SOME MISCONCEPTIONS
ABOUT

ISLAM AND MUSLIM WOMEN

IN THE WEST

By Fakhr Siddiqui

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To my
Sons and Daughters
and their Children,
a majority of whom
are now living in
North America.

Second Edition

Mr. Fakhr Siddiqui was a very wise and literary person though by profession he was an engineer. I had a very good relationship with my Taya (Father's elder brother). I also belonged to the engineering side, probably this was the reason for mental compatibility among us. He always analyzed things in a logical and practical manner. He was very conscious about time and utilized it well. He has written several books that would matter to common folks.

"SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM AND MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE WEST" the first edition of the original hard cover book was a concise and comprehensive booklet which answers some misconceptions about the religion of Islam and the role of women in a very simple and rational manner. This masterpiece was created by Mr. Fakhr Siddiqui. He spent many hours collecting information from various libraries and books in an age where there were no Internet search engines.

"SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM AND MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE WEST-Second Edition" of this book was created as a soft copy, so it can be published and reviewed in digital media format. I hope and wish that people are able to benefit from it, especially those who have questions about Islamic values. This concise edition will cater to people who do not have patience for heavy reading. We have also published an Urdu translation of this book and is also available online.

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Acknowledgment

"I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Allah (SWT) for making it possible to publish this book after so many years of trying. Also, my heartfelt gratitude to Shahid Iqbal and BBCL for their tremendous help in making the publication of this book a reality."

Mahmooda Siddiqui
(Wife of Fakhr Siddiqui)
March 2010,
Karachi, Pakistan

Foreword

During the last decade, the world has become a small village as a result of technological developments in transportation and communication. Beginning the year supersonic Concorde airplane made a maiden flight from Toulouse, France and later able to cross the Atlantic Ocean in about five hours; its services since have been extended to DC and to some other important airports in Asia, Africa, and South America. Recently, computer services have connected the whole globe and now the "Internet" has caused the planet to be shrinking more.

For many decades, hundreds and thousands of Muslims from different countries have been coming to settle permanently in Western Europe and North America for various reasons- mainly economic or political. Meanwhile, a great number of Westerners have been going to Muslim countries for business or tourism. Oil resources in Muslim countries and emerging problems in world politics occasionally bring Islam or Muslims to the front pages of the world press.

Such developments have created an invaluable chance for Westerners and Muslims to know about each other through direct contact. Westerners now have Muslims among living among them at school, business places, and in many neighborhoods where they can easily realize they are mere human fellows, who have families and children and share common concerns with other human beings. In the West as well as in their countries of origin, Muslims have been benefiting from Western civilization which has become global, and have also been contributing to its expansion and development.

Muslims believe in the One God of the Jews and Christians. The Arabic Qur'anic word "Allah" refers to the same One God and not to a particular one for the Muslims. The Christian Arabs use the same Arabic word "Allah" for God, and among their names, you find "Abdullah" which means "the servant of God." Muslims believe in all God's messages that preceded that of their own Prophet Muhammad, including naturally, Judaism and Christianity, they equally consider their faith in the One God a mere continuation of the Abrahamic faith, as the Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes (e.g., 2: 135, 3:95, 4:125, 16: 123). Abraham has been mentioned in more than two hundred verses in the Qur'an through different places, and Muslims pray for God’s blessings to be bestowed on Muhammad as well as on Abraham in their five prayers each day. The Qur'an states that all those who believe in the One God, the eternal life to come and act righteously, shall have their reward with God, be they Muslims, Jews, or Christians (e.g. 2:62 and 5:69), Even those who may have other beliefs than clear monotheism such as Magians (Zoroastrians), those who may associate others with God, their judgment is only to God, who know their intentions and all their circumstances, not to any human being with his/her limitations (22:17). The fact that

God is the only judge for the human faith has been stressed in about twenty verses through the Quran (e.g., 3:55, 10:93, 27:78, 45:17).

The Qur'an urges Muslims to know well about different peoples and human divisions and let them know well about themselves as all are human beings (e.g., 49: 13) who should contact and cooperate with, and complement one another for the benefit of the entire humankind. A tradition of Prophet Muhammad teaches that wisdom is the goal of persistent pursuit for the believer, wherever he/she finds it, he/she ought to be the most beneficiary of it. People who are taught by their faith in this way, cannot be against any civilization or any constructive effort for knowledge and development. Historically, Muslims preserved and benefited from the heritage of various civilizations that were available to them in the Middle Ages: Greek, Persian, Indian, etc., alongside having their own contribution to human civilization. Muslim Spain became a meeting point for fruitful interaction between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, which was clearly reflected in the contributions of the Muslim ibn Rushd (Aver-roes 1126 - 1 198), the Jewish Maimonides (1135 - 1204), and later the Christian Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274).

Islam and Muslims have been always criticized in the West for the status of Muslim women in particular. Muslim women may have been treated unjustly in some Muslim societies, but this is obviously an outcome of unfavorable social circumstances which cannot find any support in Islam itself. The Qur'an teaches that spouses' relations have to be based on mutual consultation and consent (e.g., 2:223). In society, both men and women have equal responsibility towards each other and towards the whole society, and they have both to take upon themselves to work for social reform and development (e.g., 9:71). Women have rights and the obligation to education in order to be able to fulfill their responsibilities. Muslim civilization in the Middle Ages knew outstanding female names in the field of religious studies and mysticism (Sufism) as well as in poetry, medicine, artistic crafts, and even in politics in certain cases.

In the West, Muslims have an equal chance to direct contact and information about the West and Westerners. Social negatives, which have been the focus of the media and the movies, are there and have been discussed by the Westerners themselves. In spite of this, these negatives do not dominate or obstruct the flow of regular daily life, nor the Western productivity and progress. The majority of Westerners have their values and proper behavior, and they care about their families and children. They work hard to earn their living honestly, and they enjoy their leisure time reasonably. The Western civilization, in spite of the existing negatives, is progressing in the final account, and one of its valuable and striking merits is the freedom of thought and expression, which secures a healthy self-criticism and self-

correction, and allows new ideas in various fields to come out and be discussed, developed, and carried out.

In his concise and interesting book that discusses "Some Misconceptions about Islam and Muslim Women in the West", the author, Fakhr Siddiqui aims to set the record right. He presents the Muslim point of view lucidly and beautifully. With the straightness and accurateness of an engineer, he presents his thinking and expresses his ideas on the topic, while the sincerity of a Muslim believer cannot be missed in his argument. He is keen on what is relevant and informative, avoiding theological and jurisprudential details which may not be necessary for the general reader, and may cause him/her to be distracted from what is basic and essential. With such clear and straight thinking, and with such well-focused and beautiful writing, the author has been able to sustain through the book, the reader's interest and enjoyment. I wish the book all success and hope to see the following contributions of the author.

Dr Mohamed Fathi Osman
Montrose, CA
May 1996

Preface

While presenting this brief article on socio-religious aspects, I want to make clear to the readers, that I am not discussing any scholastic problem with Islamic thoughts or philosophy because I do not consider myself a scholar on the subject. In this humble attempt, my addressee is a common intellectual in the western world; who under the influence of some misquoted information regarding Muslim women and society, has formed some misconceived ideas. While explaining the points briefly to my non-Muslim readers, I have specifically tried to adhere to the teachings of Islam. I have also kept in view the Muslim youth, who in their daily lives are exposed to questions as a result of these misconceptions.

I have had an opportunity to meet and interact with a cross-section of western society, and most of the points which I have tried to explain in this article are outcomes of my personal observations. These were gathered through my visit to most major cities in Europe during a training program in 1967-1968. Besides, during my thirty-five years of service as a Senior Engineer in WAPDA (Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority), I came in contact with multinational personalities, who were associated with power generation and industrial projects in the Middle East and other countries.

After coming to North America, where all my children and near relatives have settled, I felt a need for clarification on certain social issues that Muslim youth faces in western society. They are often embarrassed by questions pertaining to Islam and Muslim women that they are not prepared to answer.

This article is not geared towards our respected scholars and theologians who are engaged in producing Islamic literature and establishing Islamic centers all over North America to provide other religious assistance.

Fakhr Siddiqui
Chicago, USA

Ramadan, 1416 Hijra
January, 1996 AC

Author's Request to Muslim Readers

- *Please say **"Sallalla`hu alay-he-wa sallam"** where the Prophet or his name is mentioned.*
- *Say **"Radi Allahu anha"** wherever names of wives and daughters of the Prophet or other Khatoon Sahabia are mentioned.*
- *Say **"Radi Allahu anhu"** wherever Khulafa-e-Rashe'deen or Sahaba's names are read.*

INTRODUCTION

On the subject of Muslim women and Islamic marriage, there are some myths in the West that have become a jungle of distortion and misconceptions. The Muslim world has often been projected by the West as a Disneyland of Arabian Nights and Turkish Delight in which dark-eyed Sheiks on Arab stallions charge across the desert carrying off reluctant maidens to exotic harems. Even in these advanced scientific days, there are some highly intelligent Westerners who seriously believe that Muslim women are denied their human rights and are regarded by Muslim men as unintelligent and inferior. In Europe and in North America there is a startling number of people who really believe that most Muslim men have four wives hidden away in domestic subservience, restricted to a life of toil and unceasing satisfaction of their master's carnal lusts.

Making such contemporary generalizations from historical exceptions may help to provide a television fantasy world into which we can escape from facing reality and confirm our prejudices, but it is seriously detrimental to the promotion of tolerance, understanding, and harmony in the plural society of North America. The propagation of myths serves only to divide the Muslims.

The three most outstanding misconceptions derived from the indiscriminate mass media projection of myth and fantasy, concerning Islam in general and Muslim women in particular, revolve around the following inexactitudes and distortions:

- Arabia is Islam! Islam is Arabia!

"The tradition lives on in today's oil-rich Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; a male-dominated culture in which a man's personal and family honor depends on the conduct of females under his care" [1]

- Polygamy is the common form of Islamic marriage!

"All Muslims have four wives.

- "Muslim women have no rights!

"Women are servants of men."

[1] *National Geographic Oct. 1987 p423 Article "Women of Arabia" by Marianne Alireza*

ISLAM IS ARABIA?

It is from this popular misconception that most other myths about Muslims are derived. Islam is a comprehensive spiritual guidance and a complete way of life and social system. It is the divine path revealed by God for all mankind. The believers of this unique faith are spread throughout the whole of the civilized world and represent every ethnic group and language of the five continents.

Islam in its final stage was revealed by God to Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Arabia, the seventh century after the prophet Jesus (peace be upon him). Revelations were sent in the Arabic language over a period of twenty-three years. From this time, Islam continued to spread with amazing speed, incredible success, and with a far-reaching influence on all aspects of life, leaving an indelible imprint on the development of science, art, and social development in both Muslims and non-Muslim societies.

Geoffrey Parrinder, author of "World Religions" writes on page 462 (Chapter 21) under the heading ISLAM:

"…. spilling out of Arabia, it rapidly extended political sway over the surrounding regions, consolidated its hold in the years that followed, and in the third century of its existence, developed a most brilliant and creative culture. Its advent changed the course of history and enriched human heritage by the creation of an illustrious civilization."[1]

The focal point of Islam to which every Muslim turns, at the time of prayer, is the KAABA in Makkah (Arabian Peninsula) which was built by prophet Ibrahim (Abraham, peace be upon him) about 4,000 years ago, at the command of God, as an inviolable place of worship to which millions of Muslims make an annual pilgrimage called 'HAJJ.

[1] *published by North America by facts on file 460 Park Avenue New York, NY 10016,1981.*

Of the nearly one & a half billion Muslims dispersed throughout the world, the combined population of all the Arab-speaking countries is only about 130 million (15%); Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and United Arab Emirates, about which there are so many legends, account for less than 13 million Muslims! The whole of North Africa (47 million) and Egypt (33 million), with which Europeans appear to be best acquainted, totaling approximately 80 million Muslims. It is significant that the total Muslim population of Indonesia (125 million) and Malaysia (6 million) is greater than that of the whole Arab-speaking world. Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India account for a further 240 million, and Turkey (38 million) and Iran (32 million) make up 70 million Muslims. The total Muslim population of China incidentally outnumbers the total population of Saudi Arabia. The population of Muslims in the former USSR is 81 million, and in the non-Arabic speaking countries of Central and South Africa is more than 87 million. [2]

"The Islamic center of gravity thus lies to the east and south of the borders of Pakistan, in spite of the common belief that the Arab countries are the heartland of Islam. " [3]

From the above brief outline of the global spread of Islam, the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Islam becomes clearly apparent. Although the Muslim community is inalienably coherent by a commonly shared and actively expressed structure of norms and values, we find within it many variations in customs, traditions, and folklore relating to dress, diet, temperament. attitudes, arts, occupations, etc., obviously influenced by varied environments. Nevertheless, in respect of modesty, a free intermingling of the sexes, family, marriage, and morality, this polyglot of nations follow the teachings of the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and do their best to conform to Islamic injunctions and prohibitions without contravention; and within the framework of cultural diversity.

To project contemporary Christianity to the Muslim world in terms of the diabolical activities of some of the Borgia family of Italy, the marital record of Henry VIII, and the European involvement in the African slave trade to America in the eighteenth century would be ludicrous and unjust. To accept the equally absurd projection of Islam in Western mass media and literature is contrary to the successful establishment of economic, social, and cultural exchange prevailing circumstances in the world necessitate.

[2]for details of the Muslim pop., M.M Ahsan, Islam Faith and Practice, Islamic found. 1976, appendix. World Muslim Gazetteer, Umma publishing house, Karachi.1975.
[3]World Religions, by Geoffrey Parrinder, p.464. [Published in North America. by Facts on File. 460 Park Ave. New York, NY 100/6. 1983.

POLYGAMY

Polygamy, in Islam, is not an imposed and universal form of marriage. It is a Divine concession to the distressing reality of social circumstances, such as war. The surplus of women creates childlessness and chronic illness of the first wife which can make it possible and practicable to prevent and provide a solution for social problems which these unfortunate circumstances would otherwise create. Individuals may face such circumstances that have made extra-marital sex a common occurrence in many societies.

Polygamy is socially more secure for women, definitely fairer to children, legally binding, and morally preferable to bigamy, prostitution, mistresses, and other similarly permissive patterns of sexual behavior which appear to threaten stability and dignity of the family. It certainly reduces the pressures leading to frequent divorce and separation and also assures the children a secure and stable family life. However, in the whole of contemporary Islamic society, monogamy is the norm; polygamy is the exception.

In Africa, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, etc., polygamy is rarely practiced by Muslims and most certainly there is little evidence, even as the exception to the rule, that it is prevalent among the settled Muslim community in Europe and in North America.

Polygamy might function in Islam when the circumstances it was meant to contain prevail. When these circumstances, such as prolonged war, etc., do not exist, polygamy ceases to flourish and monogamy is the norm. The majority of Muslim men are quite content with one wife, and the almost negligible number in Saudi Arabia who do practice polygamy, do so from insatiable sexual craving and for status symbols, as the legend and the myths would have us believe.

Annemarie Schimmel, a professor in the Department of Near Eastern Languages at Harvard University says in her book, "Islam: An Introduction":[1]
“Despite these laws, polygamy is not as frequent in the Islamic world as one might think.” The husband has to treat equally in EVERY RESPECTS all his wives, and that is a difficult if not impossible task. In fact, according to some modernists, the very provision that all wives should be treated with ABSOLUTE JUSTICE, not only in providing material comfort but also by showing the same amount of love and tenderness to all, implies the PROHIBITION OF POLYGAMY. "

[1]Islam: An Introduction " p.64. printed in USA -1992- by State University of New York Press. State University Plaza, Albany, NY 12246.

THE RIGHTS OF MUSLIM WOMEN

"Muslim women have no freedom, they are slaves to their husbands," declared a European mother as she quickly packed groceries into her shopping cart. “Freedom from what?", asked a young Muslim student during her break from college. " Freedom to share her earnings and wealth with her husband; freedom to share responsibility for keeping the children, freedom to go home and cook and wash and clean after a day at the factory; and still be a friendly and loving wife?"

The American concept of family and marriage has undergone a radical change in the last few decades. Originally, as Edward Westermarck puts it, "Marriage is rooted in the family, and not the family in marriage." The family in turn was the foundation of society. Hence, the regulation of all family relations was considered a necessity called for by two fundamental exigencies: wholesome human procreation and preservation of society. The modern industrial culture has upset the past norms of family life and has greatly changed the purposes of marriage. New opportunities for material gains were opened to married and unmarried women making them economically independent from their husbands. The women's emancipation movement accordingly declared there was no more reason for tolerating subjugation to the male and cultivated the eccentric tendencies against the traditional functioning and sex roles in the family. 'The women's new freedom has greatly increased the sexual opportunity outside marriage, supported by contraception and abortion.[1]

EQUALITY OF THE SEXES WITHIN THE FAMILY

The position of men and women in the domestic organization of a Muslim family within the Islamic community is clearly defined in the Qur'an and the example of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). There is little possibility of conflict between husband and wife and other adult males and females in the extended family structure. Obligations and rights naturally conform to the obvious physical differences between men and women and take into account innate abilities and aptitudes. For equality will be a hoax if women have to be at par with every sphere of life and still bear and bring up children. In industrial management. it is called "rational deployment of manpower resources." In a Muslim family, it is simply the right person for the right job.

[1] *Williams, R.H., To live and to Die; David R. marriage: Whence and whither, Springer-Verlag, New York - - 1973. Pg.298.*

The husband's major responsibility is that of earning all the economic and material needs of the family, thus in effect fulfilling the wife's clearly defined right to this provision, without being in any way compelled to contribute financially herself, no matter how independently rich she may be. The husband is the head of the family and this in Islamic terms, quite rightly imposes upon him more obligations than rights. He is more suitable for this obligation, but not the superior member of the team. and his functions are matched to his strength and aptitude and natural inclination disposition. Many of his responsibilities lie outside the family. In addition to employment in the community, he has to look after the relations of the family with the rest of society as it relates to education, business, health, social service, housing, etc. The father is also responsible for the discipline of the family, but the power mostly remains delegated to the mother.

The wife's major responsibility is primarily, but not exclusively, concerned with the internal organization of the family: training and educating the children in an atmosphere of affection and commitment to the spiritual and social values of Islam. The father may supply the materials and general plan of action, but it is the mother who fashions and develops the minds and personalities of the children, and creates a home and provides an Islamic refuge of belongingness, security, and loyalty for the father and the offspring. The mother is indisputably the central pivot around which the whole gamut of family relations revolves and hers is unquestionably a vital and important role that is beyond the natural capabilities and inclinations of men. Children, too, have defined roles and clear responsibilities. In addition to learning their adult roles without confusion, they act as interpreters and links between two cultures in Europe and North America, keeping in view the Islamic values. Muslim women in the Islamic community are required to enjoy their role, which, while it is different from that of their husbands, is equally essential. They do not underestimate the importance of their contribution to family stability; they are proud of their status and possess knowledge of their rights.

SPECIFIC RIGHTS OF MUSLIM WOMEN

Contrary to the popular opinion in the west, women in Islam have an extensive range of specific rights encompassing the following:

(a) Spiritual; (b) Intellectual: (c) Social: (d) Economic: and (e) Political aspect of life. These rights are bestowed on women by God, safeguarded by the infallibility and unique wisdom of the Qur'an, and perpetuated by the sublime example of the Prophet (peace be upon him). These rights were granted to women fourteen hundred years ago. They were not grudging concessions to the demands of the women's liberation movement nor a reaction to any undignified protest. The most basic right of a woman in Islam is to be accepted as having rights for which she never needs to fight for.

SPIRITUAL PURITY

Islam does not subscribe to the idea of original sin (Christian doctrine); and women, according to Quran, are not held responsible for Adam's first mistake; both were jointly wrong in their disobedience to God. Both repented, and both were forgiven. In terms of religious prayer (Salah), fasting (Sawm), poor dues (Zakat) and pilgrimage (Hajj) -- women have the same duties and are promised the same rewards for carrying them out.

However, with compassionate regard to certain physiological situations peculiar to females, women are exempted from prayer and fasting during menstrual periods and forty days after childbirth.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Not only do women have a right to full intellectual development, but along with men, they have an obligation to seek knowledge, as the Prophet (PBUH) said: “It is a duty for every Muslim, male and female, to seek knowledge.” Islam credits women, as also men, with the capacity for learning, understanding, teaching, and intellectual development. The knowledge it creates is necessary for the vital process of becoming more conscious of God and for performing roles that have been assigned, maternal or paternal, domestic or economic. There is nothing at all in Islamic teaching that could be interpreted to mean that Muslim girls or women have less right than Muslim boys or men to an education related to their intelligence, ability, natural inclinations, and aptitude; from play school to university, from KG levels to a doctorate degree.

Within the Muslim community in North America, a high percentage of Muslim girls who continue their studies beyond high school levels are certainly encouraged to study and prepare for the university, college, and professional/vocational training courses. There is no significant evidence that Muslim parents in North America, Europe, and in Muslim countries attach more importance to the education of their sons rather than their daughters. They give equal freedoms of choice in careers to both boys and girls with due regard to the equally important but essentially different primary roles they will play in adult life. (As a reference; Pakistan higher education institutions have more female students than male)

SOCIAL STATUS

Islamic teaching specifically protects women in all stages of development. However, the most common misconceptions relating to women in the social area are marriage and divorce.

a. Marriage Contract (UQD)

Contrary to popular myth, but strictly according to Muslim law, Muslim women cannot be forced to marry without their personal consent or without being consulted at an early stage in the negotiations. The fantasy image of a beautiful young maiden

being forced to marry some cruel, rich man, chosen by her parents is the “plot” for a fairy story. It is, however, quite true, and to Islamic teaching, they should look for a suitable partner for their children and seek to guide them towards a wise decision. However, the final decision remains with the boy and girl, because in Islam no marriage can be contracted without the consent of the bride and groom. Furthermore, Islam emphasizes that the marriage partners should know and see one another before making a final decision. After discussion and negotiation between both sets of parents and agreement about the prospective bride's dowry, meetings and discussions concerning the proposed marriage may take place between would-be husband and wife. The dowry (mahr) in Islam is not, as is in certain other cultures, a price for the bride. It is a gift given by the husband to the wife for her exclusive use at the beginning of her married life. It can take the form of money, property, jewelry, etc., and is strictly according to the husband's means. It is important to realize when a boy or girl are getting married, they are marrying into an entire extended family - common agreement of both parents and the young couple eliminates the chances of tensions and conflicts commonly associated with “in-laws". The privacy of young married couples is assured, and their independence is never encroached on but encouraged. Marriage in Islam extends a family; it does not fragment.

b. Divorce (TULLAQ)

Islamic teaching strongly disapproves of the frequency of divorce, but recognizes the existence of marital situations that are irreconcilable and, in such cases, stipulates provisions for divorce (Christian teaching on divorce is that it is adultery) which protect the wife and does the least harm to the family as a whole. The initiative for divorce lies in the hands of the husband, and the wife as well can obtain a divorce, even on the plea of dislike of her husband. A woman can also obtain the right to divorce her husband without going through a legal process if the marriage contract which binds them has made a specific allowance for this contingency.

In all cases, the emphasis is on reconciliation, which involves the representatives of the two extended families. It is significant that this framework of reconciliation and procedure for divorce has continued in Islamic society for fourteen centuries. Divorce in Islam is a family affair; free from complicated procedures and unwanted publicity, and it is not likely to lead to a scandal of national upheaval, as is often the distressing case in Western society.

ECONOMIC ASPECT

a. Ownership

One of the most fundamental rights of a Muslim woman is the right to independent ownership. In Islamic law, a woman's right to her own money, land, property, and other negotiable assets is indisputably acknowledged and is not subject to change by marriage. This right is equally applied to the property and wealth she has before marriage and any other possessions she acquires after marriage.

b. Transactions

Legally, Muslim women are absolutely free to buy, sell, exchange, mortgage, or lease the whole or part of their properties independently.

The whole of a woman's personal and private income, profits, rents, capital appreciation, business, etc., belong entirely to her and unless it is her own personal wish, cannot be “absorbed” into the housekeeping or used for general expenses related to the husband’s sole responsibility to provide a home, education, and welfare for his wife and children.

Obviously in an Islamic marriage, based on love, a rich wife would be inclined to use her wealth if the husband agrees, to generally raise the quality and standard of life for the whole family. The important thing is that she has the right to decide about this and the husband has no right in law to his wife's property. He does not have the right, except in the most exceptional cases, to take back gifts, no matter how substantial, that he has made to her; they are absorbed into her own private wealth.

d. Inheritance

A women's right to inherit, like her right to property is similarly undisputed and safeguarded and determined in quite minute detail in Islamic law (Shari'ah). A woman's share is by common practice, half of the man's share, far from implying that a woman is worth only half of a man (a popular, yet gross misinterpretation circulated in the West). This division of parental estate quite justly allocates inherited economic resources in direct relation to economic responsibilities. A woman's wealth, as already stated, is unquestionably her own to spend or accumulate as she wishes, for her social security. The man in Islamic society is responsible for the maintenance of his wife and children, and may also have economic responsibilities relating to needy relatives, particularly the females - widows, unmarried sisters, old parents, etc.

EMPLOYMENT

There is no decree in Islam that forbids a woman from accepting employment in the community, particularly as doctors, nurses, teachers, maids, farmers, engineers, bankers, and other occupations that are compatible with her distinct nature, aptitude, and abilities and, in no way at variance with the respect and dignity accorded to women in Islam.

However, the whole question of employment for Muslim women can only be coherently observed in relation to the acceptance of women's primary social role in the family and community as wife and mother, regarded in Islam as vital and sacred. The second Khalifa. Umar bin Al-Khattab employed a lady, Shifa bint Abdullah, as Inspector in the Market at the capital of Madinah, Ibn-Hajar (Isaiah) records. The same lady had taught Hafsa, wife of the Prophet (PBUH), how to write and read. [1]

POLITICAL

Recorded in history and supported by Islamic teachings, Muslim women have equality with men in political rights and are nominated for various political offices. A woman has the right to vote and be in political offices and participate in public at the national and international level. What is very important to realize is that Muslim Women who have always had these rights, certainly take advantage of them, and did not have to fight for them. In Islam, many famous women have figured prominently in the affairs of state.

In all Muslim Countries, in North America, and in Europe, Muslim women are increasingly taking part in public life. They attend, alongside men, public lectures, conferences, and seminars and act as magistrates and sit on juries, etc. The extent to which Muslim women vote in elections is determined as it is for men) by their ability to comprehend the propaganda presented to them.

[1] *Introduction to Islam by Muhammad Hamidullah, p. 37*

CONCLUSIONS

The rights of Muslim women are entrenched in Islamic history, enshrined in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and made real in life by the obligations imposed on Muslim men. Gamal Badawi states in his book:

a. The history of Islam is rich with women of great achievements in all walks of life from as early as the seventh century.
b. It is impossible for anyone to justify any mistreatment of women by any decree of rule embodied in Islamic law, nor could anyone dare to cancel, reduce or distort the clear-cut legal rights of women given to her by Islamic law.
c. Throughout history. the reputation, chastity, and maternal role of Muslim women were objects of admiration by impartial observers, all over the world."

APPENDIX

Review from the Times, London. Monday, Dee. 23, 1974
By Clifford Longley
(Religious Affairs Correspondent)

"Islam strengthens family:
…. Though so-called Christian family life is under intolerable strain; Islamic family life appears better designed to stand up to contemporary pressures. It is based on a detailed and rigid set of rules about interpersonal relationships. The Islamic family is therefore held together by more than the social conventions and childhood that maintains family life..."[1]

[1]Family life in Islam, Ed. Khurshid Ahmad. Printed by Derbyshire Print Station Road. Chesterfield, Derbyshire, England. 1979. Pg.37.

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Towards understanding the Quran; vol.2	Abul A'la Maududi; Translated and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari	Islamic Foundation, The Leicester, UK	0-86037-187-5;0-86037-188-3	Quran
Towards understanding the Quran; vol.3	Abul A'la Maududi; Translated and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari	Islamic Foundation, The Leicester, UK	0-86037-206-5;0-86037-205-7	Quran
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Allah in the West Islamic movements in America and Europe	Gilles Kepel Translated by Susan Milner,	Stanford University Press. Stanford, CA. USA	0-8047-2751-10-8047-2753-8	Islam: Current Affairs
The Life of The Noble Prophet Muhammad	Mohammed Hussein Heikal, Translated by Ismail al-Faruqi	Islamic Book Trust. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	N/A	Prophet Muhammad, Islam: History
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The politics of Islamic resurgence - through Western eyes	Ahmad Bin Yousef & Ahmad AbulJobain'	The United Association for Studies and Research, Inc., N. Springfield, VA, USA	1-882669-00-2	Islam; Politics
Islam and the West	Burnard Lewis	Oxford University Press, New York, USA	0-19-507619-2	Islam: Current Affairs
Words that move the World (guidance, how to study the Quran)	Qazi Ashfaq Ahmad	The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, UK	0-86037-292-8	Quran: Quranic Studies
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Muslim guide for teachers, employers, community	Mustafa Yusuf McDermott, and Muhammad Manazir Ahsan	The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, UK	0-86037-057-7:0-86037-061-5	Islam; Current Affairs; Muslim Studies
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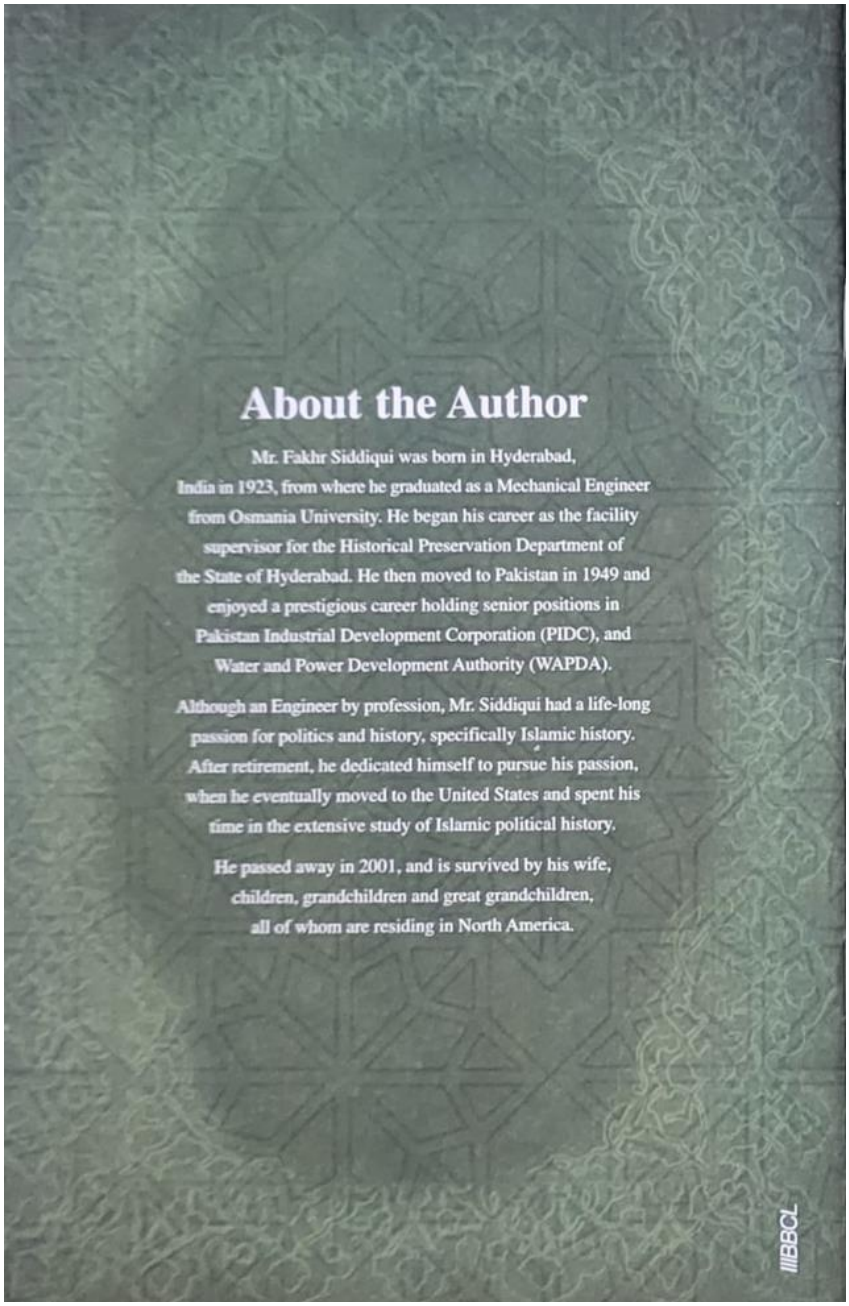
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Pakistan 1995	Charles H Kennedy & Rasul Baksh Rais	Westview Press, Inc., Boulder, CO, USA & Pak Book Corp., Lahore, Pakistan	0-8133-8728-0	Pakistan: Current Affairs
Pakistan: 1997	Charles H Kennedy & Craig Baxter	Westview Press, Inc., Boulder, CO, USA & Pak Book Corp. Lahore, Pakistan	08133-2975-2	Pakistan Current Affairs

About the Author

Mr. Fakhr Siddiqui was born in Hyderabad (Deccan), India in 1923, from where he graduated as a Mechanical Engineer from Osmania University. He began his career as the facility supervisor for the Historical Preservation Department of the State of Hyderabad. He then moved to Pakistan in 1949 and enjoyed a prestigious career holding senior positions in Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC), and Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA).

Although an Engineer by profession, Mr. Siddiqui had a life-long passion for politics and history, specifically Islamic history. After retirement, he dedicated himself to pursue his passion, where he eventually moved to the United States and spent his time in the extensive study of Islamic political history.

He passed away in 2001, and is survived by his wife, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, all of whom reside in North America.



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