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WOMEN AND GIRLS EDUCATION

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Islam and Girls' Education in South Asia

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A. Introduction

Pakistan, more than 95% Muslim, declared itself an Islamic state at partition in 1947 and over the intervening 45 years gradually introduced laws in conformity with the Shari'at. Bangladesh, more than 85% Muslim, was, as East Pakistan, an Islamic state from 1947 to 1970 and, following independence, a secular state from 1971 to 1975. After 1975, the Bangladesh Constitution was amended to include references to Islam and to fostering Islamic brotherhood, and, in 1988, to declare Islam the state religion; nonetheless Bangladesh is not at present an Islamic state. India, although a secular state, has more Muslims than Bangladesh and almost as many as Pakistan. Approximately 308 million Muslims live in these three countries.

Few households in South Asia cite religion as a reason for not enrolling daughters in primary school or for removing them from school (Akhter Begum & al, 1992; Brown & al, 1993; Foundation for Research on Educational Planning and Development (FREPD), 1989; Foundation for Research on Educational Planning and Development*, 1983; India, 1989; National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 1993a; National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), 1993b).

These conclusions are consistent with those of a recent UNICEF-sponsored report, Strategies for Female Education in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Rihani, 1993) In her brief summary of cultural constraints, Rihani does not cite religion as an important obstacle to girls' schooling, rather she points to parents' reluctance to send girls to school when both the quality of schooling and the return on investment, in turns of higher wages for literate women, are weak and where early marriage is a cultural norm.

This study does not attempt to review the large literature on women and Islam in Middle East, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, but rather will restrict itself to cases and data relating to South Asia. The hypothesis that Islam contributes to low primary enrollment rates for girls, although widely assumed, is difficult, if not impossible, to objectively evaluate in South Asia. In India, the literacy rates in two out of the three states/union territories with the highest proportion of Muslims--Kerala (21% Muslim) and Lakshwadeep (95% Muslim)--are far above the national average. At the same time, 40% of India's Muslims live in states or union territories with average literacy rates below 40%. For India as a whole, more than 70% of all Muslims may live below the poverty line (Engineer, 1985, as quoted in Mondal, 1992). Given that education levels in India tend to decrease as income decreases, meaningful analyses must disentangle the effects of Islam from those of low income. However, we have not found comparative data on enrollments disaggregated by sex, income, and religion in any of the three countries.

The following discussion therefore will focus on the groups and the customs associated with Islam that may play a larger role in education decisions for Muslims than for other groups in South Asia. For example, codes of modesty may demand more clothing for girls who go out in public than many poor families can afford; sex-role socialization may require sex-segregated classrooms, if not schools; early marriage may lead to high female dropout rates in upper primary and lower secondary schools; and close surveillance to ensure physical and moral safety may prevent girls from attending schools outside a tight perimeter of their homes. These are not issues prominent in Sub-Saharan Africa, but are relevant in both North Africa and the Middle East, where some low-income countries with

majority Muslim populations have similarly large gaps between female and male participation in primary and secondary school.

This study draws on current literature on girls' education and Islam in South Asia; discussions with Islamic and South Asian scholars; and interviews with various donors on ongoing activities with a specifically Islamic focus. The first section describes the diverse forms in which Islam exerts its influence in South Asia. The second section explores how these different forms affect girls' education in general. The third section reviews the issues associated with the custom of purdah, which though common across several religious groups throughout South Asia, is most often explained by its Muslim practitioners in terms of Islam. The fourth section examines the role of various Islamic organizations play as development agencies. Finally, the last section explores the implications of these Islamic issues and potential responses to these implications.

The findings of this section may be summarized as follows:

1. *Parents in South Asia, when talking to researchers, do not use religion or Islam to explain never enrolling girls in school or taking them out of school.*
2. *The data available for this study does not control for both income and religion. We are therefore unable to test any causal relationships between Islam and low rates of girls' participation in basic education in South Asia.*

B. The Diversity of Islam

The Qur'an repeatedly describes men and women as equal in virtue while different in nature and roles. In contrast, the Hadith, compiled after the Qur'an, contains many

sections that depreciate the value of women relative to men¹. Differences regarding the relative authority of these two sacred texts created many of the historic schisms within Islam. Given the very role of interpretation in understanding either or both texts is itself hotly disputed, modernist Muslim or Western efforts to highlight interpretations that emphasize the value of girls and the importance of their education may be of little relevance. The Hanafi school of Sunni Islam claims approximately 80% of the Muslims in South Asia. Rival Shi'ite schools of law provide guidance to perhaps another 15% of South Asian Muslims, but are not considered orthodox by Sunnis, and vice versa. In addition, the more rigid Hanbalis of Saudi Arabia provide substantial support to a radical fundamentalist² political group, the Jamaat-i-Islami, throughout South Asia, which is discussed in greater detail below. These three schools rarely accept the same interpretation of any text.

Interpretation is usually the occupation of orthodox religious scholars; in contrast, Islam in much of rural South Asia is weak in terms of both scholarship and orthodoxy. The levels of literacy in Arabic are lower than those for the official languages; many imams and maulvis (local religious leaders) do not read the Qur'an with understanding and only recite it with many errors. In most of rural South Asia, local tradition, not texts, define good Muslim behavior and innovation is easily labeled deviance.

¹See Attachment A for a brief synopsis of several of the most frequently cited verses which are used to explain the different status of men and women in Islam.

²The term "fundamentalist" is used here to describe a religious group which interprets their sacred texts as true in the most literal sense and seeks to purify themselves and their society of every thought and practice not consistent with that interpretation.

Although increases in income and modernization are often associated with a shift towards more Western, progressive lifestyles, several scholars of modern South Asian Islam suggest that increases in household income from low to lower-middle or middle income levels in South Asia lead to more, not less, religious conservatism. These scholars argue that the poor often lack the education and financial resources necessary to be thoroughly orthodox in both belief and practice. For example, poor people cannot afford to go on haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. At lower-middle and middle-income levels, however, religious propriety, in the form of more conservative religious practice, becomes affordable. At upper-middle and upper income levels, the taste for religious conservatism seems to decline. Although we found no scholarship to support this "bell curve" theory of religious conservatism, it carries a good deal of currency at the moment, and, if accurate, its implications for girls' education in South Asia are considerable, as described below.

The findings of this section may be summarized as follows:

1. *Religious authority and influence within the Muslim community in South Asia is diffuse.*
2. *Various scholars suggest that development, ie improvements in the standard of living of the poor majority in rural areas of South Asia may lead to more, not less, religious conservatism, at least in the short-run.*

Among a few groups, such as the (Shi'ite) Ismailis, the interpretation of a single pre-eminent leader, such as the Aga Khan, is sufficient to reform an entire group³. Most

³ If a father has two children--one [a] son and the other [a] daughter, and if he can afford to educate only one of them, such parents if they were to consult me, I would advise them to educate the daughter first. Because the boy would be able to stand on his [own] legs and therefore it is the daughter who should be educated first

Muslim groups in South Asia, however, do not have such pre-eminent leaders nor do they have national or regional convocations. Nonetheless, the following paragraphs describe five potentially influential Islamic groups/individuals: Arabs, radical fundamentalists, scripturalist reformers, pirs, and local mosque leaders.

C. Major Islamic groups and leaders in South Asia

The Arabs of the Middle East control a good deal of wealth in the Muslim world and channel substantial amounts of foreign aid to poorer countries with large Muslim populations⁴, much of it for the construction of mosques⁵, religious schools, and Islamic universities. In addition, over the last 25 years, the Middle East has attracted millions of (primarily young male) guestworkers from poorer Muslim communities. Finally, reductions in international airfares, increases in the capacity of airports in less developed countries, and increases in the connections between those airports and the rest of the world mean that more (primarily older male) South Asians than ever are undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca.

For these three reasons Arab influence in South Asia has grown over the last 25

(1945).

Aga Khan III. Precious Pearls, Firmans Mubarak of Mowlana Hazar Imam. Sherali Aldina and Kassim Ali, comps and trs. Karachi: Ismaili Association, Pakistan. P. 45 Quoted in (Papanek, 1973 (1982), 16)

⁴Total net flows of official development assistance (ODA) from the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) peaked in the 1970s and declined fairly consistently over the 1980s, from 4.23% of combined OAPEC GNP in 1976 to 0.86% in 1986. The largest Arab donor in 1976, Saudia Arabia, provided total net flows of ODA equal to 5.95% of its GNP; by 1991, these had dropped to 1.66% (World Bank, 1993).

⁵For example, between 1979 and 1986, the number of mosques in Bangladesh increased from 119,000 to 132,000 (Abecassis, 1990, 50).

years. The wearing of Middle Eastern clothing, for example, has become more common in urban areas. Yet the effects of the Arabs on low-income rural Bangladeshis, whose daughters are the most likely to be left out of school, may be negligible. In addition, nationalism among non-Arab Islamic countries has prompted intellectuals in recent years to argue that Arab culture is not, by definition, more Islamic than other cultures. Even the less-educated sometimes view with skepticism the attempts by Arab countries or groups to prescribe changes in local Islamic practice.

Wealthy Saudis have also provided generous support to the Jamaat-i-Islami, a radical fundamentalist political group that plays an active and highly visible role in both Bangladesh and Pakistan; at least one source argues that Jamaat is the best organized political machine in South Asia.⁶ Jamaat is closely tied to the introduction of Shari'at, Islamic law in Pakistan and efforts to declare Bangladesh an Islamic state. The Jamaat's strength lies primarily in urban areas and in tertiary level educational institutions, but their influence extends into rural areas through welfare societies and assistance for Bengalis looking for work in the Middle East. Given their educational focus, it is plausible that these groups might have an unrepresentatively large effect on the religious curriculum in colleges and universities, thereby limiting the exposure of later generations of elites to more liberal or progressive religious ideas, such as the equality of the sexes and the necessity of girls' education. Thusfar, however, I have been unable to determine the effect of fundamentalists on university curricula.

⁶Personal interview. Rafiuddin Ahmed, professor of modern South Asian Islam, Cornell University. 4/94.

Jamaat has played a critical role in recent years creating religious issues, drawing many formerly private or discretionary issues--such as purdah--into public discourse. For example, as a result of Jamaat's work in Bangladesh, demonstrations of public piety are multiplying; the formerly socialist Awami league, which ran on a secular platform immediately after Independence, now starts its meetings with a formal prayer. Jamaat has attacked many secular NGOs in Bangladesh and Pakistan as Western-oriented and fronts for Christian missionaries, the latter referring to early links between disaster-oriented NGOs and missionaries or Christian humanitarian relief organizations. Jamaat supports education for both men and, to a lesser extent, women in its own religious schools only.

Some sociological literature suggests that militant fundamentalism is not driven by old men trying to preserve the past, but rather by young men who, by virtue of newly accessible education, are in the process of moving up from rural lower- or lower-middle class to urban lower-middle and middle class in rapidly changing societies with sluggish economies (Mernissi, 1975; Wuthnow, 1980). At present, militant fundamentalism is weakest in Bangladesh--where upper and middle income groups represent a small percentage of the total population, the lower socio-economic groups practice a highly syncretistic Islam, and all remember that the Jamaat-i-Islami party collaborated with Pakistan during the independence struggle. Fundamentalism has more influence in Pakistan, and perhaps a growing influence in India. Hindu fundamentalism in India, for example, has been spurred by fears related to a supposed rise of Islamic fundamentalism--often associated with the conversion of scheduled castes and supposed conflicts between Islamic and Indian law--that has, in turn, spurred Muslims fears of rampant Hindu

fundamentalism, etc⁷. Nonetheless, current evidence suggests that, at present, Muslim fundamentalism is not sufficiently strong in most of South Asia to obstruct efforts to create co-ed primary and secondary schools.

Non-fundamentalist, "scripturalist" reform movements are more active in South Asia than fundamentalist ones but they are not a political force and tolerate some of the less orthodox aspects of Islam in South Asia, such as the veneration of pirs (see below). The Tabligh-i-Jama'at movement, "a missionary movement to nominal Muslims" (Metcalf, 1990, 5), originated in India as part of the Deobandi movement in the 19th century. It has since spread a very personal message of salvation and piety around the world. The annual convocation of the Tablighis in Bangladesh in 1993 drew an estimated two million plus adherents from all over the world. Nevertheless, in Bangladesh, the Tablighis usually do not speak out on public issues and, if confronted by the much less numerous but far more disciplined and militant Jamaatis, probably will not prevail.

Pirs are nationally and often internationally known Sufi holy men venerated in both life and death by tens of millions of adherents, both Muslim and Hindu, many from rural-based lower socio-economic groups. In-kind and cash contributions made to pirs or the tombs managed by their descendants are often used for charitable purposes. There are four widely revered living pirs in Bangladesh--one in Atrashi, Faridpur, another in Sarsina, a third in Char, and the fourth in Manikganj--and many others in India and Pakistan. The former president of Bangladesh, Md. Ershad, on occasion, helicoptered to Atrashi to consult

⁷Personal interview. Carl Ernst. Department of Religion. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

with the pir. In India, the government has formed a Council of Sheikhs to consult with the family heads of the tombs of the most revered pirs but I have not found evidence of such a consultative body in Bangladesh or Pakistan.

Local religious leaders, imams or maulvis, in South Asia vary in their training and in their conservatism. In general, however, particularly in rural areas, the standard of scholarship and orthodoxy is low; many imams do not read the Qu'ran with understanding and only recite it with many errors. In some areas of Bangladesh, imams are under attack from the Jamaat as ignorant, corrupt and promoters of heresy, such as the veneration of pirs. Ali (1994, 4) suggests that rural maulvis are not central in the economic/cultural pursuits of the community and are held in generally low esteem within their villages. Many maulvis depend on local patronage for their support and as such may oppose NGO work that challenges local patron-client relations. At least in Bangladesh, some NGO work threatens local religious leaders directly; in 1992, the government censored a secular Bangladeshi NGO that incorporated images depicting local religious leaders as fat and corrupt in its adult literacy training materials. In Dhaka, a focus group discussion on the problems of girls' participation in education with 15 imams and teachers in religious schools on revealed that these local religious leaders were more conservative than the communities they served.

The findings of this section may be summarized as follows:

1. *In Bangladesh and Pakistan, the Jamaat-i-Islami political party, although it represents only a small proportion of the Muslim population is nevertheless one of the few religious groups sufficiently well-organized to present any religious challenge to development programs.*
2. *The future influence of Jamaat in South Asia is an unknown but important factor in working in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and perhaps India.*
3. *NGOs in Bangladesh and Pakistan are facing opposition on two fronts: fundamentalists who perceive the NGOs as fronts for Western imperialism and Christian missionaries and, to a lesser extent, local religious leaders who may feel a threat to the local power structures which support them.*

The following section illustrates how various groups and leaders bring their perspectives and influence to bear on girls' education in South Asia.

D. Islam and girls' education

The religious education of women is advocated in several verses in the Qur'an and in the Hadith ⁸. Where both the local and the sacred language are written in Arabic script (ie, North Africa and parts of West Africa) these verses may be used to advocate girls' and women's literacy training.

In South Asia, Maulana Ahraf 'Ali Thanawi, a 19th century "scripturalist" reformer in India, argued that Muslim women must be educated in order to fulfill their religious and family duties. The book he wrote to instruct women, the Bihishti Zewar (Heavenly Jewels

⁸See Annex B for a list of the most frequently cited verses.

or Adornments), is still widely used among orthodox Muslims of South Asian origin (Metcalf, 1990, 5). Thanawi is in agreement with many educated and observant Muslims today who use two different lines of reasoning from two sets of verses in the Qur'an and the Hadith-- one describing the different nature and roles of the sexes and the other discouraging unnecessary contact between the sexes--to argue that single sex schools with distinct curricula are the only form of education consistent with Islam. The Middle Eastern Muslims tend to be strong on this point, and both fundamentalists and the scripturalists may argue that

All these defects in the modern system of female education can be remedied if co-education is entirely given up, separate institutions for boys and girls are set up and, consistent with the special needs of each sex, two parallel systems of education and curricula of studies are evolved, so that the large mass of girls who are to be the future mothers of the race may receive preparatory training for their special calling.

[Siddiqui, 1991, p. 124]

Ali (1994) reports that stronger urban religious leaders form small sects that provide schools for girls, managed by their own members. The Sufi pirs have an essentially elitist theory of knowledge which maintains that not everyone needs to be educated, but they have not made any effort to articulate this theory in terms of girls and so have neither promoted nor discouraged girls' education. Finally, from Pakistan, there is contradictory evidence on the importance of local religious leaders. Ali (1994, 4) reports that the rural maulvi is typically not supportive of female education but that, at least in rural villages in Pakistan, his support is not critical. Anderson and Chaudhury (1989), however, found that local religious leaders who were willing to make mosques available for lower level primary schools were a also source of encouragement to parents who were otherwise reluctant to

send their girls to school.

Despite this generally discouraging prospectus, options for working with Islamic groups and leaders to promote girls' education have not been exhausted. For example, the Egyptian government uses at least one verse from the Qur'an in brochures publicizing its USAID-funded educational reforms:

Proclaim! [or Read! or Recite!] and thy Lord is Most Bountiful--He Who taught [the use of] the Pen--taught man that which he knew not.⁹

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee's (BRAC's) Non-Formal Primary Education program deals with local religious leaders on a community-by-community basis. Infrequently, these religious leaders take exception to singing and dancing, an important part of BRAC's curriculum, or to the women program officers' riding bicycles on their school rounds. BRAC has occasionally negotiated with the local religious leaders, other times it has ignored them, and only very rarely closed a school.¹⁰

⁹Note that 'Ali (1991, 1672), the most widely accepted English commentary on the Qur'an, interprets "the Pen" here as a reference to the symbol of permanent revelation, the "Mystic Pen" that the recorder of the Qur'an used, and he interprets "that which he knew not" to be divine revelation. From a strict standpoint, therefore, this verse may have little to say about secular education, but the invocation of sacred texts may lend the educational program some legitimacy among the illiterate.

¹⁰Personal interview with Kaniz Fatema, Programme Coordinator, BRAC NFPE, 9/93.

Further examples of accommodation with Islamic organizations are provided in Section V, below. The relationship between Islam and girls' education discussed thusfar may be summarized as follows:

1. *Established religious groups and leaders are not actively campaigning to keep girls out of school.*
2. *Established religious groups and leaders do not necessarily have sufficient influence either to deter or encourage girls's schooling.*
3. *Many verses in the Islamic sacred texts promote education but the Qur'an does not explicitly support a co-ed, secular, common curriculum for girls and boys.*
4. *An increase in religious conservatism may increase demand for sex-segregated schools.*

According to modernist interpretations, the Qur'an advocates directly neither veil nor the segregation of sexes, but insists on "sexual modesty" for all and for limiting "unnecessary intermingling of the sexes"(Rahman, 1982, 290). In South Asia, both traditional Hindus and Muslims practice similar forms of veiling and seclusion of women, although each group tends to explain these practices in its own religious terms. These practices appear to have a far greater impact on the potential target group for girls' education activities than Islam itself and the next section contains a more thorough description of them.

E. The Relevance of Purdah

At various times in their histories, many societies have placed restrictions on the movement and dress of women and on the amount of contact allowed between the sexes.

In South Asia, the veiling and seclusion of women has conventionally been referred to by Westerners as "purdah", a term derived from the indigenous "parda", literally "curtain", perhaps a reference to the curtain which used to separate men's from women's areas in homes (Vatuk, 1982, 57). The origin of the rituals of purdah is not well-understood; Hindus sometimes explain it as a protective measure taken during the Moghul invasions around the 15th and 16th centuries while Muslims usually trace it back to sacred Islamic texts¹¹. Until the last 50 years, only urban and rural elites could afford to practice purdah. The burqa--a drapery of cotton, satin, or nylon used to cover a woman from head to ankle when she goes out in public--is a 19th century innovation designed to give elite women more mobility outside their homes and may not have been introduced in rural areas in Bangladesh until very recent generations (McCarthy*, 1967).

Many of the girls who are left out of school in South Asia come from poor families that never had the luxury of practicing strict purdah. The topic might therefore be dropped except that the "bell-curve" theory of conservatism suggests that increasing incomes among the lowest income groups--in direct contrast with the upper-middle and upper income groups--have lead to greater orthodoxy in purdah, not less. This orthodoxy, at least in the recent past, was strongly supported by women; Jeffery (1979) notes that in Old Delhi, the older generation considered themselves privileged to be able to practice purdah and she cites several cases where grandmothers'--not fathers'-- objections prevent adolescent girls from leaving the home to attend school. A recent study in Bangladesh by Razia Akhter

¹¹See Annex A for a selection of frequently quoted verses.

Banu concludes that both literate and illiterate women are more observant of Islamic rites than men (Jahan, 1994). The Women's Wing of the Jamaat-i-Islami is large and active and committed to a strict concept of purdah.¹² In contrast, the practice of purdah among middle- and upper-class women has been changing to emphasize modesty in clothing and demeanor and "eye purdah" (Jeffery, 1979, 5), ie, simply avoiding eye contact, either through averting one's gaze or, more recently, with sun-glasses. How quickly these less restrictive forms of purdah will "trickle down" to lower-middle class women remains to be determined.

In parts of South Asia, however, purdah was traditionally used to protect (seclude) young brides in joint families from the untoward attention of higher status males (husbands' older brothers, fathers and uncles) and the envy of higher status females (all older in-laws) (Mehta, 1982). In Pakistan, one study found cases of rape which were perpetrated as an extension of disputes between men in the victim's own family (Zakia Begum (1993) cited in Ali (1994)). Even before marriage, efforts were sometimes made to seclude young girls from potential in-laws. Where marriages were customarily arranged within the community, a girl might be more limited in her movements around her natal neighborhood and less inhibited in strange neighborhoods. In such endogamous communities, any male outside the girl's immediate family might be a prospective in-law, in whose presence she should observe purdah. In contrast a girl born into an exogamous community might move freely around her natal neighborhoods but had to be more restrained in strange communities. The

¹²For Jamaat-i-Islami's view on women, see the book written by their leader, Syed Alam Maududi on Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam.

extent to which practices of purdah in South Asia are still shaped by these concerns, whether or not they are fully observed, is not clear.

In addition, purdah is also more overtly practiced as a method of regulating women's contact with men outside their families, projecting family pride and protecting family honor. Anthropologists note that many traditional South Asian men and women continue to construct their identities primarily as members of families, not as individuals (Feldman & McCarthy, 1983; Jeffery, 1979; McCarthy*, 1967; Mehta, 1982; Papanek, 1973 (1982); Vatuk, 1982; White, 1992). First, keeping women at home is a sort of luxury good, a symbol of prosperity and religious propriety, as well as an expression of Muslim identity distinct from Western norms. Second, showing disrespect for a woman is one way to express disrespect for her family. In parts of Pakistan, if a woman is raped, the family of the victim is "dishonored" but the rapist and his family is not (Ali, 1994, 3). Third, women are also subject to less premeditated but more frequent harassment on the streets from young men whom the community is unwilling to discipline. A school girl who has been conditioned to be submissive to men is an easy target for verbal harassment or even physical abuse. Tales of abduction and acid-throwing¹³ circulate in many communities, adding to girls' sense of danger. Even rumors of harassment may have serious

¹³One schoolgirl reported that it was more dangerous for the "pretty" girls to go to school; she said that such girls attracted more unwanted attention from boys, who pestered the girl to run away with them. When the girls rejected them, the boys threw acid in their faces. I have been unable to corroborate this story personally, or the actual incidence rate of acid-throwing, but the fact that one hears these stories so often, less often accompanied by gruesome pictures in the newspapers, indicates something of the atmosphere of fear, justified or otherwise, in which girls move outside their homes in some areas.

repercussions, creating shame for the girl's family and hampering the girl's chances of finding a good husband. Given these repercussions, the community labels non-violent harassment with a curiously innocuous term: "Eve teasing" (Jeffery, 1979, 154). Finally, all South Asians contacted in this study expressed concern about a perceived increase in crime over the last 20 years, in both urban and rural areas. Given all these very real dangers, schools must offer something demonstrably valuable in order to convince parents to send their girls from the safety of their homes as adolescence approaches.

All of these factors--relating to in-laws, protecting family honor, projecting family piousness, warding off juvenile delinquents and crime--reinforce commitment to purdah and make the distance to and location of the school extremely important. A "safe" distance, however, is not a constant, even within a single community¹⁴. One kilometer within a girl's natal village and one kilometer through lonely woods or a busy industrial area are obviously not the same; similarly, if a girl's older brother attends the same school, or one very near it, a three kilometer walk through the woods may be less of a problem than a one kilometer walk if one has no brother or if his school is in the opposite direction.

Single-sex schools are one potential response to purdah norms. On the one hand, many progressive Western educators are currently reviewing the educational benefits of single-sex secondary schools and colleges. On the other hand, girls' schools are often not funded as well as boys' schools and have a lower academic reputation. Furthermore,

¹⁴This insight was provided by Jerry Behrman (telephone interview, 3/17/94), an economist at the University of Pennsylvania, who, with Richard Sabot of Williams College, is analyzing panel data on rural Pakistan for a World Bank-funded study on education. The results of this study were not available at the time this study was completed.

single-sex schools require a larger catchment area than do co-ed school and therefore the distance to school is increased. All-girl hostels have been used in some areas (eg, the Aga Khan Foundation secondary schools in Pakistan) but often don't work for poor families who need their daughters' labor on a daily basis and cannot afford room and board. Female teachers are sometimes employed to provide an impression of greater sexual safety within the classroom in both co-ed and single schools, but BRAC reports that, at least at the primary level, parents have demonstrated no preference for female teachers when the location of the school in the community allows for continuous informal parent supervision¹⁵

Although the issues raised above are common and well-known to policy makers and educators at all levels, we find surprisingly little evidence of activities designed to address sexual safety or even distance concerns at the Class IV to VII level in education projects in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Distance interventions at the primary level (satellite schools, for example) appear designed to address parents unwillingness to let small children travel alone outside their village, since the schools typically cover only Classes I to III. However, due to low levels of school readiness, lack of time or supervision to complete homework, and irregular attendance, girls often repeat one or more grades in primary school. In addition, for less clear reasons, many of the girls who attend primary school do not start at age six but at seven or eight¹⁶. Many girls reach puberty while they are still in

¹⁵ Personal interview. Kaniz Fatema, NFPE program coordinator, 9/93.

In India, one survey of persons aged 6 and above and never enrolled in school found 4-5% had never enrolled because they were judged "too young to go to school". The

primary school and therefore sexual modesty and safety becomes an issue even the primary level.

This leads to another issue related to purdah: early marriage. Early marriage has a generally negative effect on women's health and the health of their children. Parents, however, have at least three incentives to arrange early marriages for their daughters. First, early marriage shortens the period during which something may happen to damage a girl's reputation. Second, for poor families, a married daughter represents one less mouth to feed. Third, many traditional communities perceive unmarried adolescent girls as a shame for their families and a danger to the community; local norms demand that girls marry as soon as possible¹⁷.

The legal age of marriage for females in Bangladesh is 18 years and in Pakistan, 16 years with parental consent and 18 without it. In India for many years, the legal age of

proportion is highest for urban boys, followed by rural boys; followed by rural and urban girls. The National Sample Survey (1989), Draft Report No. 365, Department of Statistics, Government of India, mimeographed, p. 38.

¹⁷"The Baluch are explicit in their notion that nasp [baser aspects of the soul, if not demons, related to Urdu nafs] is a trait more pronounced in women than in men, women being associated with greater emotional instability. NOTE: Women are said to have seventy-seven kinds of nasp to men's seventy. A story is cited in this connection: 'One day Hazrat Adam quarreled with Bibi Hawa (Eve). Adam went to God and asked to be granted children independent of Hawa. So God brought forth the beings who would become slaves and kings. They are the sons of Adam. Hawa likewise asked God to have children separate from Adam. So God created jinn and la, the true children of women.' Interpretation: The 'sons of man' are either agents (kings) or objects (slaves) of 'control'. The children of Hawa, however, are the capricious, uncontrollable forces directly antithetical to rationality and social order. From such a perspective, the complex of customs relating to parda flow naturally, women being seen as requiring protection from their own worst instincts." (Pastner in Ewing (1988), 168)

marriage varied by religious community; for most religious communities it was 18, but Muslim girls were allowed to marry with parental consent any time after puberty. In practice, many lower income rural families--both Muslim and Hindu--marry off their daughters at ages well below the legal minimum. In most urban areas the average age of marriage is somewhat higher. For example, the average mean age at marriage of currently married females in India varies from 14 years old in one district of Rajasthan to 21 years in a district of Nagaland.

In parts of Bangladesh, however, local custom may be exaggerating the youth of brides. In areas where illiteracy and innumeracy are prevalent, and many births are not registered, many older girls remain "12" years old until menarche, after which they become "13 or 14" until they marry. Most surveys which include girls' age at marriage depend on girls' and/or parents' recall, and cannot be verified. One study, however which has followed residents of the Bangladesh thana Matlab for several decades, determined that although parents reported the customary dates for daughter's age at menarche and marriage, the actual average was 14-15 years and 15-16 years, respectively (Personal communication, Omar Rahman, RAND Corporation, 5/94). The cause of the relative lateness of menarche in Bangladesh, compared with the West, has not yet been determined, though poor nutrition and health is assumed to play a role. The generalizability of this finding has not been verified. For example, is the average age at marriage higher in urban areas because urban parents are more likely to be numerate and therefore keep more accurate records or whether are the customary ages used in urban areas to signal a girl's stage in life simply older?

The findings of this section may be summarized as follows:

1. *"Purdah" is not unique to Muslims and, in varying degrees of strictness, is widespread throughout traditional South Asia society.*
2. *Today purdah tends to be most strictly practiced among the lower-middle and middle classes.*
3. *Increases in religious conservatism over time may increase demands to accommodate purdah concerns in schools, ie, shortening distances to school, assuring physical safety, segregating classrooms or schools by sex, etc.*
4. *Accommodating purdah concerns is not necessarily inconsistent with good educational practice, as long all-girl schools do not become second-class schools.*
5. *Early marriage, a corollary of the way purdah is practiced in some areas, is an impediment to increasing girls' school completion rates at all levels of the South Asian school system.*

The clash between the purdah culture of South Asia and Western-style development is not easily reconciled. White (, 1992 #86, 13), for example, argues

Over gender issues, the Western aid community is openly critical of Bangladeshi society, and is deliberately aiming not only to raise economic standards of living but also to change basic social relationships. Even at the level of symbols, there is direct opposition: aid-inspired studies and projects aim to 'bring women out', to redress their 'invisibility'; while the purdah culture of Bangladesh holds seclusion to be the highest ideal for women.

Economic pressures, mentioned earlier, however, are forcing women into the labor force outside their homes and families. Likewise, an increasing number of Islamic organizations are undertaking economic development. The following section explores some of the activities of these organizations.

F. Islamic institutions involved in educational development

Three intergovernmental Islamic organizations attended the World Conference on Education for All: the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) was one of nine conference co-sponsors, and the Islamic Development Organization (IDB) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) were participants.¹⁸ In addition, other expressly Islamic non-governmental organizations participated in the Conference, including the Aga Khan Foundation and the World Muslim Conference. The ISESCO was founded in 1980 as a specialized organ of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and includes in its aims "to make Islamic culture the basis of educational curricula at all levels and stages."¹⁹ ISESCO's Plan of Action 1988-1991 makes no mention of girls or women as a special target of action²⁰.

Full-time Muslim schools (*Madrasahs*) serve a large number of children, including some girls, in each country; for example, *Madrasahs* provided education to more than 2.7 million Bangladeshi students in 1991 (Karim, 1993, 34). An even larger number of boys and girls attend daily religious classes in *moqtabas*, or mosque schools, either before or after public school.²¹ The *moqtabas* use the rote method of instruction; children in these

¹⁸ Bangladesh and Pakistan are members of all three organizations.

¹⁹Yearbook of International Associations, 1993, p. 1175

²⁰*Ibid.* I have received no answer to faxes requesting further information from ISESCO and the IDB and I have been unable to reach them by phone.

²¹I cannot get a reliable estimate of the number of children who attend mosque schools or religious classes part-time in Bangladesh, India or Pakistan. The Program Coordinator of BRAC's Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) program, with over 450,000 students, 70% of them girls, says that "many" of the NFPE students attend religious classes either before

classes learn to recite and some learn to read the Qur'an in Arabic, without understanding. In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Education recently issued regulations equating various types of *Madrasahs* with corresponding levels of secular schools, allowing for free movement of students between secular and religious schools.

In Morocco, and perhaps other parts of the Muslim world, the most junior religious schools provide general pre-primary education, in addition to religious training, to a large proportion of the modern urban population (Wagner & Lofti, 1980, 249). Wagner notes that this may be particularly useful in countries where the religious language and script are the same as the national language and script, however this is not the case in much of South Asia.

In 1978-89, the Bangladesh government, working with the Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh and the Ahsania Mission (an Islamic NGO), piloted a program to involve the mosque leaders--imams and muezzins--in rural development. The subsequent Imam Training Project (1980-85), together with the pilot activity, trained approximately 13,500 religious leaders. A 1986 evaluation determined that

89% of the trained imams in the study areas...treated on average 388 patients [for various illnesses]; nearly 85% of the imams raised fruit gardens in mosque premises and 61% cultivated fish in ponds belonging to their respective mosques. Many were also involved in teaching Bangla and arithmetic to children alongside religious education. (Karim, et al., 1990, 5)

or after their NFPE classes. Part of the purpose of the community choosing the time for the BRAC schools is to allow them to be scheduled around the religious schools. Given that Bangladesh is less conservative and certainly no more affluent than Pakistan and parts of India, this suggests that participation in religious schools may be fairly widespread throughout the three countries.

To date, there has been no follow-up to determine the degree to which the imams continued these activities beyond the end of government funding in 1985.

In Pakistan, Anderson and Chaudhury (1989) report government efforts to introduce the curriculum of the government schools to about 30,000 mosque schools as a mixed success. The teachers were often of significantly lower quality than those in government schools and the maulvi was not sufficiently educated to help. Anderson and Chaudhury, however, that the mosque schools increased girls access to schooling, particularly when there was no other primary school in the region and when the mosque was less than a kilometer from the girl's village.

Educators in Bangladesh have undertaken several studies and activities to explore the potential role of the moqtabas and madrassahs in promoting universal education. A BRAC-sponsored survey of four rural areas (Karim & Chowdhury, 1990) interviewed 100 imams to determine their interest in serving as potential teachers and their willingness to use their mosques for expanding the BRAC Non-Formal Primary Education program. Over 60% of the imams said they would be willing to have their mosques used as NFPE schools and an even higher percentage said they would be willing to spend 2-3 hours per day teaching the NFPE curriculum. The researchers refrained from drawing conclusions from their sample for several reasons. First, the size of the sample was small. Second, the mosque management committee, not the imam, determines who will use the mosque and a representative sample of those committees needed to be surveyed. Third, BRAC was concerned that the use of the mosque might discourage attendance by non-Muslims.

In October 1990, UNICEF and the Bangladesh Ministry of Education co-sponsored a

two-day workshop to discuss the potential role of mosque schools in supporting compulsory primary education. The outcome of the workshop included a UNICEF proposal for a five-year Mosque-Based Rural Preschool Education Project for Bangladesh (August 1991, unpublished) which has not yet been funded (Karim, 1993, 8).

With respect to adults, Jahan (1989, 5) reports that the female branch of the Islamic Foundation (a semi-governmental organization) provides some non-formal education for men and women throughout Bangladesh, has established 200 Islamic book clubs in educational institutions, and founded libraries in 6300 mosques. In addition, The custom of disseminating religious ideas through tracts and pamphlets is historically popular. Both fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami and the more reformist Tabligh-i-Jamaat produce a prodigious literature in the form of tracts and pamphlets, which are welcome in many rural areas which have little printed material.

Government officials from both Bangladesh and Pakistan participated in a UNESCO-sponsored International Seminar on Literacy and Lifelong Education for Women, "Islam, Perestroika, and the Education of Women: Principles and Possibilities", in Frunze, Kirghizstan, 26 November-1 December 1990. In 1993, Pakistan participated in a regional seminar in Khartoum sponsored by UNESCO and UNICEF on "The Development of the Qur'anic School and its Role in the Universalization and Renovation of Basic Education" . This seminar was remarkable in that it included both Sunni and Ismaili (Shi'ite) participants, as well as representatives of the Arab League and ISESCO. UNESCO is now looking for funding to follow up the seminar with a training workshop in 1994-95 for Qur'anic school teachers on pedagogy and management and subsequently plans to produce

a guide for Qur'anic schools on these subjects.

The findings in this section may be summarized as follows:

1. *Several intergovernmental Islamic organizations are committed to improving education in Islamic countries, but we do not have complete information on their activities.*
2. *Various donors are exploring potential roles for full-time and part-time religious schools in achieving universal primary education, but the activities which involve these schools, for which we have data, suggests that most of activities to date are pilots or studies only.*
3. *At least three religious organizations in Bangladesh are already contributing to adult literacy work, directly through literacy training and indirectly through religious pamphlets that provide reading material in remote areas. The impact of this work and its equivalents in India and Pakistan remains to be determined.*

G. Islamic organizations involved in other development activities

Family planning programs in South Asia and elsewhere have forged a variety of partnerships with Islamic organizations and leaders. The following examples are illustrative of partnerships which might be explored in the context of education. In Pakistan, a Pathfinder family planning project in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) in a small conservative district (Mardan) recruited 300 men, including four imams, to act as health educators²². In 1985-86 the Bangladesh government forbid Population Sciences International to distribute a family planning pamphlet with an Islamic emphasis for use with religious leaders, but later the government put out its own pamphlet and encouraged imams

²²Telephone interview with Imtiaz Kamal, Pathfinder consultant, 4/14/94.

to promote family planning as they saw fit²³.

The Population Council, Johns Hopkins University, Al-Azhar University and the Grand Mufti in Cairo formed a very interesting development partnership over the last 20 years. In 1971, Al-Azhar and Johns Hopkins University sponsored a conference on "The Bio-ethics of Human Reproduction" and subsequent work has led to the publication of several pro-family planning books by orthodox Sunni scholars at Al-Azhar. For example, in 1992, the Egyptian Ministry of Waqfs and the Ministry of Information published Islam's Attitude Towards Family Planning by Dr. Md. El-Sayed Tantawy²⁴. Religious leaders from Indonesia and Nigeria have gone to Cairo to study Al Asher's approach to family planning. African Muslims have historically looked to Al-Azhar and the Grand Mufti for the last word in orthodoxy and are part of the same Sunni school, the Maliki; more surprising is the interest from Indonesia, historically dominated by a different school, the Shafii²⁵. This example suggests, along with the case of UNESCO's seminar for Muslim school leaders, that doctrinal differences between Muslims, at least at higher levels of Muslim society, may be more accomodating than previously thought.

²³Telephone interview with Daniel Lissance, PSI consultant, 4/11/94.

²⁴See also, in the same series, Family Planning in Islamic Law by Shaik Abdul Aziz and The Status of Women in Islam by Jamal Badawi.

²⁵For more information, contact Parker Mauldon at the Population Council, New York. Abdul Omran at the University of Maryland has been working on family planning and Islam issues with the scholars at Al Azhar for more than a decade. AB Sulaiman, the Executive Director of IPPF in Nigeria, is also distributing family planning materials from spaces provided by mosques.

The finding of this section may be summarized as follows:

1. *Family planning projects have developed a variety of approaches to working with Islamic organizations.*

H. Implications for the Rockefeller Foundation

1. *That parents do not cite Islam as an obstacle to girls' education may simply indicate that Islam is the overarching meaning system they use to understand the world.*
2. *The empirical connections between North Africa and South Asia include: an Islamic majority in large areas; low overall education indicators; large disparities between male and female indicators; and similarly secular explanations of low rates of girls' participation in schools.*

RECOMMENDATION: Accept parents' and students' credible secular evaluations of obstacles to girls' participation in schools in South Asia and address those obstacles.

3. *Large proportions of rural and some urban Muslims are not effectively represented by organized Muslim groups or leaders that could serve as entry points for Western development agencies.*

RECOMMENDATION: Consulting with individual Islamic intellectuals or international organizations may be useful. Formal negotiations with most national Islamic groups in South Asia, however, will not result in decisions or actions that will reach most Muslims and that may be counterproductive, to the extent the negotiations could give unrepresentative groups more legitimacy and publicity

4. *The potential for negative conservative and fundamentalist Islamic reaction to major girls' education programs is sufficient to justify careful "risk analysis" prior to undertaking any program. a) Jamaat-i-Islami is sufficiently well-organized to generate defensive actions against girls' programs, if they desired, and have, in other countries, done so. b) The "bell curve" theory of religious conservatism, though perhaps not empirically defined, is of sufficient potential importance to justify thorough investigation.*

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a) *Fund "risk analyses" of the Jamaat-i-Islami and the "bell curve" theory of religious conservatism in South Asia. Potential researchers include the Triangle South Asia Consortium, currently the recipient of a three-year Rockefeller grant to study South Asian Islam.*
 - b) *Consider requiring some or all NGOs receiving initial Rockefeller Foundation grants to include in their proposals and reports brief assessments of potential negative cultural--including fundamentalist and ethnic--reactions to their work. Larger NGOs should have no trouble producing this; smaller NGOs can work with larger, more experienced NGOs to develop the capacity to prepare such assessments. If religious moderation prevails, these assessments may prove to be unnecessary and can be dropped.*
5. *There are no "magic verses" in Islamic sacred texts which prove authoritatively that girls should attend secular, co-ed schools; more importantly, texts and scholarship are not of over-riding interest to the target group. If the "risk analyses" described above, however, predict large or steady increased in fundamentalism and/or conservatism, an "Islamic" approach to girls' education will be needed. In any case, developing such an approach may provide important inputs for social mobilization campaigns.*

RECOMMENDATION: Assemble an international working group on Islam and Girls' Education, among other things, to assemble an internationally respected, orthodox group of Muslim scholars to prepare a scholarly study of Islam and girls' education. An example of the type of person who might be useful on the is Dr. Md. Zaki Badawi, head of the Shari'at Council in Great Britain, is currently serving as a link between the British government and the large, mainly South Asian population in Britain. He is well-respected within the Islamic community and has a Ph.D. from Al-Azhar University in

Cairo, a bastion of orthodoxy, as well as a British Ph.D.. He is a regular commentator on Islam and could head an advisory board, including one or two scholars from each of the three countries. Tel.# in U.K.: 81-992-6636.

6. *Reducing early marriage is obviously a high-return, single focus area of social investment with very significant returns, not just in terms of schooling, but also in terms of all other female quality of life indicators.*

RECOMMENDATION: Consult the international family planning and health development community to determine what strategies already exist, whether schools in South Asia offer comparative advantages as sites for promoting delayed marriage, and what other interventions might help to reduce the number of early marriages.

7. *The relatively low key presence of intergovernmental Islamic development organizations in the education sector in South Asia may indicate that they have small staffs and would appreciate help in locating good investments.*

RECOMMENDATION: Establish dialogue with intergovernmental Islamic development organizations committed to improving the quality of education in Islamic countries, to establish their interest in supporting girls' education programs.

8. *The need for neo-literacy materials, the historic use of pamphlets to publicize religious ideas, and the need for materials to promote girls education may dovetail in South Asia.*

RECOMMENDATION: Use materials developed in the Middle East or through Recommendation 8, above, for newsletters for neo-literates or school children.

I. Potential Roles for the Rockefeller Foundation

The findings in this study do not suggest an Islamic approach to promoting girls' education is imperative in South Asia at this time. For a variety of reasons, however, a normative approach, using Islam as the foundation, might be useful, particularly with respect to removing obstacles to girls' school completion, such as early marriage. First, the quality of schools in South Asia may not increase quickly enough to generate independent demand from girls or their parents. Second, the economic returns to schooling, particularly in rural areas of South Asia, may be inadequate; demand for literate vs. illiterate female workers in rural areas is not growing fast enough. Third, Islamic-based, normative approaches might prove useful in North Africa and the low-income Middle East, as well as Islamic Sub-Saharan Africa.

Activities with an Islamic focus might start as a one-year pilot, with a working group of (probably progressive/modernist) international Muslim educators, including some from South Asia and other parts of Asia. This working group might

- * request proposals and award grants for the study of Jamaat-i-Islami and the "bell-curve" theory of religious conservatism;
- * dialogue with Islamic development organizations; and
- * explore linkages with Al-Azhar or other important Islamic universities.

If these first-year activities yield sufficiently promising responses, the Foundation might move on to more strategic activities, such as investigating Islamic support for overcoming specific obstacles to girls' education, such as early marriage. The ongoing Islamic working group might

- * contract for a series of studies, including the study of girls' education and orthodox Islam and/or a series of papers on early marriage and orthodox Islam, the demographics of early marriage in the Muslim world, etc.

If adequate scholarly support emerges from these studies and Islamic development organizations show an interest, these studies might provide background for

- * a Bellagio Conference on Islam and delayed marriage.

Such a Conference might help the working group decide whether further activities should be pursued and, if so, in what regions of the world. The working group might then choose to

- * disseminate papers developed for and from this conference in popular form, through social mobilization campaigns, as described above, as well as through mosques, religious schools, adult literacy classes, etc.

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ANNEX A

The verses from the Qur'an most often cited in connection with purdah are as follows:

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...

[and a handful of relatives and servants and children]

...and that they
should not strike their feet
in order to draw attention
to their hidden ornaments.

And O ye Believers!
Turn ye all together
Towards Allah, that ye
May attain bliss! (24:31)

O Prophet! Tell
thy 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. (33:59)

Note that the verses which precede these are related, if not so detailed, or so often expounded:

Say to the believing men
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty: that will make

For greater purity for them:
And Allah is well acquainted
With all they do. (24:30)

And those who annoy
believing men and women
undeservedly, bear (on themselves)
a calumny and a glaring sin.
(33:58)

('Ali, 1991, 873-874)

ATTACHMENT A

Islamic Texts Relating to the Relative Status of Men and Women

Excerpts from Muhammad Sharif Chaudhury, "Woman and Education", Women's Rights in Islam, Chapter 14.
Delhi: Adam Publishers. 1991

others. So the ruler may be a man or a woman, he or she is to discharge duties of the office with the consultation and advice of the elected representatives of the people.

The Qur'an condemns in open and unambiguous terms the rule of Pharaoh of Egypt who was a man, but it does not express even a slight disapproval of the rule of the Queen of Sheba who was a woman. So it is not the sex of the ruler which is important, but it is in fact the nature and spirit of the rule which is significant. Circumstances may arise for the Muslim *Ummah* when the benevolent and democratic rule of a woman like Queen of Sheba may be preferable to the despotic and tyrannical rule of a man like Pharaoh of Egypt. Pages of history bear witness to the fact that women became rulers in the Muslim world like Razia daughter of Sultan Iltutmash in India, in thirteenth century. Shajrat-ul-Darr daughter of King Najam-ud-Din in Egypt in thirteenth century, Chand Bibi in southern part of India in 16th century, Sutt-ul-Mulk daughter of caliph Al-Aziz Billah in Egypt in 11th Century A.D. and Queen Shahjahan Begum of Bhopal in India in early 20th century. Their rule was never opposed by any of the well known *ulema* of their age, neither any of the contemporary jurists, scholars or leading *ulema* gave a *Fatwa* declaring their rule *Haram* (unlawful) on the basis of their sex. On the other hand, some *ulema* gave *Fatwas* to justify their rule, e.g., in case of Queen of Bhopal, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi gave a *Fatwa* favouring her rule. However, we can easily find many examples in history when the scholars of Islam and the *ulema* vehemently opposed some male rulers because of their tyrannical and despotic rule. Only recently we have seen in Pakistan that most of the leading *ulema* supported the candidature of a woman for the highest post of the President of Pakistan in the elections of 1964. Thus the Muslim *Ulema*, unlike the Jewish and Christian clergy, have never opposed any advancement of the Muslim *Ummah* in educational, scientific, cultural and socio-political fields.

CHAPTER 22

STATUS OF WOMAN

I - VERSES OF AL-QUR'AN

Following verses of the Qur'an establish beyond any shadow of doubt that Islam gives very high status to the women:-

1. Permitted to you, on the night of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garments and ye are their garments. (2: 187)
2. Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when or how ye will: But do some good act for your souls beforehand; and fear Allah, and know that ye are to meet Him (in the Hereafter) and give (these) good tidings to those who believe. (2: 223)
3. 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. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise. (2: 228)
4. O 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;- reverence Allah, through Whom ye demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you. (4: 1)
5. From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large, - a determinate share. (4: 7)
6. And in no wise covet those things in which Allah hath bestowed His gift more freely on 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 hath full knowledge of all things. (4 : 32)

7. 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. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. (4 : 34)

8. 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). When they are united, she bears a light burden and carries it about (unnoticed). When she grows heavy, they both pray to Allah their Lord, (saying): "If Thou givest us a goodly child, we vow we shall (ever) be grateful." (7 : 189)

9. The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity, and obey Allah and His apostle. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise. (9 : 71)

10. And Allah has made for you mates (and companions) of your own 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? (16 : 72)

11. Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new Life, a life that is good and pure, and we will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions. (16 : 97)

12. And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): Verily in that are signs for those who reflect. (30 : 21)

13. 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 thy parents: to Me is (thy final) goal. (31:14)

14. The Prophet is closer to the Believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers. (33 : 6)

15. For Muslim 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 give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), 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. (33 : 35)

16. O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (49:13)

17. And of everything We have created pairs: That ye may receive instruction. (51 : 49)

18. And Allah sets forth, as an example to those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh: Behold, she said: "O my Lord! build for me, in nearness to Thee, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those that do wrong", And Mary the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into her (body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations, and was one of the devout (servants). (66 : 11-12)

II - AHADITH OF THE PROPHET (P.B.U.H.)

Traditions of the Prophet of Islam about the status of women are quoted as under:-

1. Muawiyah-b-Ja'hemah reported that Ja'hemah came to the Messenger of Allah! I intend to join a battle and have come to you for consultation. He enquired: Have you got mother? 'Yes' replied he. He said: Then keep near her, because Paradise is at her feet. (Ahmad, Nisai, Baihaqi)

treats them with kindness, they will be a shield for him from hell. (Bukhari and Muslim)

12. Ibn Abbas reported that the Messenger of Allah said: If any body has got a female child, and then does neither bury her alive, nor treats her unjustly, nor prefers his children (meaning male children) to her, Allah will admit him in Paradise. (Abu Daud)

13. Ibn Abbas reported that the Holy Prophet said: "If one brings up three daughters or sisters, teaches them good manners and treats them kindly and lovingly till they no longer need his help, Allah will make Paradise obligatory for him." One man said: what if he has two? He replied. And he also, Ibn Abbas said that if the people had enquired about one, the Prophet would have said the same thing. (*Shariah Sunnah*)

III - HER STATUS IN THE LIGHT OF THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

1. Man and woman proceed from the same stock, they are the members of the same species and they are born of the same parents. The Qur'an says: "O Mankind! reverence your Guardian - Lord, Who created you from a single soul, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women-..." (4:1). God created Adam and from him created Eve and from this pair of human beings, He spread abroad a multitude of human beings. God has created everything in pairs (Al-Qur'an 51:49) and the man and woman form one pair among the creations of God. Man and woman are members of humankind and the Qur'an has invariably called them spouses of each other or helpmates and companions of each other. As human beings, man and woman are equal having the same human rights and obligations. Man and woman, when they are united, constitute a family. Man is the father and bread-winner of the family while woman is the mother and mistress of the house, managing the house and bringing up the children. Role of both is equally essential for the cause and advancement of humanity. Man and woman are

two complementary parts of humanity and in the absence of one of them, humanity is not complete. The roles of the man and woman are neither opposed to each other nor inferior or superior to each other, but are equally important and complementaries of one another.

2. Woman enjoys very high status of respect and honour in an Islamic society. As a wife she is the queen and mistress of the house. She manages the house and brings up and trains the children. She enjoys full and complete social, religious, cultural, legal and economic rights. She is entitled to receive dower and maintenance from her husband. She can own and manage her property and can also purchase or sell the property without the intervention of her husband. She can sue and can be sued and she can enter into contracts independently of her husband. In case of differences with her husband she can nominate an arbiter or can take the matter to the court. She can get divorce or can seek the dissolution of marriage in certain situations. Husband and wife are garments of each other being very near and close to each other. They are for mutual support, comfort and protection of each other. The Qur'an calls the wife as the tilth of the husband and thus lays down the responsibility of her protection and security on her husband. According to the Qur'an, the women have similar rights on men as the men have got over the women (Al-Qur'an 2 : 228). Thus she enjoys equal rights with her husband. (For details, please see chapter 2).

3. In the position of a mother, the woman enjoys a unique status of honour and esteem. She is the focus of attention for all the members of the family. In a Muslim home her opinions carry a lot of weight in all family matters. This is due to the teachings of Islam. The Qur'an ordains that the obedience to parents is next to obedience to God. When the Qur'an enjoins upon the believers to obey their parents, it especially mentions the services rendered by the mother (31:14) and thus indirectly places the position of the mother above that of the father. The Prophet of Islam (may Allah's peace be upon him), according to a well reported Tradition, declared in

Islamic Texts Relating to Women and Education

Muhammad Sharif Chaudhury, "Woman and Education",
Women's Rights in Islam , Chapter 14.
Delhi: Adam Publishers. 1991

CHAPTER 14

WOMAN AND EDUCATION

I - VERSES OF THE QUR'AN

It is obligatory on every Muslim male and female to get education, acquire learning and search for knowledge. The woman has got, therefore, equal rights with the man, if not more, to acquire education and learning. Following verses of the Qur'an are ordinarily quoted to impress upon the believers; men and women, the importance of knowledge and to motivate them to get education.

1. And He taught Adam the nature of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell Me the nature of these if ye are right." They said: "Glory to Thee: of knowledge we have none, save what Thou hast taught us: in truth it is Thou Who are perfect in knowledge and wisdom." He said: "O Adam! tell them their natures." When he had told them, Allah said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heavens and earth, and I know what ye reveal and what ye conceal?" (2 : 31-33)

2. He granteth wisdom to whom He pleaseth; and he to whom wisdom is granted receiveth indeed a benefit overflowing; but none will grasp the Message but men of understanding. (2 : 269)

3. O ye who believe! when ye deal with each other, in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing. Let a scribe write down faithfully as between the parties... (2 : 282)

4. There is no god but He: that is the witness of Allah. His angels, and those endued with knowledge standing firm on justice. There is no god but He, the Exalted in Power, The Wise. (8 : 18)

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ISLAM

5. Nor should the Believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them,- that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil) (9 : 122)

6. High above all is Allah, the King, the Truth! be not in haste with the Qur'an before its revelation to thee is completed, but say, "O my Lord! advance me in knowledge." (20 : 114)

7. And recite what is rehearsed to you in your homes, of the Signs of Allah and His Wisdom: for Allah understands the fine mysteries and is well-acquainted (with them). (33:34)

8. O ye who believe! when ye are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room: (Ample) room will Allah provide for you. And when ye are told to rise up, rise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted (mystic) knowledge: and Allah is well-acquainted with all ye do. (58 : 11)

9. Nun, by the pen and by the (record) which (men) write,- thou art not, by the grace of thy Lord, mad or possessed. (68 : 1-2)

10. Proclaim! (or read) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created—created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood: Proclaim! and thy Lord is Most Bountiful,- He Who taught (the use of) the Pen,- taught man that which he knew not. (96 : 1-5)

II - AHADITH OF THE PROPHET

The Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) about the importance of knowledge and need of education for the men and woman are cited below:-

1. Anas reported that the Messenger of Allah said: Search for knowledge is compulsory upon every Muslim male and Muslim female. (Ibn Majah)

2. Anas reported that the Messenger of Allah said: whoso goes out in search of knowledge, he is in the path of Allah till he returns. (Tirmizi)
3. Anas reported that the Messenger of Allah said: Search knowledge though it be in China. (Baihaqi)
4. Sakhbarah-al-Azdi reported that the Messenger of Allah said: Whoever searches after knowledge, it will be expiation for his past sins. (Tirmizi)
5. Ayesha reported: Superiority in education is better than superiority in divine service. (Baihaqi)
6. Ali reported that the Messenger of Allah said: Learning is treasure-house whose keys are queries. (Abu Nayeem)
7. Ibn Mas'ud reported that the Messenger of Allah said: There is no envy except for two: a man whom Allah has given wealth and whom he gave power for spending it for cause of truth, and a man whom Allah has given wisdom and who acts upto it and teaches it (to others). (Bukhari and Muslim)
8. Kasir-b-Qais reported: certainly the superiority of a learned man over the pious worshipper is like the superiority of the full moon at full moon-lit night over the rest of the stars; and verily the learned are the heritage of the prophets, and the prophets left no heritage, no silver or gold coins, but they left learning. So whoso acquires it, acquires a sufficient fortune. (Ahmad, Tirmizi, Abu Daud)
9. Ibn Abbas reported that the Messenger of Allah said: To the devil, a learned theologian is stronger than a thousand pious worshippers. (Tirmizi, Ibn Majah)
10. Abu Omamah al Bahili reported: Two persons were mentioned to the Messenger of Allah, one of the two is a pious worshipper and the other a learned man. The Messenger of Allah said: The superiority of the learned man over the pious worshipper is like my superiority over the meanest of you. (Tirmizi)

11. The Apostle of Allah said: Whoever brings up three girls, teaches them culture and good manners, marries them and treats them well, for him is Paradise. (Abu Daud)
12. Malik-b-Huwairith reported that there were a few young men who stayed with the Prophet for twenty days to know about matters of religion. When he felt that they were anxious to go home, he said; Go to your families, stay with them and tell them about religion and practise it. (Bukhari)
13. Once a man wanted to seek a woman in marriage. The Prophet asked: Have you got any thing with you which we may give to her as dower! The man searched and could not find anything. The Prophet asked: Have you got any portion of the Qur'an with you? "Yes", said he, "such and such verse." The Prophet married him to the woman and directed him to teach those verses to her. (Bukhari, Muslim)
14. Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari reported that the Messenger of Allah said: ...A man with whom there is a slave girl, who teaches her manners and then makes her manners good; who gives her education and imparts it well, and who then emancipates her and afterwards takes her in marriage - there are double rewards for him. (Bukhari, Muslim)
15. Hadrat Umar wrote to the people of Kufah: Teach Surah Nur to your wives". (Tafsir Qurtubi)

III - RIGHTS DISCUSSED IN LIGHT OF QUR'AN AND HADITH

Since it is obligatory on every Muslim male and female to acquire knowledge, the woman has got as much right as the man has got for acquiring knowledge and education. Hence the injunctions of the Qur'an and Sunnah are equally applicable to men and women.

1. The importance which the Qur'an gives to education and learning can be judged from this fact that the first few verses of the Qur'an which were revealed on Prophet Muhammad (Allah's peace be upon him) instructed him to read. Al-Qur'an