

## INTRODUCTION

Maulana Abdul Alim Siddiqui, who traveled over the whole Muslim world and who is in Tokyo on his visit to Japan, was invited by the Tokyo International Club to speak on the subject of “Women in Islam” on the 27<sup>th</sup> July at the Orion in Ginza. After the dinner was over, Dr. Naohide Yatsu, President of the club, introduced the speaker in elegant terms and he rose to speak. It was the first time after Dr. Robindra Nath Tagore that the Tokyo people had the pleasure of hearing an inspiring Indian orator.

Before introducing his subject Maulana Siddiqui described the status of woman among different people on the surface of the earth at the time of the birth of Islam. He said that in Christian Europe, according to Jewish and Christian writers, woman was, on the one hand, regarded as the origin of sin and human ills, and represented as the door of hell and the organ of the devil; on the other hand, the question is discussed in the open conference in the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. whether she can at all be called a human being. In Persia she was sold and mortgaged as a piece of movable property and pawned in gambling; Yasdjurd, the Persian Emperor, marries his own daughter and later kills her. In India she was pawned in gambling and treated as a slave; she was debarred from reading religious books, and bound to burn herself alive on the pier of her dead husband. As regards her position in China, and Japan, the Japanese know better what position she held. In Arabia she occupied the worst position; girls were buried alive, wives were treated as slaves, and mothers were distributed among the sons as inherited property.

At such a time when woman has fallen to the greatest depths of degradation throughout the known world, Muhammad (PBUH) appears as her saviour and liberates her from thralldom. He puts a stop to the killing of daughters, and by his personal example puts life into his precepts, he calls his daughter a piece of my heart,’ and order his followers to give preference to the daughters while distributing anything among their children, because they love the parents more than the sons, and raises the position of woman as a daughter.

Regarding wives he communicated the word of God, “He created helpmates for you (husbands) that you may find rest in them (wives)”. Again the Qur’an says, “They (wives) have also the same rights as the husbands have”. Muhammed (PBUH) raises her status to such an extent that he calls her “the queen of her home”.

As for the mother, the Qur’an orders the faithful to pay their mothers the highest respects, and the Prophet announces that if the son or daughter look at her mother’s face with the sentiments of love, he or she will get a reward equal to that of pilgrimage.

In Islam the woman is expected to make progress in social, political, moral and spiritual spheres of life in the same way as the faithful man is expected to make.

In conclusion the speaker affirmed that Muhammed (PBUH) was the first man in the history of the world who raised the status of woman, and from the worst possible degraded position brought her upon the same level which man occupies.

At the end of the speech he called for questions from the audience, and in reply to some questions he declared that Islam, instead of condemning other divine religions of the world, confirms their truth and as their original scriptures were lost or because contaminated,

represents them all, and offers a complete code of laws in the shape of the Holy Qur'an in its original form.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

نَحْمَدُهُ وَنُحِبُّهُ عَلَى رُسُلِهِ الْكَرِيمِ سُبْحَانَكَ يَا أَرْحَمَ الرَّاحِمِينَ

## WOMEN AND THEIR STATUS IN ISLAM

(The speech was delivered, on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1936 at the 'Orion in Ginza', in Tokyo, on the invitation of the Tokyo International Club)

### STATUS OF WOMEN AMONG DIFFERENT PEOPLE

History is silent as to whether there was distinction in status between the male and the female sexes during the beginning of human civilisation. In later days no doubt the female sex was regarded as inferior to the male and the idea of inferiority developed to such an extent that the male sex not only claimed a complete superiority over the female sex, but further arrogated to itself the right to utilize and employ the female sex as it liked.

Surveying the history of the world on this time we find that in *pre-Christian Europe, Greece*, which was the centre of light and learning for a long time and which provided philosophical and scientific inspiration to the Europe of latter days, regarded women as something definitely inferior to man. She was a subservient creature who had come into existence solely for the purpose of breeding of citizens for the state and soldiers for the army. The great dramatist Euripedes puts into the mouth of Medea the remark: "*Women are impotent for good, but clever contrivers of all evils*". Such degrading conceptions led to a moral degeneration, which ultimately ruined the Greek society. "*The names of virtuous women*", says Professor Lecky, "*scarcely appear in Greek history*". (History of European Morals, Vol II; p. 307).

Conditions in Europe did not improve with the advent of Christianity. "*Of the woman came the beginning of sin and through her we all die*" is a belief, which holds woman responsible for all the miseries of humanity and the wickedness of man. Consequently, Paul, the Premier Saint of Christendom, proclaimed: "*Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed than Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression*". Other early Fathers were even more uncharitable and denounced woman as "*the lance of the demon*", "*the gate of the Devil*", "*the road of iniquity*", "*the sting of the scorpion*", "*a daughter of falsehood*", "*a sentinel of hell*", "*the enemy of peace*" and "*of the wild beasts, the most dangerous*". Nay, they went still further. The Orthodox Greek Church denied that woman had a soul and, at the Council of Macon, Bishop vehemently asserted that woman did not belong to human species (Westermarck, p. 663). A council held at Auxierre prohibited women to receive the Eucharist in their naked hands and to come near the altar during the celebration of the Mass on the ground that she was an "*unclean thing*". "*I may define man*", says Principal Donaldson (Woman, pp. 181,182), "*to be a male human being, and woman to be a female human being....Now what the early Christians did was to strike the 'male' out of the definition of man and 'human being' out of the definition of woman. Man was the human being made for the highest and the noblest purpose; woman was a female made to serve only one. She was on earth to influence*

*the heart of man with every evil passion. She was a fireship continually striving to get alongside the male man of war to below him up into pieces."*

In the Asian cradles of civilization woman was no better off. Hinduism, which is the oldest among the present-day religions of the world, laid it down: *"In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent"* (Manu, V.140). *"The legislator Manu"*, says the celebrated Hindu scholar, Sir R. G. Bhandarkar, *"is equally hard on woman. It must be acknowledged that the estimate of the old Aryan of womanly nature is not flattering to them generally. They are debarred from reading the Vedas; any religious rite in which they alone are concerned is directed to be performed without Vedic Mantras. Even the Bhagvad Gita gives expression to the general belief that it is only a sinful soul that is born as woman, Vaisya or Sudra"*. (Collected Works, p. 461). In Buddhism, says the Buddhist scholar, U. May Oung *"the idea of wedlock and its attendant worldly life is opposed to the ultimate end—the annihilation of Desire....the striving for which must necessarily involve celibacy"* (Buddhist La Part 1, p.2). In Buddhist ideology, therefore, according to the historian Westermarck, *"Women are, of all the snares which the tempter has spread for men, the most dangerous; in women are embodied all the powers of infatuation which blind the mind of the world"*.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, the General conception of womanhood was of such a degraded type that her very existence was considered ignominious for the family. Female infanticide was, consequently, practiced on a wide scale. Those women, however, who escaped early death were allowed to live only on sufferance. For, an Arab woman *"had no rights; she could not inherit property; her person formed part of the inheritance which came to the heir of her husband, and was entitled to marry her against her will. Hence sprung the impious marriages of sons with their step mothers and others of an even worse character... Polygamy was universal and quite unrestricted; equally so was divorce, at least as far as the man was concerned"* (Muhammad and Mohammedanism: Bosworth Smith; p.82).

Such was the condition of the female sex in the world when MUHAMMED (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him!), the Saviour of womanhood, stood up in Arabia and, through the Divine Revelation of the Lord of the Universe, who created both the male and the female and who loves them equally, preached to the world that *females are just like males, having equal rights, equal honour and equal status in life. They were on no account to be treated as the property of the males. They have the right of ownership, of property in the same way as the males have, through no doubt under the principle of the division of labour the female sex has some specialized duties to perform in life, just as the male sex has its own special duties.*

## **AS DAUGHTER:**

Islam denounces in unequivocal terms the pre-Islamic inhuman custom of female infanticide and commands people to love and cherish their daughters more than their sons.

The Holy Qur'an says that on the Day of Judgment the female infant, buried alive, will be questioned:

وَإِذَا الْمَوْؤُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ

**“For what crime wast thou murdered?” (81: 8-9).**

Thus before the almighty the victim herself will be able to give evidence against those who killed that innocent creature of God simply for the sake of satisfying their vanity.

Allah again commands humanity;

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْءًا كَبِيرًا

**“Kill not your children for fear of want, We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily, to kill them is a great sin” (17: 31).**

Fatima was the first child born to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him!). In dealing with her, he set an example of fatherly love which is a model for mankind. “Fatimah”, he would say, “is a part of my being; who annoys her annoys me” (Mishkat-ul-Masabih, XLIV: 5).

He also emphasized preferential treatment towards the female sex and said; “When you bring any thing for your children for distribution, begin with the girls first because the girls love their parents more than the boy”.

#### **AS WIFE:**

Marriage, in the Islamic Law, is really a contract just like other civil contracts between two parties. As far as the conditions of the contract are concerned, both the parties, the man and woman, stand upon the same level. Each party has certain rights and duties. Islam commands justice to be observed in every contract, and so in the contract of marriage too justice should be observed. The Holy Quran says:

وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ

**“The women have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable” (2: 228)**

No doubt, under the principle of the distribution of labour, work should be divided between the pair. The women folk have naturally to take care of their off-springs until they grow up. They have to engage themselves in bringing them up and so are not in a position to pay attention to secure their means of livelihood. The men, therefore, have been made responsible for maintaining the family, including the wife, and have been given the duty of securing all the requirements of the home. Thus we might say that in a Muslim home, the husband is supposed to work as the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the wife as the Minister of the Interior.

The Holy Prophet is reported to have said: “Woman is the queen of her house”. The Holy Qur’an describes the position of the wife in a beautiful verse:

خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً

**“He created for you mates from among yourselves that you might find solace in them and He ordained between you love and mercy” (30: 21).**

The Prophet said: “The most perfect of faith among the Believers is the best of them in morals and the best of you are those who are kindest to your wives”. In his famous Address at the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet again laid stress on the good treatment of woman-folk. He said: “O my people! You have certain rights over wives and so have your wives over you.....They are Allah’s trust in you hands. See that you treat them with all kindness”.

#### **POLYGAMY:**

Before **the Saviour of the female sex** preached his message, there was no limit for the males in respect of the number of their wives. Even in the present age we find that among the Negroes of Africa and among other uncivilized races of the world is no limit to the number of wives a man can have. Islam really imposed a limit and allowed plurality of marriage with the idea of abolishing adultery. Polygamy is permitted in place of illegal intercourse in cases where it becomes difficult, or, rather impossible, to restrict marriage, in the interest of social health, to strict monogamy. There are two definite occasions in the lives of human beings when polygamy becomes necessary. For example, if the first marriage proves fruitless, the husband can, in most cases, be kept on the path of virtue and uprightness only by allowing a second marriage. Again, when there is a surplus of women, as it happens after the wars, human society can be saved from corruption and also extinction, as in the case of the present-day Germany, only by the permission of marrying more than one wife.

The Holy Qur’an restricts the number of wives to four and also orders complete equality and justice between them:

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً

**“And if you fear that you will not deal fairly towards the orphans, marry of the women who seem good to you, two or three or four, and if you fear you cannot do justice between them, then (marry) one only” (IV:3).**

The conditions of the marriage contract are to be settled by the parties to the marriage. If, on the one hand, according to the Islamic teaching, the husbands are entitled to have the rights of divorce, the wives also are entitled to the right of fixing their dowry and maintenance as they like and they may also take the authority of separating from their husbands when they find it necessary to do so. If agreement at the time of marriage is made with complete consideration, the parties stand practically at the same level and there remains no possibility for the women folk to suffer.

Islam enjoins justice, equity and straightforwardness. Therefore, if those who claim to be Muslims do not observe the Islamic Principles, it is their fault and Islam can on no account be accused for that. If today people misuse the permission for polygamy and try to hide their

lustful actions under the cloak of Islamic legality, it is their fault and they deserve the most severe punishment at the Court of the All-Knowing Allah who knows what is in their hearts.

## AS MOTHER:

As mother the status of woman has been raised by Islam to such an extent that nothing higher is conceivable.

The Holy Quran says:

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أَفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا

**“Your Lord has commanded that you shall worship none but Him and goodness to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repeal them but address them in terms of honour. And make yourself submissively gentle to them with compassion and say: O my Lord! Bestow on them compassion even as they cherished me in my childhood” (17:23,24).**

The Prophet is reported to have said when questioned by a disciple as to who should be revered most after the great Prophet himself” “your mother”. When questioned “Who, after the mother?” the Prophet said “your mother”. He was again asked: “and then, who after the mother?” He again replied: “your mother”. The man put the question a fourth time and the prophet then answered “your father”. This tradition shows that the position of the mother in the eyes of her sons and daughters should be three times higher than that of the father.

It is reported that once a disciple came to the Prophet and said: “O Prophet of God! On a hot day in the desert of Arabia, in the sunny noon when the stones and sands were burning like fire, my mother and I were traveling on foot without any shoes. I carried my mother on my shoulder so that she may not suffer the pain of walking bare footed on the hot-sands and stones. Could I pay the reward of the pains she had to bear in bringing me up?” the Prophet replied: “No, not even a fraction of the pain she suffered at the time you were born”.

In Islam the best action is the performance of the pilgrimage to Mecca, i.e., the Haj and the reward to a person who performs the Haj properly is that all his past sins are pardoned and he receives a high rank in the estimation of God. But, in expressing the dignity of the mother the Holy Prophet said: “One who looks at the face of his mother with sentiments of reverence and love once, is rewarded as if he had performed a pilgrimage”. People asked him, what if he looked twice, to which he replied: “It is as if he had performed two Pilgrimages, and if thrice, as if he had performed three Pilgrimages, and so on”.

In this respect, the Prophet himself set a model for the world. Once Halimah, the lady who nursed him in his childhood, came to see him. The prophet was sitting with his disciples. As soon as he saw her, he stood up with reverence and spread his mantle on the floor and requested his foster mother to take her seat there.

It is quite evident from the above that the respect which a mother receives from her children in Islam is the highest to which no other worldly relationship can aspire.

### PSYCHOLOGY OF THE VEIL:

The doors of spiritual elevation are open to women in the same way as they are open to men. They are commanded to educate themselves in the same way as the men, and if they attain a high position in learning even the men are expected to learn and benefit from their knowledge and wisdom. It is reported that after the Prophet's death, his disciples used to visit Ayesha, the wife of the Prophet, and seek knowledge from her. Islamic history is resplendent with a long list of the names of ladies who received the highest honour in society, the highest degree in learning and the highest qualifications in different branches of human activity. It was through the influence of other societies, which were not Muslim, that the idea of the inferiority of the female sex already existing in those societies, spread to the uneducated class among the Muslims, who knew very little about the teachings of Islam. If they had known the teachings of Islam, they would have known that in Islam the female sex deserves the same position, the same respect and the same dignity as the members of the male sex who, in their turn, are not allowed to degrade and insult them and make them their tools. To touch them with a bad intent is considered a sin and even a look at them with a bad motive is counted as adultery in Islam. That is why in the Holy Qur'an the men are commended in these words:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ

**“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them” (24: 30).**

The ladies too have been commanded in similar terms:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَائِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرَ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ

**“And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and their ornaments except that (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veil over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their father, their father's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants not having need (of women), or small children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden embellishment’ ( 24: 31).**



There is an important point in this connection which might be elucidated here with advantage. Every human being is endowed with Will power along with physical power. This will power is connected with the mind and the more the mental faculty is trained, the more is the will power increased. The training of this faculty is done through the exercise of concentration. The student of hypnotism forms an idea and concentrates upon it to such an extent that for certain moments he forgets every other thing. Through this training he achieves a strong power which some times enables him to make other persons his objects and influence them with the idea in his mind. For instance, he forms an idea that X is having a headache. He makes X his object and within a few minutes X feels that he is having a headache. Similarly, if he wants to attract Y towards himself, Y is attracted because the hypnotist's will power influences that of Y. This will power varies in its strength from man to man. Just as we say regarding an engine that it has ten or twenty or a hundred horse power, similarly we say of a hypnotist that he possesses ten or twenty or a hundred man's will power.

Now it is clear that a human being can influence other human beings through will power and can create in his object ideas in conformity with those existing in his own brain. So, when a male casts a lustful glance at a female, his passions would rise, the sexual idea would come to his brain, and if, he possesses will power, the same idea will be automatically created in the mind of the female object. And if hundreds of such masculine eyes fall upon that lady with the same motive and idea behind them, she is bound to be affected by the poisonous radiations of the sexual idea injected into her brain through the influence of the will power of the males, though herself she may be absolutely pure in heart and blotless in character. In a society which allows promiscuous intermingling of sexes, the atmosphere must necessarily remain charged with what might be called "sex-idea waves" of which the consequences for womanhood can be nothing else than disastrous.

The importance of woman in society cannot be over estimated. She is the mother of humanity. She brings up the child in her womb for nine months, feeds him at her breast for at least two years and is mainly responsible for his training at least up to the age of six or seven.

It is a well known fact of medical science that the mentality of the mother affects the mentality of her children just as, or even more than, her physical qualities influence their physical build. Islam, therefore, commands women to keep themselves away from places where there may be the slightest chance of their being influenced by an evil force or evil idea so that their chastity and purity may be preserved and the mentality of their off-springs may be safe from corruption. This is why Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

يَا نِسَاءَ النَّبِيِّ لَسْتُنَّ كَأَحَدٍ مِّنَ النِّسَاءِ إِنِ اتَّقَيْتُنَّ فَلَا تَخْضَعْنَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَيَطْمَعَ الذَّيْفِيُّ  
قَلْبَهُ مَرَضٌ وَقُلْنَ قَوْلًا مَّعْرُوفًا وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى  
وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ  
أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

**“O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other of the women; if you fear Allah be not soft in speech lest he in whose heart is a disease yearn; and you speak a speech that is just. And stay in your houses and do not make a dazzling display like that of the former times of ignorance; and establish regular prayer, and give regular charity and**

obey Allah and His Apostle. Allah only desires to remove all abomination from you, O people of the household, and to purify you a (thorough) purifying” (33: 32,33).

لَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِنَّ فِي آبَائِهِنَّ وَلَا أَبْنَائِهِنَّ وَلَا إِخْوَانِهِنَّ وَلَا أَبْنَاءَ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ  
وَلَا أَبْنَاءَ أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ وَلَا نِسَائِهِنَّ وَلَا مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ وَاتَّقِينَ اللَّهَ  
إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدًا

“There is no blame on them (the women) (if they appear unveiled) in respect of their fathers, not their sons, nor their brothers, nor their sister’s sons, nor their own women, nor of what their right hands possess. And fear Allah; surely Allah is a witness of all things” 33: 55).

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ قُلْ لِّأَزْوَاجِكَ وَبَنَاتِكَ وَنِسَاءِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ يُدْنِينَ عَلَيْهِنَّ مِنْ جَلَابِيبِهِنَّ  
ذَٰلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَنْ يُعْرَفْنَ فَلَا يُؤْذَيْنَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

“O Prophet tell; your wives and your daughters and the believing women that they cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad); this will be more proper, that they should be known as such and not molested. And Allah is oft-Forgiving and most-Merciful” (33: 59).

Examples of the way in which the above commandments were interpreted by the Prophet can be seen in the Prophet’s beloved daughter, Fatimah, and his beloved wives, Khadija and Ayesha. Nowhere do we find any evidence that the Prophet’s wives or his daughter, were ever seen with an open face and open head in front of strangers save at the time of performing acts of worship like Prayer or Pilgrimage! In the condition of prayer it is laid down that the body of the woman must be covered entirely except the face and hands. There is also an express injunction in the Hadith that no woman should put on a veil during the Pilgrimage. In the Prayer and the Pilgrimage, men are strictly forbidden from gazing at the faces of the womenfolk and they have been warned to remember that the female servants of Allah are in the presence of their Creator.

Thus with respect to their position in life, their inherent right as human beings and their relations with Allah men and women are on a plane of equality in Islam. This was the teaching of the Holy prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him!). And this too is the verdict of the Holy Quran. Says Allah:

أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّمَّنْ ذَكَرَ أَوْ أَنْتِي بِعَعْضِكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ

“Never will I waste the work of a worker among you, whether male or female. You are members, one of another” ( 3:195).

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