



Women in Islam

Session 3: Some subjects in need of clarification

NOVA Life-Long Learning (NOVA-LLI)

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Outline of Topics

Session 1:

- Significance of this topic
- Watching a video on Women in Islam
- Some Islamic principles about gender

Session 2:

- Women's specific rights
 - Basic human rights
 - Economic rights
 - Political rights
 - Social rights
 - Education rights

Session 3:

- Some areas in need of clarification
 - Women's Dress Code
 - Polygamy
 - Marital discord and "wife beating"
 - Inheritance share of males and females
 - Witness of women vs. men
- Summary and conclusions

Subjects to be Clarified

1. Women's dress Code
2. Polygamy
3. Marital discord and “wife beating”
4. Inheritance share of males and females
5. Witness of women versus men

Dress Objective

*“O Children of Adam! Indeed We have bestowed upon you clothing **to cover your nakedness and to offer adornment**. But the finest of all is the clothing of God-consciousness (Taqwa). That is one of the signs of Allah so that they may become mindful.” (7:26)*

- *“O Children of Adam! Let not Satan deceive you in the manner he deceived your (initial) parents out of Paradise, pulling off their clothing from them to reveal to them their private parts....” (7:27)*

Women's Dress Code

- Women's natural physical attractions
 - To be covered for modesty and dignity
- Impact of women's physical attractions on men can not be denied or ignored
 - Exposure of women's physical attractions is a major and difficult test for men
 - It is a natural weakness of men
 - Both are expected to protect each other from failing in the tests
 - *"Believing males and females are (supposed to be) protectors of each other" (9:71)*
- Role of dress in covering physical attractions
- Use of women as sexual objects throughout history
 - Role of revealing their physical attractions

Islamic Dress Code

Basis of requirements of dress code (known as Hijab) for men and women:

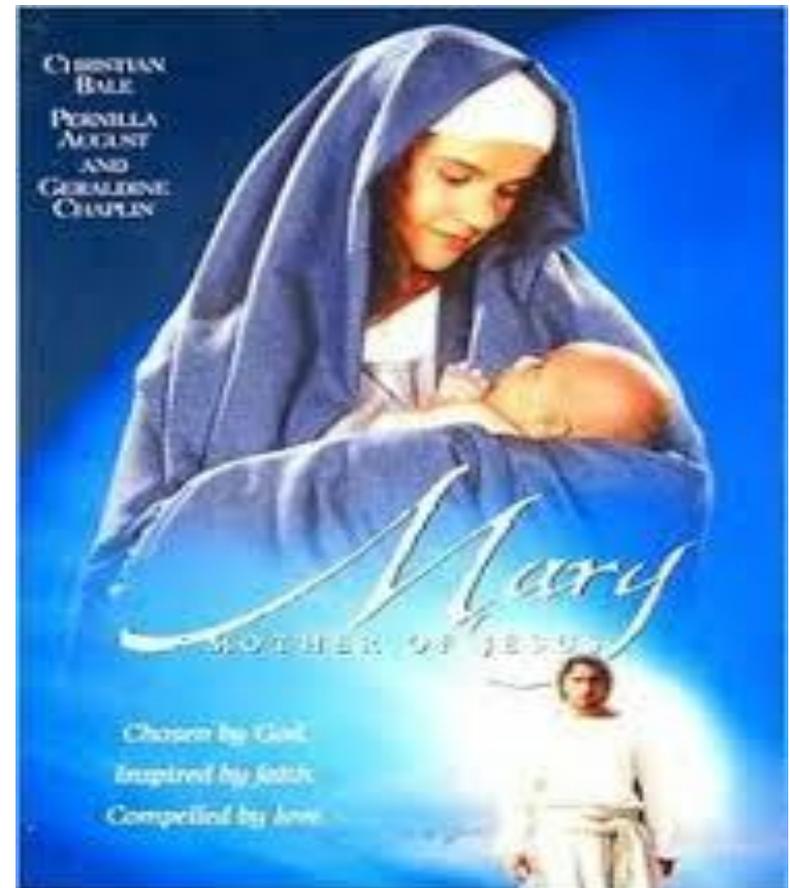
- *“Say to the believing **men** that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts: that is for greater purity for them. And, Allah is well acquainted with all that they do.*
- *And say to the believing **women** that they should lower their gaze and guard their private parts; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils (head covers) over their bosoms.” (24:30-31)*
- *“O prophet! tell your wives and your daughters **and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over themselves** (when outside): that is better that they **should be distinguished** (as such) and not harassed: and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (33:59)*
- *“When an adult Muslim woman goes outside, she should cover all parts of her body except her face and hands” (Hadith, authenticated by Albani)*

Islamic Dress Code

- Islamic Dress Code: 3 main requirements
 1. Degree of coverage (based on previous slide)
 2. Thickness
 3. Looseness
- Dress being simple and not flashy, conservative and not vulgar
- Dress code is for all believers in God

All Believing Women Observe Hijab

- Mary (mother of Jesus): Always portrayed in a wide flowing dress and veil on her head - one of the most iconic figures in Christianity is wearing the same thing that Muslim women wear



Catholic Nuns Observing Hijab



Women of the Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church



Orthodox Jewish Women



Orthodox Jewish Family (in Ontario)



Women of Faith Observing Hijab



Catholic Nun



Orthodox Christian Nun

Muslim



American Amish Women Observe Hijab



American Women's Dress in the Past

- Just a century ago



Women's Dress Code in Bible

- *“I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.” (NIV, 1 Timothy 2:9-10)*
- *“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.” (NIV, 1 Peter 3:2-5)*
- *“A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the LORD your God detests anyone who does this.” (NIV, Deuteronomy 22:5)*
- *“If a woman refuses to wear a head covering, she should cut off all her hair! But since it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut or her head shaved, she should wear a covering.” (NRSV, 1 Corinthians 11:6)*
- *A short video on Christian women head covering:*
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqbqiOHXGWY>

Head covering of Women in Christianity

- Christian head covering was unanimously practiced by the women of the Early Church
- *"It is not becoming, even for married women, to uncover their hair, since the apostle commands women to keep their heads covered. (Augustine, bishop of Hippo)*
- Until at least the 18th century, the wearing of a hair covering, both in public and while attending church, was regarded as customary for Christian women in Mediterranean, European, Middle Eastern, and African countries
- Many Eastern Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Russian Orthodox Church, and Oriental Orthodox Churches currently require women to cover their heads while in church
- Anabaptist Christians, Amish and Mennonites, currently believe that women should wear head coverings all the time when outside
- Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_headcovering

Some Benefits of Hijab

Primary reasons and benefits

- An act of obedience to God
- Modesty and dignity of women

Other Benefits

- Easier for men to interact with women
- Attention of men to women's character instead of their bodies
- Sharing special beauty and attractions only with spouses leading to family preservation and unity
- Protection of women from molesting
- Reminding others about obedience to God
- Distinction between believing women and others
- Passing a test of life for both men and women

Polygamy

- Polygamy is not the norm in Islam, but an exception
- It is a solution to specific contingencies in society when there are more women than men, e.g. post wars
- World population: Women more than men
- Polygamy practiced all along history with no limit
- The indefinite number of wives became limited in Islam
- And, allowed only by strict conditions
 - Requires justice and fair treatment
 - Requires approval
- If properly understood and applied, it is a burden on men and a favor to women

Marital Discord and “hitting wife”

- The Qur’an addresses a serious and exceptional marital discord, and it offers a 3-step solution:
 - *“Men are 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.*
 - *As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and defiance, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) **tap them** (as a last resort); but if they return to follow, seek not against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all).*
 - *If you fear a discord/breach between them, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family, and the other from hers; if they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation: for Allah has full knowledge, and is acquainted with all things.” (4:34-35)*

Marital Discord and “hitting wife”

- Misunderstanding and misuse of the verse
- First, proper context of verse need to be understood
- Second, steps to be followed in order
- Third, it has to be the last resort only for preventing divorce and saving the family
- Fourth, meaning should be understood from the Prophet
 - By his own example who never hit a wife
 - As tapping, or using straw or toothbrush - very symbolic
 - When used, it must be so light that it does not show any effect on the skin, it must not inflict any injury whatsoever, it must not be on the face, etc.
 - It is more of a gesture for conveying gravity of the issue rather than an exercise to inflict pain

Marital Discord and “hitting wife”

- The translation of the word "Dharb" as "beating" or "striking" or "hitting" is not accurate. The closest word for such light physical measure would be "tapping"
- The word "Dharb" could also mean traveling (hitting the road) and separation
- Why even tapping allowed?
 - To regulate/restrain natural tendency of men using physical force
- Why such a measure?
 - To test who is applying it correctly and who is not

Prophetic Example

- "Prophet Muhammad never hit any of his wives or servants; in fact, he did not strike any living being with his hand except in the cause of Allah (armed struggle) and when he retaliated on behalf of Allah." (Hadith An-Nisaa'i)
- The prophet repeatedly said: "The best of you are those who are the best and kindest to your families, and I am the best to my family."
- Example of Prophet Job (Ayub) in Qur'an:
 - During his ailment, Satan suggested to his wife to say a word of disbelief to her husband (Job) and she did. So, he became angry with her and took an oath to strike her one hundred times. Then, Allah ordered Job to fulfill his oath by striking her with the bundle of thin grass.
 - In such a way that he would not harm her, yet still fulfilled his oath as explained in Qur'an:
[To Job]: And take in your hand a bundle of thin grass and strike therewith (your wife),... (Verse 38:44)

Inheritance Share for Females

- *“For men, there is a share in what the parents and the nearest of kin have left. And for women, there is a share in what the parents and the nearest of kin have left, be it small or large, a determined share” (4:7)*
 - While before Islam, women were object of inheritance
 - In many non-Muslim countries even after Islam, the oldest son inherit the whole state of deceased
- *“Allah directs you concerning your children: for a male there is a share equal to that of two females” (4:11)*
- This is because:
 - Financial responsibility of family on man
 - Women have no financial responsibility
 - Always on receiving side
 - Her finances secured
- Also, a woman benefits from her husband's share coming from her in-laws' inheritance in addition to her share in her parents' inheritance
 - She gets shares from both sides while men do not get any share from her in-laws' side

Women and Men as Legal Witnesses

- Equality of testimony of men and women
 - For example, in launching a charge against spouses, the same testimony requirement for husband and wife (24:6-9)
- Only one verse asks for testimony of “*two women or one man*” (verse 2:282)
 - Exception in loans and financial matters
 - Corroboration of two women to protect each other
 - Being a witness in a court of law is a huge responsibility and burden. It could even result in the witness being jailed or fined and many such cases. So, protecting women from all those issues
 - But generalized by some and taken out of context as if there is a rule that worth of women testimony half of men testimony
- When wives of Prophet reported so many Hadith as individuals, no one asked for a second witness

Existing Situation of Muslim Women

- Rights observed whenever / wherever faith practiced properly
- In many areas of Islamic world women still enjoy certain rights (not all)
- Decline of Islamic societies have abandoned certain other rights, due to:
 - Living away from pure Islamic teachings
 - Wholesale acceptance of other cultures
 - Developing of/sticking to un-Islamic local customs
 - Misinterpretation of some Islamic teachings
- Current Trend- Islamic revivalism in individual and social levels

Women in Islam: Summary

- Full rights and equity provided over 1400 years ago
- Not a second-class citizen, but the cornerstone of family-cornerstone of society
- Prophet Muhammad can be considered a dedicated women's rights advocate
- Reasons of certain differences
 - Protection of women's rights
 - High morality of society
 - Balance in society: Some differences of assignments and rulings
 - Due to some physiological and psychological differences, there are certain differences in obligations, assignments, and requirements. - resulting in some different rulings for men and women

Readings

- Gender Equity in Islam, by Dr. Jamal Badawi
- Islam in Focus, Hammudah Abdalati, pages 162-190
- Role of Muslim Women in Society, by Afzalur Rahman