

ISLAM and WOMANHOOD, (Concluding Part)

by Anwar Shaikh

Relationship of the opposite sexes has always been one of the greatest human problems, if the balance is right, life becomes a paradise but if it is wrong, every day looms as hell.

Though the Western culture has not solved this problem, it has certainly introduced reforms improving the lot of women considerably throughout the world. However, it is customary of the religionists to claim that everything is wrong except the tenets of their own faith. Islam is one such claimant in modern times despite the fact that its basic principles of purdah (veiling), divorce and polygamy, among many other rules, have been spurned by its own adherents under the influence of the Western culture, yet the Muslim politician and priest assert the divinity and perfection of the Koranic Law!

Because of their personal interests, these priests and politicians dare not admit the truth that Islam is not a code of life, but a complete irrelevance in modern times. This fact is fully borne out by the governments of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey, headed by women. Nobody can ever claim that the Prophet encouraged female participation in public affairs or he ever appointed a woman minister. Though I have provided ample evidence to this effect in part 1 of this article, I may yet add that public life is totally forbidden to women. The Koran commands them:

"And stay in your houses..." (The Clans: 33)

Polygamy, the male symbol of superiority, which acts as a proof of female inferiority, has always been detested by woman, as a general rule, because it is the source of unhappiness to her. Even a man of such a high stature as the Prophet Muhammad himself could not strike a note of harmony amongst his wives. The mischief mongers may try to make a capital out of this statement but the truth is that it does not slight the Prophet but states an unsolvable psychological problem, beyond the capacity of any man, prophet, messiah or guru. I may therefore illustrate it with reference to the Prophet's matrimonial life:

The Prophet had nine wives, and one is inclined to think that all the wives should have been reconciled with one another in the presence of such a charismatic man as Muhammad whose law of polygamy clearly states that one must have only one wife if one cannot be equitable with all the wives. I have no doubt that the Prophet treated them all equally in social and economic matters, yet he must have found it difficult to be psychologically equitable towards all of them. For my part, I find no fault with him because some people are not only more lovable than others but also exert a greater influence on a particular person owing to his own attitude of the mind, irrespective of their personal qualities.

Beauty of Aisha, the Prophet's youngest wife was matched by her vivacity of manners, vigour of obedience and virtue of pleasantness. As the charms of spring allure the heart of a poet, hilarity of music captivates the mind of an eastern mystic and the pink complexion of the setting sun arrests the imagination of a painter, the physical beauty of a woman elevated by the piety of her character arouses a sense of devotion in the hearts of cultured men. Such was the person of Aisha. The

Prophet's enemies had tried to hurt him by stigmatising her but the purity of her character defied all sinful imputations as the mighty cliffs beat back surging waves of the ocean. Of course, the Prophet respected all his wives equally, Aisha commanded more than equal share of his love. The extent of his feelings towards her can be gauged by the following facts as recorded in Chapter MV of Sahih Muslim, Volume IV:

The prophet said about Aisha:

"I saw you in a dream for three nights when an angel brought you to me in a silk cloth and he said: Here is your wife, and when I removed (the cloth) from your face, lo, it was yourself, so I said: If this is from Allah, let Him carry it out.

The Prophet obviously thought of Aisha as a gift from Allah. And, so he treated her until the end of his life. Aisha reported that "at the time of breathing his last, he was reclining against her chest and she was leaning over him and listening to him as he was saying: Oh Allah, grant me pardon, show mercy to me, enjoin me to companions."

The above hadiths need no comments to portray the special relationship between the Prophet and Aisha, which aroused a good deal of jealousy among his wives leading to matrimonial disharmony. The following hadith from Sahih Muslim offers a glimpse of the Prophet's family life:

Aisha said: "The Wives of the Prophet sent Fatima, the Prophet's daughter (as a mediator) to him. She asked permission to enter as he had been lying with me in my mantle. He gave her permission and she said: Allah's Messenger, truly your wives have sent me to you for asking you to maintain equity regarding the daughter of Abu Quhafa (one of the Prophet's consorts) ... The Prophet said: Of course, I do. Thereupon, the Prophet said: I love this one (Aisha) ... Fatima, then left to report the matter to the other wives. Thereupon they said to her: We don't think that you have been helpful to us. You should once again see the Prophet and tell him that his wives seek equity. By Allah, Fatima replied, I will never talk to him about this matter again."

Aisha further reported: "The wives of the Prophet then sent Zainab b. Jahsh (another) wife of the Prophet, who ranked nearly equal with me in the eyes of the Prophet. I have never seen a woman more advanced in religious piety than Zainab, more God-fearing, more truthful, more conscious of blood-ties, more generous and having greater sense of self-sacrifice in practical life, and of more charitable disposition, and thus more close to God, the magnificent, than her. However, she suddenly lost her temper but soon calmed down. The Prophet had permitted her to enter when I (Aisha) was along with him in my mantle, in exactly the same state when Fatima had entered. She said: Allah's Messenger, your wives have sent me to ask for equity regarding the daughter of Abu Quhafa. Then turning to me she became harsh and I looked into the Prophet's eyes to guess if he wanted me to hit back. When I realised that he approved of it; I retorted and exchanged hot words with her until she observed silence. Thereupon the Prophet smiled and said: She (Aisha) is the daughter of Abu Bakr."

This episode tells us how love-starved the prophet's wives were. I do not mean it in any carnal sense but refer to the psychological sense of this word. Yet this hadith speaks about the bickering only and not the explosive situation that polygamy had caused in the Prophet's household. The Koran provides a better explanation of this fact:

"If you (Prophet's wives) are Godfearing, be not vile in your speech but speak honourable words." (The Confederates: 30)

As we know, vile speech means abusive language. All the Prophet's wives were known to be good and righteous women. The frustration of polygamy drove them to such an impolite conduct that Allah himself had to intervene for reminding them how a Godfearing wife should behave. Yet it did not work and the Almighty had to send another revelation: "It is possible that, if he divorces you, his Lord will give him in exchange wives better than you, women who have surrendered, believing, obedient, penitent, devout ... who have been married and virgin too." (The Forbidding: 5)

It is not clear from these verses whether it is the Prophet's wives who demand annulment or it was he who threatened them with divorce unless they yielded to his commands and restored the family peace. They would not be silenced because they knew their Quranic right of equity in a polygamous household. So they pressed on with it until Allah gave his Prophet a special dispensation from the Islamic Law of Equity: Allah sent the following verses to resolve the situation.

"You (the Prophet) can suspend any of your wives as you will and receive anyone of them as you will; and whomsoever you desire of those whom you have set aside, it is no sin for you.." (The Confederates: 50)

These verses need hardly any comment from me except that the Koran repeatedly declares that the Prophet is the model of Behaviour for all believers. Giving him exemption on such a vital point sounds the death knell of women's rights that Islam is supposed to have bestowed upon them.

Any code which claims to be of divine origin becomes outmoded and irrelevant to human needs because we live in a perpetually changing world. It is a matter of common observation that the laws enacted by the legislative organ of a country became obsolete after a few decades then how come that the so called Divine Law stays relevant throughout centuries and even millenia. The Jewish Law is over three thousand years old; if God cares so much that he sent laws to guide mankind all that long ago, why does he not send laws now? Has he gone to sleep, or does he no longer care about humanity? If His laws are really necessary, they must come all the time to suit the ever-changing social conditions of mankind whereas every prophet and messiah claims that he is the last messenger of God and his code is the final one. Obviously, these prophets and messiahs are human beings who possess an ardent desire to be treated as the Divine Agents, and worshipped like God by persuading people through a mechanism of heaven and hell to treat their self-made code as the Law of God. Is it not amazing that man is self-sufficient in all walks of life yet he is told by these holymen that he needs laws made by God? Man is quite capable of making laws for himself. In fact, he is the only person who is entitled to make laws for himself because it is his life which is being bombarded by problems, it is he who suffers pains and it is he who seeks pleasures. If God were so interested in the welfare and happiness of mankind, he would have designed this world differently. These Divine Codes are nothing but a conspiracy against humanity by those who wanted to be adored and obeyed like God. It is a lucrative business for the priestly classes and an effective tool of political power in those countries where people have been sufficiently brainwashed in the name of religion.

Why are people brainwashed by religion? Because it offers them hope though it is no more real than a mirage which makes the thirsty wayfarer believe that what he sees in the scorching desert is water, and not the deception of his own eyes.

As they say, a drowning man clutches at a straw, people do not stop to think about the triviality of faith owing to its hope value, and take the travesty for the truth. It is done by exaggerating the personality of the Prophet or Messiah, who will avenge all injustices of the oppressed and find them places in paradise where they will live happily thereafter. Thus the Prophet or Messiah becomes the fulcrum of their personality and they get conditioned to his name. Whenever his name is mentioned

by someone wishing to achieve a purpose, his followers lose control of their rational faculties and behave at the mob level. Thus they become credulous and excitable and can be easily led like sheep. One fact should be noted carefully that the more depressed a society owing to hunger, disease and injustice, the more its members are prone to act irrationally and violently in the name of their Prophet or Messiah who is considered as their last-hope and the saviour. Thus the increased social brutality sharpens their sense of securing justice and they will do anything at all to please the Prophet or Messiah to gain his favour.

Treating the Prophet's or Messiah's word as the laws is considered the sign of reverence and submission, without ever caring whether such a law is relevant or not. In fact, it is considered a panacea even though it may prove social poison in practice. Being a part of faith, it becomes immune to reason. Take for instance the Moslem women of Pakistan who believed that their liberation lay in the introduction of the Islamic law. Heaven knows where they got this idea from. Purdah, polygamy, man's unilateral power of divorce, woman's entry into paradise subject to her husband's pleasure, her gross inequality as a court-witness, as well as in matters of inheritance, are the acknowledged laws of Islam in relation to woman. The "Moslem" countries which have abolished such laws are, in fact, ashamed of Islam because they have legislated against the declared principles of the Koran and Sunna i.e. the precedents set by the Prophet himself.

The truth is that the so-called Divine Codes have brought nothing but chagrin to mankind. Take the Islamic law of rape (Zana-Bil-Jabr) as practised in Pakistan. To prove rape, the woman's evidence is discarded and she has to produce four eye-witnesses. This is a rare possibility. Whenever a woman has reported rape to the police and the case is heard in court, the defendant denies the charge and alleges her consent to the act. As woman is held the mischievous "species" for being the daughter of Eve, it is the plaintiff who faces the wrath of the Islamic law, and not the defendant. As a result, there are six thousand women rotting in Pakistani jails for suffering the loss of their honour! However, I must add that "Divine Code" is not an Arabian invention but of India, where Rg. Veda, the Hindu Scripture was first observed directly by the rishis. Though the principle of having more than one wife at the same time also arose in India, the Semitic institution of polygamy is the fountain of harem-building. Islam allows four wives at the same time and an unlimited number of concubines. Emperor Jehangir of India had one wife (Nur Jehan) and 6000 concubines. Some Moslem scholars argue that the Koran forbade concubinage. This postulate is false because the Prophet left eight widows and at least one Christian concubine, though some put the number at two.

What is a concubine? According to Chambers' English dictionary, it means: "one (especially a woman) who cohabits without being married." As a student of history, I find it hard to accept this definition. If it were true, all modern female cohabitees would qualify as concubines. Again, cohabitation is based on free will and is usually believed to be a premarital trial-association for choosing a marriage partner, whereas history tells us that concubinage:

- a. was not based on free will,
- b. it could not be dissolved by the woman, and
- c. marriage was not the ultimate end of concubinage, though very occasionally, men did marry their concubines.)

Let me quote an episode from the Turkish history to explain the reality of concubinage:

Suleiman, the Turkish sultan possessed not only the greatest empire of his time but also a character unmatched by any ruler before or after him. His title: "The Magnificent" was not forced by himself or the flatterers of his court but by his worst adversaries, the great Christian Princes and Kings of Europe. Yet he enjoyed a seraglio of three hundred most beautiful young women. What a Westerner

may call a "Grand brothel," perhaps through jealousy, a Moslem thinks of it as the "blessing of Allah" for being a reflection of paradise on earth. Of course, Turks were sincere and devout Moslems, but Islam provided the Turkish rulers with a special incentive for devoting themselves to Allah who neither counted concubinage as the worst form of carnal gratification nor dubbed it with such shabby descriptions as adultery or fornication. Instead he guaranteed preservation of the Turkish concept of honour associated with womankind. How?

In a battle against Tamburlaine the Conqueror, Bajazet I, the Turkish sultan, though a soldier of great renown was defeated, and his wife was captured and dishonoured by the victor. The rape of their Queen to the Turks was an event of extremely shocking magnitude imbued with disgrace, dishonour and degradation. The proud Ottoman Sultans, used to deflowering other people's virgins with a sense of greatness and gratification, could not bear to think of another episode of such gross indignity, and made it a rule of their conduct not to marry. The underlying philosophy though simple, was stunning: it clearly showed that the rape of one's wife was a dishonourable event but the rape of one concubine carried no such shame. After all what else is a concubine for?

She is simply for carnal pleasures. The three hundred concubines of Suleiman the Magnificent, nearly all Christian were either bought on the open market or accrued to him as a prize of victorious expeditions against the infidels. The great Sultan did not live with his harem. He visited it about two nights a week. When monotony of state affairs alerted its strangulating effect, he sought to refresh himself with the tenderness of these beauties in the same way as hunger goads a lion to look for prey. The Sultan's visit was a great event for these delicate creatures constantly watched by an array of eunuchs and Chamberlains in case they did something to spoil their purity which might upset the fastidious taste of the royal visitor. To enhance the dignity of the occasion, the wise and magnificent Sultan always carried a large silken handkerchief. His concubines stood in two rows in anticipation of being selected to adorn the royal bed at least for one night. As he moved at a very slow pace, the girls could see a radiant smile on his face, made great and graceful by his lofty manner, the envy of gods. They greeted him gleefully and he answered them with a warmth springing from a heart filled with kindness, courtesy and consideration. To attract the Monarch's eyes for having him as a one-night groom, every girl wanted to look a bride of blazing beauty, boiling with boisterous passion and impatient to unleash all her sexy arrows coated with the lethal charms of natural elegance, magnified by the art of make-up, sartorial splendour and bewitching enticement. The damsel who hit his heart the hardest arrested his march; he would stop to look into her eyes tenderly and place his handkerchief on her shoulder. This was the signal that she had been chosen as the one-night bride. The concubines who were not lucky enough to win the honour of the handkerchief until attaining the age of twenty-five, were given in marriage to men of high station, who appreciated the royal bounty.

According to Islam, a bastard child solely belongs to his mother because paternal relationship of the father outside marriage is not recognised by the Islamic law. But, uncannily, when a concubine, who is not married to her master, bears him a child, it ranks as a legitimate son or daughter; the mother of Al-Mansur, "the victorious," the famous Arab Caliph, was a Berber slave and out of the thirty-seven Abbasid Caliphs, all except three, were borne by the concubines as legitimate sons of their fathers, having all the rights of inheritance and succession!

Strange as this situation may seem, it is based on a shrewd fusion of sex and politics, requiring woman to carry the burden of male chauvinism with total passivity and pretended pleasure. Understanding of this point needs some knowledge of the Arab culture and history: women had always been looked down upon by the Arab men to such an extent that it was considered a shame to be a father-in-law. Therefore, baby daughters were usually killed leading to an acute shortage of women. The Prophet Muhammad forbade killing of children (daughters) and miraculously used

scarcity of men for the advancement of Islam. He propounded the doctrine of Jihad, that is, holy war against the infidels for the glory of Allah, and to persuade his followers to indulge in carnage enthusiastically and happily, he declared the war-booty as God's blessing; the more glorious, glittering and gorgeous part of this divine pillage was women, the dearest commodity dreamt by the sex-starved bedouins, willing to do anything for a female prize. This is the reason that as they conquered the neighbouring countries, they set up large harems of Christian, Jewish, Egyptian and Persian concubines. Since offspring of such unions were excessive in numbers, declaring them illegitimate would have created formidable problems.

The institution of concubinage which provided the Arabs with an incentive to multiply and become a great imperial nation, also caused their decline through lechery and love of massive harems brimming with beautiful slave girls administered by eunuchs skilled in the aphrodisiac arts of titillation and gratification. When the great Saladin entered the Caliphal Palace at Cairo, he found it occupied by no fewer than 12,000 most delicate female creatures whose dazzling beauty had devastated the Fatimid Caliph.

Not many people remember the imperial grandeur of Persia which lasted many centuries. Even the Roman court had adopted the royal Persian manners, which equally suited the Arabs. When importing the Persian laws regarding purdah, revenue and land administration, the Arabs must also have looked into the luscious make-up of Khusru Parvez's harem consisting of 3,000 women, each excelling the other in softness, serenity and sweetness: one Persian law laid down severe penalties, including death, for intercourse with an unmarried woman unless she was a concubine or prostitute. It is this custom which permitted the Moslems to have carnal relationship with concubines.

When we delve deeper into the status of a concubine, woman seems to have only one purpose, that is, to serve as a target of carnal pleasure for man. Permitting man to have sexual intercourse with his slave-girl outside wedlock (The Believers: 6) not only shows Islamic contempt for the institution of marriage but also puts the lowest value on feminine virginity and woman's human rights. Islam, on the one hand, places a limit of four wives on man but on the other, allows him unlimited number of concubines; Akbar the Great of India, had five thousand concubines and his son, Jehangir, possessed six thousand of them!

It should be noted that the Roman Law imposed death penalty for having sexual intercourse with a slave-girl whereas Islam allowed it at will. From the study of verses 32 and 33 of the Light, it appears that originally the Koran did not favour the idea of a Moslem having carnal relationship with his concubine, and expected him to marry her. As it became necessary to provide the faithful with an incentive to wage holy wars against the infidels, this taboo was set aside. Thus, woman's value dropped to that of a delightful gift; Marya, the Coptic girl, was a present to the Prophet Muhammad by the Egyptian ruler, and it was she who bore him his only son Ibrahim though the child died as an infant.

The Islamic view of womanhood is far from being satisfactory. Because of polygamy and unrestricted concubinage, it encourages jealousy, animosity and ill-will in domestic life. It has been stated by the Muslim scholars authoritatively that the Prophet was found by Hafsa with Marya on the assigned day when he should have been with Aisha. Hafsa seemed petrified by the conduct of the Prophet, who vowed to break with Marya completely if she (Hafsa) did not tell Aisha what she had seen. It should be noted that Hafsa, Omar's daughter, was one of the Prophet's wives. It is well-known that his wives hardly showed him any respect and used abusive language towards him. Once Omar tried to intervene for not showing reverence to the Prophet; he was rebuffed and told to mind his own business. When the existing laws of Islam proved inadequate to tackle the situation, Allah

broke His own code by giving the Prophet dispensation from the matrimonial rule of equity. If the Prophet himself cannot observe the commands of Allah, how can the ordinary faithful do it?

As I stated in the beginning, matrimonial relationship is the most important social issue of all times, but Islamic law fails on this account singularly. Yet the Muslims claim it to be the Perfect Divine Code! In fact, the conjugal laws of Islam, like other religious laws, whether they be Hindu or Christian, are medieval in spirit. During that period, life was a medium to collect dowry, or bring families together for social and political reasons. This practice was as rife in India and Europe as in Arabia. Therefore, it is not impudent to mention that the Prophet had married the daughters of Abu Bakr and Omar, and had given his own daughters in marriage to Osman and Ali to create closer ties with them. It is these four men who constitute what is called "Khilafat-E- Rashida," and Islam could not have survived without their determined efforts to maintain and spread it.

Marital laws of all religions are antifeminine. Take for example, Hinduism. Lord Krishna had 16,000 wives and 64,000 sons, and not one daughter. It shows the Hindu contempt for womanhood. Islam holds similar attitude towards femininity: it makes no provision for the marital consent of a virgin; the Prophet was over fifty when he married Aisha, who was only six years old. It is hardly likely that a child of her age would have known anything about matrimony.

Again, in the event of divorce, Islam gives custody of young children to the father. In modern times when social conditions have changed completely, Islamic laws of marriage cannot bring harmony and happiness to the couples. They are simply outdated.

It is tragic that the Islamic laws are flouted by the Muslims themselves all over the world in the name of Islam. Most of their laws regarding marriage, government, jurisprudence, economic management, international relations, are anti- Islamic, but if anyone points to this fact, no matter, how sincerely, they hold him as the enemy of Islam, even though it is they who make fun of Islam. I hereby challenge the faithful on this issue and add: "Bring your proof if you are truthful." (The Cow: 11).

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