

Lecture #7

Women in Islam

One cannot just generalize about women in Islam since it does make a difference to the Moslem woman whether the dominant religious philosophy is one of extreme fundamentalism that shuns all modernity and strives to reinstate a way of life identical in its details to what is believed to have existed within the first Islamic community, or is one of liberalism that believes it to be within the true spirit of Islam, as revealed in the Qur'an and in the traditions of the prophet, to utilize reasoning to arrive at the most suitable rules of conduct and of legislation to meet the ever changing conditions of society.

Islam, unlike other major religions, covers the day to day affairs of the community from family relations to government.

there is no such thing as separation of church and state in Islam.

thus, Islam has something to say about every detail of life, even down to modest behaviour and dress and manners.

during Muhammed's lifetime, as issues or questions appeared demanding guidance and resolution from an Islamic perspective, answers were provided directly by the prophet or thru divinely revealed statements which he communicated.

these divinely revealed statements constitute the Qur'an, which

is the incontestable word of God to the Moslems.

the word Islam simply means submission, meaning submission to Allah.

the Qur'an was revealed over 23 years of Muhammad's life beginning in 610 in the month of "Ramadan" which is now the Islamic month of fasting.

If the Qur'an does not speak about a situation, then there are other sources of help.

the Hadith or Sunna of the prophet is next to the Qur'an in importance.

these are sayings and acts of the prophet which people can emulate.

the development of the hadith was gradual and by the end of the 3rd Islamic cent. (c. 950 CE) there were 6 reliable collections.

if no answer can be found in the sunna or the Qur'an, then one turns to precedent of the community.

Women's Creation

God created Adam from mud and clay and his mate (she is not named in the Qur'an) was created from Adam's self or soul after God had breathed into it his spirit.

Verily we created man of potters' clays of black mud altered" and (remember) when thy Lord said unto the angels: So! I am creating a (human) out of potters's clay of black mud altered. So, when I have made him and have breathed into him my spirit, do ye (the angels) fall down prostrating yourselves unto him."

the opening of Surah IV entitled "women" speaks of the creation of woman from the first being.

"O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul (or being) and from it created its mate (the word is "zwag" or one of a couple) and from them twain spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah to Whom Ye claim (your rights) of one another and towards the wombs (that bare you (IV:1))

~~hence created~~ Adam and his "mate" share the same fate. they are placed in the Garden at the same time and given the same things to enjoy.

they both are tempted and eat of the "tree of knowledge and immortality" and are expelled together.

in fact it is Adam to whom Iblis ^{= Devil} speaks about eating from the tree.

the result was they both ate and were sent from the garden with the Lord saying: ^{et} Get down hence, both of you, one of you a foe unto the other.

once on earth, they are told to be virtuous, righteous, and reverant and are promised the same judgement after life with paradise or hell depending on their good and bad deeds on earth.

"and whoso doeth good deeds, whether male or female and he is a believer--such will enter paradise. . . (4:124)

There is nothing in the Qur'an that hints in any way that "Eve" had tempted Adam and that she was partly responsible for the fall from grace

in fact, it is Adam who is usually referred to as the one who

had forgotten the covenant with God.

It is said that some of the women in the early Islamic community were ardent feminists and asked the prophet why in the Qur'an God always addressed men and never the women?

the legend goes that God recognized the validity of her question and after that revelations were addressed to both.

altho the man and woman are treated as morally equal, yet within the societal framework the woman is placed one degree lower than the man.

the islamic family is a patriarchal institution where the man is recognized head but where the woman is the essential partner whom the man must provide for and protect.

There are two references in the Qur'an that are interpreted to mean that the woman is not exactly at the same level as the man.

the first is in the surah of the cow, which speaks of what divorced women are enjoined to do:

women who are divorced shall wait, keeping themselves apart, three (monthly) courses. and it is not lawful for them that they should conceal that which allah hath created in their wombs if they are believers in allah and the Last Day. and her husband would do better to take her back in the case if they desire a reconciliation. and they (the women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them. Allah is Mighty, wise (2:228)

the other Qur'anic surah refers to men as being in charge of women, and to obedience and discretion as the qualities of a good woman.

Men are the maintainers of women with what Allah has made some of them to excel others, and with what they spend out of their wealth. so the good women are obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them and leave them alone in their beds and chastise them. so if they obey you, seek not a way against them. (5:34)

since men are in charge of women and are family providers then women don't need as much wealth as men.

thus islamic inheritance laws treat the woman as half a man:

"allah chargeth you concerning the provision for your children: to the male the equivalent of the portion of two females" (4:11)

Muhammad's wives

there are two of Muhammad's wives who are very important.

one is Khadija his first wife and first convert. the other is Aisha, a favorite young wife he took after Khadija's death.

One of the Hadith record that Khadija was a merchant and woman of great honor and wealth.

she hired Muhammad to go to Syria to trade for her.

she ended up developing speicail feelings for him and proposed to him.

thus Muhammad went to her family and asked for her hand and

When Muhammad had his first revelation it was Khadija who enfolded him till his terror subsided and who said it was of God.

she went with him to a cousin who was a Christian to who Muhammad revealed what had happened.

the cousin is reported to have said: I wish I were younger; I wish I could be alive when your people will send you away. ."

Khadija was the first to believe and Muhammad is always mentioning her along with the Virgin Mary, his daughter Fatma and Asia, Pharaoh's wife, as the best women in both worlds (heaven and earth)

Muhammad did not have any other wives until Khadija's death but they married 4 others, of whom Aisha was the favorite.

she was only 6 when when she was promised to Muhammad.

she was 18 when Muhammad died and became the leading authority on the sayings and acts of the prophet and her house became a center of learning for Moslems seeking knowledge and guidance concerning Islamic law and practices.

she became very active politically and there is a hint that she was instrumental in preventing Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, (to whom the Shites look as the legitimate heir) from becoming Khalif after the prophet's death.

despite her sex and age she travelled to Iraq, raised and led an army against 'Ali.

it is after she had lost the battle and had been captured that she abandoned her political activities and lived the rest of her days away from the limelight.

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In pre-islamic Arabia, a new baby girl was and undesirable happening.

men went to war and were killed and thus the increase in ratio of females to males meant a heavier burden on the male providers.

a gruesome custom took care of that; if unwanted, a new-born baby girl is buried alive and left to die.

the protective attitude towards the female is in many Qur'anic verses and hadith.

in several verses, God, thru Muhammad, forbade the custom.

... . They are losers indeed who kill their (female) children foolishly without knowledge, and forbid that which Allah has provided for them. . they indeed have gone astray and are not guided." (6:140-141)

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and when if one receives tidings of the birth of a daughter, his face becomes darkened and he is full of inward wrath. he hides himself from the people because of the evil of that whereof he has had tidings, (asking himself): shall he keep it in contempt, or bury it (alive) beneath the dust. verily evil is their judgement." (16:58-59)

Female Circumcision Islam does not have anything to say about the practice. even tho it is widespread in Egypt, it does not seem to have Islamic origins.

We find that it is unknown in Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam, in Iraq, Iran and in a number of other Islamic countries:

on the other hand it is practiced widely in Egypt among both Muslims and Christians.

Menstruation

Islam does not ignore menstruation as it is referred to once in the Qur'an and numerous times in the Hadith, particularly in relation to prayer, and pilgrimage to Mecca, two of the five pillars of Islam.

Menstrual discharge itself is considered, like other bodily wastes, unclean; however, the menstrual state is not considered in any way defiling or degrading to the woman.

There is a great deal of emphasis on cleanliness in Islam.

the 74th chapter of the Qur'an is devoted to it.

there is much ritual preparation for prayer which must be performed.

in the Hadith there is a lack of puritanism and relaxed attitude toward sexuality and bodily functions.

"Aisha features large in the hadith answering questions raised by both men and women very frankly.

many of the ideas of cleanliness are what Aisha had described as the practices of Muhammad, to what he had advised her or others to practice, or to what her own opinion on the subject was.

Aisha's statements were answers to questions posed to her, and are the best source on the Prophet's intimate life.

she discussed how she and Muhammad went through post-coital washing and what his behaviour and injunctions were in relation

to menstruation, prayer, pilgrimage and the teaching of the Qur'an.

since menstruation is a continuing condition, the menstruating woman is exempted altogether from prayer.

when the period is over, she can wash and resume her prayers.

a menstruating woman is also exempted from fasting and from the major ritual in pilgrimage, the circling of the Ka'ba in Mecca.

yet she is not prevented from holding the Qur'an or touching other objects relating to religious ritual, a proof that she is not considered unholy because of menstruation.

there is more than one hadith that refers to Muhammad as saying that no Muslim can be considered impure, unholy.

"Om Salma (one of the wives of the prophet) said: "when I was sitting with the Prophet I began to menstruate, so I stole away and took my menstruation outfit." He said: "Are you menstruating?" I said "yes". He invited me to join him and I sat down with him."

"Aisha said: "He (the prophet) used to embrace me when I was menstruating and he used to have me wash his hair when menstruating."

"aisha said: that "the prophet used to put his head on my lap and read the Qur'an when I was menstruating."

A menstruating woman is exempted from the fast which requires total abstinence and no intake of food or water from the break of dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan.

she is exempted along with the pregnant woman, the nursing mother, the sick the old and a person on an arduous journey.

they should observe the fast later, if the reason is temporary, or if unable, feed a poor person.

Sexual relations

sexuality is treated as one of the good things to be enjoyed.

in the Qur'a muslims are encouraged to marry, enjoy their spouses, and procreate.

the man had more rights than the woman as he was allowed to marry up to 4 wives.

there is neither guilt nor sinfulness attached to sexual activity except that it should not take any other form than the heterosexual and should not be disruptive of the important institution of marriage and family.

thus homosexuality, sodomy, auto-eroticism, etc. are highly disapproved.

there are strong sanctions against adultery for both men and women.

the punishment for adulterers in the Qur'an is flogging. stoning is nowhere mentioned as an appropriate punishment and was not practiced in Muhammad's lifetime.

accusing a Muslim of adultery is not easy as it takes four eye-witnesses so to accuse a woman w/o the witnesses is strongly condemned in the Qur'an and severe punishment of the accuser.

a husband who accuses his wife of adultery must swear 5 times that he is telling the truth, but should she also swear that the accusation is false, it is her word that prevails.

divorce the Qur'an does not exclude the woman from exercising the same rights of divorce as the man but later schools of law put

A Qur'an verse states:

and if you fear a breach between the two then appoint a judge from his people and a judge from her people; if they both desire agreement, allah will affect harmony between them. 1. .(4:35)

"and if they separate, allah will render them both free from want out of his plentitude. . ." (4:130)

many verses in the Qur'an and Hadith exhibit a great deal of protectiveness towards women and speak of the reciprocal rights of men and women.

"O my people, you have certain rights over your wives and so have your wives over you. they are the trust of Allah in your hands. so you must treat them with all kindness."

a number of verses in the Qur'an ask men to deal with their divorced wives kindly and generously.

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veiling

there is nothing explicit in the Qur'an about the veil.

women from among the believers are asked to dress decently, not to display their ornaments and to cover their bosoms with their headdress (24:31)

most sources agree that the veil was a later addition to Islamic society and was used as a mark of social class.

women entered mosques, according to some Hadith, w/o veils and they were ordered not to use anyt. veils during pilgrimage.

Pregnancy and Motherhood

women are basically seen in Islam as wife and mother.

a divorced lactating mother is to suckle their children for two whole years, and their maintainence and clothing must be borne by the father.

an often quoted hadith speaks of Muhammad as saying:

"Paradise is at the feet of the mothers."

in several Qur'anic verses, kGod demands kindness and consideration to parents and particularly mothers.

a mothers milk is treated like a life-giving substance.

children, unrelated by blood, who have been nursed by the same woman, are called "milk" syblings. the same incest taboos apply to "milk" brothers and sisters as apply to real brothers and sisters.

you have been really been given women's rights under the Qur'an - unfortunately the ideal and real are far apart. what I will share is where women stand today - One practice that goes back to is the hegemony of girl halis that Mohamed ended that.

Women after Muhammad

thus, women's lot improved a great deal under Islam and during Muhammad's time women were allowed to pray in mosques and there is evidence that in the early centuries there were convents of Islamic women.

religious education was open to women and the first centuries developed female scholars and saints.

the rapid dissolution of Qur'anic rights after Muhammad's death renders the effectiveness of the Prophet's reforms even during his lifetime questionable, and the bottom line in the Qur'an itself is that males have power over females.

the centuries following the Prophet's death brought a decline in women's status.

conservative scholars designate the period from the 10th to the 14th cent. as the era when Muslim women's freedom finally slipped away. the main causes were

1. Misogynism of the areas outside Arabia into which Islam spread.
2. the totally male dominance of Muslim authority, and
3. influence of the traditions about the Prophet (hadith)

Persian poetry, for instance, later depicts women as erotic and empty-headed, this is probably due as much to pre-islamic influence as to anything strictly Muslim.

the hadith was not generated apart from the increasingly sexist society.

it became increasingly misogynistic, reading back onto the Prophet the prejudices of later times, and thereby sanctioning them.

the major collections of traditions stem from the 9th cent and contain such unlikely stories as that 1) Muhammad by special vision, perceived that the majority of those in the fire (hell) are women;

2. the prophet said that were idolatry not forbidden, he would order a wife to bow down to her husband as he enters her, because it is then that God's grace is upon her; and

3. Muhammad said that a woman cannot realize the intense joy of faith until she submits to her husband physically.

the upshot of these and other causal factors was that in practice, Islam soon revoked the rights granted women in the Qur'an.

close to these diminution of rights was the Muslim woman's veiling and Purdah (seclusion), which kept a woman solely dependent on male control and support, because these removed her completely from the public realm, under threat of scorn and character assassination.

because of purdah women no longer could frequent mosques, and since the mosques were cultural and educational centers, as well as religious foci, women soon became completely marginal

culturally.

religiously, women's seclusion meant that they had little instruction in their faith or encouragement to fulfill its duties... therefore, Muslim women generally became woefully superstitious or uninterested.

one survey in the 1950 found that 90% of Islam's veiled women neither prayed nor performed their other obligatory religious duties.

by 5 centuries after the prophet's death women were again chattel--property of her father until purchased by a husband, whose control over her was absolute.

in effect, most of her Qur'anic rights had disappeared.

she no longer had any say in who she married and fathers married their daughters off to gain a bride gift.

there was a return to the pre-Islamic custom of marrying them off as children and once sold, the wife was so totally under her husband's control that she could be imprisoned for withholding obedience to him, a practice that continued in Egypt into the 1970's and still continues in Iran.

Women's right to inherit was circumvented by a device called waaf "religious endowment", a family would list those who were to share in its estate, leaving daughters unmentioned.

divorce was now only a male prerogative with no cooling off

period. a husband need only say "I divorce you" three times.

the Qur'an said 4 witnesses were needed to charge adultery, the traditionalists would consider a wife guilty of this charge on the basis of her husband's swearing to it 4 times.

child custody cases were exclusively decided in favor of the father and women who did not produce a male heir would be divorced.

a female's role was to be docile as a daughter, submissive as a wife, prolific in bearing children, strong as a mother-in-law, doting as a grandmother, supportive as an aunt.

her key role, however, was as an "envelope for conception"--above all the conception of sons.

most Muslim women were referred to as .X mother of Y. no wonder menopause was spoken of as the age of despair.

the female role was as an instrumentality.

folklore said that the dominant parent determined an embryo's sex, to be the father of girls undermined a man's virility.

for these and many other reasons, then, at the birth of a little girl "the threshold of a house weeps for forty days."

ingratitude and infidelity to Allah were cardinal sins for males,

the striking aspect of these testimonies was that women were thought condemned, not for their failures vis a vis Allah, but for their failures vis a vis their husbands.

in a religion horrifies of idolatry this indicates and extraordinary degree of blindness--or male presumption.

later Islam made a woman's fasting contingent on her husband's permission and a woman's failure to get it resulted in her being shot and killed.

women predominate in the Fire because they lack sufficient intelligence to be saved.

all this is a far cry from the qur'an's insistence on the personal responsibility for salvation or damnation.

moreover, those women that are saved are mainly devoted mothers.

"Her child shall drag her on the day of resurrection by his navel cord into the Garden."

their fulfillment, in contrast to males, is seldom described beyond assurances that they will be with their children and husbands, to whom they will still be submissive.

in contrast the males heaven consisted of the garden with cool breezes, palm trees, flowing streams and abundant food and drink as well as dark-eyed buxom virgins, with flesh so transparent that it reveals the marrow of their bones.

in addition to his earthly wives, each man will have seventy

such hur, who are not only beautiful, but never sick, menstruating, pregnant (but if he wishes, whe will have his child in an hour), bad tempered, or jealous.

since heavenly virility will be one hundred times that of earth, he will be able to deflower 1000 each month, and find each resewn virgin when he returns to her.

there is a little fear in thse projections because accounts of the end speak of earthquakes, floods, husbands obeying wives, men working for women, andwomen outnumbering men 50 to 1, "resulting in great increase in ignorance."

masculine desire for women as objects of pleasure therefore, runs against a gnawing fear that something in it is unjust and calls for overturning. the result is another great ambivalence in the image that women bore.

women could not work because a man's honor would be injured, and people think him incapable of supporting him.

women frequently were the center of stormy vendttas caused by insane male jealousy.

women were expected to excell at giving pleasure, yet be totally submissive and gratitude.

a man might kill his sister at the hint of marital infidelity (if the husband killed her it could start a blood fued.)

because both purdah and polygamy reduced men's access to honorable women, there was a great bottling of sexual feelings in

many Muslim cultures.

one result of this was an artificial male homosexuality, strongly disapproved by religious leaders, but rife among the wealthy, that degraded many boys and young men.

society put such stress on virility and progeny that genuine homosexuality had no tolerance. the species that spawned, then, was a strange extension of the need to conquer.

In India during the Indian middle ages, harem life lowered the traditional Hindu respect for marriage and motherhood.

the relation between the sexes changed and women could no longer speak to men in public.

they had to be veiled and their lives became more circumscribed.

Courtasans, on the other hand, needed to be educated and good conversationalists. so they recieved more education and had much more physical freedom.

these were the ones romanticized by Islamic India's poetry.

by the 14th cent., the Sufi devotionism produced a fearful interest in yoga and magic which in turn made for witchhunts and wild tales of females' black powers.

many wer forced to undergo trial by ordeal, being burned to death if found guilty.

in spite of the sufis superstitions, they were more open to women than conservative orthodoxy, and various orders' rosters of saints included significant numbers of women.

in fact some shrines in Cairo, Algeria, and Punjab were erected in honor of female saints, while today there are thousands of women enrolled in the mystic congregations popular in both North Africa and Turkey.

the Modern Period

from the beginning of the 20th cent, largely because of contact with the west, books, poetry, articles in newspapers and magazines began to spotlight the women's issue in Islam.

Polygamy, divorce laws, and purdah were the critic's main targets, and the goal was to raise half the Muslim world from a fear, suffering and ignorance that could only be called slavery.

Thru the 1930's the veil became the great shibboleth, progress being measured by feminists according to the degree that women could face the world.

by the 1950's, investigative reporters had published the vast extent to which child marriage of girls was practiced and the related soaring incidence of suicide among teen-age women.

starting in the 1960's there was a traditionalist counter-attack: arguing that the frequency of muslim divorce and remarriage, for instance, is a sign of virility.

in the 1970's there were young men defending the veil.

they claim that w/o it they would go beserk and ravage all women in sight.

they defend polygamy as consistent with nature and their great needs.

even clitoridectomy continues to be defended, some seeing it as a way to save women from sin, others saying that since women's sexual capacity is twenty times that of men, it is necessary if men are to keep dominance and control.

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Change is pushing these traditionalists out of the mainstream, tho Iran, and conservative resurgence in Egypt do not look promising for women.

20 years ago only 10% of women in Egypt (Cairo) wore the veil. today it is back up to 70%.

industrialization, urbanization, exposure of women to mass media, and revelation of how women live in the non-muslim world is bringing change nevertheless.

Education for women is starting to change the complexion of the work place. countries sensitive to western criticism are making progress in birth control and limiting child marriage, tho there is not complete success.

divorcees increasingly are expected to find a job.

in countries that have sponsored birth control programs, one finds a higher abortion rate, as well as a higher rate of wife-initiated divorce--signs that women are following through on the control of their lives that birth control can initiate.

Life Behind the Veil

Muhammad boosted women's rights, but today Islam often means oppression

By LISA BEYER

The wives of the Prophet Muhammad were vibrant, outspoken women. His first, Khadija, ran a prosperous trading business and at one point was Muhammad's employer. A'isha, the Prophet's favorite, was at various times a judge, a political activist and a warrior. Among Muhammad's 11 other wives and concubines were a leatherworker, an imam and an advocate of the downtrodden, revered in her day as the "Mother of the Poor."

Some women hold relatively high positions in Muslim countries today. But if the wives of Muhammad lived in parts of the contemporary Islamic world, they might be paying a high price for their independence. Consider events in the refugee centers of Peshawar, Pakistan, where more than a dozen Afghan women have been "disappeared" by radical Islamic groups for the crime of working in women's centers or with foreign aid organizations; or an episode in the Algerian town of Mascara, where a Muslim nurse was doused with alcohol and set on fire by her brother, who was furious with her for treating male patients.

While such violence represents an extreme, women are under fire wherever Muslim zealots are on the march. Following the Iranian revolution of 1979, which swept away progressive legislation passed under the shahs, extremists in many Islamic countries have whittled away at the legal rights of women. In Egypt, for instance, the Supreme Court in

1985 struck down a 1979 law that gave a woman the right to divorce her husband should he take a second wife. Sudan's military regime, which seized power in 1989, refuses to allow women who are not accompanied by a father, husband or brother to leave the country without permission from one of the three.

The Family Code adopted by Algeria in 1984 gave a husband the right to divorce his

wife for almost any reason and eject her from the family home. During debate over the code, one legislator actually proposed specifying the length of the stick that a husband may use to beat his wife. Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, which swept local elections last June, is pushing to forbid women to work outside the home.

Pressures to curtail the rights of women come from various puritanical sects within Islam. "They want to impose a new social order by force," says Khalida Messaoudi, president of an Algerian women's organization. "They start by attacking women because women are the weakest link in these societies." Particularly strict is the Wahhabiyah, a movement founded in the 18th century that counts among its adherents many Afghans and the Saudi ruling family.

Wahhabi women live behind the veil, are forbidden to drive, and may travel only if accompanied by a husband or a male blood relative. The demands of the gulf crisis prompted the Saudis to loosen some constraints on women, but it is not clear that such liberalizations will endure.

Some Muslim women argue that the zealots are perverting the very religion they claim to hold so dear. "This terrifying image of unhappy women covered in veils is not Islam," says Leila Aslaoui, an Algerian magistrate. Certainly, Muhammad was a liberal man for his time. He helped out around his various households, mended his own clothes and believed sexual satisfaction was a woman's right. The religion he founded outlawed female infanticide, made the education of girls a sacred duty and established a woman's right to own and inherit property.

But Islam also enshrined certain discriminatory practices. As decreed by the Koran, the value of a woman's testimony in court is worth half that of a man's, and men are entitled to four spouses, whereas women can have only one. Males are superior, some argue, because the Koran says they have "more strength."

The current appeal of such male chauvinist beliefs can be traced to Islam's response to Western expansionism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Fearing the erosion of their culture, the Wahhabis and others chose to assert values that set them apart, including the negative aspects of Islam's treatment of women. Modern Islamic fundamentalism is essentially a revival of this earlier reaction against the West.

Despite such stifling interpretations of Islam, many women have found their liberation in their faith. The veil may be a symbol of oppression to the Western eye, but, to many who wear it, it is freedom—not just from the tyranny of Western culture but also from unwanted sexual advances. In Cairo veils have become so popular that fashion shows are occasionally staged to show off new styles. Says Leila Takla, a Christian member of the Egyptian parliament: "As long as women are covering their heads and not their minds, it is an individual expression." Unfortunately, however, as laws are revised and rights withdrawn, the cloaking of Islamic women grows ever more profound. —**Reported by William Dowell/Cairo and Kathleen Evans/Peshawar**

there is really no "women's movement in any muslim country and the wealthy and well educated show little inclination to lead a charge probably because it can hurt their privileged status., and the masses are too mired in poverty and ignorance.

the main determinants of liberalization are population control (muslim women are the most fertile in the world) and pockets of enlightened legislation.

it is interesting to note that in Iran any form of birth control is punishable by death.

often religious authorities oppose progressive legislation, and many women are completely ignorant of their new rights.

it is very difficult for a woman to take advantage of opportunities w/o her husband's or fathers approval.

male honor continues to mean displaying the bride's nightgown to prove her virginity, and men who beat their wives because of jealousy continue to receive suspended sentences from sympathetic courts.

Under Muslim patriarchalism women have suffered oppression that certainly is a strong contender for the title of "world's worst religion for women"

this has produced some creative self protection

Berber women developed a storehouse of liberation songs, telling of

grand one-night stands, stinging rebukes to abusive husbands, and other real or imagined delights of freedom.

songs about the grossness of male's interest in them and that debunk men's interest in their motherhood, "to bear boys, boys, and more boys!"

in the same way Tunisian women defy the injustices in their lives and refuse to think themselves 2nd rate, singing lullabies to their daughters with lines such as "a girl child is better than ten thousand boys," or "she is my good fortune."

In Egypt, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Arabia and Somalia, the common Muslim belief in demons has made possession and exorcism important phenomena, as women regularly become "possessed" in order to gain leverage against their husbands' nearly total power and caprice.

the demands of the possessing spirit (for ex: new clothes or perfume) in strange languages necessitating interpretation (which other women offer for a fee), culminating in parties for the victim and her friends.

if the spirit is not exorcised by such obedience, it will render the woman unruly, violent, or sickly--none of which she is responsible for.

many husbands feel they are being manipulated, but most go along for they fear the possession might be real.

in this way, women have fashioned their own safety valves for the pressures that build up from daily abuse and restriction.

the sanctuaries of saints play an important role.

Muslim saints, male and female alike, tended to be socially deviant, and often their deviance included a disregard for the customary relations between men and women, in favor of spontaneity and equality.

the sanctuaries function therapeutically for women, because they can find there, in their praying for help, an outlet for their fears, angers and hopes and so on.

in contrast to a doctor, the saint is non-threatening, "one of us" (most were peasants), and inexpensive (offering is made only if prayer is answered).

further, other women at a sanctuary usually reinforce a sense of having recourse to holy powers and other women gather around to support each other.

when one realizes that women are excluded from the mosque and orthodox religious ritual, one can see the need these sanctuaries fill.

many local officials support sanctuaries to keep the status quo so they do not become a movement for equality.

High on the agenda for Islam's entry into the modern world, tho,
must be the sort of conversions that make sanctuaries less
necessary and women less desperate and more politically