

The Soul of Islam

Guiding Principles for Human Relationships



TRAINING MANUAL 2024

ISSUE No 01



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About BMMA



BMMA

My Struggle My Leadership

Bhartiya Muslim MahilaAandolan (BMMA) is an autonomous, secular, rights-based mass organization led by Muslim women which fights for the citizenship rights of Muslims in India. BMMA was formed in January 2007.

VISION:

To create conditions within the Indian society where the Muslim community and especially the Muslim women can eradicate their poverty and marginalization and live a life of equality, justice and respect for human rights.

BMMA BELIEVES IN:

Values of democracy, secularism, equality, non-violence, human rights and justice as enshrined in the Constitution of India. These are our guiding principles in our struggle for justice.

OBJECTIVES:

- To work towards understanding and ameliorating the marginalization of the Muslim community and Muslim women.
- To work towards empowering Muslim women and take steps to ensure their social, economic, political, civil, legal and religious rights.
- To work to uphold Constitutional principles like equality, liberty, secularism, social justice and democracy.
- To undertake and propagate positive and liberal interpretations of religion which are in consonance with principles of justice, equality, fairness and protection of human rights.
- To take forward the process of legal reforms within the Muslim personal law
- To oppose fascism, exploitative capitalism, communalism, and imperialism in all their forms and to support peace, and justice and uphold human rights
- To collaborate and build alliances with other movements and networks that are fighting for social equality and human rights.
- To understand the caste hierarchies within the Muslim community and raise the issues of Dalit Muslims. To create an alternative progressive voice within the Muslim community.

The BMMA works for all the rights and duties emanating from the Constitution of India. Over the 17 years, the membership has increased to 100,000 in 15 states. Our membership is open to all, including men, who share our vision and mission and are secular.

From the Editors

Religions at their core have social reforms as their agenda. They have emerged at times when society needed to regain its balance and restore certain basic human values. But it is also true that all religious knowledge, irrespective of the religion, has been in the hands of men. They have kept to themselves the right to read, interpret and transmit that knowledge keeping in mind their patriarchal interests. As a result, we see religious texts and institutions being dehumanized and in turn have become each other's competitors in propagating violence, exclusion and hatred. Women, across all religions, have been the first casualties and have borne the severe brunt of the dehumanized religious institutions.

In Islam, we observe the deterioration happening across countries, especially in the Muslim-majority countries which today stand at the end of the human rights index specifically with poor adherence to gender norms. Despite restrictive patriarchal interpretations of religious texts, Muslim women have made great strides across all fields and have achieved socio-economic-educational success. And yet a lot more is possible and waiting to be completed for the vast majority who remain shackled to their chains. And we believe Islam as a religious institution can play a remarkable role in the emancipation of women. But for that to happen, Islam needs to be retrieved from the hands of those who have for centuries misused it for establishing and perpetrating their hegemony.

The values of Islam rooted in the Quranic values of equality, justice, wisdom, compassion, beauty and goodness, love and peace need a boost. That original version of Islam which finds ample display in the Holy text, must be revived and propagated to counter that version which is patriarchal, hegemonic and violent.

This book aims to bring forth this version and empower Muslim women in religious knowledge based on the values of justice and equality.

Dr. Noorjehan Safia Niaz and Zakia Soman

CO-FOUNDERS, BHARATIYA MUSLIM MAHILA ANDOLAN

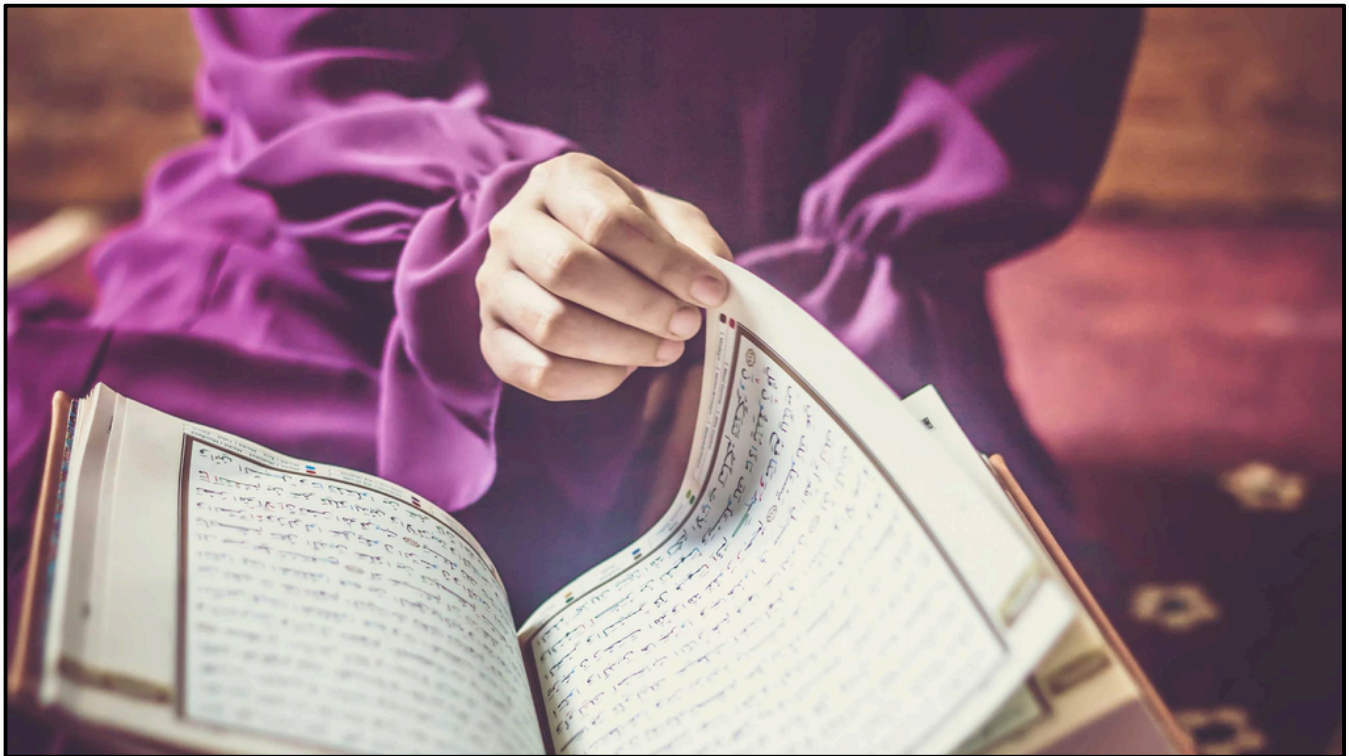
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Tawheed:

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS



BHARTIYA MUSLIM MAHILA ANDOLAN

What is the meaning of Tawheed?

Tawheed means monotheism or the unicity of Allah. It is the fundamental principle of Islam. Tawheed also means that this One harmonizes all the contradictory principles. Allah gives life and death, Allah is angry as well as merciful, Allah gives night and day. It has the capacity to dissolve all differences.

Allah is One, kul huwa allah ahad. Ilah is also unique, laysa ka mithlihi shayun
[there is nothing like him [42:11]

There is not one thing like him, Wa I am Yakun Lahu Kufuwan Ahad
[112:4].

Tawheed also means Allah Unites. It causes atomic, subatomic cellular and stellar reality to come together over seemingly irreconcilable differences. It serves as a principle of unity and not dominance and control. It harmonizes and makes all in a complete whole, supporting each other, and balancing each other.

SUPPORTED BY ASHANA TRUST

IF THE MEANING OF TAWHEED IS TO HARMONIZE, TO BRING IN ONENESS, TO BRING IN UNITY, SHOULD HARMONY, AND UNITY NOT BE AN IMPORTANT HUMAN TRAIT? IF ALLAH HARMONIZES, SHOULD HUMANS DO THE OPPOSITE? IF ALLAH UNITES, SHOULD HUMANS DISINTEGRATE?

How do we apply this principle of unity to our daily lives?

We do a big disservice to Islam when we confine Tawheed to just the divine. There is a reason why Tawheed has a central place in Islamic theology. While it is expected that Tawheed plays a central role in defining the human relationship with the Creator, it is not enough to keep it within the divine parameters. Tawheed must mean something to us in our daily life. How can we apply the Tawheedic principle in our interactions and engagements with fellow human beings?

So how do we actually do it?

If the meaning of Tawheed is to harmonize, to bring in oneness, to bring in unity, should harmony, and unity not be an important human trait? If Allah harmonizes, should humans do the opposite? If Allah unites, should humans disintegrate? Clearly not. Humans have to do what Allah does for humans, bring in harmony and unity and oneness amongst not just humans but amongst all its creation. So, to begin, we must treat all human and non-human creation as divine, as manifestations of the divine. Our task is to bring harmony and unity wherever we are, in every situation we are in. If one believes in Tawheed, then equality is essential.

We cannot treat anyone as subpar if we believe in the principle of Tawheed. And that without doubt includes gender relationships. In our heads, it is important to believe in gender equality as a given in a world today where women's consciousness has risen exponentially. So, the first job is to put women and men on a common and equal pedestal. There cannot be a hierarchical relationship between the sexes vis-à-vis the Creator.

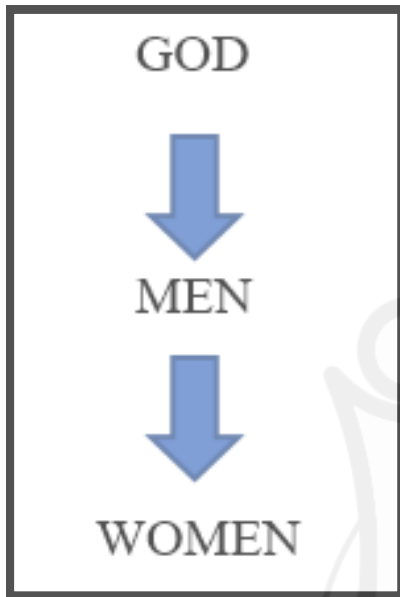
IF ONE BELIEVES IN TAWHEED, THEN EQUALITY IS ESSENTIAL. WE CANNOT TREAT ANYONE AS SUBPAR IF WE BELIEVE IN THE PRINCIPLE OF TAWHEED. AND THAT WITHOUT DOUBT INCLUDES GENDER RELATIONSHIP.

How else can this be done, especially taking the help of the Quran?

To understand human beings from the Quranic perspective, we need to understand what is our purpose of being born as humans. What did Allah envisage for us? This is stated in verse, 2:30, Inni jaa'ilun fi al-ard Khalifah, 'I will surely create on the earth a khalifa'. The purpose of human creation on earth is to be a khalifa. A khalifa is an agent of the divine will. And the divine will is that we maintain the divine harmony and oneness, equality and balance. So human beings are agents of Allah to bring harmony and oneness.

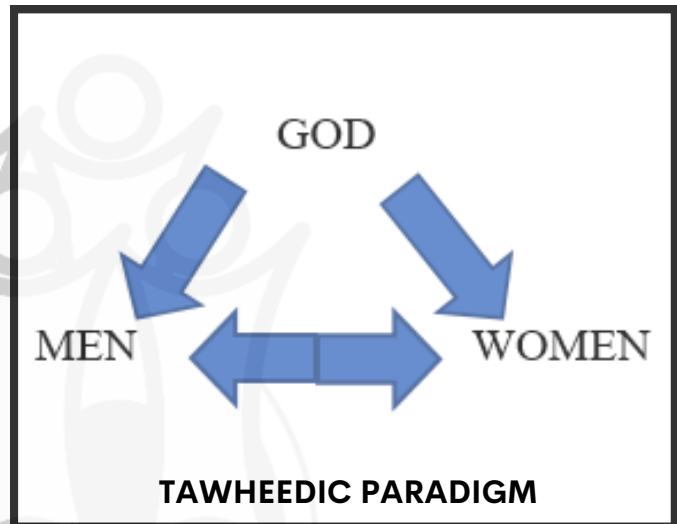
What is the Tawheedic paradigm?

The dominant patriarchal understanding of women-men relationships is hierarchical. It goes like a vertical line.



God-men-women. This arrangement is not harmonious and equal. It puts men in between women and their Creator. Putting one human being as superior to another does not indicate oneness and harmony. It is not in line with the Tawheedic understanding of Allah. Women and men are khalifa on earth, fulfilling the purpose of a harmonious and balanced creation. Not just women-men but all relationships are to move towards harmony. And not just relationships among humans but relationships with all other non-human creations must also be equal and harmonious. To keep oneself over another person is the mind of Satan. It is a sign of takabbur [pride]. Patriarchy is satanic logic, reeking of superiority and unequal relationships.

Every person, female or male is a khalifa before Allah. Women are full agents in the family, in the society, in Islam and as human beings. They have the capacity and responsibility to fulfill all role, public, private and spiritual. The Tawheedic paradigm thus looks like this:



Reference:

The Ethics of Tawheed over Ethics of Qiwwamah, Amina Wadud, Men In Charge, Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition.



Khilafah: RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL HUMAN BEINGS ON EARTH

What is the meaning of the word 'khilafah'?

The term Khilafah comes from the root word, Istikhlaf.

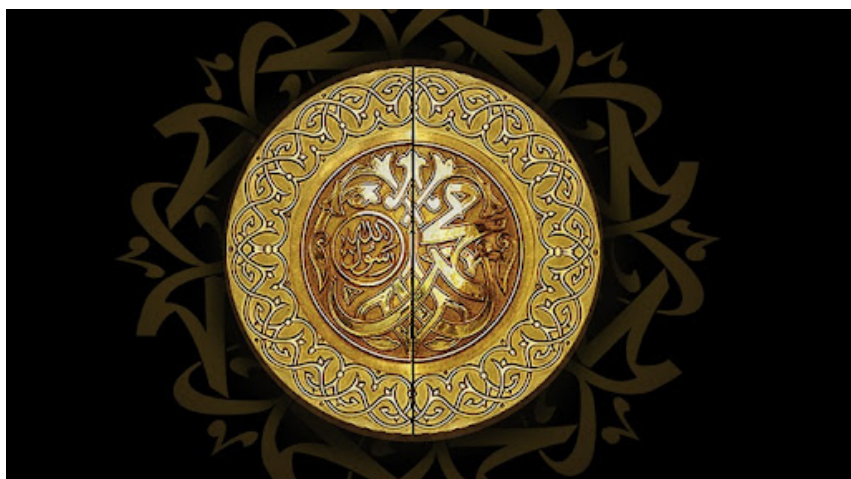
There are 3 meanings of the word Istikhlaf:

1. Khalifah / Calipha / Successor
2. Khalaif / tribes/peoples/generations
3. Someone who takes responsibility for its people.

Quranic Reference:

Verse 2:30 says, 'I will create a vicegerent on earth'. Most scholars understand 'vicegerent' as human beings. Allah created human beings so that they can take responsibility of the earth. So human beings were given this responsibility and not any other creature.

**BOTH ARE RESPONSIBLE
FOR MANAGING THE
AFFAIRS OF THE EARTH.
AND THEY ARE
ACCOUNTABLE TO ALLAH.**



So what went wrong?

The meaning of the term Khilafah changed with time. It moved from having spiritual significance to political. So earlier it meant that all human beings were agents of Allah and thus are expected to take care of the earth. Later it meant that only political leaders can be khalifa and that they were the representatives of Allah on earth. So earlier khalifas assumed political significance. They were believed to have divine powers. Anyone disobeying them were then actually disobeying Allah. What started as 'all human beings', got diluted to 'political leaders' and got further diluted to 'male political leaders'.

Is the term Khalifah gender neutral?

With time, due to patriarchy, it came to be assumed that only men can be khalifas. But in reality, as human beings both women and men have been assigned the responsibility of the earth. Both are responsible for managing the affairs of the earth. And they are accountable to Allah. So istikhlaf means equality in building human civilization. It is a relationship between human beings, both women and men, with the Creator.

So, what is the responsibility that women and men have to fulfil on earth?

The responsibility is to achieve Tawheed. Tawheed means monotheism or the unicity of Allah. It also means that this One harmonizes all the contradictory principles. Allah gives life and death, Allah is angry as well as merciful, Allah gives night and day. It has the capacity to dissolve all differences.

Tawheed also means Allah Unites. It causes atomic, subatomic cellular and stellar reality to come together over seemingly irreconcilable differences.



IT IS IMPORTANT TO BELIEVE IN GENDER EQUALITY AS A GIVEN IN A WORLD TODAY WHERE WOMEN'S CONSCIOUSNESS HAS RISEN EXPONENTIALLY.

It serves as a principle of unity and not dominance and control. It harmonizes and makes all in a complete whole, supporting each other, and balancing each other. Our responsibility as women and men is to maintain this harmony and balance.

How can human beings, both women and men achieve Tawheed?

If the meaning of Tawheed is to harmonize, to bring in oneness, to bring in unity, should harmony, and unity not be an important human trait? If Allah harmonizes, should humans do the opposite? If Allah unites, should humans disintegrate? Clearly not. Humans have to do what Allah does for humans, bring harmony unity and oneness amongst not just humans but amongst all its creation. We must treat all human and non-human creation as divine, as manifestations of the divine. Our task is to bring in harmony and unity wherever we are, in whichever situation we are in. If one believes in Tawheed, then equality is essential. We cannot treat anyone as subpar if we believe in the principle of Tawheed. And that without doubt includes gender relationships. It is important to believe in gender equality as a given in a world today where women's consciousness has risen exponentially.

So, the first job is to put women and men on a common and equal pedestal. There cannot be a hierarchical relationship between the sexes vis-à-vis the Creator.

THERE ARE 3 MEANINGS OF THE WORD ISTIKHLAF:

- 1. KHALIFAH : SUCCESSOR**
- 2. KHALAIF: TRIBES/PEOPLES/ GENERATIONS**
- 3. SOMEONE WHO TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITS PEOPLE.**

What is required by women and men to be a khalifa on earth?

To be a khalifa, you need:

- 1. Knowledge/ilm** [39:9, 16:43, 96:1]
- 2. Justice/Adl** [40:17, 42:15 and 16:90]
- 3. Wisdom/aql** [2:242, 12:2, 29:43, 22:46]
- 4. Freedom of Belief/Hurriyat al-mutaqad** [6:135, 10:99, 18:29]
- 5. Diversity/Ikhtilaf** [11:118, 5:48] and
- 6. Love/mahbah** [2:165, 5:54]

Reference:

An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of Khilafah, Wilayah and Qiwwamah
Asma Lambrabet

Wali/ Wilaya:

EGALITARIAN CONCEPT



What is the common usage of the word wilaya in India?

We have not heard the word as is written here, but we have surely heard the word 'wali' in the context of marriage. During Nikaah, the woman who is getting married needs a wali to formalise the marriage. Although it is not a practice in all states of the country, it is an added institution/person in a marriage, other than the two adults wanting to marry each other and the qazi who solemnizes it.



The job of a wali in an Indian marriage is to represent the bride. A wali is either the bride's father, grandfather, brother, paternal uncle or any male relative from the father's side. The wali or the guardian of the bride plays an important role in determining the bride's marriage especially if she is a minor.

Needless to say, the institution of wali undermines the bride's individuality. Muslim marriage is a solemn contract between two consenting adults. If the groom does not require a wali, why should the bride require it, unless she is not an adult, mature enough to decide for her marriage? In this case, the marriage need not happen at all as she is not mature enough to understand what marriage is all about.

Out of the ambit of marriage, what is the meaning of wali?

Wali is the singular of awliya which means a master, an authority, custodian, protector or a friend, supporter, close associate, or benefactor. In common use, wali is also the one who manages, who serves as a guardian or one who is entrusted with the affairs of the state.

- Wali means 'someone or something close, nearby, adjacent'.
- Wali can be a 'friend, close associate, relative', also a 'patron' or a 'helper'.
- Wali also means 'one having power over a thing or person through legal responsibility'. As an extension of this notion, a '(legal) guardian, tutor'.
- Awliya is the plural of wali which means alliance, mutual assistance and mutual reinforcement
- Al-wali is one of the attributes of God meaning one who strengthens, protects and supports.



How have Islamic Feminists understood wali/awliya?

Muslim women and even men have been kept away from an egalitarian understanding of the terms. That women and men are equal in the eyes of God and also equal to each other is missing in our madrasa education, various exegesis, commentaries on Islam and within our own homes. Not just in the private sphere but even in the public sphere, both are equal in their rights and responsibilities.



From where in the Quran can we take inspiration for understanding wilaya in the modern context?

The verse 9:71 is crystal clear:

“The believers, men and women, are awliya [allies] of one another. They enjoin al-maruf [the good] and forbid al-munkar [the bad], they observe salat and give zakat and obey God and his Prophet.”

At first the reference in the verse is to both, women and men. Secondly, they are exhorted to be awliya of one another. If we take all the three meanings of wali in the above question, it implies that women and men are close to each other, they are friends and helpers of each other or they have power over each other or are guardians of each other. In any case they are equal to each other in fulfilling their responsibility to being good, doing good and forbidding the bad.

This exhortation of doing good and avoiding bad comes first. They are to fulfil their responsibilities towards each other first. Then their responsibilities as a member of society, i.e., a public person come next. Their spiritual responsibilities of doing namaz, giving zakat or obeying God and the Prophet come thereafter. This roots the women and men in their daily responsibility of promoting good wherever they are and whatever they are doing. They are to keep away from evil or anything that brings harm to themselves or others. It is important to note that the equality of sexes is established right in the first sentence itself.

So, wali/wilaya is an empowering and enabling concept, isn't it?

Yes, it is. Women and men are equally responsible for the development of the society. They have to stand shoulder to shoulder to fulfil their responsibilities as a social being. They are equal human beings and equal citizens.

Muslim women's concerns and issues today have to be examined under the scrutiny of this very egalitarian Islamic concept of Wilaya. Islamic feminists have done well to uncover this wonderful verse and show to the misogynists as well as the larger world that God willed equal and just gender relations based on which the edifice of a just and equal world can be built.

Reference:

An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of Khilafah, Wilayah and Qiwanah,
Asma Lambrabet





Ahsan:

RECLAIMING BEAUTY AND GOODNESS



Why is this concept not so widely known?

It is probably not such a case that we have not heard the words Ahsan, adl or Tawheed or Khalifa. The problem is the application of it. And more so is our inability and unwillingness to apply these concepts while engaging with women's issues.

There has been so much discussion around Islamic legalities and jurisprudence that we have collectively ignored the ethical framework of Islam which should be the guiding force behind all legislations. We do not discuss Islamic philosophy, Islamic Theology, Islamic

Cosmology and other aspects of Islam. Also, there are multiple verses in the Quran on goodness, kindness, charity, patience, tolerance, love and compassion. We do talk about them but when it comes to women's issues, we conveniently forget about them. And we do not use it as a framework of reference for all our laws and jurisprudence. They come first but are actually not even spoken about.

What is the Quran's take on the intellect/mind/thinking?

There has been so much emphasis in the Quran itself on thinking, reflection, intellect, reasoning and the use of aql. Faith does not simply mean the

observance of rituals but also using our intellect, to see, to hear, to sense, to understand, to observe, to seek and to inquire.

Verse 47:24 says:

**“Do they not reflect upon the Quran?
Or do hearts have locks upon them? “**

Verse 8:22 says:

**“ The worse creatures in the eyes of
Allah are those who do not use
reason. “**

Hence it is our responsibility to not just highlight these concepts but also look at ways in which they can be applied in our daily lives and interactions.

In the previous articles we looked at Tawheed not just as a religious concept but as a concept which has value also in its applicability in human interactions. We also saw the concept of Khalifa and wilaya - where all human beings are agents of Allah meant to maintain harmony, protect and support and balance. Similarly, the values of justice and equality; how can we make them real for us in our daily lives? As we live our lives today, we see that the gap between what is expected of us as human beings and what we actually have landed up doing.

Living in the Goodness of God

Recognizing how God's goodness is running after you



What do you mean by the ethical framework of Islam?

The ethical framework involves looking at Islam from a value-based perspective. What are the basic values and principles of Islam? What ideology does it propagate?

So, what is Ahsan?

To the concepts of Tawheed, Khalifa and wilaya we add the value of Ahsan. The root of the word, Ahsan is 'hsn' which is a combination of beauty and goodness. All other derivatives like hasan, ahsan, husn carry the same meaning of beauty and goodness combined.



God is called asma-ul-husna. God is beauty and goodness combined. Ahsan is an act of seeing God, to be in the presence of God, to be in the presence of beauty and goodness. Because Allah is beauty/goodness, is it not inevitable that it becomes a central theme of Islam?

The word ahsan appears 194 times in the Quran which only goes to show its relevance in the Islamic framework.

The creator, who is ahsan, has to, by default create a universe which is ahsan. All that exists in this universe, including all living beings are beauty and goodness combined. Are we not attracted to beauty and goodness? Don't we love to be in nature, on a beach, or surrounded by greenery or by a brook? Do we not love to listen to good music or a play or a dance, a painting? Don't we all love the beauty of a child's laughter?

What are the relevant Quranic verses regarding ahsan?

- Verse 23:14 says, God is utmost beauty and goodness
- Verse 39:23 says the message of God is also beauty/ goodness
- Verse 32:7 says, through beauty/goodness Allah created everything. The act of creation itself is an act of beautifying and making good.
- Verse 95:4 says Allah created human beings in the most beautiful/good fashion.

- So, the creator, the process of creation and the created are all embodiments of ahsan i.e. beauty and goodness. Matter does not end here. We are also expected to further manifest this goodness and beauty.
- Verse 28:77 says, manifest beauty/goodness as they have been manifested upon you and do not seek corruption upon earth. Anything that is unjust, or unfair.
- Verse 2:83 says, manifest Ahsan to parents and kinsfolk, to orphans and the vulnerable and the needy. And speak good to people and give zakat and pray.

Remember as khalifahs on earth it is our responsibility to maintain harmony and balance [Tawheed] and manifest beauty and goodness [ahsaan]



The creator, who is ahsan, has to, by default create a universe which is ahsan. All that exists in this universe, including all living beings are beauty and goodness combined. Are we not attracted to beauty and goodness? Don't we love to be in nature, on a beach, or surrounded by greenery or by a brook? Do we not love to listen to good music or a play or a dance, a painting? Don't we all love the beauty of a

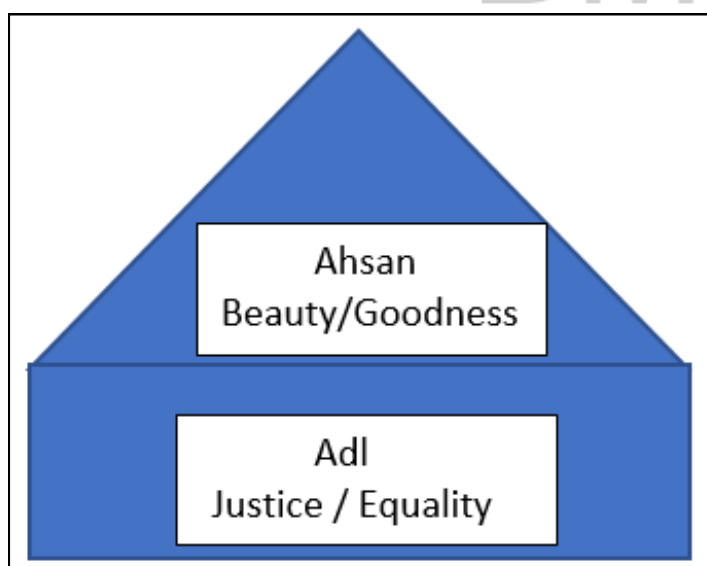


What is the connection between Ahsan and Adl?

There is a clear connection between Ahsan and adl or justice. In verse 16:90, Allah enjoins justice, kindness and the doing of good to kith and kin and forbids all that is shameful, evil and oppressive. He exhorts us so that we may be mindful. Justice is crowned by goodness.

What are the implications of Ahsan on gender relations?

Verse 30:21 says I have created spouses from among yourselves for you to live within tranquillity. God ordained love and compassion between you. So, Ahsan forms the basis of the partnership between the woman and the man. And the purpose is to stay in peace. Love and compassion lead to peace. If the basic foundation of the relationship is peaceful, imbued with love, care concern and respect for each other, the family and thus the larger society will automatically be in harmony.



Which other verses in the Quran are comparable or closer to the concept of ahsan?

There are many, some are given below:

tidings to the doers of good. [22:37]

8. And when he attained his full strength and was [mentally] mature, We bestowed upon him judgement and knowledge. And thus, do We reward the doers of good. [28:14]

And many more in the following verses as well where Allah has commanded human beings to do good and be good.

37:80, 37:105, 37:110, 37:121, 39:34, 77:44, 31:3, 29:69, 16:128, 3:148, 5:85, 46:12, 51:16

To conclude, there are egalitarian concepts in Islamic tradition on which we must focus on as Muslim women. They are not just spiritual concepts but have ramifications in our daily life as we saw in the previous articles.

Reference:

- Ethics of Ihsan: Beauty and Goodness in Muslim Family, Series of Knowledge Building Webinar, Musawah
- Quran.com

1. Righteousness is not that you turn your faces towards the east or the west, but true righteousness is in one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, angels, the book, and the prophets and gives wealth, despite the love for it, to relatives, orphans, needy, traveller, those who ask and for freeing slaves and who establishes prayers and gives zakat and those who fulfil their promise and those who are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true and it is those who are righteous. [2:177]

2. Indeed, Allah orders justice and good conduct and giving [help] to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you that perhaps you will be reminded. [16:90]

3. Is the reward for good [anything] but good? [55:60]

4. Who spend [in the cause of Allah] during ease and hardship and who restrain anger and who pardon the people - and Allah loves the doers of good [3:134]

5. And cause not corruption upon the earth after its reformation. And invoke Him in fear and aspiration. Indeed, the mercy of Allah is near to the doers of good. [7:56]

6. There is not upon the doers of good any cause [for blame]. [9:91]

7. Their meat will not reach Allah, nor will their blood, but what reaches Him is piety from you, and give good



Know your GBJEWC verses: **TEN QURANIC VERSES WHICH MUST BE KNOWN TO ALL**

GOODNESS, BEAUTY, JUSTICE, EQUALITY, WISDOM, COMPASSION

What damage has been done by male hegemony over religion?

The larger Muslim society would have been a lot better if Muslim women had read, translated and interpreted the word of God. Very cunningly, Muslim men have kept to themselves the right and the privilege to educate themselves, especially education about religion. Muslim men know that knowledge is indeed power and if Muslim women learn to read and understand what is written, they will take for themselves what benefits them just the way men have done so far.

Very deviously Muslim women have been told to read the Quran in a language which they don't understand.

They have been fooled into believing that reading the Quran in Arabic is sawaab ! Not just reading and understanding of the Quran but even its translations and interpretations have remained in the male domain. So, they say, if you know how to read then please read the Quran in an alien language. If you are lucky and understand the alien language then please don't interpret. And if you are reading a translation don't interpret that translation and don't analyze the credentials and motives of the translator.



tradition, male-centric and patriarchal understanding. They have also gone beyond the written word to extract the eternal values of Islam which put not just women and men on par but also puts all humanity equal to each other as one creation. These eternal values of Islam which are conveyed to the humanity through the Quranic verses, gives the courage to fight for justice within and outside the Muslim community.

And if you have managed to read, understand, translate and interpret, then please keep your mouth shut as religion is the territory of the so-called alims and scholars and experts. You as a woman have no business to enter that territory. Thus continues the male hegemony over religion-based knowledge which has destroyed the lives of many Muslim women across the world. Men are the readers, translators, interpreters and givers of this knowledge and women continue to merely receive it without questioning.

What have women scholars of Islam done?

But times are changing for better. Many recent women readers of the Quran have managed to come out with their own translations and interpretations which question the

Those eternal values are remembered best through the acronym, GBJEWC. That is how we can remember them. G for goodness, B for beauty, J for justice, E for equality, W for wisdom and C for compassion. For any Muslim to proclaim himself or herself as a Muslim, he or she must believe and abide by these principles.

What are the verses in the Quran on equality?

1. Allah created human beings both women and men, so that they can take responsibility for the earth. The responsibility of all the affairs of the earth is entrusted to both. [2:30 - I will create a vicegerent on earth].

Most scholars understand 'vicegerent' as human beings.

2. Women and men are created from one source and hence by default, they are equal. The very essence of their existence is mutual dependence as they come together in this world from one single source

[4:1 O people, be aware of your Lord who has created you from one person and He created from it its mate and sent forth from both many men and women, and be aware of God whom you ask about, and the relatives. God is a watcher over you]

3. When it comes to equality before God, women and men are equal. In all aspects which include surrendering to God, being truthful, being patient, being humble and charitable, and following religious rituals, women are equal to men. There are no exemptions for a woman just because she is a woman and there is no special treatment to a man just because he is a man.

[33:35 - Surely, the peacefully surrendering men, and the peacefully surrendering women, the acknowledging men, and the acknowledging women, the obedient men, and the obedient women, the truthful men, and the truthful women, the patient men, and the patient women, the humble men, and the humble women, the charitable men, and the charitable women, the fasting men, and the fasting women, the men who guard their private parts, and the women who similarly guard, and the men who commemorate God frequently, and the commemorating women; God has prepared for them forgiveness and a great recompense.]

4. Women and men are owners of what they earn or gain. Some men gain more than women and some women gain more than men. Sometimes men gain more than women and sometimes it is the reverse. God favours equally.



**Wisdom is found
only in truth.**



[4:32 - Do not envy what God has favoured some of you over others. For the men is a portion of what they gained, and for the women is a portion of what they gained. Ask God for His favour, God is knowledgeable over all things.]

State the Quranic verses on compassion, goodness, peace, care, and goodness in women-men relationship

1. The purpose of marriage is tranquillity and peace in the relationship. Spouses must love, respect and care for each other and be content and happy in each other's company. That is the essence of the spousal relationship in Islam, which exhorts us in the end to think and reflect on what should one be aspiring for.

2. .Women and men are made for each other, to shield and guard each other. There is a mutuality of support, care and protection. Linked to the above verse it conveys that women and men are there for each other, to lead a life of peace and harmony.

[2:187 - They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them...]

3. Both women and men are supporters of each other. Both are expected to do good and avoid evil.

[9:71 - The believers, men and women, are awliya [allies] of one another. They enjoin al-maruf [the good] and forbid al-munkar [the bad], they observe salat and give zakat and obey God and his Prophet.]

[30:21 - Among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, in order to have



Which Quranic verse speaks of beauty and goodness in general?

Allah commands human beings to manifest beauty/goodness as they have been manifested upon them by Allah. Human beings are asked not to corrupt the earth by doing anything unjust and unfair.



[28:77 – And do good as Allah had done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters]

Which Quranic verses talk about justice and wisdom?

- Allah enjoins justice, kindness and the doing of good to kith and kin and forbids all that is shameful, evil and oppressive. He exhorts you so that you may be mindful. Justice is crowned by goodness.

[16:90 – Allah orders justice and good conduct and gives help to relatives and forbids immorality and bad conduct and oppression.]

- Allah enjoins all human beings to use their aql, their ability to think and rationalize. There is much emphasis on knowledge, wisdom, analysis, good judgment and common sense.

[28:14 – And when he attained his full strength and was [mentally] mature, We bestowed upon him judgement and knowledge. And thus, do We reward the doers of good.]

There are of course many more Quranic verses, written in different contexts, which again and again harp on the same values and principles which bring people together and which define relationships based on mutual respect and support. It is time that these timeless eternal values are brought to the forefront of any debate concerning Muslim women.



QIWAMAH-1: PATRIARCHAL READING OF THE CONCEPT

Inspite of all gender equality verses in the Quran, we find Muslim women's status to be subpar with women of other communities?

It is time for us Islamic feminists to call out the misogyny of classical jurists and scholars who have picked up certain Quranic verses and used it to reduce women to a secondary status quite contrary to the egalitarian ethics of the Quran. Let's us look at one such verse; 4:34. This verse has been used to put the man on the top of the hierarchy, superior to women and also justify violence towards women. It also establishes not just his superiority but also his authority over her, demanding complete obedience and subservience.

Can we discuss 4:34 a little more?

The full verse reads thus:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given them one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them lightly; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).

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Classical jurists establish men's superiority:

1. Women are not equal to men; they are dependent on him for their protection and maintenance
2. Men are stronger than women and hence their responsibility and also because they earn money



BHARTIYA MUSLIM MAHILA ANDOLAN

3. Because men protect and maintain, women have to be obedient to him
4. If she disobeys, he can beat her up

To sum up, he pays and so he controls and hence she obeys.

Explain the various concepts within this verse which have been used against women?

There are 5 important words in this verse and they are:

- Darajah – degree of advantage / precedence over
- Faddala- favour / bestowed more abundantly



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It is the man's responsibility to discipline women. And why so, because they have the strength to support women and thus support becomes a reason for the privilege. They provide because they are better and they are better because they provide. So, he shifted the verse from a verse handing down responsibility to men, to making this responsibility as his reason for superiority.

- Qawwamun - protectors and maintainers / take full care off
- Qanitat - devotedly obedient / devout
- Nushuz - disloyalty / ill will

The verse thus reads that men have a degree of advantage over women because Allah has favoured them more. Hence, they are protector and maintainers of women and have full authority over them. Women in turn is expected to be obedient to him because he protects and maintains her. And if she disobeys him, he has a right to reprimand her or even beat her.

How did the classical interpretation get precedence?

These concepts evolved or rather devolved over the years. Each 'scholar

ensured that their interpretation made the verse sharper and sharper for aiding in the decline of the status of Muslim women. This verse was then interpreted to propagate patriarchy. Moreover, the above verse was given prominence by the classical jurists at the cost of those verses which indicated positive values.

For instance,

- Verse 30:21 says, '**Wa ja'ala baynakum muwaddatan wa rahmah**' [he has made intimate love and compassion between you] or
- Verse 2:187, Hunna لباسun lakum wa antum لباسun lahunaa [they are like protecting garments one to the other] or **"It is He Who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her in love" (7:189).**

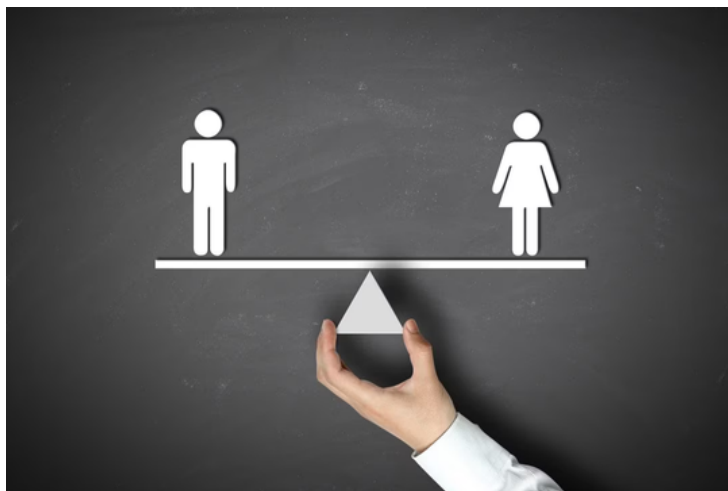
Can we look at some of the patriarchal interpretations of the above verse?

Al-Tabari understood Qawamun as watching over or being in charge of women. It is the man's responsibility to discipline women. And why so, because they have the strength to support women and thus support becomes a reason for the privilege. They provide because they are better and they are better because they provide. So, he shifted the verse from a verse handing down responsibility to men, to making this responsibility as his reason for superiority.

Zamakhshari introduced the concepts of ruler and the ruled likening it to men and women. Just as rulers manage their rule through orders, men are to do the same. He added that men are superior not just because they provide and earn money but also because they are better in reasoning and even because they are better in horsemanship, spear-throwing, jihad, imamat, azaan, khutbah etc. God has favoured men and given them the job to control women. So, we move from Tabari's idea of men as disciplinarians to Zamakhshari's idea of men as rulers.

Who else has given a patriarchal interpretation?

Ibn Khatir added to the superiority of men by quoting the hadis of Abubakr which states that people will not prosper if they are led by women leaders. He also added that women cannot be judges. Thus, male supremacy moved from domestic sphere to the public, political and social sphere.



He also linked this verse of qiwamah to the verse in Surah Bakr, 2:228 known as darajah verse. He also compiled hadises on the wife's obedience to the husband.

And lastly, Mohammed Abduh added that it is a woman's nature to be submissive. Women are reduced to their biology. Men are the head and women are like the body. He put the husband as the boss and the wife as his subordinate. He said, '**Home is like a small kingdom**'. So far even the classical jurists had not made domestic work incumbent on women but he went further on to make domestic work as naturally coming to women. She is biologically tuned for domestic work.

In the next section, Qiwamah 2, let us look at the feminist interpretation of Qiwamah.

Reference:

The Interpretive Legacy of Qiwamah as an Exegetical Construct, Omaira Abou-Bakr



QIWAMAH-2: A FEMINIST READING OF THE CONCEPT

How were the classical patriarchal interpretations challenged?

Many women scholars took it upon themselves to reinterpret the concept of qiwamah keeping in mind the ethical framework of the Quran.

Aisha Taimur states that the verse is actually a rap on the knuckles of negligent husbands who did not fulfill their responsibilities towards the family. So, if men don't do their job, they also lose their status. She says, financial support is a condition of guardianship and not the reason for it. If you want to remain a guardian, you better do your job of providing and maintaining.

Asma Barlas says that even though the Quran wants the man to be the

breadwinner, there is nothing which turns him into the head of the household.

Khaled Abou El-Fadl says if the man is not supporting the family, then his qiwamah does not exist. If a woman is supporting the family or if she is an equal contributor, then both are maintainers. Husband's sole right over being a qiwamah ends.

Amina Wadud calls for transcending the text. Instead of grappling with the difficult text, it is important to look at its trajectory and see where it wants human beings to go. The Quran is a gateway, a pointer towards better possibilities. It wants us to go beyond what is given.

We are in a post-text, post-revelation world where the Quran is a text in process. It is a document rooted in its history and at the same time pointing to better possibilities.

Kecia Ali says that the Quran itself wants us to depart from its literal provisions. Its rules and regulations must be taken as a starting point for human development and not the end. The divine message of the Quran has to make sense on the earth which is at a different realm than the divine. In its application it loses its divinity. The rules are not able to capture the divine spirit and message. The words, the text fail to convey the divine guidelines because it has to make sense in the here and now of the time when it was revealed.

How is qiwamah as a concept used elsewhere in the Quran?

Qawwamun is plural form of qawwam which comes from the root word qama which has 30 different meanings; stand up, comply, carry, take on, proceed, rise up, provide for revolt, endure, and lift up. The verses 4:135 and 5:8 has usage of qiwamah in the public sphere. It reads thus:

• **Verse 4:135**

O ye who believe! Kunu qawwamin [stand out firmly] bilqisti [for justice], as a witness to Allah, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be against rich or poor, for Allah can best protect both. Follow to the lusts of your hearts lest you swerve, and if you distort justice or decline to do justice verily Allah is well acquainted with all that you do.

• **Verse 5:8**

O ye who believe! kunu qawwamin [stand out firmly] lillahi shuhada bilqisti





[for Allah as witnesses to fair dealing] and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just, that is next to piety and fear Allah. For Allah is well acquainted with all that you do.

So, there are two dimensions to qiwamah – the private dimension and the public dimension.

Both these verses exhort men and women to respect the values of justice, fairness and impartiality in all their actions and judgements. Both verses say, to be firm and rigorous in your implementation of justice and be determined and precise in your testimonies.

Both verses command unconditional respect for the values of fairness and justice even in the matter of a judgment against oneself or one's relatives, the rich or the poor or even

an enemy whom we resent or dislike.

What does it mean?

It means that there cannot be just one meaning of Qiwamah. It cannot just mean 'maintaining and protecting'. It also means being fair and just and impartial. This meaning of qiwamah has been ignored just so that one meaning, the patriarchal meaning, gets precedence.

So finally, what would the feminist interpretation of this verse read like?

Men are supporters to women and families because in that context they are the ones who bring in the money. Also, Allah favours one over the other [no gender specification given]. Qiwamah is a duty and responsibility so that men bring in money and women manage the family. In the light of the

other meaning of the term qiwamah, this arrangement is fair and just as both are doing what they can do. So, men have qiwamah not because they are men but because they have the social capacity to earn. If then and even now, women also have the capacity to earn, so even they have qiwamah.

To sum up?

- First there is a need to confine male qiwamah to family
 - Second it is only because he is bringing in the money
 - Third if women bring in money there would be two qiwamahs in the house
 - Even if a woman doesn't bring in money her unpaid care work is equivalent to or sometimes more than what he earns. So, all women by default are qiwamah because they manage the household with their labour.
 - He brings in money and she does household chores which have an economic value which puts them on par with each other
- In instances where women work in the house as well as earn money outside, their qiwamah by logic is more than the men.



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Women are then qiwamah?

Women who are homemakers are qiwamah because of their labour. In addition, all those women who also work outside, are double qiwamah and women who work only outside are qiwamah anyway. That means a whole lot of women take responsibility of themselves and their families, who are supporters and maintainers and protectors.

THEN WHO THE REAL QIWAMAH IS ANYONE'S GUESS!!!

Reference:

Interpretive Legacy of Qiwamah h as an Exegetical Construct, Omaira Abou-Bakr
 An Egalitarian Reading of the Concepts of Khilafah, Wilayah and Qiwamah, Asma Lambrabet

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FASTING: MORE THAN ABSTINENCE FROM FOOD



Is Ramzaan not all about abstinence from food and water?

To begin with, yes it is. It is a means to many things. It allows the mind to control the body in miraculous ways. On normal days, we may find keeping our hands off food difficult but during the fast, one develops a sudden sense of control. So, it has a psychological dimension. At the physical level, it helps build tolerance. We are able to keep away from food and water for

almost 14-16 hours. Fasting has a social dimension. It helps to develop empathy for all those who do not have a choice of eating the best of foods at the end of those 14-16 hours. So, just a simple act of keeping away from food and water brings into play so many aspects of our existence.

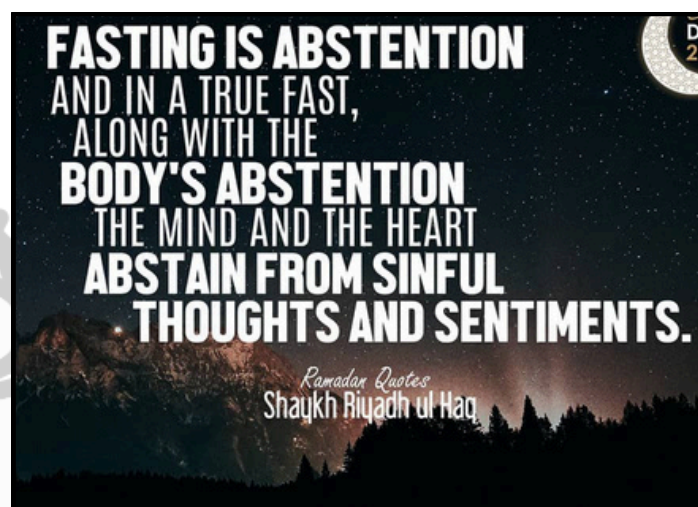
At times the display of food in the evening [iftaar] conveys that it is a mere method of self-control for a few hours, so isn't it all about food?

Unfortunately, yes. Ironically, Ramazan fasting has turned into a food fest. It has become non-consumption of food/water for a few hours and then over-consuming in the evening. All gains through the day, physical and spiritual are lost post-iftar. Day turns to night and vice-versa. At least that has been the experience in some parts of Mumbai. Children and youth stay awake the whole night post tarawih prayers, play games, chit chat, eat and sleep only after the sehri [pre-dawn food intake]. Then they sleep the entire day till 1-2 pm. Children go to school with hardly any sleep time in the night. Women spend their afternoons cooking up multiple food items and spend their evenings for the preparation of sehri. Where is the time for inner cleansing?!

What is missing in our observance of this very holy month?

As we stop food consumption for many hours, the body automatically goes into hibernation. It seeks to conserve energy till the next meal comes in. And this is exactly the time for the human body to go within its soul and mind consciousness. The body undergoes severe self-discipline, forcing the mind to do the same. As we move away from the body towards the mind and the soul, we ought to ask questions to ourselves. Why am I here, am I doing fine in this journey as a human being, am I getting better, am I being a good human being, where am I going wrong, am I harming anyone, am I being merciless or am I doing what is expected of me by my Creator, am I

just and fair, am I kind and considerate – these and many more questions ought to be raised as one keeps away from food, giving us enough time and energy to cleanse not just our bodies but also our minds and spirit.



What is the spiritual significance of fasting?

Fasting is a way for us to know that we are not mere physical beings, sustained on food and water. We are spiritual beings capable of knowing and leading life in the light of the divine. We are spiritual beings enveloped in a physical body and not a physical body having a tiny spiritual element somewhere inside of us. It is an opportunity to get in touch with the divine in us. All prayers even in non-Ramadan days are a quick touch-base to the divine at least 5 times a day. And in reality, we have to base ourselves in the spiritual realm and conduct our lives. Of course, easier said than done. And hence the mandatory 5 times prayers, at least to keep going back to who we are; a divine being enveloped in a human body. Ramazan thus is a month-long process of touch-basing this divinity inside of us.



Why do people read the Quran in this month?

Quran is the word of Allah, the divine essence of this universe. So, when we read the Quran we hear God speak. It is a book of guidance, showing the way from wherever you are standing in your life. Quran was revealed in this month hence the extreme religious significance of Ramzan for all Muslims across the world. Needless to say, the Quran being a book of guidance must be read in a language in which each one of us can be guided. No point in reading it in a language which one does not understand. Reading the Quran in a language which one understands will obviously entail the use of my mind and intellect. Reading and reflecting on the message from the divine and correlating it to one's own daily grind and experience is the purpose of Quran reading in Ramzan. How is my daily lived reality influenced by the divine message? What can I learn today from

the Quran that will help me to be a better person, and to lead a better life?

But why do this just once a year, isn't that supposed to be part of my daily schedule?

Doing it for a month, regularly, puts you in frame of mind, it gives you time to ask questions and seek answers. It pauses your life to give you an opportunity for course correction. It is a physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual emptying of self to realize your true nature of divinity. That you and the world around are part of the divinity infused with love and harmony. It is time to focus on the true nature of Tawheed, the unity of all creation, the oneness in diversity and the harmony and balance in all creation. Hopefully, if done sincerely for a month, its impact will last enough to help to become a better person. And doing it year after year takes us one step up and better.



Does any behavioural change, or psychological impact occur due to fasting?

What is the economic impact of Ramazan?

All impacts have to be on the individual mind, body and spirit; that's the purpose. But, at all times, even in the past, it did have a commercial aspect. In modern times, like all things, this month too is commercialized. With shopping malls overflowing, and food stalls flourishing full night, it does provide an opportunity for a large section of the population with a source of income. This is the economic impact and it cannot be overlooked. It does mean a lot to people who depend on this month for their economic sustenance. It also fuels the economy and keeps the money flowing. The month of fasting is followed by a feast, eid-ul-fitr, which has an important economic component.

Does any behavioural change, or psychological impact occur due to fasting?

As said earlier, Ramazan is not about non-consumption of food/water. It is an abstinence from all that is not desirable. Also, if you truly read the

Quran with its meaning and reflect upon its messages, if you go within and scan your life to make it better and to move it higher, there is very little scope for conflicts, fights, jealousy, anger, sadness, fear or any of the regular emotional responses. It is also a conscious decision to keep away from bad thoughts, actions and words. It is a conscious decision to control one's self more than controlling others. It is a conscious choice to turn away from hostility, fights and aggression. It is a conscious decision, not just to keep away from food but also from all material and physical pleasures so there is a diversion towards the deeper aspect of one's existence. Of course, it is a choice that one has to exercise, nothing is automatic. But provided we know and accept the deeper relevance of Ramazan.



Can you give an example from the hadis?

The Hadees of Anas as narrated by Khaled Abou Fadl on his YouTube channel narrates that fasting during Ramazan also is an opportunity to work on becoming better human beings. Allowing one's selves to get in the habit of doing away backbiting, slander, swearing untruthfully, giving lustful looks, lying, speaking ill of others, not using our words, our body, legs and hands to harm and injure others. It is an opportunity to seize the ethical framework of Islam and move towards being a virtuous self.

We should be a good person throughout the year and Ramzaan provides that intensive training to keep our divinity alive, to believe in goodness, to be just and fair to self and others and to keep away from bad intentions and actions.

Reference:

The Meaning of Fasting – Khaled Abou Fadl, YouTube





ROOH: SOUL IN ISLAM

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What is the common understanding of the soul in Islam?

Soul or rooh is the life within each one of us. It is what drives the entire existence of a human being. This rooh is put into the human body at the time of the creation of the child in the mother's womb. And at the time of death, this rooh is withdrawn from the body leaving it lifeless. Rooh is created by Allah, the body is created by Allah and what belongs to it, goes back to it at the time of death.

Islamic theologians' view of the soul?

Over the period of 1400 years, Islamic theologians have explained their understanding of human existence. They make a difference between the rooh, the nafs and the akl. Rooh is the soul, nafs is the human consciousness and the akl is the rational faculty. Rooh or the soul comes from Allah. God breathed life into the human being through this energy of rooh. The soul is from God. It comes from God and is dependent on God. This also implies that all human beings are divine. Divinity is recognized in all humanity. The soul is like the light that ignites the room and the room becomes

enlightened. So the human body is like the room and the soul is the light that lights up the room. Ghazali says the soul is like the light from God's beauty. Creation is dark and then Allah graces it with its divine light. All human beings are manifestations of this divine light.

How is the soul linked to the Nafs and Akl?

The soul is linked to akl and nafs. The soul is not affected by what happens to the akl and nafs. Its divine essence is never mitigated or harmed by what the mind and body go through.

What is Nafs?

Nafs is human consciousness which is embedded in the body and mind consciousness. It has three states as explained by Ghazali:

1. Nafs which is drawn to compromises and weakness, base self, gratify impulses
2. Conscientiousness – it is a higher state which interrogates you for your decisions and helps to strike a balance
3. Tranquillity – if this balance is achieved then, one is in a state of tranquillity





We are in a constant process of taking the nafs to that state where it can match the sublime essence of the soul

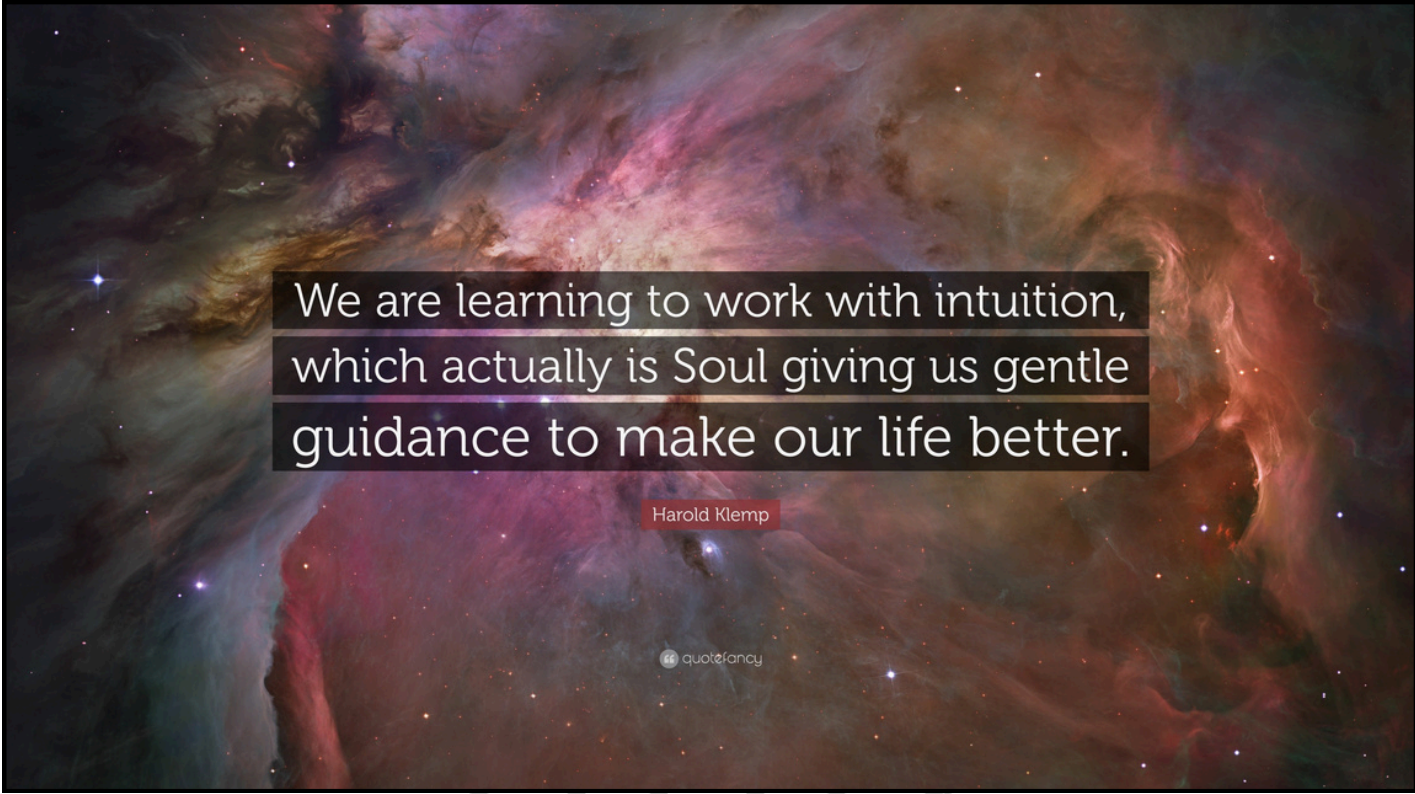
What would it mean to us as human beings in our daily lives?

As human beings, we are consumed by anger, sadness, guilt, and shame. We are at times aggressive, arrogant and ruthless. Other times we are lazy, depressed with no goal or purpose or no motivation to steer life forward. At other times we feel like victims, we feel and bear the injustices of life. This is what we struggle with every day. But through all this mess we also find solace and happiness, we allow ourselves to let go of so many issues. We turn to gratefulness; we see the positive and the better. We at times

take decisive actions, change life goals and somewhere strike a balance. When we strike this balance, we seem to have moved a little closer to our soul and its divinity.

It is easier said than done; how do we strike this balance?

Our rational faculty, akl helps us to do that. The rational faculty must be in control. We must operate out of an adult ego state which seeks and gives information, is logical and is not driven by strong emotions. Through all, we can train the nafs to be in harmony with the rooh. In other words, use the conscious mind and free will to bring the subconscious mind and body in harmony with the soul.



We are learning to work with intuition,
which actually is Soul giving us gentle
guidance to make our life better.

Harold Klemp

quoteancy

Can you give an example?

The soul is like the navigator constantly wanting you to move closer to itself, to be aware of your divine essence. The driver is like the akl which needs to constantly be in touch with its navigator and keep taking directions. The nafs is the vehicle which accordingly will move in that direction where the akl / driver takes based on the instructions of the navigator/soul.

How should this impact the human existence?

Once we are aware of our divinity which is everything good, beautiful, filled with love and compassion, we will train our mind to achieve that in our real life by being good to ourselves to start with. We need to first love ourselves, and see ourselves as a divine being. Loving one's self will lead to loving others.

Not just human beings but also all creation around us. Because they are all imbued with the same divinity. Are we contributing to our wellness and that of the wellness of others? Are we adding to the creation or adding to the destruction? These are the questions that we need to ask ourselves.

The Prophet's life did reflect all of it, right?

That is what his purpose was. To be able to convey through his words and deeds the true essence of who we are. Allah being the most beneficent and merciful is what our souls are, as they manifest that divinity. If Allah is beneficent and merciful, can we be anything else?

Reference:

Khaled Abou Fadl, Soul in Islamic Theology, YouTube



WOMEN LEADERSHIP: WOMEN SCHOLARS AND SAINTS OF EARLY ISLAM

If one were to go by the conservative narratives of Islam, it can be safely assumed that Muslim women are the most victimized. And that has been the biggest disservice to Islam by those who claim to represent 'true' Islam. When we dig into history with a feminist lens we find that we have a lot to feel happy and proud about. Given below are a few short narratives of women in early Islam who till date inspire us and give us hope that an alternative gender-just narrative is possible.

SAYIDA NAFISA

She was a descendent of Prophet Mohammed, a scholar and teacher

of Islam. She was the teacher of Imam Shafi who is the founder of the Shafi school of jurisprudence. She read his funeral prayers as willed by him. She had studied the Quran and studied Islamic jurisprudence in depth. She was extremely intelligent. She was an ascetic and went without food for days. Many miracles are attributed to her. Among the many titles given to her, some notable ones are 'Rare Woman of Knowledge', 'Leading Woman in Deriving Fatwas and Rulings'

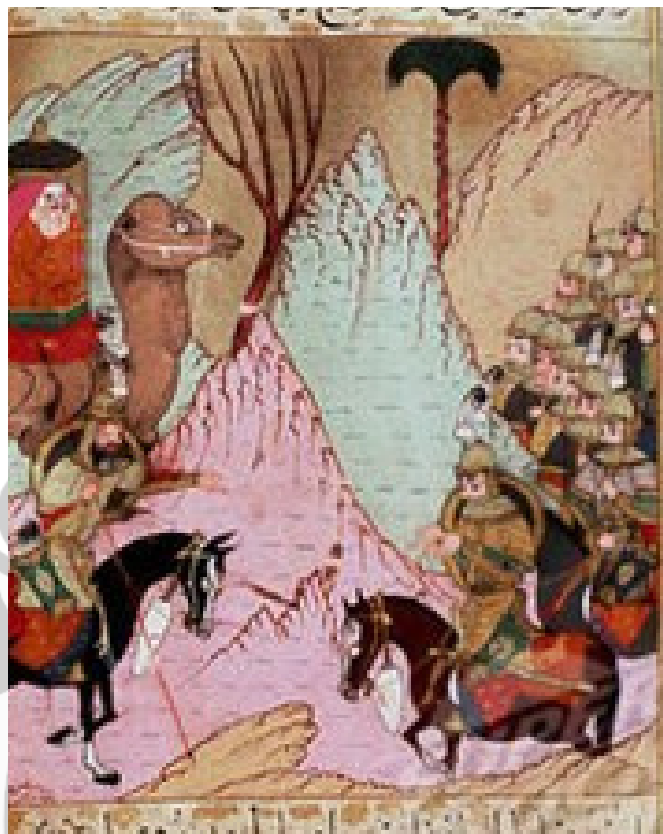
FATIMA FUDAYLIYA

She was an 18th-century scholar of hadis and a jurist. She was also an expert in usul, fiqh and Tafseer.

Many muhaddits (narrators of hadis) received certificates from her. She was also a calligrapher and founded a library in Mecca

FAKHRUNNISA SHUHDA ABU NASR

She was a 10th-century scholar, muhaddith (transmitter/interpreter of hadis) and calligrapher. She got the title of Shuhda Bagdadiya (Writer of Baghdad). She was so thorough that it was considered a mark of pride if one was allowed a session with her. She gave speeches on history, linguistics and literature. She was known for her erudition, calligraphic art and oratory. It is believed that thousands of students, dignitaries and scholars attended her funeral.



AL-SHIFA BINT ABDULLAH

Another women scholar in the 7th century!! She was a companion of Prophet Mohammed. She had the reputation of being a wise woman. She was called Shifa because she practised folk medicine. At that time barely 20 people knew to read and write and she was one of the first women to acquire that skill. She taught calligraphy. Prophet Mohammed and Caliph Umar are known to have consulted her on business matters and marketplace

SUGHRA AL DARDA

She was a 7th-century jurist and scholar in Damascus. She held classes and taught Islamic law and theology. She said, sitting and debating with scholars is the best way to worship Allah! She issued a fatwa allowing

women to pray in the same position as men. In Bahrain, a centre for teaching the Quran, hifz and tajwid for women is in her name.

BIBI HAJRA

Every year when we celebrate Eid uz Zuha let us remember Bibi Hajra. She was left in a deadly desert alone with an infant Ismail by her husband Ibrahim, on the command of God. She did not give up, wail or cry. She ran from one mountain to the other to call out to travelling caravans for water. This to-and-fro movement, safa-marwa, is what the world does today as they perform Haj. She was visited by angel Jibrael, leader of all angels, to help her discover Zamzam. She allowed a tribe to benefit from the water and that is how the city of Mecca came to being.



Hazrat Hajra, a strong, determined, positive woman, never to give up, who is responsible for Zamzam - an eternal water spring in a desert, for paving the way in setting up the city of Mecca, visited by millions every year and most important for being the initiator of a civilisation!

HAZRAT AISHA

For us Muslim feminists Hazrat Aisha is the ideal; intelligent and brave!! She was the holder of close to 1200 hadiths over which she was consulted by even the early male caliphs. Prophet Mohammed is known to have said, take half the knowledge about Islam from Aisha. She played a significant political role after his death. She even led a war. She accompanied the Prophet in military expeditions and engaged in pre-war negotiations!

UMME SALMA

We inherit our legacy to ask questions from Umme Salma, wife of Prophet Mohammed. Thanks to her, we have a verse in Quran which unequivocally establishes the equality of women and men. She asked the Prophet one day, why are men addressed in the Quran and not women? The revealed verse is 33:35, 'Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward'.



HAZRAT KHADIJA

All those who want women to stay at home, bear and rear children, and stay away from education and livelihood have a lot of explanation to do! How do they want us to view Hazrat Khadija? She, the wife of Prophet Mohammed, was a successful businesswoman, the first Muslim and the first to believe in the prophethood of Mohammed, proposed marriage to him when he was 25 and she 40. She spent her immense wealth to feed and support converts to Islam; very much a public figure.

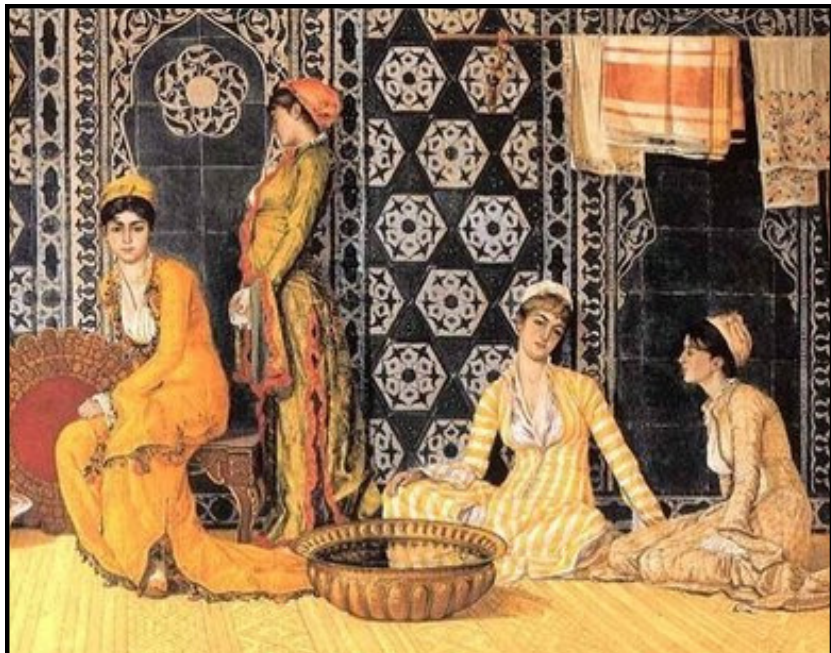
SUKAYNA

Why do we know so less about Sukayna-daughter of Rabab and Hussain, granddaughter of Fatima and Ali and great-granddaughter of Prophet Mohammed? She was known for her beauty-an explosive mixture of

physical attractiveness, critical intelligence and caustic wit. She made her husband sign a contract to remain monogamous and when he violated it, she took him to court. She stipulated in her marriage contract the right to disobey her husband.

VIEWS OF FATIMA MERNISSI

'Every woman who came to Medina when the Prophet was the political leader of the Muslims could gain access to full citizenship, the status of Sahabi, Companion of the Prophet. Muslims can take pride that in their language they have the feminine of that word, Sahabiyat, women who enjoyed the right to enter into councils of the Muslim umma, to speak freely to its Prophet-leader, to dispute with the men, to fight for their happiness and to be involved in the management of military and political affairs'



It cannot be that we demand democracy, equality, and justice in public life but not in the private sphere of the family. Nothing much has changed. In the early years of Islam, 'men were prepared to accept Islam as a revolution in relations in public life, an overturning of political and economic hierarchies, but they did not want Islam to change anything concerning relations between sexes. They were at ease with pre-Islamic traditions. The same holds today, we regale and we should about all the egalitarian principles but stop short of its application to gender relations, in the private and public sphere.

The access of women as citizens to education and paid work can be regarded as one of the most fundamental upheavals in our societies in the 20th century. By laying siege to the places considered until then the private preserve of men and the privilege of maleness in school and workplace- women opened everything up to question, in personal as well as in their public role'.

Reference

Fatima Mernissi, 'Women and Islam'

Padhai and Kamai, education and livelihood are two keys to the liberation of all women, especially Muslim women. Fatima Mernissi says in 'Women and Islam'-



WOMEN LEADERSHIP: INDIAN MUSLIM WOMEN SAINTS

The article first appeared as a full article in **Zariya-Women's Alliance for Dignity and Equality**. While the classical framework envisages man as the direct receiver of grace and knowledge from the Almighty and hence superior, she gives

How are we to look at the category of women saints in a country riddled with misogyny? a framework which supersedes and replaces that framework in consonance with the value of equality.

Yes, and narrowing down to Muslim women saints, it is even more established that women and men both are capable of receiving grace and knowledge from Allah, the universal power. Both are equipped with intelligence, insights and capacities to know and understand the transcendent. Women are no longer dependent on men to know their Creator.

Dr Amina Wadud gives a framework under which we can further explore this issue:

Aren't there many different ways to reach Allah/God?

Institutionalized religion has created structures, frameworks, rituals and prayers to establish a connection with the Creator. While a whole lot of us are comfortable with ritualistic and laid-down methods of aligning with God, many find that path very confining and narrow. Many do not wish to confine themselves to only one religious path.

prayers, they have not been able to escape the cruel hands of patriarchy.

How do we use the sacred texts to establish gender equality?

Dr Amina Wadud, also called the Lady Imaam, says in an interview to Caroline Suineer [www.ruskeattytot.fi],



For them, all paths lead to the same ultimate reality.

Sufi Islam seeks to align the soul with its origin/source through meditation and prolonged prayers which are more of an inward journey of the soul rather than a set of bodily movements or chants. Despite its esoteric and mystical orientation and its assertion of being closer to Allah through intense

‘As a Muslim, I use the Islamic sacred sources to talk about human beings as persons created by a Creator to be the khalifa of God on earth. The Khalifa is an agent, the one who fulfils the divine will and the divine will is to live in harmony with all of the creation and creator. So, both women and men are created to be moral agents on the earth.’



' It is the duty of women and men to do good and resist evil and spread the word of God which is to live in harmony with one another despite the diversity.

Having said that, should there be any doubt in anyone's mind that women are incapable of being deeply spiritual? But as we know, history has been written by patriarchs and all experiences of women, spiritual or otherwise have never been duly acknowledged.

What is the feminist perspective of gender equality in Islam?

Islam recognizes the equality of women and men at the very genesis as both having been created from a single-cell [4:1]

“O mankind! reverence your Guardian-Lord, who created you from a single nafs, created, of like nature, His mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women;- reverence God, through whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (That bore you): for God ever watches over you.”

This itself establishes the equality of status at the time of creation. Additionally, both are considered as protectors of each other ["They (your wives) are your garment and you are a garment for them" (Noble Quran 2:187)].



What is the status of shrines of women in India?

Chandan Gowda narrates in his article [3] that the city of Bangalore which has shrines of about two dozen Sufi saints, hardly knows its treasures. More regrettable is the lack of acknowledgement of women saints, since the 'official annals do not easily recognize women as Sufi saints. Indeed, the Sufi is usually imagined as a male saint'. In his own words, 'the leadership of the various Sufi orders, where disciples learnt the techniques of attaining the mystical experiences of the divine, tended to reside in men. When women did become, on a rare occasion, the head of a Sufi order, their powers were curtailed in various ways (for ex. they could teach but not initiate disciples, or, initiate only female disciples). The Bektashi order in Ottoman Turkey was the lone

exception: men and women had equal rights to spiritual apprenticeship and organizational leadership.

The Indian subcontinent is replete with shrines of women saints but nearly no records of their achievements exist, although they are known and revered locally. Gowda writes, 'in his major study, *Karnatakada Sufigalu* (The Sufis of Karnataka, 1998), Rahamat Tarikere, the literary critic, identifies several women Sufi saints in the state: Niyaamatbi of Gauribidanur; Zarinaabi of Kadur; Bibi Fatima of Gulbarga; Saiyadani of Ramadurga; Mustanima of Harapanahalli Bagur'. And this is only one state of the country.

Let us acknowledge the Muslim women saints:

Hazrat Makhdooma Maa Saheb in Kudchi, Karnataka is a revered Sufi saint. She is also referred to as our very own Rabiya Basri. She was a follower [murid] of Hazrat Shaikh Sirajjudin Junaidi Baghdadi. All saints and spiritual souls of the Deccan region have taken blessings from Maa Saheb. She is known as Shahzadi Balkh Makhdooma Hazrat Sayyeda Ma Saheba Ashrafe Do Jahaan RA. She is a revered saint of the Deccan region and is visited by all irrespective of their religion or denomination. She came from the Balkh region of Afghanistan but carried the soil of Baghdad. She was asked to choose a place in Indian soil which matched in weight with the soil from Baghdad. The soil of Kudchi matched with the soil from Baghdad. And hence she settled here.



There is very little information about her life. But interestingly half a dozen qawwali videos are done on her, eulogizing her as a mother, a patron of the poor and someone who fulfils the wishes of all those who visit her and ask for blessings. She was known for her anger for which she was also called Jalali. Hazrat Sirajuddin had to wash her heart 7 times to calm her down.

Whatever may be the actual history, the spiritual significance of Maa Hajiani cannot be undermined. The dargah itself is a site of three tombs, one of Maa and another of Haji Ismail Hasham Yusuf and his son Sir Mohammed Yusuf. The family, which was largely into shipping, trade and philanthropy built this dargah in 1908 in the memory of Maa.



And another woman saint from Mumbai city, Maa Hajiani

Another woman saint who generally is overshadowed by her brother is Maa Hajiani. Given the name it is assumed that she was the mother of Peer Haji Ali Shah Bukhari, but some accounts say that she was his sister. Both were travelling to Mecca from Uzbekistan, their home place. Their ship wrecked and they were found at the exact spots where their tombs were later

The dargah is managed by the Ismail Yusuf Trust. The plaque at the dargah reads,

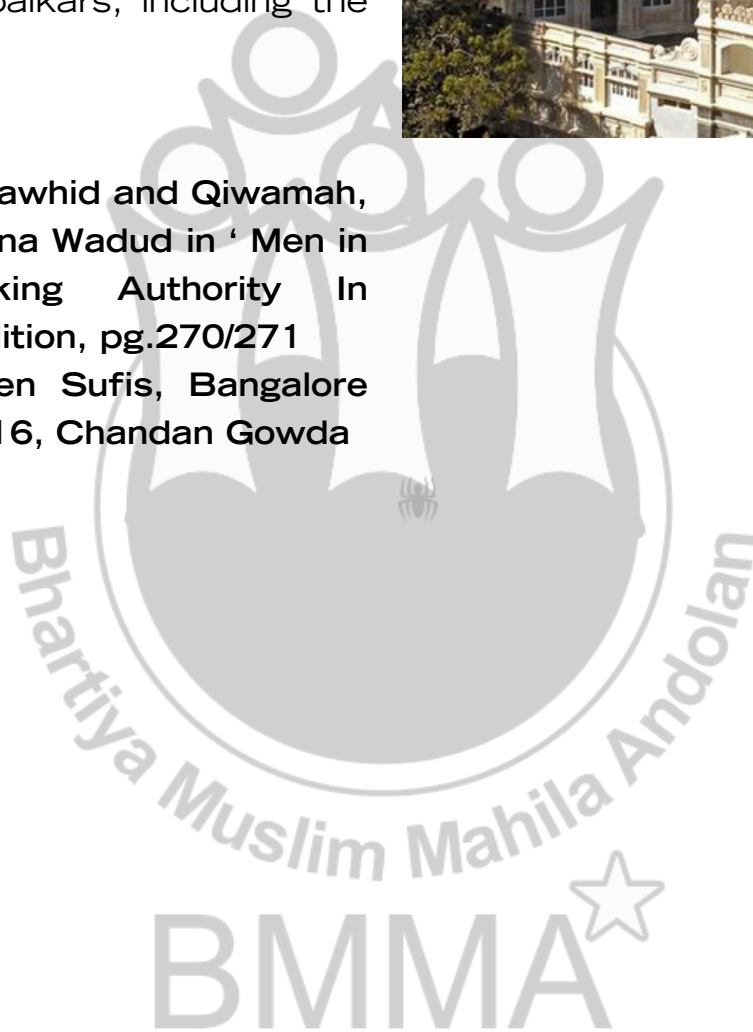
'This mausoleum was built on the grave of Saint Ma Hajiani in the year 1908 as a token of devotion and reverence to glorify her pious name and sacred memory by Haji Ismail Hasham Yusuf, ship owner and pioneer of Indian shipping who died on 20th September 1912 and was buried according to his last wishes in the west side of the grave in this tomb'.

There is not much known about the architects, and the artisans although the dargah was built just over a hundred years ago. Much less is known about the saint herself, her life, her contribution, and her piety. All said and done, this dargah is a haven of peace and tranquillity and forms an indelible part of the memories of scores of Indians and Mumbaikars, including the author.



Reference:

- 1 & 2. Ethics of Tawhid and Qiwwamah, Article by Dr. Amina Wadud in ' Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority In Muslim Legal Tradition, pg.270/271
3. Case of Women Sufis, Bangalore Mirror Bureau, 2016, Chandan Gowda



WOMEN LEADERSHIP: MUSLIM WOMEN AS MEDIATORS



Although the Muslim community does not have a comprehensive law and the poor state of implementation of all laws, how have Muslim women found a breakthrough?

Muslim women led by BMMA, Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan have done three important things:

1. It drafted its law, a comprehensive Muslim family law after a nationwide consultation spanning over 8 years. In the absence of a law, this draft shows the way to our volunteers who provide legal aid.

2. We have set up Aurton ki Shariat Adalats [Women's Shariah Courts] to provide legal aid to distressed women. Hundreds of cases get registered here. Our team of trained volunteers provide legal aid to women.

3. We set up the Darul Uloom-e-Niswaan, an organization that has trained 20 women who have become certified qazis.

We have created structures by which we can support the victim and help her get justice

Do these Adalats / individual qazis work as mediators?

Yes, the formally trained women qazis as well as other volunteers of the Aurton Ki Shariat Adalat are mediators who help the woman victim. They follow the draft law prepared by BMMA, they take the help of other NGOs, clerics and lawyers if need be. They do home visits, do joint family meetings, and engage with the police, community leaders and other stakeholders. Their work is very hands-on. They are very mobile. The volunteers visit the police station multiple times if required. If the husband does not come for a joint meeting, they visit his home as well. This helps in the quick resolution of the cases. They are also trained in feminist counselling processes by which they can emotionally support the victim. She is made aware of her rights within the Quran and also about the other laws which apply to her.

In this Qazi training, our trained Qazi is required to do joint meetings with the couple before the marriage. So all issues like mehr, conditions by either party, post-marriage residence of the couple, groom's income are to be discussed etc. The qazi must also ensure the free consent of both parties, especially the woman. She must ensure that they are of legal age of marriage, which is 18 and 21 years. She must ensure that this groom is not indulging in a polygamous marriage. A lot of that work is supposed to be done by the Qazi trained by us. So far we have had two opportunities to do that. But as we move ahead and as more and more women come forward to get married through a woman Qazi, she would be expected to do this work.

Are the Muslim women legal aid workers strictly mediators?





Are the Muslim women legal aid workers strictly mediators?

BMMA legal aid volunteers are based in the centres which are based in the communities. Women, victims, and volunteers come in and go out of the centre. Trainings and meetings happen here. Counselling and Adalat work also happens here. There is a thin line or no lines. She is a mediator and in a few minutes turns into a counsellor or even a therapist. Sometimes the victims need a shoulder to cry on and a patient hearing, in which case, she turns into her friend or sister. This support is given not just to the victim but also to her father, mother, brother and other members of her family who are equally traumatized. So, a community legal aid volunteer is all rolled into one. She does a lot of so-called pre-litigation work which is litigation work but out of the court. Her work helps those clients who would have otherwise burdened the already overburdened courts.

What values do these women mediators adhere to?

The Adalat volunteers and women qazis are trained to believe in the values of equality, justice, freedom, democracy, compassion and goodness, liberty and fraternity; values enshrined in the Quran and the Constitution. They also function on feminist principles which require that they hear out the woman without judging and support her in any way that she wants to be supported.

So what is mediation?

Without getting into a formal technical definition, mediation is an intervention by a third party to resolve issues between two people. Mediation is age-old. In earlier times, if a person had a problem, the family would be the first mediation group. Family even now continues to be the first mediator. Forums like Nyaya panchayats, gram panchayats, caste panchayats, and jamaats exist and exist even now. How



gender and caste-sensitive they are is Other than the formal courts, none of another story. But mediation has the other groups are formally trained in always been there. Today we have a these legal processes. Native wisdom, plethora of such forums. We have the intellect, basic common sense and a bit formal courts, mediation and of training and knowledge have helped arbitration groups, counseling centres non-formal mediators to emerge. within courts, NGOs, community and caste groups, women's organizations etc.

Why did such forums emerge, what ails our justice systems?

We have three aspects of governance; the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. All three are important for justice to become accessible to all citizens. Having good legislation is important. Its implementation is equally important and if there are disputes then the dispute resolution systems like the police and the courts must also function optimally.

Largely our laws are good. They are made in the Parliament after a lengthy and healthy debate, there are Parliamentary committees that sit on it and after much deliberation, they come up with a law. And there is also a possibility of amendments to these laws as society evolves and time goes by.



But when it comes to its implementation, the systems are very poorly managed. When a certain legislation is in place and if one has to access it, the first place that a person goes to is the police station and it is no secret how our police stations work. They are not just not friendly for women. They are not friendly for anybody. Complaints are not written down, FIRs not taken etc. To sum up, the implementation and execution of these legislations is extremely poor. And this becomes one of the main reasons for non-formal justice delivery systems to emerge.

Is there any synergy between these groups who do mediation?

That is where the challenge is and that should be the future thrust. How can we make such seemingly disparate groups to work with each other to help the victim?



The victim may go to the court, to an arbitrator, to an NGO or a Qazi, wherever she goes, how do we join hands with each other to help her?

Justice is a basic right mentioned in 39A of the Indian Constitution. The poorest of the poor must be able to access justice. But for this to become a reality, a synergistic approach is needed. We are working in our silos, in isolation. The lawyers do not feel the need to reach out to community-based groups and the religious groups want to work in isolation, cut off from formal processes. Can we develop a synergistic system where the cleric, the lawyer and legal aid workers, work together?

It requires a shedding of egos, acceptance and understanding of each other. We will need to develop a system which is institutionalized and where all the above work in tandem with each other, building on each other's strengths and work for the victim. Can we all be working as complimentary systems in the larger scheme of helping the most vulnerable get justice?



About Ashana Trust

ASHANA TRUST

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S INITIATIVES FOR JUSTICE, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND

Over the last many decades, women have come forward and have staked claim over their rights. However, factors like religion, caste, class, and ethnicity continue to play a determining role in enhancing the status of women. Hence we see a large section of women especially of the minority and other marginalized communities, still struggling to live a dignified life

VISION

The Ashana Trust while it envisions a society where all women irrespective of their station in society are free from fear and want, it specifically wants to focus on creating an enabling environment for Muslim and other marginalized women, where they can exercise their rights as ensured in the constitution of the country as well as strive for equal rights and justice within the community.

MISSION

The mission of Ashana Trust is to enable the social, economic, educational, legal and political empowerment of marginalised women. To also advocate for policy changes on issues concerning women, specifically related to family law, entitlements and various state initiatives. The strategy to achieve the said objectives is training, capacity building, leadership development, campaigning and advocacy initiatives.

OBJECTIVES

- To work for the social, economic, educational, legal and political empowerment of women.
- To advocate for policy changes on issues concerning women



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