

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

ANALYSYS OF THE DEPICTION OF  
MARYAM AND AISHA IN THE HOLY  
QUR'AN AND THE AUTHENTIC AHADITH:  
A FEMINIST APPROACH

BY  
SOLOMON KEBEDE



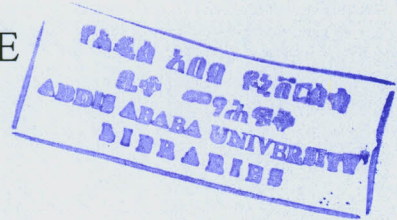
A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF  
GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE

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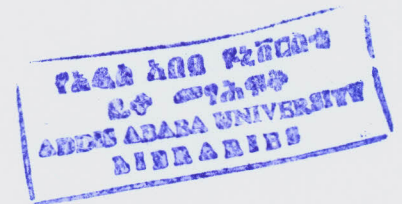
## Transliteration of Arabic Words

The following list is the system that the researcher used in transliterating the letters of the Arabic alphabet.

| Arabic Sounds | Symbol         | Example     | Gloss                 |
|---------------|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| أ             | A              | Akh         | Brother               |
| ث             | Th             | Thawb       | Cloth                 |
| ح             | *Ĥ or ĥ        | Ĥikma       | Wisdom                |
| خ             | kh             | Khubz       | Bread                 |
| ذ             | z              | Zahab       | Gold                  |
| ش             | Sh             | Sharq       | East                  |
| ص             | Ś              | Śahaba      | Companion             |
| ط             | *Ṭ or ṭ        | Ṭabib       | Doctor                |
| ظ             | Ẓ              | Ẓahir       | Clear                 |
| ع             | **Á, Û or<br>Í | Álim or Ílm | Scholar,<br>Knowledge |
| ق             | Q              | Qarn        | Century               |

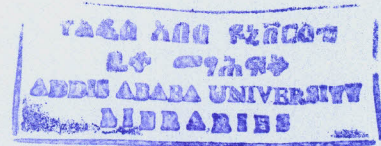
\* One of the symbols can be used with out creating any difference in meaning or pronunciation.

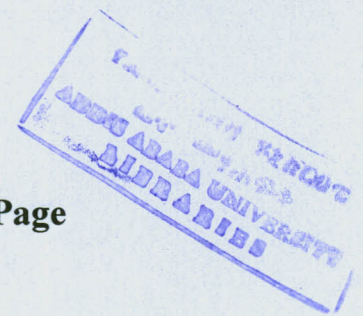
\*\* There is a difference in meaning as well as in pronunciation. The symbols change according to the vowels that follow ع.



## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the 'late' professor of history, Professor Hussein Ahmad, who gave his entire life to academics.





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## ABSTRACT

This research aims at analyzing and showing trends of Islamic feminism. The research examines the roles played by two selected personalities in their given society and period. The ladies are selected from The Holy Qur'an and the ḥadith, which are the prime sources of Islam.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter tries to give information on the background of the study, its objectives and significance. The methodology used as well as the scope and limitations of the study are also described in this chapter.

The next chapter is dedicated to the analysis and interpretations of Islamic feminist literary criticism. The developments and basic theories of Islamic feminism are also discussed.

The third chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the personalities and roles played by Maryam and Áisha in their respective societies.

The last chapter is the summary and conclusion based on the analysis of the selected scriptural texts. It reiterates the core findings in a nutshell.

# CHAPTER ONE

## 1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Women's issues have been disputable for centuries. Though women constitute half the population of the world, in many societies, including the developed countries, women were considered as unproductive, submissive and dependant.

In ancient civilizations and through out the centuries, the status of women has varied considerably. Although women were occasionally given a modicum of respect, they were usually oppressed and abused. Very often rules and legislation concerning women were shockingly unjust. They were deprived of their civil rights as well as their natural human rights... They were no better than slaves, cheap to buy and easy to sell... (Naseef, 1999, 6)



The continents believed to have a rich history of freedom and democracy, Europe and America, are not an exception. Encyclopedia Britannica (2005, 160) states the following concerning women's treatment in the history of Europe and America:

Throughout most of western history, women were confined to the domestic sphere, while public life is reserved for men. In medieval Europe, women were denied the right to own property, to study or to participate in public life. Even as late as the early twentieth century, women in the United States, as in Europe, could neither vote nor hold elective office...women had little or no access to education and were barred.

It is against such patriarchal attitudes that women raised their voices. Patriarchy according to Ruthven (1991, 1) refers to a system which

enables men to dominate women in every aspect of life. In such societies, masculine values and structures are promoted to maintain male privilege.

Schultheiss in 'Women's Rights' (Microsoft Encarta, 2007 ) states that the struggle for women's rights began in the 18th century during a period of intense intellectual activity known as the Age of Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, political philosophers in Europe began to question traditional ideas that based the rights of citizens on their wealth and social status. Instead, leaders of the Enlightenment argued that all men were born with natural rights that made them free and equal. Many Enlightenment thinkers thought that the ideas of equality, political representation and liberty applied only to men. One of the most influential thinkers of the time, the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, claimed that women were sentimental and frivolous. Rousseau argued that women were naturally suited to be subordinate companions of men.

In response to Rousseau and others who belittled the role of women in society, the British writer Mary Wollstonecraft wrote A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1791) which marks the modern awareness of women's struggle for equal rights. This book is one of the sustained works in feminist philosophy (Cudd and Andereasen, 2005). In this book, Wollstonecraft argued that, like men, women were naturally rational but their inferior education often taught them to be silly and emotional. Therefore, she argued, if they are given the proper education, they are able to reach where their brothers reached.

In the early 19th century, the vast majority of married women throughout Europe and the United States still had no legal identity independent of their husbands. This legal status—known as *coverture*—prohibited a married woman from being a party in a

lawsuit, sitting on a jury, holding property in her own name, or writing a will. In custody disputes also, courts routinely granted permanent custody of children to the father. (Schultheiss, Microsoft Encarta 2007).

In order to end women's sufferings, the feminist movement came into existence and women began to advocate for equal rights. According to Cudd and Andereasen (2005, 1), feminist theory is the attempt to make intellectual sense of, and then to critique the subordination of women to men. Feminist literary criticism emerged based on the theories of the feminist movement. Therefore, it is the application of the theory of feminism to the analysis of literary texts.

It is surprising to find such 'barbaric' actions on females, like infanticide, domestic violence, forced marriage, denying access to education and many others in the era of globalization. The societies' attitude, in both the developed and developing countries, has not been changed yet as it should be. The US Equal pay act was signed in 1963 making it illegal for employers to pay unequal wages to men and women who held the same job and do the same work. However, women are still paid less than men. Encyclopedia Americana (2006, 108k) states the current unfair situation in America and the world in the following sentences:

In the United States women earn \$0.7 to men's \$1.00. Today 12% of the females born world wide are missing, uncounted, uncountable, many of them victims of infanticide.

According to the Time Almanac (2006, 371) in American higher institutions, women occupy only 29 % of science and engineering positions. But they fill only 15% of those positions at the top 50 research universities in these fields. Men occupy 77 % of science and

engineering jobs. Only 23 % of the jobs are occupied by females. If this is the case in one of the world's 'democratic' and developed nation, America, it could easily be guessed how worse the condition can be in many of the developing nations.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Various actions have been taken by international organizations like the United Nations, The European Union, The African Union and others to improve the situation of women. Despite the efforts of these international organizations and governments, the condition of women is still dire. One of the reasons for the failure of the efforts of the organizations is lack of proper understanding of the real situation of the women concerned.

Many Western feminists considered themselves as saviors of third world women, little realizing that their perceptions of and solutions to social problems were often at odds with the real lives and concerns of women in these regions (Encyclopedia Britannica; 2005, 162)

There are different assumptions that tend to reflect that women are oppressed more in Islamic societies than others.

Muslim societies are generally described as male dominated, patriarchal, and in some cases even male aggressive. (Women and social justice, 1996, 1)

Some people, especially Western observers of the plight of Muslim women, think that women's oppression in Islamic societies stems from their religion, Islam. They argue that Islam is inherently misogynist. Moreover, since they view Islam as uniquely patriarchal and incompatible with women's equality, they believe that any

attempt aimed at liberating women from the age old patriarchy is against the Islamic principles. (Priscilla Offenbauer, 2005, 1).

On the other hand, many feminists have shown great interest in examining Islamic texts in order to fully understand the sources of and solutions to the plight of Muslim women. 'An increasing number of secular Middle Eastern feminist scholars have turned to Islamic texts to find solutions for women's oppression' (Moghissi, 2002, 134). Some feminists, especially advocates of Islamic Feminism, believe that Islam strives for women's freedom from the societies' patriarchal attitudes.

A group of feminists, mostly secular academics living in the West, has in recent years used the term 'Islamic feminism' to refer to Islamic alternatives to western feminisms. They treat Islam as the only authentic, indigenous road to gender equality and justice. Like their predecessors, Nazira Zain al-Din and others, they advocate the compatibility of Islam and feminism. (Mojab, 2001, 130)

The researcher believes that Islamic principles and women's rights do not contradict. In order to understand women's position in Islam, one should examine the conditions of women during Prophet Muhammad's time, women's status stated in the prime sources of the religion, The Holy Quran and the Ĥadith [sayings, actions and commands of Prophet Mohammed] and women's portrayal in the sacred texts.

This research tries to shed some light on the historical perspectives and theories that govern feminist literary criticism, especially Islamic Feminism. However, the basic aim is to highlight the feminist perspectives of The Holy Qur'an and the Ĥadith focusing on Maryam, the mother of Jesus (Isa) and Áisha, the wife of Prophet

Muhammad. After briefly stating the main focus of feminism in general, the researcher attempts to show what roles Maryam and Áisha played in their respective societies and how they are portrayed in the most influential materials that govern Muslims' life, The Holy Qur'an and the Ĥadith, based on feminist perspectives of writing.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

We often hear criticisms on Islam regarding the treatment that it gives to women.

Muslim societies are generally described as male dominated, patriarchal, and in some cases even male aggressive. (*Women and social justices*, 1996, 1)

Muslims believe that The Holy Quran is revealed as the guidance for mankind. Muslims use the Ĥadith to elaborate the ideas in The Holy Quran and they consider it as the second reliable source in the life of a Muslim. Every Muslim is bound to bow to the principles of The Holy Quran and the Ĥadith. The main objective of this study is to explore how The Holy Quran and the Ĥadith portray the image of women, focusing on Maryam and Áisha. The roles the two ladies played in their respective societies and the paradox that we hear from criticisms and the treatment that Islam gives to women are also discussed.

### 4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study may have the following significances:

- It sheds some light on the real images of women in The Holy Quran and the Ĥadith
  
- It helps to understand the realities of the periods in which the selected personalities lived and relate the developments of the

society on gender related issues. This can also help to understand the condition of Muslim women.

- It initiates Muslim women to analyze their due rights that are stated in The Holy Quran and the Ĥadith.
- It shows the contributions of The Holy Quran and the Ĥadith towards the betterment of women's social, political and economic life.
- Enables other concerned bodies to understand the real situation of women's roles from The Holy Qur'an and the Ĥadith and take measure towards the betterment of women's situation.
- It also serves as a stepping stone for future researches.

## **5. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The Holy Quran and the Ĥadith guide Muslims in their journey through life. Therefore, they focus on every aspect of life. This implies that they consist several themes. However, dealing with all these themes is unrealistic and beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, the scope of this paper is limited to the portrayal of Maryam and Áisha in The Holy Quran and the Ĥadith.

Portrayal of Maryam and Áisha will be evaluated and interpreted according to their roles in the socio economic context of their society using Islamic feminist approach. The study does not include the other approaches. The focus of this study is also limited to the critical analysis of the selected two personalities. It does not include the analysis of other women portrayed in The Holy Qur'an and the *hadith* though it may discuss some other women who are portrayed in The Holy Qur'an.

The study has also its own limitations. The major limitation is time. Moreover, since the subject, Islamic Feminism, is relatively a new phenomenon, there are not enough sources to help establish the context of the study.

## 6. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Feminism as a literary criticism has many sub-divisions like Marxist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, black feminism, semio feminism...It is unrealistic to apply all the sub-categories of feminist literary criticism. Therefore, Only Islamic feminist approach will be used in line with this research. The study focuses mainly on written materials. Analytic method of research will excessively be used.

The research attempts to look on the portrayals of and roles played by the selected personalities. Representation of women in politics, economy and social involvements will be analyzed to prove the gender ideology of the texts in particular and the religion in general. Txt analysis will be used as the main method.

The study will excessively be dependent on the English translation and commentary of The Holy Quran by Abdallah Yusuf Ali, The Holy Quran Text, Translation and Commentary and Sahih Al-Bukhari, which is a collection of *Hadith* and considered as the second reliable guide on the life of a Muslim. Besides the text analysis, the researcher conducts an interview with prominent Muslim scholars.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2. ISLAM AND FEMINISM: CONFLICTING OR CONVIVIAL?**

Many feminists argue that loads of the traditionally endorsed ways of representing women in literature appear to be not only anti feminist but also dead set against female. Feminists assert that in the pagan tradition as well as in many of the monolithic religions, women are considered as sources of evil that men should be careful of (Ruthven, 1991, 83).

Islam, as one of the world's monolithic religions, and feminism, as an ideology that strives to the betterment of women's status, seem contrary concepts to some people. Islam is often criticized for the treatment it gives for women. People ask how a religion that prohibits women from driving cars, forces them to wear veils, allows men to have many wives, forces girls to marry without their consent, bans girls' education, restricts them to the sphere of domestic life and does so much injustice on women could be compatible with feminism, an ideology that strives for women's freedom. They think that Islam and feminism are contrary to each other. However, in order to understand whether they are contrary or convivial concepts, it is important to examine the position of women in Islam and what Islam says about the goals that feminists are struggling to achieve.

## **2.1 THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN ISLAM**

Islam was introduced in a society that considered women as private properties. Female infanticide was a common phenomenon in the culture of pre-Islamic Arabia. A family that consists of a female member considers her as sources of shame. Therefore, the male members of the family, especially her father, will bury her alive. Fortunately, if the female child has the chance not to be buried alive, she will lead a dejected life.

If the female child was fortunate enough not to be buried alive, she spent the rest of her life being oppressed and persecuted. Neglected by her parents and abused by her husband...She was denied most human rights, she had no right to inheritance; indeed she herself was inherited like any other object and piece of furniture (Naseef 1999, 33).

Despite the fact that after the advent of Islam, the status of women in the Arabian society has shown a considerable improvement, Islamic societies are still referred to as patriarchal (Ahmed 1996, 1). What does Islam say about women's rights? Does Islam ban girls from education? Does Islam restrict women to the sphere of the domestic life? Does Islam prohibit them from driving cars? The following pages, dealing with the status and rights of women in Islam, give the answer for these and other related issues.

### **2.1.1 THE ESSENCE OF CREATION**

Islam teaches that human beings are created with a great mission. The first and foremost task of humans, according to The Holy Qur'an, is to be ambassadors or agents of God. They are

shouldered with responsibilities to establish social justice as agents of the divine will. This responsibility implies accepting to find the motivation both to understand the divine will and then to act in accordance to that understanding (Wadood 2007, 35) The Holy Qur'an stresses this fact in the following verse: 'Verily I will create a *khalifah*, vicegerent on the earth' (The Holy Qur'an 2: 30). In explaining the above verse, Wadood (2007, 33) has the following to say:

...Allah intends to create a trustee. In fulfilling that intention, humankind is created. The implication of a particular role to be fulfilled by that human creation gives the statement ['Verily I will create a *khalifah*, vicegerent on the earth'] its ontology, intent or purpose. Human beings are created to be trustees of Allah.

This trusteeship refers neither only to men nor only to women. It refers to all human beings. The status of women in Islam emanates from the essence of their creation, to obey the commands of God and be His trustees. Based on the responsibility for this great mission, women's rights and status in Islam could be analyzed as follows:

### **2.1.1.1 THE STATUS OF A DAUGHTER**

In pre-Islamic Arabia, people used to bury their girls for different reasons. Girls were seen as signs of dreadful fortune and ignominy.

Among many Arab tribes, girls were buried alive for reasons of poverty and honor (as The Holy Quran makes clear in VI, 138); many pagans believed that infanticide was sanctioned by their gods. On the whole the infant girl was an unwelcome intrusion into the family (Fazlur Rahman 1983, 37).

The Holy Qur'an strongly opposes the infanticide. It addresses the situation condemning the act in the following verses:

'When the female (infant) buried alive is questioned, for what crime she is buried' (81: 8-9).

When news is brought to one of them, of the birth of a female child his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people, because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain it on (sufferance and) contempt, or burry it in the dust? Ah what an evil (choice) they decide on? (The Holy Qur'an 16:58-59)

Islam teaches parents to have the same affection and attitude towards their sons and daughters. A person should not differentiate between his/her children. The prophet has encouraged people to support their daughters and sisters. He has also taught that anyone who has a daughter and who does not bury her alive (as it was the custom of the Arabs), does not insult her and does not favor his son over her, God will enter him into paradise (Ibn Hanbal, hadith number 1957).

#### **2.1.1.2 THE STATUS OF A WIFE**

"The most perfect believers are the best in conduct and best of you are those who are best to their wives" Prophet Muhammad (Ibn Hanbal, hadith number 7396)

Islam gives at most concern for marriage. It is considered as the legal basis for the greatest institution, the family.

The normal, natural course of behavior for a Muslim is to establish a conjugal family of procreation. This is the common practice of ordinary men, spiritual leaders and even prophets. To that effect, there are many passages in the Qur'an and the

traditions of the prophet which go as far as to say that when a Muslim marries, he thereby perfects half his religion; so let him be God minded with respect to the other half (Ábd al'Ati 1977,52)

The prophet has taught husbands to be kind to their families. During his famous *Khutba* (a discourse delivered during religious ceremonies, especially on Fridays) at *Hajjat al-wada'a* (the farewell pilgrimage) to a crowd of *Ṣaḥāba* (companions of the Prophet), one of the issues, he stressed, was married women's rights. He warned men to be God minded with respect to their wives. He emphasized that men and women have certain rights towards each other. They should live in kindness and mercy with out violating the rights of each other.

Moreover, The Holy Qur'an in 2:187 states that husband and wife are as a garment and body. "They [your wives] are your garments and ye are their garments". This implies that they beautify, protect, support and comfort each other as a garment protects and beautifies the body.

### **2.1.1.3 THE STATUS OF A MOTHER**

Mothers have a special place in Islam. Serving parents is a duty of every Muslim next to the worship of God (The Holy Qur'an 17:23). There are many Qur'anic verses that command believers to be taut in serving their parents, especially their mothers.

"And We have enjoined on man (to be good) to his parents: in travail upon travail, did his mother bear him..." (The Holy Qur'an Ch.31, Verse No.14) The same message is transmitted in chapter 29 verse 8 and chapter 46 verse 15.

According to Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari (vol. 4 ḥadith number 5971) a man came to the Prophet and asked whom to respect more and make

good companion. The Prophet replied that he should respect his mother more than anyone else. The man continued to ask and said “Then who?” The prophet replied “Again your mother.” The man asked four the third time “Whom should I respect more after my mother?” The Prophet replied by saying “Then your mother”. The man asked the same question for the fourth time. Lastly, the Prophet replied “After that, give respect to and take the good companionship of your father.”

## **2.1.2 WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN ISLAM**

### **2.1. 2.1 ECONOMIC RIGHTS**

In traditional societies, the bread winners and managers of the economy are often males. Females are economically dependent on either their parents or their husbands though they have significant contribution to the economic well being of the family. Nowadays, many people believe that women’s economic dependence hinders them from fighting for their rights. Moreover, the cost of living is increasing from time to time making life unbearable for families with single source of income. In order to make their lives better, married women are engaging in economic activities and young women are delaying their marriage until they get jobs. People ask whether Muslim women are allowed to engage in economic activities and possess wealth. The following points deal with the economic rights of women in Islam.

#### **2.1.2.2 RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES**

The prophet is reported to have said that the best food one eats is a food from the wage of his labor (Bukhari, Vol. 2 *ḥadith*

number 2072). Abu Huraira has also reported the following: The prophet (p.b.u.h.) said “One would rather chop wood and carry a bundle of it on back than ask somebody who may or may not give him.” The above *aḥadith* tell us that Islam encourages its followers to work hard. There are many traditions of the prophet that encourage people to work to their capacity.

Islam does not prohibit women from participating in economic activities. The best example in this case, could be the prophet’s first wife, Khadijah bint Khuwailid. Khadijah was one of the prominent figures who played a vital role in the economic activities of her society (Sabir, 2002). During the prophet’s time, females used to share their husbands’ jobs (Dalilu al-mar‘ah al-muslimah, 166). Al-Turabi (2000, 27) states the following concerning women’s rights to engage in economic activities:

Muslim women may engage in business and commerce. Qaylah Um Bani Atmar, was an outstanding example of a merchant lady in her time. ...Umar ibn Al-Khattab at one point entrusted the supervision of market affairs to Shaffah bint Abdullah bin Abu Shams. He hyeld her in a very high esteem and duly sought her consul.

However, Islam emphasizes that women should not be compelled to earn for their living (see section 2.1.2.4). If a woman, out of her own free will, wants to work, she has the right to participate in economic activities that suit her desire and capacity. The principle guiding women’s work is that the job should not abuse people’s dignity and contradict the *shari‘a*. Muslim women are not allowed to be engaged

in such jobs like serving alcohol, exhibiting their beauty and body as models and film actors do. These jobs are prohibited for men too.

### **2.1.2.3 RIGHT TO OWN WEALTH**

There are certain verses, in The Holy Qur'an, which show that women can possess wealth.

“From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and there is a share for women ...” (The Holy Qur'an 4:7).

“And give the women (on marriage) their dower as obligation.” (The Holy Qur'an 4:4)

It is clear from the above verses that women can possess wealth from inheritance, bridal money or from the wages of their labor. The prophet's first wife, Khedijah, and some of the wives of the companions of the prophet, like Zaineb, were rich women ( Dalilu al-mar'ah al-muslimah, 166).

### **2.1.2.4 RIGHT TO BE FREE FROM FINANCIAL EXPENSES**

As stated in section 2.1.2.2, in Islam, a woman is not supposed to work for her living. Her male relatives are responsible for providing her financial expenses. The responsibility of covering her financial expenses falls on her father or brothers if she is not married. If she is married, the responsibility falls on her husband. However, this does not mean that a woman can not earn money. She has the right to earn money. This money will be exclusively hers. No one is allowed to force her to spend the money without her will even though it is for her own benefit (Dalilu al-mar'ah al-muslimah, 166-167).The

Holy Qur'an has the following to say concerning the financial responsibilities of males:

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women” (4:34). The Arabic word used in the above verse is ‘*Qawwamun*’. The singular form is ‘*Qawwam*’ which refers to one who stands firm in his or another’s business, protects his or another’s interests, looks after his or another’s affairs. Therefore, according to the verse, men are ‘*Qawwamun*’, responsible for protecting and maintaining women.

### **2.1.2.2 SOCIAL RIGHTS**

Islam acknowledges that the progress of a society depends on mutual participation of women and men. The Holy Qur'an (9:71) states that pious men and women are helpers of each other. They enjoy what is good and forbid what is evil.

The social rights of women are discussed below.

#### **2.1.2.2.1 RIGHT TO SEEK FOR KNOWLEDGE**

Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1791) argued that women were naturally rational but their mediocre education often taught them to be frivolous. Therefore, if they get proper education, they have the ability to improve the conditions of their society.

There are many verses in The Holy Qur'an that deal with the importance of knowledge. “...And when ye are told to rise up, rise up: Allah will raise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted (mystic) knowledge...” (The Holy Qur'an 58:11). The prophet has also emphasized that education is not a ‘right’ but an ‘obligation’. The famous *ḥadith* reads: “To seek

for knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim". The prophet was keen on women's education too. In an attempt to fulfill their desire to knowledge, women asked the prophet to assign for them a day in which they can learn and ask freely. He accepted their request happily and assigned a day for them (Bukhari, vol. 1 *ḥadith* number 101).

Islam has a rich history in women's education. It has witnessed many female scholars in the fields of theology, literature, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), education, and medicine. The wives of the prophet Aishah, Umu Salamah, Zainab bint Jahsh and Safiyyah have contributed a lot to our understanding of Islam. Besides his wives, Umu Salim, Umu Atiyah, Umu Sharik, Umu Dardaa, Asmaa bint Abubakar, Fatima bint Qays and other female companions of the prophet have also played prominent roles (Shaheen, 1995; Sabir, 2002).

Women were not confined to learning only. They have also contributed a lot in spreading knowledge. Among the pioneers of the four widely accepted schools of thoughts, Imam a-Shafii and Imam Malik were taught by females. Aishah bint Sa'ad Ibn Abi Waqqas taught the first compiler of *ḥadith* and the founder of the Maliki school of thought, Imam Malik. Imam a-Shafii, the founder of the most widely spread school of thought and the celebrated judge of all times, was taught by Sayyida Nafisa, granddaughter of al-Ḥasan, the Prophet's grandson.

Women's scholarship can be witnessed in the times of the *Tabiyyin* (the next generation after the companions of the prophet) too. Quoting Ibn Sa'ad, Siddiqui (146,1961 ) states that women like Ḥafsa, Umu a-Darda'a and Amra bint Abdurrahman held the most important positions as traditionists during the period of the *Tab'iyin*.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries too, there were renowned women scholars like: Faṭīma bint al-Ḥasan, Karima al-Marwaziyyah, Shuhda and Sit-al-Wuzara' bint Umar, who were celebrated not only for their knowledge of *ḥadīth* literature, but also their mastery of Islamic law and calligraphy (Zubair 1961, 149).

There were also eminent female scholars in the later generations of the Islamic society. Asma Sayeed in *Women and Ḥadīth Transmission: Two Case Studies from Mamluk Damascus*, discusses how two women played an important role in transmitting the *Ḥadīth*. She states that these two scholars had numerous students who eagerly sought their authoritative transmissions. Women in Mamluk Damascus took full advantage of the entry points in *ḥadīth* studies and went far to the extent that they excelled their contemporary prominent male scholars.

Citing Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Asma (2002, 75) states that one of the *ḥadīth* transmitters, Zaynab bint al-Kamal, had a camel load of *ijdzas* (certificates of *ḥadīth* transmission).

Her biographers confirm that she was a reliable authority for compilations from diverse genres. Among the works that she transmitted are major *ḥadīth* collections including the *Saḥīḥs* of al-Bukhari and Muslim, the *Sunan of Abu Dawud*, and the *Muwatta'* of Malik. In addition to these, she acquired authority for numerous other lesser compilations.

The other scholar, during the fourteenth century in the region of Mamluk Damascus, was Á'isha bint Muhammad b. Ábd al- Hadi (723-816/1323-1413). Concerning the certificates that she acquired, Asma (2002, 84) states the following:

The certificates that Á'isha acquired during her early years authorized her to transmit a number of works, like: the *Sahih* collections of both al-Bukhari and Muslim; the *Sirah* of Ibn Hisham; 'Arba'in collections of al-Ta'i; a minor hadith compilation (juz) of Abu al-Jahm; and a portion of the work entitled *Dhamm al-Kalâm* of al-Harawi.

Islamic history is rich in feminine scholarship. The women involved neither confined their study to a personal interest in traditions nor in coaching of only few individuals, but actively participated as students as well as teachers in public educational institutions. Women like, Niima bint Ali, Umm Ahmad Zaynab bint al-Makki and others taught in major colleges such as the Áziziyya and Diyaiyya Madrasa. Siddiqui (151, 1961) has the following to say:

...on folio 250 [of a manuscript containing al-Mashikhat ma al-Tarikh of ibn al-Bukhari] we discover that a famous woman traditionist, Umm Abd Allah, delivered a course of five lectures on the book to a mixed class of more than fifty students, at Damascus in the year 837/1433.

#### **2.1.2.2.2 RIGHT TO SELECT MARRIAGE PARTNERS**

Islam considers marriage as the legal basis for the great institution, the family. It is regarded as an act of piety. The bases of marriage, according to The Holy Qur'an (30:21), should be love, mercy and tranquility. In order to base marriage on love, mercy and tranquility, there should be mutual cooperation between the couple. This implies that no one should be forced to marry whom she/he does not want.

In Islam women have the full right to select their future life partners. If a woman is forced to marry a man whom she does not

want, she has the right to reject the contract. In Sunan ibn Majah (hadith number 1873) Abu Baredah reports the following:

A young lady came to the prophet of Allah (p.b.u.h) and said 'My father has given me in marriage to his nephew in order to compensate for his low status.' The prophet gave her the right to decide whether to accept or reject the marriage. She said 'I agree to what my father has done. I just wanted to show women that the decision is theirs and not their fathers.'

The prophet rejected marriages that were to be conducted without the consent of the women involved (Bukhari, hadith numbers 5138, 5139, 6945 and 6969).

### **2.1.2.2.3 RIGHT TO DIVORCE**

Islam regards marriage as an act of worship. Though they are not believed to have been made in heaven, marital relationships are expected to last as long as possible. However, sometimes the spouses may not understand each other. They may even develop detestation to each other. In such cases, before divorce is inevitable, every possible attempt should be made to solve their problems. If their conditions do not improve, the couple may look at divorce as their last option. Divorce is the vilest but permitted act in the sight of Allah. In the Islamic *sharia*, there are many types of divorce. One of them is known as *khuli*. In this type, the wife is the initiator of the divorce. If she does not want to continue in marriage with her husband, she has the right to divorce him. The Holy Qur'an states the following:

If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves and such settlement is best; even though men's souls are swayed by greed, but

if ye do good and practice self restraint,  
Allah is well acquainted with all that ye  
do(4:128).

According to the above verse, if a wife feels that she is abandoned or mistreated, she has the right to seek for divorce. There are also prophetic traditions that state divorces initiated by women in which the prophet did not object (Bukhari vol. 3 *ḥadith* numbers 5273, 5274, 5275, 5276 and 5277).

### **2.1.2.3 POLITICAL RIGHTS**

#### **2.1.2.3.1 FREEDOM OF SPEECH**

Freedom of speech is one of the major manifestations of democracy. Most of the time, governments are often praised as democratic or condemned as autocratic based on their policies towards their citizens' freedom of speech.

Islam's stand on freedom of speech has been witnessed in many historical events. Anyone, whether male or female, is given the right to speak he/she feels provided that he/she will not violate other's rights. In the Islamic history, there were many females who argued with authorities and even with the prophet.

One of the women who argued with the prophet was *khawlah bint Tha'labah*. In pre-Islamic Arabia, there was a custom called *zihar*. In this custom a man says to his wife 'Be thou as the back of my mother'. This implies that he considers her as his mother concerning sexual relationship; he no more treats her as his wife. The lady will be a widow who remains in her 'ex-husband's' house. She will be obliged to abstain from sex through out her life.

Khawlah was one of the ladies distressed by this custom. She came to the prophet and complained that her husband did *zihar* to her. The prophet told her to be patient. However, she didn't stop arguing with him telling that she could not bear it. Then Allah revealed the following verses in support of Khawlah's claim and a general rule concerning *zihar* (Abu Dawud: Book of Divorce, *ḥadith* number 2214).

God has indeed heard (and accepted) the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint (in prayer) to God: and God (always) hears the arguments between both sides among you: for God hears and sees (all things) ( The Holy Quran: 58: 1-2)

It is also reported in Saḥīḥ Muslim (vol. 2 *ḥadith* number 1108) that the prophet's wives used to speak their ideas freely. Aishah and Ḥafsa went as far as arguing with him.

There is also another interesting historical event which assures women's freedom of speech during the caliphate of Umar. Umar, the head of the Islamic state and the second caliph after the death of Prophet Muhammad, was delivering a *khutbah*. In his *khutbah*, he prohibited people from paying excess dowries. He warned the people that the excess amount will be taken to the public treasury.

After delivering the *khutbah*, he met a flat nosed lady standing among the women audience. She stopped him and said that fixing dowries is not his right. He asked her why she said so. Then the lady proved her claims quoting The Holy Qur'an's verse twenty of chapter four. Finally, Umar admitted his mistake. Then, proclaimed the following:

The woman is correct and Umar is wrong. It seems everybody has deeper wisdom and insight than Umar. O! People, I had restricted the giving of excessive dowries. Whoever wishes to give a dower as much as he likes and finds satisfaction in doing so, may do so. (ḥadith ibn Jawzi, Sunan al Baihaqi: 7,233)

During the prophet's time, women had the full freedom to express their ideas freely. They also had the right to reject or accept anyone's personal feelings, including the prophet's personal thoughts and feelings.

### **2.1.2.3.2 PARTICIPATING IN MILITARY ACTIVITIES**

Islam, as a way of life, gives a full guide to its followers. All religions preach peace and tolerance. Islam teaches that if anyone slew a person, it would be as if he slew the whole of human beings; and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the whole people (The Holy Qur'an 5:35).

However, there are also some occasions in which fighting is allowed, and even made compulsory. Allah has ordered Muslims to fight for people who are oppressed in spite of the religion of the oppressed people (The Holy Qur'an 4:74). Nevertheless, it is obligatory only on men. Women are free from this obligation.

Women, out of their own free will, can participate in military activities. They used to participate in wars during the times of the prophet (Bukhari, vol. 3 ḥadith number 4071). Nadawi (2002, 6) quoting Sahih Muslim and Tabari, states the following:

Umm Zaid, Ashjiya, and five other ladies helped the Muslims during the battle of Khaibar, by working at spinning wheels. They picked up arrows from the field and offered grain flour (*sattu*) to the soldiers. Umm Atiyya cooked for the companions in seven battles.

### **2.1.2.3.3 LEADERSHIP AND RUNNING FOR OFFICE**

Islam had recognized women's right to vote before 1400 years. During the prophet's time women used to pledge allegiance with the prophet. There is no single text in The Holy Qur'an that prohibits women from being leaders. However, in the Islamic political system, the head of the state is not a mere figure. He is supposed to lead congregational prayers (though it is not obligatory) and act as the commander in chief of the army. Sometimes there might also be a need for closed door meeting between two heads of states. In such cases, Islam does not allow intermingling of sexes. Therefore, some Muslim scholars believe that women should not act as head of states. However, these scholars agree that women can participate in law making, as chief advisors and parliament members.

The Holy Qur'an in 42:8 states that Muslims should consult one another before decisions. The prophet used to consult his wives in important issues. During the treaty of Hudaibiyah, the companions of the prophet were so stressed by the terms of the treaty that they became lenient in obeying the Prophet's order. He became upset and told to his wife, Umu Salama. She told him what to do and he did as she told him. Then the companions understood that they should obey his commands (Sunan ibn Majah, 1952, vol.2, 952)

Based on the above ḥadith, many scholars argue that a woman can be the chief advisor of the head of the state. Apart from advising the head, some scholars argue that, women could act as heads of states. In fact, there were some women governors of provinces in the Islamic history (Al-Turabi, 2000).

Although they are few, Muslim majority countries have witnessed female leaders of states like Prime ministers Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Khaleeda Zia and Hasina Wazed of Bangladesh, Tansu Ciller of Turkey, Madior Boye of Senegal, and Executive President Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia.

According to Offenhauer (2005, 4) women's participation in politics and leadership in Muslim majority countries is above the world's average of women's participation in leadership positions. In some Muslim majority countries like Tunisia, U.A.E and Pakistan women's representation in parliaments is better than America, Britain and Canada.

#### **2.1.2.4 SPIRITUAL FACET**

If any do deeds of righteousness-be they male or female and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them (The Holy Qur'an 4:124).

The Holy Qur'an states that there is no difference between men and women in their relationship with God. The Holy Qur'an in 74:38 states that everyone is responsible for his or her own deeds. Men and women will be equally rewarded for their good deeds and equally punished for their sins.

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 ( The Holy Qur'an 33:35 ).



Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has Faith, Verily, to him will We give new Life, and life that is good and pure, and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions (The Holy Qur'an 16:97).

The above verses make clear that there is no distinction between male and female concerning rewards and punishments. Moreover, in Islam, women are not considered as sources of evil, but fortresses against devil. The Holy Qur'an (4:25) calls a good woman as *Muhsinah*, which means a fortress. Good women are taken as fortresses against the devil.

In terms of religious obligations, women are exempted from certain activities like praying the Friday prayer in congregation, which is obligatory on men. In addition to congregational prayers, they are exempted from any religious obligation during their menstrual and post natal periods (Bukhari, vol. 1 *hadith* numbers 304, 305 and 1462).

## 2.2 POLYGYNY, A SELECTION FROM MISCONCEPTIONS

The Islamic stand on polygyny is one of the sternly misunderstood topics. It is also inappropriately used by some Muslims. The reason behind the Qur'an's recommendation of polygyny is not satisfying ones sexual desires. The verses concerning polygyny were revealed immediately after the battle of U<sup>h</sup>ud when

the Muslim community was left with many orphans and widows (Abdullah, 1941, 179). In such cases, the members of the community are responsible for caring and providing maintenance for the orphans and the widows (look at section 2.1.3). The verses dealing with polygyny were revealed in order to protect widows and orphans.

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one,...( The holy Qur'an 4:3).

The following points can be deduced from the above verse:

1. The aim of the recommendation to practice polygyny is not satisfying one's sexual desire, but protecting orphans.
2. Polygyny is neither obligatory nor encouraged, but merely a 'permitted' act with certain preconditions.
3. Dealing justly between ones wives is a precondition. The verse emphasizes that if a man fears that he will not be just between his wives, then he must marry only one. Can a man deal justly between his wives? The Holy Qur'an in the same chapter verse 129 has the answer: "Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire..." According to this verse, it is almost impossible for a man to be fair and just between women. Therefore, polygyny could be practiced only as a solution for social problems where the number of females outnumbered the number of males in the society and the females do not have any other option. Abdullah (1941, 179) comments the following concerning the verses dealing with polygyny:

The unrestricted number of wives of the "Times of ignorance" was now strictly limited to a maximum of four, provided you

could treat them with perfect equality, in material things as well as in affection and immaterial things. As this condition is most difficult to fulfill, I understand the recommendation to be towards monogamy.

In general, The Holy Qur'an does not encourage polygyny. It only recommends polygyny as a solution for social problems. Mutahhari (1991, 396) states that Muslims in the full knowledge and full intention do not behave with justice. However, they marry several wives in the name of Islam and under the cover of Islam. Mutahhari calls those people who misrepresent and discredit Islam by their mischievous deeds.

## **2.3 PROMINENT WOMEN IN THE HOLY QURAN**

The Holy Quran depicts some women as pious, mighty, wise and exemplary to others. It also portrays some women as wrong doers and transgressors. In the first category, we find Hawwa (Eve), Maryam (Mary), the wife of the Pharaoh, the mother of Prophet Musa (Moses), Bilqis (the queen of Sheba), where as in the second category, we find the wife of Áziz, who tried to seduce Prophet Yusuf (Josef), the wives of the Prophets Nuĥ (Noah) and Luġ (Lot).

### **2.3.1 THE WIFE OF THE PHARAOH**

In order to fully understand the personality of the wife of the Pharaoh, it is important to analyze the condition of the society under the rule of the Pharaoh. According to The Holy Qur'an (20:24, 69:9, 73:16, 85:17-20, 89:10-14) Pharaoh is the most transgressor and autocratic person the world has ever witnessed and will ever witness. He ordered his soldiers to slaughter every male of newly born Israelis, who were the slaves of the Egyptians. However, when Musa's (Moses) mother gave birth to Musa, she placed him in a wooden box

and let it float on the Nile River. The people of the Pharaoh rescued the child and took him to the palace (The Holy Qur'an; 20:38-40).

Pharaoh wanted to kill the child. Nevertheless, his wife succeeded in persuading him not to kill Musa (The Holy Qur'an 28:8-9). Pharaoh continued his autocratic rule to the extent of proclaiming that he is the only god people should worship (The Holy Qur'an 28:38, 79:24). However, his wife refused to accept his false claim and stood fast in her belief of supernatural monolithic God. Amini (1996, 47) has the following to say concerning Āsia:

One of the most picturesque figures in history and one of the women, who, in the gloomiest era, rose up against tyranny and corruption in the land of Egypt, was Asia, Pharaoh's wife... The very presence of a truth seeking woman at the center of injustice and discrimination was a miracle and it was God's determination to appoint her as one of His heavenly revelations to support the divine religious movements of Moses.

Āsia dared to express her belief in such difficult circumstance that The Holy Qur'an addresses her as a woman with an exalted manner. She was also set as one of the exemplary figures to both men and women. The Holy Qur'an (28:11) states that Allah has set her forth an example for believers.

### **2.3.2 ĤAWWA (EVE)**

Unlike the popular patriarchal attitude towards Eve, The Holy Qur'an addresses her as Adam's partner and among the persons who are loved by Allah. The Holy Qur'an teaches that both Adam and Ĥawwa listened to the whisperings of the Satan and disobeyed Allah's warning not to approach the tree they are forbidden to eat. "So by

deceit he [Satan] brought about their fall...and their Lord called unto them: ‘Did I not forbid you that tree, and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?’” (The Holy Qur’an 7:22). The above verse shows that Ĥawwa was not the temptress who led Adam to sin. Unlike the English pronoun ‘You’, the Arabic suffix (*huma*) which is used in the above verses, implies only dual plural. Therefore, God addressed both Adam and Ĥawwa as responsible for the sin they committed.

However, The Holy Qur’an tells us that they regretted for the mistake they made and asked Allah to forgive them. “They said: ‘Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls: If Thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us Thy Mercy, we shall certainly be lost’” (The Holy Qur’an 7:23).

### **2.3.3 BILQIS, THE QUEEN OF SABA’ (SHEBA)**

The Holy Qur’an depicts her as one of the wisest individuals. Verses 20-44 of chapter 27 are devoted to her story. Bilqis was a democratic leader. She confers with her councilors before any decision. When Prophet Sulaiman (Solomon) heard about her potent empire and grand throne, he sent her a message calling her and her people to monotheistic belief. The people of Saba’a used to worship the sun (The Holy Qur’an 27:30-31).

As soon as the message reached her, Bilqis called her councilors and informed them about the content of the message seeking advice. The councilors suggested a military action. They told her that their army is sturdy and able to perform any mission. They also stressed that the final decision rests upon her (The Holy Qur’an 27:33).

Bilqis wanted to prove whether Sulaiman is a real prophet or an ordinary king. She thought that if he is a real prophet, military action

will never be successful. Instead of a military action, dealing with him peacefully will be effective. Therefore, she sent a gift to know Sulaiman's interest on worldly matters. However, Sulaiman refused to accept the gift.

Bilqis realized that she should visit Sulaiman's kingdom and discuss the issue with him. During her stay with Sulaiman, Bilqis was amazed to see Sulaiman's greatness and wisdom. Finally she accepted his call of her submission to the will of God, monotheistic belief.

## **2.4 ISLAM AND FEMINISM: REVISITED**

Feminism, as stated earlier, is an ideology directed at liberating women from the chains of patriarchy and improving their economic, social and political situations. Feminist criticism, according to Lois Tyson (1999,81), examines the ways in which literature as well as other cultural productions strengthen or dent the economic, social, political and psychological oppression of women.

Despite the fact that all feminists struggle against patriarchy, there have been differences and even conflicts between feminists, especially between feminists in the developing and developed nations. These conflicts, which have been recognized most luminously at international conferences, sprung from the issues that organizers of the international conferences gave priority. The burning issues for the women in the developing countries are not the same as the issues women in the developed countries are concerned about.

Encyclopedia Britannica (2005, 162) states that women in the developing nations viewed the agenda in the international conferences as being usurped by Europeans and Americans. The organizers of the conferences chose to focus on agenda which are not priorities of the women in the developing nations.

Aziza al-Hibri an advocate of Islamic feminism and a scholar of Muslim women's rights, quoted in Encyclopedia Britannica (2005, 162), has the following to say about the nature of one of the conferences:

“[Third World women] noted that they could not very well worry about other matters when their children were dying from thirst, hunger or war. The conference instead centered around reducing the number of Third World babies in order to preserve the earth's resources, despite (or is it 'because of') the First World consumes much of these resources.”

Since women in different societies have different problems, some feminists argue that there is no single best feminist point of view. They also dub their field in the plural (Feminisms) to emphasize that there are multiple points of views of its adherents (Tyson 1999, 81).

The fact that feminist issues range widely across cultural, social, economic, political and psychological categories, produced multiple sub-categories of feminism. One of these sub-categories of feminisms is Islamic feminism. The term Islamic feminism refers to beliefs and activities of Muslim women who try to find solutions to their plights within the boundaries of Islam. Moghissi (2002, 134) points out that many secular Middle-Eastern scholars have turned to Islamic texts to find solutions for women's oppression. These women treat Islam as the only bona fide, aboriginal road to gender equality and justice. They promote the compatibility of feminism and Islam (El Guindi 1996, 159-61, Mojab 2001, 130, Moghissi 2002). Islamic feminism, according to Svensson (1996) is not a new movement. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, a few great Islamic thinkers such as Sayyid Jamal-ad-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Reza, and especially Qasim Amin and later “the Sister's movement”

tried to give a fresh, laissez-faire, reformist and feminist reinterpretation of Islam.

Quoted in Mir-Hosseini (2002, 249), Saidzadeh argues that Islam regards men and women in the same way, thus it can accommodate feminism.

Islamic feminists argue that many of the injustices done on women in Islamic societies are against the principles of Islam. The reasons for these injustices vary from place to place. Saidzadeh, quoted in Mir-Husseini (2002, 257), states the following points as reasons for the roots of the injustices:

1. Acceptance of existing written collections as religious texts.
2. Lack of attentions to vernaculars and idioms at the time of revelation.
3. Selection of incorrect methodologies in deducing rulings.
4. Ignoring factors of time and space.

Islamic feminists claim that The Holy Qur'an is egalitarian in its message. However, some aspects of the Islamic *Sharia*, which are the works of men, disfavor women. Kasim (2005, 111-112) has the following to say concerning the development of the *Sharia*:

...the Muslim jurists in the systematization of their legal systems incorporated the moral and ethical injunctions as narrated in the Qur'an in the customary laws. The Qur'an provides, in general, ethical and moral injunctions and occasionally describes very specifically laws and rules in detail as we find in the case of inheritance. But on the whole the Islamic legal system are the works of the Muslim legalists. They are views and

interpretations based on the religious texts. They did so as they found fit according to the needs and the world view of their times. Their outlook on gender relations reflects the conditions of the Muslim societies of their times.

Advocates of Islamic feminism argue that there is a strong need to go back to the religious scriptures and analyze the status and rights of Muslim women. Margot Badran (The Milli Gazette 2004) states the following:

Islamic feminism wants to go back to Quran, not to the jurisprudence created by different people. According to Islam, only the Quran is divine, Shariah is not divine. Islamic feminism is speaking for justice to women as Islam stands for. It's a tool to remind people what Islam is for women... The term Islamic feminism is an idea of awareness preaching that men and women have equal rights based on re-reading the Quran, re-examining the religious texts and telling people to practice it.

Islamic feminists, unlike their Western counterparts, view religion as the main factor that enables them to attain their goal. They regard the principles of Islam as their defenders and emancipators. In claiming the rights of women ordained by God and the teachings of the Prophet, Islamic feminists point to the lives of the early *Sahabiyyat* and model women who are stated in The Holy Qur'an. It has been attempted to show that there were many female companions of the Prophet who played an important role to the well being of their societies. In addition to the companions of the Prophet, The Holy Qur'an also presents women who can be models for both men and women. Maryam and Āisha are the two most important figures that can be taken as role models for Muslims, especially for Muslim women.

In addition to the published materials, it has been attempted to review unpublished materials relevant to the study. Some senior essays have been written on The Holy Qur'an in partial fulfillment of Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education. *Analysis of Flashback in the Holy Qur'an*(2004) which is done by Rukia Hassen in Debub University is the pioneer (as far as my search goes). The paper attempted to extract samples from the chapters of The Holy Qur'an to show how flashback is used in The Holy Qur'an.

Two years later, Aida Abdullah in AAU attempted to do on the same topic but with special reference to two chapters of the Holy Qur'an, Hud and Yusuf.

In the same year, Kemalu Kheireddin attempted to analyze major characters in The Holy Qur'an selecting chapter Yusuf in his *A Brief analysis of Major characters in the Holy Qur'anic Story of Yusuf*. Ibrahim Muhammad also did *Analysis of the Three Major Characters in the Qur'anic Story of Ibrahim* in 2007.

In addition to these, in 2007, Ansha Kemal did her senior essay on Female Characterization in The Holy Qur'an. Moreover, Yimam Workineh (2008) did his MA thesis on the same text. Yimam in his *Narrative Techniques in The Holy Qur'an with Special Reference to the Five Surahs (Chapters)* discussed the major narrative techniques employed in The Holy Qur'an.

Regarding the unpublished sources, it is clear that as far as papers and thesis on feminism, especially Islamic feminism, is concerned, there isn't any that deals with The Holy Qur'an. Therefore, the researcher believes that there is a wide gap to be bridged. Thus, this research is a new contribution in the area.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. ISLAMIC FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF MARYAM AND ÁISHA IN THE HOLY QUR'AN AND THE *HĀDITH*

The Holy Qur'an and the *hadith* literature offer many female role models who achieved the highest status of life. These women were referred by The Holy Qur'an and the *hadith* as holy, righteous and even perfect. One of the women is Maryam who is depicted as the perfect woman and a role model for believers, men and women. The other woman, who is written in the hearts of many Muslims as the unbeatable scholar, political leader and a devout believer, is Aisha. This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the lives of these two great personalities.

#### 3.1 MARYAM

##### 3.1.1 MARYAM, BIRTH AND UPBRINGING

Maryam was born to a chosen family. Chapter three of The Holy Qur'an, Al-Ìmran, is named after Maryam's family. 'Al-Ìmran' literally means the family of Ìmran. Ìmran is the father of Maryam. Allah states that the household of Ìmran is one of the chosen families over the people of the earth.

“Allah did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of Ìmran above all people, offspring one of the other...” (The Holy Qur'an 3: 33-34) In the story of Maryam's birth, The Holy Qur'an does not mention about her father. The birth of Maryam is narrated in the next verses.

Behold a woman of Ìmran said “O my Lord! I do dedicate unto Thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: so accept this of me: for Thou hearest and knowest all things. When she gave birth to her, she said O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child” And Allah knew best what she brought forth “And no wise is the male like the female I have named her Maryam, and I commend her and her offspring to Thy protection from the evil one, the rejected.” (The Holy Qur’an 3:35-36).

Maryam’s mother dedicated her expected child to the service of God assuming that it will be male. However, at the end of the day, she delivered a baby girl. In the Mosaic Law, women were not allowed to enter to places of worship to be devoted to temple service (Abdullah, 1946:132). Since she knew that God’s plan is much better than any wishes of hers, Maryam’s mother was not disappointed of having a female child (Abdullah, 1946:132). She named the new born child ‘Maryam’ which means to abide, in other words someone who unremittingly worships Allah (Harun Yahia, 1999, 4).

In spite of the custom of the society, God received Maryam for His special service as her mother wished. “Right graciously did her Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty” (The Holy Qur’an 3:37)

Maryam’s mother took the infant to the rabbis, who were the responsible persons concerning the matters of faith and taking care of the places of worship. Ibn Kathir, quoting Ibn Jarir, states what Ikrimah explained about the guardianship of Maryam. The rabbis could not agree as to who should be in charge of Maryam’s guardianship (The Holy Qur’an 3:44) Maryam’s father was their leader. He used to lead them in prayer. Therefore, all the rabbis wanted to be her guardian. Zakariya was one of the rabbis who

claimed to be the guardians of Maryam. The Holy Qur'an (6:85-87) states the following concerning the virtues of Zakariya: “And Zakariya and John, and Jesus and Elias: All in the ranks of the righteous...and to all We gave favor above the nations: (To them) and to their fathers, and progeny and brethren: We chose them and We guided them to a straight way” Zakariyya argued that since his wife is the maternal aunt of Maryam, he is closer to Maryam than anyone else. Therefore, he should be in charge of her guardianship. Zakaria was also their master, chief, scholar, Imam and Prophet. However, the other rabbis did not agree. Therefore, they decided to cast lots (The Holy Qur'an 3:44)

Zakaria won the lottery and became her guardian. “He [Allah] made her grow in a good manner and put her under the care of Zakariyya” (The Holy Qur'an 3:37). Ibn Kathir comments that Allah made her conduct gratifying; her trait charming and warmhearted among people. He also made her accompany the virtuous people, so that she could learn virtue, knowledge and religion.

Maryam's presence in the place of worship was against the custom of the society. There were no other girls in the temple. However, Maryam was strong enough to face the challenges. The Holy Qur'an states that Zakaria used to visit her in the *mihrab* (synagogue). Whenever he gets in to visit her, he would find her supplied with sustenance. Then he would ask her the source of the sustenance. She would always say that it is from Allah (The Holy Qur'an 3:37). Abdullah (1946, 132) in his Translation and Commentary of The Holy Qur'an (1946:132) states that the sustenance that Maryam gets may include her physical as well as spiritual needs that made her grow in “beauty and purity”. Zakaria, being pleased by her manner, invoked God to give him a progeny (3:38).

### 3.1.2 MARYAM, THE CHOSEN

Allah chose the family of Ìmran over all the people. He also chose Maryam over all the women of the earth. "Behold the angels said:" O Maryam! God has chosen thee, purified thee, and chosen thee above the women of the worlds" (The Holy Qur'an 3:42). Two important points can be derived from the above verse.

One of the points is Maryam's position compared to other women. She is purified and chosen by Allah over all the women of the world. The other point is her contact with angels. When God intends to change the conditions of a society, He raises a prophet among them. The prophet receives instructions from God through different channels. One of the channels are angels. However, every prophet may not be able to receive the message through angels. Nevertheless, Maryam was able to see and even talk to the angel, Jibril.

"...then We sent to her Our angel" (The Holy Qur'an 19:17) The whole conversation of Maryam and the angel, Jibril, is narrated in the nineteenth chapter of The Holy Qur'an which is named after her name.

Maryam's other quality is her truthfulness. She is an icon of purity, sincerity and devotion. She truthfully conveys the words of God both in her actions and in her words. Therefore, she is named as *siddiqah*, which means a woman of truth and sincerity (The Holy Qur'an 5:78).

### 3.1.3 MARYAM, MOTHER OF A HOLY SON

Allah chose Maryam for a great mission. Maryam's society needed a reformer. The reformer's mission is announced in two ways

(The Holy Qur'an 19:21). Abdullah (1946:771) states the following:

The mission of Jesus is announced in two ways (1) He was to be a sign to men; his wonderful birth and wonderful life were to turn an ungodly world back to God; and (2) his mission was to bring solace and salvation to the repentant.

In order to bring the reformer to the world and raise him in a manner that suits his status, a pure, sincere, devoted and strong mother was needed. The only person capable of fulfilling the above criteria was Maryam.

Maryam secluded herself from the society so that she could be able to pray and devote her time to the worship of God in a peaceful environment without any interruption. However, her privacy was interrupted by a stranger (The Holy Qur'an 19:16-17).

The stranger was Allah's messenger, Jibril. Maryam was chosen to be the mother of the holy son, Ìsa. The angel came to inform her the glad tidings, the gift of a holy son. Indeed it was a strange thing for Maryam. How can she be a mother when she does not have a husband? Therefore, she asked the angel:

“How shall I have a son, seeing that no man had touched me, and I am not unchaste?”

The angel replied that whenever Allah wants anything to happen, He says only “be” and it is (The Holy Qur'an 3:47). There is no interval between His decree and its accomplishment. The birth of the righteous son from a virgin mother was also a matter decreed. The conversation between Maryam and the angel is stated in chapter three too.

Behold! The angels said: “O Maryam! God giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him...She said: “O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?” He said: “Even so: God createth what He willeth: When He has decreed a plan, he but saith to it, ‘Be’ and it is!

Therefore, Maryam conceived him without any intervention of the customary physical means with male. The Holy Qur’an (66:12) states that instead of the normal way of conceiving a child, Maryam conceived through spirit.

“And Maryam the daughter of Īmran 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).” Ibn Kathir ( ) comments the following concerning the above verse that states the way Maryam conceived Īsa.

Allah sent the angel Jibril to Maryam, and he came to her in the shape of a man in every respect. Allah commanded him to blow into a gap of her garment and that breath went into her womb through her private part; this is how Īsa was conceived.

During pregnancy, changes crop up in the physical as well as emotional state of a woman. Maryam was renowned in her society as the only girl serving in the temple. She was a devote servant of God and a sincere believer. Therefore, nobody expects her to do immoral act. If they knew that she is pregnant, they will consider her as a fornicator. Her pregnancy would be a strange thing for the society. After she conceived Īsa, Maryam retired to a remote place. She went far from her society (The Holy Qur’an 19:22).

The pain of childbirth is one of the most frightening events that a woman faces in her life time. Many women want their family,

especially their husbands, to stay close to them during childbirth. The Holy Qur'an does not mention anyone who stood beside Maryam during her pregnancy as well as child birth. The condition is narrated in the following verses:

And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree...But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the palm tree "Grieve not! For thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee; and shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm tree, it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon thee. So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye." (The Holy Qur'an 19: 23)

The only thing that she could hold seems the trunk of the palm tree. Note that any human being did not call her, but a voice. According to scholars of Qur'anic exegesis, the voice could be either Jibril's or ʾIsa's. However, she did not receive any physical help. Harun Yahya (1999, 7) comments the following:

Allah fully supported Maryam throughout her pregnancy. It is very difficult for a woman to give birth, a potentially life-threatening experience, all alone, without medical equipment or a midwife's assistance. Nevertheless, Maryam overcame all of these difficulties by placing her complete trust in Allah.

This clearly indicates Maryam's ability to accomplish her responsibility without the help of anyone. Maryam's strength could be a good lesson for today's women. Her story enlightens that a woman can perform tasks and achieve success without the help of others.

### **3.1.4 CONFRONTATION**

After she delivered ʾIsa (Jesus), she predicted that confronting the society will not be easy. She is going to be tested with the birth;

nobody wants to stand for a lady who holds a baby before marriage. Even though she tells them the truth, they would not believe her story. After she was known as a devout worshipper among them, they now thought that she had become a fornicating whore. However, Maryam was strong enough to confront with the charges the society could forward. Therefore, she came back to her society holding the new born child. They were amazed to see her with a baby:

“At length she brought the (babe) to her people, carrying him (in her arms). They said: “O Maryam! Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought!” (The Holy Qur’an 19: 27) It is not surprising if the people express their amazement. She was hiding herself from them for some time and now she came with a shameful ‘object’ in her arms. How disgracing, they thought, her action is!

“O! Sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste” (The Holy Qur’an 19:28). Maryam’s father was the leader of the society. Her mother is known as a devout servant of god and owner of a noble character. Maryam herself was brought up by Zakaria, the leader, scholar, priest and prophet. Then from where did she inherit this shameful immoral behavior? To their amazement, she did not feel anything. She did not even want to respond to their allegations. She simply pointed to the infant who was in her arms.

“But she pointed to the babe. They said: “How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?” (The Holy Qur’an 19:29)

They were amazed by her confidence. They thought that she was a sincere believer with a superior personality. However, she suddenly hid herself and changed to a fornicator. Now, she comes with her little illegally born child. The worst thing, they thought, she is mocking on them. She does not even want to respond to their questions. As if the

infant can respond in place of her, she simply pointed to the infant in her arms. Therefore, they asked her how a child in a cradle can talk to people. Then, they witnessed a miracle, the child in the cradle began to speak. Isa affirmed that Allah has given him a book; made him His messenger; made him blessed wherever he be and most importantly respectful for his mother. After, listening to what the infant told them, the society began to realize that she is not unchaste, but a miracle from Allah. In such a way Maryam confronted her society.

Maryam's courage and confidence when facing difficulties and standing firm for truth, is indeed a great lesson for both women and men. It shows that one should neither surrender to nor flee from the intricacy of life, but should face, stand firmly and be triumphant.

### **3.1.5 MARYAM, THE PERFECT WOMAN**

The Holy Qur'an (21:91) states that Maryam and her son, Isa, are signs of Allah. "...And (remember) her who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples." In this verse, Maryam is described as a woman of chastity and a sign for all nations. The same message is implied in verse 12 of chapter 66.

In addition to her chastity, Maryam is known as one of the perfect women. One of the qualities attributed to Maryam by Prophet Muhammad was her perfection. According to a *ḥadith* reported by Abu Musa Al-Ashariy (Bukhari vol.2 *ḥadith* number 3769) the prophet stated two females who attained the level of perfection. One of them is Maryam, the daughter of Ímran and the other is Āsia, the wife of the Pharaoh. The Prophet's description of Maryam as a perfect woman implies that women can attain the highest degree in

their carriers. Maryam can also be a model for those who are striving for perfection.

### **3.1.6 MARYAM, THE BEST MODEL FOR HUMANKIND**

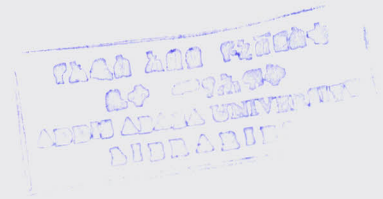
Chery Register (1989, 21) citing Martin, states that readers should be provided with role models. A literary work should also instill a positive sense of feminism identity by portraying women who are self actualizing and who became successful without depending on men.

The Holy Qur'an as a guide line for the believer's way of life and one of the great literary works of the Eastern world (Handersmark, \_\_, 465) stresses the need for role models. It commences its readers to learn from the lives of the people who lived before them. "There was indeed in them [the righteous] an excellent example for you to follow-for those whose hope is in God and the last day..."

The Holy Qur'an depicts many persons as role models for believers. One of the righteous people who are depicted as exemplary to believers, both men and women, is Maryam. The Holy Qur'an (66:11-12) depicts Maryam together with Asia, the wife of the Pharaoh as a role model. She is depicted as a role model in whom everyone should look to.

And Allah sets forth, as an example to those who believe the wife of Pharaoh...and Maryam the daughter of Ìmran, 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).

Maryam's name is stated in The Holy Qur'an thirty four times. Her name is mentioned more than many great prophets like Jesus, Adam and others. Moreover, entire chapter is dedicated to her story. The nineteenth chapter of The Holy Qur'an, *Sura Maryam*, is also named after her.



## 3.2 ÁISHA

### 3.2.1 ÁISHA, FAMILY BACKGROUND

Áisha was born in Mecca during the fourth year of prophet hood. Her father was one of the best men of Quraish, the clan that Prophet Muhammad belongs. He was known as *siddiq*, the truthful. Abu Bakar, who was the closest confidante of the Prophet, was the first male to believe in the mission of the Prophet. He was also the first *Khalifah* after the death of the Prophet. Her mother was named Ummu Rumman.

### 3.2.2 ÁISHA'S MARRIAGE

After the death of Khadijah bint Khuwailid, the Prophet's first wife, the Prophet was in deep sorrow. There was no one to look after his children, neither to comfort him. Khawlah bint Hakim felt the depression of the Prophet and consulted him about another marriage. He asked, "Who is in your mind?" she replied, "Aisha bint Abu Bakar" He said, "But she is not of marriageable age" Khawlah replied that he can ask Aisha's hand for marriage and wait until she reaches marriageable age. However, before that he can marry Saudah bint Zam'ah, who is a widow. He agreed to the proposal and Khawlah went to the house of Abu Bakar to ask Aish's hand for marriage (Mus'ad,\_\_\_\_\_,44)

Before marrying the Prophet, Aisha was betrothed to Jubair bin Mutim. However, Jubair's father refused to accept Aisha for his son lest Islam will be introduced in his house.

Aisha married the Prophet in the month of Shawwal. The consummation also took place in the same month after three years.

There was a custom in the Arabian society not to marry in the month of Shawwal. In the ancient past a plague had burst up in Arabia during Shawwal and the month became ominous in the minds of the Arabs. However, the Prophet wanted to teach the people that there is nothing wrong in arranging marriage in the month of Shawwal.

Aisha was the only virgin girl whom the Prophet married. His other wives were widows. She was the Prophet's most beloved wife.

### **3.2.2 DEVOTION TO RELIGION**

Áisha was one of the persons who had the most exalted manner among the companions of the Prophet. She was also devoted to her religion. She used to practice the non-obligatory prayers. She was regular in performing the mid-night prayers which are not obligatory, but recommended prayers. She performed the hajj every year. Moreover, she frequently kept the voluntary fast. Abdullah bin Zubair quoted in Nadvi et al. (2003, 46) witnessed that he had never seen any one more generous than Áisha. Once, Amir Muawiyah sent her one hundred thousand *dirhams* from Syria. As soon as she received the money, she went to divide it among the needy. She gave all the money before sun-set. When she returned home, her maid-servant told her that there is nothing at home that she can break her fast with. She said "If only you had reminded me, I would have kept some money to buy food." Nadvi et al (2003, 47)

One of the fundamental rules of Islam says one can not have full faith until he loves for others what he loves for himself. Aisha, in practicing this rule, not only loves for others what she loves for herself, but also preferred others to herself. Once Umar ibn Al-Khattab said to Abdullah, "Go to Aishah (the mother of the believers) and say Umar is paying salutations to you but do not say the

commander of the believers, say Umar ibn Al-Khattab asks the permission to be buried with his two companions [The Prophet and Abu Bakar]. Abdullah conveyed the message to Aisha and she replied, “I had the idea of having this place for myself. But today I prefer Umar to myself.” Umar asked the permission of Aisha because it was in her home that the Prophet died. Prophets were buried at the place they have died. Therefore, the Prophet was buried in Aisha’s home.

In addition to these, she was very kind and compassionate to slaves. She used to purchase slaves and set them free. Nadvi et al (2003, 47) state that the number of her freed slaves stood at sixty seven.

Apart from her religious devotion, she had also given some time for recreation. Aisha, as Al-Turabi (2000, 21) states quoting a *hadith* in Bukhari, describes how she attended a game played by Ethiopians:

By Allah, the Prophet was by my chamber’s door while the Ethiopians were demonstrating their spear games in Al-Haram. The Prophet covered me with his shawl so that I may be able to watch their display in comfort. I was watching them from behind his shoulder. He would stay there for my sake till I chose to break off. You should fully appreciate a young girl’s interest in fun.

### 3.2.3 AISHA, REASON FOR REVELATIONS

#### 3.2.3.1 INNOCENCE FROM SLANDER

There are many verses of The Holy Qur'an that are revealed because of Áisha. One of the verses was revealed in order to reveal Áisha's innocence from a slander by the hypocrites of Madinah. Whenever, the Prophet wants to go to a journey or there is a campaign, he casts lot between his wives.

In one of the journeys, Áisha went with him. After they completed the campaign, they started their way to Medinah. On its way back, the army rested for a while. Then Áisha went to answer the call of nature. While she came back, she found that she has lost her necklace. Therefore, she went back to search for the necklace. However, when she returned, the army has already gone.

Not knowing what to do, Áisha began to wait for help. She thought that when they know that Áisha is not with them, they will come back to search for her. Fortunately, a man named Safwan bin Muatal saw her while passing. He brought his camel and told Áisha to sit on the camel. Then they began to go to Medinah. When they approached towards the army, people were surprised to see her.

Persons like Abdullah ibn Salul instigated evil thoughts in people's minds by spreading rumors about Áisha and Safwan. Áisha did not know what was going on for about 27 days. Eventually, her old friend, Ummu Mustah, revealed her the rumor. The prophet could not do anything until he receives revelation. Then Áisha asked him to permit her to go to her parents.

While she was in her parents' house, the Prophet came and asked her about the slander. He also advised her that if she has done anything immoral she must repent because Allah accepts sincere repentance. Her response was marvelous. She said:

The only thing I am going to tell you is the same thing Abu Yusuf (Josef) told his sons when Yusuf was taken away... *'fa sabroon jameel wallahul musta'anu ala ma tasifoon .'* "(For me) Patience is most fitting against that which ye assert, it is Allah (alone) whose help can be sought...

Eventually verses revealed on to the Prophet concerning the slander revealing Áisha's innocence. Verses 10-20 of chapter 24 (Al-Nur) deal with the slander and Áisha's innocence.

If it were not for Allah's grace and mercy on you, and that Allah is Oft-Returning, full of wisdom, (You would be ruined indeed). Those who brought the lie are a body among yourselves: think it not to be an evil to you; on the contrary, it is good for you: to every man among them (will come the punishment) of the sin that he earned, and to him who took on himself the lead among them, will be a penalty grievous. Why did not the believers- men and women-when ye heard of the affair- put the best construction on it in their own minds and say, "This (charge) is an obvious lie"? Why did they not bring four witnesses to prove it? When they have not brought the witnesses, such men in the sight of Allah, (stand for) themselves as liars! ...Behold! Ye received it on your tongues, and said out of your mouths things of which ye had no knowledge; and ye thought it to be a light matter, while it was most serious in the sight of Allah...Those who love (to see) scandal published broadcast among the believers, will have a grievous penalty in this life and

in the Hereafter: Allah knows and ye know  
not (The Holy Qur'an, 24:10-20)

In the above verses of The Holy Qur'an some important points are raised. The first point is the declaration of Áisha's innocence. Allah states that the rumor is a fabricated lie by a group of people in the Muslim community. It is stressed that the believers, realizing the perfect manners of Áisha, should have said that she is innocent from the slander. It is a Muslim's duty to think of the good of others whenever told something. Moreover, if solid proofs are not provided, it is forbidden to discuss rumors.

The other important point raised in the verses is the requirement of four just and known to be just witnesses for accusing a lady of fornication. If anyone accuses a woman of fornication, he should bring four witnesses. If the person fails to bring four just and known to be honest witnesses, he will be whipped eighty stripes.

Allah considers slandering a woman as one of the most serious matters. Slandering a chaste woman is taken as one of the gravest sins even though people take it as a slight matter. The Prophet had taught that slandering a chaste woman is among the seven destructive sins.

In addition to this, the verses state that anyone who spreads rumors slandering an innocent lady will have the punishment of both worlds, this world and the hereafter.

As soon as the above verses revealed, her parents informed Áisha that Allah has declared her innocence. Therefore, she should thank the Prophet. However, she said that the only one worthy of gratitude in this matter is Allah; so she will thank only Allah, not the Prophet.

### **3.2.3.2 TAYAMMUM**

Islam regards cleanliness as one of the essential components of worship. Muslims are expected to be clean before going to places of worship. The Holy Qur'an (4:43) commands Muslims to perform ablution before prayer.

In one of the campaigns of the prophet, Áisha went with him. When they reached a place called Al-Bayda or Dhat-ul-Jaysh, she lost her necklace. Then the people stopped and set to search for the lost necklace. While searching the necklace, they realized that the time of prayer has reached. However, they were far from a place that they could get water. Therefore, since they could not pray without ablution, the people began to complain. Some people went to Áisha's father, Abu Bakar, and said "Don't you see what Áisha has done! She has made Allah's Messenger and the people stay where there is no source of water and they have no water with them." Abu Bakar became angry and admonished Áisha by saying "You have detained Allah's Messenger and the people where there is no source of water and they have no water with them."

Then Allah revealed the following verse:

If ye are ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from offices of nature, or ye have been in contact with women and ye find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth and rub therewith your faces and hands for Allah doth blot out sins and forgive again and again (The Holy Qur'an 4:43).

The revelation of the above verse made ablution easy. In the land of Prophet Muhammad, Arabia, on one hand getting water easily

was like a dream. On the other hand, in order to perform prayer, ablution is obligatory. However, there are also circumstances that a person may be ill or on a journey. In such cases, using water may be difficult. After the revelation of the above verse, people are given the permission to use sand or earth to clean themselves and get ready for prayer. This is called *Tayammum*.

People, who were complaining about the delay because of Aisha, began to praise her. A man named Usaid ibn Al-Hudair, said to Aisha “O! The family of Abu Bakar, This is not your first blessing” (Bukhari, vol. 1 hadith numbers 334, 4583, 4608...)

### 3.2.4 AISHA, THE POLITICAL LEADER

Aisha’s activities were not limited to the house hold. She was active participant in campaigns and wars. She was active participant on a number of battlefields, including the battles of Badr, Uhud, and Al-Khandaq, Jamal and many other campaigns. She participated by bringing water to the Muslim soldiers and nursing the wounded. Al-Turabi (2000, 13) citing Bukhari states the following concerning Aisha’s activity in the battle of Uhud:

...Sayyida Aishah, actively participated in such military services. Anas [one of the prominent companions of the Prophet] stated “...In the battle of Uhud when the Muslims were routed and put to flight from the Prophet, I saw Aisha bint Abu Bakar and Um Sulaim rolling up their dresses so that I saw their leg-bangles while they were carrying water-skins on their backs and emptying them into the mouths of the Muslims.

After the death of the Prophet, Abu Bakar became the first *Khalifah*. After the death of Abu Bakar and Umar, the third *khalifah*,

Uthman ibn Affan, came to power. However, Uthman's time was short. He was killed while praying. The death of Uthman brought severance between the Muslim community. Some of them rallied around Ali, the fourth *Khalifah*. Some others refused to obey the *khalifah* putting the precondition that the murderers of Uthman should be presented to the court.

During the murder of Uthman, Aisha was in Mecca for pilgrimage. Whenever they face problems, the companions of the prophet, used to ask her for solution. Therefore, they came and informed her about the murder of the Khalifah. They also asked her what they should have to do. She replied:

“Uthman has been killed wrongfully and the matter will not be corrected as long as those rebels are in power. Thus, seek the blood money of Uthman, thereby, Islam will be strengthened” (Mus'ad \_\_\_\_\_, 65 quoting At-Tabari)

Aisha decided to bring the murderers of Uthman to court. Therefore, she marched to Basrah in order to put an end to the disorder that was created among the Muslims. When she arrived at Basrah, she witnessed that the situation was goaded and brutal fighting broke out. An army of thirty thousand soldiers rallied around her. They took her as their leader and continued to fight. Finally, the leader of the opposing army, Ali ibn Abi Talib, realized that the battle is centered around the camel of Aisha. So he ordered his soldiers to hit the leg of the camel. After Aisha's camel was hit and fall, people began to disperse. With the falling of Aisha's camel, the battle came to an end.

As soon as Aisha's camel fell down, Ali commanded Aisha's brother, Muhammad ibn Abu Bakar, to check the condition of Aisha.

Then Áli ibn Abi Talib came and saluted her by saying “How are you O my mother? May Allah forgive you.” She replied: “I am all right. May Allah forgive you too.”(Mus’ad \_\_\_\_, 68; Najeebabadi, 2000, 455)

After complete peace restored, Ali made preparations to the journey Aisha is going to take to Medinah. He bade farewell to her in the company of forty ladies from influential families of Basrah led by Muhammad bin Abu Bakar, her brother (Najeebabadi, 2000, 456).

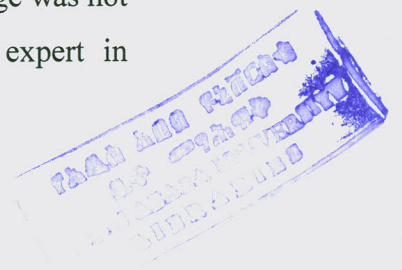
This battle is the first battle in which Muslims fought each other. The battle is known as the battle of the camel. This is due to the fact that the battle was fought centering Áisha’s camel.

Even though her army was defeated by the forces of Áli, Áisha has made a great effort to play her role as a political leader to what she believed to be the truth.

### **3.2.5 ÁISHA, THE INDOMITABLE SCHOLAR**

Áisha was one of the best scholars of her time. She possessed a cosmic amount of knowledge. It is reported that one fourth of the Islamic legal system is derived based on her contribution (Sabir 2002, 66) Out of Imam Al-Bukhari’s collection of 1602 Ahadith, 242 are narrated on the authority of Aisha. She is only second to Abu Huraira in the narration of the hadith. Many companions of the Prophet, after the death of the Prophet, used to go to Áisha whenever they face problems concerning religious matters. Some companions of the Prophet gave their witness that she was the best scholar of her time.

Mesruq said that he had seen many prominent scholars seeking her opinion about legal matters. Áisha’s knowledge was not restricted in matters of religious issues. She was an expert in



medicine, the art of speech and jurisprudence too. Hisham ibn Ūrwah, reported from his father that he had never seen any scholar better than Aisha in matters of Islamic jurisprudence, medicine and poetry. The father of Abu Musa is also reported to have said the following: “We, companions of the Prophet, used to go to Áisha whenever we face difficulties. Then we would find solution (knowledge) with her.

Áisha was also a celebrated orator. People used to gather to listen to her discourses. Akhf ibn Qays, who was her contemporary, says the following concerning the beauty of her discourses: “I have listened to the *khutbah* of Abu Bakar As-Śiddiq, Ūmar ibn Al-Khaṭab, Ūthman ibn Áffan and Áli ibn Abi Ṭalib. However, I have never heard a speech more pleasing than Áisha’s.”

These days the discourses of Áisha are being studied by students of Literature in various universities of Muslim majority countries. Áisha’s legacy of scholarship could well be a proof that women can attain the highest standard in education and teach others.

### **3.3 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ÁISHA AND MARYAM**

Áisha and Maryam, though they are depicted in different texts share some similarities. One of their similarities is that both of them are portrayed as pious persons. The other similarity is that both of them were chosen by Allah to carry a lofty mission. Maryam is regarded as a sign and a model for humanity. Áisha is also taken as a role model for Muslims. In addition to this, both of them were slandered by their respective societies. However, they were strong enough to challenge the attitudes of their respective societies. They have also succeeded in

persuading their innocence. Allah has also revealed a number of verses in defending the two personalities.

The Holy Qur'an (19:17) states that Maryam has met the angel Jibril. Likewise, Áisha, while she was with the Prophet, Jibril came and greeted her through the Prophet. She replied to his greeting: "O! You who can see me but whom I can not see, May peace blessings and mercy of Almighty Allah be on you too." (Bukhari, vol. 2)

The Holy Qur'an depicts Maryam as the best woman of her time. Áisha is also portrayed as the best of the women of her time in many aspects, though some *Ahadith* tell us that the Prophet used to give much credit to Khadija bint Khuwailid.

Maryam's life depicted in The Holy Qur'an is full of religious devotion. The other part of her life is not given much credit. She was the sincere servant of Allah in the temple since childhood. The Holy Qur'an does not say much about her political or economic life. Her life was centered on religious places and spiritual activities.

Unlike Maryam, Áisha was surrounded by intense social, political and economic activities. She was a scholar who produced many intellectuals. She was also a prominent political leader. She has participated in a number of battles fields. She has also played important roles for the betterment of her society.

In general, Maryam and Áisha have many similarities. They were sincere servants of Allah. Both of them were accused of fornication. Both of them were able to defend themselves. They were also greeted by the angel Gabriel. However, there are also some differences between the two personalities. The basic difference between the two lies in their life styles. Maryam led ascetic life thereby reaching the level of perfection, whereas Áisha's life was not centered only on

spiritual activities. Although she was devout in worship, she was also active in the socio-political life of her society.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

Many attempts have been taken to understand the roots of gender inequalities. Some feminists tried to argue that religion is one of the sources of gender inequalities and women's oppression. On the other hand, Muslim feminists have tried to argue that the source of injustices done on women is not religion. Instead, religion could be a means to the emancipation of women.

The teachings of Islam are basically egalitarian. Muslim women used to enjoy their rights during the times of the Prophet. Most of the rulings of The Holy Qur'an concerning women are revealed to protect women from the injustices that were done on them by the pre-Islamic society.

However, as Alturabi discusses, when Islam was introduced to other societies, it was intermingled with the cultures of the societies. These societies, with the passage of time, experienced significant deviations from the basic teachings and the general rules of Islam. The rules concerning women were not an exception to the deviation. Moreover, some of the teachings of Islam have been interpreted in a way that promotes patriarchy. However, these patriarchal interpretations are subject to change.

In addition to this, Muslims practiced some actions, assuming that they are Islamic. However, these practices, which oppress women, are alien

to the basic teachings of Islam. Islamic feminism emerged in order to abolish such misconceptions and develop the society's awareness.

In order to understand the sources of the plights of Muslim women and seek for solutions, it is necessary to understand the rules governing their lives. Advocates of Islamic feminism call for new interpretation of the teachings of The Holy Qur'an and the *hadith*.

The Holy Qur'an states that contemporary societies should take a heed to lives of the people before them. The stories of Ibrahim, Nuh, Musa, Yusuf, Maryam, the queen of Saba' and others are not told for futility. The Holy Qur'an gives examples of those who became successful so that the people can take wisdom from the past.

One of the flourishing personalities whom The Holy Qur'an gives high regard is Maryam. The story of Maryam tells us that she was able to reach perfection. Maryam was chosen by Allah to be a role model for believers. This implies that women can attain the level which they desire to reach.

The *hadith* literature also presents many women who were able to attain the highest standards of their respective societies. These women were not only able to compete with their male counterparts but also surpassed them in many aspects. Áisha is one of such ladies who was able to surpass her contemporaries. Since Islam's earliest days, Áisha had been taking a prominent part in the formation of the new Islamic society. She was able to contribute a lot in every aspect of life.

She had played a prominent role as an indomitable scholar and orator, spirited political leader and a role model for Muslim women.



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## GLOSSARY

Ayah: Mostly translated as verse

A Ĥadith: The plural form of ĥadith

Ĥadith: Literally, it means a tale, speech, chat, conversation or communication. In a methodological sense, it refers to all the sayings, deeds, decisions of Prophet Muhammad , and his silent approval of the behavior of his companions and descriptions of his personality. Each ĥadith is prefaced by a chain of narrators called Al-'Isnad. Al-'Isnad is the chain of people through whom the ĥadith was transmitted. The second part of the ĥadith is Al-Matn, the content, which reports the teaching or the incident. Every ĥadith or tradition must have a chain ('Isnad) as well as a Text (Matn).

There are three main categories of ĥadith called:

(1) As-Ŝaĥiĥ or the authentic ĥadith: This type of ĥadith is used in driving rules for the Shari'ah.

(2) Al-Ĥasan. Literally, it means the good. This type of ĥadith is found to be less authentic when compared with the Ŝaĥiĥ ĥadith. Some of its narrators in the chain of narration have been found to have a weaker memory in comparison to the narrators of Ŝaĥiĥ ĥadith.

(3) Ad-Ďaif. Literally, it means weak. This refers to that tradition in which there is some problem in either the chain of transmission, in the proper understanding of the transmitter or in its contents, which may be in disagreement with Islamic belief and practice. This type of ĥadith could not be used as a reference

Ĥajj: Religious journey to the holy city of Mecca. It is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Khalifah: Successor, Caliph, Leader

Khuṭbah: A religious discourse usually delivered by the leader, especially during Fridays and holydays.

Minbar: A special place in a mosque that is reserved for the Imam's Khuṭbah

Mu'min: Sincere believer

Ŝaḥaba: Literally, it means companion or friend. Technically, it is used to refer to the companions of the Prophet.

Shariá: Literally, it means way. Technically it implies Islamic law that is based on The Holy Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet.

Ŝaḥabiyyah: Female companions of the Prophet.

Surah: Mostly translated as chapter

Tabi'iy: The next generation after the companions of the Prophet.

Tayammum: An act of ablution performed with pure earth when there is no water.



## Declaration

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all the sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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Student



Signature

June 5, 2009

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Date