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## The Position Of Women in Judaism and Christianity : A Historical Perspective

Since the second half of the nineteenth century various reforms regarding the status of women have been introduced in the Western world which have certainly reduced male authority as husband and father. At present, Western women live in an entirely new world—a world which has changed their position far more dynamically than that of men. The amendments in legislation during the nineteenth century made it possible to pass a host of laws in the first half of the twentieth century which equalized or, at least, improved the status of women with regard to inheritance, property, judicial rights & duties citizenship, education, economic matrimonial and sexual matters, maintenance and guardianship of their children.

This is only a natural sequel of all these changes that the smart Western women of today in their neat, lighter and more revealing brief dress can demonstrate the signs of their new freedom and status. They, at present, are more eloquent and effectively involved in defiance and antagonism than ever before, whether it is a matter of campaigning for liberalizing abortion or improving legislation to provide equal opportunities and wages for women or protesting against the high prices of basic necessities.

However, the present portrait of western women does not bear a great similarity with that presented by the World's two great divine religions i.e. Judaism and Christianity. Both these religions are from the family of Abraham and are patriarchal in nature. Due to their patriarchal nature, it was impossible for them

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ملنے کا ہتہ  
سیلز ڈپو ، پنجاب یونیورسٹی ، لاہور

5. Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, op. cit., pp 44-45 ; Ibn Hisham, op. cit., Vol. I, pp 438 ff ; Ibn al-Athir, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp 98 ff.
6. Syed Abdul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *Islam and the World*, Lucknow, Second Edition, 1967, pp 68-69.
7. E. C. Hodgkin, *The Arabs*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1966, pp 27-28.
8. Gustave E. Von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, University of Chicago Press, 1946, p. 89.
9. E. H. Palmer, Translated by, *The Quran*, (Sacred Books of the East Series, edited by Max Muller), Clarendon Press, 1900, p. 20 Introduction.
10. A.S. Tritton, *Islam*, London, 1951, p. 21.
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13. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, London 1838 and 1939, Vol. V. p. 487.
14. M.N. Roy, *The Historical Role of Islam*, Lahore, p. 34.
15. Jean l'Heureux, *Etudes sur l'Islamism*, p. 35, Quoted on p. 248 of *Islam Our Choice*, compiled by Dr. S.A. Khulusi, published by the Woking Muslim Mission & Literary Trust, Surrey.
16. Syed Ammer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, op. cit., p. 291.
17. Syed Abdul Hassan Ali Nadwi, *Islam and the World*, op. cit. p. 71
18. Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, op. cit., pp 370-371.
19. Ibid, pp. 378-379.
20. Ibid, p. 397.
21. A.K. Brohi, *Islam in the Modern World*, Islamic Book Foundation, Lahore, Third Edition, pp 154-156.
22. Robert Briffault, *The Making of Humanity*, Islamic Book Foundation, Lahore, 1980, p. 202.
23. Gustave E. Von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, op. cit., p. 342.
24. Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, op. cit., p. 394.
25. George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, Baltimore, 1927, Vol. I, p. 624 ; Philip K. Hitti, *The History of the Arabs*, Macmillan, Ninth Edition, 1968, p. 392.
26. William Draper, *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, London, 1896, Vol I, p. 329.

that of Rome, and in as many tens of yeas as the latter had wanted hundreds to accomplish her conquests ; by the aid of which they alone of all the Shemites came to Europe as kings, whither the Phoenicians had come as tradesmen, and the Jews as fugitives or captives ; came to Europe to hold up, together with these fugitives, the light to humanity ; — they alone, while darkness lay around, to raise up the wisdom and knowledge of Hellas from the dead, to teach philosophy, medicine, astronomy and the golden art of song to the West as to the East, to stand at the cradle of moderan science, and to cause us late epigoni for ever to weep over the day when Granada fell.”<sup>24</sup>

The celebrated scholar, George Sarton, author of the monumental work *Introduction to the History of Science*, has been so much impressed by the works of Muslim scholars that he declares enthusiastically :

The main task of mankind was accomplished by Muslims. The greatest philosopher, al-Farabi was a Muslim ; the greatest mathematicians, Abu Kamil and Ibrahim Ibn Sinan were Muslims ; the greatest geographer and encyclopaedist, al-Mas’udi was a Muslim ; the greatest historian, al-Tabari, was still a Muslim.<sup>25</sup>

It is due to the impact of the Prophet Muhammad on the intellectual advancement of Europe and the world civilization that William Draper stated correctly :

Four years after the death of Justinian was born the man who, of all men has exercised the greatest influence upon the human race—Muhammad.<sup>26</sup>

## NOTES

1. Tor Andrae, *Mohammed: the Man and His Faith*, (Translated by Theophil Menzel) George Allen & Unwin, London, 1956, p. 63.
2. Janet K. O’Dea, Thomas F. O’Dea, and Charles J. Adams, *Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1972, p. 159.
3. Rev. Marcus Dods, *Mohammed, Buddha and Christ*, London, 1899, p. 17.
4. Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, Christophers, London, Fifth Impression, 1949, p. 43 ; Mustafa al-Saqa, Ibrahim al-Abyari and Abdul Hafeez Shalabi, edited by, *Al-Sirat an-Nabawiya of Ibn Hisham*, Cairo, Second Edition, 1955, Vol. 1 pp 433-434 ; Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi Taaikh*, Beirut, 1965, Vol. 2, pp 95 ff.

tous as the genesis of that power which constitutes the paramount distinctive force of the Modern World and the Supreme Source of its Victory — natural Science and the Scientific spirit. “(Robert Briffault, *the Making of Humanity*, pp, 188-90)<sup>21</sup>

Robert Briffault categorically asserts at another place :

Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab civilization to the modern world . . . . It was not science which brought Europe to life. Other and manifold influences from the civilization of Islam communicated its first glow to Europe.”<sup>22</sup>

Gustav E. Von Grunehaum writes in his work, **MEDIEVAL ISLAM :**

There is hardly an area of human experience where Islam has not enriched the Western tradition. Foods and drinks, drugs and medicaments, armor and heraldry, industrial, commercial and maritime techniques, and again artistic tastes and motives, not to speak of the many terms of astronomy and mathematics — a list indicative of the full measure of the Islamic contribution would take many a page without being even remotely complete. The very existence of the Muslim world has done much to mold European history and European civilization. . . . Muslim narrative and poetical imagery, Muslim eschatology and the boldness of Muslim mysticism, all have left their traces on the Medieval West. The greatest theologian and the greatest poet of the European Middle Ages are deeply indebted to Islam for inspiration as well as material. Thomas Aquinas uses Maimonides (d. 1204) and Averroes. (d. 1198) and he employs a manner of argumentation familiar from Muslim scholasticism. Dante's debt to Muslim visionaries, especially Ibn al-Arabi of Murcia (d. 1240) can hardly be doubted. Parallel efforts in alchemy and astrology, with Islam as teacher and Christendom a self-willed student, introduced more concepts and associations to be held in common.<sup>23</sup>

The German scholar Deutsch enthusiastically declares :

But it was again—“a Book by the aid of which the Arabs conquered a world greater than that of Alexander the Great, greater than

... The Quran is full of repeated emphasis on the value of thinking, of pondering, of rationalisation, of discrimination. In a way it would not be an exaggeration to say that the whole of the Book (i. e the Quran) is concerned with outlining the methodology and technique by which man is to read the Book of Nature and witness within himself the Signs of the Divine . . . .

It was this constant call to observe nature and to understand the secret of its operations which enabled the earlier Arabs to become pioneers of science and scientific method. Nowadays, of course, historians of human culture explain everything as though Arabian science did not so much as exist. Everything is supposed to have been found for us by the Greeks !

The moral and intellectual flowering of European culture and civilization has a source other than the one that is generally invoked by scholars. . . .

This is taught in the universities of civilized Europe and America in the name of "liberal education" and, as to the origin of this "Renaissance" itself, all kinds of false explanations exist and continue to be concocted but an honest attempt at historical analysis will, in the wise words of Dr. Robert Briffault show thus :

"It was under the influence of the Arabian and Moorish revival of culture, and in the fifteenth century, that the real Renaissance took place. Spain, not Italy, was the cradle of the rebirth of Europe. After steadily sinking lower and lower into barbarism, it had reached the darkest depth of ignorance and degradation when the cities of the Semitic world, Baghdad, Cairo, Cordova, Toledo were growing centres of civilization and intellectual activity. It was there that the new life arose which was to grow into a new phase of Human Evolution. From the time when the influence of their culture made itself felt, began the stirrings of a new life.

It is highly probable that but for the Arabs modern European civilization could never have arisen at all . . . . For although there is not a single aspect of European civilization in which the decisive influence of Islam is not traceable, nowhere is it so clear and momen-

ably situated to act the part of mediators and to influence the nations from the Euphrates to the Guadalquivir and Mid—Africa. *Their unexampled intellectual activity marks a distinct epoch in the history of the world.*<sup>18</sup>

He writes again :

In Spain the same activity of mind was at work from the Pyrenees to the Straits: Seville, Cordova, Granada, Murcia, Toldedo, and other places possessed their public libraries and colleges where they gave free instruction in science and letters. Of Cordova an English writer speaks thus : . . . *Her professors and teachers made her the centre of European culture* ; students would come from all parts of Europe to study under her famous doctors. . . *Every branch of science was seriously studied there . . . Astronomy, geography, chemistry, natural history, all were studied there with ardour at Cordova.*" . . To these we may add the words of Renan: "The taste for science and literature had, by the tenth century, established in this privileged corner of the world, a toleration of which modern times hardly offer us an example . . . The Mosques of Cordova, where the students could be counted by thousands, became the active centre of philosophical and scientific studies." (Renan, *Averroes et Averroism*, p. 40)<sup>19</sup>

He writes elsewhere :

The first manifestation of Rationalism in the West occurred in the provinces most amenable to the power of Moslem civilisation. Ecclesiasticism crushed this flower with fire and with sword, and threw back the progress of the world for centuries. But the principles of free Thought, so strongly impressed on Islam, had communicated their vitality to Christian Europe. Adelard had felt the power of Averroes, genius, which was shedding its light over the whole of the Western world. Abelard struck a blow for Free Thought which led to the eventual emancipation of Christendom from the bondage of Ecclesiasticism. Avempace and Averroes were the precursors of Descartes, Hobbes and Locke .

Dealing with the role of Muslims in the advancement of European civilization A. K. Brohi writes :

Muhammad (Peace be upon him).

We bring out this role very briefly.

Syed Ameer Ali says in his work *The Spirit of Islam* : His Voice quickened the dead into life, revived the dying, and made the pulse of humanity beat with the accumulated force of ages. The exodus of the Saracens under this mighty impulse, its magnitude and far-reaching effects, form the most marvellous phenomenon of modern times. They issued from their desert-fastnesses as *the preceptors of humanity*.<sup>16</sup>

Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi writing under the caption "New Men—New Ummat" states.

Thus it was that most stupendous change in human history was brought about. The Prophet had uncovered rich treasures of human material that had been lying dormant under the mass of ignorance since the beginning of creation and imparted to them the light of genius which was to hold the world spell-bound through ages to come. He had made into men what till then were mere herds of dumb driven cattle. He had aroused their innate possibilities ; he had released the fountains of their real life and elevated them to be the *standard bearers of light and learning and Faith and culture* in the world. Within a short span of time the desert of Arabia threw up mighty personalities whose names illumine the pages of history to this day.<sup>17</sup>

Syed Ameer Ali writes in his *Spirit of Islam* :

Each great nation of the world has had its golden age. Athens had her Periclean era ; Rome her Augustan age ; so, too, had the Islamic world its epoch of glory ; and we may with justice look upon the period which elapsed from the accession of Mansur to the death of Mu'tazid—b'illah. . . as an epoch of equal, if not of superior greatness and magnificence. Under the first Abbasid Caliphs, but especially under Mansur, the Moslems formed the vanguard of civilization. Under the inspiring influence of the great Prophet, who gave them a code and a nationality, and assisted by their sovereigns the Saracens caught up the lessons of wisdom from the East and the West, combined them with the teachings of the Master, and "started from soldiers into scholars." "The Arabs," says Humbolat, "were admir-



It will be seen from the foregoing statements of these scholars of the East and West that there is no substance in the insinuation of Hart about the spread of Islam in the wake of conquests.

Now we come to another statement of Hart wherein he says that "as the driving force behind the Arab conquests he (i.e. Muhammad) may rank as the most political leader of all time", as the Arab conquests continue to play an important role in history in the shape of the influence of the Arab world. (pp 39—40 of Hart's book)

No doubt it was due to the Prophet Muhammad that the Arabs were aroused from their sleep of ages and they shook the world with their brilliant conquests. But to lay all the emphasis rather the most emphasis, on the political aspect of the revolution brought about by the Prophet of Islam is to seriously misjudge his role in history.

It will be observed from the comments offered about the various statements of Hart that he has been trying to minimise the religious aspect of the Prophet's personality and teachings. Now he is playing up the political aspect of his influence on history.

But Prophet Muhammad was, above all, a Messenger of God sent to preach the message of Islam, a *Teacher par excellence* to guide humanity in the various spheres of their lives.

At the advent of the Prophet Muhammad darkness held sway all around and ignorance pervaded the world. By the force of his personality and teachings he broke the spell of darkness and brought humanity from the depths of darkness and ignorance to the light of knowledge and mastery over the forces of nature. In the Quran he has been called "the Luminous Lamp" (سراج منيرا) (surah 33 : 46) whose role is to bring people out of the depths of darkness into light with the aid of Divine guidance (Surahs 57 : 9 ; 65 : 11)

His most important impact on history has been the launching of a revolution in thought and letters, and, through the momentum created by him the Muslims have been the torch-bearers of knowledge in the world for centuries, and, all the achievements of modern science and rationalism—the twin pillars of Western civilization— owe their origin and growth to the personality and teachings of Prophet