savour of justice, stifling the justice seekers.

Women meanwhile, as half of mankind, have been made to suffer additional injustice – the description of which calls for a book thicker than that needed to record the oppression suffered by mankind in general – and in their role as ‘spouses of men’, invariably shared their husbands’ sorrow and were their refuge in hard times.

In many instances throughout history when the tyranny of tyrants or the tribulations of the time have caused the death of their husbands, it was the women who, single-handed, had to shoulder the burden of responsibility. In addition to these, women, whether in their role as daughters in their fathers’ house, spouses at the side of their husbands or sisters to their brothers, and women compared to men in general, have never enjoyed their proper station and have usually been regarded as the weaker sex, inferior, unfortunate, pitiful, her greatness ignored.

Even though throughout the different periods of history and in the various cultures and societies this discrimination has experienced varying degrees of severity, still, unfortunately, its perpetuation and pervasiveness are undeniable, with each period of time demonstrating at least one of its many hues.

As we know, among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times, burying girls alive was seen as a way for families to deliver themselves from what was believed to be the misfortune of having a female child. It was only in a short period in the earliest age of Islam that through the teachings and practice of the Prophet and members of his virtuous household, women recovered, to a certain degree, their true worth and station.

With the revival and restoration of the former system, this time masquerading as the Islamic caliphate, women's standing once again lapsed and gradually with the passage of time fossilised misinterpretations of Islam imposed crippling restrictions and limitations on women, such that even in the last few decades veins of these ossified views expressing disdain for women and belittling their position could still be clearly seen among the contemporary petrified religious traditionalists.

It was in such circumstances that the imperialists and their henchmen, in keeping with their hegemonic tendencies, began to seek suitable ways and means of infiltrating the cultural and political life of Iran, and to this end they availed themselves of the position of women in our society. With the slogans of freedom and equality, they promoted the culture of nakedness and libertinism, in the process making use of the most draconian of despotic measures as seen in Riza Khan's policy of forcing women to remove their Islamic veils (*kashf-i hijab*).^{[1](#)}

This ambition, which at the time of Riza Khan's son – a son truly worthy of such a father – took on a more subtle and clever form, was described in the imperial literature as turning women into beguiling creatures. In the Shah's logic, the modern woman, the woman free of religious restraints, has as her mission beguilement, and all obstacles to the realisation of this mission must be removed.

Thus it was that not only women, but the other half of society too, i.e. the men, fell under the spell of beguilement. We ourselves witnessed how, in addition to the cabarets and dance halls and the formal and informal gatherings, the streets, city squares, parks, recreational centres, swimming pools and beaches, as showplaces of this imperial policy, were in practice changed into something akin to houses of pleasure in the service of degenerating, corrupting and narcotising the young generation.

The model of the beguiling woman is one borrowed from Western society. Unfortunately, in the original model too, woman's true greatness and identity have been sacrificed at the altar of the Western materialist philosophy in worship of the two gods of Western man: the economy and the pursuit of pleasure.

Consequently, in the Western civilisation too, women are to a great extent either used to promote and sell goods or to promote and sell themselves. She is a commodity in the service of the ruling system and plays her part according to the dictates of the 'establishment'.

With the help of the above observations, the greatness of Imam Khomeini's action in reviving the true identity of Muslim women can be seen, and the luminosity of his thought demonstrated.

Imam saw for himself how the fossilised ideas of his generation viewed women as nothing other than the 'weaker sex' and wives imprisoned in the women's quarters of the home. On the other hand, with his special perspicacity he realised that the role the Shah and imperialism had in mind for women as beguilers and playthings would not lead to them enjoying a better position and would result only in the degeneration and corruption of Muslim societies, in Muslims becoming estranged from their own culture and in them losing sight of who they are.

In his position as an enlightened and crusading *marja-i taqlid*², he drew from the limpid waters of the heavenly fount of the teachings of the pure Islam of Muhammad and from his reflections as a *mujtahid*³ on the precious heritage of the traditions of the Prophet and the teachings of the infallible Imams, upon whom be peace, and arrived at such a correct understanding of women's responsibilities and true role in society that we see this manifested in the revival of the Muslim woman's identity in the Islamic republic system.

It was acceptance of his view of women that, despite years of endeavours by imperialism's propaganda organs on one side and the presence of fossilised ideas that appeared in the form of devotion to Islam on the other, brought women onto the scene during the Islamic Revolution in Iran in such a way that it was nicknamed the revolution of the chador⁴—clad by news agencies, observers and analysts.

And it was not only in the demonstrations to overthrow the Shah's regime that the opinions of women were taken as sound and helpful, rather this was the case in all stages of the sanction, endorsement and establishment of the Islamic republic system. Subsequently, despite the backwardness which had arisen from old-fashioned policies and views and which had hampered the legitimate development and blossoming of their talents and capabilities, women now rapidly made up for the past and made great strides along the road to securing their proper position in society.

The composition of the delegation, which presented Imam's historic message to Gorbachev, the former leader of the now defunct Soviet Union, provides a valuable and meaningful example of Imam's views on the role women should play in an Islamic society. In a symbolic move, he appointed a delegation made up of clergymen, academics and a woman to announce the death of communism to the world.

Indeed, perhaps one can even claim that the composition of the delegation itself conveyed a message as correct as that old sage's miraculous prediction forewarning of the fall of the Eastern bloc: that the revival of Islam and the world's future power lay in the capable hands of these three sections of society, and that it would be through their correct understanding and implementation of their true mission that the tree of Islamic revolution would blossom forth and overshadow the ruins of communism and capitalism.

For the generation that ponders on the true position of women, Imam's own attitude towards women, his directives, his unambiguous and enlightening stances and his ground-breaking edicts in this regard, which were formed within the framework of indisputable *shari'a*⁵ laws and were completely loyal to the principles and incontrovertible precepts of the religion, can be used as practical guidelines.

There are those to whom the traditional restrictions and denigration to which, unfortunately, in the name of the *shari'a*, women in many countries which claim to be Islamic are subjected, are an anathema. And yet, at the same time, they also cannot accept the extremist positions taken by those claiming to defend the rights of women – who with phantasmal claims of equal rights even reject the natural and innate differences which exist between men and women, and have in practice set off down a road towards destroying the family and the moral and spiritual centres. For such people the desire to find the happy

medium usually ends in frustration.

By referring to this anthology, such people will become acquainted with the opinions of a man who is a descendant of Fatima Zahra,⁶ and who views woman as mankind's educator, as one who helps fulfil mankind's aspirations and as one from whose lap man ascends. His view of women is such that he goes so far as to say: "If nations were deprived of courageous women, of women to rear true human beings, they would decline and collapse."

It was he who with his unique and enlightened way of thinking and without departing from the traditions (*sunna*) of his forefathers and the system of Islamic laws (*fiqh*) saw the solution to the problem or the difficulty of women's right in the matter of divorce – which had been the focus of much malicious propaganda by self-interested elements – to lie in women's right to execute a divorce.

And now we present to those interested this anthology of the valuable precepts and messages of that holy man concerning women. It has been compiled with the help of the centre for cultural study and research of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (Women's Cultural Affairs Unit).

The excerpts selected in each section are placed in chronological order except for those taken from books Imam has authored, the source for which is given at the end of each excerpt. Regarding his messages and speeches, only the dates have been given throughout, however complete references appear at the end of the book to facilitate further research.

The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works

¹. After the Constitutional Revolution from the middle of 1927, some circles close to Riza Khan began talking about the forced removal of the women's Islamic veil (*kashf-i hijab*) and by the New Year of 1928 (1307 AHS), Riza Khan's wife and daughters appeared in public without the Islamic covering. The law calling for the removal of hijab was implemented after Riza Khan's return from Turkey (in 1934) on 7 January 1935 (17 Dey 1341 AHS). On this day, Riza Khan, accompanied by his wife and two daughters, attended the opening ceremonies for a college along with his ministers and their wives who had removed their Islamic covering. At this ceremony, Riza Khan addressed the women saying: "We have broken the prison bars! Now the freed prisoners can make beautiful homes instead of cages."

². Marja'-i taqlid: a scholar of proven learning and piety whose authoritative rulings one follows in matters of religious practice.

³. Mujtahid: an authority on divine law who is entitled to give an independent judgement on a point of theology or law.

⁴. Large cloak and veil which envelops the woman's entire body, worn in Iran and elsewhere.

⁵. – Shari'a: the all-embracing law of Islam derived from the Qur'an, the normative practice and authoritative pronouncements of the Prophet, and a number of secondary sources.

⁶. – Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet and wife of Imam `Ali, also known as Fatima Zahra.

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