

WOMEN in ISLAM

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I have used the Holy Qur'an with the English Translation by Marmaduke Pickthall and the Urdu Translation by Maulana Fateh Mohammad Jallendhri published by Taj Company Ltd., Karachi, Pakistan.

When two dates are given together the first is of the Christian Era (AD) and the second is Muslim (AH).

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1 INTRODUCTION

The role of women in the Muslim world is extremely varied. I think of a Muslim student whose grandmother influenced her choice of studies in London. She was allowed to study Domestic Science but not English Literature which was her preference. Once I visited a millionaire's home in a remote part of Pakistan. Our host had enough money to fly to England to see a sick friend but his only child, a twelve-year-old daughter, was growing up illiterate. In the same extended-family household I met a college graduate, the cast-off wife of another member of the family. She may have been rejected because she had no children. It was unlikely that she would ever again be free to leave the house and garden. From the same country comes Begum Ikramullah whose autobiography *From Purdah to Parliament* is dedicated to her husband who permitted her to leave off the veil "and has regretted it ever since"!

In Saudi Arabia one of the effects of oil wealth is a new educational system which caters for all girls as well as boys - total literacy within the span of one generation. This is bound to have profound effects not only on women but on society in general. At present women medical students in the University of Riyadh learn on closed-circuit television in a room from which their male teachers and male fellow-students are shut off. If they want to ask questions they press a button and use the inter-communication system.

Quranic teaching, the 'Sunnah', 'Hadith' (the Traditions), culture and local customs all influence the role of women. Sometimes proverbs give us a clue about traditional attitudes to women. One such Punjabi proverb says, "If a wife dies, it is like a blow on the ankle; if a husband dies, it is like a blow on the head". Benedictions are also revealing, like this Afghan one sometimes said to women, "May God bless you and may you remain a married woman with seven children". Anyone seeking detailed information will need to study and if possible visit the country from which a particular Muslim woman comes. It will probably be necessary to learn her language also.

The most helpful comprehensive study on Muslim Women is a volume entitled *Women in the Muslim World*, edited by Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie. It is divided into four sections :

- Part 1. General Perspectives on legal and socio-economic change.
- Part 2. Historical Perspectives.
- Part 3. Case Studies. Nomads, Villagers, Town and City Dwellers.
- Part 4. Ideology, Religion and Ritual.

An understanding of the seclusion of women will also be important. One of the most significant studies is Patricia Jeffrey's book, *Frogs in a Well. Indian Women in Purdah*. However, the best insights can be gained from friendships with Muslim women themselves.

2 TRADITIONAL ROLES OF MUSLIM WOMEN

It is fundamental to see what the Qur'an teaches about women and the family as well as to get some idea about what a Muslim woman might know about her faith. We will look at these two subjects and then at matters relating to child-birth, family planning and abortion.

2.1 *Quranic Teaching about Women and Singleness*

In considering the teaching of the Qur'an about women, we must bear in mind the situation in Arabia just before the rise of Islam in the first part of the seventh century A.D. Arabia was rapidly changing from a polytheistic and animistic society dominated by women, to a society in which men had more authority. Such rapid social change was caused mainly by the demands of trade and town life. When Islam came it stressed the male line. Succession and inheritance were from father to son. Wives went to live with their husbands instead of staying with their families and receiving visits from their husbands from time to time. In seventh century Arabia, Islam and the stress on patrilineal (male line) ideals brought reform and improvement to the position of women and children. Against this background we should consider the Quranic teaching about women and the family.

a. Marriage is one of God's signs

According to the Qur'an one of the 'signs' or 'ayat' of God's power and mercy is that he created mankind. "And one of his signs it is that he

has created wives for you of your own species, that you may dwell with them, and has put love and tenderness between you. Here truly are signs for those who reflect" (Q 30:21). Marriage is represented as a gift of God (Q 16:72) and the normal condition (Q 4:25). Men and women are required to remain chaste before marriage (Q 24:30-33) and to avoid adultery (Q 17:32). The punishment for adultery is one hundred stripes (Q 24:2), not stoning as in the Traditions. The punishment for accusing honourable women without producing four witnesses is eighty stripes. A Muslim man may marry a woman from the People of the Book, i.e. a Jewess or a Christian, but not an idolatress or atheist (Q 5:5 and 2:221). A Muslim woman may marry only a Muslim. We can note that Muhammad had a Coptic Christian concubine, Marie, and a Jewish wife, Safiya Bint Huayy. It is a great sin to marry any of those listed in surah 4:21-23, including foster-sisters. "Forbidden unto you are your mothers and your daughters and your sisters, and your father's sisters, and your mother's sisters, and your brother's daughters, and your sister's daughters, and your foster-mothers, and your foster-sisters, and your mothers-in-law, and your step-daughters who are born under your protection..." (part of Q 4:23).

b. Spiritually, men and women are equal

In surah 16:97 we read, "Whoso doeth that which is right, whether male or female, if a believer, him will we surely quicken to a happy life, and recompense them with a reward meet for their best deeds". Both men and women

are to keep the five main religious duties, the five pillars, as far as possible. Women are more restricted in this. Practice varies in many parts of the world as to whether a woman may attend mosque prayers. In mosques that I have attended in the U.S.A. men sit in the front and women behind for the Friday prayers. Maulana Maududi who in 1941 founded the Jama'at-i-Islami, a fundamentalist equivalent for the Indian subcontinent of the Muslim Brotherhood, stated that menstruating women should not engage in ritual prayers or fasting. These women try to make up the days of fasting at some later time. Menstruation is regarded as a major pollution and for this reason among others a woman should not pray in public in a mosque according to Maududi. At a time of ritual uncleanness, prayer and fasting are rendered invalid. In some new mosques like the Kowloon Mosque in Hong Kong, there are special arrangements for women to pray and be present for Friday prayers in the upper part of the mosque where they are completely separate from the men but can see all that is taking place and participate in the ritual prayers. Another limitation for a woman is that she cannot go on pilgrimage to Mecca unless she is escorted by a male relative or guardian.

c. Men and women have different but complementary roles in society

Although men and women are spiritually equal before God they have different functions and responsibilities. There are four ways in which the primacy of men over women is affirmed in the Qur'an:

1. man is physically stronger (Q 2:228).
2. men may discipline their wives (Q 4:34).
3. in a legal situation.

In recent years there has been much debate in Pakistan as to whether, in a court of law, the testimony of one man is equalled by the testimony of two women or of one woman. In the end it was decided that in each case the judge would decide - a solution which pleased neither the fundamentalists nor the liberals. The question of evidence in court stems from one particular Quranic verse (surah 2:282). However, Muslims put a very high store on the Hadith or Traditions. Some Hadith raise interesting questions about the position of women. Aisha, one of Muhammad's wives, was not happy about being categorized with dogs. Bukhari, in his collection of Hadith (Vol. 2, 135), records that Muhammad said that, "Prayer is annulled by a dog, a donkey and a woman (if they pass in front of the praying people). I said you have made us, i.e. women, dogs."

4. in the matter of inheritance (Q 4:11).

Generally a daughter inherits half of what would come to her brother. The rationale is that the son has greater economic responsibilities. "Men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God has gifted the one above the other, and on account of the outlay they make of their substance for them." (Q 4:34).

d. The Quranic view of the family

Children are a gift of God (Q 16:72). In pre-Islamic society the birth of a girl was of less honour (Q 16:58-59). Obedience to parents is like that due to God (Q 37:102). The approval of

God reveals itself in the approval of parents and the anger of God reveals itself in the anger of parents (Q 64:14-15). Looking after elderly parents is implicit in the worship of God (Q 6:152). Being faithful to Islam comes before obeying one's parents (Q 31:15).

e. Polygamy or monogamy?

Muslims interpret variously the Quranic verse that a man may have up to four wives, provided he treats them equally (Q 4:3). Some claim that no man can treat two, three or four women equally so this is really an argument for monogamy. The main arguments in favour of polygamy are that the physiological needs of the man are more compelling than those of the woman and last to an advanced age. Barrenness, illness or long menstruation hinder relationships (Q 2:222). To guard from the sin of adultery and to protect women in immoral societies the Qur'an proposes polygamy.

f. Divorce

While the Qur'an allows divorce, it is considered "the most detestable of permitted things". Men and women do not generally have equal rights in these matters. Only the man is free to send his wife away. It is commonly thought that if the wife has the same possibilities she would be less concerned with preserving her home. The right of asking for divorce can always be granted to the wife if it has been written into the marriage contract and if the prevailing school of law permits it.

The first quarrel in the life of the couple will

not necessarily lead to divorce. The Qur'an outlines several steps towards reconciliation - the husband should begin by admonishing his wife. If she does not respond he should abandon the conjugal bed; he can beat her if she persists in disobedience (Q 4:34). If she obeys they can be reconciled. If these possibilities are exhausted the husband can appeal to two arbitrators - one from his family and the other from his wife's family (Q 4:35). Divorce will only be pronounced if all these efforts fail. Otherwise the divorce will take effect after four months. During that time the wife will join her parents' family. At the end of this period the husband will again have the chance for reversing his decision.

In the case of divorce or widowhood, the woman has to wait three menstrual cycles before remarrying, lest there be any doubt about the paternity of the new-born child (Q 2:226). During this delay and, if she is pregnant, until the birth and the end of weaning (which lasts for two years), the divorcing husband is bound to provide for the woman and child (Q 2:233).

SINGLENESS IN ISLAM

One 'Hadith' states that "marriage is half the faith" (al-zawaj nisf al-iman). Muslims have often questioned single Christian women working in Muslim lands about their single state. However, Muslims are well aware of singleness. Rabi'a, one of the most famous Muslim mystics held in the highest regard, was single. It seems that she had made a vow of consecration to God so that she could have closer union with him. Some Sufi orders encourage celibacy

for religious reasons. In fact, the early Sufis often exhorted their students to remain celibate. Al-Ghazali commends celibacy if one cannot cope with the expenses and burdens of family life. Those Muslims who do not see Sufism as an authentic expression of Islam could consider Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the highly respected orthodox reformer of the nineteenth century and the teacher of Muhammad Abduh who laid the foundations of modern Islamic reform in Egypt and beyond. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani never married although on his travels throughout the Muslim world he had many offers. Whenever an admiring disciple offered his daughter in marriage his answer was always the same, “The ummah (Islamic community) is my spouse”.

Fatima Jinnah, sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was single. Jesus Christ, one of the six main prophets of Islam, who features prominently in the Qur’an never married. His mother Mary or Mariam is the greatest woman both in the Bible and the Qur’an. The Qur’an recognizes her chastity and sees her as the perfect example of virginity (Q 21:91 and 66:12). John the Baptist, Yahya in the Qur’an, was called ‘hasur’ or ‘chaste’, and never married (Q 3:39).

Both Islam and Christianity see the celibate life as the exception. Voluntary celibacy for certain causes is increasing among Muslims, for example among those who are involved in the liberation of Palestine.

2.2 Orthodox beliefs based on the Qur’an and the Traditions

The segregation of the sexes in Muslim society has often prevented adequate research into the situation of women. Much of the investigation will have to be done by women among women and by men among men. Co-operation in research is needed in order to get a total picture.

We need to ask, “What are the religious beliefs of Muslim women?” The varieties are many, but the orthodox Muslim woman taught in her faith at the mosque school, or by the wife of the local ‘mullah’, or by her parents will at least know the ‘shahadah’ or ‘testimony’, “There is no god but God; and Muhammad is the Apostle of God”. She will accept the following six articles of faith (Q 2:285).

- 1. God.** The constant stress of the Qur’an is on the unity of God.
- 2. God’s angels.** His angels include Gabriel, one of the four archangels. Through Gabriel the Qur’an was revealed to Muhammad. Other angels include Munkar and Nakir, the interrogators who question those who have just died about their beliefs.
- 3. God’s books.** His books include the Pentateuch or ‘torah’ sent down on Moses; the Psalms or ‘zabur’, sent down on David; the Gospel or ‘injl’, sent down on Jesus and the Qur’an sent down on Muhammad.
- 4. God’s apostles.** The most important prophets are Adam, ‘safi ullah’ or ‘chosen of God’; Noah, ‘nabi ullah’ or ‘prophet of God’; Abra-

ham, 'khalil ullah' or 'friend of God'; Ishmael, 'dhabihat ullah' or 'sacrifice of God'; Moses, 'kalim ullah' or 'converser with God'; Jesus, 'kalimat ullah' or 'word of God' and Muhammad, 'apostle of God' or 'rasul ullah'. Muhammad is the last and the seal of the prophets.

5. The day of resurrection and judgment. A third of the Qur'an deals with the judgment and justice of God.

6. God's decrees. His decrees relate to the doctrine of predestination to good or evil.

Faith or 'iman' is defined by orthodox theologians as confession with the tongue and belief in the heart as to the truth of the Muslim religion. This includes the formal declaration of faith in the above six articles. It also includes a simple expression of faith in the teaching of the Qur'an and the 'Hadith' or 'Traditions'. (For more detail see Glossary).

In the Traditions, faith includes practice and all that belongs to the religious life of the Muslim. The word used for religious practices and works is 'din'. The 'arkan ud-din' or five pillars of Islam come under this heading. They are:

1. The 'shahadah' or 'witness' given by reciting the 'kalimah' or 'creed'.

The Arabic recital of this, i.e. "There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Apostle of God," admits a non-believer into the Muslim community. It is also inscribed on the national flag of Saudi Arabia.

2. 'salat' - 'prayer' in Arabic and 'namaz' in Persian and Urdu.

These are ritual prayers to be performed five times a day at prescribed times - dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset and nightfall. These prayers must be performed facing the 'qiblah' or direction of the 'ka'ba' in Mecca, and in a state of legal purity after the 'wudu' (Arabic) or 'wuzu' (Urdu), the ritual washing of the face, hands, arms, feet and ankles. Before each of the five prayer times the 'azzan' or call to prayer is given from the mosque by the 'muezzin' or 'one who gives the call to prayer'. The prayers may be recited at home, as is generally the case for women.

3. 'sawm' - 'fasting' in Arabic and 'roza' in Persian and Urdu.

The fast is from daybreak to sunset through the whole of the holy month of Ramadan. Even swallowing saliva, putting medicine into an ear, nose or head wound or having an injection is considered to invalidate the fast. Children, travellers, the sick, pregnant and menstruating women are not required to fast.

4. 'zakat' or 'almsgiving'.

5. 'hajj' or 'pilgrimage'.

Pilgrimage at Mecca is required of all Muslims once in a lifetime provided they are not exempted on account of poverty.

Many women know little about the theology of the Qur'an and the Traditions but on the subject of judgment they are surprisingly

well-informed. They can generally explain that after the resurrection of the dead, the recording angels will deliver the books recording their deeds to each person. The good will receive theirs in their right hand and the wicked in their left. Good and bad deeds will then be weighed. Those with balances heavy with good deeds will be blest, but those whose balances will be light will go to hell for ever. After these tests a narrow bridge “sharper than a sword and finer than a hair”, suspended over hell has to be crossed. So great will be the ordeal of crossing the bridge that even the angels will intercede. Some will fall headlong into hell but later they may be released.

Uneducated women cannot always understand what is Quranic teaching, what is from the Traditions and what is merely superstition and the influence of animism. Many are acquainted with the ‘Hadith’ that, “whereas out of every thousand men only one will go to hell. Yet, out of every thousand women only one will be found in heaven”. This ‘Hadith’, recorded by Bukhari is also well-known, “O women! Give alms, as I have seen that the majority of the dwellers of Hell-fire were you (women).” Several ‘Hadith’ teach that the woman’s obedience to her husband is the key to her entering Paradise. It is not surprising that many women live in a bondage of fear of judgment, death and illness. Fear drives many of them to seek safeguards against the ‘evil eye’ and against those ‘jinn’ who are regarded as ‘evil spirits’, and to invoke the help of living and dead saints.

The position of women in Paradise holds much fewer promises and assurances of delights and pleasures than it does for men. The Qur’an promises believing men beautiful women or huris’ (Q 44:51-54 and 55:72).

2.3 Family Planning

Muslim Governments continue to introduce reforms which they claim are not repugnant to the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Overpopulation is a major problem for many Muslim lands, so the question of family planning policies is crucial. The Governments of Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Gambia, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda and Yemen give positive support to family planning programmes and contraceptive services. The 1969 Muslim Conference of Rabat (Morocco) stated. “The Conference tended to consider that family planning is for the spouses by mutual agreement and without compulsion, to use a safe and lawful means to delay or precipitate pregnancy in such a way as to suit their health, social and economic circumstances, within the framework of responsibility towards their children and themselves”.

In Bangladesh the Ministry of Population Control and Family Planning published in 1977 a series of books and leaflets explaining with Quranic quotations that Islam does not prohibit family planning. A Turkish family planning poster reads as follows. “Family planning does not mean prevention of births! The Holy Qur’an says ‘Have as many children as you can look after’”.

A Pakistani Family Planning Association poster produced in Urdu and Arabic for World Population Year says, “Emphatically too many children bring poverty (Abdullah Ben Abbas)”. Abdullah Ben Abbas was said to have been an intimate of Muhammad. He has the reputation of being the greatest authority in exegesis of the Qur’an.

Despite organized government efforts in many countries, Muslim lands still have the highest percentage of population increase a year, generally around 3%. Ignorance and fear make some slow to adopt family planning techniques. Sometimes one spouse is willing and the other is not. Religious advisors - ‘pirs’ and ‘marabouts’ - are often against such devices which would reduce the number of Muslims. (‘Marabouts’ are popular religious leaders in North Africa, generally connected with shrines, the equivalents of ‘pirs’ in the Indian subcontinent).

Reinforcing these hindrances to family planning is the great fear of Muslim parents that they will not have enough sons. How often a wife is in distress because she has not produced a child. The wife who produces only daughters will also seek religious as well as perhaps medical help. If she has a son she will want more sons in case the son dies, as he may so easily do. So a woman’s importance in society in general is estimated by her ability to produce sons, and she is often known as the mother of Habib and perhaps never by her own name. This is an inequality between the sexes which the laws of a country and the efforts of family planning associations can do little about.

The Indian Government introduced compulsory sterilization. This measure was one of the main reasons for the fall of Mrs Indira Gandhi’s first government. In China it is interesting that one child families are strongly encouraged and practical measures are taken by the Government to prevent and control pregnancies. There are severe penalties for having a second child and this is only permitted four years after the birth of the first. However, there are special concessions for minority groups like Muslims who have noticeably larger families in North West China in the Province of Xinjiang. One can conclude that in general the questions, problems and solutions about sterilization and abortion in Islam have yet to have more study and remain a serious concern.

2.4 Abortion

The International Planned Parenthood Association seminar held in Beirut in 1971 heard a paper on Induced Abortion - a Hazard to Public Health. The paper was presented by Dr Hassan Hathout, F.P.C.S.E., Chief Medical Officer, Maternity Hospital, Kuwait. A summary of what Dr Hassan said is given on page 67 of Charis Waddy’s book, *The Muslim Mind*. Dr Hassan argues that abortion differs from contraception in that it is an assault on life and so can be called a criminal act. The foetus has the right to live, but danger to the mother’s life or the strong possibility of a deformed baby are grounds on which abortion could be allowed.

Whatever the teaching about abortion and the advice of medical, religious or government

leaders, there is a tremendous demand for legal and illegal abortion. Illegal abortion is widely practised and much harm is done to women and children through medically questionable methods. Pressures of poverty and social morality (in the case of illegitimate pregnancies) drive many women to take desperate measures and there are always those who exploit them for financial gain.

The Governments of Bangladesh, Iraq, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sudan and Turkey permit abortions on medical grounds. Tunisia allows abortion on social grounds also. In Iran, under Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, the laws legalizing voluntary sterilization and abortion on both medical and social grounds were repealed. At first, the Islamic Revolutionary Government closed all family planning clinics and contraceptives were removed from all pharmacies. After pressure from women, the Ministry of Health issued a statement about conditions under which birth control is permissible. It stated that the spouses should agree to it; use of contraceptives should not cause any malformation of the foetus; the contraceptive should not be harmful to the human body and the means of avoiding pregnancy should not be one which causes even a very early abortion of the fertilized ovum.

2.5 Superstitions and Customs regarding Child-birth

The policies of governments and the spread of education are bound to have some effect on the lives of ordinary women. However, if widespread positive changes are to be effected the

community leaders must be identified and influenced. The world of superstition, fear and folk religion, with all its occult activity, has immense influence in rural communities in large parts of developing countries and also in cities where country people have migrated. This is nowhere more clearly illustrated than in relation to matters of births, marriages and deaths - the rites of passage as they are sometimes called. Much of the teaching of the Qur'an, as we have seen, relates to the family, but the influence of animism and superstitious fear has reinforced customs and local beliefs which are often not Quranic in essence.

A Christian midwife, who wishes to remain anonymous, has kindly allowed me to quote from an unpublished manuscript. Writing of Afghan society, she describes the importance of a son to a bride and to the extended family. "The tiny baby represents security for the parents in old age, gives security of position to the young mother, and may ensure landholdings within the family circle... As the bride settles into life with her husband's family, she will be guarded from evil influences from the day of her marriage, by charms on her person or pinned up in the house. The Qur'an, wrapped carefully and put on a special shelf just above the door, is a guard against any evil power entering their new home. "Her mother-in-law will watch the bride carefully, even deciding what food she is to eat. The bride does very little in the household until her first child is born. If as the months pass no sign of pregnancy appears, she will be taken to the

local 'midwife' who may give advice on special herbal potions to drink. If this is not effective, she will visit the local 'holy man'. Some verse of the Qur'an will be chanted and blown on her, or a charm given her to be worn on her person - a small metal box sewn into cloth, holding pieces of paper on which verses from the Qur'an have been written. As a last resort she will visit a local shrine, walking round it a certain number of times, picking up stones and putting them to her forehead, or even kissing the shrine. Afterwards a piece of cloth is tied nearby or a nail hammered into a nearby tree...

"The childless wife is a sad person who constantly fears the threat of another wife coming into the home. The stigma of having no children is strong. Other women may feel that she is judged of God, or has the 'evil eye'. As women in Afghan society are very open with one another about the facts of life, it is usually known by all the women in the house when the bride has missed a period. Most Afghan women calculate by the moon, reckoning a pregnancy to be ten lunar months. Fear surrounds her. She is thought to be more vulnerable to evil influences and therefore is protected from certain situations - meeting strangers, walking near graveyards, and having contact with anyone who might have the 'evil eye'.

"Because they believe that evil 'jinn' or 'evil spirits' can listen to conversations, very little is said about the pregnancy, and very little preparation is made for the baby. A small bundle of clothes may be laid ready for the delivery, but

that is all. If any problems come during pregnancy she goes through the same process as before - visiting the local old women for herbal remedies, the holy man, and finally the shrine. Strong beliefs are held about certain foods, and some kinds may be avoided during pregnancy.

"Most women have no idea what will happen when they deliver their first child. Some may have witnessed a delivery; most will have heard the screams of a woman in labour, so the mother-to-be is very fearful. In larger towns there are ante-natal clinics and hospitals where the young mother can get information and a hygienic delivery, but often fear of the unknown will hold her back from taking advantage of this. In the villages it is usually an old woman who acts as midwife or birth attendant. She will have delivered many babies and will be a respected and influential member of the community; she may be related to the family. She may know very little about hygiene. Very soon after the birth the 'mullah', a local religious leader from a mosque, will come to the house to shout the creed of Islam into the baby's ear. The baby's name is chosen either by the male members of the household or by the 'mullah'. Nobody compliments the baby in case evil spirits are listening, and if someone does say anything positive it is prefixed by the 'bismillah', that is 'in the name of God', as a protection. The baby is never left alone. Mother and baby do not go out for forty days. At the end of forty days the new mother may celebrate with her woman friends."

Several of the Christian midwives that I have

known in North Africa and Asia find that their patients, in addition to being naturally nervous of the dangers of childbirth, are also fearful because of the superstitions and practices which are part of their culture. The patients sometimes ask their midwives to pray for them. The Christian may use this opportunity to teach along the following lines during several visits to the home:

“You are now the mother of a new baby. God has brought him or her safely into this world and has kept you safe too. Let us thank God for his love and goodness to you, and for bringing this new life into your family. Jesus the Messiah, the eternal Lord and Saviour of this world, was born as a baby just like your baby. His mother Mary experienced the pain of labour as you have, and rejoiced in the birth of her baby as you have. Jesus, son of Mary, came into this world to save us from sin and to make us righteous before God. God has given physical life to you and your baby by the process of natural birth. He also wants to give spiritual life. This is his gift which comes through faith in Jesus the Messiah”.

Another suggested prayer for use at the birth of a child is: “O Creator God, we thank you that through your goodness this child has been born safely and that the mother has been freed from suffering. Now we beseech you that these to whom you have given physical life may also obtain eternal life through the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah. In reading this section one may become even more aware than previously of the wide varieties within Islamic societies. In a single country there is a great difference between

the experiences of educated and uneducated women, rich and poor, rural and town-dwellers, fundamentalists and liberals. In some countries women are caught up in new roles because of ‘jihad’ or ‘holy war’ or liberation movements.

We have so far concentrated more on the teaching of the Qur’an and the Traditions. Now it is time to look at the colourful festivals which are so significant in the lives of all Muslim women and to examine folk or popular Islam which is so prevalent in most Muslim areas of the world and in which women are often heavily involved.

3 FOLK RELIGION AND BRIDGES TO JESUS

Muslims are often interested in the practices of their Christian neighbours. Dr William Miller wrote in booklet form a very helpful letter to a Muslim friend which he deliberately entitled Beliefs and Practices of Christians. He realized that the good news about Jesus could as easily be shared from an understanding of Christian practices, particularly festivals and rites as from a statement of beliefs. Westerners are so often geared to sharing their beliefs without realizing how much practice and rite can be bridges to understanding belief. They can be dramatic presentations of the truth to be believed.

3.1 Festivals

Our glimpse at women in the world of Islam would certainly not be complete if we did not look at the cycle of religious fasts and festivals which make up their year. Besides the festivals

mentioned here, in most Muslim countries or areas there are celebrations in honour of local saints. Some attract thousands or even hundreds of thousands of celebrants as is the case of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi in India, who died in 1325 A.D. and was buried in the outskirts of that city. His tomb is the scene of a very famous annual 'urs'. Muslims come from other countries to join in the celebrations. The word 'urs' literally means 'marriage'. On the eleventh day of the month Rabi' al-Thani, the death anniversary of the great saint Abdul Qadi Jilani is celebrated at his shrine in Baghdad and in other parts of the world.

The woman's whole household programme is changed during Ramadan, the ninth month in the Muslim lunar calendar, the month in which the first sections of the Qur'an were revealed to Muhammad. During this month of fasting all except children, the sick, pregnant women, the aged and travellers fast from dawn to sunset. Most people eat at night but the children still have to be fed during the day. In many parts of the Muslim world a siren, several hours before dawn, rouses housewives to get up and cook so that the family can eat before daybreak. The month of fasting is a great physical and social testing time especially in hot climates. Ramadan (Arabic) or Ramzan (Urdu) as it is called in the Indian subcontinent is not entirely ascetic. There are some festivities especially in Yemen where it is eagerly anticipated. Religious dances take place at night. More time is devoted to prayer, and reading the Qur'an.

'Id ul-fitr', the festival of the breaking of the fast, marks the end of Ramadan. After the men have attended the mosque or 'id-gah' (a special large open space set aside for such gatherings) and participated in the prayers and worship and listened to the sermon, they go home for further festivities. The women do not generally go to the mosque or special prayers but pray at home and are involved in cooking choice dishes. Everyone wears new clothes and gifts are often exchanged.

The main festival of the year is 'id ul-adha', the festival of sacrifice, which takes place seventy days after the end of Ramadan. This sacrifice, made by pilgrims as part of their pilgrimage, is celebrated by Muslims everywhere. It is prescribed in the Qur'an (Q. 22:33-37). According to tradition, merit is acquired from the sacrifice. It is interesting that the Qur'an records it was God himself who provided for a substitute an animal as 'a mighty sacrifice' when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son (Q 37:107). Most Muslims consider that the Quranic reference to Abraham's son is a reference to Ishmael and not to Isaac. However, the name of his son is not given in this section of the Qur'an and there are a few early Muslim commentators who name him as Isaac.

'Laylat ul-mi`raj' ('mi`raj' means 'ascension') commemorates the night of Muhammad's ascension into heaven. In surah 53:1-18 and surah 81:19-25, the Qur'an mentions two of Muhammad's visions and in surah 17:1 (The Night Journey) his mysterious journey. This festival is

not so widely celebrated as 'id-i milad-al-nabi', the birthday of Muhammad.

Many Muslims celebrate 'laylat al-nisf min sha'ban', or 'the night of the middle of Sha'ban' called in Persian 'shab-i barat' or 'the Night of Record', and often keep lamps and candles burning all night. Muhammad is reported to have said that on this night God registers all the actions which men are to perform in the coming year and records births and deaths. Many stay up all night praying and reading the Qur'an.

Muharram is the month when, every year, Shias commemorate the martyrdom of Ali, the fourth Caliph, and the death of his sons, Hasan and Husain. The lamentations and commemorations take place during the first ten days of the month. They culminate in special processions on the tenth day when they express their grief, remembering the martyrs. The Shias regard Husain as their 'sacrifice' and 'intercessor' who died for his people. There is in this an idea of vicarious sacrifice. Husain was killed at the battle of Kerbala in 680 AD. Kerbala is one of the holiest Muslim places in Iraq.

All these religious ceremonies affect home life very much and therefore involve women particularly. Even Muslim families unaccustomed to practising daily prayers and other religious duties will celebrate 'id ul-fitr' and 'id ul-adha' just as Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter. They are social as well as religious occasions. Muslims and Christians generally show considerable interest in each other's festivals. These festivals and the interest they generate can be bridges for

understanding and communication between the communities. There can be some mutual sharing in the festivities, particularly at the two great festivals of each faith 'id ul-fitr' and 'id ul-adha' and Christmas and Easter. This can involve shared hospitality and explanation.

3.2 Sufism and Islamic Mysticism

We have already thought a little about holy men and saints. These were often Sufis. The Sufis are the mystics of Islam and can belong to almost any group or sect except the Wahabis and the Ahmadis who condemn the practice of visiting the shrines of holy people. The word 'sufi' is generally thought to come from 'suf' the word for wool and so refer to the woollen robe sometimes worn by ascetics. Among the Sufis the distinction between male and female tends to disappear. A woman may be a top-ranking saint. Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, who was born in Basra and died in 185/802 is one of the most famous of all Sufi saints. The Sufi seeks direct approach to and knowledge of God through illumination, i.e. 'kashf'. Various Sufi leaders describe different steps which lead to illumination - a mystical experience of union with God. The steps are part of the Path or Mystic Way or 'tariqa'. There are many Sufi orders, each following a certain saint.

Four principal orders are found in the Indian subcontinent. The Chisti order was introduced into India by Khwaja Mu'inuddin Chisti who lived in Ajmer and died in 1236 A.D. Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi was one of his successors. The Suhrawardi order was introduced by Shaikh Bahauddin Zakariya. He died in 1266

A.D. and is buried in Multan in Pakistan. The Qadiri order was founded by Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani of Baghdad. The Naqshbandi order originated in Turkestan. Khwaja Muhammad Baqi billah of Kabul introduced the order into India. On the African continent the Tijaniyya is one of the most important brotherhoods or orders. It was founded in 1781 A.D. by Ahmad al-Tijani in Algeria. It then spread to Morocco, Mauretania and many areas of West Africa. It is also found in Senegal, the Gambia, Guinea, the north of Ivory Coast and Ghana, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Western Sudan.

Now let us look in greater detail at Rabi'a, that great woman Sufi. In her words we see love of God replacing fear. The Indian Bishop John Subhan, who was himself a Sufi before he became a Christian, said of Rabi'a, "It is to her that Sufism owes the conception of prayer as free and intimate intercourse with God". She did not regard prayer or any religious observances as meritorious acts. For her, prayer was a way of access to God and an experience of communion with him. One of her famous prayers is as follows, "O my Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of Hell, burn me in Hell. If I worship Thee from hope of Paradise, exclude me from thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty."

Giuseppe Scattolin, in his article on Women in Islamic Mysticism in Encounter October 1993 No.198, writes that usually Sufi women are rarely mentioned in the common manuals on Sufism, except for Rabi'a. However, Ibn al-

Jawzi (d.597/1200) recorded in his *Sifat al-Safwa* the names of more than two hundred ascetic and Sufi women, and 'Abd al-Rauf al-Munawi (d.1031/1621) in his *Al-Kawakib al-durriya* gives biographical account of thirty five of them. Most of those ascetic and Sufi women belonged to the first and second generation of Islam, 1st-2nd/7th-8th century, in which ascetic Sufism was prevalent. Most of these Sufi women were also endowed with supernatural powers and miracles, 'karamat', and became respected and recognized teachers, and even leaders of religious communities.

Very many women follow Sufi saints or 'pirs' today, especially in South Asia. Dr KVSL Narasamamba in a paper on *The Dargahs of Women Saints in East Godavari District* presented in April 1992 at the Folk Culture Study Centre, University of Hyderabad, India, notes that while many people are aware of 'dargahs' or 'tombs' of saintly men, few know of the famous local shrines dedicated to and frequented by women. Little research seems to have been carried out on this subject. In North Africa the government of Algeria has banned the veneration of 'marabouts' or 'saints', but even in the capital, Algiers, the shrines are crowded by women. Some deliberately become disciples of a chosen spiritual leader though proper initiation is generally reserved for men.

Many women go with their menfolk on pilgrimages to shrines, especially to celebrate the birth or death of the saint and to secure his help with health and family problems. The educated as

well as the unschooled go. In her autobiography *Daughter of the East* Benazir Bhutto records how her Father, when he was under the death sentence, requested her to go and pray at the tomb of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. She mentions that her Grandmother had gone there when her Father was very ill as a baby and nearly died. In Pakistan the fundamentalist and influential Jama'at-i-Islami teach against this popular practice of going to the shrines and tombs of the saints. Probably 70% of Pakistanis, both men and women, continue to go.

In the writings connected with these orders and brotherhoods, the emphasis on love for God and on his immanence fulfils a human need for a sense of fellowship with God. Sufism has come closer to Christianity than any other form of Muslim devotion. The Sufi poets also have appreciated Jesus Christ and his Way and sense of union with God. It is an interesting exercise to collect quotations from the Sufi poets about Jesus Christ. I have seen the following Persian couplets set in the border decoration of the tomb in Shiraz of the famous Persian poet Hafez. His poem shows a high regard for Jesus Christ. In translation the couplets can be rendered:

And if the Holy Ghost descend
His comfort in these days to lend
Theirs too the wondrous works can be
In grace and power infinite
To them that humbly wait on it
That Jesus wrought in Galilee.

3.3 Muhammad Veneration

Some years ago I was staying with a Muslim friend in one of India's famous cities. For bed-

time reading she lent me the *Qasida Burda* as well as a collection of prayers that she had compiled. I was so fascinated by the *Qasida Burda* that I spent half the night reading it and copying it out, little realizing that it had been translated into practically every language that Muslims read. A few days later my friend took me to hear the renowned scholar, Professor Annemarie Schimmel, lecture in Urdu at the Azad Institute on the veneration of the Prophet. Her special lectures, of which this was one, were in celebration of the new Islamic century - the fifteenth - in which we now live. Since then, in several Muslim lands, I have noticed the increasing devotion to the Prophet of Islam. It is so powerful that, although it could be regarded as part of folk Islam, it deserves a separate section. Both men and women are involved in it.

There is nothing new about venerating the Prophet but in the last twenty years or so there has been a revival of Muhammad veneration. Whereas before, the Prophet's birthday was celebrated quietly, now there are processions in many towns and villages. A few years ago there was a picture in *The Times* of London of a procession of five thousand Muslims leaving Hyde Park Corner. The explanation stated that the Prophet's birthday was the only occasion or event which could unite all parties, sects and groupings among the million or so Muslims of the UK. Muslims are looking for a focus of unity. Until 1924 the Caliphate was such a focus. Now some are seeking unity in a return to 'shari`ah' law but there is only hope of implementing this in the lands in which Muslims

rule. Even in a land like Algeria there is strong opposition to the idea of 'shari'ah' law. Love and veneration for the Prophet are probably the strongest focus of unity. As Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of the Indian subcontinent, wrote in one of his poems,

“Love for the Prophet runs like blood in the veins of the community.”

In *The Mystery of Selflessness (Asrar-e-Khudi)* he wrote, All our glory is for the name of Muhammad, and also

We are like one rose with many petals, yet one fragrance. His is the spirit of the community, and he is one.

In his epic poem *Javednama* Iqbal wrote, You can deny God but you cannot deny Muhammad.

Muhammad veneration has particularly increased in Sufi circles. This not surprising as the Sufis sought for close communion with God. Al Hallaj wrote,

God has not created anything that is dearer to him than Muhammad and his family.

Muhammad veneration goes right back to the beginning of historical Islam. Without a Quranic basis nothing endures in Islam as the Shah of Iran learnt to his cost. Surah 24:35 describes God as the Light or 'nur', and Muhammad as the Lamp which contains the Light. Muhammad is described as a 'beautiful model' for believers. A Tradition, 'Hadith', states, "If it had not been for you I would not have created the heavens". This is a 'hadith qudsi', i.e. a divine word outside the Qur'an.

Among the Shias, who represent about ten percent of Muslims, there is mention from the eighth century A.D. on of the 'nur Muhammadi' or 'prophetic light'. It is considered pre-existent and can be compared with the logos' doctrine in Christianity from which it is probably partly derived. There is also some influence from Greek neo-Platonic thought. Some Shias believe that the prophetic light was transmitted by a spirit which manifests itself in some individual. The *Dala'il Al-Khairat* (guides for the good) by Al-Jazuli, a Muslim Berber of the fifteenth century A.D., is an example of 'darud' or blessing invoked on Muhammad and his family. There are 201 names for Muhammad. Many are the same as the names for God but without the definite article e.g. 'haq' (truth) as compared with 'al-haq' (the truth), 'karim' (noble or gracious) as compared with 'al-karim', (the noble or the gracious) and ('nur' ('ight) as compared with 'al-nur' (the light). 'Nur' ('ight) is often identified with God's absoluteness.

There are many poems in praise of Muhammad, called 'qasidas'. A 'qasida' is generally a long poem in three parts - an introduction, the description of a journey toward the person whom the poet is going to praise, and the longest section which is the eulogy of the famous person. A brief history of the *Qasida Burda* will give us an idea of the influence of such devotional poems. The full title of this poem in English translation is *The Shining Stars in Praise of the Best of Holy Men*. No other Arabic poem is so well known. More than ninety commentar-

ies have been written on it in Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Berber. Qasidat al-burda means, “The Prophet’s mantle”. The poet’s full name is Shaikh Sharafuddin Abu ‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn Sa’id al-Busiri. He lived in the thirteenth century A.D. and was from the town of Busir. He was paralysed by an incurable illness. In despair he remembered that he ought to compose a poem praising Muhammad. After doing so he had a dream in which the Prophet came and massaged him and then wrapped him in his mantle (‘burda’). He was cured!

The poem became extremely popular and is recited all over the world by Muslims on special occasions. It is also used as an amulet. In fact, one commentator notes that every group of verses has special value as a charm for various purposes. It appeals to non-Arab speakers in that it gives a digest of the prophet’s life and Muslim doctrine. It is especially used for celebration of the Prophet’s birthday. We need to remember poetic licence and the unfairness of extracting theology from poetry without reflection. It might be helpful to sample a few verses from this famous poem from a translation made by James Ritchie.

Verse 34: Muhammad, Lord of both worlds and both races and both peoples, Arab and non-Arab.

Verse 36 : He is the Friend whose intercession is to be hoped for assaulting every kind of fearful threat.

Verse 42: He is free from peer in his excellent qualities so that the essence of goodness is in him undivided.

Verse 45: For the excellence of the Apostle of God has no limit which may be expressed by word of mouth.

Verse 52: And every miracle performed by the noble apostles was only brought into connection with them through his light.

Verse 58: No perfume (ointment) equals the earth which holds his bones, Blessed is he who smells it and kisses it.

Verse 59: His birth made clear the goodness of his origin. How excellent was both his beginning and his ending!

Now let us turn again to present day Muhammad veneration. In the front of the inside of most buses in Pakistan one reads, ‘O Allah’ on one side, and ‘O Muhammad’ on the other. ‘O’ is only used for a living person. Wahabis and strict fundamentalists will denounce the honouring of a dead person in this way. The media also pays attention to the cult of Muhammad veneration. A poem by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan taught in the schools includes these lines:

“Though my link with the divinity of God be severed, may my hand never let go of the hem of the Chosen one.”

A popular religious song, ‘qawwali’, praises Muhammad in verse ‘na’t’:

“If Muhammad has not been, God himself would not have existed.”

In the media Muhammad is often called Masih Uzzanan (Saviour of the world) and Sarwar Ka’inat (Lord of the universe). In secularized Turkey, the Turkish Mevlud-i-sherif by Suleyman Chelebi of Bursa, written about 1410 A.D., is very famous. It is sung not only on the

Prophet's birthday but on memorial days of a death as well. Muhammad is said to have died on his birthday. The most beautiful part of it is the Marhaba or 'Welcome' which creation sings when the light of Muhammad begins to radiate the night he was born. Here are a few lines:

“Welcome, O high prince, we greet you!...
Welcome, O one who is not separated from God...
Welcome, O friend of the Lord of Power!
Welcome, O refuge of your nation...
Welcome, O intercessor for the sinner!
Welcome, O prince of this world and the next!
Only for you Time and Space was created.

One question remains about Muhammad veneration. How should we share the Good News with those who so venerate Muhammad? Clearly, they feel a need of a mediator. So much of what we say of Jesus they transfer to Muhammad. One important emphasis is to stress the sufferings of Jesus for us. Whatever one says of his glory and majesty might be transferred in the mind of the hearer, but what is said of his sufferings will not be transferred. When his sufferings are understood, his glory will be understood. “Jesus is crowned with glory and honour because of the suffering of death” (Hebrews 2:9).

Before we go on to consider more “bridges to Jesus” or ways in which we may share our faith with our Muslim sisters, we need to study some of their endeavours to take their place in the modern world and achieve those basic rights which should be the inheritance of every human being whether male or female. So far, in many parts of the world Muslim women cannot be just themselves. Progress is seen if they can be acclaimed saintly like Rabi'a or so distin-

guished that they can be accepted as 'honourable men' or super women. The Egyptian writer, Dr Nawal El Saadawi, in her book *The Hidden Face of Eve. Women in the Arab World* makes the point many times that Arab women are still struggling to be free to be themselves. There is a domination of the male over the female which is reinforced by religious, economic and political systems. This domination is not, of course, just confined to Muslim communities. However, the Household of Islam is our main concern in this booklet.

4 MUSLIM WOMEN AND THE MODERN WORLD

In considering Muslim women and the modern world we will look first at those who, despite the odds against them, have achieved outstanding positions, and note that there is a Quranic basis for such leadership by women. In referring to reforms in women's education, voting rights and position in society, I have selected areas of the world that I know well.

4.1 Women Leaders

In the Indian subcontinent, educated women like Begum Liaquat Ali Khan (died 1990), wife of the first Prime Minister of Pakistan, and Begum Ikramullah, took an active part in the campaign for independence and became members of the Muslim League. After her husband's assassination, Begum Liaquat Ali Khan became at various times Pakistan's ambassador to Italy, Holland and Morocco. In 1972 she became Governor of Sind. The Qaid-i-Azam, Muham-

mad Ali Jinnah, who was founder of Pakistan and its first Governor-General, said, “No nation can rise to the height of glory unless its women are side by side with the men”. He therefore used to request his sister, Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah, to sit on the platform at his public meetings. As she was the First Lady of the land other women did not have so much hesitation in following her example. So the idea of women attending and participating in political and public meetings became familiar. As we have noted, in 1962 she became the candidate for the Combined Opposition Parties for the Presidency of Pakistan. Although she had very little chance of being elected, it was significant that various fundamentalist parties agreed to her nomination and supported it.

Women became members of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. Begum Khaliq uz-Zaman Zahida became Minister for Health, Labour and Social Welfare in the West Pakistan Government. Mamuda Saluci was Minister for Education for West Pakistan from 1963 to 1964. Dr Kaniz Yusuf became the first woman Vice-Chancellor of the Qaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad in 1973. I have taken most examples from Pakistan, partly because it is a modern nation created in the name of Islam. As one of its scholars, Ahmad Parvez, said Pakistan is “the laboratory of Islam”. However, Muslim women from many lands have distinguished themselves as politicians, diplomats, journalists, writers, educationalists, lawyers and doctors as well as in many other spheres.

One other debating point about the position of women in Muslim lands is whether a woman can be Head of State or not. As we have noted, Miss Fatimah Jinnah, sister of the late Qaid-i-Azam, was the representative and candidate of the Combined Opposition Parties opposing President Ayub Khan who was campaigning for re-election. The ‘Ulama’ (Muslim theologians) made a ‘fatwa’ or ‘pronouncement’ that a woman can be Head of State in an Islamic state. Maulana Maududi, who had agreed with the pronouncement, later stated as the sixth principle of an Islamic state that a woman could not occupy a position of responsibility. This statement can be interpreted as denying to a woman the right to hold the office of a minister of state or the headship of an institution or even the right to vote. Muslim scholars and lawyers differ widely on the question as to whether a woman can be appointed Head of State. A well-known Tradition in Sahih Al-Bukhari says, “Abu Bakrah reports from the Prophet that he said, ‘A nation does not prosper which entrusts its affairs to a woman’”. Those opposed to a woman being Head of State or President quote this Tradition. There is a good case in support of the opposite view as Kausar Niazi pointed out in his book *Modern Challenges to Muslim Families*. He notes that Ibn Hazm (died 1064) considers that a woman can hold all posts except that of Caliph. She can now be head of a Muslim state as the Caliphate is defunct.

When Benazir Bhutto became Prime Minister of Pakistan for the first time in 1988, she was hailed

as the first Muslim woman head of government. Bangladesh also elected a woman Muslim Prime Minister, while Mrs Tansu Cilla, leader of the conservative True Path party, is Turkey's first woman Prime Minister. Professor Mernissi, a Moroccan Sociologist, published in Paris in 1990 her book entitled *Sultanes Oubliees, Chefs d'Etat En Islam* (Forgotten Sultanas, Women Heads of State in Islam). In it she describes women who played a prominent role in Islamic history. She refers to Sultana Radia who ruled in Delhi after overthrowing her despotic brother Rosn Al-Din in the thirteenth century. Yemen had several Muslim women sovereigns including Malika Urwas who ruled for nearly fifty years in the eleventh century. There were at least four queens in Indonesia in the seventeenth century, including Taj al-Alam and Nur al-Alam. In her extensive research, Professor Mernissi has unearthed details of other Muslim queens which have been ignored by most Arab historians. One such queen was Aisha al-Hurra, the mother of the last king of Muslim Granada, Mohamed Abu Abdullah. She ruled the Kingdom of Granada until 1492 when the Moors were finally defeated.

Queen Arwa of Jibla is an even earlier example of an outstanding Muslim ruler. The ruins of her palace can still be seen in Jibla in the Republic of Yemen. The Sulayhi family ruled Yemen for nearly a century. King Ali Sulayhi and Queen Asma were loved and honoured. When Arwa's father was killed in an accident her relative, Queen Asma, took care of her, nurturing her in

the royal household. The royal sons and daughters received education alike and the women of the Sulayhi family were considered so above ordinary men that they did not veil their faces. When Arwa was eighteen she married Mukarram, the crown prince.

In 1067 A.D., King Ali was murdered. Mukarram finally rescued his mother but soon after became ill and paralyzed. After his mother's death he gave Arwa authority over his kingdom. She moved the capital from Sana'a to Jibla. When Mukarram died from his illness, Queen Arwa was acknowledged by the Caliph and people as ruler of Yemen. She first ruled as regent for her son, Ali. Sadly, both her sons died as children. She loved her people and ruled well. She died about 1132 A.D., at the age of 92, having ruled for forty years.

4.2 Education

Education or lack of it greatly influences the part that women play in the life of any community. Generally, the level of literacy among Muslim women is much lower than among men and much lower among rural women than among town women. However, in oil states like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia the picture is different and new. For the coming generations there is almost total literacy. Young men and women now have almost equal educational opportunities. So far, the vast Muslim populations of the world are not affected in this way.

Education helps women to be aware of their legal status and to know how to obtain their rights.

However, everything does not depend on education or on Government legislation. Much real authority lies with orthodox religious leaders and with holy persons and saints. Uneducated and illiterate women may be more likely to follow the advice and counsel of those authoritative figures than the educated. Nevertheless, such is the influence of saints and religious practitioners that even the educated pay great attention to them.

In 1971, a Dutch sociologist wrote a study on her researches in a section of Karachi called Azam Basti. She estimated that 90% of the Punjabi and Pathan women living in that area of Karachi, the largest town in the Pakistani Province of Sind, are followers of particular 'pirs' or 'holy men'. 'Pirs' gain authority over people by living reputedly holy lives, performing miraculous healings, explaining secrets and mysteries and by dispensing charms which protect from evil spirits and misfortune. 'Pirs' often give guidance about marriage arrangements and marital problems and undertake to pray for childless women. A village woman's knowledge of the law would come through her husband or their family 'pir'. She would be unlikely to claim her rights through ignorance of them, or through lack of knowledge of procedure and the fear of reprisal if she did what was disapproved of. Many of the people living in large towns are really economic refugees from the country areas and are at heart like most of the people in Karachi's Azam Basti.

4.3 Voting Rights of Women

Algeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Turkey and Yemen have all granted women the right to vote. However, many in some of these lands have the handicap of illiteracy. Oil wealth has changed this in Kuwait where all go to school and half the university students are women. As we have already noted, Saudi Arabia is now providing education for all girls - a contrast to a generation ago when most were illiterate and untaught. Widespread use of radio, TV and videos, and the presence of migrant workers and refugees in some countries are all opening the eyes of women who lived in previous generations, in intellectual and educational backwaters. Such radical changes will have tremendous effects on society and the perception that women have of the world and of themselves. I remember hearing a generation ago of a Saudi woman in hospital in her own country asking questions from her Pakistani nurse. It was a complete surprise to this patient not only to learn that her nurse was not a Muslim but to hear that there were people in the world who were not Muslim, let alone a woman from the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The Gulf War has increased the cry for women to have voting rights in some Gulf countries. Before the Gulf War, Kuwait University women students were active in student politics and could vote and hold office. So far women cannot vote on the national scene. A poll in 1985, of men able to vote, showed that 58% opposed

electoral rights for women. Only 27% favoured them; the rest presumably abstained. In the year of the 1985 election (the National Assembly was suspended in 1986) a thousand women signed a petition contending that women having the franchise is incompatible with Islam. However, that may not be the view of the majority of Kuwaiti women today and possibly it was not then. The issue is gathering momentum in these days of reconstruction after the War.

In Bahrain's short-lived National Assembly the securing of the franchise for women was a main but unsuccessful issue. In general, legal restrictions and inequalities for women are reinforced by 'shari'ah' law codes and the continuing seclusion of women. However, issues of wealth and poverty, living in town or country, literacy and illiteracy, tradition and change, belonging to an older or younger generation, family ties and whether there is a secular or Muslim government, greatly affect the prospects of electoral reform and the enfranchising of women in each country.

4.4 Veiling and Seclusion of Women

Right through the Muslim world dress has become a means of protest, of expressing religious and political allegiance and a matter about which a number of Muslim Governments legislate and religious leaders give 'fatwas' or 'edicts'.

The invisibility of some Muslim women fascinates many who are not Muslim. General Omer Elbashir, leader of Sudan, according to a newspaper report (Daily Telegraph, London. Novem-

ber 18, 1991) declared that Sudanese women must cover all but the face. In Saudi Arabia, even the face must be covered. One learns to identify one's friends by their shoes and their gait. There are as many fashions for the 'burqa' (Urdu for enveloping veil) and the 'hijab' (its Arabic equivalent) as for summer frocks. "My husband loves me so much that he does not want anyone else to see me," said one Muslim woman. However, total veiling is not required everywhere. As early as 1926, Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, banned the veil in his country. A recent dramatic change has occurred in the United Arab Emirates as a result of the Gulf War. UAE women have enrolled in the national army and have been trained to use M16 assault rifles, machine guns, hand grenades and 9mm pistols. UAE wants to minimize the number of foreigners in its army and enrol more nationals. With a small indigenous population of less than half a million it seemed necessary to enrol women. The Sheika encouraged this. One of the early recruits said, "Saddam Hussein made it happen. If Iraq hadn't invaded Kuwait, I wouldn't be doing this." Before joining the army she was completely veiled when she went outside her home but now she wears camouflage fatigues and headgear adapted to comply with Muslim requirements. (Wall Street Journal, August 8, 1991). The women's training academy, at first run by foreign female military officers, is now named after Khawla bint al-Azwar who fought at the side of the Prophet Muhammad.

Besides illiteracy another major factor minimiz-

ing the effect of modern reforms is the way custom has been sanctioned by religion. Pre-Islamic customs still prevail in many places, endorsed by religious sanctions. One can observe this particularly in the matter of the seclusion and veiling of women. Many still live in seclusion in the special women's quarters in the house and when they go out they wear the all-enveloping 'hijab' or 'burqa'. The Qur'an does not require complete veiling. Surah 33:59 states, "O Prophet! speak to thy wives and to thy daughters, and to the wives of the Faithful, that they let their veils fall low. Thus will they more easily be known, and they will not be affronted. God is Indulgent, Merciful!". Also we should note the injunction in surah 24:31-32, "...speak to the believing women that they refrain their eyes, and observe continence; and that they display not their ornaments, except those which are external; and that they throw their veils over their bosoms, and display not their ornaments, except to their husbands or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers, or their sons...". A list of other relatives and servants follows.

These two quotations implied that women moved outside their homes and were not totally secluded. If women could 'be known' they were obviously not totally veiled. Also they would not have had to 'lower their gaze' if they were completely veiled.

The feudal ordering of society and the spread of Islam to areas where women were very secluded contributed to the idea that 'purdah' (literally 'curtain' in Urdu) is an Islamic concept based

on the Qur'an. As we have seen, this is not so. Thus, it appears that by the practice of 'purdah' or veiling women are more restricted in some parts of the Muslim world than Islam at its inception required.

4.5 Modern Reforms Relating to The Position of Women And Children

Traditionalists and modernists in Islam are never so divided as on the question of the position and rights of women. New laws relating to the position of women have been introduced in many Muslim lands. Reform laws have often been linked to a new way of interpreting the Qur'an. How can a divine law be amended? In adapting and interpreting Quranic teaching for the modern world, four principles can be observed. First, a procedural device by which the reformers did not change the divine law but gave orders that it was not to be applied. The courts in certain circumstances were not to hear a case. Secondly, laws were formulated partly from one school of law and partly from another or from several. Thirdly, a new use of consensus, 'ijma', has developed which involves going back to the original sources and making fresh deductions. Consensus in Islam means the agreement of the community of Muslims. Muhammad is reported to have said that his community would never agree on an error. Finally, administrative orders based on one of the three principles described above sometimes, with something added which is not contrary or repugnant to Islam, has made possible the adoption of reforms even in Islamic states.

All the Gulf Cooperation Council states (Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman) officially encourage the development of women's roles. All the governments support women's centres and programmes and employ local women but they seem reluctant so far to advocate women's rights. Women students are admitted to all the universities in the GCC states. Only Kuwait and Bahrain have any co-educational faculties. Female students usually outnumber the male students in all the Gulf countries.

We will now look at some of the reforms actually introduced in a number of Muslim countries:

The Maghrib - Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya

In Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and the Sudan, where Malaki law formerly prevailed, the compulsory marriage of adult girls who have not been married before has been abolished, but with some provisos in Morocco and Sudan. A specific Law of 29 June 1963 decreed that marriages must be contracted before a court of law and that the bride and bridegroom must have reached the ages of sixteen and eighteen respectively.

In considering all the countries of the Maghreb - Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, it is well to remember that over sixty percent of the entire population is under twenty-five. About half will be women.

Morocco

In 1958 the Moroccan Code of Personal Status

was passed in successive stages, laying down minimum ages for marriage and restricting divorce, 'talaq'. Polygamy is not permitted if there is any fear that the co-wives will not be treated equally. A woman has the right to make a stipulation in her marriage contract that her husband should not take another wife. If he does she has the right to seek the dissolution of her marriage. A guardian may still refuse his consent to his ward's marriage with one who is not her equal, but under the Code may not oppose her marriage for an inadequate dower which she is willing to accept.

Provisions must be made for orphaned grandsons of a predeceased son. No provision is made for the children of a predeceased daughter or son's daughter. Amendments to the 1958 Code were made in 1963.

Algeria

In 1959 Algeria enacted a Marriage Ordinance prohibiting divorce outside a court of law and permitting alimony to be granted to a divorced wife.

The Algerian Constitution of 1976 declared Islam to be the religion of the state. Western secular culture continued its strong influence through the French language and culture. The cultural revolution had as one of its objectives the adoption of a life style in harmony with Islamic morals and the principles of the socialist Revolution as defined by the national charter. However, the influence of Islamic fundamentalism coming from Egypt through the Arabic

language grew stronger and politically powerful in the Islamic Salvation Front. The ISL banned shorts in the Algerian tourist resorts of Jijel and Tipasa which it controlled politically. However, tourism in general has little influence in Algerian economy and has not been encouraged by the Government. Resolving Algeria's political problems and maintaining stability are absorbing much of the energy of the Government.

Tunisia

In Tunisia the Code of Personal Status of 1956 fixed minimum ages for marriage. It totally abolished polygamy, provided that no divorce may be pronounced outside a court of law, and gave women the same right of divorce or 'talaq' as men. This was followed by a law disallowing unilateral repudiation of the wife by the husband and the introduction of judiciary divorce with equality of appeal for each spouse. In 1959 the Tunisian Constitution legally ended all sex discrimination. Tunisian men and women can ideally take an equal share in political life not only in voting but in election to any public office including that of President of the Republic. In practice, few women are elected to public offices. The number of women magistrates, lawyers and police increases annually. Women also hold jobs in the media.

Libya

Colonel Gadaffi has concerned himself with young people. The results of the five year plan from 1976 to 1980 show an increase of primary school pupils. In secondary schools the numbers increased from 17,000 to 66,000. In technical

schools the increase was from 3,700 to 8,000 and the number of university students nearly doubled to 25,000. The Government has tried to change attitudes through reforms, such as the suppression of dowry payments and a policy favouring the emancipation of women. However, an ideological hardening within the regime, and military training in schools and universities have brought some discontent among the young. This is difficult to measure in a society where many freedoms are suppressed.

Egypt

In Egypt the reformer and modernist Muhammad Abduh had a profound influence. A series of laws relating to the status and rights of women were passed in 1920, 1928 and 1929. In 1943 a law of inheritance was passed, followed in 1946 by the Law of Testamentary Dispositions. Provision was made for inheritance by orphaned grandchildren.

In July 1979 the Egyptian Parliament passed, by 380 votes to 12, amendments to the 1929 personal status law. These amendments gave Muslim women better rights in divorce and for alimony and child custody. An Egyptian woman is now allowed to start divorce proceedings if she disapproves of her husband taking a second wife. A divorce pronouncement made by a man is also required to be ratified by a local official after efforts made to reconcile the couple have failed.

Reforms in the Arab oil states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

The Gulf War of 1991 has changed many things,

but reform has been in the air in the Gulf states for a long time - certainly since oil became viable. Since the late 1940s Kuwait has been the most developed and established oil state in the region. Bahrain is also well developed, though it had very little oil. It decided early on to diversify its economy and exploit its strategic geographical position. One observer noted in a 1988 publication that women do not exist in the formal political system. Perhaps that is why Queen Elizabeth II, during a visit a few years ago, was treated as an 'honorary man'. Nevertheless, the lack of overt status does not mean that women do not have considerable influence in national affairs.

Kuwait and Bahrain are developing faster in regards to the official position of women. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have not been exposed to as much social change as the two countries mentioned. The United Arab Emirates, which has been transformed by petro-dollars from 1971 on, is making steady progress. The most revolutionary change is the recruiting and admission of UAE women to the national army.

Bahrain and the Sultanate of Oman already had women serving in their defence forces - Bahrain since 1979. All the GCC countries employ women police for searching at airports. The Sultanate of Oman has made dramatic progress in the last ten years. The wide spread of education in these lands has been another dramatic factor in change.

Kuwait

About 10,000 women were employed by the Kuwaiti government before the Iraqi invasion, mainly in traditional female spheres such as teaching, social services and clerical work. These made up over 22% of the whole civil service but far fewer were employed in the private sector.

As early as the 1960s women protested in Kuwait about their treatment and publicly burned their veils. Shaykha Latifa, wife of the Heir Apparent Shaykh Sa'd al-Abdullah, is well known for supporting social causes.

The Gulf War and the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait had significant results. The division over social customs is perhaps a greater postwar issue than the economic reconstruction of the state. The latter is predictable but the former could divide the country. Over 300,000 Kuwaitis fled the country. The majority went to Saudi Arabia. Some returned more conservative in their views on social affairs, even desiring to install mutawar or religious police (like those in Saudi Arabia) responsible for ensuring that everyone obeys Islamic customs of modesty and avoids alcohol. Those Kuwaitis who fled to the West are on the whole more liberal than previously. They want personal freedom to make their own choices. A class at the Kuwait University Medical School went on strike when the wearing of veils for lectures was banned. Six students had started to wear the face veil or 'niqab'. The Dean reissued a 1983 rule banning it after he saw one student's veil dragging on a cadaver. His reasons were mainly hygienic and concerned with doctor/patient relationships. All but five of the seventy

students went on strike. Most resented the ban as an attack on personal freedom quite apart from their religious views. Sixty percent of the 425 medical students are women.

Another problem facing some Kuwaiti women is the matter of residence permits. More than seven thousand Kuwaiti women are married to Bedouins (stateless Arabs). Unlike Kuwaiti men married to women with such a background, they cannot get residence permits for their spouses or children. One schoolteacher said, "Our law says Kuwaiti men and women are equal but the rights are only for men. They are forcing us either to get divorced or to leave Kuwait."

United Arab Emirates

Shaykha Fatima bint Mubarak, wife of the UAE President Shaykh Zayid, is head of the UAE Women's Federation. The Federation has expressed concern about working conditions for women and the opposition by husbands to working wives. It has lobbied the Ministry of Justice for changes in personal law. She regularly holds an open court or 'majlis' for women to come and talk with her on matters which concern them. Since 1972 the UAE Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour has aided needy families as well as divorced, widowed and single women. The UAE University opened in 1977 in Al Ain with more female students than male. Part of the reason for this is that it is far easier for men to study abroad. Also, fewer jobs are open to women so they go on to higher studies. However, in 1977 the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company hired the first local female petroleum engineer.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs employed two women, sending one of them to Kuwait. Women also serve in the Ministries of Education, Labour and Social Affairs, Information and in public health services, but the country's first female law graduate was not allowed to join the Ministry of Justice in case her well-known family objected.

Bahrain

The first women's organization in the Gulf was founded in 1955 in Bahrain. It was called the Bahraini Women's Awakening and was set up as a channel for wealthy and educated women to provide volunteer services for the poor. In 1960 women of the ruling Al Khalifa founded the Motherhood and Children's Welfare Centre. It mainly provides nursery school facilities. It is a politically conservative group as is shown by its acceptance of the Government's decision in the early 1970s to deny the vote to women.

Saudi Arabia

In 1962 the wife and several daughters of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia founded al-Nahda Philanthropic Society for Women in Riyadh. In Saudi Arabia women are not allowed to pray in mosques, with the exception of the mosques in Mecca and Medina. The 'ulama' allow women not to veil their faces and not to cover their hands in the holy mosque in Mecca. The Saudi government does not allow Saudi women, irrespective of age or status, to travel abroad outside the Kingdom without the written permission of a male 'guardian'. Women may hold more liberal views but without male support or revolution

their emancipation might be slow. Soraya Al-torki's recent study of ideology and behaviour among thirteen elite families in Jiddah, through three generations, highlights dramatic changes in society - more nuclear rather than extended families, more interaction socially between husband and wife, more private education and overseas travel, and mutual consultation on domestic matters such as the education of children.

Qatar

More than half of all the graduates of Qatar University are women. Only about 9% of the whole Qatari civil service are women, and even less are employed in the private sector. The number of female graduate assistants at Qatar University is twice as many as males. Twelve Qatari women had obtained doctorates by early 1987. The increasing number of academically qualified women is likely to strain the GCC's traditional societies. In Qatar there are more women Qatari teachers available than there are jobs in girls' schools. In an effort to reduce the number of expatriate male teachers, some local women teachers have been employed on an experimental basis in some boys' schools.

Sultanate of Oman

Education is fairly new for both girls and boys in the Sultanate of Oman. Its first, and at present only, university was founded in 1986, with five faculties. Women students have been in the majority from the start of Sultan Qaboos University. Only about 9% employed in the civil service are women, and the percentage is

much less in the private sector where expatriate secretaries and teachers often are preferred. An increasing stress on Omanization may change this. The highest-ranking woman in the Omani government is an undersecretary for planning in the Development Council. She was educated abroad before the present Sultan came to power in 1970. She has been associated with the Council since 1973 and was appointed to her present position in 1988. The Ministry of Social Affairs has a female director-general (for women's and children's affairs). In general, we can expect more dramatic changes in the position and role of women in the GCC countries.

Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. One African in every five is Nigerian. The Northern provinces of Nigeria have experienced a long-exposure penetration of Arab and Muslim influence. The question of the future orientation of Nigerian society has focussed round the debate over the membership of Nigeria in International Islamic Organizations, and the inclusion of 'shari'ah' or Islamic Law in the Constitution of the country.

From the Muslim side has come the demand for the creation of a Federal Shari'a Court of Appeal in the Third Republic (1992). The Christian Association of Nigeria, in Defence of Nigeria's Secular Status, has underlined that Nigeria is a secular state and has called for a unified legal system for one nation with one law, giving reasons for the exclusion of 'shari'ah' from the national constitution. So far freedom of reli-

gion for all Nigerian citizens continues. Any retrenchment in this position would certainly affect the position of Muslim women. Let us look at one example. In one state in northern Nigeria, the Ministry of Education decided to change the style of dress for all girls in post-primary schools. Previously, the girls' uniforms had been blouses and skirts, but the Muslims felt that the exposure of the girls' legs was un-Islamic. They put pressure on the government through the Ministry of Education to introduce a new style of school uniform. The girls were all to wear kaftan-like blouses covering their hands and Indian-style trousers covering their legs. When the Christian pupils rejected this order, a violent demonstration rocked many schools. A modification of the policy was sought so that now Muslim pupils wear the 'kaftan' and trousers and the Christians wear blouses and skirts.

Jordan

In 1951 the Jordanian Law of Family Rights was reformed to allow stipulation in marriage contracts against polygamy, give women the right to divorce on certain specified grounds, and restrict divorce or 'talaq'. The registration of marriages forms the basis of many of the most important contemporary reforms. Both Jordan and Syria require such registration.

Jordan, one of the most religiously tolerant of the Arab states, is now in turmoil over the influence of fundamentalists who made sweeping gains in the 1989 parliamentary elections and claim mass support for their measures. The Muslim fundamentalist Minister of Education,

Abdullah Akaileh, introduced a ban on April 30 1991, on fathers watching their daughters compete in school sports. Thousands of parents petitioned the Government to withdraw this and other measures including a plan to close all co-educational schools. The ban came after a series of orders and precepts including a ban on men teaching sports to girls, a curb on the freedom of schools to decide to close on Christian holidays, and the rescheduling of important examinations to coincide with the Christmas holiday. As part of the drive to transform society, Youssef Athem, the Minister of Social Development, has segregated the sexes in his ministry and barred female employees from travelling abroad on official missions without a protector. (Article in The Times of London by Christopher Walker, May 30 1991).

Turkey

As family laws are regarded as the kernel of Islam, it is not surprising that reform relating to the position and rights of women and children were the last reforms to take place. Laws relating to the Penal code, the Commercial code, maritime commerce and commercial procedure became part of the many legal systems in the nineteenth century.

Turkey was the first Muslim country to bring in a family law - in 1915. This particular law had no basis of authority in the Hanbali school of law but drew some support from the other three main schools of law. These schools of law each give a different emphasis to the various principles of interpretation. The Hanbali school is the

most conservative. The other schools of law are known as the Hanafi, the Shafi'i and the Malaki. All the schools are named after their founders. In 1917 the Ottoman Law of Family Rights was passed in Turkey.

It was Ataturk who made the most far-reaching reforms in Turkey when he made it into a secular state. He clearly expressed his view, "There is a straighter and more secure path for us to follow (than the one we have been following). This is to have Turkish woman as partners in everything, to share our lives with them, and to value them as friends, helpers and colleagues in our scientific, spiritual, social and economic life." Ataturk forbade polygamy. The revival of Muslim Fundamentalism has affected Turkey. Although it has remained a secular state, some women have chosen to wear the veil and line up with fundamentalism. The wives of government officials are probably the most emancipated. They move with their husbands to different parts of the country according to their husbands' postings. Often they do not associate with the local people especially in rural areas where they have little in common with them.

Iran

In Iran, the Family Protection Act was passed in 1967. Women had the right to seek divorce in court and were protected from arbitrary divorce and polygamy. Ayatollah Khomeini called for women to return to wearing the 'chador' or veil. Many women adopted it as a symbol of disapproval for the ex-Shah and his regime. Later, some of these same women, wearing Western

dress, marched on International Women's Day to protest against the Ayatollah's pronouncements on women's role in society. After this protest the Islamic Revolutionary Council allowed women to work in administrative and other posts. However, a woman's right to work without the permission of her husband has been removed; the testimony of two women is now equal to that of one man and the minimum marriage age for women has been reduced.

Iran enacted a second Family Protection Act in 1975 after repealing the first. It further restricted polygamy. We have yet to see what changes will come in the post-Khomeini era.

Pakistan

The concern of reformers was not only for the status and rights of women but for the welfare of children. In March 1961 Pakistan passed the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance. It ensured the registration of marriages, special measures for preventing irresponsible polygamy and appropriate arrangements for divorce and maintenance. The minimum age of marriage was fixed. A Muslim wishing to take a second wife had to apply in writing, with a fee, to the Chairman of the Union Council. An Arbitration Council made the decision after taking into account the existing wife's views. The punishment for not abiding by the Council's decision was a heavy fine or a prison sentence. For a divorce, a written notice had to be submitted to the Chairman of the Union Council with a copy to the wife.

The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance was a great

step forward in the emancipation of women. Illiterate women are sometimes not aware of their rights nor able to take advantage of them. Now the issue in Pakistan is not so much one of obtaining rights but of exercising them. Jama'at-i-Islami leaders have urged the repeal of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance but it is still current.

Women on the whole have supported the Ordinance. When President Zia-ul-Haq introduced Nizam-i Mustafa (the organization of society according to the way of the Prophet) some wondered if the Ordinance would be repealed. However, President Zia excluded the Ordinance from the jurisdiction of the Shariat Muslim legal benches; otherwise, without doubt, it would have been repealed. The First Shariat Benches Order was announced in 1978. It authorized the setting up of a Shariat Bench at each High Court and a Shariat Appellate Bench at the Supreme Court. These benches can declare a law invalid if it is repugnant to the Qur'an and Sunnah. The leader of the Jama'at-i-Islami, Maulana Maududi who died in 1988, and other 'orthodox' religious leaders welcomed the Shariat Benches Order with enthusiasm. 'Shariat' is Urdu for the Arabic 'shari'ah' and means the divine code of law based on the Qur'an and the Traditions. That its area of application was so circumscribed was a disappointment to them.

The current situation in Pakistan, because of the high illiteracy of women - over 80% - makes it difficult for women not only to know their rights but also obtain them. A uniform system of

birth and marriage registration is needed. Marriage registration is required by law but lack of registration carries no penalty, and the marriage is still valid. Enactment of the law also depends on a strong judiciary.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh became independent from Pakistan in 1971. It inherited the reforms introduced by the Pakistan Muslim Family Laws Ordinance of 1961. In March 1988 Islam was declared the state religion of Bangladesh. Religious freedom is guaranteed in the constitution. In Bangladesh women have the right to vote. Widespread illiteracy hinders them in the correct use of their franchise.

Indonesia

Although Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world as far as population is concerned (more than 80% of its 187 million people are Muslim), Islam is not the state religion. Indonesia is a secular republic. The Constitution of Indonesia provides conditions for religious peace and freedom by acknowledging equal rights for Islam, the Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, Buddhism and Hinduism. At the same time Pancasila requires every citizen to belong to one of these five recognized religious systems. This was probably the justification for banning the communist party. Members of all the five religious systems have the same right and duty to participate in the political, social and economic life of the nation. 'Pancasila democracy' was first expounded by President Sukarno in 1945. Pancasila means 'Five Principles'. These are

the philosophical backbone of the state - faith in God, humanity, nationalism, representative government and social justice.

Islam in Indonesia has been strongly influenced by popular religious beliefs and practices including Javanese mysticism, animism, the matrilinear system of law, together with Hinduized Islam which came centuries ago from India. Orthodox Indonesian Muslims are very critical of this folk Islam. Muslim modernists have tried to purify Indonesian Islam by rejecting the Thariqah Nasyabaniyah and the 'warith' or inheritance law, the matrilinear system of law (in Minangkabau), and visits to the tombs of saints.

In Indonesia the 'talaq' (divorce) rate is 52% of the marriage rate.

It is encouraging to see reform movements in various countries bringing more opportunities and greater emancipation to women. How much reform benefits the majority varies considerably. In a society where many women are illiterate they are kept ignorant of their rights. Even if they knew their rights they might not know how to claim them. For rights to be fully effective a just judiciary and absence of corruption and bribery are also needed. In some areas, considerable progress is being made but the overall position is not so encouraging. Civil strife, ethnic cleansing, natural disaster and attendant poverty make the lot of many women extremely hard. We will now turn again to consider how we may share the love of Jesus with our Muslim sisters whatever their condition.

5 MORE BRIDGES TO JESUS

5.1 *Some Basic Theological Words*

Many educated Muslim women may repudiate much that belongs to folk religion and superstition. They may have learnt basic Islamic theology. Some will be aware of other faiths and may be acquainted with some of the similarities and differences in the Muslim and Christian faiths. Muslims and Christians use many common religious terms - God, man, sin, repentance, salvation, prayer, judgment, heaven and hell - but the meanings of these words in the two faiths are often quite different. These differences can be a help but also a hindrance to mutual understanding.

It is important for the Christian communicator to be aware of the meanings in both faiths. A few examples might help. The Muslim is not generally asking, "What is the way of salvation?" but, "What are God's rules for this situation so that I can follow them and be accepted by him?" What is often needed in talking with a Muslim is to start further back with the doctrines of God and man and then to move to views of sin, repentance and salvation. God created man spiritually weak (Q 4:28), prone to sin but not sinful. That is his present state as well; every child is born innocent with a bent towards sin. As one Tradition states, "Satan touched everyone at birth except for Jesus and his mother". The teaching of the Qur'an about sin is very sparse. Sin is not sin because of God's holiness but because of his pronouncement. In summary, the Qur'an teaches

that the fall of Adam into sin was not a moral fall but only a mistake (Q 7:22-23). Almost immediately after Adam's sin God accepted Adam's repentance (Q 2:37). He lost Paradise but was not estranged from God. There is no original sin only weakness.

The greatest sin is 'shirk' (Q 4:48) - associating any one or thing with God. Other sins are divided into big sins like breaking ceremonial laws, theft, murder, drinking alcohol, eating pork and usury (Q 5:90-91 and 30:39). Lying and anger are examples of little sins (Q 30:37-39). Sin does not grieve God. He is unaffected by it. Sin only harms and hurts the law-breaker (Q 17:13-15). God does not love evil-doers (Q 7:55). Obviously, the definition of repentance depends on the definition of sin. The Muslim does not generally repent because he or she has done something against God but because of doing something against God's law. No atonement is necessary (Q 6:165). Each soul is responsible for his own actions and no soul can bear the burden of another (Q 17:15). Al-Ghazali (d.1111 AD) quotes the Tradition (Hadith), "The Prophet said, 'He who repents is a friend of God, and he who repents of his sin is like someone who has no sin'". Obviously, we will have to try and deepen our Muslim friend's understanding of the holiness of God and the seriousness of sin.

One might well ask how can a Muslim woman come to know God through Christ? It will be a miracle of the Holy Spirit as it is for any one who comes to a personal knowledge of God in Christ. As Christians we have to examine our-

selves lest we obscure the good news which we seek to share with all people. We may allow our cultural accretions to seem part of the message. We may neglect to pray enough for our Muslim friends and neighbours. We may mistakenly see them in categories and sects forgetting that some are pious but superstitious while some are nominal in their assent and practice. Secularism, nationalism, religious fundamentalism as well as atheistic communism have affected their societies and outlooks. Muslims in Europe and North America are having to come to grips with the difficulties of living in pluralist societies.

Among the more than five hundred million Muslim women in the world today we will find loyal friends and those whom God has chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). It is with the personal record of one such woman that I conclude this attempt to help Christian and Muslim women understand each other better. It should be noted that she came to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ partly by seeing something of the love of God in the life of one of his followers, and through the reading of the Bible. She was one of my students; I knew her well and requested her to write this brief account.

5.2 My True Story

(A translation from Urdu)

"I was born into a respectable Muslim family in South India, one of a large number of brothers and sisters. By God's wonderful love, I received the gift of salvation, and by his grace I have

become an heir of eternal life. This is by his promise to me, 'Whosoever believes on the Son shall have eternal life'. Thanks be to God for his gift to me.

"When I was about seventeen years old I was studying in the eighth class in a Government school. Then, because of my Father's illness, I was sent to a Mission school quite near my home.

"Just as soon as I set foot in this school I noticed a Christian teacher who was different from anyone I had ever known. I saw her gentle way of speaking, her kindness to all the students and her great faithfulness in her work. Her life made so deep an impression on me that I was really puzzled. 'How could any human being be like that?', I wondered over and over again. Later I realized that it was all because of God's Holy Spirit in her.

"In this school I began to study the Bible. Two days in the week we studied the Old Testament and two days the New Testament. One day in the week we did memory work, learning passages from the Bible and many songs. At first I did not study with zeal, but rather indifferently. I had heard the Christians called blasphemers, and I did not like even to touch their Book.

"One day we were studying the fifty-third chapter of the prophet Isaiah, memorizing some parts of it, which was very hard for me. It was while I was studying this chapter that God by his grace showed me that there was life and power in this Book. Then I began to realize that Jesus is alive

for ever. Through Isaiah 53 verse 1, He was saying to me with great sadness, 'Who has believed our report, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' Now I knew that I believed it, and that his arm had been revealed to me. I knew that this was the true way.

"So God put faith in my heart, and I believed on Jesus as my Saviour and forgiver of my sins. Only He could save me from everlasting death. Only then did I begin to realize how great a sinner I was, whereas before I thought that my good life could save me.

"Now a living power began to work in me. When Satan tried to catch me with his nets and chains, I could resist him by reading the New Testament and trusting Jesus Christ. Sometimes Jesus would say to me, as He did to Martha, 'Martha, Martha, you are troubled about many things, but Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her'.

"Now, for Jesus' sake, I had to leave my home and loved ones. He took me to Christian friends who gave me a home. After some months I was baptized. Then I could say with great assurance that Jesus is the Giver of salvation and peace. Such peace the world cannot give. It is the gift of God."

6 CONCLUSION

As we think about Muslim women, we realize that there is no stereotype. Also, there are fast-moving outside changes in the world which affect women, be they Muslim, Christian, Jew-

ish, Hindu or of some other faith or of no faith. Within each faith, particularly in Islam and Christianity, women are becoming more vocal.

Someone has said that Muslim women are the largest 'hidden group' in the world. Mostly they will be reached by women - women who can show them the love of Christ by their living and their speaking. However, the responsibility belongs to all disciples of Jesus. Some strategize and plan. All can pray.

GLOSSARY OF SOME ARABIC AND URDU TERMS

Ahmadis - An unorthodox militant Muslim sect proscribed in some Muslim lands. Founded in India towards the end of the nineteenth century by Ghulam Ahmad Mirza in Qadian in the Punjab. Sometimes known as Mirzais or Qadianis.

Allah - The Arabic word for God used in the Qur'an and the Arabic Bible.

ayat - Sign, verse

begum - Urdu word for lady; a respected married woman of good social standing.

bismillah - In the name of God.

burqa - Clothing including the veil which envelops a woman when in public (Urdu). Common in Pakistan and parts of India.

Caliph - The deputy or successor to Muhammad and the leaders of Islam after him.

The political leader of Islam. The Caliphate was abolished in 1924 with the fall of the Otto-

man empire.

chador - The veil as used in Iran.

dargah - Tomb of a saint

din - The faith of Islam in its religious practices.

hadith - the Traditions of Islam, including what the prophet Muhammad is said to have said, done or permitted to be done.

hajj - The annual pilgrimage at Mecca in Saudi Arabia, to be performed once in a lifetime, if economically possible, by each Muslim.

hazur - Chaste

hijab - A woman's veil and head-covering. Arabic.

huri - Beautiful maiden of paradise

'id ul-adha - The feast of sacrifice observed seventy days after the end of the fast of Ramadan.

'id ul-fitr - The feast that is observed at the end of the fast of the month of Ramadan.

'id ul-milad - The feast in celebration of the birth of Muhammad.

ijma' - Consensus or agreement of the Muslim community concerning the interpretation of the application of the teaching of the Qur'an in a given situation.

iman - Faith in its confession and belief in the heart of the confessor.

Islam - An Arabic word meaning submission (to God). The name of the religion of Mus-

- lims.
- jinn - Spirit created by God. Some are good but many are evil and greatly feared by Muslims.
- kalimah - The creed of Islam
- karamat - Miracle
- laylat al-nisf min sha'ban - The night of the middle of the month Sha'ban; the night of apportioning. Persian shab-i barat
- laylat ul-mi`raj - Commemoration of the night of power or the occasion when Muhammad is said to have ascended into heaven for a night.
- majlis - Open court for meeting a ruler.
- mi'raj - Ascension
- mutawa - Religious police, responsible for ensuring that everyone obeys Islamic customs of modesty and avoids drinking alcohol.
- marabout - A religious leader who exercises miraculous and occult powers. The term is chiefly used in North and West Africa.
- Muharram - The first month of the Muslim lunar calendar. The death of Husain is commemorated by the Shia sect on the tenth day of this month.
- mullah - A religious teacher. The term is more commonly used in the Indian subcontinent.
- Muslim - A follower of Islam; one who submits to God. Islam and Muslim come from the same Arabic root or radicals - s, l and m. In Arabic m in front of a word can indicate musallim (active) doer or musallam (passive) done to.
- niqab - Face veil
- pir - Urdu for a Muslim holy man.
- purdah - Literally 'curtain', in Urdu; refers to the seclusion of women.
- Qur'an - The Holy Book of Islam. Considered by most Muslims to be eternal but revealed in portions through the angel Gabriel to Muhammad who wrote it down or caused it to be written down.
- Ramadan - The ninth month; observed as a month of fasting from daybreak to nightfall when neither food nor drink may be touched except by children under ten, the sick, very aged, pregnant women and travellers.
- salat - The saying of the ordained prayers five times a day at the appointed times.
- sawm - The act of fasting.
- shab-i barat - Persian for the night of the fifteenth of Sha'ban, the night of apportioning; Arabic laylat al-nisf min sha'ban.
- shahadah - The 'confession' of the Muslim creed or kalimah.
- shari'ah - The religious law based on the Qur'an. Shariat is Urdu for the Arabic shari'a.
- shia - The Muslim sect which believes that the

rightful successor to Muhammad was Ali, the husband of his daughter Fatima. The sunnis followed the elected successors.

shirk - The greatest of all sins - associating any one or thing with God.

sufi - A Muslim mystic. Literally one who wore the wool 'suf'.

sufism - The mystic movement in Islam of those who seek a closer communion with God through mysticism. sunnah Setting an example, hence custom.

sunni - The largest sect in Islam. Sunnis follow the Qur'an and the Traditions and are orthodox.

surah - A chapter division of the Qur'an. There are 114 surahs or chapters in the Qur'an. Except for the first surah they generally appear in order of length, the longest first.

talaq - Divorce. The pronunciation of 'divorce' of the woman by the husband.

'ulama - Muslim theologians.

ummah - The single community in Islam; the totality of Muslims

'urs - Literally: marriage; festival of the anniversary commemorating the death and the day the saint was united with his Lord.

Wahabis - Members of a Puritanical reform movement in Islam founded in Arabia.

zakat - The legal arms due from every Muslim, generally two and a half percent of one's income.

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