



# WOMEN, ISLAM AND MODERNITY

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis, based on written works, is concerned with the themes of women, religion and modernity in the Middle East. Modernity, which refers to modes of social life which emerged in Europe and became influential world-wide, is being challenged by the Islamic revival. This movement, particularly, in its cultural and social aspects involves a rejection of modernist tendencies. Evidently, the topic of women is central to the antagonism between modernity and revived Islam, where the basic Islamic formulations concerning the family are re-emphasized. Part of the aim of this study is to focus on the problematic relation between Muslim women and modern ideas and practices and to understand the background of the current phenomenon of the "return" of women to Islam. As the position of Muslim women is primarily derived from the holy texts and as other related issues, e. g. sexual morality, are intimately connected with Islamic ideology, the study starts with an exploration of the religious sources. History of Muslim women's modernization is pursued and an attempt is made to place it within a wider context and to search for links between the issue of women and the overall idea of modernization which is raised by modernized groups who have attempted to accommodate Islam with modernity with the arrival of capitalism and colonial domination. The topic of women and modern nation state is also touched upon, focusing on the struggle between the modernized ruling elites and the Islamic forces in an attempt to manipulate the question of women. The final part is an attempt to understand the Muslim revivalist conflict with modernity with regard to women and the family, as expressed in their popular literature, which excoriates modern society and displays obsessive concern at the change in their position, thus revealing their agenda for women's roles in contemporary societies, an agenda which is very much contrary to what modernity is all about.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	2
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	3
<b>PART I - Women and Islam</b>	
An Historical and Theological Perspective .....	5
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
Women in the Jahiliyyah.....	12
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
Islam and Sexuality .....	20
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
The Veil (Hijab).....	27
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
Marriage and the Family .....	38
<b>PART II - The Impact of Modernity on Muslim women</b> .....	47
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	
Encountering the West: The Breakdown of the Harem.....	58
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	
Muslim States and Women's Modernization .....	82
<b>PART III - Women and the Islamic Revival</b>	
An Anthropological Inquiry into the Popular Arabic Literature of Muslim Revivalists.....	113
<b>Chapter 7</b>	
Islamic Revival and Modernity: Creation of an Image.....	114
<b>Chapter 8</b>	
The Model of the Western Woman: The Rejected Example.....	122
<b>Chapter 9</b>	
Re-Islamized Womanhood: Re-veiling.....	135
<b>Chapter 10</b>	
Women's Sphere .....	151
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	162
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	167

# PART I

## WOMEN AND ISLAM

### An Historical and Theological Perspective

At the centre of any discussion about Muslim women is the researcher's basic task to undertake an enquiry into the Islamic holy texts and into the historical context in which they were revealed and practised by what is now regarded as the sacred Muslim community of early Islam or the 'righteous ancestors'. Today, as it has been in all ages since the advent of Islam, the position of Muslim women primarily stems from the Quran and hadiths. For the practising Muslims, the Quran and hadiths lay down the model that God has chosen for His *ummah* (community) and this choice is not open to change. The Quran is (*kalam Allah*) the sacred word of Allah, that constitutes the absolute model and the pure idea. The hadiths are guides for ideal behaviour, for they report Muhammed's comments and his everyday life and that of the early community. In Islam, the basic responsibility of the living Muslim community is to restore the stereotyped forms of behaviour advocated by the holy texts in their original purity. Doing so means that the ummah is following the straight path of God; departure from the ideal set of rules is tantamount to straying into error.

While the Quran was written at the time of Muhammed and became a closed book after his death, the hadiths were compiled at later periods and are contained in numerous collections, most notable among them are the books of Al-Bukhari (d.870), Muslim (d.875), Al-Tirmithi (d.892), Abu Da'ud (d.889), Ibn Majah (d.896) and Al-Nasa'i (d.915).

Muhammed's prophecy came to oppose the dominant religious and social systems in Arabia, or what is called in the classic sources *jahiliyyah*. The orientalist Goldziher has remarked that jahiliyyah means 'time of barbaric customs' because Muhammed wanted to contrast Islam with barbarism

(1967:202). Thus, in Islamic thinking Islam came as the light of the dawn after the darkness of the jahiliyyah. To modern scholars the pre-Islamic period is marked by a situation of change which was brought about by commercial development (E.R. Wolf, 1951:329). In the 6th century, Mecca, the native city of Muhammed and the religious center for pagan Arabs as it contained their sacred (*haram*) place, the Ka'ba, was expanding commercially and became the leading trading centre. The town was controlled by the Quraysh tribe, the tribe of Muhammed. Eickelman points out that with the development of a commercial system, the social structure of Mecca altered.

Tension seems to have arisen between traditional tribal obligations based upon kinlike egalitarian principles and the consequences of the unequal distribution of commercial wealth. By the early seventh century there were signs of a growing class differentiation with wealth concentrated into a few hands to the exclusion of the poorer clans in Mecca. Certain clans within the Quraysh monopolised the benefits of trade. An oligarchy emerged with the more powerful clans using mercenaries to enhance their position (Eickelman,1988:254)

Islam began when Muhammed started to challenge the existing religious and social patterns in Mecca. He claimed to be a messenger of God and called for the end of paganism and the general decadence of jahiliyyah, and the restoration of the pristine monotheism of Abraham, who was regarded as the father of the Muslims. As the Meccan Quranic verses demonstrate, the bases of Meccans' wealth and the injustice the weaker parts of society suffered were strongly criticised. While the followers of Muhammed were individuals from weaker families and clans and slaves, the powerful Meccans rejected his religion. The Quraysh tribe refused Muhammed's new religion for political and economic reasons. They were afraid of the effects that his preaching might have on their economic prosperity, and especially that his pure monotheism might injure the economic assets of their sanctuaries (Gibb, 1989:18). But Muhammed succeeded in acquiring the support of the leading tribes of Medina, a settlement to the north of Mecca. When the struggle between Muhammed and the leading



clans of Quraysh reached a violent stage and his life was threatened, he migrated to Medina with his seventy devoted adherents. An alliance was immediately contracted between the emigrant Meccans, the (*muhajrin*) and the Arab tribes of Medina, the (*ansar*), under the leadership of Muhammed. The historic significance of the event of emigration (*hijrah*) was that Islam was able to find at Medina the opportunity and appropriate circumstances to translate the theory of Islam into a social practice and eventually to establish an independent Muslim community with distinct social, legal, cultural, economic and political institutions. This occurred under the divine authority represented in the Quran, the word of God, and the example of Muhammed.

With the formation of the ummah, a new social reality emerged. At the time of Muhammed the predominant social and political organisation of the Arabs was the tribe, with kinship as the dominant rule in social relations. The ummah was based on religious brotherhood and not kinship (Watt, 1956: 239). In the Quran it is stated:

Take fast hold, all together, of the rope of Allah, and not be divided. Call to mind the favour of Allah which He bestowed upon you when you were at enmity with each other and He united your hearts in love so that by His grace you became as brethren (Q.3:103).

So it was faith, not blood or fame that determined the membership of the ummah: it was this egalitarian dimension of the new religion which attracted newcomers to the religion of Islam. The Quran also states that the Muslim ummah, compared to other religious communities, is justly balanced and has been given the universal mission to be the guardian over other nations:

By guiding you along the right path have We made you an exalted people that you may be guardians over mankind (Q.2:142).

In another Quranic verse the ummah is supreme:

Ye are the best people for you have been raised for the benefit of mankind; you enjoin good, forbid evil and believe in Allah (Q.3:110).

The ummah is capable of leading because it conforms to the divine law. Given that the meaning of Islam is submission to Allah, who is absolute and perfect and has complete power, the idea of obeying the divine law stands at the foundation of the responsibility of the ummah.

It is not open to a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decided a matter, to exercise their own choice in deciding it. Whoso disobeys Allah and His Messenger, falls into open error (Q.33:36).

Given that the Quran does not include matters concerned with beliefs and rituals alone and that the scope of Quranic concerns reflects the comprehensiveness of Islam through the inclusion of social rules concerning modesty, marriage, adultery, divorce, inheritance, feuding, intoxicants, gambling, diet, theft, murder and fornication, etc., to early Muslims, obedience to Allah meant strictly following the rules ordered by Allah to create and make the sort of community He chose for them as His best people.

On the other hand, the superiority of the ummah was enhanced by the conception that the mission of Muhammed was the end of the cycle of divine revelations that had dominated human history. It is part of the Islamic faith that Muhammed's prophethood is the most complete and perfect in comparison to all previous ones. The question to be raised here concerns the relationship with other religious groups, particularly Christians and Jews, especially when Islam claimed to be completing the messages of Moses and Jesus Christ and to be the real heir of Abraham's religion. The relationship between the Muslim ummah and the People of the Book is divided by historians into two stages: in the first stage the ummah had a good relationship with the Jewish tribes of Medina. Muslims adopted some Jewish practices such as the *ashura*, the fast on the tenth day of the first month (corresponding to the Day of Atonement), the institution of a midday prayer, and facing towards Jerusalem during prayer (Gibb, 1989:30). Moreover, some of the social laws in Islam are seen by some Western scholars to be strongly influenced by Judeo-Christian traditions. Levy,

for example, regards the treatment of marriage as designed to bring Islamic practice into line with what held in Judaism and Christianity (Levy,1933:144).

The second stage is reflected in the Quran, where there are many verses addressing the Jews and inviting them to become Muslims. The Jews apparently refused to accept Muhammed's prophethood. Further, they attempted to assassinate him and allied politically with the Meccans. Consequently, the Quran started to attack the Jews bitterly, claiming that they were the people who wanted to divert Muslims from their religion. The Quran also attacks them for altering the words of God and for practising usury. The ummah was ordered by God not to follow Jewish practices, and a verse descended ordering Muslims to face the Ka'ba instead of Jerusalem (Q.2:143).

As regards Christians, the Arabs did not have a positive view of Christianity, given that it was the religion of the Abyssinians and the Byzantines, foreign forces whose influences they resisted. The relationship with Christians started as a friendly one and deteriorated finally when Muslims tried to spread their religion to the Christian territories north of Arabia. The Quran reflects the antagonism, stating the rejection of Islam for the doctrine of Christian divinity, the finality of Christian revelation, and the authority of the Church.

As a result of these developments, the ummah separated itself more and more from the People of the Book's influence. The Quran states that the followers of Muhammed are neither Jews or Christians, and associates Muhammed's prophethood with Abraham, who was regarded with his son Ismael (father of the Arabs) as the founder of Mecca's sanctuary, the Ka'ba.

This very short illustration of the sacred history of Islam and of the identity of the ummah is necessary for the task of examining women's position in Islam. Women were an important part of this sacred history. The great Khadijah, the first wife of the Prophet, played a very significant role in the early years of Muhammed's mission. As Muslim historians have pointed out, she was the loving and wise woman who offered Muhammed advice, reassurance and strength and announced to him that he had been chosen as a prophet. The first

revelations Muhammed received caused him great emotional crisis. He rushed to Khadijah seeking assurance and advice. 'Cover me! Cover me!', he said to her. She covered him and explained to him that what had happened to him was the sign of prophecy. 'Who will believe in me?' 'You can request me before the others, for I believe in you' (Al-Tabari, A. H. 1329, vol.28:90). Thus, Khadijah was Islam's first adherent. She advised Muhammed and assisted him financially during the difficult time of the early years in Mecca.

Furthermore, one has to point out that the first martyr in Islam was also a woman; Sumiah died in Mecca under torture. Moreover, when Muhammed migrated to Medina there were women who took the decision to follow him and to join the Muslim community in Medina, leaving their families behind. They were accepted as full members of the ummah. Along with men, women's delegations were received by the Prophet to swear the oath of allegiance in order to become members of the ummah. They participated fully in all the battles in defence of Islam. A woman fighter saved the life of the Prophet in the battle of Uhod. The women were so important that a question posed by a woman about women's position in the ummah was to be answered by the Quran. Umm Salama asked Muhammed why the Quran did not address women as it did with regard to men. 'One afternoon when I was combing my hair I was surprised to hear the Prophet's voice in the mosque...I ran to a room from where I could hear better..I heard him reciting (Ibn Kathir, 1966, vol.5:459):

For men who submit themselves wholly to Allah, and women who submit themselves wholly to Him, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who are obedient and women who are obedient, and men who are truthful and women who are truthful, and men who are steadfast and women who are steadfast, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their chastity and women who guard their chastity, and men who remember Allah much and women who remember Him, Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward (Q.33:36).

God responded to Umm Salama's wish and the above Quranic passage declares the equality of the sexes as believers; like men they deserve Allah's vast rewards. The examples of Islam's recognition of the female sex are many and so are women's contribution in the making of the success of Islam. Despite some misogynic statements that were attributed to Muhammed in the religious heritage (for example, the saying that the major part of hell is made up of women), he had great respect and love for women. His famous statements about women are typical of his attitude towards womanhood. 'It has been given to me to love three things in your base world: women, perfume and prayer, but the apple of my eye is prayer' (Nasai). When he was asked about his most beloved person, his answer was to mention the name of his wife Aishah. Regarding her he asked the ummah after him: 'Take half your religion from this fair-skinned woman' (Nasa'i). Islamic sources tell us that if women embraced Islam and were close companions of the Prophet, this was because Islam made considerable improvements to their position. The background of the jahiliyyah is very crucial in the Islamic conception of the definition of the place of women in Islam. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 1

### Women in the Jahiliyyah

The time of the jahiliyyah is very important to Islamic thinking with regard to the position of women, as old Islamic sources (and contemporary ones) tend to compare their position in Islam with that of the jahiliyyah period. What is known about women in the pre-Islamic period is recorded in classic Arabic poetry and in other ancient literary forms of expression, such as narratives, which were recorded in the Islamic era. Principally, however, considerable data exists in the Quran and the hadiths. By means of the Quranic social and legal laws regarding women and the family, one can conclude the former absence of any legal status for women and their vulnerable social situation. The Quran describes the agony of the Arab fathers upon the birth of a baby girl (Q.16:59). Three other passages (81, 17, 6) record the practice of the infanticide of female children. The Quran condemns the cruelty of Arab fathers who buried alive their young daughters for fear of poverty and out of concern for the pollution of their honour. The killing of baby girls became not only a sign of barbarity and ill-judgement, as the Quran demonstrates, but a crime against God Himself. From the verses that are concerned with the reformation of women's circumstances in marriage we learn that women were sold into marriage by their *wali* (guardians) for *mahr*, an amount of money paid to the wali by the suitor. Women were, thereby, purchased and made the husband's exclusive property. When the husband died the widow became part of the inheritance. The dead person's son, taking advantage of the privileges of the mahr paid by the dead person, claimed the widow and he either married her or passed his rights over her to other relatives who could then marry her in his place (Q.4:19, 22). Islamic legislation not only put an end to the practice of women being inherited, but women as daughters, mothers and wives were given the right to inherit. 'Unto the men (of a family) belongeth a share of that which parents and near kindred

leave, and unto the women a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be little or much, a legal share' (Q.4:35). So women were entitled to have succession rights and to share with men in their fortunes, in addition to the right to hold and manage their own property, including the mahr which became their property and not that of the father or the husband. With regard to marriage, the consent of the woman was a precondition for the validity of marriage. Therefore, marriage became a contract between husband and wife, whereas in pre-Islamic times it was a contract between husband and guardian, with the wife as the sale-object. Concerning the termination of marriage, in the jahiliyyah period it was entirely up to the husband, who, having purchased his wife, could get rid of her at will by pronouncement of the formula of dismissal (Levy, 1933: 172). In Islam, the husband's power to terminate the marriage bond immediately and at will is restricted by the introduction of (*idda*) a three months' waiting period and a fixed financial compensation. Further, the Islamic sources affirm that there was no limit to the number of wives a man could have. Islam limited the numbers of wives that a husband could be married to at a time to four (Q.4:3).

By emphasizing the degrading situation of women in the jahiliyyah period, the traditional Islamic sources present Islam as a compelling force of emancipation that radically modified the tribal customs of jahiliyyah by the introduction of concrete Quranic provisions in the interest of women. Islam is claimed to have elevated the position of women from that of a chattel to an independent individual and member of the ummah with inalienable rights and duties that are written in the Quran. In the hadith, Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, the powerful companion of the Prophet who became the second caliph, is reported to have said about the attitude of Arab men towards women: 'By God, we used not to pay attention to women in jahiliyyah until God said about them in the Quran what is said, and gave them their share in matters (Bukhari). Medina witnessed a contest between Muslims and neighbouring Jewish tribes who were reported by Islamic sources to have practised the isolation of menstruous

women: it was narrated by Anas Ibn Malek: 'The Jewish men did not eat nor socialize with their menstruating women. The Prophet was asked by his companions to give his view. He said:'Do everything with your women except for the sexual intercourse'. When the Jews heard about what the Prophet said they commented: This man likes to oppose us in everything' (Nasa'i). The concept of the impurity of women and the idea of the opposition of the sexes on the basis of impurity is absent in the Islamic holy texts. The Islamic concept of pollution is not gendered, in that it involves the body's functions of elimination and excretion. Hence, what emerges from the human body in the form of gas, urine, faecal matter, menstrual blood, sperm, blood and pus cause men and women to lose their original purity and become unable to perform the rituals of worship, unless carrying out the process of *taharah* (purificatory) rituals.

Moreover, in contrast to the idea held by 'the people of the Book', the Quran presents a different picture of Eve: a woman who did not tempt Adam to eat from the forbidden tree. In the Old and the New Testaments, Eve is the temptress and seductress of Adam. She holds responsibility for their expulsion from Paradise. God cursed her for her transgression. The people of the Book read in their holy scriptures: 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee (Genesis 3:16, quoted by Stowasser, 1984). St Paul states:'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety (The First Epistle to Timothy, chapter 2, quoted by Stowasser, 1984). The Quranic version of the question of transgression and consequent expulsion from Paradise is told in chapter 7 of the Quran:

Allah said to Adam: Dwell thou and thy wife in the garden and eat therefrom wherever you wish, but approach not this one tree lest you become wrongdoers. But Satan tempted them so that he



might make known to them that which was hidden from them of their nakedness, and said to them: Your Lord has forbidden you this tree only lest you should become angels or should live for ever. He assured them with oaths: Surely, I am your sincere counsellor. Thus he brought about their fall by deceit. when they tasted of the tree their nakedness became manifest to them and they started covering themselves with the leaves of the garden. Their Lord called out to them: Did I not forbid you that tree and say to you: Satan is surely your declared enemy? They pleaded: Our Lord we have wronged ourselves, and if Thou forgive us not and have not mercy on us, we shall surely be of the lost. Allah said: Go forth, some of you will be enemies of others.

The myth as narrated in the above verses does not portray Eve as the temptress and seductress of Adam. In the Quran Adam's female partner, like Adam himself, is generally portrayed as the victim of Satanic wiles, and like him, shares fully in the consequences of her own submission to temptation (Jane Smith, 1982:135). Moreover, all three Quranic passages which narrate the myth state that Adam and Eve were created from a single soul. The Quran does not indicate any problem or defect with the original mother of humanity in terms of her physical or mental nature. However, with regard to the hadith and traditional religious books, Smith demonstrates that the image of Eve is reversed and she appears responsible for the fall and thus divinely punished by menstruation and pregnancy.

The Quranic provisions concerning women's moral conduct, in particular, with regard to chastity and purity, played a significant role in the overall argument about Islam's elevation of the position of women over that of the jahiliyyah period. There is a firm conception that Islam (*karram al-mar'ah*) conferred honour and high rank upon women, by terminating the practices of jahiliyyah in which femininity was abused and exploited for immoral ends. In the Quran, the jahiliyyah is characterized by moral anarchy, to which women were closely connected: women's beauty was used for display (Q.33:33), some women practiced unlawful sexual relations, and they were forced to engage in prostitution (Q.4:33). Aishah, the knowledgeable wife of the Prophet, is reported

in all hadith collections as saying the following about forms of promiscuity in jahiliyyah:

The first of these sexual unions is like the marriage of today, where a man betroths his ward or his daughter to another man, and the latter assigns a bridewealth to her and then marries her. Another type was where a man said to his wife when she was purified from her menses, send to N. and ask to have intercourse with him; her husband then stays away from her and does not touch her at all until it is clear that she is pregnant from that (other) man with whom she sought intercourse. When it is clear that she is pregnant, her husband has intercourse with her if he wants. He acts thus simply from the desire for a noble child. This type of marriage was (known as) *nikah al-istibda'*, the marriage of seeking intercourse. Another type was where a group (raht) of less than ten used to visit the same woman and all of them to have intercourse with her. If she became pregnant and bore a child, when some nights had passed after the birth she sent for them, and not a man of them might refuse. When they had come together in her presence, she would say to them, 'You (pl.) know the result of your acts; I have borne a child and he is your (sing.) child, N.' - naming whoever she will by his name. Her child is attached to him, and the man may not refuse. The fourth type is where many men frequent a woman, and she does not keep herself from any who comes to her. These women are the *baghaya* (prostitutes). They used to set up at their doors banners forming a sign. Whoever wanted them went in to them. If one of them conceived and bore a child, they gathered together to her and summoned the physiognomists. Then they attached her child to the man whom they thought (the father), and the child remained attached to him and was called his son, no objection to this course being possible. When Muhammad God bless and preserve him came preaching the truth, he destroyed all the types of marriage of the jahiliyyah except that which people practise today (Bukhari).

So, in contrast to the irregular morality of jahiliyyah, ideal womanhood in Islam is connected with chastity, fidelity and virtue: Muslim women became the embodiment of the morality of the community as their honour was enhanced by putting an end to immoral sexual practices and by enacting laws fortifying

marriage and motherhood, and also the rules of modesty that were concerned with coverage, and with women's movement in the public space. The general picture that is to be concluded from the Islamic sources is that Islam rescued women from the abyss of jahiliyyah.

It is worth noting that the period of jahiliyyah which is described in the Islamic sources as a time of total anarchy is represented in modern academic literature as a period of radical and profound transformation in the kinship systems. One of the earliest anthropological analyses of the kinship and marriage system in Arabia (and of anywhere in the world) is given in the work of the British anthropologist W. Robertson Smith, first published in 1855. Smith's book is an ideal example of the dominant trend in the discipline of social anthropology in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time Darwinism had a strong impact on the social sciences. Human societies were thought to resemble biology in terms of the laws of evolution. Robertson Smith adhered to the evolutionism of his time, where it was supposed that matriliney preceded patriliney. Therefore, an attempt is made in the book to reconstruct a matriarchal past in Arabia where the sixth and seventh centuries are considered to be a transitional period with two kinds of kinship system. This was done on the basis of what was recorded of the jahiliyyah's poetry and what was written by early Muslim scholars.

The matrilineal model of the jahiliyyah constructed by Robertson Smith supposed an overall picture of the dominance of the mother's group as the source of the alignment of individuals. The evidence advanced is that many famous Arab tribes and individuals were known as sons of females. Property was held communally by the matrilineal group and was controlled by the women's uterine brothers or her mother's brothers. The marriage was uxorilocal and husbands visited wives. In his view, in the period of the sixth and seventh centuries there existed two kinds of marriage system conflicting with each other: a matrilineal marriage which the Arabs used to call *sadic* marriage and a patrilineal marriage which was called *ba'al*, or dominion marriage. In *sadica*

marriage the children belong to the woman's tribe and woman retained the right to dismiss the husband. The ba'al marriage was characterised by the attribution of the offspring to the father and by the husband being the 'lord' of the wife.

Robertson Smith's theory of the matriarchal past has been influential. Several works dealing with the position of women in Islam are shaped by the notion of Arabia's matriarchal past and of the transformation supposed to have taken place towards patriarchy one century before Islam. This is represented in one degree or another, for example, in the work of J. Smith (1985); B. Stowasser (1984); N. Minai (1981); R. Austin (1983); F. Mernissi (1985); N. El-Sadawi (1982) and Montgomery Watt (1956). Watt, for example, searched for matrilineal features in the society of Medina and Mecca that still existed in the time of Muhammed. He lists names of individuals and clans who took names of women and considers the recognition by Islam of the milk-relationship and the extension of the principle that the milk relationship is on the same level as blood relationships may be regarded as a concession to matrilineal groups in Medina in return for the prominence given to paternity and patrilineal descent (p. 280). As regards the marriage system, the hadith narrated by Aishah is examined in search of support for the theory. Watt analyses the third and second classifications as being uxori-local. The fourth type is seen as a loose polyandry. Al-Mernissi emphasizes Islam's protection of paternity: for her, Islam as a patriarchal system imposes on divorced and widowed women the system of the waiting period before getting married again, in order to ensure the physical paternity. Hence, for Al-Mernissi, female dominance in the jahiliyyah was replaced by male dominance through polygyny, repudiation and the prohibition of sexual relations outside marriage (1985). R. Austin, in his turn, maintains that the dominant or divine Feminine features quite prominently in the pre-Islamic past of Arabia in general, and of Mecca and the Ka'ba in particular. The Ka'ba, which is associated in Islam with God and Abraham and hence became a patriarchal site, was a polytheistic pantheon prominent in which were the Triple Goddesses worshipped by pagan Arabs. 'Islam fulfils the patriarchal mission in

removing all trace from its own community of the connection between woman and the Divine' (1983:41). Austin emphasizes that the positive attitude of Islam towards women in terms of the spiritual equality and privileges and rights not enjoyed by Christian women until the 19th century is inspired by an archetype of ideal womanhood, in particular the maternal aspect. The other side of the coin, he argues, is embodied in the Quranic condemnation of the promiscuous woman who defies patriarchal controls. 'This type of freedom constitutes, potentially, a grave threat to the very principles upon which patriarchal religious tradition is based, so that it cannot be tolerated and must be severely punished' (1983:43). In this context, several scholars connect important Islamic concepts with the matriarchal past. Most important of these relics is the *ummah*. The root of the term is *umm* (mother). In addition, the term for kinship in the Quran is *rahim*, which properly means womb. In general, then, Islam is seen to accelerate the passage from the matriarchal age and to represent the ideology of the patriarchal system.

One has to point out that the assumptions regarding pre-Islamic matriarchal past contain, of course, a fundamental weakness as they were primarily founded on guess-work. There is no reason to infer that the Arabs reckoned descent in the female line before they reckoned it in the male line as R. Smith supposed. The indications which are presented as evidences of the shift from matriliney to patriliney are in many ways consistent with agnatic systems observed today. For example, it is not rare amongst present Arab tribes to take female names. In addition, as the anthropological observations show, there is no correlation between the matriliney and women's high status and also no correlations between women's sexual freedom and their being goddesses and social, economic and political power.

## CHAPTER 2

### Islam and Sexuality

Islam presents itself as a religion of *fitrah*, i.e. a religion which conforms with nature and, in particular, with inherent human instincts and desires. It recognizes that the human being is a being with desires and that these desires should not be suppressed, but are to be used for the right purpose. So, Islam deals with the person as (*insan fitri*) natural human being, or what Sayed Hossein Nasr calls 'man as such' (1990:50). In the Quran, sexuality occupies a central place. The work of the flesh is not only encouraged and has divine blessing, but it is the sign of the divine miracle where the creation of "everything in a double form" is one of God's signs (*ayah*), through which He may be recognized. Regarding the sexual relationship of the couple, the Quran states: "They are a vestment of you, and you a vestment of them...So lie with them, and seek what God has prescribed for you" (Q.2:186). This verse is interpreted by commentators as a positive statement that implies a relation both of complementarity and mutual pleasure. Moreover, although the union of the sexes is essential for the reproduction of the ummah and for multiplying its existence ("couple and multiply", the Prophet has said), the exercise of sexuality for the purpose of pleasure is emphasized in Islam because it "has a purificatory power". The Muslim sociologist Abdelwahab Bouhdiba argues:

Biology occupies a special place in the Quran. This is because man is a being of desire and because the lightning flash of desire transposes the body and reposes the spirit. Hence the radical rejection of every form of asceticism. Contempt for the body is ultimately contempt for the spirit. Islam is first of all a naturalism and Islamic spirituality is full naturalness (1985:12).

In contrast to the Christian tradition which tends to degrade sexuality and to contrast the spirit and the flesh, Islam regards the satisfaction of this drive as necessary for the soul and the intellect. Therefore, for Al-Ghazali (d. 505 A.H), one of the greatest religious authorities in Islam, the preparation of the spirit to

serve and obey God becomes easier through the enjoyment of a certain amount of physical pleasure which gives it strength to carry out its duty (1913).

The Islamic image of paradise represents a good example of the integration of the sexual with the sacral. Paradise and the hereafter in general occupy a central place in the Islamic faith. Compared with the hereafter, this life is a temporary testing period in the life of the believer. So, overcoming the trials of this life and joining the people of paradise is the ultimate goal for the believer. Paradise is the place where the believer may satisfy his desires. The Quran states:

Therein you will have all that you desire, and therein you will have all that you ask for (Q.41:31).

In the Quran and the hadith, paradise is a place for sexual pleasure. The Elect will be married to *hur al-ain* (virgin girls with black eyes). No one of the people of paradise will be celibate (Muslim).

However, the fact of the privileged position enjoyed by sexuality and its incorporation into religiosity and the arena of the sacred does not conceal elements of conflict. This conflict is present in the opposition between *nikah* and *zina*. According to the Islamic notions of lawful (*halal*) and prohibited (*haram*), *nikah* is the lawful form of sexual relations. On the other hand, *zina*, which means fornication and adultery is considered a prohibited form of sexual relation. It is the antithesis of *nikah*. Hence, it is regarded as a capital crime in Islam; stoning to death is the punishment for adultery. Moreover, while marriage is associated with Islam, *zina* is associated with *jahiliyyah*. For example, the Quran links it with paganism:

An adulterer does not consort except with an adulteress or an idolatrous woman, and an adulteress does not consort except with an adulterer or with an idolatrous man  
(Q.24:3).

Moreover, the religious and social meaning of sexuality is determined by its submission to the assumptions of concealment and privacy. This fact seems universal and, religiously of crucial importance. Therefore, in the Quranic version of the myth of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise, we read:

when they tasted of the tree their nakedness became manifest to them and they started covering themselves with the leaves of the garden (Q.7: 22).

Two other Quranic passages (2: 28; 20:120) make mention of the event of the manifestation of *suatihima* (their shameful parts), an event which is associated with the evil work of Satan. When their shameful parts were revealed, they felt ashamed and realized that they had been punished by God. It is interesting to note that while the notion of sin, guilt and curse are stressed in the Bible, these notions are totally absent from the Quranic passages concerning this myth; instead, shame is stressed. Bouhdiba (1985:10) points to the strong relationship in Islamic ideology between the notion of shame which resulted from the revealing of the private parts and disobedience to God.

This leads to the Islamic notion of *awra*, which gives a more elaborate image of the positive view of sexuality and its linkage with the hidden and women's close association with this idea. *Awra* is an Arabic term which means both genitals and defect. The term is connected with seeing; the root of the word, 'awar', means the loss of one eye. In its religious sense, the *awra* of a person is what should not be seen of him or her by other people; the *awra* should be covered when performing daily prayers. In Islamic law, *awra* differs according to the person's sex, his or her marital status and whether the person is free or a slave. Between husband and wife there is no *awra*. The *awra* of a man in front of the public eyes stretches from the navel to the knees and the same applies to the female slave. As for free women, their whole bodies are not allowed to be seen by men; the palms of the hand and the face are a subject of controversy between Islamic schools where some of them allow their exposure and others require their concealment.

This legal rule does not depend on a Quranic text, but is based on a set of hadiths and particularly on what is considered a valid hadith of the Prophet: 'a woman is a concealed *awra*' (Tirmithi). Moreover, in hadith collections, religious books and even in traditional literary literature a man's gaze at a woman's *awra* is elaborated upon and strongly connected with threat. 'The look is an arrow of



Iblis..'. According to a well-known hadith, the eyes can commit zina: ' The zina of the eye is the look; the zina of the tongue is the word, the zina of the hand is the touch..' (Abu Dau'd). Hence, the divine punishment is severe. In the words of the Prophet: 'The man who looks with concupiscence at the attractions of a woman who is not his will have lead poured into his eyes on the Day of Judgement'. And: 'The man who looks at the forms of a woman beyond her clothes to such an extent that he is able to make out the form of the bones will not smell the odour of paradise'. Not only the look is a danger, but the smell and particularly the hearing of her voice could also be a threat. In the Quran:'..nor let them stamp their feet so that their hidden ornament may be known' (24:31). This verse lays down proper suggestions concerning the sound caused by the movement of a woman who wears *khalkhal* (ankle bracelets). Like the eye, the ear can commit zina; its zina is no less blameworthy than the eye. Some Muslim scholars consider the voice of the woman as an awra.

Islamic hatred of open sexuality is expressed through the powerful concept of *fitnah*. *Fitnah* is a rich Arabic term which has a set of meanings: it is charm and bewitchment; seduction and sedition; disorder and ordeal. In the religious context, the concept is used to signify an anti-religious threat. It could be said that *fitnah* is what makes one lose one's rational soul; it is an affliction and trial. As the traditional Muslim authority Imam Ibn Kayyem Al-Jawziyyah (d.1350) explains in his book 'The legal View regarding Looking to Women' *fitnah* implies the believer's distance from the love of God and his submission to Him, because it involves the domination of emotions and desire (*hawa*), and the loss of reason (*aqul*) (1985). According to holy texts, the Muslim is exposed to different forms of *fitnah* in life. In the Quran (3:14), 'The love of desired objects, like women and children and stored-up reserves of gold and silver, and pastured horses and cattle and crops, appears attractive to people. All this is the provision of the hither life'. In another passage 'Your belongings and your children are a *fitnah* for you (64:15 ). However, *fitnah* is associated more with women in religious tradition and literary expressions. Looking at a woman's

awra or beauty is the most effective form of fitnah. The Prophet's sayings sustain the connection between women and fitnah: 'I will not leave more harmful fitnah to men than women' (Tirmithi). Ibn Kayyem Al-Jawziyyah maintains that looking to women's charms leads with certainty to the decline of the mind and religion, for in the end the viewer indulges in the forbidden.

The Moroccan sociologist, Fatima Al-Mernissi takes the concept of women's fitnah as an indication that the Muslim women are considered to be powerful and dangerous beings; in this they are different than Western women who considered to be biologically inferiors by their culture. She presents a psychological theory based on men's passiveness and weakness when confronted with women's fitnah:

The Muslim woman is endowed with a fatal attraction which erodes the male's will to resist her and reduces him to a passive acquiescent role. He has no choice; he can only give in to her attraction, whence her identification with fitnah, chaos, and with the anti-divine and anti-social forces of the universe (1975:41).

Al-Mernissi ignores the elaboration of the concept of fitnah in Islamic culture and concentrates only on the meanings which serve her psychological theory and her thesis of the *'femme fatale'*. Her argument that Islam is in total harmony with sexuality and that the conflict is really with women is apparently wrong. The evidences she assembled from Islamic sources concerning woman's danger to religion should be understood in the context of the conflict with sexuality rather than an actual hostility towards women. Thus, the more women deny their sexuality the more they are positive beings .

Related to the concepts of awra and fitnah is the significant concept of *tabarruje*, which signifies the public display of intriguing feminine beauty and decoration. A famous Quranic verse condemns tabarruje and associates it with the anarchy of the jahiliyyah period: 'And stay at your houses. Bedizen not yourselves as in the time of jahiliyyah (33:33).

So, the three basic concepts of awra, fitnah and tabarruj make a clear linkage between sexuality and femininity. On the other hand, it seems that the

identification of sexuality with women is one crucial component of a cultural system according to which the Islamic social order is divided, i.e. the division of society into the two fundamental divisions of femininity and masculinity: the Islamic sharia places a strong emphasis on the dichotomy of the sexes. The teachings of the holy texts require men to assume full virility and women to assume full femininity. Any slight hint of similarities in terms of clothing or behaviour is prohibited. Hence, gold and silk are strictly forbidden for men; they should wear wool and silver. 'Allah has cursed men who imitate women and women who imitate men', the Prophet is reported to have said (Ibn Majah). On the other hand, the social universes of femininity and masculinity are clearly marked and separated. This is expressed through the notions of 'boundaries' for men and 'boundaries' for women. These boundaries are to be safeguarded and rigorously marked by (*hudud Allah*) the limits layed down by God.

According to *hudud Allah*, the woman's basic boundary par excellence is the house. The Quran orders women: 'And stay at your homes' (33:33). In the religious literature, the house, like the mosque, has a sacredness (*hurma*). It is a sacred frontier whose entry is prohibited for strangers of the male sex. We have to notice that *hurma* is another term for a woman in Arabic. Considerable attention is paid in the Quran and the hadith to the etiquette of entering a house by a male visitor. The Quran states: 'O men who believe! do not enter the houses of other people until you have asked their permission and when you do enter, salute them' (24:27-30). In another verse, *awra*, privacy, and the house are all interconnected; the Quran states that the house should not be entered without previous notice at three times of the day and these three times are called three '*awras*' (24:58).

It is noteworthy that the etiquette of entering the house is extended to the male head of the household who is required to declare his presence outside by raising his voice or banging his shoes; for him to suddenly enter the house is prohibited in the hadith. Further, once male children have attained puberty, they have to seek permission when entering the house (Q.24:57). The act of looking

inside a house by a strange man is considered a religious crime such that if the man of the house were to defend his house using violence he would not be blameworthy. In the hadith, the statements in this regard are abundant. For example, there is a saying of the Prophet: 'If a man peeps into somebody's house without permission, the man of the house will be justified if he injures his eye' (Muslim).

In sum, the house is identified with femininity; its separation from the masculine is strongly sanctioned. Outside the house is the masculine space or boundary. According to the fundamentals of the Islamic teachings, for women to be able to use that space they have to veil themselves and comply with rules of modesty. Moreover, a woman's need to go outside is reduced. Basically, women are not required to earn a living because it is the man's religious duty to provide for them. As to the use of public streets, women are ordered to use the edge of the street according to some hadiths. However, religious tradition, especially the hadiths, indicate that Muslim women participated in the social life of the early Muslim community. For example, at the time of the Prophet women went to the mosque, participated in war and politics, practices denied for them in later times.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Veil (*Hijab*)

Although the veil is enjoined by the Quran and was emphasized by the hadith, it existed before Islam; several scholars, such as G. Stern, R. Levy and M. Watt, assert that it was not an Islamic innovation. Veiling was practised in the Byzantine Empire and in Persia before Islam. In Arabia itself, veiling was observed in some areas and was associated with high rank. Early Muslim historians and Quranic commentators like Al-Zamakhshari (d.1144) in his book *Al-Kashaafe* and Ibn Kathir (d.1373) in his book *Tafsir*, argued that amongst the Prophet's own tribe of the Quraysh veiling was in general the rule. However, from the Islamic point of view it was argued that the (*kimar*) head scarf, of the women of jahiliyyah was loose and did not conceal their ornaments or the shape of their bosom, nor covered their necks. Relying on a Muslim historian's account, Levy points out that ancient Meccans used to dress their unmarried daughters and their female slaves in all their finery and display them with their faces unveiled around the Ka'aba, in order to attract suitors (1933:176). Levy argues that there is possibly a reference to this heathen custom in a passage of the Quran [33:33] addressing the wives of the Prophet, asking them to remain in their houses and not to go around in public decked out as in the time of barbarism.

The standard Islamic term for the veil is *hijab*. It is important to note that in Arab and Islamic culture, hijab serves to signify a set meanings and contexts, some of which are interconnected. Their Quranic basis is not a subject for dispute. Basically, the term hijab signifies the hidden, the protected, the separated and the forbidden. The traditional Arabic dictionary 'Taje Al-Arous' explains that the root *hajaba* means: (1) to hide behind a hijab; (2) to prevent someone from entering; (3) to protect: *al-hajiban*, the eyebrows, are so called because they protect the eye from the sun (p.203); (4) it signifies maintaining

and preserving the most sacred place both in jahiliyyah and Islam, the Ka'ba. 'Banu Qusay [a subclan of Quraish] claimed they had the *hijaba* of the Ka'ba; they meant that they were in charge of its maintenance and that they kept its keys in their hands' (p.203).

The association between the most sacred place and the concept of hijab is further illustrated when we take into account the fact that the Ka'ba building is covered by a huge cloth. Further, the dictionary points to the Quranic passage that explains how a hijab separates the people from God: in certain situations this hijab is removed and the righteous and the oppressed may then contact God. Further, a *muhtajib* king or prince, the dictionary explains, is the king who hides himself from the public. *Hijabah* refers to the political post in which the *hajib* was demanded to prevent the public from seeing the prince. The Encyclopedia of Islam illustrates an important dimension of the hijab when it was used by some Shiite caliphs to imply divine nature to themselves:

The caliph, considered as the hypostasis of the Active Intelligence of the world, was almost the object of worship. Because of this he was expected to hide himself as far as possible from the eyes of his faithful followers, who were thus protected from the radiance of his countenance (1971:360).

The Encyclopedia of Islam emphasizes the use of the hijab in the Fatimid state in the holy month of Ramadan. The caliph visited the mosque on the second, third and fourth Fridays of Ramadan. He ascended the *minbar* and sat under the *Kubba*. The vizier, who also ascended at his invitation, approached him and publicly kissed his hands and his feet and closed the curtains. After delivering a short sermon the vizier opened the curtains. On Lesser Bairam (*id al-fitr*) everyone veiled themselves and then the caliph, who was also veiled began to speak.

Ibn Khaldoun (d.1406) the traditional Arab historian, discussed the hijab from a historical point of view with regard to its use by the Muslim state. The hijab is classified into four categories:

The first is adopted when nomadism is abandoned and the sovereign, giving up primitive customs, separates himself from

the people and allows only his intimates to cross his threshold. With the development of the state and of the complexity of its workings, a second hijab is instituted: this allows only those who are initiated into the customs and etiquette of the court to have any communication with the sovereign. In their turn the ruler's familiars and intimates also place a hijab between themselves and the people. Finally, as the state declines, the dignitaries who have placed on the throne the heirs of the reigning dynasty sometimes seek to seize for themselves the privileges of power. The dictator then sequesters the sovereign: he isolates him from his family and from his councillors by a hijab, making him believe that his dignity demands that he be separated from them (Encyclopedia of Islam, 1971:361).

However, categorically, the hijab is particularly concerned with the domain of gender. It signifies both the system regarding the pattern of dressing and the spatial dimension which divides the Muslim society into two 'frontiers': women's and men's. It is important to note that the hijab corresponds to the concept of awra, since it covers the woman's awra.

Muslim historians and Quranic commentators believed that the first enactment of the hijab in the Quran was in the fifth year of the hijra, a year that was marked by a political and a military crisis facing the Muslim ummah in Medina, where (*al-ahzab*), or the confederates [an alliance of pagan and Jewish tribes], attacked and besieged the town. Inside the town the opponents were launching their anti-Islamic campaign. An important Quranic passage legislating the veil both for the prophet's own household and for the ideologically committed female members of the ummah is contained in the famous section of al-Ahzab:

O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known and not molested (Q.33:59).

The Quranic commentators gave some details about the context of this passage. The eminent commentator Al-Tabari (d.923), who is usually called by the 'ulema (*imam al-mufassirin*), the chief of the interpreters, mentioned in his

Tafsir that *al-monafiqeen*, (the hypocrites or the Prophet's opponents in Medina), used to annoy his wives when they went out of doors at night. They justified their annoyance to the Prophet's wives by saying that they were mixing them with slaves and prostitutes. This background of the verse is sustained by the following verse (33:61), in which the hypocrites are threatened with exile from Medina if they do not stop their misbehaviour. Al-Tabari interpreted the verse saying: 'God says to His Prophet: 'Tell your wives and daughters and the wives of the believers when they go out of doors to distinguish themselves in the pattern of dressing from female slaves who left their hair and face uncovered. Muslim women should let down part of their (*jilbab*) cloaks [or robes] that no miscreant may expose them to harmful comments when he discovers them to be free-born women' (v. 22:33). Al-Tabari points out that the interpreters differ on the meaning of "letting down the jilbab". Some of them say it means they must cover their faces and heads, showing nothing but one eye.

Another significant passage which orders the seclusion of the Prophet's wives is the following:

O ye who believe, enter not the houses of the Prophet, unless you are invited to a meal, and then not in anticipation of its getting ready. But enter when you are called, and when you have eaten, disperse; linger not in eagerness for talk. This was a cause of embarrassment for the Prophet, but he felt shy in asking you to leave. Allah is not shy in pointing out the right course. When you ask any of the wives of the Prophet for something, ask from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. It behoves you not to cause annoyance to the Messenger of Allah, nor that you should ever marry his wives after him (Q. 33:53).

This passage, which is called by Quranic commentators *ayat al-hijab* (the verse of the hijab), legislates on the spatial separation between the Prophet's wives and males of the Muslim community in Medina. Regarding the background of the verse, Ibn Kathir, another significant commentator, stated: 'This is the verse of the hijab and it contains religious etiquette and provisions. It confirms what Omar Ibn Al-Khattab suggested to the Prophet. Omar said to the



Prophet: 'O Apostle of Allah ! there enter into your wives' houses men who may be pious or fornicators. If you command their concealment'. In effect, the verse of hijab descended from Allah' (Ibn Kathir, v.5:489). Ibn Kathir comments on "enter not the houses of the Prophet", saying that it became forbidden for the believers to enter the houses of the Prophet without permission, as the people used to do in the time of jahiliyyah and in the early period of Islam, until God showed His concern for this ummah and commanded them to apply this rule. That was evidence that He honoured and glorified this ummah (p. 492). Regarding the Quranic statement "When you ask any of the wives of the Prophet for something, ask from behind a curtain", Ibn Kathir points out that, just as the believers were forbidden from visiting the wives of the Prophet, likewise they were completely prohibited from looking at them. If they had any request from the wives of the Prophet, they were to make it from behind a curtain or a hijab (p.492).

At a later date other regulations were enacted by the Quran in the passage of *al-nur*, (the light), ordering the women of the ummah in general to follow the proper conduct of modesty and chastity and stressing the wearing of the veil. They are ordered not to display their adornment except in the presence of their husbands or to persons covered by the incest taboo. It is to be noted that the verse starts by ordering men to lower their gaze and to be chaste. These verses descended after the verses concerned with the etiquette of men visiting other peoples' houses.

Say to the believing men to restrain their looks and to guard their privy parts...Say to the believing women to restrain their looks and guard their privy parts and not to disclose any part of their adornments, save that which is apparent thereof. They should draw their headcoverings across their bosoms; and should not disclose any part of their adornments save to their husbands or to their fathers, or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or their sisters or their sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who know naught of

women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment (Q.24:30).

The above verses are of special importance because they were interpreted as containing, among other things: 1. A more specific and strict regulation in regard to wearing the veil and decoration. 2. The verses were understood to set the basis for the symbolic separation of the sexes through placing a restriction on the look, the sound..etc. In his commentary on the verses, Ibn Kathir reminded the reader: 'Allah's saying "They should draw their headcoverings across their bosoms" means that the head cover should be drawn to cover the bosom and the neck in order to oppose the emblem of the women of jahiliyyah, who used to pass between men with their bosoms not covered by the headcover and with their necks, part of their hair and ear decoration visible' (p. 89). Ibn Kathir emphasized the significance of the preservation of the look in Islam. The look is a poisonous arrow which leads to indulgence in fornication. For Ibn Kathir, the Muslim woman should not display her adornment, except for what is impossible to conceal. He puts forward the different views of the scholars in regard to the meaning of the *zeenah* (adornment) that is exempted from concealment, pointing out that the majority of scholars specified the face and the palm of the hands as the *zeenah* exempt from concealment. He remarks that the scholars took into account in their judgement a hadith stating that' Asma, the Prophet's sister-in-law, came in wearing transparent clothes. The Prophet turned his face and said: 'If the woman reaches the age of puberty, no part of her body should be seen except this (he pointed to his face and hands)'. Historical evidence is given to show that the pattern of clothing as required by the above verse was ordered for Muslim women in general. It is related to Aishah, the Prophet's wife, saying that in the wake of the verse's revelation, the women of the Ansar [the original inhabitants of Medina who apparently did not observe the veil as it was in the Prophet's city, Mecca] hastened to tear part of their loin clothes and cover their heads. They appeared in the Prophet's mosque covered in black as if there were crows on their heads.

Ibn Kathir comments on "and should not disclose any part of their adornments save to their husbands...or who children know naught of women's nakedness", stating that, in addition to the husband, it is allowed for women to release the rules of formality in the presence of persons covered by the incest taboo. He concluded from "their women" that a Muslim woman's awra should not be seen by non-Muslim women. Men who are not interested in women and male children who do not yet understand the nature of women are allowed to enter the house. 'If the male child is very young so that he cannot notice women's awra, their soft words, their curving walk, gestures and movements, there is no harm if he enters to their places. But, if he is adolescent or close to adolescence, so that he could distinguish between the ugly and beautiful woman, he should not be allowed to enter to women's places' (p.92).

In regard to the meaning of "And let them not stamp their feet", he remarks: 'In jahiliyyah the woman used to strike the ground with her feet when she walked in the avenues so that men could hear its sound. Thus, God prohibited the believing Muslim women from doing that and from any attempt to reveal her concealed adornment' (p.93).

The subject of the sound in the above verse leads Ibn Kathir to the issue of perfume. He emphasizes that the practice of women to perfume themselves and go out so that men can smell them is forbidden. Likewise, women walking in the middle of the road is forbidden, 'because it implies tabarruje'. These regulations for bodily modesty are relaxed to some extent for the sexually non-active woman:

As for women past childbearing, who have no hope of marriage, it is no sin for them if they discard their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show adornment. But to refrain is better for them (Q.24:60).

It must be stressed that despite the imposition of the veil, the image we have about women of the early Muslim community is highly positive compared to that of Muslim women of later times who totally disappear behind walls and curtains. In the Islamic imagination, the early Muslim community is the time of

great and unique women: women warriors and politicians, poets and women of knowledge. The image of Aishah as presented in the hadith literature provides some idea of the active role played by some women in the early days of Islam. In addition to the title of 'mother of the believers', she is referred to by Muslims (Sunni) as the 'beloved of the Apostle of God'. Aishah Bint Abu Bakr was born to a father who was an expert in Arab genealogy and poetry and she learned these very important arts at an early age. Her wit attracted the attention of Muhammed, her father's close friend, and he asked to marry her. As a woman and a wife she was the most loved and preferred one amongst Muhammed's wives. He loved her 'more than butter with dates'. Muhammed stated that she was the only person in whose company he received revelation and he asked to die close to her bosom. She described the last moment in the life of her husband: 'The Apostle of God died while his head was in my bosom; his spittle mixed with mine' (Bukhari). He was buried in her room, as were the first and second caliphs. It could be said that Aishah was actually her husband's intellectual companion or partner; she learned from him the matters of religion and her excellent memory and sound logic helped her occupy a very important position in the science of hadith and in the science of religion in general. The Prophet's saying 'Draw half of your religion from this ruddy-faced woman', further, strengthens Aishah's religious position. In addition to religion, she extended her interest to medicine, in which she was considered an authority in her time. A respected contemporary of her, Urwa Ibn Zuheir, said about her: 'I have not seen anyone who is more knowledgeable in religion, medicine and poetry than Aishah' (Muslim). She accompanied the Prophet in battles and participated in nursing the injured. The books of hadith include a narration demonstrating her boldness and distinguished character at the time of the besiege of Medina by the confederates. Motivated by a strong sense of vigilance and interest in public affairs in the face of the most serious threat then experienced by the Muslim community, she walked alone at night to explore what was happening on the edge of Medina. 'I broke into a garden where I saw

a group of Muslim men including Omar Ibn Al-Khattab...He cried out with astonishment: 'What brought you here? By God, you are too bold! What if we were defeated or withdrew? [he implied the possibility of her captivity] (Ahmed).

It is noted that despite the glorification given to Aishah in the books of hadith, these books also give details of the marital disputes that arose in the Prophet's household. Aishah emerged as an earthy and ordinary woman who was motivated by jealousy and involved in 'feminine tricks' to divert her husband's attention from other women. These tricks sometimes reached a serious level and the Prophet found himself in confusion and bewilderment. Moreover, she once led the other co-wives in a collective protest for more share in the war booty. The pressure on Muhammed was so strong that he withdrew from public life for some time, but finally he did not succumb to their demand. A verse descended threatening them all with divorce if they chose to prefer material goods:

Oh Prophet! Say to thy wives if it be that ye desire the life of this world and its glitter, then come! I will provide for you enjoyment and set you free in a handsome manner. But if ye seek Allah and His Apostle, and the Home of the Hereafter, verily Allah has prepared for the well-doers amongst you a great reward (33:28).

However, there are other Quranic verses which were revealed for the sake of declaring Aishah's innocence. A group of Muslims accused her of having an affair with a young man. This unfortunate event is called in Islamic sources the "affair of the slander". This was part of the political campaign against Aishah's influential position in the life of Muhammed and the whole community. The community of Medina was divided about the accusation and many were close to believing the accusations. Muhammed himself was reluctant to believe or support her against the accusations. She faced this damaging and hostile atmosphere bravely declaring her innocence and her confidence that she would be rescued by God in the manner afforded to Jacob, father of Joseph (Bukhari). When the revelation descended asserting her innocence (Q.24:1), the relieved parents asked her to thank her husband. In a proud and confident

voice, she replied: 'It is God who gave me the innocence, and my thanks are for Him alone' (Bukhari). This divine endorsement of Aishah's innocence was regarded as an honour to her which not only deleted the accusations, but raised her position in the community.

It was after the death of the Prophet that Aishah played a significant role in the public scene and on the religious plane. She shaped the religious knowledge and the whole life of the community because of her honored association with Muhammed. She was considered first-hand authority on her husband's teachings and many of the hadiths were narrated by her. After the Prophet's death she had to enter into a feminist battle to preserve the Prophet's teachings. For example, she was told that Abu Huraira, one of the main transmitters of the hadith, was spreading a saying he attributed to the Prophet saying: 'Women, riding animals and the house are causes of misfortune'. 'She was so angry that part of her was in heaven and the other was on earth. She said: "By God who revealed the Quran to Abu Al-Kasim [another name for Muhammed], he did not say that. The Prophet of Allah said: 'The people in jahiliyyah used to say that women, riding animals and the house are sources of misfortune'"(Ahmed). She took the same position with regard to narrations connecting women with pollutions.

Politically, Aishah played a role similar to a one-woman shadow cabinet to the ruling caliphs, a role reminiscent of the tribal poetess-social critics with her ability to deliver good oratory (Minai, 1981:23). She contributed significantly to the public riot against the third caliph, Uthman, by holding up Muhammed's shirt and telling the crowds in a mosque that Muhammed's example had been forgotten very quickly. Uthman was killed and the Muslim community was divided into two sects: the Sunni and the Shiite. Aishah participated fully in the civil war that followed the assassination of Uthman. She led her followers against the fourth caliph, Ali, in a battle known in Islamic history as the Battle of the Camel; the 'camel' concerned was Aishah's as she was riding a camel in

the battle. She lost the battle in which fifteenth thousands Muslims were killed, and Ali forced her to withdraw from political life.

The age of socially and politically active women was ended with the end of the golden time of Islam in Medina. It must be stressed that with the expansion of the Islamic state into more complex and more advanced countries such as Mesopotamia and Persia, Islamic teachings were accommodated with the cultures and social environments of the conquered countries. The cities of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo produced some great women poetesses and religious specialists during the later ages. However, these women rarely participated in public life in a direct way. The example of Aishah could not be fully adopted in the inegalitarian and conservative setting of the towns. However, her life story remained in the religious literature as an ideal model for Muslim womanhood.

## CHAPTER 4

### Marriage and the Family

As stated above, regulations of sexuality constitute an important part of the sharia and are connected in the Islamic mind with the formation of the ummah and with its distinct social and cultural identity. The regulation of nikah is considered to be a profound transition from the anarchy and morality of the jahiliyyah. In the famous hadith narrated by Aishah (see p.16), she referred as nikah to some forms of union dominant in the jahiliyyah times. These forms of marriage are loose and nearer to prostitution than to marriage (Watt, 1955:278). The Quran itself reflects the existence in Medina of a group of women who did not restrict themselves to one man (4:25). Moreover, *mut'ah*, or temporary marriage, still practised by some Shiite sects, is regarded as a modification of the jahiliyyah practices. One of the measures to define marriage was through the prohibition of degrees. From the Quran we learn that in the jahiliyyah period few barriers were placed on marriage. For example, a man could inherit his father's widow and either marry her himself against her will himself or give her in marriage to another (Q:4:18). It was also a common practice for a man to marry two sisters. Robertson Smith showed that marrying a niece was practised (p.112). The Quranic verse (4:23) forbids the marriage of a man with the following relations:

- |                                   |                                |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Mother                         | 2. Daughter                    |
| 3. Sister                         | 4. Aunt (paternal or maternal) |
| 5. Niece                          | 6. Foster mother               |
| 7. Foster sister                  | 8. Mother-in-law               |
| 9. Step-daughter                  | 10. Daughter-in-law            |
| 11. Two sisters at the same time. |                                |



Some of the specialists in Islam (e. g. Levy, Watt, Roberts) argue that the persons with whom Islam forbids marriage are in accordance with the priestly code of the Old Testament. But it is clear that the Islamic prohibitions are more extended than the Jewish and are distinguished by the inclusion of kinship through women, and, unlike Jewish law, Islamic law forbids marriage with nieces. As is clear from the list, the relationship which arises through suckling the child has a similar effect to blood relationships. Nikah was made a legalized institution through (*uqdat an nikah*), the marriage contract which is defined as a contract for the legalisation of intercourse and the procreation of children. It is held that *uqdat an nikah* was an Islamic innovation. Stern suggests that the term originated with Muhammed himself and is used in the Quran in a formal sense. The term is used in the Quran in connection with the ordinances which attempted to establish the conditions for remarriage of widows and divorced women. Her conclusion is that:

It does not appear from the evidence supplied by the traditions that any well-defined legal usage was followed in the early community in the preliminary steps leading to marriage, but it is evident that Muhammed in his teachings in the Quran laid the foundation for the practice of certain customs, as also for the legal terms to be employed at a later date by the legalists in their application of these ordinances (Stern, 1939:44).

While the age of the bride was not specified, Islamic law advanced some general regulations. As a general rule, Muslim women should not be exchanged in marriage with other groups outside the Muslim community. Muslim women are forbidden to marry Jews, Christians, and pagan Arabs. But Muslim men could take women from the People of the Book. Moreover, at the marriage ceremony, the presence of a proxy and two witnesses is considered essential; no marriage can take place without the presence of two witnesses. Nikah should involve a public acknowledgement and publicity; this social dimension differentiates it from zina. In order for it to be valid it must be celebrated and accompanied by a feast, singing and the sound of drums. It is

related by the Prophet: 'Notify this marriage, and perform it in the mosque, and celebrate it by beating the tambourine' (Tirmithi).

It is important to note that nikah is not only the lawful form of sexual relations, but is also regarded as creating the social state of (*ihsan*). The Quran uses the term (*muhsin*) for the married man and (*muhsina*) for the married woman. These terms come from the Arabic root (*hisn*), which means fort. Hence, marriage is conceived of in Islam as fortifying and protecting the married couple's chastity in the same way as a fort protects from the army. It is exactly this dimension which gives marriage such an important position in Islam. Marriage protects and transforms the person to a state of chastity and thus to a positive social being. In the Prophet's words: 'It is necessary for you to marry, because marriage is the most powerful shield against the allurements of sight and the protection of your private parts; if one of you cannot afford it, let him fast, because fasting weakens the sexual impulse' (Bukhari).

Marriage in Islam is a sacred religious duty; it is regarded as half of faith. A famous hadith states: 'When a man marries, he has completed one half of his religion'. In another hadith the Prophet associated marriage with allegiance to Islam and with his tradition: 'Marriage is part of my way and whoever keeps away from my way is not of me' (Bukhari). Marriage, then, is a precondition for placing the individual within the ummah. Therefore, Muslims who refuse marriage and prefer celibacy are almost unacceptable to the Islamic understanding of social order. Celibacy receives the strongest condemnation from the Prophet: 'Those who live as celibates are the worst kind; those who die celibate are the lowest of the low' (Bukhari). 'The most evil amongst you are your celibates', the Prophet has said.

Assisting single persons to marry is a duty of every Muslim and is considered to be an act of piety. The Quran states: 'Marry the spouseless among you and your slaves and handmaidens that are righteous; if they are poor, God will enrich them of His bounty' (24:32). *Ta'fif* (helping everybody to be chaste), is a collective duty; parents must help their children to get married

and children must encourage their widowed and divorced parents or mother to remarry. Assisting the poor and servants to get married was part of the responsibilities of the early Islamic state. It was reported that Caliphs used to pay mahr to enable the poor and slaves to marry.

The institution of polygyny is in harmony with the great concern of Islam to see every member of the ummah married. The only verse in the Quran sanctioning polygyny is the following, which makes it lawful for a Muslim man to marry up to four wives and no more at any one time:

If ye fear that ye cannot act with equality towards orphans, take in marriage of such women as please you two or three or four. But if ye fear that ye cannot act equitably (towards so many), marry one only, or the slaves which ye shall have acquired (21:3).

The traditional accounts regarding the historical background of the revelation of this verse state that it was revealed shortly after the battle of Uhod, in which seventy Muslim men were killed. This left a considerable number of widows and unmarried orphan girls under the guardianship of their kinsmen. Traditional Muslim sources and Western specialists alike agree that polygyny was sanctioned as a remedy for the excess number of women which was a feature of the pre-Islamic society dominated by tribal wars. The same problem faced the Muslim ummah dominated by the values of jihad. Indeed, Muslim males were encouraged to marry widows and divorced women because marriage was seen as a means of protection and as an honourable solution for such vulnerable women. The life of the Prophet gives a good example of this Islamic custom. All his marriages, except that with Aishah, were with widows and divorced women. However, there are statements in the hadith literature which encourage polygyny for the purpose of social prestige and power and for having many sons. As stated in the above verse, equality between wives is stressed and is made a condition for taking a second wife. Nonetheless, Islamic law leaves this matter to a man's conscience without any judicial intervention.

The verse which sanctions polygyny makes concubinage lawful. While the number of wives is restricted to four, the number of female slaves who could be

taken as concubines is not limited. In Islam, a concubine could change her status by giving birth to a child; her becoming a mother is a sufficient reason for her freedom from a servile situation. As Bouhdiba demonstrates, the status of women in Islamic societies at certain historical periods, especially at the time of the Abbasid state, where the (*jawari*), concubines, were part of the social life of the ruling and merchant classes, was decided upon according to whether she belonged to the institution of *nikah* or concubinage. A wife and a concubine were of different natures: while the wife has to conform with the rules of modesty, the concubine must be ludic and is freed of veiling. He argues that in the end the concubines, became veritable anti-wives.

On the other hand, the institution of *nikah* is not eternal. Although there are statements disapproving of divorce, the dissolution of *nikah* is accepted and the procedure of divorce is simple. The law of divorce is a subject of many Quranic verses which deal elaborately with certain procedures to be followed and with the husband's responsibilities towards the divorced wife and her children. The decision to end the marriage bond is usually confined to the husband (Q.4:24). The formula of dismissal used by Muslim men is the same as that used in the *jahiliyyah*, the husband merely says 'Thou art divorced' or 'I herewith dismiss thee'. Regarding the number of times a Muslim may divorce the same wife, the Quran says:

Ye may divorce your wives twice, after that ye must either retain them with kindness, or put them away with benefits....If then the husband divorces her (a third time), it is not lawful for him to take her again, until she shall have married another husband, and if he also divorces her, then no blame attaches to them if they return to each other, if they think they can observe the ordinances of Allah (Q.2:228-229).

From the above verses we see that a Muslim may divorce his wife twice without being obliged to part with her. If he utters the formula of divorce a third time, it is not lawful for him to take her again until she been married to another man and then divorced by him.

An important legal aspect of Islamic marriage is the husband-wife relationship. The nature of this relationship and the rights of the husband over his wife and vice versa are mentioned in the Quran in a general manner. However, in the hadith and religious books the etiquette of the relationship between husband and wife is carefully defined. In general, it is agreed amongst jurists that the husband has an authoritative position over the wife and the wife's position is of an obedient nature. In justifying their judgement, they refer to the following verse: 'And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women, and men are a degree over women' (Q.2:226). This single 'degree' is generally interpreted as meaning that men are superior to women and that this is due to the man's economic responsibilities within the family. Another very important Quranic verse states:

Men are *qawamuna* over women because God has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of their women) (Q.4:34).

Although from a linguistic point of view the term *qawamuna* means 'to serve,' it was interpreted by the principal traditional Quranic commentators such as Ibn Kathir to mean that men are protectors, guardians, and are in charge of their women; and they are so by virtue of the fact that God has given preference to men over their wives and because men give them bridewealth and provide for them in full. The ideal Muslim family according to religious prescriptions is of a hierarchic nature: the husband is the leader, the economic supporter, the protector of morality, and the educator. These functions of the husband are well supported by Prophetic statements, many of which make submission to the will of the husband (in lawful matters) equivalent to submission to God's will. The Prophet said: 'If it had been given to me to order someone to worship someone other than Allah, I would certainly have ordered women to worship their husbands' (Tirmithi). Thus, patriarchy is a strong feature within the Islamic family. The household father's authority symbolises God's authority in this world (Hajarpe, 1986:17). The wife's obedience to the husband is, thus, one of the fundamental pillars of the Islamic family.

The husband's obligations towards his wife are divided into two categories: material and moral. The most important material obligation is the payment of mahr, without which no nikah is valid. The second material obligation is to support the wife economically; the wife is entitled to be housed, fed and clothed at her husband's expense.

She is never asked to earn for him, nor to spin or weave for the household. If she has been accustomed to the help of a servant and her husband is afforded one, he is required to provide such help for his wife as is necessary (Levy, 1933:143).

Even if she is financially better off than her husband she is not obliged to support herself or spend on the household. Of the husband's moral obligations, guarding the chastity of his wife is the most important. The Muslim husband is required to possess *ghairah* (a sense of honour). Ghairah is an important component of manliness. A husband who shows no concern for his wife's mischievous conduct or who allows male strangers to enter the house is called a cuckold (*dayyouth*) by the Prophet. Such a man will not enter paradise. Manly jealousy is encouraged. For example, the Prophet said: 'The believing man is a man of ghairah'.

Kind and fair treatment of one's wife is emphasized in the Quran and hadith. Even if a husband does not love his wife he should treat her in a just and kind way. The Quran states: 'And associate kindly with them, for if ye be averse to them, it may be that ye are averse to a thing wherein God has placed much good' (Q.4:19). It is reported that the last words of the Prophet were: 'O men! Fear Allah in your treatment of women; they are placed under your mercy. You have taken them only as a trust from Allah, and have the enjoyment of their persons by the word of Allah' (Ibn Majah). 'The most noble man among you is he who is best to his wife' (Tirmithi). The husband is required to bear with tolerance any ill-treatment he receives from his wife. Kind treatment includes the use of gentle words, joking and sharing in games and leisure activities. The Prophet is reported to have been accustomed to competing with Aishah in running. Omar, the second caliph, said that men should behave like boys at

home and as real men outside it. Helping with domestic work is recommended. The Prophet is reported to have cleaned the house, washed his clothes and milked his goat (Bukhari). Furthermore, for the purpose of the *ihsan* of *nikah*, the husband is religiously obliged to adorn himself for his wife and to give her her share of sexual pleasure. This is equated with *jihad* and alms-giving. A man was asked by the Prophet to break his voluntary fasting for it interfered with the wife's right to sexual pleasure. Moreover, a husband's sexual incompetence is a valid reason for divorce when demanded by a wife.

As regards the wife, it is striking that religious law frees her from the domestic work. She is the 'queen of the house' who is not obliged to cook for her husband, wash his clothes or suckle his children. Domestic work is voluntary and a wife's refusal to do any such work is not grounds for legal complaint against her; it is also her right to be paid by her husband for suckling his children. The fundamental obligation of the wife is to be obedient to the husband, i.e. to accept his *quwamah* in the house. Goodness and obedience are interconnected with regard to women, virtuous women are 'obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded' (Q.4:34). This idea is dominant in the hadith. The acceptance of women's pious works by God is connected with their obedience to the husbands. Hence, 'he is your paradise or your hell' (Ahmed) and any woman who dies while her husband is not angry with her enters paradise (Tirmithi). Obeying the command of one's husband with regard to the satisfaction of his sexual desire is placed at the core of the notion of obedience. This obligation of the wife is explained by the jurists as a consequence of the purpose of marriage, which is inclusive of sexual gratification. The wife is obliged to demonstrate her willingness to meet her husband's request under all circumstances. 'When a man calls his wife to satisfy his desire, she must go to him even if she is occupied at the oven' (Tirmithi). And, 'The wife may not desert her husband's bed and if she denies herself to her husband and he is angry at her because of it, the angels curse her until dawn' (Bukhari).

The second important obligation of the wife is to safeguard and protect her and her husband's honour from pollution. She must remain chaste and faithful to him in his presence and absence. Therefore, taking the permission of her husband whenever she wishes to leave the house is a religious obligation for a wife. A disobedient wife, on the other hand, is strongly condemned and the obligation of a husband to maintain and work for his wife implies the right to discipline her. The disciplinary remedy for a disobedient wife ranges in the first instance from giving advice, secondly desertion in bed and, as the last resort, beating (Q.4:34).

The position of the woman as a mother (*umm*) is far more privileged than that of wife. Some Quranic passages and many Prophetic statements glorify the position of the mother. *Al-walud* (the prolific woman), is a woman with special prestige in Islam. The unstable and restricted position of a woman within marriage is compensated for through the highly valued position of mother and through the relationship with the offspring, especially the sons. 'Paradise lieth at the feet of mothers'. There is also this narration: 'A man came to the Messenger of Allah and asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, who is the person who has the greatest right on me with regards to kindness and attention?' He replied, "Your mother." "Then who?" He replied, "Your mother". "Then who?" He replied, "Your mother." "Then who?" He replied, "Your father.'" (Ibn Majah). Women who die in childbirth are regarded as martyrs in the same way as men who fall in jihad.



## PART II

### THE IMPACT OF MODERNITY ON MUSLIM WOMEN

The French invasion of Egypt in 1798 was an extremely significant event for the Islamic world. Despite the fact that it was not really the first encounter between modern secular Europe and the traditional religious East where Ottoman Turkey had had earlier contacts with the West, this event is considered to mark the beginning of modernity in the Islamic Middle East. Indigenous historians refer to the year 1798 as the 'year of the shock'. Upon encountering the French army, which was accompanied by a shipload of French scholars, Muslims were in a state of shock because they realised the extent of the decay of their ummah. No longer was the ummah the master of the world. Muslims were to discover that the great days, when Islamic civilization flourished in science, the arts and human virtues had ended. To them, the French represented religious, cultural and military contestants. They were considered the heirs of the 'Franks', the name applied to the waves of Crusaders who attempted to remove the holy land from Muslim dominance. However, Napoleon Bonaparte, the leader of the French campaign, was not in fact a religious enemy of the Muslims. He was actually an armed preacher of the secularist positivist ideas of the Enlightenment. Thus, the French campaign provided a kind of model for the relationship between the dominant secular West and the defeated religious East, where military rule was accompanied by a cultural project. Napoleon had the task of dealing with the obstacle of Islamic culture in his attempt to introduce the fruits of the Enlightenment, because he was aware that Islam was a potential source of resistance to French occupation. In *Campagnes d'Egypte et de Syrie* (his reflections on the Egyptian expedition), he mentioned Islam as one of the barriers to French hegemony in the Orient and tried to gain the support of the 'ulema. In his proclamation of July 2, 1798 he announced:

You have been told that I have come to your country to demolish Islam. This is a mere lie: do not believe it. O shaiks, judges and imams, tell your people that the French also are Muslims; they have dominated Rome and ruined the papal See which was always encouraging the Christians to attack Islam (Al-Jabarti, 1322 A. H. vol.3:4).

He attempted everywhere to prove that he was fighting for Islam; everything he said was translated into Quranic Arabic, just as the French army was always urged by its command to remember the Islamic sensibility (E. Said, 1978:82). In the interest of occupation, the sixty 'ulemas who taught at the Islamic university of Al-Azhar were invited to his quarters, given full military honours and then allowed to be flattered by Napoleon's admiration for Islam and Mohammed and by his obvious veneration for the Quran, with which he seemed perfectly familiar (E. Said, 1978: 82). However, this policy did not succeed in ruling Egypt and, significantly, the Enlightenment's secular values were rejected. The famous indigenous historian Al-Jabarti (1756-1825), who was one of the 'ulema, viewed the French occupation as the beginning of a reversal of the natural order and the vicious chaos of all things (vol.3:3). Although he praised the French for their devotion for learning and their hospitality to Muslim visitors, the French were regarded as enemies of the ummah and a danger to religion and morality. The 'ruinous' innovations introduced into the legal system, and (significantly) the 'corruption' of women, to which I shall return later, are the most important objections against the French. However, the 'material' advancements of Europe left a profound admiration in the minds of the Muslims. Discovering the secrets of Europe's progress and strength was of paramount concern to the Muslim leaders and traditional intellectuals. Shortly after the departure of the French, Muhammed Ali, the ruler of Egypt, started an ambitious project of modernizing the country's economy and army. The ruler was, however, less enthusiastic with regard to Western social and cultural practices. Hundreds of students were sent to Europe to learn the new technical sciences and military specialization. Some of these students recorded very interesting accounts about social life in the West as seen through

an Oriental eye. One of them was Rifa'ah Al-Tahtawi, whose book *Takhlis Al-Ibris Fi Talkhis Paris*, a description of the social life of Paris, had an important impact in the whole region.

The independent economic project of Muhammed Ali was soon crushed by Western colonial powers and the whole Middle Eastern area fell under the control of the colonial powers: between 1840 and 1882 in Egypt, between 1830 and 1870 in Algeria, in 1882 in Tunisia, in 1911 in Morocco, and in 1919 in the Arab East. Under these unfavourable conditions, the colonial powers of the West enforced the capitalist system on the region.

The questions of the relationship between Islam and capitalism and why Islamic societies did not develop a capitalist mode of production were dealt with by Western scholars. The most important of these scholars is Max Weber, who studied Islam as part of his effort to explain the absence of rational capitalism outside Europe. Although Weber died before completing his study of Islam, his work still contains an interesting and scholarly discussion about the relevance of Islamic ideology and institutions to his thesis on asceticism and rational economic activity. Weber maintains that Islam was never really a religion of 'salvation' (1965:72). Recognizing that Meccan Islam was a monotheistic religion based on ethical prophecy and the belief in Allah, the powerful and omniscient, where man is predestined, Weber argues that asceticism could have emerged in Islam as a solution to a potential 'salvation anxiety'. But the development of asceticism in Islam was blocked by the military group which turned the quest for salvation into the quest for land through jihad, and the Sufi brotherhoods who introduced magical, orgiastic mysticism into Islam, thus diminishing its monotheism. Moreover, Weber argues that Islam lacked a systematic formal law tradition, a necessary condition for capitalist development. He concluded that capitalism was not produced because Islamic culture was incompatible with the spirit of capitalism. But he asserts that Islamic beliefs, though influential, were secondary to the Islamic institutions which stood

in the way of capitalism because they had been dominated by a long history of patrimonialism.

The Weberian thesis about Islam and capitalism has been thoroughly criticised by the French orientalist Maxime Rodinson (1974), who maintains that Islamic culture was not opposed to commercial development. Citing examples from the Quran and the hadith, Rodinson demonstrates that Islam encourages trade and commercial activity: "Economic activity, the search for profit, trade, and consequently, production for market, are looked upon with no less favour by Muslim tradition than by the Quran itself. We even find eulogistic formulations about merchants"(Rodinson,1974:16). Nonetheless, and at the same time, Rodinson's work implies that Islam as an ideological system contains no clear attitude towards capitalism; in the last instance, the determining factor is social reality: "Ideology shows itself to be a great deal less powerful, in the long run, than the requirements of the social situation, the struggle of societies and social groups for maximum power and maximizing of the advantages and privileges of every kind that they enjoy" (1974:157). Moreover, in response to Weber's argument, which had highlighted the position of warriors in Islamic society, Rodinson stresses the long-term importance of the merchant class in Islamic society.

The Arab economist Samir Amin's analysis is particularly important for this discussion. He holds that, since the emergence of Islam and throughout history, Islam has been connected to trade and merchants. He emphasizes the importance of the merchant class in Islamic society, where the Islamic ideology came to reflect the socio-economic situation:

Right from the beginning, the Islamic ideology translated the dominant character of the merchant relations for all the social formations which Islam was to affect in the Arab world. Not only is Islamic law a commercial rather than a peasant legal system, but it occupies a significant place in the religion. If this feature has spread out from its region of origin, it is because the Muslim state offered conditions very favourable to the blossoming of merchant relations (1978:23).

It is this same peculiarity which explains why it was always mobile merchants who introduced Islam to new areas, from Black Africa to Indonesia. In contrast to Weber's analysis, Amin emphasizes the merchant character of the Middle East. For example, the ruling class of Arab society was urban, made up of courtiers, clerics, the little world of small artisans and clerks typical of Oriental cities. The merchant class's prosperity was linked to long-distance trade, which was the basis for this class's alliance with the nomad tribes (its caravaneers) and for the isolation of the agricultural areas, which retained a distinct personality. For Amin, this highly mobile class played a very important unifying cultural role; by adopting the same language, the same orthodox Islamic culture, it was the cement which held things together.

This was the class which made the Arab civilisation. The Arab world was simultaneously diverse and deeply unified by its ruling class (Amin, 1978: 21).

As to the reason why this class could not produce capitalism, Amin argues that the Muslim Orient, which was more advanced than feudal Europe, was hindered by its more developed relations of production (tributary rather than feudal) and by mercantile centralization of surplus: commercial expansion for the Muslim merchants allowed for the surplus to be concentrated, whilst in feudal Europe it was scattered. Middle Eastern social formation is seen as having allowed the ruling class (concentrated in some very large towns) to centralise and profit from a surplus produced by tens of millions of peasants. This situation is very different from the case in Europe where the surplus is split up amongst rural lords, each disposing of the fruits of the exploitation of only some thousands of peasants. According to Amin, this centralisation of surplus and its circulation allows for the diversification of its forms, for wealth and civilisation, constituting the foundation which underlies the persistence of the cultural and linguistic unity of the region. Feudal Europe had to evolve both towards the formation of various nations and towards the emergence of capitalism, while the Arab world, because it was tributary and commercial, was to retain a more unified character despite the political instability and so could

not give rise to capitalism until it was integrated, by outside aggression, into the imperialist system (p.23).

On the other hand, an important feature of the social structure in the pre-colonial Muslim societies of the Middle East and North Africa is the fact of alliance as well as the antagonism and the oscillation in the relationship between the urban merchant class of the towns and the tribal groups of the countryside. The traditional social formation was written about by the traditional Arab historian Ibn Khaldoun. Ibn Khaldoun's theory deals with two contrasting communities: townsmen as against tribesmen or countryfolk. Townsmen:

have become used to laziness and ease. They are sunk in well-being and luxury. They have entrusted the defence of their property and their lives to the governor and ruler who rules them, and to the militia which has the task of guarding them. They find full assurance of safety in the walls that surround them, and the fortifications which protect them...Successive generations have grown up in this way of life. They have become like women and children, who depend upon the master of the house. Eventually, this has come to be a quality of character (Quoted by Gellner, 1981:18).

The countrymen, on the other hand, possess strong group feeling, *asabiyya*, based on kinship and religious sentiments:

When there is religion among them through prophethood or priesthood, then they have some restraining influence in themselves. It is, then, easy for them to subordinate themselves and unite (Quoted by Gellner, 1981:19).

The complex relationship between these two social groups as viewed by Ibn Khaldoun is embodied in the exchange of goods and services; the countrymen need cities in order to supply certain necessities. There is also a cultural need; towns are seen as places of high culture and tribesmen need the knowledge of the urban Muslim specialists. Cities need the tribesmen politically and militarily. This system is disrupted by periodic attacks by tribal armies and the ostensible removal of the corrupt town-based dynasties, and, finally, the dominance of the tribal groups over the cities. Ibn Khaldoun's model implies cultural continuity, as Gellner points out:

The economic and religious-cultural need by the tribesmen of the towns, in the traditional social order, is profoundly significant, and constitutes presumably the second most important fact in Ibn Khaldoun's world, alongside the political dependence of towns on tribes. This mutual dependence holds the overall society together in its peculiar form, and helps explain what may be the greatest puzzle of all: Why a society so fragile politically should be so very coherent and homogeneous culturally (1981:29).

This traditional social and cultural formation, which prevailed for centuries without giving rise to a mode of production similar to that which developed in Europe, was to be altered dramatically by the forces of capitalism and colonialism. These forces put an end to the activities of the Muslim merchants; after the 16th century, during the age of mercantilism, European merchants gradually won the struggle to control long-distance trade world-wide. The final defeat of the merchant class arrived with Napoleon's campaign and the direct occupation of the Islamic world by Western powers which followed it. Thus, by means of coercive colonial and imperial dominance, the integration of the Muslim world into the capitalist system was initiated on a basis of inequality. The conquered Islamic countries were brought into the capitalist system as a dominated periphery to be remodelled according to the form taken by the imperialist domination. This process meant in Algeria, for example, the destruction of the economic and social as well as the cultural structure. By 1870 about 250,000 *colons* had seized 674,340 hectares of farmland and 160,000 hectares of forestland. The pattern of land use was altered from wheat to viticulture. This was an abuse against the land, which became so impoverished that it could not be returned to wheat production; they were also an offence against indigenous Muslim culture.

On the other hand, the capitalist system produced a different class system in the colonized areas. Two new social classes were eventually born: a local bourgeoisie and proletariat, two social classes which are specific to the capitalist mode of production. While the proletariat played an insignificant role in the area generally, the bourgeoisie, through its close linkage with the

imperialist system, was to play an important historical role in modern Muslim societies. However, it should be stressed that, although engendered by the capitalist system, in certain historical events, some segments of this class conflicted with the imperialist domination. This occurred, for example, when they were confined to agriculture and denied access to industrialization. This class played a crucial role in introducing and establishing modernity to the region.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there was a dominant conception among the emerging Muslim bourgeoisie, particularly its intellectuals, that Muslim societies should undergo a process of 'renaissance' similar to the European renaissance. Indeed, Muslim societies were regarded as being on the threshold of renaissance. However, the discussion about progress and renaissance was generally within an Islamic framework. The fundamental question of the relationship between Islam and modernity was raised by the 'ulema and traditional intellectuals. The 'ulema were in disagreement. The majority believed in the self-sufficiency of Islam and were very nervous about the impact of modernization on Islam and the ummah. It should be noted that Islamic ideology was the basis for the popular resistance to Western occupation. During European domination, all popular resistance movements expressed themselves not in nationalist, in patriotic, in social or economic, but always in Islamic terms (Bernard Lewis, 1985:16). Hence, modernization meant for the majority of the 'ulema the dominance of the civilization of the colonizers. The other group, called the 'Muslim reformers', undertook an intellectual effort to interpret Islam in a modern way and to come to terms with Western capitalist culture by asserting that true Islam was rational and compatible with modern life, especially with regard to the economy. This school was represented by two very important religious characters: Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani and Muhammed Abduh, both of whom travelled to Europe and engaged in cultural dialogue with influential Western personalities. Al-Afghani (1839-97) maintains that, in essence, Islam is a rational religion and its rationality is compatible with the modern way. It is the religion of reason. Its original teachings encourage



thinking and it is the religion which liberates the human mind from superstition. He also holds that Islam is the religion of activity. The Quran, when correctly interpreted, discourages passive resignation to life; it demands that the individual leads a responsible life in fulfilment of the will of God. Al-Afghani condemned the folk religiosity, based on the idea of (*jabr*) which means that everything which happens to a person is inevitable and compulsory. He emphasized rather the idea of *qada* (predestination) which he considered as genuine to Islam. Predestination means that everything happens in the context of cause and effect and that God is the first cause and the initiator of events. He provides man with reason and sent him prophets in order to help him make decisions and He will assist him if he acts in the correct way.

Turner (1984) notes that active involvement in this world became a major theme of Islamic reform, directed against Sufi quietism. He adds that there are certain interesting parallels between Weber's account of Protestantism and the basic themes of Islamic reform. Pure Islam and Puritanism sought in the basic scriptures of their religion an ethic which would be free from mystical, ritualistic accretions. The result was a set of norms prescribing asceticism, activism and responsibility. Yet, he maintains, the connection between Puritan asceticism in Europe and Islamic modernism in the Middle East is superficial and derivative. Turner argues that the Islamic reform was a response, often apologetic, to an external military and cultural threat; it was an attempt to answer a feeling of inferiority and frustration resulting from Western colonialism. Islamic reform was not so much an autonomous development as an attempt to legitimate the social effects of an exogenous capitalism. The 'Protestant Ethic' of Islam was second-hand because the leaders of Islamic modernism were either educated by Europeans or accepted European culture. Weber's Protestant Ethic theory came to fit Islamic modernization simply because Muslims accepted a European view of how to achieve capitalist development. It is no surprise that Al-Afghani saw himself as the Luther of Islam (Turner,1984:40).

Muhammed Abduh (1849-1905) was a disciple of Al-Afghani, but became more influential with his occupation of the position of *mufti* of Egypt, the most important religious office in the country. His ideas were carried by a group of students who later dominated Egyptian society, one of whom was S. Zhaghlul, Egypt's prime minister. Abduh's position towards modernity was considerably different from traditional Muslim scholars who usually faced the dilemma of modernity with a set of rules defining what to accept and what to reject. Abduh's position was to reinterpret the Islamic sacred heritage in such a way that a man living in the modern time could accept it and take it as a guide. The problem for him was not to convince the doubtful Muslims of the advantages of Western culture; on the contrary, his purpose was to convince the modernists doubtful about the role of Islam in social life that it was compatible with the new ideas and institutions (Hourani, 1967:139). Reason and rational judgement should be exercised in understanding the Quran and hadith. For him, Islamic law contains essentials and secondary requirements and the Muslim ummah had declined because of its loss of the sense of what is essential and what is secondary and because the use of reason was restricted. Europe, by contrast, became stronger and more advanced because its people followed the rules of rational thought, which led them to productive activity. Thus, in order for the ummah to restore its glory it should learn the sciences from Europe and reform its social institution including Islamic law. Islamic law should be reinterpreted and re-adapted to modern problems. As mufti of Egypt, he took the first steps towards such reinterpretation, especially with regard to family law.

It is worth noting that although Islam was discussed in modern terms, there was no suggestion of unrestricted adoption<sup>of</sup> the culture of the West. The things to be borrowed from the West were thought to be limited: certain techniques and sciences. In the face of western civilization, Muslim reformers stressed the glorious Islamic past and the importance of the ummah following *al-salafe al-saleh* (the righteous ancestors) who lived in the golden past and implemented the teachings of the Quran and hadith.

Paradoxically, the ideas of Muslim reformers were the basis for two schools of thought: on the one hand, the influential trend of *salafia*, or school of strictly following the righteous ancestors, represented in Abduh's disciple Rashid Rida. On the other hand, a group of other disciples adopted the ideology of sweeping modernization. The most well-known of the latter group is Qasim Amin.

In the context of colonial expansion and capitalist transformation and the cultural responses to them, the idea of the emancipation of Muslim women was born.

## CHAPTER 5

### Encountering the West: The Breakdown of the Harem

Many agree that Napoleon's famous project to deliver the universal values of the Enlightenment to the Islamic world was a failure. This first historic attempt to introduce Western secular values was complicated by the impact of the French presence on Muslim women. Probably, this element was decisive in the initial Islamic response to Westernization and the perception of it as being opposed to morality and religion.

The shock of the French occupation, first encountered with incredulity, brought about changes soon felt by a few clear-sighted individuals as a brutal shattering of traditional ways. The keepers of old customs called debauched those who dared innovate or even ignore these ancient prejudices, and the position of women was one of the major issues of the conflict (Nada Tomiche, 1968:179).

Al-Jabarti held the French responsible for the 'corruption of women'. In *Aja'ib Al- Athar Fi'l-Tarajim Wa'l-Akhbar*, he described the behaviour of the French:

In the period 1215 (1800-1801) *tabarruje* spread among women and most of them violated the rules of modesty and shyness. The French women who accompanied the army went about the town, faces uncovered and wearing brightly coloured silk dresses and scarves. They rode about on horses and donkeys wearing cashmere shawls around their shoulders. They galloped through the streets laughing and joking with their guides and with those of the rabble. Such indecent freedom pleased the badly brought-up women of Cairo, and as the French were proud of their subservience to women and showered gifts upon them, the women began to enter into relations with them. At first they were somewhat circumspect, but after the Cairo revolt when Boulaq had been taken by assault, French men began to catch those women and girls who pleased them, dress them in the French style and oblige them to change their ways. From that time on licentiousness spread rapidly throughout the country;

many women, were drawn by a love of wealth or by the gallantry of the French, followed the example of the women of Boulaq. The French in fact held all the money in the country and appeared to be completely submissive to the women, who might sometimes even hit them with a slipper (Vol.3:161).

As is clear from Al-Jabarti's account, the women who dressed or behaved like the French women provoked strong concerns as these innovations sharply violated the Islamic rules of modesty. Hence, the punishment was severe; the polluted honour and shame inflicted by the 'corrupted' women on their kin were to be cleaned by getting rid of them, as was the practice in Middle Eastern societies. Al-Jabarti mentioned how the daughter of the greatest religious authority, Shaikh Al-Bakri, who had mixed with the French and dressed like a French lady, was executed after the departure of the French. Western historical accounts also record the event, although with many more female casualties. As accounted by French contemporaries (Michaud and Poujoulat, *Correspondance d'Orient*, 7:29-30. Quoted by Tomiche):

I have heard Franks who were in Egypt when the French army left this country. They described to me horrible deeds which occurred in harems at the time. Up to several thousands of women were massacred, poisoned, or drowned in the Nile (1966: 180).

This violent historical incident initiated an unhappy beginning for the project of modernization and highlighted the fundamental cultural differences between the two worlds. The ummah, already nervous from the encounter with the force of occupation which had come to impose its cultural project, aggressively rejected any imitation of Western ways with regard to women. In fact, this was not the only occasion when honour came to be the dominant value considered to distinguish the morality of the East from that of the West. Usamah Ibn Munkith, a Muslim historian who lived at the time of the crusades expressed his astonishment towards what seemed to the shocking absence of manly jealousy (*ghairah*) in the men and shyness in women. He, wrote numerous stories on this point:

The Franks completely lack the sense of honour. One of them may be walking accompanied by his wife, and he meets another man, and this man takes his wife apart and talks with her in private, while the husband stands away waiting for her to finish her conversation; and if she takes too long he leaves her alone with her companion (1965: 133).

The author also gave another example. Influenced by Muslims' habits, a Frankish knight asked the barber in the *hammam* (the public bath) to shave his pubic hair. Afterwards, the man asked the barber if he could bring his wife to him to do to her what he had done to him.

He said, "Salim, do the same to madame"...His wife also lay on her back and the knight repeated, "Do to her what you had done to me"... I shaved all the hair in the presence of her husband who was sitting looking at me. Then, he thanked me and gave me the pay for my service.

Ibn Munkith comments with astonishment:

Look at this great contradiction! they lack manly jealousy and the sense of honour, although they are of great courage and chivalry. How could there be courage without a sense of honour? (p.137).

The French invasion of Egypt increased European curiosity to learn about the Orient and its people. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries different categories of researchers, writers, travellers, artists and missionaries, followed by anthropologists poured into the region. There was a certain obsession and fascination with the Orient. Previously, Christian Medieval Europe had depicted the Muslim enemy as practising sexual promiscuity and Muhammed was described by Latin authors as sensual. In the age of the Enlightenment, with Europe freeing itself from Christianity and adopting secular ideologies, many writers and artists showed a fascination for the re-discovered 'romantic', 'sensual' and 'exotic' Orient. These ideas were mainly derived from the Arabian Nights:

The image was characterized by fierce and lavish scenes in a wild array of colours; harems and seraglios; decapitated bodies; women hurled into the Bosphorus in sacks; feluccas and brigantines displaying the Crescent flag; round, turquoise domes

and white minarets soaring to the heavens; viziers, eunuchs, and odalisques; refreshing springs under palm trees; *giaours* with their throats slit; captive women forced into submission by their lustful captors. As the poet Heine had already accurately noted, these daringly colourful paintings catered to the bourgeois European's baser instincts (Rodinson, 1988:59).

The works of French Orientalist painters such as Ingres and Delacroix expressed this bourgeois disposition; the fantasies of the Oriental woman as the embodiment of sexual licence. In these paintings women were presented in sensual scenes in the hammam. Judy Mabro (1991) points to the remarkable fact that few paintings have shown Oriental women as mothers. In her view, this is partly because painters could paint things in an 'exotic' setting which they would not have got away with in a domestic one: a provocative, barely clothed girl in an Algerian doorway was exotic; the same girl in the same attitude in a Parisian doorway would have been obscene. The Orient as a site of sexual freedom was the antithesis of Christian society:

In this fantasy the Oriental woman was surrounded by the barriers created by the veil and seclusion. But behind these barriers, men reigned supreme, living in a sexual paradise in which four wives and unlimited concubines were permitted. The fantasy consisted of gaining access to this world seen as the antithesis of Christian monogamy with its sexual taboos and emotional problems which the fantasist wished to escape (Sarah Graham Brown, 1988:9).

Taking into account the Islamic rules concerning the boundaries between men and women, in reality male observers met great difficulties in 'seeing' and speaking to Muslim women in the urban environment. Moreover, there was a deliberate tendency to hide Muslim women from the curiosity of foreign observers. From his own experience, the French Arabist Jacques Berque points out that North African Arabs have three domains which are totally closed in the face of Westerners: religion, women and the Arabic language (P. Rabinow, 1977:27). Only women considered of low rank (prostitutes and public dancers) were accessible, thus the disappointment expressed by the French novelist Gustave Flaubert. For some of the explorers, the veil and the confinement of

women to the house were to arouse the sensual imagination about what went on behind the veil and the wall. On the other hand, a considerable number of Westerners viewed the veil and the house with evident hostility. There were strong and angry reactions to what was considered a closed system in Muslim societies. Muslim women were depicted as being sexual beings imprisoned behind walls and bars.

If the women are inaccessible to sight (that is veiled), it is because they are imprisoned. This dramatized equivalence between the veiling and the imprisonment is necessary for the construction of an *imaginary scenario* that results in the dissolution of the actual society, the one that causes the frustration, in favour of a phantasm: that of the harem (Malek Alloula, 1987:21).

In the majority of writings, veiled women were equated with ghosts and death and likened to moving bundles of clothes (Mabro 1991). One has to consider the fact that a good part of the writers were concerned with generalizations and with making moral judgements. These writers judged the situation of Muslim women according to the criteria of their own culture, seeing the Muslim system as characterized by over-sexed tendencies, immorality of women and their lack of sense of motherhood. Most of the time, Islamic family law was blamed for the backwardness of Muslim societies and the inferior status of women. This was used as a justification for moral objection to Islam and its social order. Lord Cromer, the British representative and governor of Egypt, in his book 'Modern Egypt' (1928) viewed Islam, as a "social system" which is a "complete failure". He blamed the failure on the inferior status of women (Albert Hourani, 1967: 251).

In the European writings of the 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a general tendency to concentrate on the institution of the harem and to associate Muslim women in general with the life-style of the harem. The term has passed into English and other European languages from its Turkish form (Encyclopedia of Islam). Originally, harem is the plural form of the Arabic word *hurma*, which means a woman, the forbidden and the sacred (see part 1). The concept as



used in European writings meant those parts of the house which were reserved for women and were inaccessible to non-kin men. The system of the harem was developed in the urban merchant settings in the region. The males of the wealthier classes used to marry a number of wives who lived in one large house. The wives were strictly secluded and rarely left the house. Quranic provisions concerning sexual morality were taken as justification for the system. It was noted that with the passage of time and with a more urban way of life the 'ulema tended to interpret the Quranic provisions in a much stricter way. For example, Barbara Stowasser noticed that the 'ulema of the 2nd century interpreted the Quranic verses concerning women in a literal and moderate way. Later generations of 'ulema were very restrictive in their interpretation. For example, the 'ulema of the 5th century of the Islamic calendar demanded the total invisibility of women and their absolute confinement to their homes (p.28). The harem system was further elaborated under the Ottoman Sultanate. The system of 'imperial' harem was part of the Ottoman tradition. The palaces of the sultans were reported to contain tens of concubines from which the sultan chose the most talented in beauty and arts. Aside from the ruling elite, the Muslim merchant class was known for its practice of the system of polygyny, concubinage and the strict confinement of women to the house.

Unfortunately, what was written about Muslim women in the period that preceded the capitalist penetration is extremely scarce. Ian C. Dengler's study (1978) of the Turkish women in the Ottoman Empire in a city setting is particularly interesting; firstly it gives a picture of women's position before the age of European influence and capitalism. Secondly, it portrays different kinds of women within traditional Islamic society. This fact was widely ignored by early Western observers.

Dengler's study demonstrated that by means of legal and customary restrictions placed upon Ottoman women, they were relegated to the confines of household and family. Women were constrained in the manner of their public appearance in that they had to be veiled in public. This custom was never

absolute; it was most common among the upper classes and only laxly enforced among the lower orders and in the rural areas. On the other hand, contact between the sexes was reduced by restrictions placed upon the physical movement of women who were discouraged from moving about in markets, places of amusement and certain kinds of shops. "The physical space allotted to women in the Ottoman Empire was narrower than that allotted to men and of a substantially different nature" (p.230). The most effective way of enforcing the separation of the sexes was by depriving women of all but a few functions in the public sector of government. Thus, teaching was the only job that women could practise in the public sector. Hence, Turkish women lived within a system of restrictions that made it unlikely that they would have either the need or the ability to deal with males outside the network of kin, family and the household unit. There were also incentives: the most important was the increased sense of personal worth a woman acquired through marriage and the production of offspring. Women in Ottoman society had considerable reason for accepting the roles of wife and mother. They thereby ensured their maintenance, obtained personal companionship, family and community support, and, at times, considerable amounts of money.

The study demonstrates that the world of women had four separate levels: the royal harem, women of merchants, women of the artisan class and the servitor class. The women of the servitor class were largely of servile origin, though some of them were free and worked as wage labourers. The work of women of this class was household labour, but they also worked in the textile industry or in women's baths. In addition, some of them worked as entertainers and prostitutes. In the last two roles women of servitor class appear to have violated the rules of organization that separated the worlds of men and women. These two groups of women were held to be members of religious and ethnic minorities and thus not part of their own social order. Women of the artisan class were confined to their homes carrying out their tasks of cooking, cleaning and childrearing or, when free of these, working to supplement the family income

through the production of textiles and embroidered goods. The family was small, servants were absent, the marriage unit was monogamous.

Women in the families of the urban merchants were freed from menial household tasks and shared with the women of the ruling class the quality of being major consumers of luxury goods and leisure-time activities in the Ottoman economy; in Bursa, for instance, over 50 percent of the wills of these women were made of such items as clothing, jewellery, mirrors and the like. Much of their free time was spent in idle consumption, on promenades, excursions, picnics in the countryside and at the women's baths. The royal harem, however, had a broader choice of activities. Dengler argues that in addition to some intellectual and religious careers, they could become political and social arbitrators through linkage with their friends, kin groups and the army of subordinates placed under them. They became heads of vast clientage and patronage networks that at times gave them direct control over the entire Ottoman state apparatus (Dengler,1978:237).

Harem life is defended against the Western representation by some feminists (Laila Ahmed, Minai, Marsot). For example, Marsot protested against the image of the harem as being a lascivious place where odalisques reclined in voluptuous poses in expectation of their master's visit, or in tones of revulsion as a place of idleness and apathy (1978: 265). She pointed out that some women in the Egyptian harem were reported to manage and control their own properties and practices commercial activities. Similarly, some of these women of the Turkish society, as Dengler shows, extended their activities to the world of trade and commerce in partnership with relatives. However, according to Dengler, this kind of activity was not usual in Ottoman society; evidence from judicial records indicates that the majority of women of this class only infrequently took an active interest in the organization of their capital, and then did so only insofar as it concerned the establishment of estates and trusts for the benefit of their heirs (p:236).

The transformation of Islamic society from the old class system to the capitalist mode of production in the period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries had a powerful impact on the women living in the secluded world of the urban harem. Intellectual contact with the West played a significant role in shaping the idea of modernization and progress. The position of Muslim women was questioned in the light of the Western model. One of the earliest Muslim travellers to the West, Rifa'ah Al-Tahtawi (1801-73), who became an influential intellectual in Egypt and in the whole region, showed great admiration for Western societies and cultures. In his book *Takhlis Al-Ibris Fi Talkhis Paris* (1834), he described the unique characteristics of Parisian life to the Muslim reader: there were the opera, theatre, journalism and the parliamentary system. The principles of the French Revolution, in particular, were glorified. The relationship between the sexes was also introduced to the reader as something totally different to anything with which the Eastern reader might be acquainted. Al-Tahtawi was particularly interested in introducing the atmosphere of the ballrooms, which struck him by their curious practice of changing partners.

Each man invites a woman so that he may dance with her, and when the dance is finished another man invites her for a second dance, and so on...To touch a woman anywhere in the upper part of the body is not considered an offence among these Christians...In Egypt, the dance is practiced only by women in order to excite desire. In Paris, on the contrary, the dance is simply a kind of jumping around without even a whiff of immorality (quoted by B. Lewis, 1982: 292).

Although Al-Tahtawi wrote that French women lacked modesty, he clearly admired them. They were presented as if they were in demand on the basis of their intellectual qualities and education. He also denied that their pattern of dressing gave rise to moral corruption.

The confusion on the question of a woman's virtue is not related to what she conceals or reveals of her body, for virtue is a consequence only of a good or a corrupt upbringing (Quoted by Baraka, 1987: 47).

He told the reader that women in France were different in that there were no veils, no beatings and no limitations. Women were pictured as a source of grace for French society and were given personal freedom to choose their spouses, travel alone and publicly express their views.

In his writings, he encouraged Muslim women to participate in the communal life of the ummah and viewed modern education as a necessary condition for changing women's situation. It was necessary for three reasons: for successful marriages and better raising of children; to qualify women for work; and to end the life of emptiness and gossip in the harem.

The debate over the emancipation of women actually originated among Muslim reformists (Thomas Philipp: 1978:278). Their contention of the possibility of reconciliation between Islam and modernity was extended to include the question of women, but they did so in a more cautious manner than with other issues. They argued that the existing situation of the upper-class urban women, who suffered from certain dreadful practices such as excessive polygyny, concubinage, illiteracy and the spread of divorce, was against the true commands of the Quran and the hadith. The position of Muslim women had suffered because of the general decline of the ummah and its disregard of the teachings of the Quran. In addition, it was argued, corruption was admitted to Islamic practices through the cultures of people who converted to Islam and brought their own customs. Thus, an Islam correctly interpreted and set free of traditional ballast provided the blueprint for the emancipation of women. Jan Hjarpe noted that, using the tool of interpretation, Muslim reformers asked the question: what did the Islamic Revelation mean for the woman's position as compared with her previous status?

The answer is that the arrival of Islam indeed meant concrete improvements in all areas. For example, before Islam came, unwanted female babies were buried alive, a practice which was later forbidden in the Koran. Islam signified greater security, justice, and economic liberty for women. To follow Islam's principles is, therefore, to continue in this path (1983: 13).

Muhammed Abduh maintained that the backwardness of women was at the heart of the general crisis of the ummah. He emphasized three domains in the women's issue: education, polygyny and divorce. Modern education was considered essential for women. With education women could use their reason to understand their true religion. He cited the Quran in favour of women's education:

We wish that our daughters should be educated. For Allah has explained, "To them are due the same goods that we expect from them". There are many sacred verses that clarify that both man and woman share in fulfilling the same duties towards life and towards religion (El-Saadawi 1980:171).

In regard to polygyny, Abduh provided his re-interpretation of the verse "marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, four, but if you fear you will not be equitable, then only one". He pointed out that the Quran in reality enjoined the Muslim male to marry one wife only, since it was impossible for a human being to treat several wives justly and equally. Abduh used the same line of reasoning with regard to divorce. His aim was to restrict the husband's unfettered power to repudiate his wife at will. The husband's pronouncement of three dismissals all at once was considered unlawful. He considered divorce reprehensible in itself, and interpreted the Quran as permitting it only in case of necessity.

Muslim modernists started from where the reformists ended and arrived at different conclusions. The most well-known modernist is Qasim Amin (1865-1908) who is currently dubbed by modernists as the "emancipator of women". Qasim Amin had a French education and worked as a judge in Egypt. Juan Cole (1981) emphasized Amin's social background as a representative of the emerging educated bourgeois class. Thus, his writing was for the new upper and middle classes, most of whom were themselves Western educated. In his book *Tahrir Al-mar'ah* (Women's Emancipation), published in 1899, he called for the emancipation of Muslim women and emphasized that the principal beneficiaries of such emancipation would be the educated men whose

opportunities to find educated wives was limited. Amin stressed education for girls regarding it important for creating modern housewives. Compared with Egyptian women, European middle class women are good housekeepers; they know how to choose furniture and perform their job with more economy of cost. He pointed out that by means of modern education and work, veiling and seclusion would end. Amin did not call for the complete abolition of the veil, but encouraged women to uncover their faces, arguing that Islamic law did not demand full veiling as was practised in urban areas. In the same book Amin declared that the ummah was in decline; it had lost power and strength and could not survive in the modern world. The reason given for the decay was the situation of the Muslim family, which 'lacked moral strength'. The publication of the book led to strong fury among the orthodox 'ulema. It gave rise to many books attacking the author, especially with regard to his views about the veil.

In reply to his critics he published *Al-Mar'ah Al-Jadidah* (The New Woman) in 1900. In this book, he abandoned Islam as a framework for emancipation. Islam as a social system was questioned in the light of the theory of evolutionism that was based on Darwinism (Q. Amin,1987: 116). He attacked the idea that Islam embodied the 'model of human perfection'. It could not be taken as a model because it had reached its full potential without developing a concrete, rational mode of thinking. Religious men were always in control and they prevented any development of the sciences independent of theology. Islamic civilization was not the perfect civilization, for the Greeks and Romans had been more advanced. Qasim Amin urged Muslims to stop deceiving themselves that their civilization was the perfect model. They should admit that Europe was the most advanced in science and social perfection. Europe must be taken as the perfect model and the idea of the perfection of the righteous ancestors should be abandoned, because it was a disease:

This is the disease which we must start to remedy. The only medicine is for us to teach our children about Western civilization. When the time comes the truth will sparkle before our eyes, shining as brightly as the sun. Then we will understand the

greatness of Western civilization and will accept that it is impossible to reform our society if it is not based on modern scientific knowledge. This is why we note that civilized countries regardless of race, language, nation or religion are similar in the form of government, administration, legal system, family structure, education, language, writing, architecture and roads, extending even to many simple customs such as dress, greetings and food. From this we infer that the result of modernization is that humanity walks on one path; primitive peoples are different because they did not develop a social system based on rationality. This is what leads us to cite Europeans as an example and urge that they be copied, and it is for this that we have undertaken to call attention to European women (Q. Amin,1987: 120).

Influenced by Western evolutionary ideas, he points out that women are like societies in that they progress from one stage to another. Throughout history there have been four stages in women's progress. The state of primitivism when women were equal to men. The state of the family when she was dominated. The state of civil society when some of her rights were acknowledged, but she was prevented from exercising them by the domination of men. The fourth stage is represented by Western civilization. He presents a rosy picture of Western women arguing that they are equal to men, have most of their rights if not their full rights and that they work side by side with men in industry, commerce, law, science and arts. Muslim women were situated at the third stage (p.56). Qasim Amin went to great lengths to defend the Western social system: contrary to what was believed in the East, Westerners were morally more advanced. In particular, their middle class had good morals with regard to sexual virtues (p.124). He pointed out that it was wrong to believe that Westerners did not veil their women because they were generally lacking in moral values or that Western men did not have a sense of honour. The European woman was free from the enslavement of the veil and seclusion and had many rights, because Western society worked according to rational judgements and not according to tradition and customs. The practice of veiling did not guarantee virtue, as some kinds of veil arouse sexual desire. Moreover,



it prevents women from becoming 'full citizens'. Veiling and seclusion are opposed to the idea of human liberty and the spirit of the law of nature. Women were prevented from enjoying their freedom and from developing their mental and physical potentialities in contemporary Muslim society (p.110). Hence, Qasim Amin concluded that according to modern standards, the veil was an unacceptable practice. It was bad in itself for it was based on lack of trust and disrespect of women. It was an indication of the fact that Muslim women were stripped of their human attributes and dealt with as sexual beings. In short, the veil was considered to be an indication of the deterioration of moral standards in Muslim society where men, children and especially women were preoccupied with sexuality and where there was little space in their minds for high and refined values.

The publication of the book gave rise to profound shock in the Arab and Muslim worlds. It was not only Amin's demands for women that shook traditional Egyptian society, but rather his attack on the prevailing morality and his criticism of the degeneration and corruption of male/female relationships and of the meanings of love, marriage, motherhood and fatherhood insulted and hurt both men and women (Abdel Kader,1987: 60). Hundreds of pamphlets and books were published in reply to Amin's views. He was forced to lead an isolated and difficult life until his death.

In Turkey, modernists of Qasim Amin type were several. From the latter half of the 19th century to the beginning of this century the modernist Turkish intelligentsia distanced itself from Islam as the only form of legitimate discourse on women's emancipation. The intellectuals were particularly influenced by the French positivist school, with its notion of social progress; they were also influenced by the new ideology of nationalism. For them, European civilization was the only civilization to be followed. Abdullah Cevdet, one of the founders of the Young Turk Movement, wrote:'There is no second civilization; civilization means European civilization and it must be imported with both its roses and its thorns' (quoted by K. Jayawardena, 1986: 30). In general, modernist

intellectuals held Islam responsible for what they saw as the degraded condition of women, which were considered to be an important symptom of Ottoman backwardness. The assumption was that, by adopting Western culture, the status of women would be changed. Kandioti noted that Cevdet supported his argument about modernization of women by biological materialism and the ideas of Ribot, a French disciple of Darwin. He claimed that whatever the social extraction of their father, children born of enslaved women would in time lead to the degeneration of the race. Bernard Lewis mentioned that in a journal edited by Cevdet an article was published in 1912 describing a vision of the future modernized Turkey. The following things were anticipated: the Sultan would have one wife and no harem, the fez would be abolished, women could wear what they wanted and could choose their spouses, and matchmaking would be prohibited (1965: 231).

Hence, the harem system embodied for the modernists the most backward aspect of the archaic structure; it was blamed for many evils in Muslim society and was a source of shame for men with a modern mentality. In describing the condition of oriental women, modernists echoed European ideas about the Orient. Laila Ahmed points out rightly that in perceiving the status of women as perhaps the single most important aspect of their society in need of reform, Middle Eastern thinkers were therefore to some extent accepting and endorsing the diagnosis of their societies arrived at by Western men (Laila Ahmed, 1984:117). Thus, the situation of Oriental women, compared with the idealized Western woman's life, was described as one characterized by imprisonment, denial and inhumanity. For example, Taj Al-Soltan, one of the most significant feminist campaigners in Iran, who had mixed with upper-class European women in the beginning of this century, wrote:

Women in Iran are separated from humanity and classified as wild animals, incarcerated throughout their lives behind high walls, shrouded in black garments that they can remove only when their corpses are wrapped in white for burial (Quoted by Minou Reeves, 1989:79).

Indeed, since the late nineteenth century, the intellectual atmosphere in Middle Eastern Muslim countries had been dominated by active male intellectuals from the emerging bourgeois class attempting to reconstruct a new image for the individual and society; the women's issue was part and parcel of that new modern society. The idle, gossipy, wild and concealed woman of the harem institution defied the image of the ideal Western middle-class woman: educated and possessing certain fine skills, a good housewife and mother, active in charity, elegant and visible. The period was characterized by an increased demand for 'civilized' housewives. Jayawardena demonstrated that to the male reformers of the local bourgeoisie, women needed to be adequately Westernized and educated in order to enhance the modern and 'civilized' image of their country and of themselves.

It is to be noted that concepts devaluating women were borrowed from the West. For example, Arab intellectuals imported the concepts of the 'weaker' and 'fair' sex to refer to the female sex, and these terms are still widely used in modernist expressions. These expressions imply that women are in need of men's protection because of their physical and moral passivity. The new term for the male sex is the 'harsh' sex. Traditionally, women's subordination was interpreted in a religious framework. It was predetermined by God's wisdom and His preference for men to be the protectors and managers of women and also because of men's economic role. With the contact with the West, women's physical inferiority was stressed to justify men's universal control. This idea had its roots in Darwinism and other Western biological schools which maintained that the female structure is weaker and different in its function.

On the other hand, at a time marked by a fierce struggle with the French and English colonial powers, the issue of women was incorporated into the national issues by the anti-colonial forces, most of them of Islamic character. Continuation of Islamic formulations with regard to women was linked with the honour of the ummah and the liberation of the land. Women's adoption of Western ways was to be viewed as a serious concession to the enemies of the

ummah. Laila Ahmed explained the dilemma that faced Muslim modernists and feminists. They have been under pressure to remain loyal to the Islamic formulations. The issue of cultural betrayal has a disturbing quality for the Islamic and Arab individual. This stems from the unique history of the relationship between the Western and Islamic worlds (1984: 121). Thomas Philipp notes that the opposition to Qasim Amin's demands came not only from conservative religious quarters, but also from some of the Egyptian nationalist leaders. Nationalists were opposed to Qasim Amin's stand because, as one of them argued (Tal'at Harb), the emancipation of women was just another plot to weaken the Egyptian nation and disseminate immorality and decadence in society. He criticized Egyptians who tried to emulate the West and claimed that there was a European imperialist plan to create a negative image of the position of Muslim women. Outsiders were responsible for trying to meddle in Egyptian affairs; and the unknown origin of Qasim Amin's family was mentioned by Tal'at Harb. This attitude was shared by Mustafa Kamil, the Muslim leader who sought the immediate withdrawal of the British from Egypt. Mustafa Kamil opposed the emancipation of women on the basis that national unity and strength were more important than social change and the introduction of change smacked of foreign designs to corrupt and weaken society. Thomas Philipp (1978: 280) notes that there appeared to be much evidence confirming their suspicion about the foreign origin of the feminist movement. According to Philipp the predominance of members of religious minorities is overwhelming: of the editors and founders of the fourteen magazines specializing in issues concerning women before World War I, one was a Copt, two were Jewish, six or even eight were Christian and two were Muslim. "It is exactly this element", Philipp comments, "Mustafa Kamil eyed with unveiled hostility". For him, these feminists were intruders, who backed the enemies and their way of life. Hence, women's emancipation was nothing but a foreign conspiracy to weaken and corrupt Muslim society. Philipp notes that the content of these magazines invited public discontent, since some of them emphasised what was considered the high position of Egyptian women

in the Pharaonic, Roman and Byzantine periods. Nothing was mentioned about the period of Islam and it was only stated that the position of women was currently extremely low. Thus, implicitly, Islam was made responsible for the subordination of women in society.

However, did colonial authorities really attempt to modernize Muslim women as conservative Muslims claim? Significantly, colonial policy makers, in general, did not show much enthusiasm for the improvement of Muslim women's position, despite the declared and well-known policy of 'the white man's burden' that was declared by politicians and colonial administrators. Women were considered representatives of a traditionalism that could not be changed. In North Africa, the French attempted to prevent change in the private life of the rural populations; these populations were protected from the influence of the national emancipatory movements. The *Bulletin d' Enseignement Public* declaimed in 1920:

Politics, in the current European sense of the word, cannot favour our attempts to bring about progress here. Therefore, let us not dream of emancipating the Moroccan citizen, or of freeing the slave, or of liberating the women (V.Maher, 1978:105, quoted from Bidwell, 1973:248).

V. Maher concluded that the colonization of Morocco "was not likely to lead to improvements in the position of women on the contrary" (1978:105). France's colonization of Algeria which lasted for 132 years and involved a considerable process of transformation of the social and cultural structure to Europeanize Algeria, meant very little for the improvement of women's position. By 1954 there were only 952 girls in secondary school, and 24 at university in Algeria (Gordon, 1968: 45). When the French colonial administrators showed occasional concern for change in the situation of Algerian women, this concern was concentrated on superficial practices like urging men to bring their wives to mixed parties and encouraging women to remove the veil. Frantz Fanon (1967) argues that abandoning the veil was essential for the policy of undermining national resistance because it was a mechanism of resistance, hence, the

policy of unveiling Algeria for which the French mobilized various resources and which was echoed in General de Gaulle's invitation to Algerian women to become Westernized. The image of the French in the eyes of the Algerian public was that they were corrupting Algerian women through a highly visible prostitution business. For example:

Among the Ouled Nail tribesmen, some of the women, called Daughters of the Nail, customarily spent a number of years dancing and entertaining men in Bu Saada and neighbouring oasis towns of the Sahara-often in houses run by their own relatives. Far from being ostracized, these gaily attired and bejewelled girls coifed with heavy braids of black wool were invited to dance at sacred village festivities and eventually retired to a respectable marriage. The French tourist trade is said to have transformed them into vulgar strippers-cum-prostitutes (Minai,1981:75).

Moreover, the Algerian writer Malek Alloula, who studied thousands of picture postcards of Algerian women produced and sent by the French in Algeria during the first three decades of this century, remarks that "history knows of no other society in which women have been photographed on such a large scale to be delivered to public view". Unveiling the veiled was the main concern of the photographers. Women were denied all but their sexual nature by means of the pornographic representation of their bodies. This practice, for Alloula, reveals an intense preoccupation with the veiled female body"..fixation upon the woman's body leads the postcard to paint this body up, ready it, and eroticize it in order to offer it up to any and all comers from a clientele moved by the unambiguous desire of possession" (1987: 9). Barbara Harlow gives examples of this possession: Meursault, the protagonist in Camus's 1939 novel, *The Stranger*, killed an Algerian Arab who refused to make his sister available to the French colonists. Having the example of French colonialists in their relation with Algerian females in mind, she points out:

Possession of Arab women came to serve as a surrogate for and means to the political and military conquest of the Arab world (1987:15).

However, missionaries who had their influential presence in the region in the second half of the nineteenth century adopted a more active stand. In their writings they strongly objected to the treatment and the position of women in Islamic societies. Raising the status of women was generally regarded as a crucial part of the missionary enterprise (Sarah Graham-Brown, 1988:12). They considered that their mission was to contribute to the removal of the people of the region from a state of degradation and to spread the principles of Christian civilization through education. The educational institutions established by missionaries had a very important influence on 'women's emancipation'. As it became acceptable for increasing numbers of wealthy Muslim families to send their daughters to missionary schools, harem women had the opportunity to receive a certain amount of Western education and to experience Western ideas. Modern education contributed to the emergence of the 'new' woman, as modernity was associated with educated women. But what kind of education did women receive? Jayawardena points out that it was class biased, since it was geared to providing good wives for men who had risen on the economic and social ladder. Girls were educated to uphold the system of the nuclear patriarchal family.

In becoming 'modern' ladies for modern bourgeois gentlemen, these women started gradually to get rid of aspects of the harem life. The receptions which were described as being dedicated to gossip, heavy eating, fortune-telling and zar sessions were replaced by sophisticated 'salons'. In these 'salons', the piano was played and one could hear discussions about fashions and the latest English and French imports on the market. 'Salons' were usually characterized by the presence of the hired European mentor, whose function was to assist the harem women to shed their shyness and teach them bourgeois manners and etiquette. To acquire the supposed accomplishments of the Western feminine ideal, efforts were made to learn foreign languages, music and domestic arts in foreign schools. Significantly, the pattern of clothing came to occupy an extraordinary importance for Oriental bourgeois women's

perception of modernity. In practice, modernity represented for them that dramatic metamorphosis from the previous state of absolute veiling and seclusion in harem quarters to the new phase of visibility in the modern European shape. Considerable significance, therefore, was given to a change in physical appearance as an indicator of more invisible changes. The public and collective removal of the veil was usually surrounded by great anxiety and considered an historical occasion in the history of women's emancipation. For example, 1923 is considered an epoch-marking year for the Egyptian feminist movement, because it was the year when Huda Sharawi and other prominent women within the upper-class discarded their veils in public and became visible figures. The harem's original consumerist life style had contributed to this tendency of associating modernity with Western appearance. Hence, indulgence in the consumption of Western fashion became a symbol of status and prestige (replacing the veil and seclusion in this function), as well as a symbol of liberation from social and religious restrictions.

Nevertheless, participation in public activities was a major concern for some women in the new era, especially the enlightened among them. Some of them were interested in acquiring a profession, not for the sake of income, but for self-fulfilment and prestige. Others gave their time to charity organizations and social service for poor women and children. In 1914, Huda Sharawi founded L'Association Intellectuelle des Dames Egyptiennes. Addressing the audience (in French), Huda posed the question: "What can and should be the role of Egyptian women in social and national activities?". She explained that by engaging in social service projects, women could acquire practical knowledge, their horizons would widen and their traditionally inward focus would be directed outward as well.

Yet, while posing questions about women's public role, the feminist campaigners of the reform movement remained without a definite answer as to their point of reference with regard to the emancipation of women. They were to remain torn between adopting the Western-inspired modernist ideology on the



one hand and continuing to demonstrate loyalty to religion on the other. Muslim conservative forces reacted angrily to the new ideas of emancipation and towards what was happening in the harem quarters. As the example of Q. Amin shows, in the Arab world modernists who explicitly advocated the emancipation of women according to the Western example were faced by overwhelming social disapproval and rejection. It is significant that the example of Amin was not followed by any other Egyptian or Arab intellectual; they had learned to express their ideas with less openness and in so doing to prove their loyalty to religion and country.

The Egyptian bourgeois feminists led by Huda Sharawi took the same path in presenting their feminist cause in an Islamic framework. In the union magazine a religious tone was frequently adopted in defence of their stand "We, the Egyptian feminists, have a great respect for our religion. In wanting to see it practised in its true spirit, we are doing more for it than those who submit themselves blindly to the customs that have deformed Islam" (Quoted by Minai, 1981: 72). Sharawi was careful to present her demands for reform within the spirit of the Quran and ideal Islamic history. For example, when a petition was organized by her demands for reform of Islamic family law, she wrote to the Grand Qadi, the highest religious authority, arguing against polygyny on the basis that the Quran restricted polygyny to certain cases. Sharawi's effort was without significant success. The religious authorities agreed to pass a law establishing sixteen as the minimum age of marriage for girls, eighteen for boys, but the rest of the petition was ignored. They considered the abolition of polygyny to be against the letter of the Quran. Nevertheless, Sharawi continued to campaign for the reform of Islamic laws using an Islamic approach, an approach which Woodsmall argues was for political expediency rather than real belief (1936:121). Woodsmall mentions how Sharawi, while delivering a lecture in 1935, was interrupted by many members of the audience led by two religious men. At the moment of her calling for the restriction of polygyny, the audience rose up and shouted 'Long live polygyny'.

Furthermore, Sharawi had to face internal problems within the feminist union she led. The Muslim activist, Zaynab Al-Ghazali, who played a significant role in the history of the leading revivalist organization (*Ikwan*) or the Muslim Brothers, revealed the conflict within the union between modernists and Islamists. In her autobiography, she described the split in the union which occurred in the thirties. Zaynab left the union with a group of women and established the Muslim Women's Association which later became part of the Muslim Brothers. The association was dedicated to the reinterpretation and reconstitution of Islam among women.

I was working with Mrs. Huda al-Sharawi in the women's movement, which calls for the liberation of women. But I, with my Islamic upbringing, found that this was not the right way for Muslim women. Women had to be called to Islam, so I founded the Muslim Women's Association after I resigned from the Feminist Union....Our goal was to acquaint the Muslim woman with her religion so she would be convinced by means of study that the women's liberation movement is a deviant innovation that occurred due to the Muslims' backwardness. We consider the Muslims to be backward; they must remove this backwardness from their shoulders and rise up as their religion commands, as it should be in Islamic lands (Zaynab al-Ghazali, interviewed by V. Hoffman, 1985:234).

Meanwhile, emancipation remained a matter of class exclusiveness; it did not extend to the lower classes. Cole (1981) points out that the practices and issues that were raised by the modernists were confined to the middle and upper classes. Thus, the discussion about unveiling, monogamy and education was a reflection of the situation of the emerging bourgeois class. Women seeking emancipation were concerned about problems especially applicable to themselves and in their writings, they were concerned to address women of their own class and the topics dealt with are evidence of their exclusive concern with women of the upper classes. As Philipp shows, a popular subject was the education of children: concern was expressed that the young should not be left in the care of servants because they would imbibe lower-class values and

attitudes. Other frequent topics were the management of large households and the supervision of servants. Idleness in the secluded quarters of upper-class households seem to have been one of the problems of women. Acquiring an education, activities in welfare organizations or even teaching are suggested as remedies.

In sum, the harem finally broke down when upper-class women became free to change their Islamic costumes and to permeate formerly prohibited spaces. Nevertheless, modernization and emancipation were limited to certain superficial practices. For the majority of women of this class, change meant no more than learning European bourgeois habits and manners. The basic cultural assumptions about the relationship between men and women were rarely questioned or challenged. Hence, it was not by accident that most of the advocates of change were male. These emancipated women did not regard themselves as independent persons and individuals who had potential capacities and ambitions. They perceived themselves, and were perceived, only as functional parts within the male-dominated family and society. On the other hand, the emancipatory movement led by bourgeois women was limited because of its restriction to upper class women and lacked any impact on the lower classes. Their message was alien and irrelevant. Despite the modernists' concessions to the guardians of religion and the presentation of modern demands in an Islamic framework, the impact of Islamic opposition persisted. In the eyes of the guardians of Islam, the adoption of a Western pattern of dressing and etiquette and abandonment of the veil meant an actual departure from Islamic rules of sexual morality. The removal of the veil, in particular, was taken to mark the beginning of the waning of the influence of Islam in society.

## CHAPTER 6

### Muslim States and Women's Modernization

Anderson (1991) uses the example of the Muslim ummah to demonstrate how sacred communities were imaginable largely through the medium of a sacred language and written script. The break-up of the Ottoman Empire, which was built on Islamic foundations, was a painful and tragic event. The emerging nation states (like those of Europe discussed by Anderson) sought to construct new images and created different conceptions of time and space in order to 'think' the nation. They attempted to replace the concept of the ummah by the ideology of nationalism and citizenship. However, a kind of synthesis with Islam was attempted to achieve legitimacy in the process of creating the state. These quasi-secular and secular states with their different political forms - monarchical, military and socialist - sought to implement ambitious programmes of rapid Western-inspired modernization and the secularisation of existing traditional institutions.

Under state policies, Islamic societies experienced profound economic and social transformation, the universal characteristic of which was a change in the relationship between town and country. Ironically, Ibn Khaldoun's model of historical cycles in which countrymen overwhelm the cities has some relevance here. As a result of state policies, which disrupted the rural economy, the peasants were largely dispossessed, caught in a vicious circle of poverty and converted into landless agricultural labourers. This led to the migration of peasants and agricultural labourers from villages to urban areas with their relative prosperity and the emergence of the phenomenon of the "ruralisation of the cities". They were absorbed as unskilled labourers in sectors such as building, light industries and services. In the absence of industrial employment, they experienced increasing pauperisation without developing any coherent class consciousness. As Beck and Keddie (1978) argue, the impact of

capitalism on different groups was differential and so were their actions regarding modernisation. If the Western impact, and even Western rule, was advantageous to an important section of the upper and new middle classes, it was often harmful to the traditional or bazaar petty bourgeoisie and manual workers in both town and countryside (Beck and Keddie, 1978:12). For this reason the traditional urban groups and the migrant peasants were less inclined to emulate Western ways than the new middle classes. Moreover, they turned against Western liberal ideology associated it with Western and Westernized oppressors and competitors, and adopted an ideology that was anti-imperialist and stressed the value of the Islamic past. Social groups whose lives had been shattered by the effect of market forces and the process of modernization were the fertile soil in which populist Islam flourished and grown as a mass movement, appealing to the rural lower classes and urban groups in traditional occupations. The setting of this movement has mainly been the slums of modern cities. In these social and economic circumstances, the movement has come to prominence, in Jansen's words, as a radical critique of Westernization and national politics (Jansen,1979). The theoretical question about whether Islamic doctrine is pro- or anti-capitalism is open to opposing points of view, Muslim and Western. What is concrete is that on the practical level Islam has been used as a framework and validating principle for a broad range of anti-capitalist sentiments in the twentieth-century Middle East (Joel Beinin,1987). The thesis by Engels and Marx that the history of the Orient is a history of religion seems valid in the case of Islamic revival. Here, one cannot mistake the inter-relation between religion and class interests. The classes disadvantaged by capitalism and modernization have embraced Islam or a utopian version of Islam and identify themselves with it in opposition to the 'Westernized' classes. This is the social and economic background of what is currently called "Islamic Revival", "Islamic resurgence" or "Islamic Fundamentalism".

The case of modernized Turkish state, as described by M. Gilson, illustrates the extent of the social and cultural effects of modernization on traditional organizations. He points out that the impact of capitalism combined with state-planned modernization had the effect of beginning the fragmentation and the pauperization of the rural strata and driving them into the expanding cities as a large pool of unskilled labour. This process of breaking-up of the rural society's traditional units and forms of property and production has occurred in different forms in many modern societies, often through colonial rule and the application of state regulations. The emerging middle class freed themselves from religion and tradition and adapted the ideology of modernization through which the affected groups (the peasants and landless coming into the towns or displaced artisans) were defined as 'conservatives' who should change themselves in order for them to be made useful for the general planned progress of the state. This ideology of the dominant class concealed the structural characteristics of the lower strata and prevented any comprehension of their situation.

Explaining this cultural process, Gilson points out that these circumstances were the appropriate context for religious forces to become a framework for the expression of the interests of the disprivileged and exploited. Religious idioms and symbols were interpreted by the poor as enshrining their identity, and they represented for them another order of existence based on divine prescript and prophecy. Resentment and nascent class sentiment were canalized and structured by religious forces and religion was thus transformed from a pillar of the state into a form of latent rebellion on the part of the uprooted.

The determining forces of this very slow transformation were ultimately Western capitalism, and proximately state-directed 'reforms'. Every attack upon those ideas and institutions that had once been part of the basic symbolic capital and legitimacy of state and society but that were now being discarded in the name of modernity further crystallized and defined Islam for the poor and for those classes who were marginal to this new order as

'their' religion. In this sense state policy worked very directly against itself (1990:44).

In short, with the policy of secularisation, in which religion and religious institutions were separated off and controlled, the state diminished its legitimacy in the eyes of the 'traditional' groups. The state and the new order were seen to fall outside a pure Islamic society.

With regard to women, anthropologists acknowledge the importance of the state not only in regulating people's lives, but, as Henrietta Moore points out, in defining gender ideologies, conceptions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity', and determining ideas about what sorts of persons women and men should be (Moore, 1988). Haleh Afshar (1987) emphasizes the increasing importance of the state and its policies in the lives of women in the Third World. The nature of these policies and their direction vary historically and may, at times, appear inconsistent and contradictory (1987:4). Afshar explains this contradiction in terms of the character of the ruling classes and whether they are traditional landed classes, a Western-oriented bourgeois class or local industrialists.

The state's interference in the lives of women in the Islamic world by means of modernization policies is a good example of this Third World phenomenon. As Nadia Youssef (1978) points out, the real beginnings of female modernism in the Islamic world cannot be traced to a feminist movement; it is related to economic change and political conditions where the political leaders played a very important role in implementing modernization policies. State intervention in the lives of women was justified on the basis of freeing women from the shackles of 'backward' social customs which were regarded as obstructing progress. The ruling elites considered modernization of women as a fundamental factor in constructing modern nations. It is noteworthy that the ideology adopted by the state corresponded with the demands raised by Muslim modernists and the early bourgeois feminist movement. The state claimed to fight women's illiteracy, seclusion and polygyny on the grounds that they curtailed the individual human rights of women and because they created ignorant mothers and unproductive members of society. Women were

increasingly presented as a wasted national resource (Deniz Kandiyoti, 1991:10). The early development of capitalism made it possible for harem women to walk out of their secluded wards and acquire education and professions, but the bourgeois feminist movement they led was largely isolated, and modernization, therefore, remained confined to the realm of the new bourgeois. The task of the states, theoretically, was to extend the territory of modernization to include the bulk of women who were still clinging to their traditional world and were faithful to the religious world view. These women were needed as a workforce for economic development plans in a context of labour shortages. In some cases the modernization of women served political purposes, such as controlling kin-based and ethnic communities.

By and large, however, the connection between women and the continuity of Islam in general and Islamic law in particular remains a major obstacle to the programme of modernization. Whereas political, commercial and civil codes of Islamic law were relinquished during the colonial period, laws concerning women are the only aspect of Islamic law which remain untouched by secularisation. Therefore, the enormous problem which challenged reforming women's position in modern society was how to deal with these laws and how to introduce Westernization measures seen by the traditional masses, led by religious men, as destructive to their natural social order as specified by religion. Most Muslim governments have been careful not to clash with religion in this area. They emphasized the democratization of education as an effective way leading to women's participation in the workforce and thus their emancipation. Others, in addition to education and the encouragement of work, introduced aggressive and coercive policies to enforce the new practices and uproot the old. In all cases, however, there have been two kinds of religion: the 'official' Islam which was largely in the hands of the state and in its approach to women's issues has generally been a continuation of the Islamic reform movement. This Islam has been exploited by the state to give a religious justification for women's work, education, fertility planning, etc. The other



religion, 'stubborn' and uncompromising, on the other hand, has been active in developing its opposition discourse against this world (anti-modernity, anti-capitalism, anti-materialism, anti-consumerism etc.). Moreover, it has greatly succeeded politically in persuading the majority of the lower and lower-middle classes against the political systems and against their disastrous economic modernization in particular. This Islam has been defending all aspects of social life which the new ideologies came to sweep away. To them, the issue of women bears particular symbolic and real importance. Hence, the state's interference in this area was considered a serious threat to religion. For some regimes, like that of Iran, who took a radical turn, the outcome of modernization policies was religiously and politically disastrous for the regime.

In the next pages, I shall review the state's policies in a number of Muslim countries. Turkey and Tunisia are examples of secular orientation, whereas Algiers and Egypt represent the socialist system. Iran provides a vivid platform for the conflict between modernization and Islam.

### **Women and secular states**

The first Islamic country to adopt Westernization policies concerning women was the newly-born Turkish Republic. Western impact resulted in the abolishing of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic by Kemal Ataturk in 1923. This event was dramatic because it marked the end of the last autonomous state based on Islamic principles and the unity of the ummah. It also meant the emergence of a new order based on the division of religion and the state. The state had undertaken radical steps to Westernize Turkish society and to separate it from its Islamic traditions. This meant furthering the introduction of capitalism, industrialization and the adoption of Western law. Radical measures borrowed from the West were introduced: the European system of dates instead of the Islamic calendar; the Latin alphabet instead of the Arabic; the declaration of Sunday rather than Friday as the

weekly day of rest. However, most important of all were reforms in the area of family and women. Ataturk strongly supported women's involvement in the economy and public life. The progress of women was connected to the progress of the nation.

A country which seeks development and modernisation must accept the need for change....the weakness of our society lies in our indifference to the status of women (Quoted by Minai, 1981:114).

Ataturk's determination to modernize Turkish women was effectively supported by the aristocratic women who had received a European education during the Ottoman era. Under the new ideology Turkish women were included in the new notion of 'citizenship' and their lives were to be governed by a civil code adopted from Neuchatel, Switzerland, instead of Islamic law. Polygyny was abolished, equal inheritance and property rights were granted, a minimum age for marriage was set and equal rights for both sexes in divorce and child custody. Moreover, women were given the right to vote and to be elected and to get equal pay for equal work, and education was compulsory at least until the age of eleven. It has been noted, nevertheless, that Ataturk used Islamic explanations to justify his radical reforms; answering his Muslim opponents he was quoted as saying:

Nothing in our religion requires women to be inferior to men (N. Minai, 1981:64).

The reforms did not include banning the veil officially, because, as Minai points out, he refrained from ordering anything that might violate men's sense of honour. However, on a personal level, Ataturk encouraged unveiling and the visibility of women. This was accomplished through the inclusion of his wife, Latife Hanim, in his public tours and through his encouragement of his adopted daughters to become public figures in their own right. In addition, he encouraged the government's ministers and officials to bring their wives to official ceremonies and ballrooms. Visibility of Turkish women was important for Ataturk because, as Kandiyoti points out, the 'new woman' of his era became an explicit symbol of the break with the past (1991:41). In his era, Turkish women

achieved the right of enfranchisement and they obtained their highest level of representation in parliament. A total of 18 women deputies were elected in the 1937 general election, making up 4.5% of the National Assembly. This level of female presence in political life was not equalled again; after that election onwards there was a steady decline in women's representation in parliament.

Some Turkish feminists raised questions about inconstancy and ambivalence in Ataturk's attitudes towards women. He disbanded the Turkish Women's Federation a fortnight after it had hosted the 12th Congress of the International Federation of Women. The international delegates, including Huda Sharawi of Egypt, expressed their appreciation to Ataturk for reforming women's position in Turkey. The real cause for the self-elimination of the Federation was not known. The president of the Federation, Latife Bekir, gave a public explanation for the closure of the Federation and the dispersal of its assets. She asserted that Turkish women had achieved real equality with complete constitutional guarantees, and that the goals of the Federation having thus been totally achieved there was no further grounds for its continuation. It is noticeable that the modern state in the Islamic world opened up an arena for state-sponsored 'feminism,' but at one and the same time circumscribed and defined its parameters (Kandiyoti, 1991:42). The authoritarian and repressive state could not tolerate the existence of independent women's organizations.

Although the example of Westernized Turkey was widely rejected in the Islamic world, there were some admirers of Ataturk's project. The state-sponsored Westernization of Tunisia, in which the state and religion were not directly separated, corresponds to a willingness to follow the example of Turkey, although with a lesser degree of radicalism.

During the first decade of independence after 1956, the Westernized Tunisian leader, Bourguiba, sponsored the modernization of Tunisia. His vision of modernization emphasized change and not continuity with the past. Change required sweeping away all cultural barriers to modernization and progress.

These 'cultural barriers' were reflected in President Bourguiba's speeches. He stated:

A large majority of our people are still entangled in a mass of prejudices and so-called religious beliefs (Quoted by Mark A. Tessler, 1978:144)

In another speech he said:

Faith and spiritual values are only effective to the extent they are based on reason (Ibid.).

Thus, not all aspects of tradition were to be eroded. Bourguiba described his policy of modernization as faithful, dynamic and open:

faithful because it respects permanent moral and spiritual values, dynamic because it is capable of evolving on an intellectual and scientific plane, and open to a constructive dialogue between civilizations and cultures (Ibid.).

In spite of the Westernized character of modernization, it was asserted officially that development would be accomplished in accordance with the teachings of the Quran.

As far as women were concerned, Tunisia obtained a reputation as the only state which outlawed polygyny formally and as the Arab state in which women were making the most progress; and Bourguiba's policies concerning women's rights brought him considerable international publicity. The 1956 Personal Status Code replaced Quranic law, which was considered an audacious step given the code's explicit prohibition of the practice of polygyny. The code dealt with marriage and divorce, in general, as civil matters. Muslim women were allowed to marry outside their own faith and unilateral repudiation by the husband was outlawed. A minimum age for marriage was also established. It is noted that the state used the Quranic text to sustain its reforms concerning women's family law. Bourguiba argued that the Quran allowed polygyny only to men who could treat all of their wives equally. Since it was humanly impossible to treat all wives equally, he pointed out, the Quran actually prohibited polygyny. By the same token, unilateral divorce by the husband was

incompatible with Quranic verses requiring arbitration by an objective third party in cases of marital conflict.

Moreover, many programmes were designed to promote women's participation in economic and political spheres. By the end of the sixties Tunisian women appeared to have gained a considerable advancement when compared with their Arab and Muslim sisters. In Mark A. Tessler's words:

That means that educational and professional opportunities were expanding, that substantial numbers of well-dressed, unveiled Tunisian women could be seen on the streets of major cities, that men and women could regularly be seen working together in business establishments and sitting together in coffee houses (Tessler, 1978:145).

The Personal Status Code met with strong opposition in the Islamic world and in Tunisia. In 1956, a group of Tunisian religious judges sponsored a petition in protest against the code and judges within the government's civil courts refused to apply the code. However, Minou Reeves (1989: 71) argues that despite the audacity of Bourguiba's reforms, opposition to them was relatively mild. This is usually explained by the historical legitimacy and moral authority acquired by Bourguiba through the struggle for independence from French rule.

### **Women and socialist states**

Socialist states like Algeria, Egypt and Syria, with the adoption of anti-capitalist ideologies, rejected what they called the bourgeois individualistic and consumerist Western model for women's liberation. This attitude of anti-Western governments was in line with the nationalist leaders' negative view of the Westernized feminist movements and the call for women's emancipation in the pre-independence period. The feminist movements lost their independence and were absorbed into government bureaucracy. Their function was to support the state's modernization programmes such as literacy and health campaigns.

These states, with their socialist orientation, emphasized the interest and welfare of society as a whole. In general, political leaders refused to consider women's issues as separate in their own right, but were to be dealt with only within the broader reform of society. The socialist leadership in Egypt, for example, considered the concept of women as a separate group as a divisive and reactionary form of thinking (Iqbal Baraka, 1988: 55).

Although most of the political, economic and social institutions were secularised by the state, the Islamic laws prescribing women's lives were not touched. As an Arab sociologist (Haidar Ibrahim, 1988:182) remarks, these states did not differ considerably in their attitudes from the more conservative ones like Saudi Arabia with regard to legislation. He points out that most national constitutions of Arab countries refrain from specifying women's right to work. Rather, the emphasis is placed on women's role within the family as a wife and mother. The following words are repeated almost exactly in all constitutions of Arab countries: "The family is the basic unit of society; it is based on religion, morality and loyalty to the nation". One principal reason for not adopting revolutionary policies was that states had to take into account the powerful religious opposition to women's modernization.

The revolutionary leaders of Algerian independence in 1962 had to bend to the Islamic groups who remained extremely strong and had set the tone since independence. In fact, after more than a century of Europeanization, the newly independent Algeria showed little desire to be Westernized. After independence, the dominant attitude was for restoring the Algerian and Islamic way of life and certain Islamic provisions, not previously enforced, were observed. "The example given by the European society to Algeria was to be rejected....Western women in general were considered too different to be really imitated....The participation of Algerian women in the fight, according to the women, should aid in accelerating the process of decolonization, after which they could again take their place in the home" (Juliette Minces, 1978: 164).

There were different views within the political leadership about the policies to be taken up to change women's position. The first president, Ben Bella, expressed a tendency to introduce reforming policies. This clearly meant clashing with the Islamic forces. Ben Bella was quoted as saying:

The Algerian woman, who played an important role in the revolution, must play the same role in the construction of our country. We oppose those who, in the name of religion, wish to leave our women outside of this construction (Gordon, 1968:62).

Ben Bella's rule did not last long, as he was soon deposed. The new president, Bumedienne, expressed a view which reflected to a considerable extent the religious and traditional forces' ideology:

We say no to this type of evolution, for our society is an Islamic and a socialist society. A problem exists here. It involves respect for morality. We are in favour of the evolution and the progress of women....But this evolution must not be the cause of the corruption of our society....For we have seen among several peoples, who have been recently liberated, that the woman, once free, hastens to think of things which one need not cite here....the evolution of the Algerian woman and the enjoyment of her rights must be in the framework of the morality of our society (Gordon, 1968: 77)

Submission to traditionalist pressure and the confrontation within the state between modernism and Islam were reflected in the national Charter adopted in 1976: "The National Union of Algerian Women must adapt its activity to the specific problems posed by the integration of women into modern life. It must be realized that the emancipation of women does not mean the abandonment of the ethical code deeply held by the people" (Minces, 1978:169). As J. Minces points out, women's emancipation became a taboo subject.

For the same reason, legislation had scarcely been modified; except for the prohibition of forced marriage and child marriage, the family code remained almost entirely Quranic. The reluctance of the state to adopt effective modernisation measures, nevertheless, did not displease the Algerian masses. On the public level, the post- colonial period was characterized by widespread religiosity in the towns and the countryside, reflected in social rejection and

hostility to 'modern women' who were molested and attacked in the streets; modern women were considered incapable of behaving modestly. Moreover, re-veiling of women became common.

Minces observed that women had to submit to these pressures, especially in the countryside and in small towns, out of fear of losing respect. Others who refused to wear the veil or to be separated from men, and those who sought salaried work, unless they belonged to the administrative bourgeoisie, were rapidly stigmatised and often rejected. Married women in the cities who had formerly discarded their veils re-adopted them.

The socialist state in Egypt under the leadership of Nasser, whose reign extended from 1952 until 1971, claimed to assume responsibility for the emancipation of women as part of its socialist programme to bring progress and socio-economic development to society. The state actually echoed the ideas of the modernists and the early feminist movement. Thus, the state-sponsored media represented women as the greatest obstacle to national progress. It was emphasized that women's lives must be changed so that the entire society might change aptly. In the national charter it was stated: 'Woman must be regarded as equal to man and must therefore shed the remaining shackles that impede her free movement so that she might take a constructive and profound part in shaping life'. Moreover, the regime incorporated the feminist movement's demands, especially regarding education and work, into its plan. Thus, in accordance with its socialist commitments, the government enacted a new labour code giving women equal pay for equal work; and education laws gave them access to equitable educational opportunities. In addition, a number of laws which gave women the right to vote and to stand for public office were enacted. A family planning programme was launched by the government aimed at reducing fertility levels. The government was concerned to present and justify these measures in an Islamic framework. For example, fertility control was endorsed by official 'ulema of Al-Azher university. Some 'ulema gave religious



decrees allowing family planning. Modern ways of fertility control were claimed not to be prohibited in Islam on the grounds that during the life-time of the Prophet and during the period of the Quranic revelation Muslims practised coitus interruptus and the Prophet knew of this and did not prohibit it. On the other hand, the traditional Islamic establishment and ideologues from the Muslim Brothers demonstrated strong opposition to the programme. It was regarded as being opposed to the teachings of the Quran and the hadith, which were interpreted as encouraging the proliferation of the ummah. Thus, this policy was regarded by the religious forces as further evidence of the state's departure from the Islamic system. Moreover, the programme was considered to be an imperialist plot aimed at depriving the ummah of its human resources after the imperialists had stolen the material wealth. Egyptian women, in general, also resisted the programme:

Like other Muslim societies, the Egyptian society gives a great value for fertility. The majority of Egyptian women, despite discrimination in other areas, derived respect, sociopsychological rewards, and status from their roles as mothers, and they were not about to deemphasize the only role that gave them a bargaining position in the social structure (Abdel Khader, 1987:148).

The socialist state used religion; it needed it for legitimacy and control because it was in a state of fierce struggle with the Muslim Brothers. Thousands of their members were put in jail and some of their leaders executed. It is noteworthy that the Muslim feminist Zaynab Al-Ghazali imprisoned in 1965 and only released by Sadat in 1972. The organization of Muslim Sisters that she led was also banned. The discourse of revivalist Islam concerning gender was severely suppressed. The National Charter calling for the removal of impediments to women's 'free movement', policies of co-education and women's work in the public sector, in addition to the encouragement by the state's media of social liberalism and Western fashion, all these elements constituted a direct challenge to the Islamic ideology of gender. Margot Badran (1991) notes that at a time when the state had suppressed the Muslim Brothers

and contained the 'dangerous' Islamist populist discourse, Muslim religious scholars were highly vocal in keeping alive a 'safer' discourse on gender issues. To counter the traditional and orthodox discourse, the state's controlled media promoted the image of the modern and liberal woman. The state established the popular magazine *Hawwa* (Eve). Amina Al-Said, a liberal feminist and a disciple of Huda Sharawi, was appointed chief editor. Amina Al-Said promoted in the magazine an image of women which did not belong to traditional thinking. The woman of *Hawwa* was liberated from traditional morality and pattern of dress. She adopted modern habits and practices: she went to the cinema and theatre; she worked and mixed with men; she raised her children in the modern way.

Although the socialist government did not attempt to touch Islamic family law, the reign of Nasser gave educated women greater opportunities to participate in the public sector. Badran notes that because of the state's interest in increasing its scientific and technical capacities, it enforced policies to encourage greater enrolment in the applied sciences at university. Accordingly, larger numbers of women were attracted to these subjects and subsequently into the professions. Statistics show that nearly all women medical students who graduated in the middle 1960s practised their profession (Badran:1991:218). Moreover, the government was concerned to appoint women in the cabinet and other political establishments; these women were surrounded by high publicity. Aishah Ratib was the first woman minister in the Arab world, heading the Ministry of Social Affairs. Other women were appointed as ambassadors. Nasser enforced a law making it compulsory to appoint a certain number of women to the People's Assembly or the parliament and in local councils.

The failure of the Family Planning Programme was symbolic of the effect of the government's emancipation project. Egyptian feminists demonstrated their disappointment in the modest achievements of the Nasserite state. They remarked on the fact that the state promoted new roles for women for pragmatic

and ideological purposes, and that women's acquisition of constitutional and legal rights did not mean that their position changed on the practical level.

During Sadat's reign Egypt's socialist orientation was reversed to capitalism and a free enterprise economy, or what was called *infitah*. The new class of *nouveaux riches* composed mainly of army officers and businessmen, which ascended during Nasser's period, became visible with the *infitah*. This new class tended to consume luxury goods imported from abroad. The Western cultural model was also sought. Wedad Zenie-Ziegler observes (1988:81) that the Sadat reign witnessed an ostentatious display of fashionable clothes and the latest gadgets made in European countries. These goods, she argues, are a constant provocation for those who cannot afford them. Soha Abdel Khader describes the impact of *infitah*:

Just as factors of production and purchasing power had to be diverted from domestic products toward foreign goods, so, too, national culture had to give way to an interest in the culture from which these goods originated (Abdel Khader, 1987: 125).

It is important to note that Jihan Al-Sadat, the president's wife, symbolized in her appearance and behaviour the new state's political and cultural orientation. She appeared in the latest and most expensive fashion and she was presented as the supreme lady of the nation and the chief feminist. The international media showed a special interest in interviewing her. At a time when the veil was greatly spreading amongst Egyptian women, Jihan made this comment to Marie Claire magazine:

I am against the hijab because those veiled girls with their strange shape frighten the children. As a lecturer in the university, I decided to expel any veiled student from my lecture. In my view, university lecturers are responsible for the spread of the hijab; if any of them had expelled veiled girls they would not have worn the hijab (Quoted by Al-Qabas newspaper No 2625, 1980).

Significantly, members of the Muslim Brothers were released from jail by the Sadat regime. As Gilson (1990) remarked, the state needed Islam for legitimation at a time when the nationalism and socialism of Nasser were discredited. The Muslim Brothers were allowed to practise their ideological

message again; during the 1970s and 1980s the country witnessed an Islamic resurgence. Many educated women from the lower and more modest middle-class wore the hijab. Female university students were amongst the most enthusiastic adherents of revivalism. Badran notes that women students specializing in applied and medical subjects were at the centre of the new wave of young fundamentalists. After her release Zaynab Al-Ghazali resumed her feminist activity. She wrote her prison memoirs; last year the tenth edition was published.

With regard to legal codes and constitutional rights, President Sadat adopted efforts to reform the legal status of Egyptian women. Law 44 was enacted in July 1979 by the People's Assembly. This law amended the Personal Status Law in effect since 1929. The Personal Status Law of 1929 raised the minimum age for marriage to sixteen, extended the period of the mother's custody over her children and made certain clarifications regarding women's rights to demand the annulment of marriage. According to the provisions of the new law, a woman had the right to ask for a divorce within one year of her husband's taking on a second wife, hence restricting polygyny to some extent. Further, according to the new laws a divorced woman who had custody of young children was entitled to remain in the marital abode until her children reached the legal age. The new family law was a major reason for the dramatic assassination of Sadat according to the confessions of the group which undertook the assassination. It is meaningful that the law was repudiated by the new President.

### **Iran: the drama of modernization and Islam**

In Iran, the conflict between modernization and Islam has been intense, dramatically affecting the lives of women. Rigorous modernization measures were introduced in the thirties by the state to transform feudal Iranian society into a capitalist society for which women's labour was needed. Reza Shah, a

military man who became the head of state with British assistance, was attempting to push Islam out of public life following in the footsteps of Ataturk. He made it known clearly that the clergy were a great obstacle to his modernization policies. His son Mohammed Reza later said: "If he had not treated the clergy rather roughly, it might have taken three or four times as long as it did to carry out his programme of modernizing the country." To this end Iranian women became the very yardstick of the conflict between capitalism and Westernization on the one side and the traditional Islamic forces on the other.

Until 1936 only certain segments within the upper classes were Westernized and removed the veil; the great majority of Iranian women followed Islamic tradition; among them the veil was the norm. In this year Reza Shah passed a law enforced by the police in which he abolished the veil. Reza Shah's intention was to force every Iranian woman to become Westernized. In effect, masses of shy and embarrassed Iranian women were seen in the streets wearing, against their will, European clothes and hats. The police were instructed to prosecute all women who did not give up wearing the veil.

And so veiled women were seized by the police in the streets and had the veil torn from their heads. Many of them therefore decided not to go into the streets again and to remain only at home. For them not wearing the veil was a sin, an ethical encroachment of the laws of Islam (Minou Reeves, 1989: 86).

Eliz Sanasarian (1982) mentions that in one case the employees of government ministries were told that next month's salary would not be paid to them, but to their wives. Their wives had to come to receive the salaries wearing hats.

This law deeply shocked Iranian society to the extent that thousands fled with their families to the surrounding Muslim countries. Furthermore, instead of liberating Iranian women, the outlawing of the veil caused many of them, mostly the elderly, to stay at home. For them, unveiling was identified with nudity:

As a result, in order for such women to leave the house, their male relatives undertook some uncommon practices. For instance, one writer recalled how his father would carry his

mother and grandmother in a large sack (one by one) to the public baths ( Sanasarian,1982: 64 ).

Reza's outlawing of the veil was beneficial to the European hat and garments industries which made high profits from the new Iranian market. The law was supported by upper-class women of Western orientation who considered wearing European clothes and hats a symbol of liberty. By contrast, the devout women of the middle and lower classes, in line with the religious establishment, demonstrated their discontent with the Shah's reforms. With Reza Shah's abdication and with the relative political freedom in the early days of the new Shah's government, the religious men found an opportunity to encourage women to return to their veils. Many women responded to this call, they abandoned the hat and went back to the veil. However, Fischer (1978:207) remarks that women returned to a modified form of the veil without face masks so that the modified veil no longer provides anonymity.

The forceful unveiling of Iranian women disturbed a complex system operating through the veil. In the Iranian context, in addition to its significant religious and political message, there is also what M. Fischer calls the moral component of the veil. First, there is the modesty component: in a veil a woman can use the public space. However, the territorial and behavioural patterning are subtly specified. Women must use the back street and alleys; they must always look busy or going somewhere; they must not engage in eye contact with men. In general, in the streets, women must not be seductive or immodest in their appearance and response; men must keep their gaze chaste and respect other men's honour. Second, the veil is a marker of status and stratification. Veils are rough markers of stratification between villagers, urban poor and traditional upper class. Village women wear headcloths, the urban lower-class women wear a relaxed kind of veil, whereas the traditional upper-class use a complete veiling. Fischer explains that veils are also markers of intimacy from sons, brothers, husbands (no veils) to close friends and near kin (loose veiling) to the stranger (veiling to the point of covering all but one eye).

The confrontation between Westernization and Islam reached its peak during the reign of Muhammed Reza Shah. Like his father, he was immensely influenced by the West; his policies were largely directed towards diminishing the impact of Islam on public life. Women were an essential part of the fierce battle which appeared to Western writers writing before the revolution to have resulted in the marginalization of religion. Shortly before the Revolution, Michael Fischer suggested that the new professional-bureaucratic-technocrats, with their ideology of individual achievement were winning the battle over the old agro-mercantile-military gentry with its ideology of the genteel woman in purdah. He 'optimistically' described the change in the lives of Iranian women and their achievements, compared to pre-industrial Iran, as "dramatic enough to be easily sketched":

One need only compare Clara Colliver Rice's outrage in 1923 with Ruth Woodsmill's optimistic survey in 1960 and then look at the figures and legal changes since. Today, there are few areas excluded to women: aside from an activist queen, there have been two women cabinet ministers, a number of senators and Majlis representatives, mayors, city councillors, writers, architects, lawyers, doctors, senior civil servants, journalists, and university professors (Fischer,1978:191).

In terms of legal reforms, the Family Protection Law (passed in 1967 and amended in 1975) was intended to weaken the authority of the Sharia on women's daily lives and to increase the power of women as individuals. The minimum age at marriage was raised to twenty for men and eighteen for women. Men's rights to initiate divorce were restricted; they were required to process a divorce through the courts instead of announcing it before two witnesses. Women were allowed expanded grounds for requesting a divorce. The law required the consent of a healthy and fertile wife to her husband's second marriage and guaranteed a divorce on request to an unable or barren wife if her husband married again. Divorced women were granted the right to seek custody of their children, which had previously been automatically given to the fathers of boys over the age of two and girls over the age of seven.

The whole discussion about women's new role in the modern era and of their representation in this context loses a considerable part of its credibility when actual patterns of behaviour are taken into account. The celebrated picture of urban, modern and professional Iranian women was not the rule. On the contrary, the great majority were "traditional": the majority of urban dwellers came from rural backgrounds and the rest lived in villages and tribal settlements. It was impossible for these traditional women to receive the message of modernization or have sufficient knowledge about what lay beyond their restricted world; the state's modernization policies concerning women were in fact directed towards and indeed a thin layer of Iranian society responded to it.

Moreover, modernization policies, instead of helping to liberate women, meant in practice a return to traditionality. Urbanization and increased economic prosperity in the Pahlavi era meant greater seclusion and more limited economic and social activities for many women (Higgins, 1985: 484). Higgins argues that a number of female productive activities, once crucial to the rural household economy, became unnecessary in the urban environment. At the same time, she notes, urbanization brought both women and men into closer contact with the religious culture, and increased economic prosperity gave greater opportunities to many to adhere to Islamic norms proscribing the free intermingling of unrelated men and women. Gulick and Gulick remark that among women migrants to the industrial and modernizing city of Isfahan "the seclusion [of women] may have been intensified because of the possibly greater threat posed by the large mass of urban strangers" (Gulick and Gulick, 1978: 510). From Janet Bauer's observation of poor and immigrant women in the south of Tehran, it is concluded that because most adult urban and rural women were illiterate and became more confined to the domestic sphere, they did not have a formal ideological framework for interpreting their own social existence. These women's lives were untouched by the feminist movement. Poor women in the south of Tehran were exposed to both modern and religious cultures



which provided role models for them. The media input and formal education clearly had a stronger impact upon younger women, while older women were influenced by the religious figures. Women in the villages sought to emulate their veil-wearing relatives who came to visit them in the countryside. Modernity and Westernization were always associated with higher classes.

While women might like to emulate the ways of life they saw or thought they saw among higher classes, most poor women were working hard to maintain their own status within existing social circumstances. Particularly in the low income urban areas the expectations not only of male relatives but also of networks of neighbours and kin encouraged women to observe culturally approved behaviors-that is, the more restrictive female behaviours (Bauer,1983: 152).

This often meant, Bauer argues, accommodating one's behavioural choices in marriage, career and friendship in the meantime. One result of women seeking to uphold status-producing behaviour was the reinforcement of differences between men's and women's opportunities and behaviour. Another effect was the erosion of women's confidence in their own abilities.

Regarding the effect of the legal reforms on the lives of Iranian women, save those of the urban upper classes, legal changes largely failed to affect the lives of most Iranian women. Most women continued to observe sharia family law and local customs, despite the presence of the Family Protection Law. For example, Paul Vieille notes that among peasants and industrial workers, civil and religious law according economic rights to women were rarely respected, or they were respected in principle and with bad grace (1978: 460). Erika Friedl's observation of a large village in West Iran showed that the Family Protection Law was never implemented in the village. Higgins attributes the ineffectiveness of the Family Protection Law in part to:

a lack of administration and enforcement, to women's ignorance of the legal changes, and to economic conditions that made it difficult for women to take advantage of their new rights. More important, however, legal changes simply were not relevant to most women (1985:484-485).

In essence, the state modernization policies were to the benefit of the ruling elite and the Westernized bourgeois class. Modernization meant for them the indulgence in blind mimicry of Western models of dress, social behaviour and conspicuous consumption. To consolidate his regime, the Shah took advantage of the women of Western orientation, encouraging them to adopt even more Western habits and customs. The public appearance of Iranian women, in particular, became the criterion for the success of modernization projects and the diminishing influence of Islam.

The more she assumed Western appearance and attitudes, the stronger and better legitimated the Shah's regime felt itself to be (Reeves, 1989: 96).

The Empress's appearance symbolized the ideal Iranian woman and promoted this image to the outside world. The Empress competed with the immensely rich women in the world in adopting the latest and most extravagant Parisian fashion. In brief, the Westernized model of women was exploited by the state to give a modern image of the country to the outside, especially to the foreign businessmen and investors. Through this image, the regime declared its association with the advanced capitalist world and its departure from the traditional image of a Muslim' country.

The new Iranian woman as presented in the state-controlled media during the 1960s and the 1970s, reflected to a great extent the habits, manners and lifestyles of the ruling Westernized classes and the moral values of capitalism. Although the traditional middle-class image of women, being married and economically dependent upon men, existed, the dominant image was of consumerist Western-style women. Azar Tabari (1982) argues that part of the state's interference in Iranian women's lives was embodied in the policy of active encouragement of new concepts of consumerism and the propagation of a new image of the modern consumer woman. The modern woman was not only consumerist, but, according to M. Reeves, the Shah's government seemed to be actively involved in encouraging the image of a mindless, beautiful, pleasure-seeking woman. The state-controlled magazines typified this attitude.

Women's magazines sponsored beauty contests with beauty contestants appearing in bikinis. They featured pictures of movie stars and popular singers, reporting on their lives and loves, and focusing on fashion, sentimental stories and horoscopes.

The Shah's views about women reflected the substance of his understanding of gender relations and women's emancipation. In his famous interview with the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci (1973), he stated:

Women are important in a man's life only if they're beautiful and charming and keep their femininity....This business of feminism for instance. What do these feminists want? You say equality. Oh! I don't want to seem rude, but....you're equal in the eyes of the law but not, excuse my saying so, in ability....You've never produced a Michelangelo or Bach. You've never even produced a great chef .

These well-known remarks, which manifested the 'traditionality' of the Shah's mentality, were to enter the field of political struggle and were subsequently used by Khomeini. Khomeini did not only condemn the immorality of modernization, but also, ironically, the 'backwardness' of the Shah's conception. He commented on the Shah's remarks:

In an interview with an Italian journalist, the Shah declared that women should only be objects of sexual attraction. It is precisely this concept that leads women to prostitution and reduces them to the status of mere sexual objects. Our religion is opposed to this view of woman and not to their liberty and emancipation (Quoted by Reeves,1989: 105).

The image of the Iranian upper-class would be clearly reflected in the content of the religious discourse. The immorality of 'modernity' would be connected to jahiliyyah. Women as the regime wanted them were like women of the pre-Islamic Arabia

Jahiliyya was an era in which woman was treated like an animal and even lower than the animal. Another time in our Iran, woman was again oppressed, and that was the era of the previous Shah and unjust Shah. In the name of freeing woman they oppressed the woman. They brought down woman from that high respectable and honourable place she had. They turned woman,

with such a spiritual position, into a commodity...In Jahiliyya Islam released them from oppression and this time too, I hope that Islam will once again take their hands and save them from the depths of contempt (Khomeini, 1979. Quoted by Tabari, 1982:101).

After the successful revolution in which the poor urban women participated significantly, religious men had the holy mission of reversing the jahiliyyah of the twentieth century and restoring God's rule to Iranian society again. The establishment of a new social order required before anything else the releasing of Muslims from the values of modernity. In regard to women, the Muslim state carried out significant changes. For example, sex segregation in public places became the rule, veiling was enforced and the sharia law was restored. Yet these changes are not as dramatic as some feminists in the West imagine. Many feminists have been puzzled about the silence of Iranian women in general to what is seen as their deprivation of rights and modern achievements. In reality, the bulk of Iranian women did not shed tears over losing the rights they had never achieved or practised in the Pahlavi era. The Islamic state, probably, did not meet significant difficulties in restoring Islamic order in the world of women, because the universe of women was, and is, profoundly governed by Islam; it had been scarcely altered by modernism.

### **Conclusion**

In their attempt to create a modern image for their societies, Muslim states imposed policies to modernize Muslim women. Educational and professional opportunities were provided and some of the policies were directed against Islamic regulations regarded as archaic and incompatible with the modern era. Officially, the states promoted the model of the educated and the working woman; this model embodied the country's liberation from backwardness. The era of the modern state was characterized by the enrolment in universities of thousands of female students and by the emergence of moderate but increasing

numbers of women in the public sector. By and large, these achievements were to the benefit of upper and Middle-classes urban women. The majority of urban poor and rural women remained outside the circle of modernization. A quick glance at the statistical record reveals striking facts about the impact of modernization on Muslim females in general. Compared with other developing countries, Muslim societies fall near the end regarding the process of female modernization. The lowest rate in female enrolment in modern education in the world are recorded for Muslim females. In addition, the lowest female participation rates in economic activities outside of agriculture are consistently reported in Muslim societies. Parallel to these facts is the observation showing that all Muslim countries display very high fertility rates that are higher than those of non-Islamic countries currently at comparable levels of economic development. Moreover, the legal reforms intended by the states to secularise women's lives were rendered ineffective and outlived by Islamic law meshed with local culture. This evidence points to the disappointing outcome of the state's modernization policies. In notoriously secular Turkey, the recent emergence of veiled women represents a dilemma to the secular system and puts into question the effectiveness of the forced Westernizing project of Ataturk. The non-immunity of this secular state against the re-Islamization of women highlights the fact of the marginalization of liberated women. Despite the radically secular social and legal reforms, the Western model women which had been sought by modernists are still not the norm; a female Turkish sociologist notes regretfully:

In the industrial West we find no counterpart of the Turkish peasant woman, with her enormous work burden, or the small-town woman, who is almost completely segregated within her biological function, or the woman in the larger cities, who is partially segregated. When we consider women who are professionals and who belong to the middle and upper ranges of the social strata, we find similarities (Fatma Cosar, 1978:138).

She points out that the lives of rural women, forming seventy percent of the female population, can hardly be said to have improved. With the migration to

the urban area these women lost their economic role and became similar to women in small towns and cities: veiled and strictly segregated. An example of the prevalence of Islamic tradition and the popular resistance to the secularisation of Family Laws is the phenomenon of millions of children who are the issue of polygynous marriages religiously celebrated, but regarded as unlawful by the civil code. Eight million such children were given civil status in 1950. This was when the population numbered 21 million.

The state not only failed in modernizing rural women, but there is also evidence pointing to the adoption by rural women of the conservative customs of the cities. Anthropological observations from different Islamic countries show that the veil was spreading rapidly in rural and tribal communities. For example, post World War II, Turkey witnessed a strong increase in the veil in small towns and villages. In Iran, while it was abandoned by the upper-classes, it was spreading rapidly in the countryside. The same phenomenon was noticed in North Africa.

More significantly, the state's economic policies led on the one hand to the deterioration of rural women's position in the rural setting, and on the other rural migration to the cities exposed urban women to the conservative culture of the traditional classes of the cities. As regards the first point, which is observed in other Third World countries where economic modernization may lead to a decline in rural and urban poor women's position (Boulding 1976; Boserup 1970; Dixon 1978; Huston 1978). Alya Baffoun (1982:232) argues that the spread of a monetary economy and the outrageous commercialisation of agricultural goods constitute an important historical fact in the deterioration of the status of Arab women. Men controlled the newly introduced modern sector and machines, credit and co-operatives often instituted men as the intermediary transactors for the household and its traditional work, regarded as essentially feminine. The new situation, she believes, confirmed the sexual dissymmetry and resulted in the development of a hierarchy based on this new distribution of tasks. Hence, sexual dependency, legislated by unilateral patriarchal socio-

judicial laws, became reinforced by an economic dependency which removed women from the protection of their clans and delivered them bound and gagged to the often capricious whims of their husbands. On the other hand, as a result of capitalism, many women who were involved in economic activities in the traditional sector were removed from activities such as agriculture and from traditional industry as the goods they produced are replaced by imported or locally produced factory ones. These women of poor rural and urban backgrounds suffer a decline in their status as they lose their productive role. In Egypt, for example, according to Abdel Khader (1987), capitalization of agriculture decreases employment opportunities for women in the agricultural sector and increases their household work load. In addition, the diminishing of local industry and crafts caused women to lose employment opportunities in the manufacturing sector of the economy. Poor and unskilled women were forced to seek low-paid, seasonal and sporadic employment in the informal sector. In Morocco, the impact of modern capitalism on Moroccan women, especially rural women and the urban poor, resulted in the deterioration of status of women who used to work in the traditional economy. Fatima Mernissi notes that women who now work in modern factories lost their personal autonomy, becoming exploited and underpaid. In Iran, women who used to work in agriculture lost their economic activities with rural migration to the urban centers (Higgins, 1985: 484).

On the other hand, the imbalanced relation between the towns and the countryside resulting from modernization policies leading to the exodus of rural women to urban areas not only led to women losing their economic role, but also exposed them to the influence of religious culture and the conservative values of the old classes in cities and towns. Vanessa Maher notes that in Morocco peasants and men of recent peasant origin living in the towns tend to attribute to women ideal roles (seclusion, exclusively domestic work, virginity or fidelity, subordination to male authority) that emphasize their dependence on

men, but which are in sharp contrast with the facts of women's existence in these classes.

Since the seventies, a steady retreat from women's modernization plans is evident in most Muslim countries. In pioneering Tunisia, the enthusiasm for Westernization had diminished by the seventies and the hijab was greatly spreading amongst young women, especially in the universities. The Islamic movement, which became the main oppositional force, demanded the abolition of the 1956 Personal Status Code. In effect, Bourguiba retreated from the basic principles of his modernization programme. He stated that the modernization project needed to be put in "perspective". Referring to women's emancipation, he said that too much reform will lead to "a loosening of our morals". Further, freedom "must be coupled with religious and moral education in order to produce the respect for virtue" (quoted by Tessler, 1978:14). The state abandoned its ideological campaign of women's emancipation and less emphasis was placed on education and professional qualifications on the grounds that there was an insufficiency of jobs for all graduates.

Another important sign of retreat is that the liberalized marriage and divorce laws of Sadat in Egypt were reversed. Recently, the newly-born Republic of the Yemen declared its commitment to the Islamic family laws, putting an end to the secularized family laws of the former Republic of the South Yemen. The Iranian case, however, remains the most dramatic and radical with regard to the retreat from modernization ideology and policies altogether.

In discussing the reasons behind the apparent failure of the project of modernization, many things could be said about the undemocratic nature of the agents of the project and the superficiality and contradiction of the project. However, there is no doubt that Islam substantially contributed to the retrogressing of the movement of women's modernization in the Muslim world. Unfortunately, this ideological element is rarely discussed adequately and elaborately in the literature. No doubt, the message of ideology of modernization clashed flagrantly with the fundamental social and cultural



concepts of honour, veiling, the sexes' boundaries and the family. The assumption adopted by modernity advocates and by social scientists alike was that these concepts would be eroded with the breakdown of their social basis in the small-scale peasant and merchant communities. Muslim women were supposed to become individuals in their own rights and they would be freed from these values. This assumption turned out to be incorrect; except for the Westernized-minded urban elites, no significant victory for modernity was recorded over the old life patterns of the other classes. The role of the wife and mother retained its significance as it has been and the life of the ordinary Muslim woman is still centered around the house and family. The honour of men stands firmly against women stepping out of the domestic world.

Certainly, the embedding of the concepts of honour, veiling, separation of the sexes and the position of women in general in the holy Islamic texts was to furnish these concepts with the energy of continuity, a continuity which is perceived by social groups to be crucial to their continuing existence. The works of Meeker and Bourdieu on honour, for example, demonstrate the significance of this ideology in Muslim societies, as well as its correspondence with the sacred. Meeker<sup>(1976)</sup> emphasizes the sacred historiography implied by Islam where it provides the significance by which men's acts are measured. He stresses the sacred quality of sexual honour, arguing that male control of women's sexuality neatly fits with the problem of continuity. Bourdieu (1966) reveals another sacred aspect of honour in Kabyle society: hurma, the prohibited or the sacred, is what constitutes honour; it is what makes the group vulnerable in its most sacred possession. Women are identified with hurma, so they must take care that their conduct does not diminish the prestige of the group in any way. Therefore, unlike other third world people, for Muslims change did not mean mere replacement of the old customary values with modern ones. Rather, innovation in regard to the question of women implied an explicit intrusion and assault on the arena of sexuality and privacy with its complex cultural system surrounding the notion of woman. Beside, change was regarded as

transgression from what God has chosen for His ummah. It meant a departure from the Quranic doctrines and from the Prophet's statements. By and large, Muslim modernizers attempted to manipulate the holy texts for their own purposes. The idea of modernization of Muslim women was based on a liberal interpretation of the holy texts. This was a risky tactic, since the new interpretation contradicted the consensus of the 'ulema, both old and contemporary, and also contradicted the basic idea of the non-historicity of Islam. The weapon the state used was to be turned against its policies and against its legitimacy by its religious opponents who were better equipped in dealing with religious matters. With the rise of the Islamic revival in the seventies the modernization project was retreating under the immense cultural campaign of the revivalists. As the Iranian case demonstrated, the women's question was a central topic in the religious campaign against the Shah. Khomeini confronted the Shah on the grounds that his policies transgressed the teachings of the holy texts and destroyed the "honour of the ummah". Elsewhere, other states were ready to abandon their emancipatory plans under the strong pressure of the revived Islam. Islamic revival played a significant role in the marginalization of the ideology of modernization, which was regarded as the antithesis of Islam. Urban middle-class women's liberated and consumerist practices were the point of departure in the revivalists' critique of modernity. These women were seen to embody everything which is not Islamic. The historic antagonism with the West and the Islamic sensitivity to modern capitalist culture have a strong bearing on the critique. On the other hand, the Islamic holy texts were the basis in constructing an Islamic model for contemporary Muslim women. This model in many ways is the antithesis of the modern woman's model. Muslim revivalists emphasized what is seen as the emancipatory elements of Islam and the female characters of early Islam were highlighted. In the next part of this study, I attempt to focus on the ideology of Muslim revivalists through a study of their popular literature in the Arabic language.

## **PART III**

### **WOMEN AND THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL**

#### **An Anthropological Inquiry into the Popular Arabic Literature of Muslim Revivalists**

## CHAPTER 7

### Islamic Revival and Modernity: Creation of an Image

The contemporary Islamic revival is primarily a cultural phenomenon (George Marcus and Michel Fischer, 1986:39). Indeed, the cultural and social message of revivalism is much more influential in Muslim societies than the political message stressed by Western commentators. Modern culture has provoked debates over values and traditional morality which have become entangled in the shift towards the capitalist system with its devastating social effects. In this context, the popular expressions of Islamic revivalism represent a cultural and social response to the forces of modernity which affect the social and cultural institutions and pose a threat to the dominance of religion in society. This feature of Islamic discourse is one major source of its hegemony and popularity. Muslim revivalists regard themselves as the legitimate defenders of Islam and indigenous culture against the real and increasing threat of modernity which spreads its message by means of the modern media and popular culture. Thus, for the Muslim intellectual Salahiddin Al-Jourshy, the phenomenon of contemporary revivalism is the one and only voice raised in defence of societies torn apart and quivering; societies which have lost a great deal of self-determination and internal unity and are overwhelmed by acute conflict between social classes, and between the state and civil society. Moreover, on the level of culture, language, modes of thinking and the common practices of daily life are all under threat (1989:4).

Ironically, the theoretical anti-modernist position of Islamic revivalism was developed primarily by those who were formerly modernists. For example, Rashid Rida, the disciple of Muhammed Abduh, retreated from his former views and reached the opposite conclusion, that there is no hope of a compromise between the two systems. Rida's ideas exercised their impact on Ikhwan or the Muslim Brothers movement, which is the mother organization of Islamic

revivalism in the region. However, it is with Said Qutb (d. 1966), another modernist, that revivalism developed a clear-cut opposition towards modernity. Qutb's notion of contemporary jahiliyyah, for which he was executed by the Nasserite state and thus became an inspiring martyr, had an immense and long-lived impact on revivalism's world-view, on the development of the Islamic resurgence as an anti-modernist social and cultural movement and on the continuing debate between pro-and anti-modernity groups.

Qutb was a man of the pen; a well-known literary critic and a person who was directly exposed to modern culture during a two-year stay (1948-1950) in the United States. This experience had a profound effect on his thinking: instead of being bewitched by the glamour of California, Qutb was totally disappointed by Western life. His observations of American society led him to a total rejection of its economic and social system. In a revealing passage he states:

During my stay in America, some of my fellow Muslims resorted to apologetics and justification. On the contrary, I took an offensive position, criticizing the Western jahiliyyah in its degenerate and dissolute socio-economic and moral conditions.. I directed my criticism towards capitalism with its monopolies and usurious transactions, and its grim ugliness..this individualism which lacks any sense of solidarity and social responsibility other than that forced and laid down by law..that crass and vacuous materialistic perception of life..that chaotic freedom which is called "the freedom of mixing of the sexes"..that slave market called "women's liberation" (Ma'alim Fi Al-Tariq ,1964:194).

Qutb turned his back on modernity, finding it unworthy of imitation; he withdrew himself into the fold of Islam and became a Muslim Brother. Against the background of what he observed of the 'poisonous' effect of modernity on Islamic culture and under the influence of the Indian thinker Abu Al-A'ala Al-Maududi, Qutb developed a theoretical position towards modernity: the modern system with its political, economic, social and cultural aspects is another jahiliyyah. The analogy between pre-Islamic time and the modern era lies in the chaotic social and moral situation which has its basis in denial of the divinity of

God and the laws laid down by Him; the West has replaced divine laws with a man-made social system and moral values. This religious analysis of modern society, which takes as its point of departure the contemporary social and moral crisis of advanced industrial Western societies, was of great significance for those social groups which had reason to fear the consequences of 'progress'. The image of modern society that Qutb created as a social system lacking any sacred and moral elements helped to restore the self-confidence of many Muslim believers and encouraged them to go on the offensive to shed their inferiority complex towards the 'culture of the stronger'. Instead, they retained confidence in their own culture as superior because of its divinity. In effect, the notion of a modern jahiliyyah provides the anti-modernity campaign with a powerful ideological tool against those groups who present modernity as an ideal leading to progress, civilization and economic prosperity. On the contrary, the Muslim revivalists argue that modernity with its evident social, economic and spiritual crises is not something to be aspired towards; modernists who advocate imitation of Western ways are mere fools, if not also traitors. In addition, modernity is not only a failure, it is the culture of imperialists and religious opponents, whose ultimate goal is the erosion and elimination of Islam as a social system.

While in the USA Said Qutb also composed *Ma'arakat Al-Islam wa Al-Ra'simaliah* (The Battle of Islam against Capitalism), the first powerful and concrete critique of the capitalist social order to be produced since the encounter with the West. The basic argument of the book, later elaborated upon in other works, centres around the idea that capitalism is a manifestation of jahiliyyah. Capitalist societies, Qutb observed, are characterized by crass consumerism and moral decline. Alluding to Quranic verses which prohibit usury, Qutb's theory is that the capitalist system is produced and controlled by a class of usurers and is distinguished by usurious transactions. Capitalists are depicted as being irreligious and immoral; they are sinister because of their economic exploitation of the whole world and their active involvement in

spreading immorality. The Qutobian expectation, like Marx's, is that the decline of such a system is inevitable and that Islam is the alternative. Capitalist societies are seen as heading towards the same fate of those prosperous ancient communities, who according to the Quran, were destroyed because of their immorality and their disobedience to God.

For Qutb, capitalism is destructive of fitrah, inherent 'human nature'. Islam, in contrast, a religion in accordance with fitrah, is characterized by a collective social responsibility embodied in income tax (*zakat*). Islam opposes both extreme wealth and poverty; the wealthy are required to justify their possessions through the accepted means and the Muslim state is entitled to appropriate not only the *zakat*, but part of their capital. Thus, Qutb imposed severe restrictions on private property and regarded labour as the only legitimate source of wealth. Further, he affirmed that Islam prohibits monopolies, usury, gambling, fraud and hoarding (1975:75). In the same book, he condemned the corrupt Egyptian elites; he claimed that their interests were contrary to those of the masses and considered them to be natural allies of imperialism.

Significantly, the state of jahiliyyah is applied to Muslim societies too. Qutb maintained that since Napoleon's campaign jahiliyyah has dominated Muslim societies and every aspect of life: "Perceptions and beliefs, habits and morals, culture, art and literature, laws and regulations, even the great part of what is considered an Islamic culture all these domains are products of jahiliyyah" (1964:21). Modernity is thus totally rejected on the basis that it constitutes the most serious threat to Islamic culture. The only acceptable products of modern time are technology and scientific facts that are compatible with Quranic statements.

The ideological significance of Qutb's works is that he places modernity on a collision course with Islam; the essence of his ideas is that modernity negates the very existence of Islam. Muslims are warned not to accommodate the jahili system on any single issue, for that would lead to a compromise of the whole.

The only position towards modernity that should be taken is complete rejection (1964:23). For him, the danger to Islam comes from within: from the modernized military state system which tries to marginalize Islam and cut the ground from under it. Muslim elites are sinful and guilty, because they are responsible for a situation in which Islam is eroded and isolated from daily life.

Salvation from this total debacle, for Qutb, is through a process in which the perceptions and practices of jahiliyyah are replaced by pure Islamic perceptions and practices (1964:195). In the same passage Qutb points out that this process will be far from easy because of the pressure of the dominant modern ideologies and social practices, especially in the domain of women. The sensitivity and centrality of the woman question is emphasized: " The Muslim woman is confronting in this jahiliyyah an enormous and evil force"(1964:195). He maintains that Muslims have no option but to face the challenge, counter attacking jahiliyyah by exposing its shortcomings and total failure compared to Islam. Qutb is optimistic that Islam will win the battle against the modern jahiliyyah as it won it against the old jahiliyyah. For him, the process of reversal is transcendental and purificatory; it is "a transition from darkness to the light". Significantly, the family and women, in particular, are given central importance in terms of preserving Islam and establishing the ideal ummah.

Further, Qutb was the first Arab revivalist ideologue to pioneer an intellectual tradition that would be followed with great enthusiasm by others. In his critique of modern civilization, along with his own observations of American society, Qutb used citations from works by Western critics and rebels against their own social order. Arabic translations of Western sources are marshaled in his works to strengthen his argument about the failure and chaos of the contemporary world. Arnold Toynbee and Alex Carrel, whose accounts of the modern world seem to correspond with the theory of jahiliyyah, are frequently quoted. Carrel, a Nobel Prize winning biologist and a cultural critic is cited in a discussion of the position of women where up-to-date 'scientific' facts are used to support traditional doctrines about different sexual roles. Carrel, who was a



Frenchman of extreme conservative views, asserts that the structure of women's bodies is more fundamentally different from men's than is usually realized. These differences are caused by the very structure of the tissues and by the impregnation of the entire organism with specific chemical substances secreted by the ovaries. Each and every cell of a woman's body bears the mark of her sex and the same is true of her organs and, above all, her nervous system. According to Qutb's quotations from *L'homme, cet inconnu*, Carrel maintains that women should dedicate themselves to their inherently specialized functions of motherhood and childrearing and of making a happy home and should not try to contradict their nature by imitating men. The French biologist is praised for his scientific findings and his criticism of Western societies' attempts to make men and women equals with the same responsibilities. Moreover, the psychological and biological facts stated are used as a modern exegesis of Quranic statements regarding women and are said to be compatible with the concept of fitrah. Hence, male dominance in the public sphere and women's confinement to the house and to the function of motherhood are supported by modern biological evidence. Thus, for Qutb, the reproduction of males and the breeding of future generations is the noble and ultimate task of Muslim women. The conflict between the sexes regarding gender roles characteristic of the West is irrelevant to Muslim society. Qutb argues that the specialization of the sexes is determined by God and stated in the Quran in accordance with the sexes' biological nature, or fitrah, and in accordance with the wider social interest. Using biological evidence, he provides a novel interpretation of the religious duty of the jihad:

Jihad was not demanded for a woman because she propagates the men who wage jihad in the cause of God. A woman's entire organic and physiological formation is arranged to procreate men and prepare them for both jihad and life. She is- in this field-more capable and more useful: more capable because each of her cells is physiologically and psychologically prepared to perform this function. As regard to the long-term interests of the ummah, the woman is more useful than men: in the wake of war through

which men were depleted and women left untouched, the latter would compensate the loss by becoming centres of procreation...This is only one example of divine wisdom which assigns functions according to the nature of each sex (1987:644).

Moreover, a 'modern' psychological argument is presented in relation to the interpretation of the Quranic verse enjoining a husband to use beating as a means of disciplining a disobedient wife. Qutb asserts that psychoanalysis has proved the existence of deviant masochistic women who prefer to be physically subjugated by men. It is for this type of woman that this measure is suggested by the Quran.

Qutb's innovative critique, which resorted to selected Western sources or statements by "rational and wise Westerners" in order to defend Islam and also to paint a dark picture about industrial capitalist societies, became a tradition in popular Islamic discourse. Writers whose goal was the deconstruction of the ideology of women's modernization followed suit. Threatening ideologies were to be confronted by displaying the problems within their original settings in Western societies; this was the best means to defend Islamic criteria and the threatened patriarchy. Hence, their widespread written and recorded literature became a battle ground between modern ideologies and practices and the Islamic system. Among the pioneers was Mustafa Al-Sibai, a prominent theologian and leader of the Syrian Ikhwan. His popular work *Al-Mar'ah Bein Al-Fiqh Wa Al-Qanun* was first published in 1962. This book is dedicated to "the believing woman who resists the temptations and attractions of Western culture". The writer assembles a vast number of examples regarding women's life in the West based on citations from conservative Western newspapers and books and on personal observations. The overall image of Western life is presented as being socially alienating and morally corrupt. The author establishes a strong connection between what he depicts as the abysmal situation of Western society and the new sexual roles. Against the dark and shocking situation of the family in industrial societies, Islamic regulations

concerning women are defended as being a manifestation of God's wisdom, socially constructive and vital for social equilibrium. Imitation of Western societies by adopting modern notions of personal freedom, economic independence, free mixing and immodesty would lead Muslim societies to the same social and moral crises.

The last decade, which has been the golden era of Islamic revivalism, has witnessed a proliferation of popular Islamic literature on women in the form of books, pamphlets, magazines and audio- cassettes. This literature, mainly from Egypt, is directed mainly to the younger generation and is easily available from bookshops and on the streets all over the Arab world.

## CHAPTER 8

### The Model of the Western Woman: The Rejected Example

The theme of the position of women in the West constitutes an integral part of revivalist texts dealing with contemporary Muslim women. There is hardly any publication about women which does not include a discussion of this subject. The critique of modern gender relations is intended to 'disclose the real situation of modern women and the falseness of the spurious attraction of Western civilization'. In their critique of modern womanhood using the Western example, Muslim revivalists base their argument on a kind of historical determinism. They seek to demonstrate that modernized Muslim women are inevitably converging towards Western women's present state of affairs and with them the family and the whole of society. They introduce their critique with the following kind of argument:

Since women in contemporary Muslim societies are following the steps of Western women, it is easy, therefore, to see the consequences of women's liberation through the present state of Western women (Muhammed Al-Bahei, 1975:13).

It is significant that, by examining Western women's experience, Muslim revivalists demonstrate their profound fear of social change in Muslim societies. The representation of Western family as being in a state of disintegration and Western societies as examples of moral decay is intended to alarm and warn the populace that a similar outcome could be witnessed in Islamic societies. It is a tactic to hold back and isolate the forces of modernization which would lead not to progress, but to social and moral 'confusion'. Interestingly, the Muslim revivalist representation of Western women is somewhat similar to the stereotypes deployed by medieval Christian writers faced with threat of Islam when it was posing a serious cultural challenge to Europe. Muslim women were charged with promiscuity and licentiousness, just as Western women are now represented.

How is Western women's experience represented in the writings and public sermons of Muslim revivalists?

Primarily, most Muslim ideologues attribute the imbalance in the domain of gender in Western industrial societies to capitalist development and the absorption of women into the urban work-force. Capitalism is represented as a mysterious and formidable force linked to money and profit and as the new god that people of the modern jahiliyyah worship. Such people are deceived and illusioned by luxury, comfort and the enjoyment of life that the capitalist system promises them. But in reality people are driven to an earthly hell. Thus, both men and women are perceived to be victimized by this evil force aiming at destroying humanity.

Significantly, the aspect of capitalism that Muslim revivalists concentrate upon is its impact on the natural order laid down by God which harmonizes relations between the sexes. It is this harmony that is based on the dichotomy of attributes, the specialization of the sexes and the separation of the world of women from the world of men. With the emergence of capitalism this system which had previously predominated the cosmos, was interrupted. This argument is put into its historical context. It is supposed that prior to the era of capitalism, the situation of Western women was different; they were very much like Muslim women: modest and restricted in their activities to the domestic sphere. The worlds of men and women were distinct and the frontiers that God had set between the sexes were respected. The Muslim revivalist version of the beginning of capitalism and its impact on women centres around the situation of rural and very poor women forced to leave their homes and to move to the cities to work in the capitalists' factories along with men. This onset of widespread mixing between men and women is heavily emphasized and regarded as the beginning of the present moral dilemma characterizing Western societies. In a recorded sermon, Al-Shodoukhi, who indicates he was a student in America, remarks:

When Europe had expanded its industries in different fields, labourers were demanded for the industries. People rushed to

the cities with or without their families... Women were also drawn to participate in the work force. As a result, the circle of the interaction between men and women widened. The frontiers that Allah sets between the sexes to discipline them were abolished and immorality spread. With the passage of years the meaning of honour and chastity changed; men no longer have the sense of honour and women lost their chastity. Western society had surrendered to the moral decay and it is not a concern for the Westerners. This is the stage that society has reached.

The typical conception is that capitalism has violated the natural order through the social phenomena of taking women out the house (*ikhraḡe al-mar'ah min al-beit*), mixing up the worlds of men and women (*ikhtilat*), and unveiling and excessive adornment (*al-sufur wa al-tabarruḡe*). These grave developments have removed the sexual division essential for social harmony and tranquillity. Categorically, then, capitalism is associated with sexual anarchy. The popular ideologue Abdullah Al-Talidi regards capitalist development as the cause of licentiousness:

The capitalist system which glorifies individualism and opens the doors for sexual anarchism in European societies affected the position of women. Thus, woman became indifferent to modesty, shyness and chastity. She unveiled all beauties and charms and left her house to mix with men and share with them every thing. As a result, European societies witnessed the spread of the phenomena of iniquity, moral corruption, adultery and illegitimate children. The world reached a state in which a total crisis and moral anarchy are the norm (1990:13).

The new social order created by the capitalist system is a world emptied of moral and religious values and with little consideration for the family and marriage; it is dominated by lust and unrestrained sexuality. Capitalists are accused of bringing sexuality into the open and of shattering its privacy in society. Sex, the source of the human being's weakness, is fully exploited and traded in modern society in different ways. In the entertainment industry the services of beautiful, semi-nude women are essential. Fashion designers and the beauty industry create sexually arousing, semi-covering dresses and publicize their products among women for the purpose of making huge profits.

Daily newspapers and magazines publish exciting articles and shameful pictures, thus ensuring a quick increase in their circulation. It is stated that capitalists not only economically exploit women's labour, but also more importantly their sexuality is exploited and morality stained in order "to fill their purses with gold". It is emphasized that the capitalist commercial project exploits the feminine body in order to attract buyers. Further, capitalism is associated with promiscuity and prostitution; the latter is a capitalist form of trade (for example: S. Qutb: 1975; M. Al-Bahei: 1975; M. Al-Bar: 1981; Nawabiddin: 1986; M. Qutb: 1991; Braigish: 1985; Al-Jawheri: 1980; S. Al-Arabi: 1989; F. Jasim: 1985). The beginning of the capitalist era was also the beginning of the organization of a wide scale prostitution trade where cheap sex was provided for large numbers of labourers who dwelled in the cities and did not have the means to establish families. Western societies are represented as indulging in unlawful sexual relations, which threaten the existence of the family. It is argued that, although Westerners are concerned about moral standards when dealing with each other, sexuality has been totally divorced from morality and religion. This tendency has become a norm and has the support and backing of the state, the press, television, theatre, etc. Western ideologues, social scientists and thinkers support this communal indulgence in unlawful sexual relations and place it in a theoretical framework. Durkheim, Marx, Freud and Sartre are the satans whose theories are seen as encouraging a divorce of sexuality from religion. Durkheim is attacked for what are supposed to be his theories about religion and morality and his claimed statement that 'marriage is not of 'fitrah' and the family is not a natural system'. Marx is attacked for what is supposed to be his call for the destruction of the family and for calling it a feudal institution. Freud is attacked for his advocacy of the fulfilment of sexual desire without the restrictions of morality and religion. Sartre denounced marriage and encouraged sexual license, along with his companion Simone de Beauveoir, in their writings (Al-Jawheri:1980: 216; M. Qutb: 1989:165; Al-Bar:1981:157).

The image of the Western family occupies a considerable space within the revivalist representation of Western society. The Islamic notion of the family, which combines the meanings of the house, the family and the woman and regards them as a unity, has great difficulty in understanding the Western institution of the family with its dramatically different organisation. Many revivalists declare that the family no longer exists in the West. The existing confusion between the worlds of men and women, hence between the private and the public, the interior and the external, affects the position of the house or the family in their eyes and leaves it in turmoil. The Western house, which Muslim revivalists consider to be no longer women's permanent, sacred and guarded space, appears ambiguous and hollow. It is referred to as a 'hotel' and as a 'formal meeting place'. The point of departure for this decline is women's 'removal' from the house (*ikhraḡe al-mar'ah min al-beit*). Women have been removed from their natural private space and have been drawn to strange and different frontiers in which they are lost and exploited. The question, then, is: how does this 'empty' place look and how does the family function? In answer, first- and second- hand information is included in the texts in which statistics and statements by both Western critics and well-known Western personalities such as the actress Marilyn Monroe are used to describe the situation of the Western family. Without doubt, the image they present is highly shocking and horrifying; it is an image which betrays and contradicts the very image of the 'family' known to Muslim readers.

Muslim revivalists regard modern society as a society in which the bonds of kinship are cut off (*rawabit al-rahm maghtooa*). Hence, the situation of the family in the West is portrayed as an area which exhibits the extent to which individualistic tendencies replaced kinship ties. It is maintained that the dominance of capitalism and materialism caused social values to diminish. The economic conditions of inequality make it difficult for the common man to acquire the necessities of life such as housing, food and clothing for himself, not to mention supporting his family. Consequently, every member of the family is



forced to earn a living and be responsible for himself only. The ethics of selfishness were implanted in the people's souls. So, the family was broken up into individuals and the relationships between parents and children, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives were profoundly affected by the selfish tendencies. Al-Bahei points out that the family does not exist in modern societies. "What exists is individuals who are connected by material interests. As to the authority of the family, the control and supervision of the parents and consanguinity of the offspring and their solidarity on blood basis, all that are not existing" (p.16). M. Al-Sibai presents this typical image:

One of the students who is studying in Germany, says that before his return to Damascus, he had a tour in European countries and the last country he visited was Switzerland. When he was asked about his impression he said: There is a strange phenomenon felt in Europe. The European family is very much dismembered and taken apart. It is dominated and directed by the spirit of total individualism. The father works and the same with the mother. They only meet during supper time. The mother does not have time to spend with her children. She usually throws them to a boarding school and only sees them during festivals and seasons. A great percentage of European ladies never get pregnant, not because of the limit of time but because they are concerned with keeping up their beauty and maintain their right to divorce. In Switzerland there is a divorce case in every three marital cases. When the son or daughter completes primary school, she or he gets himself admitted to one of the vocational schools in order to learn a vocation or profession. Duration of the course in these schools is three or four years-after graduating they instantly get employed-that means girls and boys start working at an early age, not more than eighteen years old. The young Swiss man rarely completes his study or graduation, that is because his father however rich he is, does not pay the expensive university fees for him. Most Swiss students pay their university fees for themselves through their own effort and sweat, not from their fathers' pocket. The European girl is free in her each and every conduct. She pays the rent of her room to her family, she also pays for her meals and washing of her clothes-I know a girl who pays to her mother for

each and every telephone call at home, she also has her own key  
(1984:301).

The nature of the relationship between parents and offsprings is heavily emphasized. Westerners are not interested in having children because they are primarily concerned with their individualistic goals and have no time for taking care of the children. Working women are responsible for the situation of the younger generation, deprived of a mother's care, they suffer serious psychological problems and are victims of child abuse, drugs and suicide. Unlike caring Muslim parents, parents in Western societies expel sons and daughters from the family home in their early youth to search for jobs and live alone away from the protection of the family. This practice provokes much comment, especially with regard to the 'driven away daughters' who are left without financial support and whose honour is not cared about. For example, Al-Shodoukhi conveys to his listeners the astonishment he felt at an incident which happened to him while he was studying at an American university. An American lecturer told him that he was happy to receive the news that his daughter had finally found a boy-friend. Authors and preachers exploit their audience's astonishment by drawing conclusions which have an instant interpretation: the absence of any value on the protection of women and the death of honour and real masculinity.

Because of their selfishness with their offspring in the early years, parents end up with a lonely and miserable life in their old age. Their offspring do not support them financially or visit them. The fact that aged parents spend their last years in old people's homes or die alone in cold flats without their children knowing is a favourite subject and discussed with a great deal of astonishment.

There is a consensus among authors that modern society is anti-marriage; marriage in Western societies is seen to be diminishing and being replaced by temporary forms of union which are underlined by the pursuit of pleasure and the liberation from religious and ethical foundations. The spread of sexual license is regarded as the main reason for Westerners refraining from marriage and not establishing upright families. Modern culture, as well as the corrupted

social space, is seen as providing a whole range of ideas and means that undermine the position of marriage in society. It is explained (with figures) that Westerners can have children without establishing marital unions; readers and listeners are informed of the widespread phenomenon of illegitimate children and of families headed by women, particularly within American society. The phenomenon of millions of fatherless children is typically interpreted as: 'anarchy of genealogy' (*dhya al-nasab*). Modern society produces generations which lack blood relation (*asabiah*) (Al-Bahei:16). With regard to the nature of the marital unit, there is a strong conviction of instability, discontinuity and the artificiality of marriage. The underlying argument for the ambiguity and hollowness of marriage is the lack of 'closeness' in the private domain. The marriage bond is seen as weak and ambiguous because a wife meets with strange men at work and spends more time with them than with her husband; and furthermore the house is 'open' for non-kin male visitors. Moreover, the Western husband is depicted as tamed and he lacks the sense of manly jealousy; he does not 'guard his house' and is unconcerned about his wife's conduct. It is repeatedly claimed that men have lost their original control over their families; they are helpless and muted creatures whose natural roles have been stolen from them by women preoccupied with illusions of freedom and equality. The worried patriarchy is perfectly expressed in the recorded words of a popular preacher:

One of the reasons behind immorality and disgracing is the removal of the man's authority in the family-we read, heard and witnessed how in the West man has no voice, no authority, and no leadership. That the man has no say about what his wife does (Al- Karni).

The deterioration of the position of the family and marriage in modern society is regarded as a further manifestation of jahiliyyah. The Azherian theologian and prominent Muslim Brother Muhammed Al-Bahei, in his book *Islam and the Attitudes of Modern Women* (1975), has popularized the notion of jahiliyyah on the social level, finding an analogy between the anarchic modern

marriage and family system and the pre-Islamic system. For him, the modern phenomenon of abortion is equal to the ancient Arabs' practice of killing babies. Short-term friendship between men and women on a sexual basis is a form of mut'a marriage. In addition, sexual relations outside the framework of marriage are zina. Artificial fertilization and procreation outside marriage are correlated with certain sexual unions in jahiliyyah described by Aishah's famous narration (see p.16). The present-day prostitution trade is very similar to that of jahiliyyah. Finally, modern women's preoccupation with fashion clothes that reveal their charms is the self-same tabarruje of jahiliyyah that the Quran warns about. Thus, for Al-Bahei, modern society is not in a state of evolution towards progress, rather it is retrogressing towards jahiliyyah. The signs of decline and divine punishment are the afflictions with the plagues of narcotics and venereal diseases.

It is stated that there are nonetheless upright people in the West who have discovered the reasons behind the decline of the family and who call for women to return to the sphere of the family. For example, an American woman (Edalin) is quoted by different authors as saying:

Experiences have taught us the necessity of the staying of the mother at her house and of her supervision of the children's upbringing. The difference in the moral standard between this generation and the previous one is due to women's migration from the house and her negligence of her child leaving him to people who are incapable of his education. The reason behind family crisis and the high rate of crimes in the American society is that the woman left her home to raise the family income; the income has increased but the moral standard decreased (Al-Talidi,1990:146).

Women themselves are depicted as suffering under this 'unnatural situation' since women naturally belong to the private and domestic sphere; their abandonment of their role as proper wives and mothers is irregular and a sign of abnormality. Hence, awakened women have come to realise the reasons for their suffering. Results of opinion polls are included to demonstrate that most women regret their decision to leave the house:

It is important to note that even women who succumbed to difficult circumstances and left the house are dissatisfied, sad and repentant. The clearest evidence for this fact is the opinion poll undertaken by Gallup Institute. The conclusion is that women are becoming exhausted and fatigued. 65% of American women preferred to return to the house. In the past, the woman thought that she would achieve her goal through work. Today, after hindrances made her feet bleed and after her energies are consumed, she wants to return to her nest and to devote herself to embrace her nestlings (Mustafa Al-Sibai, 1984: 259).

Many quotations are given to prove a woman's natural inclination towards motherhood and domesticity and her nostalgia for this role. Typical of these is a letter alleged to have been written by Marilyn Monroe shortly before her suicide:

I am the most miserable woman on earth...I failed to become a mother...I am a woman who preferred the life at home and the honourable family life more than any thing else. The real happiness for the woman is in the honourable and pure family life...People have been unfair with me and the work in the field of movies turns a woman to a cheap commodity (M. Qutb 1990; Al-Talidi 1990; A. Al-Taibi 1989; M. Abdelhamid).

In sum, the representation of the woman in Western industrial societies swings between two images, both of which are negative in Islamic culture: the quasi-male woman and the woman as a commodity. The modern woman who is allowed by the modern economic system to force her way in the masculine public sector and to have a career and a position within it embodies a dilemma for the revivalist critics with regard to her real identity. Such a model contradicts and defies Islamic ideology which is based on the oppositional nature of the sexes and stresses the clear-cut differentiation between gender roles and social spaces. Thus, Muslim revivalist authors express their profound concern about the impact on women's identity. The literature refers to the category of women who impose their presence in a man's world as *mustergilat* (women assuming masculine qualities). Hence, a working woman in the modern sector of economy appears in the literature as irregular; she is stripped of the natural

characteristics and attributes of womanhood. A. Al-Taibi's description of the modern working woman is typical of this dominant idea in the discourse:

Imagine oh brother and sister the situation of women in societies where mingling of the sexes and bodily display are practised: imagine them in the streets and alleys clearing rubbish, on corners and pavements polishing shoes, in hostels and pubs carrying luggages, in construction works digging and carrying sand. Imagine them when they are in the factory, in the office, in the field of politics and war....Imagine them unkempt, shaggy and wearing dirty clothes. Imagine women with large veins, enlarged muscles, gloomy faces, harsh voices, rough skins, wrinkled and hard palms, damaged feet and so on. This is a sad and tragic situation for women in these mixed and mindless societies (1989:130).

For Al-Bahej, such an unnatural state of affairs affects women's nature not only physically, but psychologically as well:

The experience of contemporary Western societies demonstrates that economic independence of women through work outside home caused women to lose many characteristics as a woman and a human being. For example, women who work in public transportation, in mining, heavy industry, and in paving and cleaning streets loses her femininity and becomes quasi a man; she becomes harsh in terms of her physical appearance and in her behaviour. A woman who works in offices and in other jobs which do not demand movement develops an asceticism towards the sexual relation with the husband; she ends up becoming indifferent about this relation (1975:43).

For Al-Behie, a working woman in the West faces a crisis of identity:

She is made a subject of:

- 1-The crisis of weakness in terms of the sense of femininity.
  - 2- The crisis of weakness in regard to the sense of motherhood
- (p.45).

Further, the revivalists talk about the emergence of the phenomenon of the 'third sex' amongst working women in industrial societies:

There is medical evidence indicating that physiological changes are taking place in working women's bodies making them lose their femininity and at the same time they are unable to become complete men...Scientists have noted a decrease in the number

of children born to working women. It was presumed that this phenomenon was due to the women's own choice. However, scientists then discovered that this serious form of sterility has nothing to do with organic reasons. Scientists now presume that this change is due to women's physical, intellectual, emotional separation from her own domain, motherhood, and her attempt to be equal to the man, sharing with him in the arena of work.. Scientists are ready to declare that the imminent emergence of third sex in whom feminine characteristics are disappearing (Mohammed Al-Bar, 1981:123 ).

On the other hand, the abolition of the 'boundaries' between the worlds of men and women is seen as seriously affecting the 'natural attraction between the sexes'. It is reiterated that the mixing of the sexes affects men's masculinity.

Rashid Al-Talili wrote in the magazine, *Al-Ma'rifa*:

The natural law as laid down by God requires the persistence of the natural attraction between the female and the male in order for them to marry and proliferate. If this taming [mixing] occurs we are facing a fatal disease suffered by modern societies. That is sexual frigidity which led to sexual deviation, infidelity, extreme adventures and crimes as compensations for the lost masculinity (1977:60).

Again in another edition of the magazine:

The mixing between men and women will lead to diseases the most dangerous of which is the feminizing of men. Psychology and social sciences prove that mixing of the sexes results in men becoming soft, emotional and gentle (Abdulwahab Al-Hintani, 1973:20).

In addition to the *mustarjilah* woman, the discourse conveys an image of the woman as a commodity (*sil'a*). This description is widely used and has its parallel in Iranian fundamentalist discourse. The term *sil'a* refers to a commonly circulated good; such symbolization is peculiar to the position of women in capitalist society. The image is concerned with the visible and the publicly 'seen' woman. The Islamic mentality, which correlates honour, social respect and elevated position with the system of concealment and covering and with prohibiting other's men's eyes from 'seeing,' find in the modern woman an embodiment of open and visible femininity. In their eyes, it is femininity that has

lost its vital essence. The public appearance of women is given much emphasis and is used to attack the capitalist mentality which has 'naked' women made their femininity available and cheap. In consumerist societies, women are seen as degraded, misused and stripped of honour; they are 'things' in the market, not persons. Al-Shodoukhi describes this category of women as follows:

The woman in the West whos's allegedly liberated is in reality degraded, misused, and subjugated. Because she is compelled to soil her honour and humiliate her dignity in order for the capitalists to make profits out of a movement, a smile or a short dress she wears.

The audience is informed that in Western societies, physical appearance is important for certain professions. Attractive secretaries, saleswomen, waitresses and nightclub dancers are chosen by employers for their physical attraction. The media and advertisement industry exploit the feminine body to promote all kinds of commodities; semi-naked women are shown with cars and various machineries. The film industry is wholly dependent upon women's physical qualities. Further it is narrated that in the prostitution trade young girls are recruited in bulk. Moreover, working women are sexually harassed at work by their employers. The most recent literature enthusiastically reviews Western books on sexual harassment where such phenomenon is taken as evidence in support of the Islamic propositions. The conclusion drawn is that Western women have no value in their societies other than for their sexuality and that they are not dealt with as persons.

The value of a woman in the West is determined by the ability of the market and the profit makers to make the maximum profits out of her body and out of her readiness to sacrifice her dignity (Al-Shodoukhi).

Interestingly, against the symbol of *sil'a*, a commodity reserved for women in capitalist societies, Muslim ideologues use the symbolization of '*jawhara maknona*', a cherished and concealed jewel, to represent the ideal Muslim woman, a woman whose body is covered and concealed from the common gaze.



## CHAPTER 9

### Re-Islamized Womanhood: Re-veiling

Without doubt, the prime concern of Muslim revivalists is the eradication of the innovations on the gender level in Muslim cities, particularly the open and free femininity, which is connected with the increased spread of elements of capitalist culture. First, there is the moral corruption of a large city, embodied in entertainment and tourism. Theatres, hotels, nightclubs and cinemas are regarded as anti-Islamic institutions. Muslim revivalists are extremely sensitive and angry at the modern phenomenon of a woman's physical appearance becoming a constant and essential element in the entertainment industries and in modern culture in general. In particular, popular actresses, female singers and dancers are regarded as the embodiment immodest womanhood. The second element which concerns the revivalists is the woman's entry into the public domain through education, work and public transport and the consequent weakening of the traditional notions of gender and social and spatial boundaries. In their view, the public space is no longer 'clean'. For example, Al-Talidi describes the public space that is now open to adorned and unveiled women as 'contaminated' and 'polluted'. Thus, for him, it would be better for practicing Muslims to live in isolated valleys, mountains and forests than in contemporary jahili societies (1990:6). In general, the demand for the re-Islamization of women is placed within the context of salvaging and purifying contemporary Muslim societies from what is seen as imminent moral corruption and of fortifying the ummah to rise up and face the internal and external dangers. The well-being and the revival of the sacred ummah are associated with women's religiosity and their commitment to the divine rules concerning modesty. As the leader of the Tunisian revival stated in the magazine, Al-Ma'rifa, the ideal social order is where 'men's community and their gathering

places should be different from women's community and their meeting places' (Rashid Al- Ghannoshi,1978:7).

Thus, the revivalist cultural campaign addresses modernized city women, particularly university students and professional women. Indeed, what the discourse is really about is the re-Islamization of such women. The holy texts play a decisive role in the process of intellectual persuasion. Innovations are measured against the fundamental teachings of the Quran and hadith; women have to choose between what God wants for them or what modern culture imposes upon them. The choice is between following 'the straight path of God and Muhammed' or following the 'kings of fashion and the unhappy Western women'. It is a choice between being regarded as authentic, formidable, pure, respectable, or as alien and unrelated, vulnerable, shameless, and thus approachable in the street.

With remarkable success, the Islamic discourse has been very effective not only in helping to preserve the Islamicity of traditional women, but also in penetrating modernized groups. Modern Egyptian society provides meaningful examples of Muslim revivalist success. Not only have the great majority of female university students and many women in modern occupations been Islamized and veiled, but, interestingly, increasing numbers of today's popular female artists are subjects for re-Islamization. These formerly 'corrupted' singers, movie stars, television announcers and belly-dancers have become 'repentant' Muslim artists; stories of their return to Islam with their heads veiled are frequently reported in the Arab press, and such stories are even reported by Western news agencies such as Reuter. News of the adoption of hijab by a famous actress is usually considered an important national and regional event as it arouses immense popular interest. Of course, such a significant success is fully exploited to publicize the idea of returning to Islam. 'Repentant' artists are encouraged to join the cultural campaign aimed at re-Islamizing women. They hold public seminars and lectures and write books about their experiences;

such very popular books are published by Islamic publishing houses and prefaced by prominent revivalist leaders.

In contrast to modernizers, who considered the hijab to be a symbol of women's inferiority and an obstacle to social progress and who initiated their liberation by casting off the veil, Muslim revivalists, reverse this trend by associating the new Muslim womanhood with the protection of hijab. Thus, women's re-Islamization is symbolized by wearing the hijab. The kind of hijab they call for is not the customary one seen in poor and traditional urban areas and in the countryside, but an ideological and strict hijab based on religious evidences where certain conditions are expected from the newly veiled. For example, in a booklet addressing Egyptian female university students, the author, while acknowledging that the majority are veiled, demands a stricter and more 'proper' veiling. The students are reminded that the hijab should be:

1-Long and full, no part of women's body should be revealed. 2-It should be thick. 3- It should be loose, so that the contour of the body is not to be noticed, and it should not be in itself a decoration. 4-It should not be worn for fame and for inviting the attention of the eyes and the feelings. 5-It should not be incensed or perfumed so as not to attract noses or excite desires of others. 6- It should not resemble the men's clothing for the Prophet has cursed those women who imitate men in dress. 7-It should not resemble the unbelieving women's clothing because contrasting unbelievers is a sign of following the straight path (Dr. Abu-Alata, 1987:18).

As is clear from the quotation, concern with the denial of sexuality is of the utmost importance. Muslim revivalists emphasize the fundamental Islamic notion of awra as religious justification for the concealment of the female body. The literature reflects a certain amount of controversy with regard to the extension of awra. To some revivalists the woman, including the face, is a total awra that should be concealed. Such a view is widespread in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Revivalists belonging to more modernized societies such as Egypt adopt a view which allows exposure of the face and palms of the hands as non-awra parts, arguing that complete veiling is obligatory only for women of

exceptionally infatuating beauty. For both trends, exposure of the hair, part of the legs or arms is as shameful as exposing the private parts. In the light of this criterion, modern women who wear fashionable clothes are believed to be exposing their nudity. Moreover, the complex notion of fitnah, which embodies the Islamic tension with sexuality, is frequently emphasized. It is argued that women embody the most dangerous kind of temptation on earth, where the believer is required to strive for piety. Women constitute the most difficult test possible for men because of the powerful natural attraction (*tagatheb fitrey*) men feel towards them.

Woman is the most difficult affliction and trial, for all other prohibited deeds and things do not agree with the pure human nature. Only one thing is exempted, that is the sexual instinct between man and woman; it is part of the normal human nature that can not be resisted or constrained. Hence, the Islamic remedy is to satisfy this instinct within certain legal boundaries. This illustrates the reason why women are a trial for men. That is why God ordered women to conceal weapons of charms, otherwise, men may fall and fail in the examination (M. Al-Bouti:12-15).

And:

The woman as a whole is fitnah [seduction]; her voice, shape and all her parts. Therefore, she is the most powerful kind of fitnah [trial] and the most dangerous thing to the man. Therefore, our beloved leader and teacher Muhammed has said "I did not leave fitnah more harmful to men than women (Al-Talidi, 1990:38).

These descriptions are applied to the modern unveiled women, who therefore, constitute imminent danger to the 'clean' Islamic social order that Muslim revivalists seek to re-establish:

Islam aims at establishing a clean society where sexual desires are not aroused at every moment. Constant sexual arousal results in mad lustfulness..The seductive gaze and gesture, the excessive make-up and the bare body arouse sexual madness.. Attraction between the male and female is powerful, indeed.. In Islamic system, the secured way is to minimize these arousals (Said Qutb, 1987: 2511).

In response to such manifest tension between religion and sexuality, the hijab is presented as a divinely ordered means of distancing and controlling the danger of sexuality. Hijab, then, denies sexuality; it makes women clean and pure. Without such a protective measure, women's bodies are 'hot', dangerous and impure: one of the writers uses modern technology to explain the moral function of hijab and its social necessity:

The hijab is a device, a refrigerator, to preserve women's flesh from contamination by concealing it and not allowing its circulation to the eyes of the passers-by. As meat gets spoiled if it is taken out of the refrigerator, so is the woman's flesh if it is displayed and circulated to the public (eyes). It gets contaminated and the society is spoiled and stinking (Jamil Al-Ajam, 1986:67).

Moreover, in the light of such a dominant fear of sexuality or fitnah, the hostile Islamic response to women's modernization is more understandable. The essence of the problem of modernity is that it radically impinges on the Islamic arrangement with regard to containing and suppressing sexuality. Through *sufur*, *tabarruj*, and *ekhtilaf*, modernity is regarded as having freed the force of sexuality from its Islamic restraints and released it to destroy public morality. Interestingly, many revivalists make a connection between the freed force of sexuality and the external hostility that comes from the West; this intensifies the politicisation of the question of women. Thus, the modernization of Muslim women is regarded by the majority of authors as an external conspiracy to destroy the Muslim ummah. Various religious enemies are thought to be involved in the conspiracy.

What was the important weapon which the Westerners used to diminish the Islamic civilization? The sharpest weapon used by the West to realise this goal is the element of woman. They knew what we only come to realize today, that intellectual uncertainty cannot affect Muslim minds one tenth of what the sexual arousal does to them...For this reason, the cultural invasion is based on an important and indispensable element, that is the woman, first, through the exploitation of charm and seduction and secondly through the removal of woman caring for the young and the

family...But how could the leaders of mental invasion make woman a means for realizing their aim? The aim that they were and still are trying to realise. The answer is that they took a reversed attitude to the Islamic rules regarding the woman. One of the legislations is that women should be sheltered and be decent and that they should not demonstrate their charms in front of men. The means for those people was to keep her away from the restrictions of sheltering and decency and push her to display her charms in all places, market places and different gathering places. Islam ordered woman to stay at the house and to raise a righteous generation. The only means for those was to remove her from the house (Mohammed Al-Boutti, p:21).

Missionaries and Zionists are accused of being actively involved in a conspiracy to ruin Muslim women. They are thought to be behind the call of emancipation, the removal of the hijab and the mixing of the sexes.

The [contemporary] crusaders recognized the essential role played by the woman in founding Muslim society. Therefore, they concentrated their effort on ruining her religiosity and morality and using her as an instrument to ruin society. The crusade-along with the Zionism is behind ideas of women's liberation, removal of hijab, mixing of the sexes and fashion. In all their conferences and activities, missionaries focus on Muslim women's Westernization. Thus their leader, Dr. Zwemer says " We learnt that there are other plans better than direct attack and random strike on strong wall, we have to find the loophole on the wall. Then we put the powder, for we have known that the loophole is located in the hearts of Muslim women. It is they who make Muslims" (Zaynab Al-Ghazali, quoted by Al-Hashimi,1989:85).

Further, historical bourgeois advocators of change, as well as contemporary ones are depicted as blind imitators of the West or simply traitors and collaborators with outsiders. The Muslim reformers Al-Afghani, Al-Tahtawi, Abduh and Qasim Amin are connected with foreign networks. Interestingly, well-known modernists are depicted as having been seduced by women with a colonial connection with the aim of changing their original beliefs to become protagonists for women's emancipation on behalf of the colonialists. Muhammed Abduh and Qasim Amin were influenced by the beautiful princess

Nazli Fadil, a Westernized woman and friend of Cromer, the British governor of Egypt. They were great admirers of her beauty and regular visitors to her salon. She had a great influence on what they wrote about women. A second woman played a crucial role in the life of Qasim Amin:

He mentioned in his autobiography that he met in France with a French girl who became his close friend, and that a deep emotional relationship had developed between them....He also mentioned that she used to accompany him to visit French families, salons and clubs....Whether he met her incidentally or it was prepared to put her in his way, this girl played with his mind and heart and changed the course of his life. She prepared him to play the role that missionary organizations regarded as necessary for demolishing Islam (Mohammed Qutb, 1989:8).

The early feminist movement is depicted as a toy in the hands of colonial authority. Sharawi's historic removal of the hijab is described as a crime. Again, colonial connections are revealed in the case of Sharawi; her father, Sultan Basha, was one of the notables who betrayed their country and helped the British to occupy Egypt. The evidence presented is that he was granted the order of Saint Michael and Saint George by the British. Besides, she learned the lessons of feminism from the prime minister's French wife. She is condemned for shaking hands with Mussolini and Ataturk and for discussing Muslim women's issues with them. The goals of the union she established were the very same goals that the colonial authority had long been striving for.

The paramount social significance of the hijab for contemporary Muslim societies is emphasized by discussions about the serious effects of its absence on different levels. The point of departure is the association of various uncontrolled problems on the collective level with the absence of hijab and the return of hijab is firmly believed to provide a solution to contemporary social, moral and even political crises. On the level of public morality, the absence of hijab leaves the door open for the uncontrolled and unsanctioned force of sexuality, embodied in the 'naked' Westernized woman, to destroy morality. "These women who are allegedly 'liberated' from hijab are actually freed from

virtue, honour and shyness, they liberated them from virtue and decency. They should name it libertinism instead of liberality", argues Fatimah Abdullah (1989:61). Muslim societies are undermined from within by the poison of lust and fornication, which consume the time and energy of the youth and divert them from religion and social duties. Giving in to unlawful sexual desire is believed to increase the occurrence of zina, to seriously threaten the institution of marriage and to be the cause of the emergence of genealogical disorder. In this regard, many Muslim revivalists believe that all previous civilizations met their downfall as a result of unlawful indulgence in lust and pleasure.

Secondly, unveiling or open sexuality, is depicted as constituting a threat to the kin of women. The free and immodest modern woman is not controlled by her kin; she embodies a sexuality that has slipped away from the control of men. The honour of fathers, brothers and husbands is seriously affected by behaviour of such women; their manliness is put in doubt in the eyes of other men. Modernist men who advocate women's liberation are excluded from membership of the ummah; they are regarded as having lost their Islamic identity because they lack the necessary sense of honour. For example:

There is a terrible conspiracy against the Muslim woman supported by people who do not fear neither Allah, nor scandal or shame. This is because they are not religious and also they do not have the sense of honour. Most of them do not have wives and daughters...Even if some of them have wives and daughters they do not have any honour or ghairah even the minimum that the animals have (Muhammed Al-Sabbagh,1980:2).

Qasim Amin is shown to have changed his beliefs about women's emancipation after the challenge to his sense of honour. The following story is frequently reported in the literature, telling how one of his friends knocked on his door:

When he opened the door, the visitor said: this time I came to talk to your wife. Amin was astonished...How he dared to ask to see his wife...His friend told him: are not you calling for such things? Why, then, not experience it for yourself? Amin bowed his head



and kept silent (Ali Mutwalli:1989; Fatima Jasim:1985; Wahbi Ghawji:1987).

Mutwalli thinks that this experience possibly had an affect Amin's views. He mentions that one year before his death Amin is said to have regretted his views on modernization.

Fathers and husbands are urged not to give in to the desire of daughters and wives for liberation and to be 'real' men; only the low kind of men have no honour. They are requested to reject Western ideas which withdraw women from the protection of men.

For example, Nadimah Abu-alsaid wrote in Al-Ma'rifa:

The attempt to implement the Western idea of equality in Muslim society is absurd, for the position of Muslim woman is different...Islam looks at the woman as *ard* [sexual honour] that needs to be protected, the father's responsibility does not end when his daughter reaches puberty, it continues until marriage when responsibility is handed to the husband. With husband's death, the son becomes in charge. It is a crucial matter to protect and preserve women (1978:23).

They are told that sexual honour corresponds to religiosity and that the Prophet, whose sayings on the subject are frequently cited, was a man with great honour.

Modern women not only debase honour on the family level, but it is emphasized that the broader 'Islamic' honour is also seriously affected: in the words of Al-Ghanoshi, the hijab is the 'flag' of the Muslim ummah. Unveiling is considered to be a violation of the holy principles that unite people and give meaning and significance to their existence. In exceptionally classical and poetic language, Muslim revivalists identify the situation of women with the situation of the ummah. The fall of hijab is depicted as similar to, and even more serious than, the fall of the last bastion in the land of Islam. The exposure of a woman's body is seen to resemble the humiliation of the present state of the ummah, whose points of weakness have been revealed and exposed to the exploitation and hostility of its enemies.

Thirdly, unveiled women as a category are told that they have lost honour, status and respect by being stripped of the veil in a period dominated by capitalism. It is stressed that modern Muslim women, under capitalism, are objectified and reduced to the position of a commodity that is cheap and available. They are made subjects for sexual attention of men. The immorality and dishonour inherent in this situation stems from the conception that these unveiled and adorned women are seen or consumed by every man's eyes in the public domain. Thus, the modern woman is referred to as 'a woman for all men'. This representation fits in well with the Islamic idea of women as awra and with many hadiths that regard looking and smelling as symbolic acts of indulgence in the sexual act. Fatima Bint Abdullah describes a 'commodity' woman thus:

She displays her charms on the streets and in the marketplaces as a commodity displayed by a peddler or as sweet seller displaying what he has with decorated colours and glistening papers-every man enjoys seeing such an attractive and wonderful woman. She rouses their hidden desires and becomes a possession of all. In doing so she deserves to be the woman of all men (1989:29).

The hijab is presented as the appropriate protection for women in such a degrading situation. By neutralizing their external appearance and making their bodies invisible, women are protected from the exploitative mentality of capitalism. If, for capitalism, women are cheap commodities to be exhibited and abused on every corner and consumed by every body's eyes, for Islam they are cherished and above circulation. In the context of such metaphoric language, it is argued that the hijab raises women's position to the status of a 'cherished and hidden jewel'. Being cherished entails confinement. As one author explains it: 'Any thing dear to you like a pen or a watch, you do not put it anywhere; the woman is the greatest treasure that should not be open to the eyes'. Moreover, the confinement of the dear women under the guard of men is for him the meaning of 'honour' (Wahbi Ghawji, 1987:126). Hence, with the hijab women

become unapproachable, inaccessible; the hijab is the 'shell' which protects the cherished pearl from the loss of uniqueness once displayed:

The Muslim woman is a shining jewel sending her shine to her husband. She is ordered to conceal this shine away from men in general in order for this shine not to fade (J. Al-Ajam, 1986:39).

On the other hand, the adoption of the Islamic 'ideological' hijab involves a tendency towards asceticism and an ideological rejection of consumption, in particular the consumption of modern Western fashion. In general, asceticism is a feature of modern revivalism. The present life is fitnah, a seductive force which can drive the believer away from the path of God. Muslims, in general, are urged to guard themselves against the materiality of this life. Women in particular are seen as having a natural inclination towards consumerism and there is much advice directed at them to be satisfied with simple necessities. For example, the Muslim feminist Dr. Najat Hafez, in a book dedicated to the newly recruited Muslim women advises them to believe in and accept God's will with regard to one's share of wealth.

With this (belief in fate) you get rid of your desire for this mortal world and turn your back to what people possess, from pleasure and ornaments of life, for you know it is eventually disappearing however much it is and to however long it lasts. By doing so, you purify yourself from selfishness and greed and get yourself clothed with content and satisfaction for satisfaction is an imperishable treasure (1989:18).

Modern fashion, in particular, is attacked and rejected on the basis that it is merely a form of consumption produced by colonialism and a means of cultural domination. The fashion industry is associated with immoral aims; it is directed by cunning 'satans' who deceive women with their ever-changing fashions and is the instrument with which modern jahiliyyah penetrates Muslim societies:

Modern fashion is not only a manifestation of modern jahiliyyah, but it bears its concepts, values, ideologies and philosophies. It aims to uproot the belief in the hereafter and to convince people to indulge in the riches and luxuries of this world...Fashion is the instrument to destroy families and to dominate societies (Mohammed Braigaish, 1985:113).

It is argued that the hijab carries a political message by the refusal of veiled women to consume goods representative of cultural imperialism, such as cosmetics, indecent clothes, pornographic films and books. The feminist Shahrazad Al-Arabi (1989) argues that the veil is socially advantageous. If the majority of women wear the veil, the import of clothes and cosmetics will decrease dramatically, thus resulting in national economic advantage.

Significantly, the hijab is emphasized as a sign of the social egalitarianism of Islam:

Hijab is a mechanism to deter class conflict where in the existence of one uniform means the absence of indications of richness and poverty. Hijab is a manifestation of equality. When looking at veiled women in the streets the viewer will see one uniform with no jewellery or other indications of wealth (1989:123).

Significantly, the ideological hijab not only symbolizes a break with the material culture of the modern times, but also simultaneously signifies an intellectual 'veiling' against the legacy of modernization or what is conceptualized as the culture of the jahiliyyah. In the context of the current phenomenon of 'returning to Islam', the act of veiling is made to symbolize a process of 'passage' from the world of modernity to the fold of religion. This process is described in the literature as 'the journey from darkness to light' and 'the severance from the path of Satan and the return to the path of God'. This process of metamorphosis involves an ideological position which is the negation of modern culture, with Islamic sources of knowledge replacing modern readings. Therefore, the return to God signifies ideological shaping:

Caution should be taken regarding the leakage of Western thought to the Muslim mind...The Muslim girl had better judge the imported thought in the light of criteria and principles of the holy Quran and the words of the Prophet and the Sunnah (Fatima Jasim, 1985:60).

Instead of allegiance to examples taken from modern feminist sources, veiled women are united with ideal Muslim female ancestors whose deeds are to be taken as models: Khadijah, the mother of the believers and the first wife of

the Prophet, who relinquished her tribal privileges, generously gave up all her wealth and made every effort for the sake of the success of the call of Islam; Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, who shared in the poverty of her father and husband and was involved fully in the course of the call; Aisha, the beloved wife of the Prophet, intelligent, eloquent and knowledgeable, who was a religious authority of her time and the person who narrated one-third of the Prophet's sayings. Such women, and many others who fought for the cause of Islam, are taken as the ideal guides for the ideologically veiled women.

Thus, hijab stands as a symbol of rebellion against modernity and as a sign of restored identity. The veil, once a symbol of backwardness and the subordination of Muslim women, is made to incorporate new meanings by articulate Muslim ideologues. It is argued that adherence to the hijab, despite connotation of backwardness made by colonialists, is in itself an act of liberation from cultural imperialism, and a challenge to Western cultural and aesthetic values. Like others, the feminist Fatimah Jasim sees a spiritual dimension in the hijab which raises women's position in society from that of alienation and ideological subjugation to foreign forces. She argues that the veil raises women above the level of commodity with its implication of the subordination of modern women to the concepts of supply and demand which require the visibility of women's charms and the abandonment of modesty. For Jasim, the adoption of hijab is in itself clear evidence that a Muslim woman is perfectly aware of the facts of human nature, she recognizes the law of fitrah and hence expects the defiant response of men to women's open femininity. For her, a Muslim woman who is committed to the hijab becomes endowed with two indispensable attributes fundamental to the 'winning of the cultural battle' and to the reconstruction of Muslim societies: authenticity which means returning to the original sources and distinctiveness: being different intellectually, morally and with regard to outward appearance.

However, the greatest significance of the hijab is that it is an expression of a woman's re-affiliation to religion. The profound spiritual and religious

experience involved in the act of veiling constitutes the essence of the process of 'passage from darkness to light', where in the end women are described as 'reborn' and 'purified'. The return to God signifies entrance to the realm of spirituality and to the fold of religion, where women are expected to become spiritual beings and be united with God and the Prophet through worship, performance of basic Islamic rituals and recitation of the Quran. Taking up the hijab is an act of obedience to God's will. In the final analysis, adopting the hijab and sacrificing femininity is a positive response to God's call in the Quran:

And let them pull their veils over the opening of their chemises at their bosoms and not display their ornaments.

Kariman Hamsah's book *The path of the Light: My Journey from the Sufur to the Hijab* (1987) and Shams Al-Baroudi's book *My Journey from Darkness to the Light* (1989) explain the process of intellectual passage from affiliation to modern culture and return to the fold of religion. Hamzah is a middle-class Egyptian woman and a popular television announcer who now appears veiled on Egyptian television and presents religious programmes; Al-Baroudy was once a well-known movie star and sex symbol in Egypt and the Arab world, but has adopted the veil and abandoned her previous career; both became Muslim feminists and their books have been reprinted several times.

The introduction to Hamzah's book was written by a Muslim authority, Atyah Khamis. Hamzah is welcomed to the domain of God and the Prophet as a 'pure sister'. She is described as the woman who:

Follows the path of light; she changed her clothing from the non-Islamic to the Islamic..Her readings have changed from the non-Islamic culture to the Islamic..She defied her surroundings: society, the club and the television institution..Her journey to the light was not easy or paved with roses; but was difficult and paved with thorns and troubles (1987:15).

Formerly, Hamzah used to be a very modern woman; she never covered her hair, used to wear mini skirts and held mixed parties at her house. However, despite her freedom, she suffered from anxiety and inner emptiness until she attended by chance a public lecture given by a virtuous Muslim authority on

renouncing this world's pleasures and the return to the path of God. The lecturer described the lives of certain historical Muslims who had changed the course of their sinful lives and begun to struggle with their whims and desires; in the end they dedicated their lives for obeying God and for His worship. With the knowledge and practice of Islam, the anxiety and lack of direction which Sartre and other Western thinkers could not remove were to disappear and be replaced by spiritual satisfaction and a feeling of personal worth. By means of this religious authority and other Muslim personalities, including the distinguished popular theologian and preacher Sheikh Muhammed Al-Ghazali, she gradually entered the world of Islam. She deserted the 'club' where she used to meet modern middle-class women, who are described as preoccupied with trivial interests, and entered the world of her 'brothers and sisters in God'. These representatives of real Islam, who are of humble social background, are depicted as being honest, pure and blessed; they are living examples of real religiosity and commitment to the Islamic cause. The 'brothers and sisters in Allah' were generous in guiding her to the path of Allah and His Prophet. She was provided with advice and lists of religious books.

A considerable part of Hamza's book is given over to an explanation of the concept of God's love in which she found the relief and satisfaction so much sought after. For her, the human being is in a great need for God's protection because she/he is inherently helpless and dependent. The steps leading to passionate devotion and closeness to God are explained at length. Daily prayers, frequent recitation of the Quran and love of the Prophet are important elements in the journey to God. Muhammed is the Messenger of Allah whose purpose was to instruct and rescue his ummah. The present-day turmoil and humiliation of the ummah is due to Muslims' disregard of the directions of the Quran and hadith. Obedience to the divine laws of the Quran and hadith is the means to God's love and also the guaranteed means of personal and collective salvation. Thus, adoption of hijab in the context of such profound religious experience is a sign of obedience to God's will and a symbol of religiosity, as

opposed to the concepts of liberation, personal freedom and a life of leisure, in other words, modern jahiliyyah.

The former actress Shams Al-Baroudy, like Hamza, experienced a similar conversion. Her only worth used to be her body, which film makers used for the promotion of their films, and her life was dominated by trivial interests like the consumption of fashionable clothes and cosmetics. She refers to this stage of her life as 'coma' (p.15). Al-Baroudy believes she was 'awakened' when she started to perform basic Islamic rituals and recite the Quran on a daily basis. She felt unity with God and the Prophet. The climax of her religious experience came with her (*hajj*) pilgrimage, where she felt a unique closeness with the Prophet and as though she were a born-again, pure person.

I felt something strange inside myself; suddenly I felt that I was in the presence of the Messenger, as if he was setting his eyes on me exclusively among other people...a shivering sensation crossed over my body...I burst into tears and kept repeating: My beloved Messenger of Allah...I collapsed and left the place feeling that it was a process of purification...At that moment I changed into a different human being. Some women asked me if I would get myself veiled. I replied: 'By the grace of God I will'...From thereafter, I have never removed the hijab (1989:24-28).

Such pure, veiled women, who attained purity by detaching themselves from modern culture and by adhering to Islam, are affiliated as sisters to Islamic groupings based on the concept of brotherhood-and sisterhood-in Islam. They become sisters to thousands of brothers and sisters who devote themselves to God and the awakening of the ummah. Such a strong sense of clear-cut identity and a feeling of belonging to a group are surely not provided by the ideology of modernity to modernized women in Muslim societies.



## CHAPTER 10

### Women's Sphere

In opposition to the ideology of modernization, which gives women access to the public sphere through work, revivalist discourse raises the house and the institution of the family to a privileged position as the realm of women's activity. The family is usually referred to as 'the fundamental unit' in Islamic society and the woman is described as the 'pillar', the 'goddess', and the 'queen' of the house. Led by a sense of puritanism and protection towards women, the Muslim revivalist point of departure is the revival and maintenance of the values of the ideal traditional Muslim family. Hence, this originally central institution in the social structure and in doctrine of Islam is given renewed and crucial significance in the present age; as a means to the salvation of women and society, Muslim women are urged to devote themselves to the home, family and marriage as the only solution. Thus, in opposition to the outside world or the public space dominated by many aspects of moral disorder, this private space is offered as the only refuge and haven for women. Sheikh Muhammed Al-Ghazali, describes aspects of modern jahiliyyah in Cairo in his book *The Cause of women* (1990). For him, the public space is no longer Islamic. The life in the city is dominated by social evil; men's and women's bodies and breathes come into close contact everywhere. City life discouraged marriage, while unlawful sexual relations are growing and spreading like a malignant cancer. Satan has developed new means to arouse desire:

In fact, it is really impossible to walk in any big city without being subject to real "sexual shelling"..Advertisements and posters in the streets, magazines with photographed seductive covers, films and sexual scenes displayed at entrance of night clubs ..and thousands of immodest women and girls walking in the streets (46:1990).

For him, the only solution is to retreat into the clean and sacred interior world of the house. He maintains that in the present age, the house becomes

the only 'cave' where a woman and a man can meet. As a result, the establishment and continuation of this institution in the present age is a sacred religious duty equivalent to jihad (1990:110). For him, the establishment of a pure Muslim society where honour is maintained and decency preserved, begins in the home (1990:43).

Marriage is enthusiastically encouraged for both sexes at an early age. The phenomenon of marrying at a relatively older age, which is practised in cities for economic reasons, is criticized and parents are urged to ask for a reasonable mahr and hold inexpensive wedding ceremonies. In this regard, revivalists attempt to publicize the novel idea of an economic marriage which they call an 'Islamic marriage'. The difference between such a marriage and the customary marriage is that a copy of the Quran is given to the bride as a mahr instead of a sum of money. This is in addition to the absence of expensive gifts and heavy expenditure on ceremonies as is customary in the Arab world. It is worth noting that this type of marriage is spreading among Islamically committed youth.

There is a strong emphasis on the significance of marriage and the family. The rich Islamic heritage on marriage, especially the hadiths, are frequently cited; works on marriage of old Muslim scholars such as Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali are reprinted and young people are urged by popular authors and preachers to read them. 'Marriage is the other half of religion', is emphasized; as is the fact that marriage is a divine institution and the formation of a family is an act of worship of greater significance than prayers, haj and jihad, the three most important pillars of Islam. Only through marriage can the power of sexuality be controlled and channelled towards positive social goals. It is stressed that enjoyment of the sexual act within this institution is highly valued and rewarded by God. Thus, marriage is a means of personal moral purity and a form of protection against the moral disorder of the outside world. Sheikh M. Al-Ghazali points out that the institution of marriage symbolized in the house is a forbidden divine territory; the Western tradition which allows a wife to receive strange men

into the house or dance with them is rejected out of hand by Islam. For him, the house is:

A kingdom which has territories similar to that of modern states, these territories need to be protected...Homes should not be opened for any comer (1990:156).

Fundamentally, then, the boundary of the house, supposed to be guarded by religion and the authority of the male, is strictly regarded as the natural and categorical realm for female activities. The fact that the home is the natural place for women is not open to debate by Muslim revivalists, despite public discussion on this subject for over a century. However, with regard to the productivity of women within society, the literature reflects a controversy amongst the ideologues, some of them presenting conflicting messages. The dominant view is that women's activities should be restricted to the family. The benefits of modernization embodied in work in the public sphere are seen as illusory and disruptive to the family and society. Some call upon working women to abandon their jobs and return to the house. At this point, the benefits of an Islamic marriage are stressed, particularly the fact that the Muslim husband alone is required to support the family, whatever the financial position of his wife, that he is obliged to keep his wife in the style to which she was accustomed before marriage, and is to pay her for breastfeeding. It is argued that the case of Muslim women is different to that of Western women. Western women were forced to leave their homes and suffer the hardships of work because their menfolk did not feel responsible for supporting them financially; hence it is asserted that Muslim women are more privileged. Al-Bahei sees no justification for women working in a Muslim society as long as they are supported financially by male members of the family. Al-Bahei warns that independence of Muslim women from the financial support of their kin will have a profound effect on kinship bonds and the family such that women will lose the feeling of unity with their families and men will lose their position of authority and:

The family will disintegrate and kinship bonds will vanish (1975:9).

Therefore, the call to 'the return to the Islamic system of the family' implies that:

In the ideal Muslim society in which the Islamic law is implemented in every aspect of life and with the existence of the value of solidarity, women are not required to endure the hardship of working outside the home (A. Nawwabiddin, 1986:165).

Parallel to the above argument, is the argument based on the biological and emotional nature of women which makes work outside the home exhausting and unnatural. Islamic authors use data from modern scientific sources to illustrate that women's bodies and psychologies are different from men's; that the nature of women fits them for motherhood and the raising of children. Pregnancy, menstruation and female emotions are considered as subjective obstacles to women's work; this argument is placed into a scientific framework by citing Western specialists.

But the main reasons for objecting to work in the modern economy have much to do with the anxiety about sexual morality and the dichotomy of the sexes. Hassan Al-Banna (d.1949), founder and spiritual leader of the modern revivalist movement in the Arab world, maintained that women should only be taught subjects connected with domesticity. Domesticity is what women are created for. For him, work outside the home is a Western concept that does not conform to Islam because it implies fitnah; work provides opportunities for men to be tempted by women and vice versa. He went to great lengths to prove that Islamic society, unlike Western society, is a sexually segregated society and that the impact of women's participation in public life will lead to the loss of honour, the break up of families, moral disorder and femininity of men (Al-Albani, 1990: 12). Most Islamic ideologues follow this line of argument where modern work is connected with public immorality and seen as being out of line with proper femininity. However, the door to women's work is not totally closed. "Women's going out for work is a disaster that might be allowed for reasons of necessity' (Said Qutb,1974:54). Accordingly, in special cases where women

have no male family members to support them, they are allowed to go out to work. There are authors who try to impose Islamic rules on the concept of women's work. Abdulrab Nawwabiddin's work, *The Position of Islam in Relation to Women's Work* (1986), is typical of the literature that places Islamic conditions on women's work in society. Nawwabiddin believes that, primarily, women should devote their whole time and effort to the family; nonetheless, he argues that Islam does not object to women's work as long as certain considerations are taken into account. He argues that according to the teachings of the Quran and hadith, five conditions should be met before women can go out to work. The first condition is total commitment to the code of modesty, which means: wearing the proper hijab, not putting on make-up, being careful not to talk in a feminine way and to be constantly aware that the sexual drive is present in the hearts of defiant men, and to look away from the forbidden. The second condition is the guarantee that a woman's presence in the men's sphere will not cause fitnah: if she is exposed to fitnah so that her honour will be in a threat, or if her beauty will give rise to allurements in the workplace, she should not work. The third condition is the consent of her guardian (father or husband). Fourthly, the work should not consume all her energy or contradict her nature: her energy should be saved for the household and bringing up the children. Women should not work as engineers, builders or carpenters since such professions will transform their bodies and behaviours after a time into those of men. There are also certain professions which are totally forbidden as being degrading to women, e.g. secretarial work and jobs in restaurant and entertainment businesses in general. Fifthly, Nawwabiddin argues that as God's will requires women to be followers of men rather than men to be followers of women, their work should not place them in an authoritarian position over men; they therefore should not be heads of the state, ministers or judges.

Moreover, the recent literature reflects a tendency to encourage women to enter the professions of medicine and education; these two areas are

considered to be Islamic, because, it is argued, with the availability of a sufficient number of female doctors and teachers it will be possible to create a segregated system within hospitals and also separate schools for girls. Recently, Islamic groups in Egypt established a hospital for female patients only with entirely female medical staff (Sana Al-Mesri, 1989:63).

With the restriction on women's access to productivity in society and their position in the house at mercy of the husband, the breadwinner and head of the household, women certainly lose important rights and their position seems to be restricted similar to the traditional image that persisted before contact with the West. So, what kind of roles do Muslim revivalists offer women in return that make their ideology popular to women? The answer is that they offer women a dynamic cultural role within their own sphere which is in harmony with the dominant culture. As a consequence of the powerful ideology of revived Islam, which is regarded by many as the only solution for the liberation of the individual and society, women now do not appear in the ideological context as merely imprisoned traditional housewives; rather, are urged to fulfil the noble role of Muslim mothers after the examples of great Muslim women ancestors. As mothers, their function is stressed, redefined and ideologized. Motherhood is closely connected to society and politics. They are no longer passive mothers; but mothers who have purpose and direction, who create and are actively engaged in the socialization of a dignified future generation that the ummah can rely on to liberate itself and establish its divine existence. The representation of the woman as a mother is based on the powerful Islamic heritage glorifying the position of mothers. In comparison to the modern woman, who is individualistic, remote from her children and careless of her family, the Muslim mother sacrifices herself for the well-being of the family and Islam. In the literature, Muslim mothers are addressed with utmost respect; they are described as the guardians of virtue, the makers and educators of heroes. The family they lead is not isolated from the current of society; indeed, Muslim ideologues place strong faith in the ability of the family to resist modern

culture and maintain the Muslim identity. For example, Mahmoud Al-Jawheri, in his book entitled *The Muslim Sisters and the Quranic Family*, states:

We believe that the fact of the crucial significance of the family's influence on the individual is not absent from the minds of the educators, preachers and the activists who are all striving for the renewal of Islamic life and revival of Muslim society. If the doors of education and media institutions were fully opened for anarchy, political subjection, and atheism and, hence, were successful in diminishing the original Islamic identity and in shaking the confidence in precedence of the Islamic system to dominate society, our hopes, therefore are concentrated on the potentialities of the family to change the situation (1980:183).

In the Muslim Brother's magazine *Al-Dawa*, the section on the family edited by the Muslim feminist Zaynab Al-Ghazali deals with women as active social beings who are conscious about political and social problems and active participants in the struggle with external powers and the regime. They are addressed as women who have a religious, moral and cultural mission to perform within their private sphere, embodied in the creation of a righteous Muslim family. Moreover, domestic problems are also given attention and dealt with in details, with provision of possible solutions.

It is significant to note that more recent literature conveys considerable flexibility in the position of Muslim revivalists with regard to women's participation in the public sphere. The participation of Iranian women in the triumph of the Islamic revolution and the influence of Muslim feminists within the movement of revivalism seem to have contributed to the emergence of a somewhat permissive attitude, where women's participation in the public sphere is regarded important and necessary to the cause of Islam. Thus, in addition to the role of motherhood, the new slogan for women's participation is sisterhood. Some Muslim revivalists call for a reconsideration of the position in this regard. In a book called *The Character of the Muslim Sister* (1989), it is stated:

Extreme norms should not debar women from <sup>أولى</sup> prohibited professions in the public realm. Women writers, journalists, historians, political analysts should be allowed to practise their roles as long as they are veiled and pure (Ali Mutawali, 1989:19).

The sisters are described by the author as new Muslim women who have purified themselves externally and internally from all traces of the moral disintegration. Such religious and modest women are accepted and trusted to fulfil the ideological and cultural tasks concerned with the salvation of society. Unlike the previously dominant tone, where women were dealt with as a source of fitnah and social danger, they are now addressed in a highly respectful manner and called upon to follow their powerful Muslim female ancestors and to be no less than Israeli women:

You whose character is elevated to precedence and the highest position, thus, you find that you are obliged to rescue this society from the abyss, and to restore this ummah to its balance ...You are the hope for the salvation of this crumbled and enslaved ummah. You are the daughter of Islam...daughter of the Quran, your character is the strongest and the most capable of creating miracles.. you should be confident in yourself, in your new role and responsibility..We count on you to bear serious responsibilities and to stand for the challenge. We want you to be Nusaiba Bint Kaab [a historic fighter] and to follow the Mothers of Believers and they wanted you a doll for men's entertainment (Ali Mutawali:1989).

Further, Sheikh Muhammed Al-Ghazali's work (1989) in its sixth edition raises various issues from a completely different perspective. In his book, the Arab manliness is bitterly criticized and ridiculed. Arab men, whose beards and moustaches were humiliated in the Six Days' War by a nation led by a woman [Golda Meir], demonstrate their manliness through the imprisonment of their women and preventing them from participating in public affairs. Such men are unable to understand and to admit that there exist in this world powerful nations which have been led by women towards triumph and progress [India and Britain are mentioned here as examples]. He expresses his own view with regard to the question of women's leadership of the state, saying that the Quran praised



the queen of the ancient Arab kingdom of the Yemen and describes her as a wise and intelligent queen; in contrast, the dominant idea in the trend prohibits female leadership on the ground that the Prophet dismissed the Persians of his time for being governed by a woman. If the Prophet had observed contemporary female leaders, he would have given a positive comment, he argues. "What we demand for the leadership of the government and the state is that it should be led by the most qualified person in the ummah" (1989:56). Through their practice imprisonment of women and the deprivation of their rights, Al-Ghazali argues, Arab men are not following real Islam but tribal traditions, for in the early years of Islam Muslim women participated fully in public affairs. Moreover, by means of traditional Islamic scholarly discussion, he dismisses many hadiths that are being cited and used to isolate women from contemporary social and political life, regarding them as 'not sound', weak in their derivation from the Prophet and contradictory to the actual practice of the early Muslim ummah. Despite such bold views concerning what he calls 'women's social and political jihad', Sheikh Al-Ghazali gives first priority to the house and the family and stresses the fundamental fact that the woman is the goddess of the house and the educator of future generations. Moreover, Al- Ghazali seems to take great care to detach himself from modernist ideas. Women's participation in the modern economy is not desirable and women who work have to be veiled, guard their honour and respect the divine sexual boundaries. His latest book (1990) deals with the same issues. He criticizes the absence of Muslim women from the realms of politics, culture, jihad and the religious activities of the mosque and demands that Muslim women should participate fully in the public affairs of the ummah. Al-Ghazali often makes mention of Mrs Thatcher. She is praised for her serious character and regarded as an example of faithfulness to her country and religion. Besides, the political and military activities of Israeli women are discussed and are regarded as being a challenge to Muslim societies. "So, why Muslim women are not engaging in serving the Islamic

principles in the same faithfulness? Who prevents them? Those who prevent them are merely ignorant of Islam" (1990:82).

In the context of this new debate, Abdulhalim Abu Shikkah's work (1990) is very important as it opens further debate on the Muslim revivalist position on women's participation in social life and questions some dominant sexual values. The author, who is a respected authority within the trend, states that because of the Muslim men's obsessive concern about honour and fitnah Muslim women are excluded from participation in the public domain and positive aspects of early Islamic history are concealed and ignored. Thus, his four-volume work is dedicated to reveal aspects of the participation of women in public life at the time of early ummah. As regard to the concept of fitnah, a new perspective is adopted: men should not escape from the inevitable; they must enter the trial and struggle against fitnah :

In conclusion, the fitnah resulting from women's legal participation in the social life is inevitable; it is predestined by Allah on human beings, men and women. Muslim man's suffering from this affliction, destined by Allah, and his struggle against fitnah will result in the strengthening of the will, triumph upon desires and finally a balanced character will be born. Escaping from fitnah in order to avoid it will result in limitation and despotism which will not bring us any advantage (1990:222).

It seems that such a self-criticizing position within the trend is no isolated example. Hassan Al-Turabi, the influential leader of the Muslim revivalists in the Sudan (a postgraduate from the University of London), maintains that the trend's traditional position in regard to women lacks a valid Islamic basis. It is also completely outdated and it is only a matter of time before it collapses. He remarks that the traditionalists view will fall because of the strong winds of social change blowing across the lands of the Muslim world from Occidental terrain. Al-Turabi calls upon revivalists throughout the Islamic world to take the initiative in introducing social reform in the affairs of Muslim women and to adopt a sympathetic attitude towards their circumstances. Those conditions, he argues, are as much a product of oppressive circumstances in past ages as

they are a dim reflection of ill-understood Islamic ideas. The only way to harness a social rebellion by Muslim women is to introduce enlightened reform based on the authentic presuppositions.

The fate of the traditional way of Muslims would not be different from that of the European old order when its theoretical and material foundations collapsed and new social values and structures were ushered in by the revolution. If conservatives hold on to rigid customary forms of the past and fail to direct the process of change according to Islamic guidance, the change will come to pass all the same and even faster and more tragic than in the case of Europe. A revolution against the condition of women in the traditional Muslim societies is inevitable. The Islamists are urged by their own ideals to reform the traditional society...This is even more urgent with respect to the present state of women...Conservation is a wasted effort (1991:47).

Moreover, Al-Turabi claims that he is in favour of broad public participation for Muslim women, including their right to participate in the political process. With regard to modesty, he asserts that strict veiling was peculiar to the wives of the Prophet and is not required of Muslim women in general. He also authorises the mixing of the two sexes in the mosque, in educational establishments and in innocent family gatherings. In obvious disagreement with the dominant trend, he maintains that the Muslim woman can receive male guests of the family at home; she can converse and eat with them, and serve them. Al-Turabi bases his ideas on what he considers conclusive juristic evidences from the Quran and the hadith.

A recent publication of the Tunisian revivalist movement carried a most important development in the position of revivalism with regard to the involvement of women in society. It was declared acceptable that a woman might assume the leadership of the ummah. They also allowed women a wider range of movement with regard to mixing with men in family gatherings and social occasions.

## CONCLUSION

In this study I have attempted to explain the attitude of Muslim societies towards women's modernization by placing this issue in a broad historical and cultural framework. Muslim societies appear as a special case within the experience of the Third World countries shaped by colonial domination and capitalist expansion, where societies thus dominated have been largely moulded according to a Western model. In the face of the destruction of the former economic, political and social structures, moral, cultural and ideological structures constitute the remaining bases for the unity of social groups and for resistance to the new order.

The continuation of the traditional system has been made possible by taking refuge in the religious culture especially the holy texts, which provide a contrasting world view. In this context, the values of the family constitute the cornerstone for the process of social continuity. I have shown the intimacy of the relationship between Islam and the family, where the ideological bases for the family are carefully included in the Quran and hadith. At present, while Islam has been considerably excluded from the public domain, its continuation and survival are largely confined to the private domain. The uniqueness of Muslim societies is embodied in the fact that the cultural and social innovations brought about by capitalist expansion and the impact of Western culture were to be stopped at the threshold of the house. The basic values of the family were fiercely defended and Islam has been able to raise an effective barrier between itself and the new culture and undermine any attempt to modernize the family. Consequently, the Muslim woman has to bear a heavy burden, as these conditions impose on her the role of representative of the values of the past and preserver of the cultural distinctiveness of the Muslim ummah. For example, Muslim men have cast off their turbans, shaved their beards and wear Western clothes without provoking any reaction; but it was regarded as a disaster for the ummah when bare-headed women emerged in the streets of Muslim cities. It

was as if Islam had lost its final hold on society. This concern about external appearance is one important objection to the forces of modernity and is linked to a complex system of sexual morality which is deeply rooted in the Islamic heritage. The pressure on a Muslim woman to keep herself within the strict limits of her culture is enormous and it seems that the great majority of Muslim women accept this role as the guardian of tradition. The fact that women constitute a considerable number of the supporters of the contemporary revivalist movement, as the recent experience of Algeria and other Muslim countries demonstrated, is revealing. The Muslim revivalist movement uses women to emphasize the cultural difference of Muslim societies as opposed to the threatening culture of modern Western industrial societies. In the interest of society, many Muslim women demonstrate their readiness to pay the price of remaining apart from the international march of women who have said farewell to their old cultures. Perhaps, such women are not to be blamed for their unenthusiastic and negative attitude towards modernity, as improvements to their conditions brought about by the modernized ruling elites are not at all impressive, especially where Western values are combined with the traditional conceptions are used to control them.

As the experiences of Muslim societies have shown, modernity in itself is not necessarily good; in other words, it does not always lead to 'progress'. Progress backwards has been one outstanding outcome of the encounter with the West. On the ideological level, Muslim contact with Western capitalist culture has to a great extent helped to give the traditional culture new meanings and an interpretative power which were not possible previously. As I have shown with reference to the revivalist literature, the image formulated about Western industrial societies is essential for the reassertion of the basic values of Islamic culture. For example, the abstract and almost dead concept of the jahiliyyah has been rescued from the ancient books and given flesh and blood by applying it to the modern age and society. The conception of the present age within the framework of jahiliyyah allows the development of alternative view about time

and history, where a barrier is erected between what is Islamic and what is non-Islamic. Equally, the meaning of womanhood, the Islamic marriage, the house and the veil are all to be understood anew and re-emphasized when compared with modern social practices. Even modern scientific knowledge, the highest privilege of the Western mind and the symbol of human progress, is exploited to assert the essentials of Islamic family values. Revivalists illustrate their publications with pictures showing the internal structure of the male and female body to prove their biological difference and thus their essential difference in social function. So, in a way, the encounter with modernity was to engender old ideas and help them to flourish.

On a practical level, we have seen how the modernizing policies of the state have led to a further deterioration of women's position, particularly in the countryside, and also to their adherence to the conservative culture of the city. On the other hand, modernized bourgeois women in Islamic countries have reduced the meaning of emancipation and liberation to the level of unrestricted consumption of clothes and objects of beauty. Such women, who are as obsessed by fashion as much as models in the West, represent a trivial and cosmetic face of modernity. They are regarded as mere sex objects in the eyes of a generation of furious and rebellious young women. Thus, the area of doubt and failure surrounding modernity was to be filled by the resurgent Islam. It is within Islam that an ideal for women's liberation is currently being sought by many women who find the bourgeois example of liberation unacceptable and irrelevant. At the present time, there is a fierce struggle being fought between the forces of the past and the forces of modernization; and women are main participants in the process of the re-Islamization of everyday life. Many have re-veiled themselves and turned their backs on modern ideas and practices. Women's voices are also to be clearly heard in various Muslim cities demanding the abandonment of the modern social systems and institutions based on liberal values, including the mixing of the sexes. Universities, work

places and transportation systems in large Muslim cities are subjects for re-Islamization.

The sacred history and religious texts continue to have their influence on the position of contemporary Muslim women and with the current debate within the revivalist circles concerning women's role in society the sacred history will assume a renewed importance. Ideologues who have adopted a permissive attitude turn to the early Islamic history searching for positive aspects to support their arguments; for example, they emphasize the role of Aishah and the female warriors. However, this employment of the religious texts is clearly motivated by an urgent need to accommodate the ideas and requirements of the modern age. We have seen how Sheikh Al-Ghazali and Hassan Al-Turabi are trying to present an Islam which takes into account the world-wide achievements of modern women. Moreover, despite the widespread popularity of revivalist ideas and the mass re-veiling amongst young women, it appears that there is a growing crisis with regard to the movement's relation with its females adherents and sympathizers. This crisis is embodied in the fact that what is offered to women as the 'Islamic project of liberation' is in fact of a very narrow perspective. If we take into account the nature of revivalism, which is basically a glorification of the past and the strict rejection of innovation, the needs and aspirations of the twentieth-century woman are seldom admitted or recognized. This creates a silent tension within women sympathetic to the trend who expect concrete improvements to their situation from the current ideological Islam they are sacrificing for. Thus, it is probable that such women, however great their sacrifice and loyalty for their society and for Islam, will one day withdraw their support for the the movement. Clearly, some ideologues have already realized this fact and responded to it. Thus, modernity still exerts an indirect, but strong and permanent influence. Here is exactly where the real revivalist crisis lies: they realize that there is no escape from submission to the impact of modernity in one way or another. But how far can moderate ideologues go beyond the standard traditional interpretations of the religious texts with regard to women?

To what extent can a synthesis be achieved? Are they not following the footsteps of those modernists who use the holy texts to introduce imported ideas? Sheikh Al-Ghazali and other moderate revivalists are now facing extensive uproar within the movement and there are clear signs of divisions on this issue. They are currently being attacked for departing from the teachings of the holy texts and for bending to the pressures of modern times.

But whatever the outcome of the internal debate within revivalist circles, there is little doubt that the issue of women and the family will continue to be of the utmost importance as the symbol and engine of conflict with modernity and that women will continue to bear the consequences of their society's open crisis.



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