



THE FRAGRANCE OF EAST

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The Fragrance of East

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CONTENTS

The Role of Muslim Ummah	7
<i>S.Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi</i>	
The Qua'ran, The Magnificent The Oppressed	13
<i>Abdullah Abbas Nadvi</i>	
The Prophet of Mercy	17
<i>S.M. Rabey Nadvi</i>	
Glimpses From Early Islam	21
<i>G.Y. Sowani</i>	
New World and Islam	29
<i>Meraj Ahmad</i>	
Woman In Islam	39
<i>I.A.Patel</i>	
The Concept of Prophethood in Islam	83
<i>Abrar Ahmad Islahi</i>	
The Noble Quran on the End of Human Life	93
<i>Abul Fadal Mohsin Ebrahim</i>	

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Editors Note:

It is encouraging to note that our decision to take out 'The Fragrance', an English quarterly magazine, has been well received. Even before its formal publication hundreds of subscribers have got themselves registered and a good number of suggestions have also been made to make the magazine more attractive, objective and effective. We plan to incorporate these ideas so as to satisfy our readers. Our message is to observe nothing more than adherence to the minimum obligations of our faith; a way of life reflecting a deep love of God as well as observing the tenets of a system established for worshipping the Almighty. With His blessings we hope to march ahead and be productive.

Even though we announced our decision to launch the Fragrance more than three months back, writers and intellectuals have yet to show an interest to help us in fulfilling the task. This cold shouldering by the intelligentsia of the community is depressing. We do not want to be reduced to mere copy-holder of other magazines and journals by lifting articles from there. We wish to be pioneer in publishing and propagating the ideals of a pious, evil-free society in context of the present day developments. It is, therefore, earnestly requested that intellectuals and writers should favour us in building up a regular source of publication material. Howsoever, efficient and aesthetic an architect may be but he can give only attractive structural designs; the execution of his plan depends on skilled masons and good material. By the grace of God we have launched the magazine but its effectiveness rests on the active co-operation of our writers, scholars, intellectuals and academicians. We also seek co-operation from those who can help us in translating the existing Urdu, Persian and Arabic material into English. Nadwatul Ulema true to its traditions of effecting healthy reforms

in educational and social behaviour of Muslims, has come out again to help reach the message of righteousness to all and sundry. Now it is our duty to carry out the mission further.

A biased media always remains watchful to pick-up issues through which it can malign those ideologies which are *not* palatable to it. For instance, the enforcement of *Shariah* in certain Muslim countries is a burning issue these days. A report from Karachi, recently making rounds in the Press says that a young woman, who went to a shopping complex wearing a sleeveless dress, was attacked in day light by two men. They brushed past her bare arm with a razor to get the message home. Similarly sometime back a strong acid was sprinkled on the body of a girl student, who was not properly dressed. New York Times News Service in its international release has spread another canard that in Afghanistan according to Taliban interpretation of the *Qur'an*, an adult male is obliged not only to grow a beard but also to leave the hairy underbrush unmolested by scissors. Scruffiness is required by law

Sometimes frolicsome elements themselves engineer such incidents and attribute them to their dissentients. Similarly fallacious interpretation of "*HUDUD*" is put forward to create doubts about their implementation, violation of human rights is attributed to the punishment of guilty. In absence of the proper projection of the positive aspects of the *Shariah* Laws reprehensible stories get currency. We therefore invite articles on *Shariah* Laws and their implementation to counter misgivings and present the correct picture in proper perspective.

S.A.

THE ROLE OF MUSLIM UMMAH*

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

It is common knowledge that Muslims read the Qur'an every day and they try to read it as much as possible. Generally speaking, when one comes across something amazing which perplexes one, this effect gradually disappears. One does not eternally remain in a state of perplexity. However, let me relate my own experience. This, incidentally, forms the main point of my speech. To revert to my experiences, whenever I read this verse of the Holy Qur'an: 'If you do not do this [i.e. spread the message of Islam], there will be persecution and great corruption in the land.' (al-anfal 8: 73), I am reminded that Allah addresses the Muslims in it, both *Muhajirun* and *Ansar*. The number of *Muhajirun* who migrated from Makka to Madina were only a few hundred. For migration is not an easy job. It involves abandoning one's hearth and home, separation from kith and kin and forfeiting those privileges which one inherits locally. So the number of *Muhajirun* was quite insignificant. In addition, the inhabitants of Madina had not embraced Islam in large numbers by this time. As is evident from *Hadiith*, the Prophet thrice ordered the census of Muslims. In the first census, their number stood at 500, in the second between 600 and 700 and in the third at 1,500. The Muslims considered even this figure of 1,500 quite high. They thanked the Allah and were gratified to know that their number had reached such proportions. They now felt somewhat secure and assured. For there was a time not in the distant past, when they dare not perform prayers simply for fear of being attacked. They were subject to constant persecution at the hands of their enemies.

So, it was only a hand full of Muslims that entered the fold of Islam at that time. Yet the responsibility entrusted to them was such that they had to carry out

the spread of their message of guidance to the whole mass of humanity around them. Obviously the great majority of people in the world then had not heard of Islam, let alone accepted the faith. The world was then dominated by two empires with their distinct cultures, ways of life, ideal and values. These empires exercised absolute cultural hegemony over the rest of the world. They stood out as models for other nations. Take, for example, the general currency enjoyed by Roman law all over the world. Likewise the Persian civilization had made its way even into India and other far-off lands.

Whenever I read the verse I have just quoted, I am struck with wonder and amazement. It is simply beyond me to appreciate that this directive was given to a handful of people at a time when they were so few in number and so confined to a particular place. The last census which put the figure of Muslims at 1,500 was conducted, according to some scholars of *Hadith* and researchers, on the eve of the Battle of Uhud which took place in 3H. Some scholars, however, hold that the census was taken at time of the battle of Ditch (which is known as the battle of Confederates) in 5 H. Anyway the period to which the census stretches at most to five years. What is really significant, however is that these 1,500-2,000 Muslims are asked to unite and make a new unit based in faith, the Qur'an, sound beliefs and under the supervision and guidance of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

They were asked to constitute this unit so as to disseminate the message of Islam and to liberate mankind from *Jahiliyah* (a lifestyle characterized by unbridled freedom and self-gratification) and to invite them to Islam (worshipping God and total surrender to Him). They are told that if they do not do so, it will engender great mischief and corruption in the world.

This makes me ponder over the relationship between the addressees of this directive and the magnitude of the task laid upon them. However, as the adage goes in both the Arabic and Persian languages, something that may be small quantitatively may be invaluable qualitatively. A few people can achieve a lot. Although this directive was made to a small band of people, they were quite worthy in terms of their quality. The decisive factor is, in fact, quality and not mere quantity. Little wonder, then, that this small band of people which excelled in quality proved its mettle by bringing about an epoch-making revolution. It brought an end to the Persian empire. Not only was the empire subjugated, Islam struck a death-blow to its ideals and values. For it is the way of life, thought-patterns and ideals that hold their sway over life. The very part of the word - Persia - which was considered the ideal for cultural and civilization till the last days of Caliphate of 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), or the last phase of the Rightly -Guided Caliphate, had lost its prestigious position. The norms of this ideal were under constant change. Islam brought about a total transformation in peoples ideals, norms and ideological subjugation to the two great empires of the day- the Persian and the Roman. The ideals of these cultures were no longer considered as the yardsticks to measure one's position. Rather obedience to Allah and emulation of the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) *Sunnah*, following the footsteps of the Prophet's Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) in all departments of life - be it culture, one's social life, customs and rituals, dress and all outward forms - were taken as the standard. This change affected everyone, rich and poor alike, the powerful and the ordinary, as is borne out by history.

It is common knowledge that lifestyles change and so do cultural forms. However, standards of honour and dishonour, knowledge and ignorance, change very slowly and with much difficulty. It often takes centuries to effect such a change. Reading the history of human

civilization, it is readily observable that certain standards affecting thought - patterns held their sway for centuries. One may readily change one's actions. However, in the wake of the new faith - Islam - both the worldview and people's thought patterns were changed as well. A worldview is of immense significance in that it rules the way of life. We witness that in many Islamic countries the standards set by Western power and culture have still not changed. Their standards of honour, nobility, prosperity, poverty, ignorance, knowledge, progress and backwardness are still the same one as implanted by the colonial masters.

Seen against this backdrop it should be recalled that only a handful of Muslims who were constantly subjected to persecution were called upon to bring about a revolution throughout the world. They were entrusted with the onerous responsibility of following and leading others to a path characterized by Godliness, God-consciousness, love for fellow human beings, sacrifice and divine guidance. It is for us to note what degree of success this small band of Muslims achieved in discharging this responsibility. Though they were few in number, by dint of their intrinsic qualities and virtues, they achieved a great success. For a better appreciation of this success one may read books written after the 6th century AD in various languages, especially in English.

I must congratulate you on choosing such a suitable place for establishing the Islamic Foundation. You have been carrying out this valuable work in the very heart of Western civilization. If a movement is initiated from here on any major Western country or a major center of Western civilization, it will be a force to reckoned with in terms of its appeal and depth. I very much pray that those living in these Western countries may realize a quest for the truth and feel the vacuum that mars their life. That they ask for breaking away from this life of

darkness, of self-gratification, and of narrow vision. It is worth recalling here that the Qur'an often uses the plural form for darkness, i.e. *zulmat* and the singular form for light, i.e. *al-Nur*. For example, take this recurring Qur'anic statement: 'Allah brings them out of every darkness into light' (al-Baqarah 2:257). We thus learn that there are many varieties of darkness, whereas there is only one light. I am sure the Westerns will soon realize that they can derive this light only from Islam.

However, this can be achieved only when the lives and conduct of Muslims are marked by excellence. I recently related an episode at the Oxford Central Mosque. Let me repeat it here for it gives me immense pleasure every time I recount it. When Sayyid Ahmad Shahid (1786-1831) won over Peshwar (presently in Pakistan) and his army were encamped there, a local inhabitant took one of his companions aside and said to him: 'I want to ask you something. Do tell me correctly and frankly'. To this Sayyid Ahmad Shahid's companion agreed. He said: 'Are you and your fellow army men shortsighted? Can't you look at things at a distance?' He replied: 'No, it is not so. We can see things at a distance. You can test me. I will tell you what is situated at a distance'. He however still persisted and said: 'No! there is definitely something wrong, I believe you have this disability by birth.' The companion asked: 'Tell me, why are you asking it?' The local inhabitant said: 'I have been watching your army encamped here for several weeks. Some of you have been away from home for months and others for years. Some of you are married while others are bachelors. However we have not seen you looking at any local women. In view of this observation, the only reason we can think of is that you are shortsighted. For there is plenty of beauty and youth around you. However, we have not seen you ogling local women.' The companion replied: 'Praise be to Allah, there is no fault in our sight. However we are led by this Qur'anic

The Fragrance of East

directive: " Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty" (*al-Nur* 24:30). Moreover, our leader has instructed us to behave in this manner, a point which is set forth in the following Qur'anic verse: " O Believers! If you fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong)" ' (*al- Anfal* 8:29).

I conclude my speech with two couplets from Iqbal's poetry which are quite befitting in terms of their purport about the position and role of Muslims.

You are, indeed, the trustee of the original (pledge of)
honour.

You are the right and left (hand) of the Ruler of the
Universe.

Made of earth! You belong to time and space, as well!
Drink up the wine of faith; get away from the idol-house
of doubt!

Wake up, wake up, wake up from this deep slumber.
And arise!!

Seek refuge from the heart-captivating snares of the
Franks.

Stay aloof from their sweetness and their aristocracy.
Europe's Genghis-like tyrants have turned the world
into a barren waste.

O! builder of the Ka'bah! Rise, once more, to construct
this ruined world.

Wake up, wake up, wake up from this deep slumber!
And arise!!

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Universe.

* Speech delivered at the Islamic Foundation, Leicester UK .

THE QUR'AN, THE MAGNIFICENT, THE OPPRESSED

Abdullah Abbas Nadvi

There is no book more magnificent than the glorious Qur'an in the world. There is no book more oppressed than the glorious Qur'an under the sky! The criticism of the non-Muslims does not carry any weight with us and those who have said a few words in praise have demonstrated their insight. The columnist of Encyclopedia Britanica writes:

"The most widely-read book in existence."

(Enc.Brit. vol. xv, p. 898)

It is a statement of fact and an admission of truth.

It is claimed that the holy Bible has been translated in about a thousand languages and it is placed in the suites of posh hotels in the seven continents. It is distributed free of cost all over the world. Still the number of readers of the Bible in ten years does not equal the number of reciters of the glorious Qur'an in a day! Few selected verses (from Bible) are sung in the Churches accompanied by music. A few church-goers, consisting mostly of aged ladies, attend the services on Sunday and on festive occasions. A few words of benediction or requiem are repeated as the occasion demands. On the contrary there is not a single moment in twenty-four hours when the glorious Qur'an is not recited in some or the other part of the world.

We may leave aside the *Tahajjud*, *tarawih* or *Shabina* and take into account the five obligatory prayers, is there anytime when one or the other prayer is not being offered in some part of the world? It is like the regular rising and setting of the sun and moon, the twinkling of stars and drops of rain that the verses of the glorious Qur'an are recited at all times of day and night. Then a number of sciences have been derived from it - according to *al-Itqan*:45 - like etymology, syntax,

elegance (of language) and clearness (of meaning), etc.*

Beisdes hundreds of Glossaries and Lexicons have been compiled to help recite it correctly and grasp the meaning(s) properly. The writings of commentaries started in the third century *Hijri* and since then there is no period of time when a new commentary has not been added in a topical way. The people found new subjects for study every time a new commentary saw the light of the day and it appeared that a secret has been unfolded which was concealed so long! We take, for instance, the Opening Chapter (*al-Fatiha*) - over ten thousand commentaries have been written on it alone. It is recited thousnads of times every day and nobody gets weary of it.

All said and done, it is no denying the fact that it is an oppressed Book which has no parallel. No divine book would have been subjected to such neglect as the glorious Qur'an! What to talk of the 'outsiders' their commonplace objections and disaffection, their - tale bearing and ridicule, did not the 'insiders' oppress it? Every school of thought propounds diffrent interpretations, everyone looks at it with coloured glasses and all types of views - right and wrong - are heaped on it. Everyone thinks that if anybody has understood Qur'an it is his school. There are a people who have limited its use to recitation to recompense the dead. It is used as a tailsman. It is also true that such people are not looked upon with respect by the intellectual class. There is a good number of persons who condemn them. It is also a fact that some people are coming out of ignorance to the light of knowledge and the number of uninformed is getting fewer and fewer. But the number of those scholars and commentators is not less either who first form an opinion and see those meanings in the glorious Qur'an! Imam ibn Taimiyah has rightly said:

"There are people who first form an opinion and then mount it on the glorious Qur'an."

There is a tradition that there would be seventy-two sects in my '*umma*' but one will get deliverance (*nijat*). One may meet the leader of any sect or speak to its follower, he will speak with confidence that his sect will get absolution. The number of sects may be any, but each sect claims to be most faithful to the glorious Qur'an which practices it and holds it in high esteem.

There is a '*madrassa*' with a prefix of '*jamia*'. One of its scholar told the writer that the research work which is being done on glorious Qur'an in their '*madarsa*' has no equal anywhere. When enquired what is the method of research of which he is so proud of. He replied that every word is reserached from the old poetry of '*jahiliya*' and the meaning of the glorious Qur'an fixed in the light of that. He was told that in whatever context a word has been used in the poetry of '*jahiliya*' would you then cap it on the glorious Qur'an though the context provides the meaning of a particular word? It is found that a word has been used in different meaning at diffrent places in the glorious Qur'an, there is not one couplet in the old (pagan) poetry whcih makes the meanings of that word clear. Besides there are a few words about which an oblique refrence has been made to look into pre-Islamic poetry which are not found in the Traditions. It is within these limits and keeping in mind the context in which a particular word has been used that is permitted to fix the meanings and commentaries. It can not be generalised. It is not cruelty to look into dubious poetry of the "age of ignorance" to fix the meaning(s) of a word according to it when the authentic commentators have established the meaning(s) thereof?

VALUE OF LOVE

There is an exceptional glare of love in man's eyes which is not found in any other creature. His heart is characterised with a softness and melting quality inspired by love and quivers with the touch of pain and suffering for others. Such a heart is not in the treasures of the angels and surely man alone can present to his Lord a heart full of sincere love for others.

The excellence of man lies in his love and mercy for others: one person is pricked with a thorn but another person feels the pain. Man is gifted with tears which fall from his eyes when he sees a widow's head uncovered in helplessness, a poor man's kitchen unlit, and a sick man in distress. If such a drop of tear is put in the sea of transgression, it will cleanse it. If it falls in a forest of sins, it will burn it and fill the space again with the effulgence of virtue. The angles can bring forward anything, but they cannot present this drop of tear. The angles do not sleep due to their cognisance of Allah's being and attributes, but their vigil does not have the excellence of man's inability to sleep due to the suffering s of others.

The quality of love permeating through the human heart is a very precious gift of God. When something stirs it, it assumes a strange power. It rises above the consideration of religion, community, nation and motherland. It then only sees another man's heart and feels its suffering and is drawn to it by nature as is pulled an iron towards a magnet

- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

THE PROPHET OF MERCY

S.M. Rabey Nadvi

Here are two verses from the Holy Qur'an. The first is addressed to Arabs and tells them:-

"Now hath come unto you a messenger from amongst yourselves. It grieves him that you should suffer-Ardently anxious is he over you; to the believers he is most kind and merciful."

The second is directed to the holy Prophet displaying His pleasures:

"We have not sent you but mercy for the world".

Both these verses throw light on that aspect of the holy Prophet's characteristic features which distinguish him from others. This is not a simple laudation. This is pronounced by the Creator of Heaven and earth as an everlasting reality."

One can visualise by the study of history of that period about the conditions of the world and also the direction towards which it was heading. The men were divided in different groups. Many of them had become great by manipulation, exploitation and the use of brute force. They over powered the helpless and treated them worst than slaves. They were not made to serve only but were also made objects of pleasure by treating them with extreme cruelty and torture.

While celebrating and rejoicing any occasion they illuminated the venue by putting the slaves on fire. They made them fight with brute animals and it was a pleasant sight for them when they were torn to pieces and killed by these animals. Stadiums were crowded with spectators who enjoyed the game. These chosen few collected such luxuries and niceties around them that one finds it difficult to visualise it. The crown of the king and the turbans of the courtiers were studded with

diamonds and precious stones. A big retinue of singers, dancers, attendants and chefs always formed a part of the court.

Woman was a source of pleasure only otherwise she was regarded as inferior to menfolk and was unwanted. In her parental home she was considered inferior to her brothers and had to serve them along with her mother. The birth of a baby girl was taken as a bad omen. Her relations with the family were severed after marriage. She was not entitled to share in the inheritance. The death of her husband was a real calamity for her, already detached from her parental home. She was treated with contempt and reduced to the status of a domestic servant.

Our beloved Prophet bestowed all human rights on slaves and women. He gave directions for their respectable position in society. He said that all are sons and daughters of Adam. All are equal irrespective of their complexion, Arab or non-Arab and none is inferior to other. The criteria for greatness was righteousness. He taught the world equality of all. Salman Farsi of Persia, Bilal of Ethiopia and Suhaib of Rome lived with him as members of the family. He freed his slave Zaid, son of Harisa, and treated him so affectionately that he was regarded as his foster son. Then he married him with his cousin sister Zainab which was so unusual in those days. He accorded proper rights to women, fixed their share in the patrimony and advised parents to take care of them even after their marriages. He instructed husbands to provide comforts to their spouse according to their status. He allowed separation under specific circumstances when they could not live together. He ordered for moderate expenditure of wealth but forbade to be miserly and closefisted. He made it obligatory for the wealthy people to help the poor and needy.

To extort money from anybody, to dishonour him and to kill him without justification was regarded a grave offence. He permitted revenge for killing innocent but restrained to exceed limits in exercising such rights.

His preaching was not simple, in fact created a society which had to observe strictly this code of conduct. We find unique examples of adhering to these basic principals and values. When Hazrat Abu Bakr sent an army for the holy war, he issued orders that any worshipper at his religious place should not be ill-treated. No territory should be attacked unless the prospects of a treaty recedes. Nothing should be taken from occupied area without paying its cost. No body should be forced to change his religion.

When Hazrat Umar Farooq went to Jerusalem on the invitation of its ruler who wanted to hand over the city to Muslims, he entered the city on foot while his slave was on the camel's back. It was decided that both of them would ride the camel alternately and while entering the city it was the turn of the slave to be on the camel's back. The slave insisted to change positions but the Caliph did not agree.

When Persia was conquered a Muslim Soldier came in possession of the crown of the Emperor. The precious crown studded with jewels was brought by the soldier, covered by the front of his shirt, and delivered to the Caliph. On being asked his name he said that God knew his name and did not tell.

The holy Prophet, by his practical guidance, created a society of which every member was indifferent for worldly pleasures and cared only for the reward in the life hereafter. He was prepared to make any sacrifice, even his life, for implementation of truth and righteousness. He was just and honest in all walks of life, he cared for the weak and downtrodden, it was immaterial to what religion the oppressed man came

from. Animals were also treated kindly. The spread of Islam was under the shade of kindness and mercy. Parents relatives and neighbours got the rightful attention.

The world found a social order based on moral values and humanity. An order which had no precedence in the history of the past. It was a period when humanity had reached the brink of cruelty and injustice. No doubt, in that period, the world had tremendously progressed in the pursuit of knowledge and had achieved such glorious strength and power that its shine glared the vision. The world was wonder struck with the glamour of the Persian and Roman Empires but humanity was crying under the weight of cruelty and injustice. The rulers, the intellectuals and the clergymen had no feelings for it. If somebody cared for it he found himself helpless to bring any change and abandoned his efforts. God Almighty took pity on this sorry state of affairs. He chose the holy Prophet and gave him perfect code of conduct and made him the last of the Prophets. This code of religious jurisprudence (Shariah) was in harmony with the changing conditions of the world and requirements of life. A code to be followed till the last day. It can stand to any new development.

The bounty, the blessing and the piety which have been brought by the holy Prophet are eternal. The ark of the well being is moving very smoothly. The proclamation of the Creator stands that He has sent the Prophet as the mercy for the worlds.

GLIMPSES FROM EARLY ISLAM

G.Y. Sowani

Colonel Govind Yeshwantrao Sowani (Retd.) researched extensively on the first 100 years of the advent of Islam. In the result he not only acquired vast knowledge of this religion but go deep into the spirit behind the ideology.

Every honest person in India will have to admit that today, a vast majority of the Muslims in India are not part of the mainstream. This feeling is based partly in fact and partly on imagination. But whether justified or not, the sense of being left out is genuine and the consequent bitterness real.

This is a very obvious matter. Muslims constitute a huge part of this nation - almost 16%! Quite obviously, no nation can afford to have such a large section of its manpower indifferent to its interests.

The matter needs attention; this is much obvious. But the malaise is deep rooted and has many facets. It would be naive oversimplification to suggest that there is magic or a quick solution. However, as in all these cases where social rifts widen with the time instead of healing, it is a communication gap which is responsible and that needs to be closed before thinking of solutions.

It is not as if there is no interaction between non-Muslims and Muslims in India. There is plenty of that; at all social levels and in a variety of ways. After all, one out of every six Indians is a Muslim and they are closely interwoven in the social fabric! But there is no meetings of minds. There is a particular period of History, which is very precious to every Muslim and unfortunately it is precisely in this area that non-Muslims are most poorly informed. this in my opinion is where the communication gap arises.

This period of history covers the first 100 years after the advent of Islam in Arabia. The lore forms an integral part of every Muslim identity and he learns about it in the cradle as it were. This is living history to him a source of inspiration. Guidelines for his day to day conduct today, are taken from the events that took place during those days. The Muslim reveres to the towering personalities who shaped those events and it is the endeavour of every Muslim, man, woman and child to emulate those august persons in whichever way that he can, in his or her own life. The Muslim culture, social customs and their very sense of right and wrong, have their roots in these years.

This era features once again and yet again in conversation and dialogue; literature and verse; in argument and rhetoric. The Muslim drunk deeply at this pristine fountain and the waters have permeated his very soul. Though it forms a deeply integral part of his culture, his attachment to this period is not merely cultural. In fact, it happens to be cultural only by association; the real bond lies in the tremendous religious significance. These are the events which led (in many cases) to the enunciation of several of the Qur'anic verses. Every single Hadis (the tradition of the Prophet on which conventional law is based) originated during these times. Thus every guideline to a Muslim's life style is related to these 100 years.

Even a mere working knowledge of these events will help open a window on the Muslim mind and will go a very long way towards closing the communication gap. It is with this specific aim of familiarizing the non-Muslim with the string of saga of these years that this series of articles has been planned.

Throughout this series of articles the word 'Arab' has been used to denote the inhabitants of the Saudi Arabian peninsula. Today, everyone in the middle east

likes to be called an Arab, because of the prestige associated with the name after Islam. The Bedouin tribesmen have never been a subject race (except the Turkish occupation before World War I). They are hardly beyond imagination, fiercely proud and very large hearted. They are the people who wrote this history by their blood and sweat. They performed prodigious feats of arms and valour during these 100 years. This is their account.

Before Islam the condition of the Arabs was pathetic. There was no government, no police or judiciary and no organised society as such. People lived mainly by tending to a few animals. The number of animals in any one herd was necessarily small as the arid land scape provided very sparse forage at any one place. This in turn limited the number of people who could depend on those animals to sustain themselves, to about a hundred families or five hundred people. These were always members of an extended family including upto 3rd or 4th cousins and formed the 'Clan'.

They had to move every few days to seek fresh pasture and had to forever be ready to fight other clans to guard their rights. These clashes forced the clans to live in isolation without any chance of interaction with other neighbouring clans. The nomadic life precluded schools and consequently, literacy. The end result was a superstitious and ignorant people and a life of extreme hardship, practically of starvation level.

The Arabs had childish beliefs about divinity and worshipped many gods and godlings and religion was more superstition than any dogma. Though, Allah was accepted to a powerful or even a supreme god, there were many other godlings whose powers were restricted to a particular area or function. There were stones representing ancestors, grotesque figurines governing fertility and rag dolls. There were 'gods' like Hubbal or fearsome Moloch, who even demanded an

occasional child sacrifice. By far the most popular deities were the three 'daughters' of Allah - Lat, Mannat and Uzza, who were considered very effective as intercessors with Allah. The Arabs bowed to them all.

In spite of two super powers of that era, namely, Persia and Byzantium, being their immediate neighbours, the Arabs had the distinction of never being ruled by outsiders. Though these mighty neighbours were constantly at war with each other neither bothered to have anything to do with the Arabs. In any case the barren stretches held nothing that these rich powers coveted and both despised the ragged Arabs as an uncouth and loutish people of no account.

Thus while the world went its way, the Arabs continued to grovel and grope in the abyss of their ignorance and isolation. Rightfully, this period of their history is referred to as 'Jahiliyat' or the era of ignorance.

But then, as the sixth century was drawing to a close, a little orphan boy was growing up in a dusty village called Mecca, a settlement of 12000 souls, in a remote corner of Arabia. When he grew up to manhood, he would unite his people into the strongest nation in the world invincible in war. He would educate them rid them of superstitions and give them laws, he would teach them civilized behaviour and above all guide them into worshipping a single God, who is all powerful and yet Most Merciful (Rehman), Most Compassionate (Rahim) and Most forgiving (Gafoor).

In the years to come the world would come to know him as Muhammad Rasulallah (SWS) - Muhammad the messenger of Allah.

Most non-Muslims in India are broadly aware of the major events in the life of Prophet Muhammad (SWS). For instance, the fact that he had to migrate to Yathrib,

now Madina, because of the persecution of Makkah, is generally known; but the high drama associated with the event may not be known that widely.

Ever since the call to prophethood came to him at the age of 40, Muhammad Rasulallah (SWS) preached against idol worship, bringing out the absurdity of man praying to an object made by another man.

The Ka'bah which housed as many as 360 idols of all sorts was a source of a great deal of prestige and monetary benefits accruing from the pilgrims, to the residents of Makkah. The principal male diety, Hobbal, was larger than lifesize statue of Red Carnelian; fearsome, and of course, fabulous in value. It held seven arrows and the Arabs used to throw them on the ground to know the 'Gods' approval or otherwise for anything of importance. The pattern that the arrows made was then interpreted as 'God's will'.

Thus the residents of Makkah perceived Muhammad Rasulallah (SWS) as a clear threat to their way of life and all were agreed that he had to be stopped; the question was how! They tried in vain bribe, abuse, ridicule and social ostracism. The only recourse left was to kill him; but then, that would have started a bloody feud with the Prophet's clan, the Bani Hashim. (It is interesting to observe that hardly 4 or 5 of the Bani Hashim were Muslims at this point of time; but the clan loyalties transcended these considerations). To those Muslims, who did not have clan protection - many were slaves - emigration was advised and the first lot of fifteen, later eighty, went to nearby Abyssinia, across the Red Sea.

With time, more and more people were drawn to Islam including some from Yathrib, (later to be known as Madina), some 300 miles to the North. The stronger the Islamic movement grew, the more the Makkans panicked and more intense became the persecution.

Finally, the Prophet decided that it would be pragmatic if the Muslims were to migrate to Yathrib. And so they did, unobtrusively and gradually (all except the fiery Omar. He not only declared his intention to migrate loudly and clearly, but defied the Makkan to stop him). Though all the Muslims had left, the Prophet himself refused to go. No matter what the hardships and the danger, he would not leave the environs of the Ka'bah, unless commanded by God. Only his closest friend, Abu Baker and Young Ali, remained in Makkah with him.

Muhammad Rasulallah (SWS) life was in grave danger by this time. Abu Sufian, a life long enemy, had come out with a truly diabolic plan (some authorities ascribe the plan to Abu Jahal). To avoid the certain retribution by Bani Hashim in the event of bodily harm to the Prophet, Abu Sufian proposed that several young men, one each from different clans of Koresh, should simultaneously plunge their swords and kill the Prophet. The logic was that Bani Hashim will not be able to enter a bloody feud with all the clans simultaneously and themselves survive. The plan was approved and the young men chosen. Only the exact moment of strike was as yet undecided. The Prophet was aware of what was afoot but he was steadfast in refusing to leave the Ka'bah and except for arranging with Abu Baker to keep two fast running camels ready, did nothing further in the matter.

The assassins already had the Prophet's house encircled, when finally God's command to emigrate came. Ali covered himself with the Prophet's green shawl and lay on his bed while the Prophet slipped out of the house, despite the vigilant assassins outside. (Most Muslims believe that angles clouded the vision of the assassins for that moment). The Prophet and Abu Bakr left Makkah the same night and hid in the cave of Thaur which is located some 3 miles south of Makkah - whereas the road to Yathrib, where the search would be

centred, goes due North, in exactly the opposite direction.

A frenzied search ensued next morning. A reward of 100 camels (a very substantial offer in those days) was announced for the capture of the Prophet, dead or alive. The Makkan frenzy is easy to understand. They had banked on the killing of the Prophet. Without him the handful of Muslims who had gone to Yathrib were of no consequence. But, if he were to live there was no telling what kind of trouble may ensure, especially with a safe base like Yathrib to operate from.

There was not much of a cave really. It was just 2.5 to 3 feet high at the entrance and was located in a totally arid and unfrequented mountain side. However, a 100 camels constitute a powerful incentive and some searchers reached the cave eventually. But they noticed that a pigeon had built a nest in the cave mouth and was sitting on its egg. Not only that, but a spider was also busy weaving its web there. Obviously no humans could be inside, the searchers concluded and so moved on. Muslim historians and poets touchingly refer to this episode as the time "when the fate of Islam hung from a single slender thread of spiders web." After three nerve racking days like this the Prophet and his companion started for Yathrib. They went by the little known and perilous mountain tracks, far from the usual road to Yathrib (they had hired a Bedouin guide). And yet, one skilled tracker got on to the trail. He examined the dung of Abu Bakr's camel and found date stones in it. He correctly concluded that these were city reared camels and not Bedouin (who usually had camel thorns to eat and not dates).

He caught up with the Prophet's party; and then there took place another one of those incidents which do not have simple, natural explanation. He just let them go. The Prophet migrated from Makkah on the 18th of June 622 CE. He reached Qoba, the southern most

settlement of Yathrib on the 28th. Since three days were spent in the cave, it means that the journey of 300 miles was completed in 7 days; i.e. 40 miles a day, in the June heat of Hejaz, where temperatures exceed 50°C everyday! (The road distance between Makkah and Madina is little over 300 miles, but the Prophet's party had gone South for a few miles, then turned towards the coast and traveled through the mountain trails of the Tihamat range. Mountain trails are not only much longer than the straight tracks but the up and the down of the mountain adds to the distance. Night travel much more sensible in those climes, is not possible along the hazardous mountain paths either, which adds considerably to the discomfort. Ali, who reached Yathrib later, travelled by night and yet it took two weeks). Interested readers should refer to Mohammed Hayakal's excellent biography 'Hayat Mohammed', to fully appreciate the travails of this nightmarish journey.

Finally the ordeal was over and for the first time in his life the Prophet could preach in peace and safety. Islam has never looked back since then. So much is the significance attached to this transition-from harrasement and vicissitude to peace and tranquility - for the pursuit of one's faith, that Muslims date their calender 'Hijra' from the event (Hijra means emigration).

NEW WORLD AND ISLAM

Meraj Ahmad

Today we are living in a fragmented world torn by discord and conflict. The mankind is reeling, bleeding and gasping under the onslaught and outrage of violence, militancy, terrorism, naked aggression of one nation (state) against the other. Internal strife and civil war, violation of human rights by military and police, social injustice of various kinds, air, water and noise pollution, environmental degradation, fatal diseases like AIDS and widespread lawlessness, anomie and alienation.

Historical and Sociological Analyses: Long back, Oswald Spengler warned against the cultural degeneration, moral decadence, loss of creativity and commercialisation of life and intellect in Europe which have brought it at the verge of annihilation (Decline of the West, 1926). Arnold J. Toynbee also took a pessimistic view of the picture of the Western civilisation which according to his calculation, had already entered the phase of disintegration and was characterised by the schism in the body politics, schism in the soul, various forms of escapism, truancy, standardisation, hero-worship, idolisation of institutions and techniques and eruption of crimes, immoral acts, sex aberrations, abuses and diseases and mutinies, revolts, rebellions, wars, civil wars and other forms of anti social behaviour (A Study of History, 1954). P.A. Sorokin analyses social, moral and spiritual crisis of our age in terms of vacuum or void created by the gradual passing out of the sensate culture. Depicting vividly the symptoms of crisis, he writes: "Ever-expanding misery spreads its gloomy shadow over larger and larger areas. The fortunes, happiness, and comfort of untold millions have disappeared. Peace, security and safety have vanished. Prosperity and well-being have become in many countries but a memory; a mere myth. Western culture is covered by a blackout. A great

tornado sweeps over the mankind" (The Crisis of our Age, 1941, p.15). Charles A. Ellwood highlights the social problems of modern society and finds it conducive to revolts and revolutions, and general reversion of mankind to barbarism. He disentangles the historical, physical and biological, economic, spiritual and ideal and educational factors the social problems and suggests certain remedial measures for the solution of the same (The Social Problem: A Re constructive Analysis, 1919). Karl Mannheim attempts an analysis of the disruptions and breakdowns of social relations and institutions in contemporary society in the phase of transition as a result of rapid technological change, industrialisation, urbanisation and democratisation (Man and Society in An Age of Reconstruction, 1940). Jose Ortega y. Gasseyt visualises the modern society as the assemblage of not specially qualified, average persons of commonplace mind (the so-called public) taking recourse to direct action on the basis of "reason of unreason" and revolting against everything that is different, excellent, qualified, noble and select (The revolt of the Masses, 1930). David Riesman views alienation and other direction as the principal attributes of modern society which he calls the "lonely crowd" (The Lonely Crowd, 1950). George C. Hamans sees modern society as "a dust heap of individuals without links to one another" (The Human Group, 1950)

Similarly other analyses of contemporary social order such as those of George Orwell (The Novel: 1984), Alvin Toffler (The future Shock), V.S. Naipaul (India: The Wounded Civilisation), E.H. Carr (Twenty Years crisis and The New Society) and others portray the contemporary world order, particularly the socio-economic and political order, in dark colours. Disruptive, chauvinistic, parochial, sectarian, secessionist, nationalistic tendencies have fractured and fragmented nations on the micro level and the world order on the macro level. International relations

have gone down to the lowest ebb and the harmony between nations has been severely affected and jeopardised and the threat of armed confrontation involving use of nuclear and biological weapons is looming large over entire mankind. Thus the phenomenon of world order has been converted into world disorder, a world characterised by a void in the field of higher social, moral, spiritual and ideal values, erosion of democratic norms and institutions, confusion and chaos, tension and unrest, the frustrated and alienated common man, upsurge of direct action and confrontation, anomie and above all the cult of violence. The present dismal and sombre scenario reminds of the famous lines of Mathew Arnold's poem Dover Beach:-
Ah, love, let us be true

*To one another. for the world which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
hath really neither joy, nor love, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

EMERGENCE OF NEW WORLD ORDER - POTENTIAL AND PROMISE OF ISLAM: Several measures and remedies have been tried to overcome the crisis of society, economy and polity all over the world. Socialism and centrally planned economy model have failed and resulted in the disintegration of former Soviet Union. Welfare State has created a new despotism and encouraged corruption, lethargy and parasitism. The recently formulated Dunkel Proposals adopted by nearly 117 countries of the world through General Agreement on Tariff and Trade (GATT) promising the emergence of a global economic order by integrating the economics of the nation states are fraught with so many hazards. As P.N. Piplay has shown, the operation of the GATT regime is likely to disturb communitarian stratification and ethnic identities

particularly in traditional societies like India resulting in renewed social tensions.**

In the face of the dismal world social and political scenario and failure of measures adopted for redemption of the same, Islam with its distinctive theology and social theory presents the only promise, hope and last refuge for the distressed and baffled mankind. Islam is a religion and constitution of life (code of conduct) most akin to nature and human psyche can go a long way in the creation of a new world order free from tumult and turmoil, strife and struggle, disharmony and discord, ethnic and racial prejudice and bias, socially created inequalities and injustices, oppression and exploitation, gender and generation gap, anomie and alienation and cruelty and violence.

(i) Stress on Peace and Disapproval of Disruptive Tendencies. Islam is basically a religion of peace and well being. The word 'Islam' itself connotes peace, well being and total submission to the will of the God Almighty. The way of wishing and complimenting others ('Assalamo Alaikum'), which is the hall mark of the Islamic creed, is also suggestive of the invocation of peace and well being for others. Islam treats and rejects cruelty, tyranny, oppression and high-handedness as the characteristics of the age of ignorance and obscurantism. It stresses upon the settlement of disputes, reconciliation of discords and resolution of differences through negotiation, discussion and meditation. Thus Islam lays the foundation for a sound, viable and vibrant democratic ethos.

Islam vociferously condemns creation of disruptive tendencies and sowing the seeds of dissension, tumult and turmoil among the human beings. The Holy Qur'an enjoins:-

"Those who break God's covenant after it is ratified and who sunder what God has ordered to be joined and do

mischievous on earth; these cause harm only to themselves.” (Al-Baqara, 27)

“And slay them (the mischief-maker) wherever you catch them and turn them out from where they have turned you out, for tumult and turmoil are worse than slaughter” (Al-Baqara, 191)

(ii) Stress on Oneness of Mankind: Islam lays stress on, and advocates, the essential oneness and unity of mankind which is but a reflection and manifestation of the Oneness of God in the human sphere. The Holy Qur'an proclaims:-

“Mankind were one people and Allah sent (unto them) Prophets as bearers of good tidings, and as warners, and revealed therewith the scriptures with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed (and were divided)”.

(Al-Baqara, 213)

Thus Islam exhorts man (Homo Sapiens) to convert himself into man-of-the-world (homo universalise) with a broader vision and cosmopolitan outlook. Islam has a rich potential for translating into practice the one-world ideal and fortifying the trend toward the same.

This is the second important pre- requisite for the creation of the new world order.

(iii) Stress on Universal Brotherhood: Islam preaches universal brotherhood and visualises entire mankind as one fraternity, one family, representing the progeny of Adam and Eve, the first primeval man and woman. The Holy Qur'an proclaims:-

“O mankind, be careful of your duty to your lord who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women.” (An Nisa, 124).

The entire mankind according to the Holy Qur'an is an extended family. Therefore, universal brotherhood

should be its cherished ideal. This fraternity ideal finds lucid and unequivocal expression on several places in the Holy Scriptures, e.g. *An-Nisa* 6, *Ale-Imron* 103, and *Al- Hujurat*, 10. Thus Islam denounces diminutive, authoritarian and exploitative relationships between them.

The *Hadith* and *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad also insist upon and propagate fraternal relations between human beings. The Prophets commitment to the equality and fraternity ideals becomes evident from the following words of his farewell address:-

"I reiterate that all humans are brethren to one another. An Arab has no preference over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, nor is a white one to be preferred to a dark one, nor a dark one to a white one"

These sublime words of the Holy Prophet can be treated as the charter of universal equality and fraternity. Universal brotherhood is one of the essential conditions for the emergence of a new world order and Islam can play a crucial and substantial role in this enterprise by its egalitarian ideology and fraternal spirit.

(iv)Rejection of Ethnicity and Racism.: Islam explodes the myth of racial superiority and ethnic pride and makes righteousness and good deeds as the sole criterion of excellence and status. The Holy Qur'an ordains:-

"O mankind we have created you male and female and have made you peoples and tribes that you may know (and interact with) one another. The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the best in character and conduct" (Al- Hujurat, 13)

Thus Islam liquidates all forms of inequality based on colour, race, sex, parentage, caste, class or region and

removes the main hurdles in the way of the creation of a just, egalitarian and fraternal social order.

Similarly the Prophet of Islam spoke emphatically on many occasions against the notion of racial superiority and ethnic pride. The following Hadiths testify to the Holy Prophets aversion to ethnicity and racism:-

- (1) "All men are from the race of Adam and Adam was made from sticky wet-earth."
- (2) "And surely all of you be worshippers of God and brothers to each other."
- (3) "The best among you is ne who wishes for others what he wishes for himself and promotes best the good of others."

Ethnicity and racism being anti-human, anti-social and anti egalitarian tendencies have received a sever blow form Islam and by repudiating the same both in theory and practise, Islam paves the way for mankind to usher into a new world order.

(vi) Stress on Spiritual Integration of Communities and Nations.: Islam has laid a firm foundation for inter-community and international psychic and spiritual integration by making it imperative and obligatory as an article of faith to believe in all Prophets and all holy books revealed to the Prophets and hold them in equal esteem and reverence. The Holy Qur'an maintains that Islam (the divine message of peace, righteousness and well-being of all and total surrender to the will of God) has been the message gradually communicated, and the way of life gradually unfolded, to the Prophets (from Adam to Mohammed) through commandments, gospels and holy books (Scriptures). When the divine message was totally revealed and the way of life for the humans which was in the process of unfolding perfected, prophethood and revelations were terminated. Mohammed was declared the last prophet and Qur'an the last scripture. Islam's stress on equal recognition

to, and respect of, all prophets and holy books is clearly reflected in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:-

"The messenger has believed in the guidance which has been sent down to him from his Lord, and those who believe in the Messenger have also sincerely accepted the same. They all believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books and His Messenger. And they say, "we do not discriminate against any of His Messengers....."

(Al-Baqara, 285)

The above verse of the Holy Scripture paves the way for the psychic and spiritual integration of mankind, particularly the followers of the Semitic religions, viz., Judaism, Christianity and Islam. One of the major religious communities having a divine book, viz. the Jews (formerly known as the Bani Israelites) developed a sense of religious bigotry by considering their Prophet Moses as the most exalted and the last one and themselves as the "chosen people" dearest and most favourite to God. When Jesus Christ was born and appointed a Prophet, the Jews used slanderous language against him and his holy mother, Mary, and inflicted insult and torture of every kind on him and tried to get rid of him in vain bid to crucify him. When Prophet Mohammed was born and bestowed with Prophethood, the Jews and Christians united and negated his Prophethood and rejected his message. Today, the Jewish and the Christian world is looking at Islam as their common enemy and a grave challenge to their political supremacy and hegemony, turning a blind eye towards the spiritual excellence, moral pre-eminence and socio-economic effulgence of Islam as a religion and way of life. The Holy Qur'an by denouncing and rejecting the vanity of religious bigotry, racial superiority and ethnic chauvinism (ethnocentrism) exhorts the people of the Book (people having divine scripture) to unite spiritually into a fraternity and comity of nations to create anew world order based on truly democratic, egalitarian and equitable ideals and help

divided, distressed and suffering mankind to usher into and era of peace, plenty and prosperity.

THE POTENTIAL AND PROMISE OF ISLAM: As elaborated herein above Islam has great potential and promise for the creation of a new world order. There are two important preconditions for utilising this potential and making it real Firstly, the Muslims all over the world should shed off their self imposed sense of spiritual and moral void and realise and appreciate the great potential and promise of Islam. There is tremendous spiritual resurgence and vast sections of mankind are turning towards Islam and they have to play a crucial role in the creation of a new world order. Mohinder Singh writes: "On the political plane, the challenge of Islam can once again dominate the coming decade - the followers of Mohammed taking over this role from the followers of Marx. Karl Marx not only proved a false prophet but, like all secular prophets, a short-lived one. The appeal of Islam extends over centuries. Of all the religions of pre-modern, traditional societies, Islam is currently the most vital. It is a crusading faith whose energy appears to be renewed and overriding." Secondly, the non-Muslim nations, particularly the Jewish and Christian ones, should transcend their biased, prejudiced and distorted perspective towards Islam and unhesitatingly appreciate and accept its merits, virtues and potentialities for social, economic and political reconstruction of the world order. In his address delivered at the opening session of the Oxford Centre of Islamic Studies on October 27, 1993, Prince Charles acknowledged that the Christian West's judgement of Islam has been grossly distorted by taking the extremes to be the norm. He stated: I believe wholeheartedly that the links between these two worlds, Islam and the West matter more today than ever before, because of the degree of misunderstanding between the Islamic and Western Worlds remains dangerously high, and because the need for the two to live and work together

The Fragrance of East

in our increasingly interdependent world has never been greater... It is odd, in many ways that the misunderstanding between Islam and the Western World should persist. For that which binds our two worlds together is much more than that which divides us". Stressing the relevance and role of Islam in creation of a new world order, Abul Hassan Ali Nadvi writes:-

"The call of the Islamic world is to believe in God, in the Prophet and in Divine Leadership. The consequence of such a faith would be the emergence from darkness to light, from the worship of human beings to the worship of God, from the narrowing circumstances of this world to the expanse of the universe, from tyranny and injustice to the justice, equality and fraternity of Islam. The supreme importance of such a message today is obvious that it is easier to appreciate it in the present age in which ignorance stands exposed and its hidden evils unmasked. The whole world has become tired of it. It is, therefore, precisely the time when the world could turn from the present leadership to the leadership that Islam offers, provided the Islamic world awakes and adopts with conviction and sincerity, determination and courage the message of Islam and believes firmly that Islam alone can save humanity from degradation and ruin."

WOMEN IN ISLAM

I.A.Patel

Islam has achieved far more for women's emancipation and equality than what many of today's feminists realise. Judging Islam by their own secularised and often atheist standards, many members of the feminist's movement denounce the way of life chosen by Allah for woman and man, without knowing or deeply understanding what they are really criticising. It is only Islam that has lifted women from abyss of oppression to previously unknown levels of freedom and respectability, levels which are unmatched even in today's so-called civilised world.

Greek And Roman Civilisation.

In the days of ignorance, prior to the advent of Islam, women in many cultures throughout the world were considered little more than commodities, objects of desire to be bought and sold like livestock. According to Prof. Wil Durant, "In Rome, the man alone had any rights before the law in the early republic; he alone could buy, hold or sell property, or make contracts. Even his wife's dowry in this period belonged to him; if his wife was accused of a crime she was committed to him for judgement, and he could punish her to death for infidelity or for stealing the keys to his wine cellar. Over his children he had the power of life, death and sale to slavery... Birth itself was an adventure in Rome. If the child was deformed or female, the father was permitted, by custom, to expose it to death."

Neither did the Greek philosophers show a great deal of concern for females. Aristotle stated: "... We must thus conclude it is a natural law that there should be natural ruling elements and elements naturally ruled... The rule of the free man over the slave is one kind of rule; that of the male over the female another... The slave is entirely without the faculty of deliberation; the female indeed possess it, but it is a form that remains

The Fragrance of East

inconclusive." The Greek considered women to belong to the third (lowest) rank of society. If a woman gave birth to a deformed child, it was a common practice to kill her. In Sparta, which was acknowledged as an elite society, a woman who could no longer bear children was put to death. The Spartan also took women away from their husbands to be inseminated by "brave and strong men" of other communities. The Greeks in general considered women to be insignificant creatures who could not be dear to the "gods".

Hippolytus' invective against women, in the tragedy by Euripides, sums up the Greek view:

"O Zeus, whatever possessed you to put an ambiguous misfortune amongst men by bringing women to the light of day? If you really wanted to sow the race of mortals, why did it have to be born of women? How much better it would be if men could buy the seeds of sons, paying for it with gold, iron or bronze in your temples and could live free without women in their houses"

JUDAISM

Orthodox Jews who have held on to the classical teachings of Judaism have come under great strain from within as their practices are seen as sexually oppressive. The *Talmud*, a book pertaining to the Jewish civil and ceremonial law states, 'it is impossible for there to be a world without males and females. Nevertheless happy is the man whose children are males and woe to the man whose children are females'.

Superiority of the male child is further emphasised by several customs. On the birth of a male child parents invite guests to a *Kiddush*, a celebratory meal after Sabbath, where there is no such custom after the birth of a female child. In education it is not considered appropriate to educate the female beyond what is

necessary to learn regarding the practices ordained in the Jewish scripture to the women. When a boy reaches adulthood maturity is further celebrated by a ritual called, *bar mitzvah*, 'son of the commandment'. The boy who has now become a man can be counted upon to make a quorum, (*minyan*), which is needed for certain prayers and for public worship in the synagogue, for which ten free male adults are required. Whereas the women cannot be counted upon to make the quorum (*minyan*). There are no parallel celebrations for women in the Jewish custom. The inequality and injunction towards female oppression is further to be found in the law relating to divorce. A women has no right of divorce. even if her husband disappears without trace. Without the evidence of his death, she cannot remarry. A man has the only right of divorce, and many men have abused this right by abandoning women and not divorcing them, thereby restricting them to remarry.

According to Le Bonn the male Orthodox Jew solemnly recites, "Blessed art Thou, O lord our God, King of the Universe, that I was not born a female". The inequalities in the Jewish scriptures and traditions is experiencing pressure for change, from within, to be more equitable. The liberating ideologies have brought many changes to Judaism. There has been a recent introduction for the celebration of a girl attaining puberty called *bat mitzvah* (compared with boys called *bar mitzvah*). In education, despite the ruling of Zohra, that the Torah was meant only to be given over to males, the girls education has become an established feature. In divorce, today the law has been changed so that the couples first turn towards the state courts for separation and then gain a religious divorce.

HINDUISM

Women fared little better in other belief-systems. In Hinduism, the perfect women is the *pativrata*, the devoted wife whose entire existence is dedicated to her husband. The very word *pativrata* says it all: "she

whose vow (*vrata*) is to her husband (*pati*)". During her lifetime, the good Hindu wife is expected to regard her husband as her own personal god, for the man ordained to be a women's husband is regarded as far more than a man: He is the incarnation of the supreme law in her life, the definition and summation of her religious duty. After a blameless life, such a woman should ideally die before her husband. If by some mischance she does not, then she may be put that right by taking her own life in her husband's funeral pyre. This horrific rite, known as *satee*, was until very recently still being practised in India, and the government has had to intervene to abolish it. Nevertheless, for devout Hindus a woman who is *satee* is worshipped as a goddess, the perfect example of the self-sacrificing wife.

A book on the ancient discipline of Sanskrit religious law, *Dharmasastra*, includes a chapter on "the religious status of women ", *stridharmapaddhati*. The author (or more accurately, the compiler) of this work, Tryambaka, was an orthodox pundit living in Thanjavur, in what is now the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The ruling on the women generally places them at the level of a subordinate citizen. For example: a wife has no right over the husbands property. Property owned jointly by the wife and husband may be distributed by the husband alone, but the wife needs his permission. even with various kinds of 'women's property', such as gifts from her husband or her own family, a woman still needs her husband's permission to exercise her rights of ownership.

Tryambaka's stark message is defined in three ways. Firstly, a wife should have no regard for her own life. Secondly, she should allow herself to be even sold, if her husband should wish it. Thirdly, obedience to her husband takes precedence over all other duties, including religious ones. In essence, however this law

contains only one point: that a woman's highest duty is to her husband.

ARABIA - PRE ISLAM

Prior to Islam, in Arabia, the Arabs treated women with contempt: it was customary for infant girls to be buried alive at birth. Men could have as many wives as they wished, and all were effectively enslaved, and would be inherited as possessions when the husband died. Among the pre-Islamic Arabs, when a man died his eldest son or other close relatives had the right to possess his widow or widows, marrying them himself if he so desired.

Before and during the time of Prophet Mohammed, Persia was ruled by Sassanids who practised Zoroastrianism. Their faith demanded total obedience of the wife to her husband. A wife was required to declare, "I will never cease, all my life, to obey my husband". Failure to do so will lead to divorce. A wife had no say in any matter and the husband could lend her, for a fee, to others. If a woman did not produce any children, she would be abandoned, if she were lucky; more often than not, a barren wife would be killed.

EUROPE

Britain and most of Europe was just recovering from the lengthy Roman occupation, which was followed by the arrival of Christianity. European society was a highly fragmented one, in which tribal wars and kingly struggles to gain control over the land and people were commonplace. With very few exceptions, women had no active role to play in such affairs. As the dawn of Islam was starting to illuminate the long shadow of oppression on women, the French in the same period (586 CE) were claiming compassion and civility by passing a resolution, after great deliberation and controversy, that women can be classified as a human

being, however she is created for the sole purpose of serving man.

CHRISTIANITY

The title of this section, by definition, is somewhat ambiguous, since the term 'Christianity' covers such a varied set of beliefs and practices. As one commentator puts it, "Christianity is always adapting itself into that which is believable". (Or not, as the case may be). The apparent flexibility of this religion creates immediate problems for discussion, since it is easy for anyone to counter what is said about Christianity with the latest amended pronouncements of the Vatican, or Anglican Synod, or of other churches. It is very much like describing a desert landscape controlled by moving sand. The broad nature of Christian division must also be kept in mind: what holds true in one sect, such as the Church of England (Anglicanism), may not be true in another, such as the Roman Catholicism. Nevertheless if we look to the supposed sources of Christianity, the Old testament and the New testaments of the Bible, and the scholarly work produced elsewhere, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that women have, over the centuries, received a raw deal from the Mother(!) Church.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Christianity did not bring a revolutionary social change in the position of women". Indeed, "in the world of the early church the women were kept in very low esteem, and this was the basis for divorce practices that put women practically at men's complete disposal". This is in keeping with the "Old Testament view of marriage as an institution primarily concerned with the establishment of a family, rather than sustaining the individual happiness of the marriage partners", a view which has "strongly influenced" Christianity.

When the kingdom of God is established marriage which was understood to be a part of the old passing order will not exist. According to the Bible as it exists today, the risen ones will "neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like angels in heaven" (Mark 12:25). Similarly, St. Paul's understanding of marriage in the light of the coming kingdom of God was as follows: "... the time is short. From now on all those who have wives should live as if they had none... For the world in its present form is passing away". (1 Corinthians 7:29-30). The early Christians believed that the end of the time was very near, so marriage was not deemed worth while, as it would involve what were regarded as unnecessary troubles: "I would like you to be free from concern" (1 Corinthians 7:32). So it was felt that the unmarried, widowers and widows would fare better if they did not marry. Celibacy was demanded, not only of ascetics and monks, but of increasing numbers of clergy, as a matter of duty.

The Bible, a book with conclusive evidence, proves to have been written by men and to contain only fragments of the original revealed Books given to the Prophets over the centuries (including the Torah, Psalms and Gospel), contains too many references to the women in society. For example:

"As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says". (1 Corinthians 14:33-34)

The ideology of the female being inferior is indoctrinated from birth:

"... A woman who becomes pregnant and give birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days... If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean...." (Leviticus 12:1,5)

"Wives, submit to your husbands... for the husband is the head of the family as Christ is the head of the Church...." (Ephesians 5:22-23)

"Then the Lord God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate'.... To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you'." (Genesis 3:13,16)

St. Paul said: "The head of the women is the man ... for a man... is the image and glory of God. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence".

Based on the Biblical image of Eve as a seductive temptress, Christian theologians have historically associated women with sexuality and viewed her with deep suspicion, loathing and fear. Throughout the history of Christianity and the Roman Church, theologians, moralists and ethicists have inveighed against woman's corrupt, weak, lustful and evil "daughter of Eve", who are to be shunned and avoided at all costs. The post-Christian feminist Mary Daly insists that since the Genesis stories were written by men, and their conception of God is irrevocably androcentric, they cannot be applied to or by women.

Interestingly, in his 1988 Encyclical, Pope John Paul II stated his belief that mothers are more important than fathers when it comes to raising children. There is no connection between man's procreative role in conception and their social role as fathers, and it is only mothers that are socially defined by their procreative role.

BRITISH HISTORY

English common law stated that upon marriage, a woman lost the rights she possessed when single. All

of her property transferred to her husband and both she and it fell under his complete control. He did not even have to account to her. She could not transfer her property, nor enter into contracts in her own name, nor could she sue or be sued. In effect, marriage meant civil death.

A court case in 1840, quoted by O'Faolain and Martines, highlights how insignificantly women were held in British society:

"The question raised in this case is, singularity whether by common law the husband, in order to prevent his wife from eloping, has the right to confine her in his own dwellings and restrain her from liberty, for an indefinite time.... There can be no doubt the husband has by law power and domain over his wife, and may keep her by force... and beat her, but not in a violent or cruel manner".

As late as 1856, women were not allowed to keep their earnings, and had no rights of inheritance. In that year, women petitioned parliament, which was composed solely of male members, to allow married woman keep their earnings and inherited property. In 1857, divorced women were granted the same rights as single women, but married women had to wait until 1893 to receive the same rights.

Throughout the 19th century, women became more aware of their lack of basic rights in society, and towards the end of the century, a significant movement of change developed, and the suffragettes campaigned for women's right to vote. The political franchise had for centuries been restricted to property-owners only, and had only recently (in the mid-nineteenth century) been extended to all males over the age of 21. Women had to wait till 1928 for this right to be granted to them. Equal pay for equal work took longer: This was not won until 1975. It is clear, then, that Western Europe in general and Britain in particular, were late in developing

basic rights and equal status for women, contrary to what the moral high ground taken by critics of Islam portray.

This is the global context into which the Prophet of mercy, Mohammed brought his message, and liberated women from the oppression of men and offered them the shade, mercy and equality of Islam. At a time when the entire world treated women with contempt, when women were unable even to question their status, let alone demand basic human and civic rights, Islam came as a beacon blazing forth in the darkness liberating and elevating them. To discuss how Islam enhanced the role and status of women in seventh-century Arabia, without addressing present day issues as well will be a great disservice to the reader. Islam (*submission to the will of the creator, Allah*) which all the prophets called to, is a religion for all the people and for all times, equally applicable to all.

How many of today's feminists supposedly, fighting against oppression and subjugation of women, would disagree that women should be viewed as the equals of men? That female infanticide, for any reason, be it social or economic, is evil? That in the theological terms, women should be viewed as equal with men in the sight of the Almighty, and be rewarded equally for their virtues? That, as wives, they are entitled to mutual consultation in the affairs of their families? That they should be allowed to possess assets and have a right to their own business and incomes? That they should be entitled to inherit from their parents, husbands and other relatives? That they should be allowed to live freely without the fear of being molested or raped? That they should be free from the dangers of sexual harassment and should not be portrayed merely as sex objects or as objects of male desires? That the honour of their bodies be protected from pornographic portrayals? That their suffering in child birth should be

recognised, appreciated and rewarded? For all these basic rights and more, women of all colours, creeds and social status have had to fight tooth and nail. It is only Islam that has promoted women's rights from the very outset. Islam granted them liberation from the evils of inequality, hundreds of years, before the word "liberation" became fashionable.

Spiritual Equality of The Sexes.

In many other religions, women have had to fight for their rights and dues, and their struggle, in many cases, is still ongoing. Christian women for example, have had to struggle to make their voices heard, and have gone to the extreme of changing the text of the Bible to make it less "sexist" and more "acceptable" to women. Islam, on the other hand, has justly granted women their rights without them being having to ask, let alone demand and fight.

"For Muslims men and women - for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who given in charity, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise - for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward."

[al-Ahzab 33:35]

A number of Islamic virtues are mentioned here, but the primary message of this *ayah* is that these virtues are applicable to both, women as well as men. Both sexes have human rights and duties to an equal degree, and the reward of the Hereafter are available to men and women alike. Each individual will be judged according to his or her deeds. Gender is simply not an issue in this matter.

"And their Lord has accepted them, and answered them: 'Never shall I suffer to be lost the work of any of

you, be he male or female: you are members, one of another...."

[Al Imran 3:195]

Allah has granted the prayers of the Believers, and has told us that He will not let the labour of any individual go to waste. Everyone will reap the reward of his or her efforts. A woman may achieve this just as a man may. Man and woman alike are members of the human race, created from the same source and joined by Islam as partners in life and in reward.

"Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, and life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their action."

[al-Nahl 16:97]

The spiritual equality of women and men in Islam is abundantly clear, so nobody should fall for the prejudiced view propagated by the Islamaphobes in the Western Media.

From the time the child is conceived, Islam gives glad tidings to a woman regardless of the gender of the foetus. The pregnant woman is held in the highest esteem, and her patience in bearing the discomforts of pregnancy is regarded as an act of virtue which brings her closer to Paradise. If the baby is a girl, this opens up further opportunities for the parents to attain Paradise. In stark contrast to the attitude of the pagan Arabian society which buried female babies alive (and the modern jahiliyyah in which many societies views the birth of a girl as bad news), The Prophet gave the glad tidings of Paradise as the reward for the one who welcomes a daughter, brings her up properly, provides a sound education and arranges a good marriage for her. In another *hadith*, it is stated that the fire of Hell will not be permitted to touch one who goes through trials and tribulations because of a daughter, but still does not hate her, and treats her well.

The Qur'an expressively forbids killing babies whether by infanticide or abortion, for fear of poverty or losing face in the community:

Say : *'Come, I will rehearse what Allah has (really) prohibited you from: join not anything as equal with Him; be good to your parents; kill not your children on a plea of want - we provide sustenance for you and for them - come not nigh to shameful deeds, whether open or secret; take not life, which Allah has made sacred, except by way of justice and law: thus does He command you, that you may learn wisdom.*

[al-An'am 6:151]

The Qur'an also tells us that the innocent girls who were slain for no other reason than that they were female, will be asked on the day of judgement for what sin they were slain:

"When the female (infant) buried alive is questioned - for what crime she was killed"

[al-Takwir 81:8-9]

The crime is that of the parent not of the child. Parents should not think that they are at liberty to do whatever they like with regard to their children. It is almost beyond belief that in the modern world infanticide, in the epithet of abortion, can be allowed to exist. China is currently experiencing an epidemic of this barbarism, under its strict population control laws; Families are allowed only one child, and most parents want sons, so girls are abandoned or allowed to die, or killed, so that the parents may have another child, hopefully boy. The Western nations, which are so quick to condemn China, are not so far behind in savagery, except they have sanitised infanticide in the guise of abortion.

Not only does the Qur'an protect the female infant from being murdered by ignorant parents, but it describes her birth as good news, and grants her the rights of inheritance from her father, husband and brother, and gives her the right to own property and conduct

business transactions independently and in her own right.

"When news is brought to one of the, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people, because of the news that he has had! Shall he retain it on (sufferance and) contempt, bury it in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide on."

[AL-Nahal16:58-59]

This *ayah* refers to the period of *Jahiliyyah*, just before the advent of Islam, when it was the custom of the pagan Arabs to bury female infants alive. Islam totally forbids such crimes, but sadly this evil practice is still continuing in many communities, where women are not valued and are seen as burden. At the very least, the birth of a girl is resented and she may be neglected while the best food and education is given to her brothers; at the worst modern technology is exploited so that if a female foetus is detected via an ultra sound scan, it may be aborted while a male foetus will be carried to full term.

The spiritual equality of the sexes in Islam extends to the worldly plane, and education is required for both male and female. The Prophet said : "Seeking knowledge is a duty for every Muslim male and female". He also urged Muslims to "Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave".

The importance of seeking knowledge cannot be over-emphasised. All Muslims are urged to educate themselves, to act upon their knowledge, and to convey it to others.

"... Those truly fear Allah, among his servants, who have knowledge."

[Fatir 35:28]

It is only those with knowledge and understanding who will be truly conscious of the glory and the transcendence of Allah. They will understand the transience of the present world and the permanence of the Hereafter, and thus they will be concerned about their future and will strive to attain knowledge of the Divine guidance.

Islam promotes the education of both the sexes. Islamic history, from the very beginning, records the names of numerous female scholars, foremost among whom is 'A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), who was one of the greatest narrators of *ahadith*. Not only was she responsible for conveying over two thousand *ahadith* but the great men of time used to consult with her on matters of *fiqh* (*jurisprudence*).

MARRIAGE

There is no celibacy in Islam. Islam considers sexuality to a natural part of life, which is to be channelled into a healthy married life; sinful fulfilment of the sexual urge and exploitation of woman through prostitution, pornography and rape are utterly forbidden.

The Prophet (SWS) advised all Muslims: "Whoever is able to marry, should marry, for that will help him lower his gaze and guard his modesty". As well as providing a legitimate channel for sexual energy- which will keep a person away from sins - marriage provides comfort, security, solace and companionship. Islam not only regards marriage as necessary, but has raised it to the level of being a positive virtue, whereby those who marry will be rewarded for doing so, as for any other good deed. The Prophet (SWS) emphasised the importance of marriage when he described it as being half of faith.

An important condition of marriage is that this union should be by the consent of both partners; neither male nor female should be forced into marriage. In particular

- as a warning against the oppression of women - Islam clearly states that a marriage contracted without the free consent of the woman is null and void. The Prophet (SWS) said : "No widow should be married without consulting her, and no virgin should be married without her consent..."

Prospective marriage partners are encouraged to see one another before they agree to marry. Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the messenger of Allah (SWS) said, "When one of you seeks to marry a woman, if he is able to have a look at the one he desires to marry, let him do so".

Above all, marriage in Islam is a contract between two equal parties. As an equal partner, the Muslim woman may stipulate conditions in the marriage. In contrast to British women, who even now do not have the right to draw up a contract and stipulate conditions. Muslim women were given this right fourteen hundred years ago. The woman may stipulate, prior to marriage , conditions, including transfer of divorce power to herself, restricting her husband to one wife only, and clearly defining the conditions of maintenance.

Marriage in Islam is much more than a means of satisfying sexual desires; it is social contract of cohabitation through which both partners may find companionship and a refuge from the trials and tribulations of life. In Islam, a woman is not seen as an object for male gratification or a workhorse who is expected to cater to every need and whim of the male. She is spiritually and moral being who is brought into union with a man on the basis of a solemn pledge in which Allah is called upon to witness. The Prophet (SWS) is reported to have said, "you have seen nothing like marriage for increasing the love of two people".

Today in the West, married women who retain their maiden names are viewed as feminists or unusually self-assertive. Muslim women, however, have always been allowed and expected to keep their maiden names after marriage. The right to maintain their own identity was given to women in Islam when elsewhere in the world women were seen as being barely human and debates raged as to whether they even possessed a soul, let alone be given independence.

The Qur'an describes marriage in the most moving and eloquent terms:

"... They [wives] are your garments and you [husbands] are their garments...."

[al-Baqarah 2:187]

"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your(hearts): verily in that are the Signs for those who reflect."

[al-Rum 30:21]

"It is He Who created you from a single person. and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love)..."

[al-A'raf 7:189]

"He is the creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves..."

[al-Shura 42:11]

In Islam, there is no notion of woman being responsible for the "Fall" or of being the first sinner and therefore responsible for all of the mankind's woes. There is no idea of man being created out of superior material and woman out of base matter. Woman is made equal, both men and women are the progeny of Adam, so both have similar souls.

"mankind ! Reverence your Guardian - Lord Who created you from a single Person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like

seeds) countless men and women - fear Allah, through Whom you demand your mutual (rights)".

[al-Nisa 4:1]

"And Allah has made for you mates (and companions) of your nature, and made for you, out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren. And provided for you sustenance of the best: will they then believe in vain things, and be ungrateful for Allah's favours".

[al-Nahal 16:72]

Islam does not view woman as the instrument of the devil, as is asserted by Christian teachings. The Qur'an describes woman as *muhsanah*, a fortress against evil, because a good woman helps her husband maintain the path of righteousness.

Muslim men are continually admonished to treat their wives kindly. To these men who oppress their wives:

"O you who believe! You are forbidden to inherit woman against their will. Nor should you treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the dower you have given them - except when they have been guilty of open lewdness; on the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If you take a dislike to them it may be that you dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good."

[al-Nisa 4:19]

Men are commanded by Allah to consort with women amicably and honourably. They should refrain from harshness in speaking to and dealing with them. Behaviour that goes against the standards of morality and common courtesy is prohibited. Such wicked and brutal conduct is the sign of ignorance (*jahiliyyah*) which Islam came to abolish.

Muslims are admonished to treat women equitably. The Qur'an forbids them to inherit women and abuse them, sexually or otherwise, as was the custom prior to the

advent of Islam and is still practised in many societies where the rich and the strong take advantage of the poor and weak in this way. This Islamic rule applies not only to the Arabs of the Seventh century CE, but to all subsequent generations of Islam. Men are forbidden to abuse women, and are commanded to live amicably with their marriage-partners. The command of Allah to do so is reinforced by the comment that while a man may find some trait or aspect of his wife's behaviour that he dislikes, it may be that Allah will bring about something good if he tolerates it graciously and accepts his wife for what she is. In all of this there is a benefit for man.

The Prophet (SWS) enhanced this message of equality and fair treatment of women by setting the supreme example for mankind to observe and emulate. He demonstrated the importance of taking care of oneself and one's daily needs, instead of imposing on one's wife. Accounts of his life give numerous examples which "modern men" may learn from. The Prophet (SWS) attended to his own personal needs, he helped his wife in the house, and he even stitched and mended his own clothes. The Prophet (SWS) demonstrated that a man is never too great to clean and look after himself, and he imparted the following advice:

"The best among you is the one who is best to his family, and I am the best man among you to his family",

"The most perfect believers are the best in conduct and the best of you are those who are best to their wives"

"Many woman have come to the family of Mohammed complaining about their husbands.... Those husbands are not the best of you".

"By assisting your wives in their household duties, you will receive the reward of saaqah (charity)".

"A believer must not hate a believing woman; if he dislikes one of her characteristics, he should be pleased with another".

"When a woman breast feeds, for every gulp of milk she will receive a reward as if she had granted life to being, and when

she weans her child, the angels pat her on the back saying, 'Congratulations! All your past sins have been forgiven, now start all over again'

"O women! remember that the pious among you will enter Jannah before the pious men".

"During pregnancy until the time of childbirth, and until the end of the suckling period, a woman earns rewards similar to the person who is guarding the borders of Islam".

In his famous speech given during his Farewell Pilgrimage, in which the Prophet (SWS) reiterated the most important points of Islamic teachings, the Prophet (SWS) reminded the Muslims of the importance of treating women equitably: "O people, fear Allah with regard to women..." Once again, men are reminded to remember Allah and fear His retribution, for Allah is aware of everything that passes between them.

'A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) reported that when the Prophet (SWS) was home, he would help with the house hold chores, treat his family amicably, and maintain a pleasant atmosphere in the home.

Islamic teachings are very strict when it comes to the fair treatment of others, and in the case of physical superiority Islam clearly states the responsibilities of the stronger party. As women are physically weaker, they are entitled to protection, and men are answerable for any misuse of their physical strength against women. All kinds of physical abuse are forbidden in Islam, which also prohibits psychological abuse such as seclusion and unnecessary restriction of movement and travel. A husband is also forbidden to disclose his wives secret, as the Prophet (SWS) said: "the worst of all the people is the one who approaches his wife, enjoys her company, then divulges her secrets".

Marriage is in accordance with the teachings of Islam, so whatever permissible deeds are done within the

context of marriage - including sex - are regarded as virtues. The Prophet (SWS) once said, "A man will be rewarded for his physical relations with his wife". His listeners somewhat surprised, asked, "Will a person be rewarded for satisfying his passions?" The Prophet (SWS) replied, "Do you not see that if he were satisfying his passions in a forbidden manner he would be committing a sin? So if he satisfies himself in a lawful manner he will be rewarded".

The importance of the physical side of marriage is also referred to in a *hadith* narrated by Imam al -Bukhari. The Prophet (SWS) is supposed to have upbraided one of his Companions, who was going to extremes in his devotion to worship: "O Abdullah, have I not been informed that you will fast all day and standing prayer all night?" Abdullah said "Yes, O Messenger of Allah". He said, "Do not do that. Observe the fast at some times and refrain from fasting at others. Stand in prayer at night, then sleep. Your body has a right over you, your eyes have a right over you and your wife has a right over you".

Islam regards men and women as equal partners who should cooperate in making the home, community and society at large harmonious, happy and successful. The partners should be loyal, considerate and dependent upon one another. They should work together to overcome any problems and obstacles. They should be jointly concerned with their children's upbringing and education, and work together to meet their children's needs. They should work together to overcome the shortcomings of each partner, and present a united front to the outside world. They should also provide companionship and comfort to one another.

Certain Qur'anic references have given rise to much debate concerning women's role, rights and duties.

"... And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them."

[al-Baqarah 2:228]

These are the various points of view as to the significance of the phrase "a degree (of advantage)". Some suggest that it means the qualities of leadership, surveillance and maintenance that are given to men. Others favour the idea that it refers to the tolerance which is expected of men even when their wives are in extremely bad mood. Another opinion is that a man's natural gift, bestowed by Allah, for judging family matters and managing problems that may arise. However, the consensus of most scholars is that, this degree refers to the principals of guardianship, and nothing more. In another *ayah*, the Qur'an says:

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means...."

[al-Nisa' 4:34]

Commenting on this verse, Yusuf Ali states that the difference in economic position between the sexes makes the man's right and liabilities a little greater than the woman's. This verse refers to the duty of the man to maintain the woman, and to certain difference in the nature of the two genders. However, the two sexes are seen as being on equal terms in the law, and in certain matters the "weaker sex" (the female) is entitled to special protection. It should be borne in mind that the Qur'an offers guidance for all human societies at all periods of history. So Islam seeks to maximise the benefits of all women, world wide.

Abdullah ibn Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), a companion of the Prophet (SWS), mentioned, with

reference to the ayah quoted above, that as men have been granted such noble position by Allah, they should exercise greater patience. If there is some deficiency on a wife's part, then the husband's position demands that he should accommodate her weakness, maintain a patient attitude, and establish consistency in the fulfilment of her rights. In short, marriage is intended to bring mutual benefits to both the partners.

A renowned Asian scholar, Hazrat Hakim Akhtar sahib states; "The rights of women have been mentioned before those of men in this verse because man, due to his inherent power and strength, easily obtains his rights from the woman. Thus Allah placed more emphasis upon the rights of women who cannot forcibly obtain their rights". The second point that may be noted from the ayah is that the man should take the initiative in fulfilling his responsibilities, because Qur'an has mentioned women's rights first.

The "degree above" cannot, and must not, be taken to imply male superiority of worth. What it does imply is greater liability and responsibility, which means that men will be subjected to greater questioning in the Hereafter regarding the treatment of their wives and families. This is hardly what could be described as an enviable position, and some may even consider it "inferior"! The degree in position is nothing more than a means of assuring the maintenance of women, as and when it is necessary.

Islam clearly recognises the equal potential and ability of the sexes, but Allah has created human beings in a manner whereby men and women are better suited for differing but complimentary tasks. Just because a male may be better at a given task than the female, it does not mean that he is inherently superior. This is an error made by many feminists, who assume that liberation may be achieved by adopting a male role. Instead of recognising and cherishing their femininity,

they seek to ape men, to the detriment of women and human society in general. By aspiring to male traits, values and behaviour, they have further diminished the female whilst elevating the male. By equating financial earnings and following a career with prestige and status, the feminine pursuits of motherhood, household work and raising of a family have become valueless and are seen as degrading. Because unpaid work is seen as worthless, household work is viewed as demeaning drudgery. In contrast, Islam emphasises harmony and mutual dependency, so a woman's work in caring for the home and raising family is seen as being as essential and important as a man's work in earning money for the financial support of the family

Mankind has been infected by the capitalist bug, where any type of work not providing financial income is considered oppressive. The simple truths, taught by Islam, have become too difficult to accept. Humanity should not allow itself to be dazzled by the West and fooled into denigrating women's valuable work. In Islam, the woman's role is very important, perhaps even more important than the role of man. As we have seen the acts of childbearing and suckling - roles which are open only to women - bring immense rewards. Although these abilities are a gift granted by the Creator, the woman exercises an element of choice whether to breast feed as a means of earning this reward. Moreover, as her share of childbearing burden is greater, from the moment of conception onwards, Allah the All-Merciful and All-Wise has made the woman a means by which any individual may attain Paradise, and that Paradise is described as lying at the feet of mothers (see also the *ahadith* in the virtues of mothers, below). The hardships and tribulations suffered by the woman during pregnancy, birth, suckling and childbearing are not wasted. They bring the promise of compensation, reward and a higher status in this world and the next.

MOTHERHOOD

The Prophet (SWS), indicated that a woman's status is further enhanced when she becomes a mother. A man once asked the Prophet (SWS), "Who deserves the best care from me?" The Prophet (SWS) replied, "Your mother". The man then asked, "Then who?" The Prophet (SWS) replied, "Your mother". The man asked "then who?" the Prophet (SWS) replied, "Your mother". The man asked "then who?" the Prophet (SWS) replied, "Then your father".

Islam has taught us the preciousness of the female at every stage of her life in accordance with the Islamic teachings, as to please the Creator. If He is pleased with you, then you will benefit in this life and certainly in the life to come. In order to please Allah, Muslims must follow His commandments. His orders are to be kind and just to women, as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. Muslims who seek to make their women folk happy may expect to earn the pleasure of Allah, and pleasing Allah is the key to Paradise.

"And we have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: (hear the command), 'Show gratitude to Me and to your parents: to Me is (your final) Goal.'"

[Luqman 31:14]

Although Islam tells us to respect both the parents, the mother is given precedence. For months she bears the burden in her womb, suffers the trials of pregnancy. After the exertion of labour, she suckles the baby for up to two years. She sacrifices her own comfort for the sake of her child. So a man has to recognise, first, the rights that Allah has over him, and then the rights of his parents, especially the mother; He must worship Allah, and occupy himself in obeying and serving his parents to the best of his ability, so long as there is no disobedience to Allah, because Allah's rights are

paramount. Everyone must answer to Him, so men and women alike must think as how they will answer to Him for their deeds.

Miqdam (may Allah be happy with him) reported that the Prophet (SWS) said: "O people, listen: Allah the Most High commands you to be good to your mothers, and thereafter to your fathers". Anas (may Allah be happy with him) reported that the Prophet (SWS) said: "Paradise lies at the feet of mothers". What is meant by this is that a believer may attain the pleasure of Allah, and hence Paradise, by pleasing his mother and attending to her needs. Even if one's mother is not a Muslim, one is obliged to treat her well and take care of her, so long as this does not entail any disobedience to Allah.

POLYGyny

The fact that Islam permits more than one wife (polygyny) has been the cause of much ridicule and misinformation on the part of those who are shallow-minded, prejudiced and inimical towards Islam. They have misled many by publishing and promoting distorted facts and advocating practices that have no basis in the true teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

As we have seen, prior to the advent of Islam, women were treated as chattels and objects for the gratification of men. Girls, women and widows were at the mercy of male whims. In pre-Islamic Arabia, man could take as many wives as he wanted and treat them as he pleased. In the modern world this practice continues in the form of frequent divorces, affairs, mistresses and prostitution. Women are left alone to fend for themselves and their children, whilst divorce is so common that there now exist groups such as "Single Again", which cater for the people who have been divorced for the second (or subsequent) time.

Islam did not abolish polygyny, as it recognised that in some cases, polygyny would be necessary and even preferable to the alternatives. However, it strictly limited it, to a maximum of four wives at any one time; there are also stringent conditions to be met by a man who wishes to take a second wife.

The initial intention of this law was to bring some order to the people of Arabia and neighbouring societies, who had been accustomed to unlimited number of wives, and to inaugurate a system that would take care of the needs of women, who had been regarded as good chattels to be acquired with no regard for their own human feelings. Polygyny also sought to solve the problem of existence of large number of widows and orphaned who were left to fend for themselves.

"If you fear that you will not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if you fear that you will not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice".

[al-Nisa' 4:3]

The circumstances in which this *ayah* was revealed illustrate the sincere teaching of Islam regarding polygyny. It was revealed after the battle of Uhud, in which a significant number of Muslims men were martyred and as a consequence, many women were widowed and their children orphaned. To safe guard the new Muslim community, this just and compassionate law was revealed, and it remains in effect until the end of time. Islam requires men to take full care of the orphan's interest and property, but if they felt that they could not do justice to them as custodians, then they were advised to marry other women, up to a maximum of four.

Any man who wishes to take a second wife also has to meet the important condition of fair treatment of all his wives. The *ayah* quoted above includes the command to treat wives equally, and anyone who is unable to do so should marry only one wife. equal treatment includes all social, economical and physical needs. It is very difficult for human beings to be completely fair, a fact which is recognised by the Qur'an:

"You are never able to be fair and just between women, even if it is your ardent desire: but turn not away (from a woman) altogether, so as to leave her (as it were) hanging in the air..."

[al-Nisa' 4:129]

Shaikh ul Islam of Pakistan, Allamah Usmani suggests that as equality in all aspects of one's dealings with women is impossible, a man should do justice as much as is humanly possible. He should not be excessively inclined towards one wife and disinclined towards the other and leave her as if she were in suspension. Such an attitude is cruelty on the part of the husband.

The Prophet (SWS) urged fair treatments of co-wives when he said: "A man who marries more than one woman and then does not deal justly with them will be resurrected with half his faculties paralysed".

It is worth nothing that some Muslim "modernists" have linked the two *ayahs* quoted above and drawn the conclusion that Islam effectively allows only one wife, because al-Nisa 4:129 states that it is not possible to treat two women equally, and therefore men who marry more than one woman are put in an impossible positions and are acting against Islamic teachings. What the modernists fail to recognise is that the equal treatment referred to is only that which is humanly possible. A man may be more fond of one wife than another, but he is not allowed to make this fact obvious,

and he must always ensure that the "less favoured" wife is taken care of properly. On no occasion did the Prophet (SWS) ever forbid his Companions to take second or subsequent wives. In case of men who had more than four wives when they embraced Islam, such as Ghaylan ibn Umayyah al-Thaqafi, the Prophet (SWS) asked them to keep four wives and to release the others. The "modernists" have played into the hands of the enemies of Islam by trying to appease non-Muslims and present far fetched interpretations.

Polygyny in Islam is restricted and may be practised only when certain strict conditions are met. It is also the exception rather than the norm in Muslim societies throughout the world. A world health Organisation census has shown that less than 5% of Muslim men practice polygyny. This is in contrast to other groups in countries such as India, where 15.25% of men from tribal religious groups practise polygyny; 7.97% of Buddhists, 6.72% of Jains and 5.8% of Hindus have plural marriages. The percentage of polygynous marriages in India is the lowest among Muslims, at 5.7%.

The figure give an indication of the level of misinformation and stereotyping perpetrated by the Western media. Not only have Westerners coloured themselves with this jaundiced view, but some Muslims are also questioning the teachings of their own religion. It is very important for scholars to educate the people and provide them with correct information, to counteract the false picture of Islam and Muslims given by the Western media, and to enable them to understand their own faith more fully.

It is very sad to see the "modernist" propagating monogamy and seeking to change the teachings of the Holy Qur'an by suggesting that polygyny was intended to be practised only in case of war and the like. These

people came up with such pathetic excuses in an attempt to appease the enemies of Islam to no avail.

The topic of polygyny cannot be considered complete without some discussion in the Prophet's (SWS) practice and the historical context in which he and his wives lived. This is a topic which has received much attention from the west, and about which many Muslims are confused. It is a subject which is worthy of an entire book in itself. Here the topic will be covered briefly.

It should be noted that in the seventh - century Arabia, adultery, rape and fornication were the norm. Men could have as many wives as they wanted, with no obligation to care for them or attend to their needs as human beings. In this environment, the Prophet (SWS) remained chaste from the beginning. At the age of 25, he married Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), who was a widow 40 years of age and was thus his senior by 15 years. Their marriage was a happy and harmonious one, and remained so until Khadijah passed away some 25 years later. By that time the Prophet (SWS) was 50 years of age and bearing the great responsibility of Prophethood.

The Prophet's (SWS) second wife was Sawdah (may Allah be pleased with her. She and her husband had been among the earliest converts to Islam. They suffered great hardships at the hands of Quraysh (inhabitants of Mecca), so the Prophet (SWS) had instructed them to migrate to Abyssinia (Ethiopia). There, her husband passed away, and Sawdah suffered much hardship as a widow in a foreign land. The Prophet (SWS) knew that he was responsible for the welfare of his followers, so he proposed marriage to Sawdah. This marriage brought relief, respect and status to her, and provided the Prophet (SWS) with companionship and assistance in raising his children from his marriage to Khadijah. At the time of her

marriage to the Prophet (SWS), Swdah was around 55 years old.

In order to create blood ties and to show his love and respect to his closest Companion who had given up this world for the sake of Islam, the Prophet (SWS) gave two of his daughters in marriage to Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) and 'Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him); he also accepted in marriage 'A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) and Hafsa (may Allah be pleased with her), the daughters of Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) and Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) respectively. His marriage to these two noble women not only enhanced his close ties with his Companions, both these women were later to offer deep insight into the Prophet's (SWS) life. They were responsible for narrating over half of the *ahadith* which now form the basis of the Islamic code of conduct. 'A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) alone is known to have narrated over two thousand *ahadith*.

Zaynab (may Allah be pleased with her) was a cousin of the Prophet (SWS). She had previously been married to Zaid (may Allah be pleased with him) the freed slave and adopted son of the Prophet (SWS). This marriage has been arranged by the Prophet (SWS), but the couple were never happy in their marriage and it became apparent that they were not compatible. At the Prophet (SWS) insistence, they stayed together for several years, but in the end Zaid could not tolerate it any longer, and decided to set Zainab free from the marriage contract. The fact that an ex-slave had divorced a woman of noble Quraysh tribe became a subject of much gossip among the pagans and the weaker members of the Muslim community. Not surprisingly, Zaynab confined herself to her quarters and it fell to the Prophet (SWS) to relieve her of her misery. He married her, and she was around 38 years of age at that time. This action achieved two ends. One was to demonstrate that Islam makes no distinction

between classes, race or status, as the Qur'an teaches that the noblest person in the sight of Allah is the person who is most pious. The second was that adopted sons were not to be counted as blood relatives, as has previously been the custom in Arabia.

"...Nor has He (Allah) made your adopted sons your sons. Such is (only) your (manner of) speech by your mouth. But Allah tells (you) the Truth and He shows the (right) way".

[al-Ahzab 33:4]

In order to have the tribes of Arabia under Islam, it was deemed necessary to have blood tie with them, which could be accomplished through marriage. Hence some of the Prophet (SWS) marriages were arranged to establish inter-tribal ties and to further the cause of unity. The Prophet's (SWS) marriage to Juwayriyah (may Allah be pleased with her) led to her tribe of Banu Mustaliq, who had been among the fiercest enemies of Islam, freeing all their Muslim prisoners. The whole tribe later entered into Islam. Maymunah (may Allah be pleased with him) came from the tribe of Najd, who had murdered the emissaries sent to them by the Prophet (SWS). After his marriage to Maymunah, however, their attitude changed and the Najd became favourable towards Islam.

In all, the Prophet (SWS) had eleven wives, of whom two - Kahdijah and Zaynab - passed away in his own life time. After the ayah restricting the number of wives to four was revealed, he contracted no further marriages, but his nine remaining wives were regarded as "mothers of the faithful" and as no other man would be permitted to marry them if he divorced them he kept all his wives on the grounds of compassion.

With the exception of 'A'ishah all of his wives were widows or divorcees. His marriages were all for political

reasons or were contracted in order to set examples of compassion, as in the case of Zaynab and Sawdah. His polygynous marriage all took place rather late in his life, from the age of 55; taking into account the fact that the responsibility of conveying the message of Islam to the whole of mankind was his to bear, these marriages show the extent of his compassionate and caring nature. He was in a position of great political power, and could have had all the worldly comforts and carnal pleasures had he desired these. However he chose to marry widows and older women - a sure indication of his upright moral character and desire to set the highest example to his followers.

DIVORCE

The Prophet (SWS) said: "Divorce is the most hateful and all lawful things in the sight of Allah".

Although Islam emphasis the importance of marriage, it is a humane and practical religion which recognises the fact that there may be situations in which dissolving the marriage bond may be in the better interest of the individuals concerned and of society at large. Divorce is allowed as a last resort, rather as amputation or major surgery may be unpleasant but a necessary step needed to save a person's life. If divorce was forbidden, then animosity and adultery may become rampant. To save individuals and society form such evils divorce has been permitted. However, it is not a step to be taken lightly or hastily. Sincere attempts at reconciliation are to be made first and - as in the case of marriage - the rights and the welfare of the woman are to upheld.

Imam al Ghazzali (b.1058 CE) who is honoured with the title of Hujjat al Islam 'The Proof of Islam' states, the greatest care should be taken to avoid divorce, for, though divorce is permitted, yet Allah disapproves of it. If divorce becomes essential then the woman should be divorced kindly, not through anger or contempt, and not

without a valid reason. After divorce the man should give his former wife a present and not announce to others any of her shortcomings.

The Qur'an advises a couple who are facing difficulties in their marriage to appoint arbiters:

"If you fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family and the other from hers; if they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation..."

[al - Nisa'4:35]

But if the attempts at reconciliation fail, then the couple are permitted to separate,

"But if they disagree (and must part), Allah will provide abundance for all from His All-Reaching bounty..."

[al-Nisa'4:130]

In order to dissolve a marriage, it is essential to pronounce a declaration of *talaq*. There are three types of *talaq* (divorce) that are practised among Muslims.

1. *Talaq ahsan* -(the preferable type of divorce): After issuing one pronouncement of divorce, the couple wait for the *'iddah* (waiting period, which consists of three menstrual cycles of the wife usually three months). During this time all possible attempts at reconciliation should be made. The husband may take his wife back at any time during the *'iddah* period. During the period of *'iddah* the man must oblige either keep the woman in the same home or at least furnish her with a comfortable apartment, which is easily accessible to him. Further the man must provide for her as if no divorce has taken place. At the end of the *'iddah* or the waiting period if reconciliation has failed then the marriage is broken.

2. *Talaq hasan* - is a divorce where a man pronounces *talaq* to his wife in three consecutive state of purity.

3. *Talaq bid'i* - (*bid'i* or innovative divorce) is *talaq* where the husband issues three pronouncement of divorce at one time. According to the majority of the jurist this *talaq* is valid but it is against the spirit of the Shari'ah and so the man is an offender in the eyes of the law.

Talaq bid'i is considered a serious act against the Islamic teachings. Hazrat Umar, a close companion of the Prophet (SWS) and the second Calipha of Islam, used to whip the husband who pronounced divorce thrice at one and the same sitting.

"When you divorce women, and they fulfil the term of their ('Iddah), either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms; but do not take them back to injure them, (or) to take undue advantage; if any one does that, he wrongs his own soul. do not treat Allah's Signs as a jest, but solemnly rehearse Allah's favours on you, and the fact that He sent down to you the Book and Wisdom, for your instruction. And fear Allah, and know that Allah is well-acquainted with all things.

[*al-Baqarah* 2:231]

During the *'iddah* period, the couple should stay together, which gives greater opportunity of reconciliation. The woman cannot be evicted from her marital home unless she has committed in indecent act such as adultery.

"...And fear Allah, your lord: and turn them not out of their houses, nor shall they (themselves) leave, except in case they are guilty of some open lewdness, those are limits set by Allah: and any who transgresses the limits of Allah, does verily wrong his (own) soul: you

know not if perchance Allah will bring about thereafter some new situation."

[*al-Talaq* 65:1]

When it comes to divorce, Islam treads the middle ground, and safeguards the rights of women. It neither prohibits divorce, thereby imprisoning women as is the case in Hinduism and historical Christianity; neither does it regard divorce as insignificant, as in pre-Islamic Arabia and in the present time.

The right to divorce is not restricted only to the husband. The woman can also seek a dissolution if the marriage by means of a process known as *fask*, whereby she applies to the *Qadi* (Judge) for an annulment of the marriage. The wife may seek *fask* in several cases, including: apostasy (renunciation of Islam) by the husband; lack of equality of status (*kafa'ah*); lack of compatibility; spoiling of marriage (*Fasad*); incurable impotence on the part of the husband and if the husband ill treats the woman (*nushuz*). The above cases present valid grounds for a woman to seek divorce from her husband. If the couple comes to a mutual agreement for separation and get divorced then this is called *khul*.

"If the wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves; and such settlement is best..."

[*al-Nisa'* 4:128]

Islam has decreed justice for both sexes in the case of divorce. Although the act of divorce is disliked, it is permitted for the sake of weak human souls who cannot always find comfort and solace in the marriage relationship. This is mainly due to lower tolerance levels, high expectations in others and needless desires.

MODESTY

As already indicated, Islam is a complete way of life, and it has not left out any aspect of human life in its prescription for living. It is to this religion's credit that not only does it point out the dangers of life, but it offers practical solutions to them. One such area is that of modesty, which in the broadest sense means humility, restraint in manner and conduct, avoiding excess and presenting an unpretentious appearance. This is the way of life taught by the Qur'an and exemplified by the Prophet (SWS).

In humanity the worst crime after murder is *zina* (adultery), and the punishment dictated by Islam for adultery is equal to that meted out for murder. This indicates the enormity of illicit sexual conduct and the disgust with which this crime is viewed by Islam.

'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud reported, "I asked the Messenger of Allah (SWS), what is the greatest sin?' he replied, 'To set up rivals with Allah by worshipping others although He alone has created you'. I asked 'What next?' He said, 'To kill your child lest it should share your food'. I asked, 'What next?' He said, 'To commit adultery with the wife of your neighbour'."

The reason behind the prohibition of *Zina* is not to "spoil the fun" for people, but because *Zina* is the cause of much social chaos, upheaval and suffering for individuals, families, societies and nations. *Zina* destroys the moral fibre of a person, creates an atmosphere of mistrust and deceit, and leads to the birth of illegitimate children who must bear the stigma of their birth. Pornography, prostitution, rape abortions, divorce and single-parent families are the by products of *Zina*, as now is all too evident in Britain and other Western societies. Families are torn apart, disease are spreading people's character become twisted and distorted. The Qur'an warns us:

"Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)"

[al-Isra' 17:31]

To protect the moral well being of mankind, Islam lays down laws which restrict, if not stop, the things that may lead to zina.

"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for (Amongst) them: and Allah is well aquatinted with all that they do.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments..."

[al-Nur 24:30 31]

The first step on the road to zina is sight. It is only after a person has had a glance that his desire are inflamed. As men are generally more aggressive in this way, the Qur'an addresses the command of lowering the gaze to male first. The believing men and women are restricted from gazing at one another, as this is the gateway to greater sin.

The Prophet (SWS) said:

"the zina of the legs is walking towards an unlawful act, the zina of hands is touching and patting, and the zina of the eyes is casting passionate glances at those who are forbidden to you".

Being a practical religion, Islam recognises the fact that a person has to look around to be aware of his or her environment and to see where he or she is going, in which case there is no sin if a person's glance happens to fall upon a person of opposite sex. It is the second glance that is punishable. The Prophet (SWS) advised Ali,

"O Ali, do not allow your first glance to be followed by a second, because the first glance is permitted for you but the second is not".

In other ahadith the Prophet (SWS) warned Muslims against putting themselves into situations where temptation may overwhelm them and the potential for sin is increased:

"Let no male stranger sit in privacy with a female stranger, for the third among them is Satan".

"Do not go to the houses of women whose husbands are absent".

There are exceptions to this prohibition on looking at members of the opposite sex. In the case of medical examinations or treatment, deciding on a marriage partner, recording evidence or carrying out criminal investigation, the rulings are relaxed somewhat, but proper conduct and modesty must still be adhered to.

The free mixing of men and women from the time they become sexually aware to the time they are no longer sexually active is prohibited. On the face of it, this may appear rather harsh, but if we examine the effects of unrestricted contact between the sexes, the person who is blessed with understanding and insight will soon see the wisdom behind this restriction. Today in the Western world, every type of crime that results from the free mixing of the sexes is on the increase.

Islamic modesty encompasses not only behaviour, but also dress. It is well-known that appearances count, and that clothes can make a "statement" about the person. Muslims are required to dress modestly and conceal their private parts. The Qur'an reminds us that after the error committed by Adam and Eve, they became aware of their nakedness and shame, so clothing was given as a means of concealing the body:

"O children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness - that is the best. Such are among the Signs of Allah, that they may receive admonition!"

[al-A'raf 7:26]

A prominent commentator, from Asia, on the Holy Qur'an, Hazrat Shah Saheb interprets this ayah as meaning that the enemy (i.e., Satan) tripped them of their 'Paradisian' garments, then Allah taught them the art of dressing, so that henceforth they should wear only the garments of piety..

Allamah Usmani points out that Allah has bestowed many natural resources for human use. He has created cotton, wool, feathers and other materials which man utilises and makes into clothing and other items. When we reflect upon these bounties of Allah, we easily recognise Allah's favours and become thankful to Him. Moreover the dress of piety will help us to regain the long-lost Paradisian dress.

Muslims are commanded to cover the 'awrah, which in the case of men extends from the navel to the knee, and in the case of women includes the whole body except face, hands and (according to some Hanafi scholars) feet. Muslims should wear clothes that are loose-fitting, thick (non-transparent) and simple (not ostentatious and gaudy).

Although the man's 'awrah is from the navel to the knee, the sunnah (practice) of the Prophet (SWS) is to wear clothes that cover the body from the shoulder to just above the ankles. The 'awrah is the minimum area to be covered in cases where a person may be too poor to afford more extensive garments.

The guidelines regarding women's dress come straight from the Qur'an:

"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' father, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brother's son, or their sisters' sons, or their women or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O believers! Turn all together towards Allah, that you may attain bliss
[al-Nur 24:31]

"O Prophet! Tell your wives and 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 (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

[al-Ahzab 33:59]

The outer garment (*jilbab*) is one that covers the person from head to foot. A well-known hadith further describes the dress of the Muslim woman: "When a woman reaches the age of maturity, it is not lawful for her to uncover any part of her body except the face and this -" and he the Prophet (SWS) put his hand on his wrist joint so as to leave only a little space between the place he gripped and the palm.

Not only do the women have cover themselves in front of the men who are strangers to them, but they are also required to lower their gaze. Umm Salamah reported that she and Maymunah (who were both wives of the

The Fragrance of East

Prophet (SWS)) were with the Prophet (SWS) when the son of Umm Maktum, who was blind, came to speak with him. The Prophet (SWS) told his wife to observe *hhijab* in front of the visitor. Umm Salamah said, "O Messenger of Allah (SWS), he is a blind man and will not see us". The Prophet (SWS) said, "He may be blind but you are not, and do you not see him"?

The main aim of the *hijab* is to restrain individuals of the opposite sex from being unduly attracted to one another. However, *hijab* has numerous secondary advantages that bring benefits to women. It gives women their own identity and their own sphere, which exists parallel to that of men. Women are thus freed from the Western - style social pressure in which women are expected to look impeccable and sexually attractive at all times, and they are relieved of the "necessity" of spending large amounts of time and money in visiting beauty parlours and applying chemicals, lotions, potions and scents to their bodies for the purpose of gratifying men. Above all it allows Muslim women to have an identity, an ability to express their personality and intellect of their own, independently of men's whims and desires.

The Prophet (SWS) issued a warning which offers food for thought for all of us:

"Those women who appear naked even though they are wearing clothes, who allure and are allured by others, and who walk in a provocative manner, will never enter Paradise, or even smell its fragrance".

ECONOMICS

"And in no way covet those things in which Allah has bestowed His gifts more freely in some of you than on others: to men is allotted what they earn and to women what they earn: but ask Allah of His bounty. For Allah has full knowledge of every thing".

[al-Nisa' 4:32]

Through Islam women gained economic liberation and independence from their menfolk. For the first time in human history, Islam bestowed upon women a legal economic entity. A woman could own, manage, inherit, distribute and sell her own property as she wished as in her own right. Her assets remained hers, and marriage or divorce did not alter the facts. The Islamic ruling and practice with regard to woman's economic rights was light-years ahead of any Western equal rights manifesto. Islam brought these rights fourteen hundred years ago, long before equal rights were thought of or campaigned for in other lands.

In the West, women's emergence into the economic arena only took hold during the two World Wars when, with most men conscripted for the war effort, the need of labour was so acute that there was no other option but to bring women out of the home. However, it has taken much heartache and a great deal of struggle and striving to bring women anywhere near a position of equal economic status. Even today, the Western woman is economically bound to her husband, who can demand a share from her earnings for ongoing domestic expenses and, in the case of divorce, can claim a share of her savings. In contrast, the Muslim wife is entitled to be supported by her husband, no matter how rich she may be in her own right; whilst she is a child, she is entitled to be supported by her father and in the old age to be supported by her children. The Muslim woman is relieved of the burden of having to earn a living, and she is allowed to dispose of her earnings in whatever manner she chooses.

In the case of inheritance, the Muslim woman is allotted a share equal to half of that given to her male counterpart. This is often cited as an example of Islam's un-fairness to women, but the fact warrants closer examination. In many societies, including pre-Islamic Arabia, wealth that was to be inherited was

distributed by means of a written will which in many cases deprived women and those in weak position of their share; this is still the case in some parts of the world. Islam offers, as it were, a "ready-made will": the Qur'an spells out the Islamic injunctions regarding inheritance, and gives women the right to inherit from husbands, father and brothers:

"From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property is small or large - a determinate share".

[al- Nisa 4:7]

The reason for men being given a portion twice as much as that given to women is that the men are responsible for taking care of the womenfolk: A man may be required to spend on his mother, sisters or other female relatives. A woman is entitled to dispose of her share of the inheritance as she wishes, and is under no obligation to support anyone, even herself. When these facts are borne in mind, the just and equitable position of Islam is vindicated.

Islam has given rights to the women in all aspects of life, including some where women in other cultures have no rights even today. Many of the instances which critics point to as being unfair to women are, upon closer inspection, found to be favourable to women and may even be seen as giving them preferential treatment.

THE CONCEPT OF PROPHETHOOD IN ISLAM

Abrar Ahmad Islahi

Our universe with all its wonderful natural phenomena and beautiful objects gives us an inspiration to pause and ponder over some vital questions like: Who created this universe and what was the purpose behind it? The Holy Qur'an seeks to provide an answer: *"If thou wert to question them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' They would be sure to reply. 'They were created by (Him), the Exalted in Power, Full of Knowledge'".* Qur'an 43:9

Every human being who has even slight rational faculty is bound to come up with the inescapable conclusion that the universe has a creator who is Almighty and every object in this universe is his creation.

We also know that man has a natural inclination for religion. Throughout the ages, people have been following a specific form of worship and religion. These religions might have propounded different views on aspects of faith and life, but they are in total agreement on the fact that our universe has a creator. Allah the almighty honoured the human being with distinguished qualities and gave him necessary abilities that he required to meet the needs of his every day life. Wisdom is one of these qualities which was given to him. Allah also gave him the freedom of choice among the different options available to him. With his insight and wisdom, man is able to cope with the physical and material requirements of his life. The mankind is not similar to the animal kind, instead he has special intellectual faculties and other behavioural qualities which animals do not possess.

However, there are certain areas of life for which solutions can not be found by reasoning alone. Matters like faith, choice between good and bad as well as the

knowledge of God and the mystery of life after death are such complex issues which need special guidance. If that guidance comes from none else than the Creator the Almighty Himself. There lies the assurance of success in this world and salvation in the Hereafter.

What is Prophethood.

The institution of Prophethood was designed by Allah for dissemination the Divine guidance to His servants through prophets, His chosen slaves. Prophethood is as old as mankind itself. The man was in need for the spiritual guidance since the beginning of his life on this earth. Adam was the first human being and was the first to receive the divine guidance, which he later conveyed to his children as commanded by Allah. The Holy Qur'an states:

"Allah did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of Imaran above all people"
Qur'an 3:33

Man will ever be in need of the Divine guidance till his existence on this planet and the final book of Allah's Revelation; the Qur'an will continue to provide its valuable guidance.

Prophets sent for the guidance of mankind were themselves mortal humans and were the best people of their communities. Prophethood is Allah's special grace and blessings which He bestows on His chosen servants. No one can attain Prophethood through intellectual effort of religious devotion. It is not hereditary. Allah confers this unique honour on those people whom His infinite wisdom, considers capable to hold His trust.

The Qur'an confirms this fact:

"Allah chooses for His special Mercy (Prophethood) whom He will, for Allah is Lord of grace abounding" Qur'an 2:105.

The prophets were emissaries of Allah and were a link between the creator and His servants. They received Allah's messages through revelations to convey them to their peoples which were exemplified through their conduct. The guidance from Allah required to be explained and acted upon by Allah's prophets and messengers who received it through various means from Allah:

- Through direct speech conveyed by the Angel appearing in the human form;
- Through divine inspiration;
- Through their earnest dreams

All these means are called revelations and are considered as extra ordinary means.

Number of Prophets.

The prophets were sent to every nation and community.

Allah says in His Holy Book:

"And there never was a people without a warner having lived among them" Qur'an 24:35

Hence, it is natural that the number of the prophets who were sent to the mankind in the various periods of time, should be very large. However the number of prophets whose name is mentioned in the Qur'an are 25 and they are following:

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Adam | 11. Yusuf (Joseph) |
| 2. Idris | 12. Shuaib |
| 3. Nuh (Noah) | 13. Ayub (Job) |
| 4. Hud | 14. Dhul-Kifl |
| 5. Salih | 15. Musa (Moses) |
| 6. Ibrahim (Abraham) | 16. Harun (Aaron) |
| 7. Isma'il (Ishmael) | 17. Dawud (David) |
| 8. Lut (Lot) | 18. Sulaiman (Solomon) |
| 9. Is'haq (Isaac) | 19. Elias (Elijah) |
| 10. Ya'qub (Jacob) | 20. Al-Yassa (Elisha) |

23. Yahya (John)

25. Muhammad.

24. Issa (Jesus)

8 of them have been mentioned in four verses 83-86 of Surah 6 (*An'am*). The names of remaining seventeen prophets have been mentioned at other places in the Glorious Qur'an. *"There are many prophets whose names have not been mentioned in the Qur'an which itself states: 'Of some messengers, we have already told thee the story; of others, we have not'".*

Qur'an 164:4

Most of these Prophets who are mentioned in the Qur'an were known to the Arabic speaking people because Allah's Last Book was sent down in Arabic language. Moreover, the regions these prophets inhabited, happened to be close to each other. They were mainly in the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Palestine and Egypt.

Allah's prophets enjoyed various ranks and status as the Qur'an explained:

"Those Messengers we endowed with gifts some above others; to some of them Allah spoke; others He raised to degrees (of honour); to Jesus the son of Mary We gave clear (signs) and strengthened him with the Holy spirit". Qur'an 2:253

Some of them have been described in the Glorious Qur'an as the Resolute Prophets: *"Therefore patiently preserve, as did the messengers of firm resolution".* Qur'an 46:35 They were so described because they possessed strong will and determination, made great sacrifices and bravely faced difficult conditions and adversities in the midst of which, they accomplished their Prophetic duties. These resolute Prophets were Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them). All of them were to put to the hard test in the various ways during their times.

be upon them). All of them were to put to the hard test in the various ways during their times.

Prophet Muhammad (SWS) was the best of all the prophets and enjoys the most exalted rank because he is the last of all the Prophets and was sent for the whole mankind.

Duties of Prophets

The Prophets accomplished the following duties:

- They called the people to worship Allah the Almighty.
- They conveyed the commands of Allah to the people.
- They led the people in the affairs of the day-to-day life and guided them to the straight path.
- They reminded the people to try for the real success and the ultimate salvation after the end of their term on this earth.

Prophets and Miracles

The prophets did not claim that they were gods. They only said that they were human beings like other people and the only distinction they enjoyed was that they were messengers of God. However, they were supported by miracles which represented Allah's Signs so that His message could be delivered forcefully to the people. The Holy Qur'an has reported some of these miracles. Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) was cast by his opponents into a pit of fire which was cooled and was made safe for him. Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) produced a water spring from a rock stone. His staff turned into a big serpent to swallow the snakes of Pharaoh's magicians. For him, a passageway was opened in the midst of the sea. He and his people passed through the sea but when Pharaoh and his forces tried to cross, they were drowned. Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) raised alive the dead from their graves and cured the blind and the leper.

Prophet Muhammad (SWS) also had many miracles. One of them was his Me'raj - the midnight journey to the high Heavens. The most important of his miracle is the Qur'an, the Last book of the divine guidance, that was given to him by Allah for all times and all peoples. The Arab idolaters who were opponents of Prophet Muhammad (SWS) were renowned for linguistic eloquence and poetic genius and were proud of that. The Holy Qur'an challenged them to produce just a Surah (chapter) or Ayah (verse) of its like. They smugly failed in this endeavour.

Infallibility of Prophets.

Since prophets were Allah's people from among the entire mankind and were sent down for its guidance, it is quite rational that should serve as models for their followers in their outlook and behaviour. They should be truthful and trustworthy and must be free from all sins, moral shortcomings and bad habits in order to win the trust of the people around them and be able to lead them to the right path. Thus Prophets are infallible and protected by Allah the Almighty from all sins.

If we look at the followers of other religion, we find that the Jews have smeared the character of their Prophets, blackening their reputations. Their religious books narrate story of a prophet who drank wine and committed fornication with his daughters; of another prophet who sent his commander to the battle - front in order to marry his wife. Such accusations did great harm to the status and reputation of Allah's prophet.

On the other hand, in Christianity, its followers committed over glorification of Allah's Prophet Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) and made him son of God because Christ had no father. They like others believe that human being is begotten by Allah the Almighty through a man woman, however they could not perceive

that Adam was created without a man or woman, and eve was created from Adam but without a woman, so what is so incomprehensible if Allah created Prophet Christ from a woman (mother) and without the agency of a man (father). In Christ's birth, God's extraordinary way of creation of humans reached its culmination:

- Adam's birth without a man and woman.
- Eve's birth without a woman.
- Jesus Christ's birth without a man.

Christian's made him the son of God and thus went astray.

But Muslims have a balanced view of Allah's prophets as their faith, Islam, accords them due respect as human beings and presents them as exemplary models for mankind. Muslims do not degrade any prophet as Jews did, nor do they over glorify their prophets so as to make them gods as the Christians did. There is another point for consideration in respect of the prophets:

- Muslims believe in all the prophets including Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be on them)
- Christians believe in Prophets Moses and Jesus (peace be upon them) and do not believe in Prophet Muhammad (SWS);
- Jews believe in Prophet Moses and do not believe in Prophets Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them)

This gives a clear perspective of the prophets' position in the major religions of the world. The Muslims have been strictly forbidden to discriminate among the prophets of Allah the Almighty.

"Sayye: "We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to all prophets from their

Lord: We make no difference between one another of them: and we submit to Allah." Qur'an 2:136

"Those who deny Allah and His messengers and wish to separate between Allah and His Messengers, saying: We believe in some but reject others and wish to take course midway. They are in truth Unbelievers, a humiliating punishment". Qur'an 4:150-151

Impact Of Prophethood on Humanity.

When a prophet called his community to worship Allah alone and live according to the Divine guidance, free from tyranny, exploitation and corruption, his call was welcomed by a section of the community which was socially oppressed and economically weak. He was opposed by others who were socially and economically weak. He was opposed by others who were socially and economically well-placed and politically powerful and thought that the prophet's call would undermine their interest in times ahead. They denied Allah and the institution of Prophethood altogether and bitterly opposed the Prophet's mission. Then there was persecution meted out to the prophet by Allah's enemies who continued their war against His prophet and his teachings until they were punished and destroyed by Allah. The Prophet and his followers ultimately came out victorious with the help of Allah.

This story is repeatedly told in the Holy Qur'an in case of every prophet and his community. One might ask: the Holy Qur'an was given to Prophet Muhammad (SWS) then why are the stories of the previous prophets narrated by it? The past stories of Allah's prophets have been told in the Qur'an because of the following purpose:

- To reaffirm that Muhammad (SWS) is a prophet of Allah.

- To convince that Prophet Muhammad (SWS) was given the same message that was given to the previous prophets of Allah as the Almighty says in His Book:
"We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers" Qur'an 4:163

He says in another place:

"The same religion has He established for you as that which he enjoined on Noah-the which We have sent by inspiration to thee-and that which We enjoined of Abraham, Moses and Jesus: namely that ye should remain steadfast in religion and make no divisions therein."

Qur'an 42:13

- To correct the wrong information about Allah's prophet, incorporated in the religious books of Jews and Christians through their deliberate tampering and distortions.
- To derive lessons from the stories of past nations who were given the Divine message but had the audacity to treat it with contempt ridicule and were punished by Allah for their transgression.

In this way, the Holy Qur'an highlights the role and function of the Prophets placing them in the right perspective after deliberating distortions and interpolations made by Jews and Christians in the scriptures revealed to their prophets.

Courtesy: MWL Journal

A Hadith

Hasten to do good before
you are overtaken by
perplexing adversity, corrupting
prosperity, disabling disease,
babbling dotage and sudden
Death

THE NOBLE QUR'AN ON THE END OF HUMAN LIFE

Abul Fadal Mohsin Ebrahim

The *Noble Qur'an*, emphasising the universality of death, uses the expression "*every soul is bound to taste death*", thus signifying that all that exists will die but "*forever will abide the Sustainer's self*".

In several passages, the *Noble Qur'an* affirms that both life and death are in the control of Allah. For example, it states:

"Say (O Muhammad): It is Allah who gives you life, then causes you to die..."

According to Ibn Kathir, the renown mufasssir (exegetist) of the *Noble Qur'an*, this verse was revealed in order to impress upon the Quraysh, who denied the existence of life after death and attributed all earthly events to Time (*al-dahr*), that the Allah is One Who exercise control over everything.

The *Noble Qur'an* makes mention of the *ruh* (the spirit) being breathed into every human being during the process of being created as cited in the following verse:

"Thus, He (Allah) begins the creation of man out of clay; then He creates him to be begotten out of the essence of a humble fluid; and then He forms him in accordance with what he is meant to be, and breathes into him of His spirit (ruh)..."

The *Noble Qur'an* also informs us that the death occurs when the *nafs* (the soul) is separated from the body as in the following citation:

"It is Allah that takes the souls (*anfus*) (of human beings) at death"

The Arabic operative verb *yatawaffa* has been used in the above mentioned Qur'anic verse in order to designate death and this term implies both 'seizing' or 'causing to die'.

It may be appropriate here to point out that although a distinction ought to be made between the two Qur'anic terms, namely *ruh* and *nafs*, depending upon the Qur'anic context, these two terms are also synonymous i.e. even if they are translated as spirit and soul respectively, they also imply one and the same thing i.e. the soul. This has been pointed out by al-Husayn bin Muhammad al-Damaghani in his *Qamus al-Qur'an*. He explains the term *ruh* has been used in six contexts in the *Noble Qur'an*, i.e. to refer to the following: *al-rahmah* (mercy) as in (58:22); *al-malak* (angel) as in (78:38); the Arch-Angel Jibril (A.S.) as in (16:102 and 97:4); *al-wahy* (the Revelation) as in (16:2); Prophet Isa bin Maryam (A.S.) as in (4:171); and life in all animate beings that possess souls as in (17:85).

The terms *nafs*, on the other hand, has been used in ten contexts in the *Noble Qur'an*, i.e. to refer to the following: in its plural form *al-anfus* to denote *al-qulub* (sing. *al-qalb*) (the hearts) as in (15:23); in its plural form *min anfusikum* to designate from among yourself as in (9:128); *al-insan* (human being) as in (5:45); *al-ruh* (the spirit) as in (6:93); in its plural form *anfusakum* to designate *ahl dinkum* (people belonging to your faith) as in (4:29); the self as in (4:66); *al-uqubah* (the punishment) as in (3:28); *al-umm* (the mother) as in (24:12) and *al-ghaybb* (the unseen) as in (5:116).

In the *Hadith* literature we come across an incident whereby the Prophet Muhammad (SWS) came to Abu Salamah(R.A.) as he died. He noticed that his eyes were fixedly open. So he closed them and said, "when the soul (*ruh*) is taken away the sight follows it...." This further substantiates the fact that the two terms *ruh* and *nafs* are synonymous.

In so far as death (*al-mawat*) as an event is concerned, the *Noble Qur'an* prefixes it with the verbs namely *qaddara* and *qada* as in the following citations:

"We have (indeed) decreed (qaddaran) that death shall be (ever-present) among you..."

"Those on whom He has passed the decree (qada) of death, He keeps back (from returning to life)..."

From the Arabic English Lexicon one gathers that the verb *qaddara* pertains to Allah decreeing, ordaining or pre determining the occurrence of death and according to Thomas O'Shaughnessy the verb *qada* indicates "the accomplishment of the divine predetermination."

Death as a process is signified by the Qur'anic term *ajal* as is evident in the following citation:

"But to no soul will Allah grant respite when the time appointed (for it) (ajaluha) has come: and Allah is well acquainted with all that you do."

The Arabic English Lexicon explains that the terms *ajal* implies "the duration of life: and its end: a man's life being thus termed: and his death by which it terminates: the assigned or appointed duration of the life of man".

Thus according to the *Noble Qur'an*, death is something that is predetermined and fixed by Allah as categorically stated in the following verse:

"And no human being can die save by Allah's leave, at a term pre-ordained"

CONCLUSION

Death is undoubtedly a natural phenomenon. Where there is life, death is sure to follow. According to the Qur'anic teaching, the moment of death would be at the time when the soul is separated from the body. But one has to concede that the *Noble Qur'an* does not in anyway tell us anything about the nature of soul nor its location in the human body, hence the dilemma of Muslims in so far as brain death is concerned. Referring specifically to the *ruh* (the spirit or soul) the *Noble Qur'an* simply states the following:

"They ask you (O Muhammad) concerning the ruh (spirit or soul). Say: Knowledge of the spirit (or soul) belongs to My Lord. Little indeed is the knowledge you are given (O men!)"

Commenting on the above verse, *al-shahid* Sayyid Qutub states in his celebrated *Fi Zilal al Qur'an* that man has (through his God-given ingenuity) invented many undreamt-of things and discovered many unheard of natural phenomena. But he is confused about the soul and remains helpless in solving its mystery in view of the fact that it is beyond the reach/range of human perception. Man is unacquainted with the reality of the soul, its property and nature. He is unaware of its routes of arrival and departure (into and out of human body). He does not know where it comes from, where it is (located) and where it goes to (upon separation from the body). His knowledge pertaining to the unknown realm is limited to what Allah makes known to us through the medium of revelation-observation, experimentation or speculation.