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# The status and rights of women in the Islamic system

## The status of and esteem for women in Islam

### The status of and esteem for women in Islam

Islam wants men and women to develop. Islam freed women from those circumstances, which existed for them during the age of ignorance of pre-Islamic times. Islam did not serve men to the extent that it did women. You cannot imagine what circumstances were like for women during pre-Islamic times and to what degree their situation improved with the advent of Islam. (41)

9 November 1978 (18 Aban 1357 AHS)

Islam did a service for women, which has no precedent in history. Islam raised women up out of that slough and gave her back her identity. (42)

9 November 1978 (18 Aban 1357 AHS)

**Question:** In the eyes of Western countries, Shi`ism is seen as being a conservative element hindering progress. We have heard Shi`ite calls for the exclusion of women from active roles in society and a return to Shi`ite laws, which envisage religious tradition as the basis of state laws, something stipulated in the Constitution but later and unlawfully dropped. We have also heard that Shi`ism rejects the Western lifestyle because it does not conform to religious customs. Would you please give us your view on this on the basis of the Shi`ite faith?

**Reply:** Shi`ism is a revolutionary school of thought and is a continuation of the true Islam of the Prophet. Just like the Shi`ites themselves, their faith has always been the target of craven attacks from dictators and imperialists. Not only does Shi`ism not exclude women from society, it gives them their elevated status in society. We accept the developments of the Western world, but not the West's corruption of

which Westerners themselves complain. (43)

15 November 1978 (24 Aban 1357 AHS)

Islam took women by the hand and made them equal with men, whereas before the Prophet came, women had no standing. Islam gave women strength. (44)

11 December 1978 (20 Azar 1357 AHS)

We want women to attain the high rank of true humanity. Women must have a share in determining their destiny. (45)

6 March 1979 (15 Isfand 1357 AHS)

If nations were deprived of courageous women to rear true human beings, they would decline and collapse. (46)

6 March 1979 (15 Isfand 1357 AHS)

Islam holds you in higher esteem than it does men. Islam wants to save you; it wants to save you from becoming this plaything they want to turn you into. Islam wants to train you to become a perfect human being. (47)

8 March 1979 (17 Isfand 1357 AHS)

Unfortunately, women have suffered from victimisation in the past, notably in two periods. The first was during the Age of Ignorance, the period before the advent of Islam. During this time, women were oppressed; they were treated like animals, even worse than animals. Then Islam came and bestowed its blessings on mankind, it dragged women out of that state of oppression, [and] it pulled her from that slough of ignorance. (48)

16 May 1979 (26 Urdibihisht 1358 AHS)

. . . Women are human beings, great human beings. Women are the educators of society. It is from the laps of women that true human beings originate. The first stage in the development of sound men and women begins in the lap of a woman. Women are the educators of human beings. A country's success or its misfortune depends on women. If they impart sound teachings, they create (sound) human beings and a flourishing country. Good fortune originates from the laps of women; they should be the source of every success and happiness . . . (49)

16 May 1979 (26 Urdibihisht 1358 AHS)

Mothers are the source of all blessings, but if, God forbid, they bring their children up badly, they become the source of all evil. (50)

17 July 1979 (26 Tir 1358 AHS)

The realisation of mankind's hopes lies in the hands of women. She is the educator of great men and women. It is from the laps of women that man begins his ascent. It is in the laps of women that great men and great women are nurtured. (51)

17 May 1979 (27 Urdibihisht 1358 AHS)

Women raise brave men in their care. Like the Noble Qur'an itself, women have the function of rearing and training true human beings. Indeed, it is their duty to do so. If nations were deprived of women to rear true human beings, they would decline and collapse. (52)

1 February 1980 (12 Bahman 1358 AHS)

The position of women is a high one. Women in Islam enjoy a high rank. (53)

1 February 1980 (12 Bahman 1358 AHS)

We want women to enjoy the high rank of true humanity, which is theirs, not to be a plaything in the hands of men, in the hands of depraved men. (54)

1 February 1980 (12 Bahman 1358 AHS)

Islam grants woman a say in all affairs, just as it grants man a say. Just as men should avoid corruption, so too should women. Women should not allow themselves to be playthings in the hands of dissolute youths, they should not lower their station and, God forbid, come out into the streets dressed up and made up, placing themselves in full view of depraved men. Women must act like true human beings; they must be pious. Women enjoy a dignified position; they have free will, just as men have. God created you free beings and gave you dignity. (55)

1 February 1980 (12 Bahman 1358 AHS)

Islam has particular regard for women. Islam appeared in the Arabian Peninsula at a time when women had lost their dignity, and it raised them up and gave them back their pride. Islam made women equal with men; in fact, it shows a concern for women that it does not show for men. (56)

1 February 1980 (12 Bahman 1358 AHS)

One of the benefits of the Islamic movement obvious today is that women, these effective members of society, have to some extent regained their standing. (57)

5 May 1980 (15 Urdibihisht 1359 AHS)

# Women's rights in Islam

## Women's rights in Islam

As regards the issue of the right of the woman to execute a divorce, if, at the time of marriage, she stipulates that she would possess this right either conditionally or unconditionally, the question has been raised: What about those women who have already entered into matrimony?

They oppose this legal power of the faqih even when they don't know what his powers are. If a man mistreats his wife, this is one of the concerns of the faqih who will first of all counsel him then secondly punish him, and if he sees that none of this has worked, he will grant the divorce. Support this guardianship of the faqih, it is a gift from God the Blessed and Exalted to the Muslims.

Among the concerns the faqih deals with are matters relating to the question you have just posed: what must those women do who already have a husband and are experiencing difficulties in their marriage? They must refer the matter to a faqih, either at a court or elsewhere, and he will deal with it. If the complaint is valid, he will punish the husband, he will try to compel him to behave properly, and if this fails, the faqih will grant the woman a divorce. He has the legal power to do so if he sees that it would be damaging to the people involved if the marriage were to continue.

Even though divorce is the prerogative of the man, in situations where the faqih believes it to be in the interests of Islam, in the interests of the Muslims, and when he realises there can be no other course of action, he will grant the woman a divorce. This is what the guardianship of the faqih is about. It is a divine gift to you. (58)

31 October 1978 (9 Aban 1357 AHS)

Islam put women on a par with men, and made them equal with men. Of course, there are certain Islamic precepts, which apply only to men, and others which apply only to women, but this does not mean that Islam discriminates between men and women. (59)

11 December 1978 (20 Azar 1357 AHS)

**Question:** Women make up a large section of the Muslim population, what role and what rights do you foresee for them in the Islamic system?

**Reply:** The Muslim women of Iran are currently participating in the political struggle and the demonstrations against the Shah. I have been told that in some Iranian cities they hold political meetings. In the Islamic system, women will have the same rights as men: the right to education, the right to work, the right to own property, the right to vote, the right to stand for election.

In all aspects that men have rights, women have the same rights. However, there are some things

unlawful for men, because of the corruption they create in men, and others unlawful for women because of their tendency to corrupt women. Islam wants the human dignity of both men and women to be safeguarded. It doesn't want women to be playthings in the hands of men. The image they have portrayed abroad of women being treated harshly under Islam is not a correct one.

This is false propaganda emanating from elements motivated by self-interest. In Islam both men and women enjoy free will, any differences, which exist, do so for both of them and concern their different natures. (60)

7 December 1978 (16 Azar 1357 AHS)

The laws of Islam are all for the benefit of both man and woman. (61)

6 March 1979 (15 Isfand 1357 AHS)

Just as the rights of men are propounded in Islam, so too are those of women. Indeed, Islam shows a concern for women that it does not show for men. It pays a greater regard to their rights than those of men. Women have the right to vote; indeed they enjoy more rights than women in the West. They have the right to vote, the right to elect or be elected. They control their finances; they are free, free to choose their profession. In the East certain restrictions are placed on men for their own good.

Consequently Islam prevents gambling, drinking and the use of heroin because these are a cause of corruption. Restrictions exist for everyone. Religion imposes restrictions for the benefit of society, it is not the case that something is beneficial to society and Islam places restrictions on it. (62)

29 March 1979 (9 Farvardin 1358 AHS)

The rights of all segments of the population have also been observed in the law. The rights of the religious minorities, women and other segments of society have all been taken into consideration. Islam does not discriminate between the various groups (in society), the only difference between them stems from their piety and fear of God the Exalted. (63)

1 April 1979 (12 Farvardin 1358 AHS)

Because Islam has laid down special rights for women, show moderation in their case if it is not proved that they are spies. Likewise the black Americans, for they have been subject to oppression and suffering for an age and those there may have been forced to come to Iran. Dear Students! 1

Hand over those African Americans and women whom you do not believe to be spies to the Foreign Ministry so their immediate departure can be arranged. The noble nation of Iran does not give permission for the others to be freed, consequently they will be detained until the American government acts on the (Iranian) nation's demands. (64)

17 November 1979 (26 Aban 1358 AHS)

When women wish to marry, there are certain prerogatives they can stipulate for themselves that are contrary neither to the *shari'a* nor to their own self-respect. For example, a woman can stipulate that if her future husband turns out to be of corrupt moral character or if he mistreats her, she would possess the right to execute a divorce.

This is a right that Islam has granted to women. If Islam has imposed certain restrictions on both women and men, it is for the benefit of both. All Islamic laws, be they those which permit or those which prohibit, are for the benefit of all. Similarly, just as Islam has granted man the right to divorce, it has also granted it to woman, on condition that the parties stipulate at the time of the marriage that if the husband behaves in a certain manner, the wife will have the right to execute a divorce.

Once the man has accepted such a stipulation, he can never repudiate it. Apart from making it possible to include such a stipulation in the marriage contract, Islam forbids the husband to mistreat his wife; if he habitually mistreats her, he is to be punished, lashed even, and if he still persists, the *mujtahid* will grant the wife a divorce. (65)

1 February 1980 (12 Bahman 1358 AHS)

Just as God has laid down laws for men imposing restrictions to prevent them from becoming corrupt, so too He has laid down laws for women. These are for your benefit; all Islamic laws are for the good of society. (66)

1 February 1980 (12 Bahman 1358 AHS)

**Question:** What exactly are the rights of women in an Islamic republic? What will become of coeducational schools? And how will such issues as birth control and abortion be dealt with?

**Reply:** In an Islamic republic, from a human rights point of view, there is no difference between men and women for both are human beings, and women have as much right as men to determine their destiny. In some areas, however, differences exist between men and women, which have nothing to do with their status as human beings. Anything that is not incompatible with the high social standing and dignity of women is allowed. Abortion is prohibited in Islam. (67)

5 November 1980 (16 Aban 1359 AHS)

**Question:** The issue of divorce being a man's prerogative is something that has upset and worried a group of militant Iranian women who believe that under no circumstances do they have the right to execute a divorce. Some people have and still are exploiting this issue. What is your opinion?

**Reply:** The law has prescribed an easy way for the respected women to be able to execute a divorce, and that is when she enters into marriage she must stipulate her conditions. If she stipulates that she

can execute a divorce whenever she wants or under certain conditions, such as if the husband were to mistreat her or get another wife, then she will have no problem in getting a divorce. I ask God Almighty to grant the honourable women success. It is hoped that you will not fall under the influence of those who oppose Islam and the Islamic revolution, for Islam is beneficial to all. (68)

29 October 1980 (7 Aban 1359 AHS)

**Question:** Please tell us how married women should practise *taqlid*.<sup>2</sup> Can she follow the rulings of a different *mujtahid*<sup>3</sup> from the one her husband follows, and if so would that contradict the requirement of a woman to obey her husband?

**Reply:** Women are independent in matters relating to *taqlid*, but must obey their husbands in marital affairs. They should not leave their homes without their husbands' consent.

*Istifta'at*, Vol. 1, p. 13.

**Question:** During the *taghut* period, when the so-called courts for family protection finalised a divorce, they would collect a sum of money from the husband as 'rent' on the bride's dower, if it were cash, because of the period which had elapsed since the marriage, in addition to the main dower to be paid to the woman. If the dower is cash and the time for collecting it has not been legally stipulated, is it permissible to put rent on the original dower?

**Reply:** Rent cannot be put on money and taking an additional sum is prohibited.

*Istifta'at*, Vol. 1, p. 210.

**Question:** If, when the marriage vows are exchanged, the woman stipulates that she reserves the right to execute a divorce, can this right be taken from her?

**Reply:** If she stipulates this condition at the time of the marriage, it cannot be taken from her later.<sup>4</sup>

*Istifta'at*, Vol. 2, p. 319.

## Women's role in the establishment of an Islamic society

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**Question:** What does a return to Qur'anic laws mean for women? To what extent will entertainment (alcohol, films, etc.) be available to the people?

**Reply:** In an Islamic system, women, in their role as human beings, can work alongside men to establish the Islamic society, but not if they wish to act as mere objects. Women do not have the right to lower themselves to such a level, nor do men have the right to think of them as such. As to those things known

as entertainment, Islam opposes anything that tends to lead human beings towards acquiring a frivolous nature or towards self-estrangement. The consumption of alcohol is forbidden in Islam, as are films, which pervert the exalted nature of the human being. (69)

9 November 1978 (18 Aban 1357 AHS)

**Question:** In Islam, to what extent are women permitted to participate in the establishment of an Islamic government?

**Reply:** In Islam, women have a sensitive role to play in the establishment of the Islamic society. Islam elevates women to the extent that they can regain their human status in society and leave that woman-object level. In proportion with such growth, she can assume responsibilities in an Islamic government. (70)

10 November 1978 (19 Aban 1357 AHS)

Women like men have a part to play in building the Islamic society of tomorrow. They enjoy the right to vote and be voted for. Iranian women participate in Iran's current struggle just as the men do. (71)

23 January 1979 (3 Bahman 1357 AHS)

Islam grants woman a say in all affairs just as it grants man a say. All the people of Iran, men and women alike, must repair the ruins that the previous regime has left us; the hands of men alone will not suffice to accomplish the task. Men and women must collaborate in this respect. (72)

6 March 1979 (15 Isfand 1357 AHS)

Women must have a say in the fundamental destiny of the country. Just as you have participated in our revolutionary movement, indeed played a basic role in it, now you must also participate in its triumph, and must not fail to rise up again whenever it is necessary. The country belongs to you and, God willing, you will rebuild it. (73)

6 March 1979 (15 Isfand 1357 AHS)

You and we together, the government and nation together, must right this chaos, for neither can do it alone. If the ladies think they can leave it up to the men to do, who in turn think they can leave it up to the ladies, or both think the government can do it or all three think the clergymen can do it, then they are all sadly mistaken. For the situation is so chaotic, the problems so many that it is up to each individual to do his duty and rebuild wherever he is to the best of his ability. (74)

13 September 1979 (22 Shahrivar 1358 AHS)

Women have the right to participate in politics; indeed it is their duty to do so. The clergymen too have a right to concern themselves with politics, and it is their duty to do so. The Islamic religion is a political

religion; everything in it has a political dimension, even its acts of worship. (75)

16 September 1979 (25 Shahrivar 1358 AHS)

Greetings to you great women who through your counsel wish to lead us to the right path. (76)

16 March 1981 (25 Isfand 1359 AHS)

It is hoped that the community of women will cease being indifferent and will awaken from the unnatural stupor the plunderers have forced them into, and that together, shoulder-to-shoulder, they will help those who have been deceived and guide them to the lofty station which is theirs.

It is also hoped that women in the other Islamic countries will take lessons from the miraculous change that has occurred in the Iranian women as a result of the great Islamic revolution, and will strive to reform their society and bring freedom and independence to their countries. (77)

24 April 1981 (4 Urdibihisht 1360 AHS)

The role of women in the world enjoys certain special characteristics. The rectitude or immorality of a society stems from the rectitude or immorality of the women in that society. Women are the only creatures who can bestow upon society individuals raised in their care whose deeds can be a blessing to communities and can inspire perseverance and lofty human values, or can have the opposite effect. (78)

14 April 1982 (25 Farvardin 1361 AHS)

## **Women's activities in the social and political arenas**

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All of you must cast your vote, a vote for an Islamic republic, not a word less (in this designation) nor a word more.<sup>5</sup> You too must vote, you are no different from others, indeed you lead the men. (79)

8 March 1979 (17 Isfand 1357 AHS)

It is necessary for me to reiterate that the crusading and brave women all over Iran must participate in the referendum. The women who played a sensitive role in the victory of the Islamic revolution at the side of men, indeed who led the men, should realise that by actively participating they will ensure the further victory of the Iranian nation. Participation in this referendum is one of the national and Islamic duties of the men and women. (80)

24 March 1979 (4 Farvardin 1358 AHS)

Women have the right to vote; indeed they enjoy more rights than women in the West. They have the right to vote, the right to elect or be elected. (81)

29 March 1979 (9 Farvardin 1358 AHS)

I ask Almighty God to grant you health and happiness and I hope that side by side with the men you will vote for the Constituent Assembly<sup>6</sup> and the National Consultative Assembly so that an Islamic republic, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic and the Consultative Assembly of the Islamic Republic can be founded and we can attain that which we want. (82)

10 April 1979 (21 Farvardin 1358 AHS)

Of course there is no objection to women taking up employment, sound employment, but we do not want a repeat of the way it was during the Pahlavi era. Then they did not have employment in mind for women, rather their aim was to degrade both men and women, pulling them down from that position they occupy. They did not want a natural growth for either sex. (83)

16 May 1979 (26 Urdibehisht 1358 AHS)

It is one of the blessings of the movement that you ladies from the coastal regions, and indeed the other respected ladies of Iran, are now involved with the issues of the day and political issues. The criminal hands, which were manifested in the form of the hands of Muhammad Riza and his father, had excluded all segments of the population from involvement in social and political affairs.

Political matters were never presented for the consideration of the ladies, nor for that matter the brothers either. And if a political issue was put forward for the people to decide on, it was still based on their (the West's) plundering policy. If some classes of the population, the so-called political classes, became involved in the political issues of the day, they were simply involving themselves in policies dictated by the West and aimed at plundering the East. (84)

3 July 1979 (12 Tir 1358 AHS)

It is today when all segments of society have a say in their own affairs, in the affairs of the country and the political affairs of state. It is today when all people of the nation, whether the esteemed ladies or the brothers, have a say in determining their own destiny. (85)

3 July 1979 (12 Tir 1358 AHS)

The respected women and dear ladies have gone into the villages to help with the harvest and other things. Of course they are not reapers in the same sense as the farmers are, but by their action, small as it may seem, they enable the reaper to work twice as much of his land and thus double his harvest.

For when the men who reap the land see that these ladies, who normally sit in the shade and have nothing to do with such work, are prepared to come out into the sun and harvest the barley, it breathes new life into their spirit. So the action of these ladies is also valuable in that it gives renewed vigour to the farmers and they work even harder. (86)

21 July 1979 (30 Tir 1358 AHS)

We all voted for an Islamic republic, you too voted, but voting alone is not enough. Our votes mean only that the country of Iran is now officially an Islamic republic. But it will be a true Islamic republic only when you ladies, along with these gentlemen, undertake your responsibilities and we all see ourselves as having a duty to perform. (87)

13 September 1979 (22 Shahrivar 1358 AHS)

It is important that each of us sees ourselves as having a duty to perform. So, for example, I, as a theological student, consider it my duty to serve (the nation) to the best of my ability, while you sisters must consider it your duty to help rebuild this country which they (the Pahlavis) ruined and destroyed, beginning in the area where you live, and through your efforts put it right. (88)

20 September 1979 (29 Shahrivar 1358 AHS)

The sisters who hitherto have not been involved in the issues of the day must now involve themselves. (89)

20 September 1979 (29 Shahrivar 1358 AHS)

Women must have a say in determining their destiny. Women in the Islamic Republic must vote. Just as men have the right to vote, women too have that right. (90)

1 February 1980 (12 Bahman 1358 AHS)

Today, women in the Islamic Republic shoulder-to-shoulder with the men are striving to rebuild themselves and their country. (91)

5 May 1980 (15 Urdibihisht 1359 AHS)

I return once again to you sisters and dear ones and remind you that you must attend to the matter of observing Islamic rules in your environment. The country is an Islamic one, it is an Islamic republic, [and] there must be a change in all aspects of its character. (92)

13 May 1980 (23 Urdibihisht 1359 AHS)

Who has mobilised these women to involve themselves, and quite rightly so, in all the country's affairs? God has called them to this task and they are obeying His call. (93)

12 July 1980 (21 Tir 1359 AHS)

Today, the ladies must act on their social and religious duties and protect public morality, and in so doing carry out their social and political activities. (94)

10 September 1980 (19 Shahrivar 1359 AHS)

I hope that this movement will end in victory and you will all be successful, God willing. May you expand your gatherings everywhere in an even more splendid manner so that women will awaken and reject those things of the past, reject that former role of being a plaything, of having to dress up and make up. You yourselves know how much damage that attitude did to our economy and how much harm it did to public morality. Today's women, like the men, must be properly educated and concern themselves with the issues (of the day), they too must exercise sound judgement in their involvement in the (country's) affairs, and God willing, they will be successful. (95)

10 September 1980 (19 Shahrivar 1359 AHS)

All the women and all the men must involve themselves in social and political affairs. They must be supervisors, supervising the work of the Parliament and the government; they must express their opinions. (96)

10 September 1980 (19 Shahrivar 1359 AHS)

Guiding a nation is a momentous task to undertake, and guiding half of that nation – the women – is even more so. This task is fraught with difficulties; indeed the decision to take it on is itself an important undertaking. But now that you have resolved to do such a thing, let nothing weaken or shake that resolve. (97)

7 February 1981 (18 Bahman 1359 AHS)

You ladies who are occupied with this humanitarian and Islamic task can be absolutely certain that because you are doing this work for God, you will be successful. (98)

7 February 1981 (18 Bahman 1359 AHS)

Today we see that the respected ladies of Iran throughout the country are useful members (of our society) and form a committed and devout community serving their country. They are the mainstay of this country. I hope that, mindful of Islamic precepts and armed with the weapon of faith and devotion to Islam, they will carry this victory forward and will be the mainstay of this revolution too. (99)

23 May 1981 (2 Khurdad 1360 AHS)

It is the duty of every man and woman of legal voting age to go to the polling stations and cast their vote for a president. If you waver in this regard, then those who wish to see this country destroyed may be victorious. All of you, all of us, men and women together, are bound by duty to determine our destiny just as we are bound by duty to perform our *namaz* (the ritual prayer). (100)

4 July 1981 (13 Tir 1360 AHS)

I advise both men and women who are of legal voting age to take part in these elections and vote for any of the candidates they wish. Participate they must. (101)

27 November 1982 (6 Azar 1361 AHS)

Wherever one looks in Iran, one sees women pursuing Islamic activities, religious and even political activities, while at the same time preserving their modesty and their dignity. Whereas those women who freely mingled with men in society produced nothing other than corruption throughout the whole of the *taghut* period, these women (today), in this short span of time, have been so active that the results of their endeavours are already beginning to show in Qum and other cities. (102)

13 March 1983 (22 Isfand 1361 AHS)

If those people<sup>8</sup> who wish to sabotage the activities of these ladies – this great service they are performing which before God is a worthy service – are Muslim, then they are committing a cardinal sin, and if they are not Muslim and by their actions merely seek a return to the dissoluteness which once existed, then they should know that the season of wantonness is over, and the ladies of Iran will no longer give them permission to return to the way they used to act.

I must thank all of you. Praise God, you are busy doing religious activities and you also have political insight. Iranian women today enjoy both religious and political acumen. The obstacles that once prevented you from carrying out religious and political activities have now been removed. I hope that very soon each one of you will reach the point where you will be able to educate others. (103)

13 March 1983 (22 Isfand 1361 AHS)

You must involve yourselves in all aspects of the country's life to the extent that Islam has allowed, such as taking part in elections. The elections are one of the most talked about issues in Iran at the moment, and participation in them today is something that must be done. The ladies must be active in the elections just as the men are, for when it comes to their destiny, there is no difference between them and others.

The destiny of Iran is the destiny of all. Islam has served you ladies more than it has the men. Islam protected you, so now you reciprocate by protecting Islam. This means taking part in these elections, for they will determine the formation of the second parliamentary assembly. Elections play a very important role in your destiny and ours, a primary role. It is elections that must lay down the path the country follows in all its affairs, whether domestic or foreign.

Therefore, you ladies must play a very active role so that the parliament does not become one that is, God forbid, infiltrated by some unscrupulous elements and is gradually drawn towards the East or the West, becoming the kind of parliament that existed in the previous era and imposing on us policies which parliaments of that time imposed on the people. (104)

8 April 1984 (19 Farvardin 1363 AHS)

Just as men should concern themselves with political matters and safeguard their society, so too should women. Women should take part in social and political activities shoulder-to-shoulder with men, while, of course, at the same time complying with Islamic principles. God be praised, this is happening today. (105)

8 April 1984 (19 Farvardin 1363 AHS)

We are proud that the ladies, both young and old, are present in the cultural, economic and military arenas, and that they are active shoulder-to-shoulder with the men or even more so than they are – in the area of elevating Islam and advancing the goals of the Most Noble Qur'an. (106)

5 June 1989 (15 Khurdad 1368 AHS)

## Women and Education

### Women and Education

**Question:** Can women attain the position of *mujtahid*?<sup>9</sup> Would you please elaborate.

**Reply:** It is possible for a woman to become a *mujtahid*, however she cannot become a *marja' -i taqlid*<sup>10</sup> for others.

*Istifta'at* Vol. 1, p. 21.

The men and women of Qum are exemplary in their learning and their willingness to act, as are the men and women of Iran on the whole. (107)

17 May 1979 (27 Urdibihisht 1358 AHS)

If you are in a position that requires you to educate small girls, educate them well. If you are in a place where your position is to propagate, then do so well. All segments of the population in whatever post they may occupy must carry out their duties well. (108)

13 September 1979 (22 Shahrivar 1358 AHS)

One of the most significant effects of this movement is the change brought about in all of you, in the ladies, in the brothers and sisters alike. That change is the sense of duty that we all now feel, a duty to our country, a duty to educate, to educate people in those things that will be useful to them in religious and worldly affairs. (109)

16 September 1979 (25 Shahrivar 1358 AHS)

All those who are illiterate should rise up and embark on a campaign to learn, and all the literate brothers and sisters should rise up to teach them. The Ministry of Education, with all the facilities it has at its disposal, should also take action in this regard, not allowing bureaucracy and administrative formalities to get in its way.

Brothers and sisters in faith! You must mobilise yourselves in order to eradicate this painful shortcoming. Teaching and learning are forms of worship which God the Blessed and Exalted has called on us to perform. The congregational prayer leaders in the provincial towns and villages should invite the people to this task.

Those who are literate should teach reading and writing to the brothers and sisters who are not in the mosques, in other religious centres and even in their homes. They should not wait for the authorities to take action. For their part, the illiterate people should not shrink from this task. (110)

28 December 1979 (7 Dey 1358 AHS)

The women of Iran today are committed, lion-hearted individuals, who shoulder-to-shoulder with our dear men are busy rebuilding their beloved country, just as they are busy rebuilding themselves through learning and education. You will not find a town or village without cultural or scientific centres composed of dedicated and honourable Muslim women. (111)

5 May 1980 (15 Urdibihisht 1359 AHS)

I hope that the teachers, the brothers and sisters, wherever they may be, in whatever capacity they may be teaching, whether as trained teachers, as students or simply as scholars with a knowledge to pass on, consider themselves to be both teachers and students. Teachers to call the people to the straight path of guidance of the prophets, and students as they themselves tread that path. (112)

30 August 1980 (8 Shahrivar 1359 AHS)

Elderly men and women too can learn. They too can receive an education. They should not give up on themselves. (113)

27 December 1980 (6 Dey 1359 AHS)

I hope that the sisters and brothers busy with their studies and propaganda activities at the Shahid Mutahhari (may God grant him peace) school of higher education are mindful of the fact that this school was named after a martyr who was very beneficial to Islam and whose teachings serve as instruction for our youth, as well they should.

You sisters and brothers who attend this school should arrange your daily programme in such a way that other Mutahharis or another Mutahhari will emerge from your midst. Resolve to see this happen, direct your attention to God and let everything you do be for God the Blessed and Exalted alone. Strive to

pursue your studies well at the school, and even more importantly, strive to achieve moral edification.

Be Islamic, and as you complete your Islamic studies, so too perfect an Islamic spirit in yourselves. Alongside your studies be serious about observing Islamic decrees and striving to purify yourselves Islamically. (114)

1 March 1981 (10 Isfand 1359 AHS)

Endless greetings to the committed women who are presently busy throughout the country educating children and illiterate people and teaching the rich culture of the Qur'an. (115)

24 April 1981 (4 Urdibihisht 1360 AHS)

Women who in the past were deprived of an active involvement in society, have, over these past few years, praise God, entered the arena. And they have done so in a fitting manner, with *shari'a* rules being adhered to. They are now active in the areas of education and propagation. (116)

13 January 1982 (23 Dey 1360 AHS)

Praise God, those shackles that once bound our beliefs have today been cast off. Today, all segments of the nation are engaged in education, including the ladies. Today, ladies are among the theological students in Qum and other places; wherever they are in the country, they are busy with education. And this is something that has materialised in this revolution.

Previously, the ladies were confined to such an extent that they did not even have the right to join a group of ten people and discuss scientific or religious matters. Today, however, while observing Islamic precepts, they can go and speak anywhere in the country, even abroad. In these matters we were very backward, today we must make up for that, we must redress the failings. (117)

6 September 1983 (15 Shahrivar 1362 AHS)

I ask God, the Blessed and Exalted, to grant you ladies and sisters success both in your educational endeavours and in your ability to take action and to purify yourselves morally. For just as knowledge alone is to no avail, so too is blind purification. It is knowledge and purification together that will take man to the stage of the true human being.

I ask God the Blessed and Exalted to grant you ladies, indeed all the sisters throughout the country and the brothers, success in advancing these two aspects, which are learning and action, together with Islamic morals, so that Islam can be put into practice in Iran in a way that pleases God the Blessed and Exalted. (118)

8 April 1984 (19 Farvardin 1363 AHS)

Now the situation is such that the women, shoulder-to-shoulder with the brothers, are studying

mysticism, philosophy, all branches of science, and, God willing, of industry too. At that time they used to say that the half of Iran's population in veils could not do anything, not that they wanted them to be able to do anything for they prevented the men too from being productive. No, they simply wanted to get them to enter society adopting the style that they, their friends and adherents had adopted, and thus drag society into corruption.

God, however, did not want them to succeed. Today, you ladies are a source of pride, for along with your brothers in the theological schools you are busy studying and teaching or pursuing other Islamic activities; and I hope you will prove to be even more active than they are. Still you must be careful and act contrary to what was expected under the former regime. They wanted to destroy Islamic values and put European values in their place. Act contrary to this so that some of those who were deceived, and are still to be found in Iran, may be influenced by you and adopt your style instead. (119)

8 April 1984 (19 Farvardin 1363 AHS)

Sciences without exception, and particularly Islamic sciences, are not the preserve of any one section of society. The respected women of Iran have proved throughout the revolution that shoulder-to-shoulder with the men, they can render valuable services to Islam and the Muslims in political and social activities, and be the spearhead of the movement to educate the great community of women (in Iran).

Praise God, currently an institute is in the process of being built in the holy city of Qum, the city of learning and struggle (*jihad*), for the education of the respected ladies. It is hoped that through the efforts of the learned *ulama* and the teachers at Qum's theological schools, may their blessings continue, this Islamic goal is achieved and proves to be an effective step towards the intellectual development of women and the blossoming of Islamic learning among them.

Therefore, I appoint their excellencies the Hujjat-ul Islams Hajj Shaykh Ali Meshkini, Musawi Ardabili, Hajj Shaykh Ahmad Jannati, Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Fazel, Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Ali Shar'ei, Hajj Shaykh Muhammad Riza Tavassoli and Hajj Shaykh Hassan Sane'i, may their blessings continue, as the organising committee for this institute so that they can take the appropriate steps to appoint the managerial board, prepare the articles of association, determine its name and see to its other affairs.

It is hoped that with the assistance of Almighty God and the prayers of *Hazrat* Mahdi, may our souls be sacrificed for his coming, this institute will render a valuable service to the community of revolutionary Muslim women of Iran. (120)

22 August 1984 (31 Mordad 1363 AHS)

God be praised, you worked hard, you suffered and were steadfast in every stage (of the movement). Iranian women were actively involved in all affairs, from the cultural to the economic, and today a large number of them are involved in agriculture, a large number in industry and still others in the educational arena in the areas of literature, science and the arts.

All of these efforts are commendable in the eyes of God the Blessed and Exalted, and you are all in God's care; as long as you remain committed, God the Blessed and Exalted will assist you. (121)

12 March 1985 (21 Isfand 1363 AHS)

Strive to acquire learning and godliness, for learning is not the preserve of any one person, learning is for all, godliness is for all, and striving to acquire learning and achieve godliness is the duty of us all.

I hope that the state organs will help you and will meet your needs in all areas, and in your educational activities will adequately provide you with the things you need. I hope that you will be assisted by God and will be successful in everything you do.

The Iranian ladies have brought Islam to the stage it is now at by sacrificing their lives, their youth and their time, and I hope that from now on it will be advanced even further. You can be sure that as long as you remain active and committed to Islam, as long as you are ready to give your young ones for the cause and are willing to train them properly, then Islam will progress and will sever the hands of the enemies of religion from this country, and all Islamic countries, allowing happiness and goodness to follow, God willing.

I hope that Muslim women wherever they may be will imitate you dear ones who are striving to elevate the status of women and to make up for the injustices, which were perpetrated against you in that era. (122)

12 March 1985 (21 Isfand 1363 AHS)

## **Freedom of women in the Islamic system**

### **Freedom of women in the Islamic system**

**Question:** You have been accused of being against civilisation and you have turned the accusation against the Shah. That is not necessarily convincing. How do you stand on specific issues like agrarian reform, industrialisation and the status of women?

**Reply:** . . . As for women, Islam has never been against their freedom. It is, to the contrary, opposed to the idea of woman-as-object and it gives her back her dignity. A woman is a man's equal; she and he are both free to determine their destiny and choose their occupations.

But the Shah's regime is trying to prevent women from becoming free by plunging them into immorality. It is to this that Islam raises objections. This regime has destroyed the freedom of women as well as men. Women as well as men swell the population of Iranian prisons, and this is where freedom is threatened. We want to free them from the corruption menacing them. (123)

6 May 1978 (16 Urdibihisht 1357 AHS)

**Question:** Regarding social issues, what is the view of His Holiness the Ayatullah on the presence of women in universities or the workplace? Will there be restrictions placed upon them that do not exist in society today? What is His Holiness's opinion on birth control and coeducation in universities?

**Reply:** Women are free in the Islamic society and will, under no condition, be barred from universities, offices or Parliament. What will be checked equally among both men and women is moral corruption which is prohibited for both sexes. As far as birth control is concerned, that depends on what decision the government will take on the matter. (124)

7 December 1978 (16 Azar 1357 AHS)

Both women and men are free to attend university, both are free to vote and stand as parliamentary representatives, that which is objectionable is the way these people (the Shah and his regime) want women to be: a plaything in the hands of men. To quote the Shah "a woman should be beguiling." We want to get rid of this mistaken idea. We want a woman to be a person like other people, a human being like any other human being, to be free as others are free. (125)

11 December 1978 (20 Azar 1357 AHS)

**Question:** In the event of your movement's triumph and the establishment of an Islamic government, what will your approach to social development and progress be, particularly with regard to women? Will you permit polygamy?

**Reply:** Women are free, just as men are. We will act in accordance with Islamic law. (126)

12 December 1978 (21 Azar 1357 AHS)

These people you call lawyers have always misguided our women. Today, the Shah's prisons are filled with our 'free' women, yet these lawyers have consistently endorsed the Shah's crimes. Which of the two is free? (127)

28 December 1978 (7 Dey 1357 AHS)

**Question:** What changes do you feel are needed regarding the position of women in Iranian society? How, in your opinion, will an Islamic government change the status of women, for example as regards employment in the civil service and working in different professions such as medicine, engineering etc., and in other areas such as divorce, abortion, the right to travel and compulsory wearing of the chador?

**Reply:** The Shah's malicious propaganda, along with that of people bought with his money, has obscured the issue of women's freedom for the people, so that they think Islam has come just to make women stay at home. Why should we oppose women's education? Why should we oppose them working?

Why shouldn't women be able to work in the civil service? Why should we oppose women being able to travel? Women, like men, are free in all these things, women are in no way different from men. Yes, in Islam women must dress modestly and wear a veil (i.e. have *hijab*), but that does not necessarily mean she has to wear a chador. Women can choose any kind of attire they like so long as it covers them properly and they have *hijab*.

Islam does not want women to be an object, to be a doll in our hands. Islam wants to safeguard women's nobility, it wishes to make her a serious and efficient human being. We shall never allow women to be merely men's sex objects. Islam has prohibited abortion. Women can gain the right to execute a divorce if she adds this condition to her marriage contract. The respect Islam shows woman and the freedom it grants her is equalled by no other system of laws or school of thought. (128)

28 December 1978 (7 Dey 1357 AHS)

**Question:** A good many women who have reached a level of freedom and education in Iran are afraid that they will be forced to return to a reactionary religious regime. What have you to say to put their minds at ease?

**Reply:** Islam has given women freedom. It is this government and this Shah that have deprived them of freedom and have restricted them in every aspect. (129)

5 January 1979 (15 Dey 1357 AHS)

**Question:** Is an Islamic government a retrogressive one? The Shah wants to create a modern country, the Arab countries too seek progress, but Islam opposes reform and social change such as freedom for women. What is your view on this?

**Reply:** The Shah's government opposed our social development and gave away the freedom and independence of our country. An Islamic government is not a retrogressive one. It sanctions all the manifestations of civilisation apart from those that disrupt the nation's peace of mind and are incompatible with the nation's view of public decency. Islam not only sanctions freedom for women, it is actually the founder of freedom for women in all the dimensions, which exist for a woman. (130)

10 January 1979 (20 Dey 1357 AHS)

**Question:** What will be the policy of the government of an Islamic republic on women's freedom, the fight against illiteracy and the cinema?

**Reply:** The Shah has not done anything positive in Iran, trying to mend the damage he has done will take quite a while. The Shah has given freedom neither to women nor to men, we, however, will give freedom to all. Cinemas under the Shah's regime have been in the service of corruption, in an Islamic republic they will have to serve the good of the nation. We will fight illiteracy in the best way possible. (131)

11 January 1979 (21 Dey 1357 AHS)

**Question:** What will the role of women be in a future Islamic government?

**Reply:** Women are free to participate in many affairs, free in the true sense of the word, not in the sense that the Shah wanted. Some of our women are in prison, and of those who are not, a great number take part in the demonstrations and the struggles. An insignificant number are 'free', free in the sense that the Shah wants them to be free. We are most definitely opposed to that kind of freedom. (132)

15 January 1979 (25 Dey 1357 AHS)

**Question:** What will be the status of women in your future government?

**Reply:** They will have the status of a true human being and a free individual, contrary to these past periods we have lived through when neither our women were free nor our men. The nation whose men and women were not free [and] were repressed, has now thrown off the yoke and from now on men and women are free. However, if they wish to act immodestly or contrary to the interests of the country, then naturally they will be prevented from doing so. (133)

15 January 1979 (25 Dey 1357 AHS)

**Question:** What will be the role of women in the Islamic government? For example, will they be able to get involved in the affairs of state by becoming, say, members of parliament or ministers? That being, of course, if they demonstrate that they are suitable for and sufficiently competent to hold such a post.

**Reply:** The Islamic government will determine the course to be taken in such matters. Now is not the time for me to comment on such things. Women, like men, are participating in building the Islamic society of tomorrow; they can vote and be voted for in elections. Women have taken part in the recent struggles in Iran to the same degree as the men. We will give women every kind of freedom, but we will prevent corruption, and where this is concerned, there is no difference between men and women. (134)

23 January 1979 (3 Bahman 1357 AHS)

**Question from one of the female reporters:** The fact that I have been accepted as a woman shows that our movement is a progressive one, even though some have tried to portray it as retrograde. Do you think women must necessarily wear Islamic dress (*hijab*)? Must they cover their hair or not?

**Reply:** To say I have accepted you means nothing. I have not personally accepted you; you came here without my knowledge. This is not proof that Islam is progressive. Islam did not become progressive the minute you walked in here. Progress is not what some of our women or our men think it is.

Progress is determined in terms of human and spiritual perfections and by how useful a person is for the nation and the country, not by whether people go to the cinema or dances.

These are things they made you think were progressive so they could drive you into a backward state. Later we must remedy this. In salutary activities, you are free; you are free to go to university and to do any kind of respectable job. The whole nation is free in this respect. However, if anyone wants to do something immodest or harmful to the nation, he or she will be prevented. This is a sign of being progressive. (135)

23 January 1979 (3 Bahman 1357 AHS)

There is no suppression in Islam. In Islam there is liberty for all strata of society, for women, men, for whites and blacks, for everyone. From now on men should be afraid of themselves, not of the government, they should be afraid lest they do wrong. (136)

1 February 1980 (12 Bahman 1358 AHS)

Islam has set you free. Islam has declared men and women free; all are free. (137)

6 April 1979 (17 Farvardin 1358 AHS)

Today you are free, all the brothers and sisters are today free, free to criticise the government, free to criticise anything that goes against the path of the nation and Islam, free to make fundamental demands of the government. This movement has made you free, has liberated you from the bonds, which bound the nation.

You have gathered here freely, and freely you are propounding political and social issues vital to the nation, you are not the ladies of a few years ago. Today you are having a say in your destiny. You are propounding political issues and are making demands of the government. This is the meaning of freedom. (138)

3 July 1979 (12 Tir 1358 AHS)

This freedom that our nation now enjoys, which the women, men, writers and so on, now enjoy, this freedom is in all affairs, which are beneficial to you. You are free to go out and say what you have to say, to criticise the government, criticise anyone who puts a foot wrong, no one is going to ask you why you are doing so.

You are free to join the Construction Crusade (*Jihad-i Sazandeghi*) and help your countrymen. Anything that is involved with the growth of man, the growth of the sisters, brothers and these dear children, is free for you. That which is not free, indeed which Islam prevents, is gambling which corrupts the nation, drinking which corrupts the nation, and all types of obscenities which were made available during the time of that criminal (the Shah). Islam forbids such things. (139)

30 September 1979 (8 Mehr 1358 AHS)

**Question:** In the future government, what will freedom for women be like? Will they have to cease attending schools and remain at home or will it be possible for them to continue with their education?

**Reply:** The things you have heard said about women and other issues are all simply propaganda put about by the Shah and people guided by self-interests. Women are free (in Islam), free to study, free in other areas too, just as the men are. It is at the present time that neither women are free nor men. (140)

13 November 1978 (22 Aban 1357 AHS)

**Question:** Your Holiness, what do you expect the American government to do in exchange for the release of the female and black hostages that you have ordered?

**Reply:** We released the women and the blacks because women are shown a special regard in Islam and the blacks have been subject to pressure and oppression in America. We do not consider them totally culpable, for perhaps they were pressurised into coming here.

We did this out of obedience to the command of Islam and God, we don't expect anything from Mr. Carter<sup>11</sup> and we do not want any reward for what we have done. The issue here is that Mr. Carter must hand this criminal (the Shah) back to us. A criminal who has committed crimes against a people in a country must, according to all international laws, be returned to that country. Yet he (Carter) goes against all the rules of reason. (141)

18 November 1979 (27 Aban 1358 AHS)

**Question:** Your Holiness, in Neauphle-le-Chateau<sup>12</sup> you promised that not only would freedoms be protected but that they would reach all, whereas after the victory of the revolution we witnessed demonstrations against women, pressure being brought to bear on tribal minorities such as the Kurds and the banning of certain newspapers and political groups. Could you please explain these apparent contradictions?

**Reply:** The women who demonstrated are the remnants of former problems, women whom the Shah brought into the arena as "free women" and whom he led to corruption. They prefer the former situation, which that corruption had brought about, those freedoms that the former regime wanted: freedom for the youth to do anything they wanted, to embrace vice and to act indecently.

But they saw that Islam does not consent to indecency and to actions, which drag the country into corruption and drive the nation into a state of backwardness. It was these women who came out onto the streets, with faces made up as everyone observed, and demonstrated. Otherwise freedom most certainly has not been and will not be curtailed. The people are free, but not to create corruption and drive the nation into backwardness. (142)

26 November 1979 (5 Azar 1358 AHS)

Today, women in the Islamic Republic are striving shoulder-to-shoulder with the men to rebuild their country and rebuild themselves. This is the true meaning of free men and free women, not that which was promulgated during the reign of the deposed Shah, for freedom then meant prison, repression, persecution and torture. (143)

5 May 1980 (15 Urdibihisht 1359 AHS)

I ask the youth, the girls and boys, not to sacrifice their independence, freedom and human values, regardless of the trouble and suffering this may cause them, for a life of luxury, pleasure, indulgence and frequenting the centres of corruption which the West and its agents, men without a country, open to you. (144)

5 June 1989 (3 Khurdad 1368 AHS)

## Islamic dress (hijab)

### Islamic dress (*hijab*)

**Question 1:** If a lady does her daily prayers (*namaz*) dressed in modest attire such as a baggy manteau, trousers and a large scarf or *miqna'a*,<sup>13</sup> is this permissible or not?

**Question 2:** If a lady doing her prayers at home wears a thick, long chador while underneath she has on a sleeveless top or dress and wears no socks, are her prayers invalid?

**Reply 1:** There is no problem.

**Reply 2:** Her prayers are not invalid.

*Istifta'at* Vol. 1, p. 137.

**Question:** What are the rules governing the viewing of TV films which sometimes show unveiled women, and listening to a musical instrument being played?

**Reply:** There is no problem concerning the viewing of foreign films in which the actresses are not known and which do not have a corrupting influence. Dance music is forbidden, but there is no problem with other types of music.

*Istifta'at* Vol. 2, p. 17.

**Question:** I am a woman working as a hairdresser for Muslim women who observe the Islamic cover (*hijab*). I work in an environment closed off to men. Could you please state your esteemed opinion of income earned in this way?

**Reply:** Based on the conditions set out in the question there is no problem, and income earned in this

way is religiously legal.

*Istifta'at* Vol. 2, p. 32.

Women are free to choose their activities, their destiny and also their manner of dress, providing it complies with the rules. Present-day experience in the action against the Shah's regime shows that women have found more freedom than ever before in the mode of dress which Islam stipulates for them. (145)

1 November 1978 (10 Aban 1357 AHS)

**Question:** For a long time now Your Holiness has been criticising the Shah's policies, to what extent will your policies, with regard to the following, differ from those of the Shah: Social issues, will Islamic laws be put into effect and what difference will they make to daily life in comparison with the present laws?

'Beneath the banner of Islamic government', could Your Holiness explain more precisely what this means? Will women have the right to freely choose between the veil and Western dress? Will cinemas continue to exist? If so, what kind of films will be selected for viewing? Will alcoholic beverages be banned? Finally, will Iran become another Saudi Arabia or Libya?

**Reply:** The implementation of penal laws in Islam depends on many conditions first being fulfilled and involves many preliminaries. Many aspects must first be justly considered and Islam must be implemented fully. If these conditions exist, it will be seen that Islamic laws are not as harsh as others. Women are free to choose their activities, their destiny and also their manner of dress, while complying with the rules.

Present-day experience in the action against the Shah's regime shows that women have found more freedom than ever before in the mode of dress which Islam stipulates for them. We are opposed to cinemas whose programmes corrupt our youth morally and subvert Islamic culture, but we approve of programmes which educate society and which contribute to its healthy, scientific and moral development.

Alcoholic beverages, alcoholism and other narcotics, which are harmful to society, will be banned. The Islamic republic government that we have in mind will not be like any of the regimes mentioned (i.e. Saudi Arabia and Libya). (146)

1 November 1978 (10 Aban 1357 AHS)

**Question:** Some of the Islamic customs, such as the mandatory veil, have been abandoned. Will the veil be once again enforced in the Islamic republic?

**Reply:** The veil, in the form we commonly understand it to take and which goes by the name Islamic *hijab*, is not opposed to freedom. Islam is against indecency. We invite the women to accept the Islamic

*hijab*. Indeed, our brave women are tired of the calamities that the West, in the name of civilisation, has brought upon them, and they have turned to Islam. (147)

28 December 1978 (7 Dey 1357 AHS)

In Islam women must dress modestly and wear a veil (i.e. have *hijab*), but that does not necessarily mean she has to wear a chador. Women can choose any kind of attire they like so long as it covers them properly and they have *hijab*. (148)

28 December 1978 (7 Dey 1357 AHS)

Women must not enter the Islamic ministries improperly dressed. They can work there, but they must have *hijab* and must observe *shari'a* principles. (149)

6 March 1978 (15 Isfand 1357 AHS)

**Question:** This chador, is it right that these women hide themselves under a chador? These women took part in the revolution, they gave lives, they were imprisoned, [and] they fought. This chador is an old custom, the world has changed, is it right that they should have to hide themselves in this way?

**Reply:** First of all, this is something that is their choice, and they have chosen it for themselves. What right do you have to deprive them of their choice? If we tell the people to come out and demonstrate their approval for Islamic dress, whether the chador or some other form, out of our population of 35 million, 33 million would come out. What right do you have to stop them?

What kind of dictatorship is this you want to impose on the women? Secondly, we do not say a woman has to wear a specific type of dress, particularly in cases of women your age<sup>14</sup> there are no specifications. We are concerned mainly with the younger women who when they make up and dress up draw hordes of young men after them. It is these women we are stopping. They don't need your sympathy. (150)

12 September 1979 (21 Shahrivar 1358 AHS)

**Imam Khomeini, the Leader of the Revolution and Founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in reply to a question about the attacks by a number of ignorant and possibly anti-revolutionary elements on women not properly observing the Islamic dress code, issued this edict:**

It is possible that the attacks on women in the streets, alleys and market places are being carried out by perverse elements opposed to the revolution. No one has the right to perpetrate such an attack and this kind of behaviour is unlawful (*haram*) for Muslims. The police and revolutionary committees must prevent such incidents. (151)

4 July 1980 (13 Tir 1359 AHS)

Whereas under the former regime one's consequence and standing were measured by obnoxious make-up, by what one wore and in what kind of house one lived, the values found today in Islamic countries, particularly in Iran, are human, moral values. These values have come about because of the change that has taken place in the ladies.

Those who once liked to show off amongst the female community with their costly clothes and pernicious make-up are now condemned and stand shamefaced. In those days, our Muslim ladies were embarrassed wearing Islamic dress, and the deprived classes who observed the Islamic dress code felt ashamed of the way they dressed before the affluent, but corrupt, classes. Today the opposite is true, and now one of those people who once put on such corrupt displays of make-up and dress would be ashamed in your midst. (152)

16 March 1981 (25 Isfand 1359 AHS)

You must remember that the veil, which Islam has prescribed for you is to protect your status. Whatever God has decreed for man or for woman is to keep alive the true values they possess, values that may be destroyed by the devil's insinuations or at the corrupt hands of imperialism and its agents.

12 March 1985 (21 Isfand 1363 AHS)

*Questions put to Imam about television programmes by the managing director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) organisation and member of the IRIB's supervisory board:*

1. On the airing of TV programmes in which the woman's role requires her not to observe fully the rules of the Islamic dress code concerning the face, neck and hair.
2. On the airing of sports programmes such as wrestling and football in which some parts of the sportsmen's bodies are uncovered.
3. On watching such programmes when broadcast on TV.

**Reply:** There is no problem from the point of view of the *shari'a* to watching these kinds of films and plays, indeed many of them are educational and it is perfectly permissible to broadcast them. The same goes for sports programmes and music, most of them present no problem. On rare occasions transgressions do occur and greater care must be taken to avoid them.

Two points, however, must be heeded. Firstly, the person who does the actor's make-up must be *mahram*<sup>15</sup> for the person being made up. It is forbidden for anyone else to perform this task. Secondly, people watching the programmes mentioned above must not do so in a lustful manner. (154)

21 December 1987 (30 Azar 1366 AHS)

Most probably the struggle against the wearing of the veil by Muslim women in educational institutions is

a perverse attempt to undermine this great manifestation of the Islamic world's defence of the Most Noble Messenger, peace be upon him and his descendants. The issue is one which vexes the Islamic nations: why in the so-called free world forcing women and girls to remove their veils is considered pure democracy, yet when we simply state that anyone who insults the Prophet of Islam, peace be upon him and his descendants, should be sentenced to death, and the council of Islamic jurists issues an edict to this effect, this is considered undemocratic!

Why does the world sit back and remain silent in the face of people who do not allow Muslim girls who have chosen to wear Islamic dress into universities to attend classes or teach? Is it not that the interpretation of freedom and how it is used lies in the hands of people who are opposed to the fundamentals of a freedom which is sacrosanct. Today God has made us responsible, we must not be negligent. Today, we must struggle against apathy, inaction and silence and the enthusiasm and momentum of the revolution must be maintained. (155)

22 March 1989 (2 Farvardin 1368 AHS)

## **Advice for safeguarding and perpetuating the Islamic movement**

### **Advice for safeguarding and perpetuating the Islamic movement**

Today, the movement is in greater need of the nation of Iran, of ideological unity, of the honourable ladies, of Chahar Mardan<sup>16</sup> than it ever was before its victory and at its climax. It is today that the hands of the criminals and traitors, those who see their interests endangered, are working to try to stop this movement from flourishing. It is today that these treacherous hands must be severed. It is today that the hands of those who spread dissension and create excuses to cause division in the ranks of the Muslims must be severed. Our honourable women must sever the hands of these traitors, our powerful men must sever the hands of these traitors, the clergymen, wherever they are, must be vigilant and must sever the hands of these traitors and frustrate their machinations. (156)

25 April 1979 (5 Urdibihisht 1358 AHS)

You ladies, you brothers and sisters alike, must be vigilant, the Iranian nation must be vigilant and not let the blood of our martyrs be in vain, not let the spilt blood of our youth be meaningless, not let it be trampled underfoot by personal interests. Rid yourselves of personal interests. Do not let treacherous hands create different groups. (157)

25 April 1979 (5 Urdibihisht 1358 AHS)

In this period of history, at this juncture we now find ourselves, where one road leads to ultimate victory and the other, God forbid, to defeat and a return to the former state of affairs, it is the duty of all of us, whether you respected ladies or the rest of the nation, all of us, the brothers and sisters alike, to safeguard that ideological unity, that unity of purpose which was Islam – everyone shouting out together

for Islam – and which brought this movement to victory. Hold gatherings, fill the mosques and remember your aim, which is to put all Islamic laws into effect in Iran. (158)

2 July 1979 (11 Tir 1358 AHS)

All of these respected sisters and you brothers, all the people of Iran, all of us must now be mindful of this path that our movement is following. This movement must be kept alive so that these problems are overcome. (159)

8 July 1979 (17 Tir 1358 AHS)

Now, it is the bounden duty of us all, whether the law enforcement officers or the people, the ladies or the brothers, to protect this trust which is in our care and which is from God. This trust is Islam; it is the Qur'an. (160)

2 September 1979 (11 Shahrivar 1358 AHS)

We must all join hands together, not only the men but the women also, all segments of society are one, they must join hands together to repair this ruin they have been left with, and to get their lives back together. (161)

9 January 1980 (19 Dey 1358 AHS)

My brothers! My sisters! Be alert, for today we are faced with great responsibilities. If we lose this movement that has reached this stage, this revolution that has reached this stage and this Islamic Republic that has been made a reality in our country, we will all be responsible. (162)

19 January 1981 (29 Dey 1359 AHS)

## **Complete Texts of some of Imam's Speeches Concerning the Position and Rights of Women in the Islamic System**

**Complete Texts of some of Imam's Speeches Concerning the Position and Rights of Women in the Islamic System**

### **Address to a group of women in Qum**

**Address to a group of women in Qum**

**In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful**

Incessant greetings to the women of Iran! Peace be upon you, respected ladies. May the mercy of God be upon you, lion-hearted women, whose noble efforts have delivered Islam from the fetters of

enslavement to foreigners. The peace of God the Blessed and Exalted be upon the nation of Iran, upon the ladies and the men.

Courageous sisters, you fought shoulder-to-shoulder with the men and ensured the victory of Islam. I thank you, women of Iran and women of Qum. May God and the Imam of the Age be pleased with you. Carrying your infants in your arms, you came into the streets and supported Islam with your ardent demonstrations.

I have heard what happened in Qum and other cities; I have heard what happened in Chahar Mardan. I take pride in all the courageous deeds accomplished by the women of Iran, in Qum and other cities for you have been in the vanguard of our triumph and have encouraged the men. Our men are indebted to your courage, lion-hearted women; I am indebted to both the honourable men and women.

Islam has particular regard for women. Islam appeared in the Arabian Peninsula at a time when women had lost their dignity, and it raised them up and gave them back their pride. Islam made women equal with men; in fact, it shows a concern for women that it does not show for men. In our revolutionary movement, women have likewise earned more credit than men, for it was the women who not only displayed courage themselves, but also reared men of courage. Like the Noble Qur'an itself, women have the function of rearing and training true human beings. If nations were deprived of courageous women to rear true human beings, they would decline and collapse. It is the women who strengthen the nations, who make them brave.

In the earliest age of Islam, the women participated in wars together with the men. The position of women is a high one. Women in Islam enjoy a high rank. We saw how in this movement the women, the honourable ladies, stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the men, in front of them even, in the line of battle. They lost their infants and youth, but still they bravely resisted the enemy.

We want our women to attain the high rank of true humanity, not to be a plaything in the hands of men, in the hands of depraved men. Women must have a share in determining their destiny. Women in the Islamic Republic must vote. Just as men have the right to vote, women too have that right. In this recent period, the women were degraded. One of the great acts of treachery committed against our nation (by the former regime) was that they robbed us of our human resources, they reined in the power of our youth and that of our women, they degraded our women, betrayed our nation.

They turned our women into playthings, into something akin to dolls. Our women were warrior-like, but they wanted them to be profligate pleasure-seekers. They insulted woman's dignity; they wanted women to become mere objects, a possession to pass from one hand to another. God, however, determined otherwise.

Islam grants woman a say in all affairs, just as it grants man a say. Just as men should avoid corruption, so too should women. Women should not allow themselves to be playthings in the hands of dissolute youths, they should not degrade themselves and, God forbid, come out into the streets dressed up and

made up, placing themselves in full view of depraved men. Women must act like true human beings; they must be pious.

Women enjoy a dignified position; they have free will just as men have. God created you free beings and gave you dignity. Just as God has laid down laws for men imposing restrictions to prevent them from becoming corrupt, so too He has laid down laws for women. These are for your benefit; all Islamic laws are for the good of society. Those who want to see women as playthings in the hands of dissolute men are traitors.

Women should not be tricked, they shouldn't imagine their station in life calls for them to come out into the streets dressed up and made up, with no veil and scantily dressed. This is not the role of women; this is the role of a doll. Women must be brave, they must involve themselves in the fundamental destiny of the country, [and] they are the makers of true human beings, the educators of mankind.

May God protect you women of Iran, you women of Qum, from the dangers presented by corrupt people, people who in reality are animals (not human beings). Just as hitherto you have always participated in our country's movements, just as you partook in this movement and played a role in its victory, so too now you must continue to participate and rise up again whenever the need arises. The country belongs to you.

God willing, the hands of foreigners, of venal elements and plunderers have been severed, they have left and the country is yours, yours to rebuild. All the people of Iran, men and women alike, must repair the ruins that the previous regime has bequeathed to us; the hands of men alone will not suffice to accomplish the task. Men and women must collaborate in this respect.

There is one particular point concerning women to which attention should be paid. When women wish to marry, there are certain prerogatives they can stipulate for themselves that are contrary neither to the *shari'a* nor to their own self-respect. For example, a woman can stipulate that if her future husband turns out to be of corrupt moral character or if he mistreats her, she would possess the right to execute a divorce.

This is a right that Islam has granted to women. If Islam has imposed certain restrictions on both women and men, it is for the benefit of both. All Islamic laws, be they those which permit or those which prohibit, are for the benefit of all. Similarly, just as Islam has granted man the right to divorce, it has also granted it to woman, on condition that the parties stipulate at the time of the marriage that if the husband behaves in a certain manner, the wife will have the right to execute a divorce.

Once the man has accepted such a stipulation, he can never repudiate it. Apart from making it possible to include such a stipulation in the marriage contract, Islam forbids the husband to mistreat his wife; if he habitually mistreats her, he is to be punished and the *mujtahid* will grant the wife a divorce.

May God adorn all of you with dignity, health, happiness and perfect faith and character.

Peace be upon you, beloved and respected ladies. (163)

6 March 1979 (15 Isfand 1357 AHS)

## **Imam's address to a group of ladies from Qum**

### **Imam's address to a group of ladies from Qum**

#### **In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful**

When I left Qum you ladies and gentlemen of this city were afflicted with troubles, but you had your youth at your side. When I returned, they were gone. Their loss brought grief not only to the hearts of the mothers and fathers, but to my heart also. I saw the pictures of these brave youth on the walls of the Fayziya theological school.<sup>17</sup> I offer my condolences to the people of Qum, to the bereaved mothers, on their loss.

When I left, the whole of our country was afflicted with such troubles; indeed the whole of our country for the past fifty odd years has been in a state of affliction, hardship, repression and dependence on foreigners. God only knows what this father and son<sup>18</sup> have done to this country of ours. Throughout its history Iran has not witnessed the likes of such acts of treason.

All the monarchs throughout the 2,500 years or more of monarchical rule in Iran were traitors; even those who were reputed to be good were traitors, yet their treachery did not reach the bounds, which that of these two did. Indeed, no one really knows to what bounds Riza Shah and his son's treachery did in fact reach, the extent of their crimes was huge, but the extent of their treachery was even greater.

What scenes we witnessed during the reign of Riza Khan, a reign that perhaps most of you cannot remember. In Qum and indeed in all the towns and cities in accordance with the wishes of those who instructed him and in the name of *kashf-i hijab*, he violated that which is inviolable in Islam; he violated that which is sacrosanct to the believers and to our respected women. What his agents did to our veiled ladies! How they treated them! They tore off their chadors and scarves and confiscated them. I myself witnessed these scenes, and you witnessed what this son did to this country on the plea of creating a 'great civilisation'.

We cannot imagine the true extent of what they did to this country. We cannot know the volume of their crimes and their treachery. We don't know where they have bank accounts or the exact amount they have in them. We don't know for sure that the amount, which has been revealed, is the true amount. It's not known how much they have in Swiss, American, British or other banks. It is said that recently \$3 billion has been taken, but we have no idea how much was taken previously.

At the time of the father, when he entered the war and the Allies sent him into exile, he collected together the crown jewels, filled his suitcases with them and took them with him. As I was told, once out at sea a ship used for transporting livestock drew up alongside the ship on which he was travelling, and

he was told (by the British) to board it. That wicked man, who himself was worse than an animal, asked what he should do with his suitcases, he was told they would be brought for him later. But the British took them and kept them for themselves.

In the reign of this son too everything we had, all our self-respect, all our resources, has been taken. Our material strength was damaged, but not to the extent that our human resources were. The people were not allowed to develop, centres of corruption were made, gambling houses and houses of ill repute built and placed at the disposal of our youth. They were made to be unmindful of their destinies. So many of our youth became addicted to drugs during his reign, they were stupefied through addiction so they wouldn't bother about their destinies or where their true destiny lay.

However, God, the Blessed and Exalted, wanted otherwise; He helped you and during these past two years the movement – which originated in the 15th Khurdad movement<sup>19</sup> – blossomed. You ladies have proved that you are in the vanguard of the movement; you have proved that you lead the men; men get their inspiration from you. The men of Iran have learnt lessons from the ladies of Iran and the men of Qum have learnt lessons from you dear ladies. You are in the vanguard of the movement.

Islam holds you in higher esteem than it does men. Islam wants to save you, it wants to save you from becoming this plaything they want to turn you into. Islam wants to train you to become an integrated and virtuous human being, so that in your care suchlike human beings may be raised.

I thank you all for participating in this movement. I thank all the mothers who took part in this movement and lost their loved ones. I am deeply sorry for their loss. May God have mercy upon the souls of their martyrs. May He grant you all mercy, happiness and help you attain perfection. All of you must cast your vote, a vote for an Islamic republic, not a word less (in this designation) nor a word more.<sup>20</sup>

You too must vote, you are no different from others; indeed you lead the men. Men are raised in your care, you are the educators of men, recognise your own worth, just as Islam does. All of you take part in this upcoming referendum and vote for an Islamic republic.

I hope that an Islamic republic will be established and Islamic justice and a just government will emerge to save our country from these problems, stop the hands of foreigners from ever again having free rein in this land and ensure freedom and independence for you all. May God's mercy be upon you all.

Peace be upon you, and also the blessings and mercy of God. (164)

8 March 1979 (17 Isfand 1357 AHS)

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1. – Addressing the students following Imam's line who seized the American Embassy on 3rd November 1979.
  2. – The adoption of the authoritative rulings of a scholar of proven learning and piety in matters of religious practice.
  3. – Refer to footnote 3.
  4. – If when exchanging the marriage vows the woman stipulates that she will become the man's wife only if he accepts her

condition that she has the irrevocable right to execute a divorce, and the man accepts this condition, then that right of the wife cannot be taken away from her.

5. – The reference here is to arguments advanced before the referendum of 29–30 March 1979 by various non-Islamic elements who said it would be enough to have a republic, that to speak of Islam in this connection was unnecessary, or others who said they wanted a ‘democratic republic’ not an Islamic one, or those who said they wanted a ‘democratic Islamic republic.’ For more of Imam’s views on this matter refer to p. 337 of the book *Islam and Revolution*, translated by Hamid Algar (Mizan Press).
6. – As it turned out, the plan to form a Constituent Assembly that would draw up the definitive text for a new constitution was abandoned in favour of convening a numerically more limited Assembly of Experts, for which an election was held on 3 August 1979.
7. – Referring to the publication of an informative magazine for women.
8. – Referring to those people who for various reasons opposed women’s social activities.
9. – Refer to footnote 3.
10. – Refer to footnote 2.
11. – James Earl Carter, the former American president.
12. – A hamlet near Paris where Imam took up residence in early October 1978 during his period in exile.
13. – A scarf sewn at the front under the chin and covering the chest.
14. – Addressing Oriana Fallaci, a famous Italian journalist.
15. – Either someone of the same sex or who shares a degree of consanguinity with the person being made up, if of the opposite sex, thus precluding marriage.
16. – Chahar Mardan: a district in the city of Qum the people of which played a very significant role in the struggle against the Shah’s regime.
17. – The seminary situated in Qum next to the shrine of Hazrat Fatima, the Immaculate One (upon whom be peace), the sister of Imam Riza, the eighth Imam from the Holy Prophet’s Progeny. Her tomb in Qum is the centre of the shrine complex.
18. – Meaning Riza Khan and his son Muhammad Riza Pahlavi.
19. – On 3 June 1963, Imam Khomeini delivered a historic speech in Qum, repeating former denunciations of the Shah’s regime and warning the Shah not to behave in such a way that the people would rejoice when he should ultimately be forced to leave the country. Two days later, he was arrested at his residence and taken to confinement in Tehran. His arrest prompted a major uprising in many Iranian cities, which resulted in the deaths of not less than 15,000 people in the span of a few days when the Shah’s troops opened fire on unarmed demonstrators. The date on which this uprising began was 5th June or 15th Khurdad according to the solar calendar used in Iran and became known as the uprising or movement of 15th Khurdad.
20. – Refer to footnote 63.

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