

# Daughters of Eve

Whoever does deeds  
of righteousness,  
- be they male or female -  
and have faith, they will enter  
Heaven, and not the least  
injustice will be done to them.  
an Nisā 4:124



## TRANSLITERATION GUIDE

Please take note of the table below as our transliteration method may be different to those adopted by others.

The transliterated symbols are unvarying in pronunciation, e.g. the representation “s” will remain pronounced as “s” and not distort to “z” in any circumstance, e.g. Islām is *not* pronounced Izlām.

While every effort has been made to ensure the transliteration is as close to the Arabic as possible, no alphabet can ever fully represent another.

This is all the more true where recitation of Qur’ānic verses is concerned as this must adhere to the very precise science of Tajwīd. It is therefore imperative that the readers do not consider a transliteration a substitute for learning to read Arabic correctly from a competent teacher.

### VOWELS

<b>A / a</b>	SHORT “A” AS IN “AGO”	<b>I / i</b>	SHORT “I” AS IN “SIT”
<b>Ā / ā</b>	LONG “A” AS IN “HAT”	<b>Ī / ī</b>	LONG VOWEL AS IN “SEE”
<b>AY or AI</b>	DIPHTHONG AS IN “PAGE”	<b>AW or AU</b>	DIPHTHONG AS IN “HOME”
‘	ABRUPT START/PAUSE DOES NOT OCCUR IN ENGLISH	<b>U / u</b>	SHORT “U” AS IN “PUT”
		<b>Ū / ū</b>	LONG VOWEL AS IN “FOOD”

### CONSONANTS

ب	<b>B</b>	“B” NO “H” ATTACHED	ض	<b>Ḍ</b>	“DH” USING SIDES OF THE TONGUE
ت	<b>T</b>	“T” NO “H” ATTACHED	ط	<b>Ṭ</b>	“T” WITH RAISED TONGUE
ث	<b>TH</b>	“TH” AS IN THIN	ظ	<b>Ẓ</b>	“TH” AS IN THEN, SOUND IS WITH RAISED TONGUE
ح	<b>Ḥ</b>	“H” GUTTURAL SOUND	ع	‘	GUTTURAL SOUND - ACCOMPANIES VOWEL
خ	<b>KH</b>	“KH” VERY GUTTURAL NO TONGUE USAGE	غ	<b>GH</b>	“GH” VERY GUTTURAL NO TONGUE USAGE
د	<b>D</b>	“D” NO “H” ATTACHED	ق	<b>Q</b>	“K” WITH BACK OF TONGUE RAISED
ذ	<b>DH</b>	“TH” AS IN THEN	و	<b>W</b>	“W” READ - NOT SILENT
س	<b>S</b>	“S” ONLY - NOT “Z”	ي	<b>Y</b>	“Y” ONLY - NOT “I”
ش	<b>SH</b>	“SH” AS IN SHIN			
ص	<b>Ṣ</b>	“S” WITH RAISED TONGUE			

Note: Double consonants must be pronounced with emphasis on both letters without pause, e.g. **ALLĀHUMMA** should be read **AL-LĀHUM-MA**.

### SYMBOLS

SUBHĀNAHŪ WA TA`ĀLĀ FOR ALLAH “GLORIFIED AND EXALTED IS HE”	ṢALLALLĀHU `ALAYHI WA SALLAM FOR MUHAMMAD “PEACE BE UPON HIM”
RAḌĪYAL-LĀHU `ANHU FOR COMPANIONS “ALLAH BE PLEASED WITH HIM”	`ALAYHIS-SALĀM FOR PROPHETS “PEACE BE UPON THEM”

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## *Woman was made from ...*

*Woman was made from the rib of man.*

*She was not created from his feet to be stepped upon,*

*Nor from his head to top him.*

*Woman was made from the rib of man.*

*She was made from his side to be close to him,*

*Near his heart to be loved by him.*

***...Unknown Poet***

## Creation

Allāh ﷻ created the first man Ādam ﷺ and then made the first woman to be his soul mate and companion through the journey of life.

*O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person and from him created his wife and from them both scattered many men and women; and fear Allāh through Whom you demand (your mutual rights) of each other, and the wombs (that bore you). Surely Allāh is ever a Watcher over you.*

*Qur'ān, 4:1*

Further to that Allāh has stated:

*I have only created Jinn and Mankind that they serve Me.*

*Qur'ān, 51:56*

The creation of woman from man was a token of Allāh's mercy upon man. But showing no discrimination between the purposes of the two, by stating all of mankind share the same common purpose to worship and serve Allāh, states the equal worth of both before the Creator.

## Womanhood in Islām: a Comparative Look

Before the advent of Islām, women were considered to have only one purpose all over the world: to serve men. It was the Qur'ān that declared that she, too, was only created for Allāh (as seen in the above verse) and, in that regard, was a complete equal to man.

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said clearly,  
"Women are the twin halves of men."

*at-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd*

It was also through Allāh's Final Word that women for the first time were given constitutional rights such as in marriage, divorce and the ability to own possessions.

Yet at the same time, Islam does not mistake equality of worth for sameness in roles. Since it is obvious that men and women have been created differently both physically and psychologically, it is also clear that both have been made for distinct, though equally important, roles. In Islām, Allāh dignifies both men and women in their distinctiveness, not sameness, while maintaining that in the most meaningful sense of equality – equality before the Creator – they both are the same.

*And whosoever does deeds of righteousness, whether male or female, and has faith, these will enter Paradise and not the least injustice will be done to them.*

*Qur'ān, 4:124*

A look at examples of other societies and religions and their outlook towards women demonstrates exactly how advanced the teachings of Islām were 1400 years ago and how advanced they still stand today.

## **The Worth of Women**

From a glance at history, it becomes clear that the female gender was held in very low esteem indeed in almost all societies.

Judaism had it:

*"It is impossible for there to be a world without males and females. Nevertheless happy is the man whose children are males and woe to the man whose children are females."*

*The Jewish Talmud*

The Old Testament of both Jews and Christians states:

“The birth of a daughter is a loss.”

*Ecclesiastics 22:3*

In pre-Islāmic Arabia, fathering a daughter was considered to be such a loss and an insult that men would often bury their daughters alive. In the midst of the darkness of such a world did the final divine revelation scathingly announce:

*“And when one of them is given tidings of a daughter,  
his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief.  
With shame does he hide himself from his people  
because of the terrible news he has received!  
Shall he retain her on (sufferance of) contempt,  
or bury her in the dust?  
Ah! what an evil (choice) they decide on!*

*Qur’ān 16:58-59*

Both sons and daughters were declared blessings from God in a verse where the gift of the female birth is mentioned before the male:

*To Allāh belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth.  
He creates what He wills. He bestows female children to  
whomever He wills and He bestows male children  
to whomever He wills...*

*Qur’ān 42:49*

And far from just asking that the daughter not be buried alive, Islām demanded that she be treated with kindness, honour and equality.

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: “Whosoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favour his son over her, Allāh will enter him into Paradise on account of her.”

*Musnad Aḥmad*

At a time when to have one female ward to look after was considered a curse, Muḥammad ﷺ declared:

“No-one has three daughters or three sisters, or two daughters or two sisters, and then fears Allāh regarding them and so is good towards them but shall enter into Paradise.”

*Musnad Aḥmad*

According to another Ḥadith,

“Whoever looks after two girls until they mature, he and I will enter Paradise like these,” and the Prophet held his two fingers together.

*al-Hākim*

And to a people for whom just *tolerating* the female would have been achievement enough, the Messenger of mercy ﷺ said,

“Anyone who has to suffer any amount of hardship because of these girls and yet is good to them, they will be a barrier for him against the Fire (of Hell).”

*al-Bukhārī & Muslim*

## Eve

The reason for the low opinion of women in Christianity and Judaism (or, at least, the excuse) was because, according to Judaeo-Christian tradition, it was the woman who had caused the downfall of man by committing, and seducing him to commit, the first sin.

Judaism, Christianity and Islām all agree that God tested Ādam and Eve with a forbidden tree and both ultimately ate from it. However, the first two then make a point of laying the blame on Eve. When Ādam was rebuked by God for what he did, we’re told he said,

“the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

Genesis 3:13

This grudge was carried very seriously by these traditions; womankind was to be forever guilty for the first woman's fault, and to inherit her unfaithfulness:

"...and I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands."

Ecclesiastics 7:26

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the above chapter goes on to say:

"No wickedness comes anywhere near the wickedness of a woman. Sin began with a woman and thanks to her we all must die."

Ecclesiastics 25:19:24

In the New Testament, St. Paul says:

"Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."

1 Timothy 2:14

When Christianity taught that all men were born tainted with this, the Original Sin, because of which Jesus Christ had to die on the Cross, Eve's crime became all more serious, and with it, womankind's wickedness.

St. Tertullian (155-245 AD) was one of the early Latin Fathers of the Church. He says to his sisters in the faith:

"And do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him (Adam) whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of what you deserved – that is, death – even the Son of God had to die."

St. Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, 1:1

The Qur'ān, on the other hand, made no exclusive mention of Eve in relation to the first sin at all. Both were jointly wrong for disobeying God, both repented, and both were forgiven. (*Qur'ān* 2:36, 7:20-24) In fact, if anyone is mentioned specifically, it is Ādam (20:121). And even if Eve *had* played a greater role in eating the forbidden fruit, the action would in no way have condemned anyone else, for

*“no bearer of burdens carries the burdens of another.”*

*Qur'ān* 6:164, 17:15, 35:18, etc.

Every child, male and female, is born pure and innocent of the actions of its parents, only to be judged before God for its own actions once mature.

### **Freedom and Ownership**

*“In Rome, the man alone had any rights before the law in the early republic; he alone could buy, hold or sell property, or make contracts. Even his wife’s dowry belonged to him.”*

Prof. Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*

The English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, wrote in his book, “The Subjection of Women” (1869) of the status of women in England:

*“We are continually told that civilisation and Christianity have restored to the woman her just rights. Meanwhile the wife is the actual bond servant of her husband: no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slaves...”*

*“She can acquire no property but for him; the instant it becomes hers, even if by inheritance, it becomes ipso facto his. In this respect the wife's position under the common law of England is worse than that of slaves in the laws of many countries.”*

Below is a time-scale of women acquiring basic ownership rights in Britain:

- 1856 Single women were allowed to keep their earnings
- 1857 Divorced women were allowed the same privileges
- 1893 Married women were allowed the same
- 1928 Women over 21 allowed to vote
- 1975 Equal pay for equal work

The reason for this state of affairs is that women were considered in many of the world traditions, including Judaism and Christianity, to actually *belong* to the chief men in her life (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*). We find in the writing of Rabbis that:

“The man may sell his daughter, but the woman may not sell her daughter; the man may betroth his daughter but the woman may not betroth her daughter”

*L. J. Swindler, Women in Judaism*

Any oaths made by a man would be binding, the oath or pledge of a woman only stood if her father before marriage, or husband after it, allowed it to pass (Num. 30:2-15). Since she was considered the property of someone else, her dealings had to be approved of by her owner to be valid. This is why women in Europe had no legal status to buy, sell, pledge, or otherwise enter into a contract until as late as the Nineteenth Century.

“In the Hindu tradition, the idea of the complete subservience of women to men was taken to such an extent that a woman whose husband died was ideally expected to burn herself alive on her husband’s funeral pyre as the perfect example of the self-sacrificing wife.”

*Archer, Fischle and Wyke, Women in ancient Societies*

Islām, however, declared that no man owned any woman. Before marriage, her father could not betroth her except with her consent: her refusal would invalidate any attempts of a forced marriage from being recognised in Shari`ah.

“No remarrying woman is to be given away in wedlock without her ordaining it, nor is a virgin to be married without her consent. Her consent is her silence (i.e. not objecting).”

*al-Bukhārī, Muslim, at-Tirmidhī*

A girl was married without her consent by her father during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. She came and complained of this to the Prophet ﷺ, and was given the option to dissolve the marriage. She said, “I allow what my father has done to pass; I had only wanted women to know that the decision (of who daughters marry) does not rest with fathers.”

*Ibn Mājah*

Neither did her husband become her owner after marriage: the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said in his last sermon,

“Hear well: treat your women with kindness. They are only confined with (being with) you – you do not possess from them any more than that.”

*at-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah*

It is because the woman is not the possession of her husband that in Islām a woman does not take on her husband’s surname after marriage but retains her own. Just because she’s married him, he does not now own her.

Islām made women economically independent. She could buy, sell, make pledges and enter into contracts and do as she pleased with her property without needing validation from either father or husband. The Qur’ān says in broad terms that include both the spiritual and material:

*For men is the benefit of what they earn,  
and for women is the benefit of what they earn...*

*Qur'ān 4:32*

Her right to employment and to utilising her talents professionally were recognised in Islām; early Muslim authorities like Abū Ḥanifah and aṭ-Ṭabarī held that a woman could occupy the highest public office of being a judge. Islām restored to women the right to inheritance, after she herself had been an object of inheritance in many cultures. Furthermore, when she entered into marriage, it became her husband's responsibility to maintain her from his means, even if she had her own assets.

The Qur'ān, while acknowledging the physical strength and leadership roles of men, describes her as the guardian of the household. She is not only a guardian for the physical possessions of her husband, but for everything to the most important and noble trust: safeguarding the Command of Allāh within the home and the Dīn (divine way of life) Allāh has honoured humankind with.

*“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women  
because Allāh has made one of them to excel the other,  
and because (men) spend (to support women) from their means.*

*Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient  
(to Allāh and to their husbands), and guard in  
(the husband's) absence what Allāh would have them guard.*

*Qur'ān, 4:34*

So, over 1400 years ago, the woman was at last declared the legal equal of man by Islāmic law. Unlike the outlook of many other societies (including this country's) until as late as last century, she was not considered inferior in Islām because of her femininity. The roles of men and women were made complementary to each other, not

preferential. Men and women must work together to build a successful society and a successful Ummah.

*“And the believing men and the believing women,  
they are protecting friends one of another;  
they enjoin good and forbid evil and keep up prayer  
and pay the poor-due, and obey Allāh and His Messenger.  
To these will Allāh show mercy.  
Lo! Allāh is Mighty, Wise.*

*Qur’ān, 9:71*

It’s worth mentioning here that the fact that women in the modern world are able to work and own property etc. is not due to the kindness of the men of the West. It was actually achieved through a long and painful struggle on the part of woman, and then, too, only when society needed her contribution, particularly during the two world wars, and then with the escalation of technological change. Islām had first liberated women before the word ‘liberate’ even came into fashion.

### **Treatment of Women**

Islām was aware of the injustices that male-dominated societies historically had been guilty of towards the weaker sex. Women the world over were treated so inferior to men that it was almost as if they did not belong to the human race. For instance,

*“The Greeks considered women to belong to the third (lowest) rank of society.”*

Rubin Suleiman, *The Female Body in Western Culture*

In the Synod of Macon (585 AD), the Church had debated whether or not women have souls, and Johannes Leyser, a

pastor from the region of Frankfurt in Germany, tells us that “among the holy fathers [at the Council] there was one who insisted that women cannot, and should not, be called ‘human beings’ (homines).”

Bayle, Dictionnaire Historique et Critique

Physically not having the strength to stand up for themselves and being therefore subjected to men, women were – and, in many places, still are today – overlooked and treated with harshness and cruelty. It is for this reason that Islām emphasised compassion towards women so strongly to men, declaring it even a part of faith itself.

We have already seen how Islām demands that fathers and anyone else in charge of raising girls bring them up with kindness and equality, telling them that their efforts will be rewarded with Paradise by an appreciative Lord. We look now towards the treatment Islām has enjoined of women in their other various roles.

## The Wife

*“And of His signs is that He created for you partners  
from yourselves that you may find rest in them,  
and He placed between you love and compassion...”*

*Qur’ān 30:21*

Islām recognised the fundamental differences between men and women and that the needs of each were different to the other. Modern research has arrived at the same conclusions that traditional wisdom had always held: that while a man’s primary need is to be respected, a woman’s primary need is to feel cherished. And so the teachings of Islām emphasised at every juncture kindness to and good treatment of women.

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, “Truly, of the most complete in faith among believers is he who is best among them in character and most gentle and kind towards his wife.”

at-Tirmidhī

He ﷺ also said, “The best of you are those who are best to their womenfolk. (due to him knowing how his followers would try to emulate him, he further stressed its importance with the words,) And I am the best of you towards my family.”

at-Tirmidhī, Ibn Ḥibbān

In his last sermon, the Rasūl ﷺ urged:

“Hear well! Accept my counsel to treat your women well... It is their right upon you that you are good to them in clothing them and feeding them.”

at-Tirmidhī

Even if a man disliked his wife, the Book of Allāh commanded:

*“...and live with them in kindness; for if you hate them,  
it may be that you dislike a thing  
wherein Allah has placed much goodness.”*

Qur’ān, 4:19

The Messenger ﷺ urged,

“Let no believing man hate a believing woman: if he dislikes one trait of hers, he will like another.”

Muslim

Islām recognised the right of a wife to sexual gratification, maintaining that marriage was not only about fulfilling the needs of the man. A woman could come and complain to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ of not finding sexual satisfaction from a husband and seek separation from him on those grounds, as was the case with Tumaymah bint Wahb, commonly referred to as the wife of Rifā`ah. *al-Bukhārī and Muslim*

Indeed, the Qur'ān has aptly described the inter-dependance of husband and wife when it said:

*“They (women) are your garments and  
you (men) are their garments.”*

*Qur'ān 2:187*

And so did the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said to the men,

*“When any of you has sex with his wife let him be true to her. If he satisfies his need before her, let him not hurry her until she also satisfies her need.”*

*Musnad Abi Ya`lā, Muṣannaf `Abd ar-Razzāq*

He ﷺ even emphasised the importance of foreplay for the benefit of women with the words, “None of you should fall upon his wife like an animal; let there first be a messenger between you.” When asked what that messenger was, he replied, “Kisses and words.” *ad-Daylamī*

It is in the nature of a man to need to feel needed, and in the nature of a woman to need to feel protected. A man needs to be able to provide and a woman needs to feel provided for. This is the way Allāh has created men and women, and why they feel a need for each other. And this is also what modern studies have found (see for example Dr. John Gray, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*). It is for this reason that Allāh ﷻ has assigned the task of being the bread-winner to men, and that of being the manager and carer of the family to the woman. Even when a wife works, she needs to know that her husband is the main provider, or at least truly wants to be and is working to that end.

*“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women  
because Allah has made one of them to excel the other,  
and because (men) spend (to support women) from their means.  
Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient*

*(to Allāh and to their husbands), and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard."*

*Qur'ān, 4:34*

Women may often feel that their share of the bargain is much less glamorous than that of men. Western society particularly has convinced a whole generation that to stay at home and look after one's own family and help to develop and bring up the next generation is a demeaning, humiliating task, whereas to go out of the home and serve complete strangers is the ultimate achievement – being 'career-minded' and sophisticated. The Dīn of Allāh, however, assures women that the role of a house-wife and a mother is no less important and valued than men's.

Anas ؓ relates that some women came to the Messenger ﷺ and said to him, "O Messenger of Allāh, the men have excelled us through Jihād in the path of Allāh (i.e by their going and our not being able to go). What action can we adopt for us to keep up with the Mujāhidin?"

The Messenger ﷺ replied, "The work of any one of you in her home equals the work of the Mujāhidin in the path of Allāh".

*al-Bayhaqī, Abū Ya`lā*

Asmā' Bint Yazīd ؓ narrates that she said to the Messenger ﷺ, "O Prophet of Allah ﷺ! You are dearer to me than my parents. The Muslim women have deputed me as their representative to talk to you on their behalf. There is no woman in the East or West, whether or not she knows of my coming to you, but holds the same view as mine:

"Surely Allāh has sent you with the truth to both men and women, so we believed in you and in your God who sent you. Now we, the assembly of women, are restricted and restrained to sitting in your homes, fulfilling your desires and bearing your

children, while you, the assembly of men, have been made to excel us with Jumū`ah, congregational prayers, visiting the sick, attending funerals, Ḥajj after Ḥajj and better than all that (by means of) Jihād in the way of Allāh.

“Yet surely when a man among you sets out for Ḥajj or `Umrah, or to protect the boundaries of the Muslim lands, it is we who look after your property for you, weave your clothes for you, and bring up your children for you; will we then not share in the reward with you?”

The Messenger ﷺ turned to his companions and said, “Did you ever hear a woman asking a better question than this regarding her Dīn?”

The companions replied, “O Messenger of Allāh ﷺ! We never thought that a woman could ever put such a question.”

The Messenger ﷺ turned to her and said, “Go and tell the women behind you that for one of you to carry out her marital duties to her husband and seek to please him and satisfy him earns her the reward of all that men get for their services to Allāh.”

She turned away exclaiming, “Lā ilāha il-lal-lāh!” (There is no god but Allāh) and “Allāhu Akbar!” (Allāh is the greatest) in happiness.

*al-Bayhaqī*

“Should I not tell you of the best of all that which can be treasured?” asked the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ to his companions once. “(It is) a good wife: when her husband looks at her, she pleases him; when he asks her to do something, she obeys him; and when he is absent from her, she looks after faithfully what he leaves behind.”

*Abū Dāwūd, al-Hākim*

The Rasūl ﷺ also declared, “Any woman who dies while her

husband is pleased with her will enter Jannah (Paradise)."

*at-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah*

It's interesting to note that some women (who have no problem with the idea of keeping the boss and clients happy at work with painted smiles and short skirts) may object to statements like this last one as sexist. The fact of the matter is Allāh has placed duties and responsibilities on every human being in the context of his or her relationship to others. Discharging one's duties to Allāh and to those whose duties one has been charged with by Allāh is what earns one Allāh's pleasure and with it the triumph of Jannah. The Messenger ﷺ has said, "Each of you is a shepherd and each of you will be questioned regarding his flock," and went on to mention, among others, the husband and wife, and that they would be questioned about those they are responsible for.

*al-Bukhārī, Muslim*

Indeed, Allāh ﷻ has clearly said:

*"And they (women) have rights similar to those which are (held) over them to be honoured with fairness, and men have a degree over them..."*

*Qur'ān, 2:228*

Based on this verse, the Ṣaḥābī renowned as the Mufasssīr (Qur'ān Exegete) of the Companions *par excellence*, Ibn `Abbās ؓ, said,

"I like to adorn myself for my wife as I like her to adorn herself for me, for Allāh says 'And they have rights similar to those which are (held) over them to be honoured with fairness.' Nor do I wish to claim all of the rights that I have over her, for Allāh also says, 'and men have a degree over them,'" – indicating that the 'degree' is one of greater responsibility.

*al-Bayhaqī in al-Kubrā*

So, men actually have a greater onus in Islām to ensure that their women are pleased with them.

## Polygyny

Polygyny, or the right for a man to have more than one wife at a time is an issue that the West angrily holds against Islām, as if it was Islām that had introduced this practice to the world. In actual fact, the Qur'ān is the *only* religious book on the face of this earth which not only limited the number of wives a man could have at a time to only four, but also expressly states "**only one** if you cannot do justice"(4:3). None of the other religious scriptures, whether the Talmud, the Bible, the Vedas, the Ramayan, the Mahabharat, the Geeta or anything else places any restriction on the number of wives one may have at all. It was only in much later years that the clergy of some religions decided people should only have one wife, not the religions themselves.

The Old Testament of Christians and Jews tells us that Abraham had three wives, while Solomon had hundreds. Nowhere in either the Old or New Testaments did God make any remark on this practice, much less prohibit it.

The Qur'ān's injunction on polygyny therefore is the most compassionate to women, only allowing it if the husband guarantees fair treatment of all his wives, and even then not allowing anymore than four wives. And after imposing these restrictions on men, the verse ends with the words, "*that is more fit that you should not do injustice,*" (4:3). This is the concern of the Book of Allāh for women. But would it not have been better to prohibit polygyny altogether?

Polygyny has been permitted with these strict regulations in Islām for certain unescapable reasons. It is a fact that the population of women in the world outnumbers that of men: in the USA alone there are some 7.8 million more women than men. It is also a fact that women generally outlive men all over the world. Whether it's through warfare, the risks involved in long, strenuous journeys, or exposure to the

elements and multiple hazards while earning a livelihood, there are, and have always been, more widows in the world than widowers. Without any concession for polygyny, hundreds of thousands of women in the world, many with young children, are denied their need for a husband, a breadwinner, and a companion to share the load.

Couple that with the fact that the very biological *and* psychological build-up of men and women is consistent with polygyny: while a woman has been designed to be able to conceive only once every ten months or so, a man can impregnate a woman every time he embraces her. And psychologically, while a man's primary need is for respect and to be needed, a woman's primary need is to be cherished and protected. Put all of these things together in a society which cannot accept polygyny and what you get is extra-marital affairs. As Dr. Annie Besant put it:

"You can find others stating that the religion [of Islām] is evil, because it sanctions a limited polygamy. But you do not hear as a rule... that monogamy with a blended mass of prostitution [is] a hypocrisy and more degrading than a limited polygamy...

"...it must be remembered that the law of Islam in relation to women was until lately, when parts of it have been imitated in England, the most just law, as far as women are concerned, to be found in the world...

"Those things are forgotten while people are hypnotized by the words monogamy and polygamy and do not look at what lies behind it in the West - the frightful degradation of women who are thrown into the streets when their first protectors, weary of them, no longer give them any assistance...

"I often think that woman is more free in Islam than in Christianity. Woman is more protected by Islam than by the faith which preaches monogamy."

Annie Besant, *The Life and Teachings of Muhammad*, Madras 1932, pp. 25, 26.

It is indeed sad that the West, in rejecting polygyny as degrading, has subjected countless women to either the humility of being mistresses with no acknowledgement and no rights, or the deprivation of living without a companion and a lover.

## The Mother

Allāh ﷻ states in the Qur'ān:

*“And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him,  
and that you are good to parents.*

*Now, if one or both of them attain old age in your life,  
say not to them a word of contempt or harshness,  
nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour.*

*And lower before them the wing of humility out of compassion  
and say: My Lord, show mercy to them as they  
brought me up when I was little.”*

*Qur'ān, 17:23-24*

A bird's wings provide comfort, protection, and love to its young. Using this metaphor, the Qur'ān instructs grown-up children to provide the same love, care, and comfort to their parents with humility that they received when in their helpless stage of babyhood. Particular emphasis in this regard is placed on the mother:

*“And We have enjoined on man concerning his parents –  
in weakness upon weakness did his mother bear him,  
and in his weaning took two years – saying:  
Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents:  
to Me is (thy final) Goal.”*

*Qur'ān, 31:14*

*“We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents:*

*in pain did his mother bear him,  
and in pain did she give him birth.  
The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is  
(a period of) thirty months."*

*Qur'ān, 46:15*

*"And fear Allāh through Whom you demand (your mutual rights)  
of each other, and the wombs (that bore you).  
Surely Allāh is ever a Watcher over you.*

*Qur'ān, 4:1*

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ has said: "Paradise lies under the feet of mothers," – i.e. in serving them.

*Muṣnad ash-Shihāb, al Firdaws*

Abū Hurayrah ؓ narrates that a man came to the Messenger ﷺ and asked, "Who most deserves my good companionship?"

The Messenger ﷺ replied, "Your mother."

The man asked, "Then who?"

The Messenger ﷺ again replied, "Your mother."

The man asked again, "Then who?"

Again the Messenger ﷺ again replied, "Your mother."

The man repeated for the third time, "Then who?"

The Messenger ﷺ replied, "Then your father. "

*al-Bukhārī and Muslim*

The Messenger ﷺ once exclaimed in anger, "May his nose be rubbed in dust! May his nose be rubbed in dust! May his nose be rubbed in dust!"

"Who, O Messenger of Allāh?" asked his companions.

The Messenger ﷺ replied, "The one who finds his parents in old age, either one of them or both of them, and yet does not enter paradise (through serving them)."

*Muslim*

A man came to the Messenger ﷺ after performing ṭawāf (to circumambulate the Ka`bah) while carrying his mother on his back in the sweltering heat, and asked, "O Messenger of Allāh ﷺ! Have I fulfilled her right?"

The Messenger ﷺ replied, "No, not even for a single moan (that she let out when delivering you)."

*Ibn Kathīr*

While mothers who gave birth to deformed or stillborn children often suffered the consequences as if it was their fault – it was common practice among the Greeks, for instance, to kill them – Islām promised such women Paradise for their patience.

Abū Sa`īd al-Khudhriؓ narrates that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, "There is no woman among you of whose children, three pass away before her, but they will be a veil for her from the Fire (of Hell)."

A woman asked the Messenger ﷺ "And two?"

The Messenger ﷺ replied, "And two."

*al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Hibbān*

A companion called Jābirؓ stated that he was sure that if they had asked about one they would have received the same reply - that if a woman bore patience if one child passed away they would get the same reward.

*Ibn Hibbān*

Children often overlook the 'wombs that bore them' once they grow up and the days when they depended on their mothers for every little thing is well behind them. This is often especially true of a son when he gets married and the main woman in his life is now his wife. While without doubt a spouse holds many rights over a person, one must not forget about what is owed to the parents - especially one's mother.

A man once came to the Ṣaḥābī Abū ad-Dardā' and told him that his mother was unhappy with his wife and wanted him to leave her.

Abū ad-Dardā' ﷺ said to him, "I could not command you to divorce your wife, but I did hear the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ say, 'The parent is the centre-most door of Paradise.' Now preserve that door if you wish or waste it.'"

*at-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim, the wording being al-Ḥākim's*

## Education

Historically, female education was not exactly considered a priority. After all, according to popular perception, since she'd only been created for serving men, the only knowledge a woman need have is how to perform some menial tasks.

The Talmud, for instance, says that "women are exempt from the study of the Torah." Some Jewish Rabbis firmly declared, "Let the words of Torah rather be destroyed by fire than imparted to women," and, "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is as though he taught her obscenity."

Denise L. Carmody, Judaism

In Christianity, women were hardly any better:

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

1 Timothy 2:11-14

"Let women be silent in the assemblies, for it is not permitted to them to speak; but to be in subjection, as the law also says.

But if they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is a shame for a woman to speak in assembly."

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Islām, however, was adamant from its dawn that knowledge is the birthright of every human being, male or female. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, without discriminating between the sexes, said, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim." *Ibn Mājah*

In fact, women were praised for speaking out and asking questions, as `Ā'ishah ؓ once said: "The best women are the women of the Anṣār; modesty never prevented them from acquiring deep knowledge of the religion." *al-Bukhārī*

The fifty-eighth sūrah of the Qur'ān is called al-Mujādilah, which means "She That Argues". The background to the revelation of this chapter is that a woman named Khawlah bint Tha`labah came to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ to complain that her husband had said to her at a moment of anger: "You are to me as the back of my mother." This was held by pagan Arabs to be a statement of divorce which freed the husband from any conjugal responsibility but did not leave the wife free to leave the husband's home or marry another man. Khawlah's point was, since he had not said the word divorce, why should this statement have such an effect? The Prophet ﷺ, however, could not legislate without Divine Command, and since nothing contradicting this custom had been revealed, he maintained that the time-old law still stood. Khawlah kept arguing her point with the Prophet ﷺ in an attempt to save her suspended marriage. It was while they were both engaged in this dialogue that Sūrah al-Mujādilah was revealed, a whole chapter abolishing this cruel custom and ruling in the favour of Khawlah. The sūrah opens with the words:

*“Allāh has indeed heard (accepted) the statement of her that disputes with you regarding her husband and raises her complaint (in prayer) before Allāh...”*

*Qur’ān, 58:1*

So, far from being commanded to be “in silence” and “in subjection” and not to speak, the woman in Islām had the right to raise a legitimate issue with even the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ.

ʿUmar, the second successor to the Prophet ﷺ, was once riding with an entourage of important people in the days of his Khilāfah, (Caliphate), when an old woman beckoned him to stop. He dismounted from his camel and moved to the side with her and stood for a considerable time listening with great care to everything she was saying. When someone made a remark about this, he said, “This is a woman whose complaint Allāh heard from above the seven heavens - Khawlah bint Tha`labah. By Allāh, if she had not (finished and) turned away from me until nightfall, I would not have turned away from her either.”

*Ibn Kathīr*

Another time, ʿUmar ؓ announced from the Mosque’s pulpit that no woman was to set a dowry exceeding a certain amount of silver, as high dowries were making marriage difficult for many men. A woman stopped him and said, “That is not for you to do.”

“Why not?” asked ʿUmar.

“Because,” she replied, “Allāh says: ‘And if you decide to take one wife in place of another, and you had given one a *whole treasure* (as dower), take not the least bit of it back. (4:20)’”

ʿUmar ؓ said, “The woman was correct and the man erred,” and he re-ascended the pulpit to correct himself.

*Ibn Kathīr*

As well as the public sermons of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, which both men and women could benefit from, special classes were arranged for women in view of the fact that they could not always accompany the Messenger ﷺ as the men could.

Abū Sa`īd al-Khudrī ؓ relates,

“A woman came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, ‘O Messenger of Allāh, men have taken away all of your words! Fix for us, then, a day from yourself when we may come to you that you teach us from that which Allāh has taught you.’

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, ‘Assemble on such-and-such a day at such-and-such a place.’

So Rasūlullāh ﷺ used to come to the women and teach them of what Allāh had taught him...”

*al-Bukhārī, Muslim*

This environment created by Islām produced women of excellence and the highest calibre in learning and the sciences from the very first century onwards. The names of `Ā`ishah, Ḥafṣah, Umm Ḥabībah, Maymūnah, Umm Salamah, and the various Zaynabs among others, ؓ, are familiar to every student of Ḥadīth as being among the earliest and most distinguished transmitters of Ḥadīth and scholars in their own right. `Ā`ishah ؓ, particularly, is one of the most important figures in history as not only a narrator but also a jurist who could hold her own with the leading men among the Companions of the Messenger ﷺ.

Abū Mūsā al-Ash`arī ؓ said, “Never were we, the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, ever perplexed by a problem which we then asked `Ā`ishah about, but we found with her its knowledge.”

*at-Tirmidhi*

Imām Zuhārī narrates; “`Ā`ishah was of the most intelligent of

people. Her knowledge was sought by even the senior Ṣaḥābah”

*at-Tirmidhī*

Scanning the centuries that followed, many more women are seen in the ranks of the great scholars of Islāmic history. For instance, Umm ad-Dardā' the Younger (d. 81 AH/700 CE), who was held by Iyās ibn Mu`āwiyah, (an important traditionist of the time and a judge of undisputed ability and merit) to be superior to all the other traditionists of the period, including celebrated masters of Ḥadīth like al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Ibn Sirīn.

*as-Suyūṭī, Taḍrīb ar-Rāwī*

Many other devout women from diverse backgrounds also rose to the very top in Islāmic scholarship, whose public lectures were attended to from far and wide. Zaynab bint Sulaymān (d. 142/157), for example, was a princess by birth. Her father was a cousin of as-Saffāh, the founder of the `Abbāsīd dynasty, and had been a governor of Baṣrā, Oman and Bahrain during the Khilāfah of al-Manṣūr. Zaynab, who received a fine education, acquired a mastery of Ḥadīth, gained a reputation as one of the most distinguished women traditionists of the time, and counted many important men among her pupils.

*al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Tārīkh Baghdād*

`Ābidah al-Madaniyyah, by contrast, started life as a slave owned by Muḥammad ibn Yazīd. She learnt a large number of Aḥādīth with the teachers of Madīnah. She was made over by her master to Ḥabīb ad-Dahhūn, the great traditionist of Spain, when he visited the holy city on his way to Ḥajj. Ad-Dahhūn was so impressed by her learning that he freed her, married her, and brought her to Andalusia. It is said that she related ten thousand traditions on the authority of her Madīnan teachers. Islām truly recognised neither class or gender as obstacles in rising through the ranks of Islāmic scholarship.

*al-Maqqārī, Nafh*

This collaboration of brilliant men and women of knowledge continued into the time that the great anthologies of Ḥadīth were compiled. A survey of the texts reveals that all the important compilers of traditions from the earliest period received many of narrations from women masters: every major collection gives the names of many women as the immediate authorities of the author. And after the compilation of these tremendous works, we find many women who had mastered them and delivered lectures on them to large classes of pupils, to whom they would issue their own *ijāzah*, or accreditation.

Karīmah al-Marwaziyyah (d. 463/1070), for example, was considered the best authority on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī in her time. Abū Dharr of Herat, one of the leading scholars of the period, attached such great importance to her authority that he advised his students to study the *Ṣaḥīḥ* under no-one else, because of the quality of her scholarship. She thus figures as a central point in the transmission of this, the most authentic collection of Aḥadīth.

*al-Maqqārī, Naḥḥ*

Among her students are names as prominent as the Imāms al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and al-Ḥumaydī.

*Yāqūt, Muʿjam al-Udabāʾ*

There are a number of other women traditionists who occupy an eminent place in the history of the transmission of the text of *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī. Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad (d. 539/1144) received the proud title of Musnidah Iṣfahān (the great Ḥadīth authority of Iṣfahān) from Ḥadīth specialists. Shuhdah 'the Writer' (d.574/1178) was the daughter of someone who had a great passion for Ḥadīth and had managed to study under several masters of the subject. In obedience to the Sunnah, he gave his daughter a sound academic education, ensuring she studied under many traditionists of accepted reputation.

*Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil*

Sitt al-Wuzarāʾ bint `Umar (d. 716/1316) was an acclaimed master of Islāmic law. She was once invited to Cairo to give her fatwā on a subject

that had perplexed the jurists there. She delivered lectures on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* and other works in Damascus and Egypt and was known as the Musnidah of her time. The person known as ‘the last great Ḥadīth scholar of the *Ḥijāz*’ was also a woman – Umm al-Khayr Amat al-Khālīq (d. 911/1505). *Ibn al-ʿImād*

Then there were women whose expertise lay in other texts. Fāṭimah bint ʿAlī (d. 532/1137) and Fāṭimah al-Jawzdāniyyah (d. 524/1129) lectured on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Imām Muslim. Zaynab bint Aḥmad ibn ʿUmar (d. 722/1322) had travelled widely in pursuit of Ḥadīth and delivered lectures in Egypt as well as Madinah, and narrated to her students the collections of ad-Dārimi and ʿAbd ibn Ḥumayd. *ibid*

Zaynab of Harran (d. 689/1289), whose lectures attracted a large crowd of students, taught the Musnad of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, the largest known collection of Ḥadīth. *Ibn Sālim*

Zaynab bint Aḥmad (d. 740/1339), had acquired ‘a camel load’ of diplomas; she delivered lectures on the Musnad of Abū Ḥanīfah, the *Shamāʿil* of at-Tirmidhī, and the *Sharḥ Maʿānī al-Āthār* of aṭ-Ṭaḥāwī, the last of which she read with another woman traditionist, ʿAjibah bint Abī Bakr (d. 740/1339). *Ibid*

Umm Hāniʾ Maryam (d. 871/1466) learnt the *Qurʾān* by heart while still a child, acquired all the Islāmic sciences then being taught, including theology, law, history, and grammar, and then travelled to pursue Ḥadīth with the best traditionists of her time in Cairo and Makkah. She was also celebrated for her mastery of calligraphy and her natural aptitude in poetry, as also her strict observance of the duties of religion (she performed Ḥajj no fewer than thirteen times). She pursued an intensive programme of learning in the great college of Cairo, training many of the great scholars of the next generation.

*as-Sakhāwī, aḍ-Ḍawʿ al-Lāmiʿ*

These are but few of the great luminaries of Islāmic knowledge among the female gender. Their scholarship was well acknowledged and their high standing undisputed by their male counterparts. The contribution of women to the sciences of Islām can be easily appreciated by picking up the Ṭabaqāt (biographical sketches) of any of the famous biographers of Islāmic scholarship to reveal the numerous women who devoted themselves to preserving and passing on the primary sources of Islām and were renowned as great teachers of a nation.

### **Political, Military, and Social Involvement**

*“And the believing men and the believing women,  
they are protecting friends one of another;  
they enjoin good and forbid evil and keep up prayer  
and pay the poor-due, and obey Allāh and His Messenger.  
To these will Allāh show mercy. Lo! Allāh is Mighty, Wise.”*

*Qur’ān, 9:71*

The Arabic word translated in the verse as ‘protecting friends’ is *awliyā’*, which means friends, protectors, guardians and allies. It comes from the root *wilāyah*, which involves planning, governance and authority. In all of these duties, the men and women of the Muslim Community supported and strengthened each other, creating a strong, balanced, just, and pious society, as Allāh praises them in the above āyah.

Women played very important roles in the build-up of Islāmic history alongside their brothers in Faith. Islām from the very start was a struggle; believers were punished and persecuted for their Faith, and had to suffer loss and even leave their beloved homes. But through all of these trials, men and women stood firm and true to their Lord, and He recognised the sacrifices of each of them:

*“So their Lord answered their (prayer):  
 ‘Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you,  
 male or female: you are members, one of another;  
 those who have left their homes,  
 and were driven out therefrom,  
 and suffered harm in My Cause,  
 and fought and were slain,  
 I will of a surety blot out from them their iniquities,  
 and of a surety admit them into Gardens beneath  
 which rivers flow – a reward from Allāh.  
 And with Allāh is the best of rewards.’”*

*Qur’ān 3:195*

It is the pinnacle of servitude and commitment to Allāh to promote and uphold His Dīn knowing full well the consequences to be torture and death. The following is a case of this.

Mujāhid narrates, ‘The first to announce their faith to all were seven in number. They were: the Messenger ﷺ, Abū Bakr, Bilāl, Khabbāb, Şuhayb, `Ammār and Sumayyah ؓ. Out of whom, due to the families of the Messenger ﷺ and Abū Bakr ؓ, the kuffār were restricted in torturing them. The rest however were not so fortunate. Armour was put directly onto their bodies and they were forced to lie on the desert floor throughout the day. To such extents they were tortured that their pain and suffering had reached all excruciating levels. They screamed out readiness to whatever demands were placed before them. In the evenings the people would come with formed skin containers filled with water and throw them in there. Thereafter they would make them carry these heavy loads.

While this was continuing, one day Abū Jahl impaled Sumayyah ؓ in the most private part of her body taunting her

through her painful dying moments, in which she continued calling out to Allāh. She became the first person to die for Allāh and Islām.'

*Muṣannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah*

Islām excuses women from taking a fighting role in warfare. However, at the time of necessity women are indeed instructed to take arms to defend themselves and others. History bears witness that at times women have upheld this duty even better than their male counterparts.

During the battle of Khandaq (the battle of the trench, which was a siege conducted by the pagan Arabs against the Muslims around Madinah, in the 5th year A.H.), the Messenger ﷺ was accompanied by almost all the male Ṣaḥābah, leaving only one to look after the women in Madinah, who had all gathered in one of the forts. This he did without the Jews knowing. However during the face-off the Jews began to suspect that there were no men protecting the women. To check they sent a spy to the fort to see what was the case.

Ṣafiyyah saw this Jew approach, and instructed the Ṣaḥābī guard to go and kill him and strip him of all things of value and use. Unfortunately this Ṣaḥābī was for some reason unable to do that. So Ṣafiyyah went and killed him. She returned and said to this Ṣaḥābī to go and remove all items from him and sever his head and bring that back. The Ṣaḥābī again backed down.

*al-Hākim*

So she went and beheaded the dead Jew, and threw his head over the wall of the fort towards the Jewish camp. The Jews were then convinced of the presence of men in the fort, and were scuppered of any chance of mischief. This was when she was 58 years old.

The following incident has been included in its full transmitted form because of its remarkable nature. (It is possible that the narrator may have exaggerated the figures, but the narrator has collected the information from multiple reliable sources, and thus, the magnitude of the event can be accepted as sound.)

During the conquest of Syria, the leader of the Muslim army “the Sword of Allāh” Khālid Ibn Walīd had his 38,500 troops encamped around the fortified city of Damascus. Half were under his direct order near the eastern gate of the city, and the other half were under the leadership of his second in command, Abū `Ubaydah Ibn Jarrāḥ who were encamped near the Jābiyah gate to the west. The fighters within Damascus had just been defeated by the Muslims in battle but were nonetheless, approximately the same in number. News of this siege had reached Emperor Heraclius who immediately despatched a further 12,000 men under the leadership of their champion Wardān.

To repel this army, Khālid Ibn Walīd thought that 200 men under the leadership of Ḍarrār Ibn Azwar would suffice. Ḍarrār (who by now had earned the reputation of being Khālid’s protégé) was not happy at this, and calculating that a 60:1 ratio in favour of the Romans was not fair, pleaded with Khālid to send him alone. To this Khālid politely declined.

In the ensuing battle, the unarmoured Ḍarrār fought tooth and nail and succeeded to wipe out hoards of non-believers using only a spear. Unfortunately the spear was not as strong as Ḍarrār, who, when he impaled Wardān’s only son, managed to lodge the spearhead, between the second-in-command’s ribs. Ḍarrār was left without a weapon, and was caught by the Roman army and held prisoner.

News of this reached Khālid Ibn Walīd, who immediately took a large number of men and set off for the battlefield, saying,

“By Allāh! I am not of those who are stingy in spending their lives in the Path of Allāh.”

Khālid then addressed the army, “Let go of the horses’ stirrups and hold your spears firmly instead. When we’re close to the enemy then attack altogether. Perhaps we’ll rescue Ḍarrār if he’s still alive or else if they’ve martyred him we’ll certainly avenge him if Allāh wills. I hope that Allāh will not cause us to grieve in regards to Ḍarrār.”

While he was riding he suddenly saw a tall, short-necked, racer horse upon which sat a rider armed with a gleaming spear. The rider’s behaviour and appearance projected awe and the riding-style displayed courage. The warrior held the bridle loosely but sat firmly in the saddle and wore armour covered in black cloth. A green girdle tied at the waist was spread over both chest and back. This rider outpaced the army like a blazing flame.

Khālid said, “How I wish I knew who this horseman is! By Allāh! He appears to be sent as help by Allāh.” He continued behind the stranger heading towards the Christian camp. Rāfi` Ibn ‘Umayrah who had taken the command of the remaining men of Ḍarrār’s legion, was desperately holding out against the Romans when he saw Khālid’s reinforcements. By that time the mysterious warrior had already pounced upon the enemy like a wolf on an unprotected flock of sheep in such a manner which wreaked havoc in the Roman lines, and penetrating through the army, the masked figure left a riverbed of dead or dying bodies. This figure of death may have only managed to kill a few dozen Romans in his first attack, but had already massacred the hopes of the entire Roman legion.

Rāfi` and his men thought that, that could only be Khālid but then they saw him with his men. He called out, “O Khālid! Who is this rider who risks his life in Allāh’s Path and slays the enemy without hesitation?”

Khālid: By Allāh! I do not know. I am myself astonished at his daringness and bravery.

Rāfi` : What an amazing man who penetrates the Roman ranks and kills them left, right and centre!

Khālid: O Muslims! Rise for the defence of Islām and attack together. The Muslims straightened their bridles, readied their spears and advanced in formation with Khālid in front. They were about to attack when they saw the stranger flashing in the heart of the Roman army soaked in blood and mounted on a horse drowning in sweat. This Mujāhid while surrounded was still single-handedly facing several Romans at the same time. Khālid and his men attacked them until they managed to bring the stranger into the Muslim ranks.

The Muslims gazed at the visible eyes of the stranger and found it to be like a crimson rose-petal dipped in blood. Khālid said, "You've offered your life in the Path of Allāh and vented your anger upon the enemies - may Allāh reward you well. Now remove your mouth-cover so that we can see who you are."

The mysterious warrior ignored him and walked into the crowd who grabbed out and said, "O slave of Allāh! The commander of the Muslim armies speaks to you and you dare to ignore him. Go to him and tell him your name and lineage so that he can promote you."

They too received no reply, so Khālid personally went and said, "How very sad that I and in fact all the Muslims wish to know about you but you couldn't care less! Who are you?"

He repeatedly insisted until eventually a soft voice replied, "O commander! I have not avoided you out of disobedience, but out of modesty for I am of those who seclude themselves behind the veil. My sorrow and broken heart forced me here."

Khālid: Who are you?

The Rider: The captured Ḍarrār's sister, Khawlah Bint Azwar. I

was sitting with the women of the Madhhaj tribe when I heard of Ḍarrār's capture. So I immediately mounted and came here, the rest you know.

Hearing this Khālid was wonder-struck and was unashamed of the tears which he wept.

Khālid: We'll attack together. I have firm conviction that Allāh will let us reach your brother and free him.

Khawlah: If Allāh wills then I'll be in the front line.

Through her and Khālid's selfless efforts Ḍarrār was rescued after the Roman army was totally annihilated.

*Futūḥ ash Shām by al-Wāqidi*

The reason for the inclusion of this event is not only to note that such an important physical feat had been accomplished by Khawlah ﷺ but also that her action had psychologically contributed to strengthen the Muslim army and weaken the Roman one. This, no doubt, contributed immensely to the outcome of the battle and the course of history.

One can also note the fact that this event was not painted over by men who may not have wanted to portray the victory as a result of her efforts, but rather they too not only admired such prowess but also praised it. Khālid ﷺ also shows complete confidence in Khawlah's ﷺ fighting ability by saying, "We'll attack together. I have firm conviction that Allāh will let us reach your brother and free him." Khālid ﷺ is reported to have praised Azwar (Ḍarrār and Khawlah's father) for producing two phenomenal warriors.

Women had also participated in the first battles of Islām alongside the Messenger ﷺ, tending to the wounded and providing water for the troops. In the Battle of Yarmūk, when the Roman army had penetrated the ranks of the Muslims, the women fought valiantly with swords and spears to drive them back.

*ibn 'Abd ar-Razzāq*

At the time of the Conquest of Makkah, Umm Hānī', a sister of `Alī ﷺ, gave asylum to a pagan who had fought against the Muslims, and whom `Alī had wished to kill. The Prophet honoured her pledge of asylum and declared, "We grant refuge to anyone you have pledged to protect, O Umm Hānī'". *al-Bukhārī, Muslim*

Shifā' bint `Abdullāh ﷺ was entrusted the important task of the administration and management of the market by `Umar ﷺ. *al-Muḥallā*

### Spiritual Excellence

Having looked at the academic and social recognition that Islām gave to women, we turn now to the spiritual heights that women were able to attain to as well, thanks to the fairness and complete lack of sexual discrimination in the Islāmic world-view.

How very true this is can be seen by looking at the last two verses of the sixty-sixth sūrah of the Qur'ān, Sūrah at-Taḥrīm. Allāh cites an example for believers of the greatness of faith of His truly devout servants, and chooses for this purpose none other than two women:

*"And Allāh sets forth as an example to those who believe*

*the wife of Pharaoh: Behold she said:*

*'My Lord! Build for me, in nearness to Thee,*

*a home in the Garden,*

*and save me from Pharaoh and his doings,*

*and save me from evil-doing folk.'*

*And Mary, daughter of `Imrān, who guarded her chastity,*

*so We breathed into her of Our spirit;*

*and she testified to the truth of the Words of her Lord and  
of His Scriptures, and was of the devoutly obedient."*

*Qur'ān 66:11,12*

When Moses went to the Pharaoh with his call to Allāh and to stop oppressing Allāh’s slaves, his wife, Āsiyah, who had brought up Moses from a baby to a young man, recognised the truth of his call and brought faith in him. Needless to say, Pharaoh was outraged at this, and promised her a painful death if she did not renounce her faith. Being married to the ultimate tyrant of all time, she had nowhere on Earth to run to and no-one on Earth to turn to. So she turned to Allāh with this beautifully sweet prayer, touching in its simplicity:

*“My Lord! Build for me, in nearness to Thee,  
a home in the Garden,  
and save me from Pharaoh and his doings,  
and save me from evil-doing folk.”*

*Qur’ān 66:11*

It is said that she made this prayer as she was about to be crushed by a huge boulder at the order of Pharaoh. In answer to her prayer, her soul was taken before the rock could land on her body, to the ‘nearness’ of the Allāh she had trusted in and had hoped for. The rock fell to crush a lifeless shell.

*Ibn Kathīr*

Mary, the mother of Christ ﷺ, is celebrated for her devotion and chastity, exemplary for all times as a model of piety and purity. It was this righteousness that earned her the honour of being the mother of Jesus, Rūḥ-Allāh, or the Spirit sent from Allāh; but then, she was herself the outcome of another pious and devout lady: her mother.

*“Behold! the wife of `Imrān said:  
‘My Lord! I dedicate to You what is in my womb  
for Your special service, so accept this of me:  
Truly, You hear and know all things.’  
Then, when she was delivered, she said: “My Lord!  
Lo! I am delivered of a female-”  
and Allah knew best of what she was delivered  
‘-and the male is not as the female.*

*And lo! I have named her Mary,  
and lo! I commend her and her offspring to Your protection  
from Satan, the Outcast.'*

*So did her Lord accept (Mary) with a good acceptance and  
caused her to grow a good growth (in body and spirit)..."*

*Qur'ān, 3:35-37*

There are unending reports of acts of generosity from many of the female companions of the Messenger ﷺ. All of which astonish the reader of their selflessness. One incident is that of `Ā'ishah who would spend all of whatever she would receive on the poor, often disregarding her own needs in the process. Once she gave away 100,000 dirhams in a single day, and in her eagerness to help others did not leave even one dirham for her own meal. *al-Hākim*

As mentioned previously, both man and woman stand absolutely equal in the eyes of Allāh, it is only by virtue of greater faith and devotion to one's Maker that any one excels another, regardless of race or gender. Therefore, verses in the Qur'ān that praise believers and speak of their reward with Allāh apply equally to believing men and women. However, since the gender used in the wording is masculine (as is the usual case when speaking generally of both male and female in languages which have gender distinctions in nouns and verbs), some of the female companions of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ wanted to make completely sure. (Islām had its feminists long before the West did!)

An Anṣārī lady by the name of Umm `Ammārah ؓ came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, "It seems to me that everything belongs to the men – I do not see women being mentioned with anything!"

Allāh ﷻ subsequently revealed in the Qur'ān for the peace of mind of women everywhere:

*"Lo! men who surrender (unto Allāh) and women who surrender,  
and believing men and believing women,*

*and obedient men and obedient women,  
 and truthful men and truthful women,  
 and patient men and patient women,  
 and humble men and humble women,  
 and alms-giving men and alms-giving women,  
 and fasting men and fasting women,  
 and guarding men of their chastity and guarding women,  
 and men who remember Allah much and women who remember –  
 Allah has prepared for them (all) forgiveness and a vast reward.”*

*Qur’ān, 33:35*

*at-Tirmidhī, al-Ḥākim, al-Bayhaqī, aṭ-Ṭabarānī*

Another verse which speaks of the equality of men and women before Allāh declares:

*“Whosoever does evil will not be requited but by the like thereof,  
 and whosoever does a righteous deed - whether man or woman -  
 and is a Believer; such will enter the Garden (of Bliss):  
 therein will they have abundance without measure.*

*Qur’ān, 40:40*

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ once said, “If a woman performs her five daily prayers, fasts for the month (Ramaḍān), protects her chastity and obeys her husband (in permitted matters), she may enter Paradise through whichever gate she wishes.

*al-Firdaws*

Speaking of the Ḥūr, the women of Paradise, the Prophet ﷺ said:

*“If a woman of Paradise were to glance into this world, she  
 would illuminate all that is between the heavens and earth,  
 and would fill them both with her fragrance. Indeed, the scarf  
 upon her head is more precious than the entire world and all  
 that is within it.”*

*al-Bukhārī*

Umm Salamah (as part of a lengthier Ḥadīth) once asked the Messenger ﷺ, “Who are better, the (pious) women of this world or the Ḥūr of the Hereafter?”

To this the Messenger ﷺ replied, “The women of this world are far superior to the Ḥūr, as the outer garments (a person wears) are superior to the inner garments.”

Umm Salamah then asked, “Through what are they superior?” The Messenger ﷺ replied, “Through their prayers, their fasting and their worshipping Allāh, the Mighty and Magnificent. Allāh will cover their faces with light and their bodies with soft silk. They will be of fair complexion wearing green garments and golden jewellery, tiaras of pearls and combs of gold. They will say,

‘We are the eternal, we will never die;  
We shall always remain gentle and giving,  
We will never become miserable;  
We shall remain forever young, we will never age;  
We shall remain forever happy,  
We will never be saddened.

Blessed is he whom we are for and who is for us!’”

Umm Salamah further asked, “O Messenger of Allāh! There are women amongst us who have been previously married to two, three or even four husbands [in succession]. If they all die and enter heaven with her, who will be her husband then?”

The Messenger ﷺ replied, “Umm Salamah, she will be able to choose. She will choose the one who was best to her in terms of character. She will say, ‘my Lord this one was the best to me in character, make him my husband.’”

“O Umm Salamah! Those of beautiful character shall take the best of this world and the next.”

*Ibn Kathīr*

## Conclusion

In Islām the role of women is unique. If we are to look historically at the different empires and nations and even religions that have had their rise and fall, it can be clearly noted that including the prominent ones like the Roman, Greek, Babylonian, Persian and Indian empires, none of them had any recordable contributions made by women. The fact that some had Queens as rulers at times fails to make a mark as they were not factors in creating the empires.

The situation of Islām is different. Without any exaggeration a massive contribution was made by women. It is quite possible that this has created a sense of belonging for women towards Islām, as it would explain why yearly we see that the majority of converts in many areas are women, despite all the negative portrayals by the media and also by many Muslims in their promoting their national customs in the guise of Islām.

In this day and age the role of women in Islām is thought of as restricted, whereas this is not the case. Women are recognised as nation and standard builders, and their ability of being better teachers and instructors than men, for younger children especially, is unparalleled. They are the ideal teachers of the leaders of tomorrow.

In regards to movement and being able to practically do things like going to the Masājid, studying higher level education etc, permissibility can indeed be found in cases where facilities are adequate. It is the lack of facilities or their inadequacies that are preventatives.

Thus did the final revealed guidance to mankind, Islām, restore to women the wholeness that Allāh had created them with. The whole of nature testifies to the balance of Allāh's creation: where there is heaven there is earth, where there is night there is day, where there is

fire there is water. Neither is more important than the other; each is vital to maintain the harmony of being. It is with this same balance that Allāh made man and woman, to live together in a mutual exchange of the gifts Allāh has vested each with and establish peace. The teachings of Islām, therefore, reflect the balance, justice and wisdom one would expect from the Creator of man and woman. So,

*“Glory be to Him Who created all pairs,  
of that which the earth produces,  
and of their (mankind’s) own selves,  
and of that of which they have no knowledge.”*

*Qur’ān, 36:36*