

Our Expectations on the Muslim Woman

Author(s):

Dr. Ali Shariati [3]

This text discusses about women's rights, women's personality and Islam's view of women differs a great deal from the realization of the actual value which Islam gives to human beings, and to women, in particular. A great many people are acquainted with Islamic views of society, social relations, women's rights, children's rights and family rights, but these same people then actually follow non-Islamic, ancient cultural traditions and do not dare to base their lives upon Islamic values. Dr Ali Shariati proposes his views and explains how to put them into practice.

Translator(s):

Laleh Bakhliar [4]

Category:

General [5]

Women [6]

Politics & Current Affairs [7]

Topic Tags:

Women Rights [8]

Miscellaneous information:

Our Expectations on the Muslim Woman Dr. Ali Shariati Translated by: Laleh Bakhtiar, Ph.D.

Part 1

Prior to beginning my lecture, I would like to propose some practical suggestions. Speaking about women's rights, women's personality and Islam's view of women differs a great deal from the realization of the actual value which Islam gives to human beings, and to women, in particular. Often we are satisfied by pointing out that Islam gives great value to science or establishes progressive rights for women. Unfortunately we never actually use or benefit from these values or rights. We could benefit from these if we were to act according to the understanding which we acquire from them.

Many people are acquainted with Islamic views of society, social relations, women's rights, children's rights and family rights, but these same people tend to follow non-Islamic, ancient cultural traditions and do not dare to base their lives upon Islamic values. That is, they do not practice what they preach. Thus we always remain at the level of talking.

We must complete Islamic views and intellectual discussions with practical solutions. We must find a way whereby we reach these values and rights in practice. After proposing my views, the question should be asked, how we can actually put them into practice?

Throughout history the problem of women's rights and their role has always been considered to be an intellectual problem. Hence, various religious, philosophical, and social systems have reached varying views in this respect.

From the 18th through the 20th centuries (particularly after W.W.II) any attempt to address the special problem of the social rights of women and their specific characteristics has been seen as a mere by-product of a spiritual or psychic shock or the result of a revolutionary crisis in centers of learning or as a response to political currents and international movements. Thus, traditional societies, historical societies, and religious societies, in the East and in the West, have all been directly or indirectly influenced by these thoughts, intellectual currents, and even new social realities.

Unfortunately, the crisis of the problem of women and their liberation, which began in the West and has been strengthened by the ruling superpowers in the 20th century, has influenced all human societies, even closed traditional and religious societies. There are only a few cultural, traditional and religious societies which have been able to properly stand against this flood.

Such societies have frequently been confronted by a peculiar modernism which they have adopted, under the guise of liberation of women, either by rejecting old traditions or by under-taking blind struggles. None of them have succeeded in standing against this attack.

In such societies the majority newly educated class, the pseudo-intellectuals, vigorously welcome this crisis. They themselves even act as one of the forces that strengthens this destructive transformation.

In traditional religious societies, neither groups could stand against the attack of the modern view of the liberation of women as announced by the West. The pseudo-intellectual and modern class of Islamic and non-Islamic societies in the East considered the modest dress to be the symbol of modern civilization, progress, and awareness.

The old traditional group passed through and confronted this crisis with non-scientific and illogical tactics due to their lack of experience. It is a general law that when there is a fire resulting from a spill of oil, trying to hurriedly and unskillfully put the fire out, only leads to the fire spreading more rapidly!

Thus such unskilled struggles against the West have frequently been performed in a manner that has created complexes and various reactions inside such societies. In this way they have paved the way for acceptance of Western ideas and innovations. There are very few societies who have been able to stand against, and show an effective reaction to the modern West by consciously selecting their manner of lifestyle.

One of the most important factors that can assist Eastern societies in confronting and standing against the intellectual and cultural attack of the West (as it relates to the view of modern woman) is to have a rich culture and history full of experiences, values, and ideas. It is important to have progressive human rights and, in particular, to have perfect and complete human models in the religious history of those societies and communities.

Fortunately, from this point of view Islamic societies have cultural power and possibilities and have a very progressive history. The value system and religion are in this way very rich. Thus, they can, by relying on these values and sources and by reviving and progressing towards the high humanitarian values existing in their culture and their past history, encourage their new young generation to stand and resist the West's attack.

The most effective weapon to confront Western values and the most important factor for creating a conscious struggle within the new generation of our Islamic societies against the West's seduction is to hold up very high, distinguished, and characteristic symbols. An example of this would be real personalities of Islamic history. If the lives of such personalities are known in detail, shown precisely, and revived and introduced properly, the young generation will sense that there is no need to decline in the guise of modernism and accept the seductions of the West. Rather, they will sense that there are very high, elevated symbols in their own history and religion to be considered as models for self-reconstruction.

It must be taken into consideration that all matters related to women, science, life-style, class, relationships, scholastic understanding, and one's world view all have been discussed in Islam. We have only to solve our present difficulties to answer the intellectual challenges and to reduce our sensual needs. How can we understand our values? How can we use and obtain actual results from them? Our essential aim must be to solve the problem of proper understanding and recognition.

The members of the Prophet's family, in the view of all of the intellectuals of Islamic countries (who possess a more distinguished image of them) have always been the manifestation of the most elevating and liberating humanitarian and Islamic values. These values are not limited to a particular tribe or even to all Muslims. Thus, all of the people of the world can easily see and understand these examples which have come out of a small house which is greater than the whole of history.

Anyone who believes in the values and virtues of humanity will admit that the symbolic role of the members of this family in various dimensions and fields is beyond historical values of class or tribe. They are rather the highest, meta-historical, meta-tribal values. They are permanent symbols and examples of humanity.

Thus, anyone who is a human being respects them. Anyone who is aware of the values of humanity, any committed intellectual in the world, will admit the values and virtues which this small house created within the arena of human history.

Therefore, when we describe the biography of Fatima, as one of the members of the Prophet's family, we must learn lessons from her personality, her role, her social, mental, and political status and use them to guide our lives in our groups and in our societies.

The problem of proper understanding is the most important and essential problem of our time. At the present time, the struggles of the committed Muslim intellectuals should be directed to a proper understanding and recognition of Islam's history and religion. This proper understanding, including the proper understanding of Fatima, is the key to our salvation. After W.W.II, the problem of women was designated as being the most important and sensitive problem in the West. The war itself was the main cause for family relations to be split and destroyed. Traditional religious values such as ethics, morals and spirituality collapsed. Also due to the war, crimes, cruelty, aggression and plunder increased.

From the intellectual and ethical point of view, it had a very diverse effect, causing a decline upon the post war generation. Its inauspicious effect after a quarter of a century [since W.W.II] can be seen in the spirit, thought, philosophy and even the art of the present time.

Those who have seen France, Germany, England and even the USA [the last of which was far from the actual field of battle], prior to the war and visited those countries after the war, can clearly see that although it seems as if centuries have passed, actually the cultures collapsed within one generation. Therefore, the fall of ethical values was one of the natural results of the war.

But the point must be noted that prior to the war, the West had already started a multi-dimensional fight from the various philosophical, mental, and social aspects with the Catholic religion, the ruling religion in the Middle Ages. Thus they had unconsciously destroyed all ethical value and limits which the church had defended in the name of religion.

One of the values which the church defended in the name of religion was women's spiritual and social

values and rights. This defense combined with the declining, anti-female traditions, bonds, and limitations.

But after the Renaissance and the development of the bourgeoisie, the bourgeois culture which is the culture of individual liberty, defeated the church and consequently the rule of the church over values was abolished. Thus, all of the restrictions and values concerning women which the church had defended and supported in the name of religion, succumbed to the rise of the bourgeoisie and its culture.

Then suddenly the problem of sexual liberation appeared. Women realized that through the slogan of sexual liberation, all of the anti-human limits, restrictions, and bonds which restrained them could be destroyed. Women welcomed this change vigorously to the extent that sexual liberation entered the arena of science!

What is normally designated as scientific understanding of religion is not a pure scientific and scholastic understanding. It is rather a bourgeois cognition. After the Middle Ages, science was made to serve the present ruling bourgeois system. If nowadays science appears to oppose religion and moral values, it is not really science that opposes these, but it is the ruling bourgeois which does so just as in the Middle Ages.

It was feudalism which defended aristocratic social-moral traditions in the name of religion. It was Christianity which was defending feudalism, and now it is science which defends the bourgeoisie. It is intellectuals those who believe that economic and materialistic social foundations are the basis of all social transformations who will more easily accept my argument and logic.

Up to the appearance of Freud (who is one of the agents of the bourgeoisie), it was through the liberal bourgeoisie spirit that scientific sexualism was manifested. It must be taken into consideration that the bourgeoisie is always an inferior class. Although feudalism was an anti-human system, it nevertheless relied on an aristocratic elite and their moral values even though these moral values led to a decline. Bourgeoisie mentality negates all of the high ascending human values and believes in nothing except money.

Therefore, a scholar or scientist who lives, thinks, and studies during the bourgeois age, measures collective cultural and spiritual values (the sacrifices of mankind, the martyrdoms, struggles, literature, art etc.), with only the scale of naked economy, with production and consumption and with nothing else. One who studies psychology or anthropology, looking at all the dimensions and manifestations of the mystic spirit of human beings that which religion believes to be the spirit of God and the manifestation of metaphysical virtues sees only unsatisfied sexual appetites.

Belief, culture, mental illnesses all are related to the struggle to release an imprisoned and condemned sexual complex. The bourgeois social scientist looks at all of the delicate human sensations and feelings (even a mother caressing her child, the worship of the beloved by the lover and all other issues) in relationship to sex.

Freud, a modern bourgeoisie, armed himself against all moral and human values, and all high and ascending manifestations of the human soul and called it realism. Freud's "realism" was not that of the bourgeoisie, but rather of the scientist who serves the bourgeoisie class because of these bring the human being down to the level of a sexual and economic animal. Thus, the bourgeoisie, by alienating all values and virtues, made only one religion for all miserable men of this age for whom all must be sacrificed.

This messenger was named Freud. His religion was sex. His temple was Freudianism, and the first one who was sacrificed on the threshold of this temple was woman and her human values.

We who live in the East always speak about Western colonialization, but I would like to explain that this does not mean that Western colonialization only colonizes or exploits the East. It is a world-wide power and class that exploits and colonizes both the East and the West.

If I had the opportunity, I would explain that this power has alienated the European masses even more than the Eastern masses. The European has been captured by colonialization's legacy of unemployment and misery and will continue to be so in the future. They will continue as victims of anti-colonialism. This ruling colonial power influences Eastern people in many ways such as, emphasis upon unimportant, sensational and emotional matters; rumors, discrimination, and hypocrisy; and sowing discord and pessimism to keep Easterners occupied with mundane and unimportant issues.

By these means Easterners are kept in a state whereby they are unaware of what Western colonialization is doing to them, unaware of their fate and destiny. These conspiracies, then cause young Europeans, likewise, to become alienated and destructive, and perform more tricks and crimes. All of these acts are performed in the name of colonialization in Eastern countries without the Easterners realizing it.

Part 2

For example, we all know about the widespread international police network and the extensive intelligence services which observe even the minutest movement anywhere in the world. And yet, there are tons and tons of narcotics which are freely transferred from the East to the West. They are distributed and sold by huge international organizations and transferred through their factories, planes, ports, ships and offices. Why is it that the international police cannot prevent the distribution of narcotics among the younger generation of Europe and the U.S.A? Because ruling powers prevent the young generation from understanding what is going on in Europe and the U.S.A. Ruling powers prevent them from caring about who rules the destiny and fate of humanity. This is the same ruling power which colonizes both the West and the East only its methods and relations differ. At any rate, in both the East

and the West, human beings are victims of this anti-human worldwide power.

One of the most important means that has been created by this ruling power from the intellectual, social, economic and moral point of view, is Freudian sexualism. This has become the common social spirit of our age and has become the substitute for all values, virtues and liberties.

It is not accidental that Freud's view of sexuality came to prominence after the second world war and became the fundamental basis and foundation of art. Most motion pictures are based on only two elements: violence and sexuality. Both of these are legacies of the war. Motion pictures are one of the most important examples of the relationship of art to Western capitalism because film production is the only art which cannot exist and develop without the aid of capital. Thus it differs from the arts of painting, literature, poetry and music. A poor painter, writer, poet or musician can create the greatest work of art, but a film producer must have capital of millions of dollars to create a saleable film. Thus, this art is unconsciously supporting capitalism.

The pseudo-scholars of the third and fourth worlds suppose that Freudianism is really the science of the present age. Modern scholars research and record Freud's works in a special way.

It is interesting that in underdeveloped countries, under the guise of intellectuality and modern scientific psychology, scholars and scientists serve these universal powers free of charge. In the name of science, they freely propagate anti-human ideas among the intellectuals and younger generation. How miserable are these thinkers and intellectuals who serve the capitalistic ruling powers! They really believe that they are serving humanity, freedom, liberty and science!

Thus, in order for the superpowers of bourgeois scientism to dominate, both the East and the West must be sacrificed. They must become the victims of narcotics as well as Freudianism. From science's point of view, every young person who is still human and who still shows sympathy and sensibility towards the destiny of his or her nation and other nations, must be caused to deviate, must be made indifferent to his or her destiny and the destiny of others. In order to accomplish this, any means is permissible and advisable whether it takes the form of science, art, sports, literature, history, tradition, or religion. It does not make any difference. One must be amused by any form. One must be removed from the scene so that one takes notice of nothing. The best way is scientific and mental stupefaction and the strongest factor, particularly among the younger generation, is sex.

Why sex? Because it can be logically explained. It is new. It can easily and freely be accepted. It is the most important point that can attract the young generation, who, in turn, are the most important victim of Freudianism.

Thus all of intellectual, human, artistic, social, political and financial investments must strengthen this school. It is not strange to see how rapidly it progresses and develops.

It must be noted that there is another group who cooperates, albeit unconsciously, in a most effective

way with this worldwide power to achieve the aim of attracting the younger generation, particularly women, to Freudianism, and to sex. This group unskillfully fights Freud's innovations by relying on old, strict, illogical and anti-human traditions and creates restrictions and complexes in the young generation, particularly, women. You may want to know how they cooperate in this inauspicious endeavor. They cooperate by pushing the young generation towards pessimism.

While Freudianism invites woman out of the house, this old group tries to hold her inside by creating bonds, obligations, and restrictions and depriving her of all her human and religious rights thus unconsciously preparing the way for Freudianism. It is in this way that they cooperate with Freud. Statistics show that the insidious invitation of Freudianism has been most successful in traditional societies and countries where women have been most deprived. Thus we cannot fight and confront this universal illness and danger only by relying on ancient traditions, customs, restrictions, bonds, etc. which deny rights to women. There is only one solution: to give human and Islamic rights back to women.

This is the only way. If the human and Islamic rights of women are given back to her, you have armed her with the weapon whereby she can personally resist and confront Freudianism. But if you deprive her of her rights, you insure that this satanic invitation will capture her. You have pushed her towards it.

The essential and important problem which we have confused is the distinction between culture and religion. Culture and religion have mixed with each other throughout history. They make up the collection of ideas, tastes, behaviors, feelings; customs and legal relations which are sacred and honorable to a society.

For example, in Islamic societies, Islamic precepts and laws relating to the economy, the family, the community and even the social system have been mixed with local and tribal traditions formed over the centuries. These are certainly not related to Islam. They are only ancient tribal and local traditions and customs supported and protected by society. Thus an intellectual wishing to be released from such ancient and local, tribal traditions must fight a combination of religion and custom in order to be free of both.

Thus both groups (whether they defend religion or do not) must defend the mixture of ancient customs. Those who fight against traditions also confront the living and ascending values of Islam. None of these groups neither the progressive modern intellectuals nor the old traditional religious group can distinguish between religion and culture.

Why should they be separate and distinct from each other? Because we Muslims believe Islamic rights and laws are derived from the essence of humanity and the essence of nature and are made by the Will of the Creator of the laws of nature. The laws of nature are stable and never grow old. Thus laws which are based on the general dignity of creation never grow old. On the contrary, social traditions based on production and consumption (on cultural systems which are not fixed laws) have to change.

Religion, a living, permanent phenomenon which could be effective in the present age, can no longer

play an effective role in the social life of a community, a society or a generation because religion has been captured by ancient deviated traditions and thus can no longer effectively confront the danger of the superpowers.

An aware intellectual is a historian, whose most important cultural mission and responsibility is to distinguish Islam as a living faith from the old traditional moulds which are not Islam but rather tribal customs and to put the real Islamic ideas and faith into new moulds matching the necessities of the present age. The everlasting, living, moving, progressive Islamic contents must be protected and put into new moulds which meet the challenges of each age.

Based on my own experience I have to announce that even the most progressive, intellectual, rebellious and revolutionary thinker when confronted by pure Islamic values and virtues will be attracted and submit easily to them.

The visage of Fatima the visage of the woman who existed, spoke, lived, played a role in the mosque, in society, in the home training her children, in her family's social struggles and in Islam, a woman whose role should be made clear in all its dimensions to the present generations should be accepted as the best and most effective model to be followed by the present generation.

I myself have experienced this. I have seen so-called religious histories which lack religious feelings, which have no idea about religion, which even negate and oppose religion. When a proper picture of the Prophet's family, all of whom showed humility and submission, emerges we feel that they are really living personalities.

When I say that Islam is living, I mean it is a collection of living thoughts and ideas. It is alive because of its living social laws and rights and because model, living personalities have been trained by it.

When the beautiful image of Husayn is presented, which no human society can deny his unique and exceptional personality. No one can deny he is an eternal human symbol who should be followed, admired and praised. All accept him.

Remember Zaynab at Karbala. She had withstood the difficult task of seeing martyrdom after martyrdom in her captivity in the bazaar of Kufa and in the courts of Ibn Ziyad and Yazid.

What woman of whatever class, at whatever stage of life in whatever system of particular tribal, religious and social ideas, who believes in the eternal values of womanhood and ascending values of the feminine, does not accept Zaynab as a permanent everlasting symbol of the social, human and progressive leadership of women?

Such people are living. They are symbols of Islam. To be alive means to be effective, to show the right way, to guide humanity in whatever stage it may be, in whatever race or land it may occupy.

But, unfortunately, customs and religion have been mixed together. This mixture of customs is defended

in the name of religion.

The intellectual, seeing the deprivations and abuse of women on one hand and the appearance of social freedom, class advantages and sexual liberty on the other hand, becomes confused.

When the religious group of a community (who are acquainted with religion and believe it), are unable to distinguish between the religion and the local, tribal, cultural customs, how can we expect young, modern intellectuals (willing to fight against ancient customs) to make a distinction between religion and customs?

If the distinguished scholastics of Islam, who are acquainted with Islamic truths, do not perform this task, what organization or power will do so?

The Prophet of Islam has such an elevated personality. He is one before whom history is humiliated. When he entered his home he was kind, lenient and gentle. When his wives quarreled with him, he left his home and made a place for himself in the storage area without showing any harsh reaction against them.

This behavior of the Prophet of Islam must be considered as an Islamic criterion rather than the behavior of a supposedly religious but really abusive man. Such un-Islamic abusive behavior was based on an ethnic, cultural tradition. Therefore, distinctions should be drawn between ethnic, cultural custom and an Islamic religious command.

The Prophet's behavior was so human that it amazes us. For example, some of the young girls of Madinah showed interest in participating in the Battle of Hunayn, a place between Makkah and Jeddah. There is a distance of more than 600 kilometers between Madinah and Makkah and then an additional distance from Makkah to Hunayn. This journey took several months.

Nevertheless, the Prophet of Islam took a group of fifteen young girls along with the fighting caravan so that they could assist in the war effort.

In the Mosque of the Prophet in Madinah, there was a porch used for social affairs. Each corner of it was devoted to a social purpose. At one corner was the tent of Ruqiya who, according to the Prophet's command, had established a tent inside the Prophet's mosque Islam's place of prayer to nurse the war's wounded. Sad ibn Maaz (the Islamic chief officer wounded in the Battle of Khandaq) was hospitalized there. This tradition of looking after the sick patients and nursing them continued for many centuries afterwards in Islam.

I personally read about this in Ibn Yamin's book in which he praised Aladdin, the governor of Sabzevar, and mentioned that Aladdin built a hospital in a very large paradise like garden in a village near Sabzevar. Describing the hospital, Ibn Yamin says that there were beautiful girls, like angels, who looked after the patients.

Part 3

When there was such a hospital, with such a staff in a remote village near Sabzevar in the 7th and 8th Islamic centuries, there must certainly have been more important and well-equipped hospitals in larger cities like Rey, Tus, Balkh, Bukhara and Baghdad. But we see that our ethnically-oriented intellectuals announce that a European or American woman serving in the first world war established nursing in the world. They negate and oppose the nurses who worked in the early stage of Islam, because it is a religious tradition.

Therefore, you see how problems are confused, how rights are abolished, how great talents are sacrificed in the name of religious traditions and how many great religious values and Islamic virtues are forgotten in the name of intellectualism and opposition to traditional, religious beliefs!

Thus the responsibility of those who understand both the present society and Islam and who live in the present century is very heavy. They must bear the burden of many centuries of emotions, ideas and faith. It is not an easy task to travel such a long distance and discover the truth which exists beyond it.

As mentioned, one of the most important factors that enables Islamic communities to stand against and resist the insidious invitation of pseudo-scientific Freudianism and its dreadful use of sexuality is the presence of an exemplary religious models in a humane culture. In the same way that Western worldwide colonialization stupefies the minds of its own youth through narcotics, promotes Freudianism and sexual liberty for Eastern countries, and exports sexual liberty into the Eastern countries in exchange for their raw materials. In place of the oil, diamonds, gold, rubber, etc. which the West takes from the East, it gives sexual liberty to them.

When a young man or woman is introduced to sexual liberty, he or she will become occupied by it and will not think about other things, such as problems of freedoms. And when such young people have matured, they will be so involved with installment payments, sexual obsessions, etc. that they will never come to look and think about other problems!

The most important weapon of Islamic youth against this insidious invitation of the West is the possession of symbols leading the mind to genuine spiritual experiences. The spiritual symbols made available to the present generation which is unwilling to be captured either by hollow, conservative, anti-human, anti-Islamic ethnic traditions or by the stupefying culture of indecent Western modernism are the best weapons against the West's attack.

The woman of the Third World must be one who makes a choice. She is the woman who neither accepts the inherited mould nor the imported novelty. She recognizes both of them. She knows and is aware of both of them. The one which is imposed upon her in the name of tradition which she inherits, is not related to Islam at all but is related to ethnic customs of the period of paternalism and even slavery. And

the one which is imported from the West is not science, not humanity, not freedom and not liberty. It is not based on sanctity and respect for women at all. Rather it is based on the low tricks of the bourgeoisie stupefying consumerism and mindless self-indulgence.

She wants to select, but what model? She wants neither the model of the traditional, strict woman, nor the model of the modern degraded woman. She wants the face of a Muslim woman. Fortunately, both material and history are available to build this third figure. And even more authentic than history, logical than scientific arguments are the objective exemplary personalities who are symbols in our Islamic history.

All of them were gathered in a family. All lived in a small room a family, each of whose members is a symbol, a model. Being Hasan-like means having patience and peace. Being Husayn-like means participating in spiritual and religious struggle in the way of God (Jihad) and martyrdom. Being Zaynab-like means bearing the heavy social mission of justice and truth. Being Fatima-like means being a real woman. Being Ali-like means being virtuous.

I do not intend to once again repeat the life of Fatima as a model. All I knew in this respect I have already said and written. But I would like to mention once again that it is not sufficient only to understand and repeat the historical biographies. We must realize how to describe, how to understand, how to learn lessons from Fatima's life.

When the Prophet of Islam said that Fatima was one of the four greatest women of the world, when he consoled all the pains, miseries and disturbances of her life and implied she would be selected as the woman among women of the world, he was not intending to superficially greet her or to give her false consolation. He was quite serious in this respect. He recommended she be patient and bear the heavy burden and responsibility of being Fatima.

Fatima's sisters did not have such a responsibility and were living with their husbands as ordinary Muslim women. But Fatima was exceptional. Thus the Prophet by calling her 'the woman among the women of the world' was intending neither to make an idol for his followers to worship nor to praise her as a victim in order to mourn for her. He intended to introduce her as a model and a symbol, to learn lessons from the manner of her life and to act in accordance with it. This is the meaning of being the 'woman among women of the world'.

How can we learn from Fatima's life? You all know the various dimensions of her life and, thus, there is no necessity to repeat it here. The only point that I would like to make is that we should try to learn from this great personality.

For example, when we consider Fadak in Fatima's life, we must see what lesson we can learn from it. Fatima's insistence upon getting back Fadak was not for the sake of possessing a small farm. Her struggle must not be reduced to that level. Her struggles and efforts were to take what she thought was her right, even though the companions of the Prophet tried to show that their opposition was according

to Islamic standards. Therefore, the real value of Fadak is as a symbol and an example.

Today Fadak does not exist. Some may say that such historical subjects must not be considered and discussed so much. But, quite the contrary, I believe these are living subjects which must be repeated and discussed not as historical events which are taught in schools, but rather as subjects from which one can gain valuable lessons.

What lessons? A lesson to be learned about the highest manifestation of motherhood in Islamic history, about Fatima, about the edifying symbol of a woman in the house, in marriage, in relationships, in motherhood, in training and nourishing children like Hasan, Husayn and Zaynab, and in companionship with her husband Ali. She was a woman who throughout the whole of her life, from her childhood to her marriage, from her marriage to the end of her life, felt herself to be a responsible and committed person and a part of the destiny of the community. She defended what was right, supported justice in thought, idea and deed and confronted the oppression which existed in her society. She was ever present in all social problems and confrontations. She did not remain silent until her death even though she knew that she would not succeed in her fight. This is the meaning of social commitment and responsibility. It is the lesson that can be learned from Fatima's life.

When she was a small girl of around ten years, she went everywhere in Makkah with her father, Prophet of Islam. No one expected a small girl to go hand in hand with her father in such a socio-political and ideological situation. But Fatima felt herself responsible for the destination of the Islamic Revolution although according to her age, she was not responsible. So she was present at any confrontation. She was present wherever the Prophet of Islam was alone against the enemy. She stood beside him. Numerous cases have been recorded. For example, once when the Prophet's enemies poured dust onto his head from a balcony, it was Fatima who cleaned the dust from the face of the Prophet with her small hands. It was she who gave consolation to him.

The Prophet and his family were exiled in the desolate valley for three years. Heroes such as Sad ibn Waqqas (the famous officer and commander) even after the passing of many years, when recalling those days, would tremble with terror. Throughout that time, when the whole responsibility for the blockade, imprisonment, humiliation, loneliness, hunger, and difficulties rested upon the shoulders of the Prophet, Fatima was present. She caressed her old mother, her hero father and even gave consolation to her older sisters! She was the only source of love, kindness, and enthusiasm in this horrible valley and through those hard and difficult years.

When the Prophet migrated to Madinah, she bore the difficulties of the period of migration. Even in marrying Ali, she showed social commitment because everyone knew that Ali was not a man of the house but rather a man of battle. Thus he was not a desirable husband from the point of view which seeks only home, pleasures and comfort. Everyone knew that Ali possessed nothing except a sword and love. They knew he would not possess anything else up to the end of his life. Fatima knew that Ali would never return home with full hands. She knew that the hand of destiny had made Ali like an anvil which

must bear all strokes of hardships. Thus, by selecting a warrior like Ali as a husband, Fatima shouldered a great responsibility.

Hence, Fatima consciously made her selection. She gloriously bore the heavy burden of this mission up to her death. She made a home which is unique in history, beyond human scale and standards. For everyone, whether Muslim or not, admits that her home was a paradigm of the human situation. A home in which Ali was the father, Fatima was the mother, Hasan and Husayn the sons and Zaynab and Umm Kulthum the daughters. All of them were elevated symbols. All of them were gathered in one family not dispersed throughout history in order to be collected and introduced separately. They were one generation inside one house. It is really painful for Muslims who had such models, such a religion, and such a culture to have such a destiny. A great personality like Fatima was among the members of this family. She was such a distinct woman that Ayisha, the Prophet's wife, praised her saying, "I never saw anyone higher than Fatima, except her father, the Prophet."

Thus it is sufficient for any intellectual woman to read a book about Fatima (or about other distinguished Islamic women, like Khadija or Zaynab) to know these figures and compare them with figures who are introduced in the name of modernism. Any women comparing Fatima with women who are introduced through modern magazines will recognize significant differences and reach the proper and inevitable conclusion.

Therefore, the most important duty of the aware, responsible writers and preachers is to introduce these figures accurately to the present generation thus holding up the most conscious, humane models to defend and resist the West's attack.

A real figure of a Muslim woman can be seen in the Battle of Siffin, the battle that took place between Ali and Muawiyah. In this battle, the women (who were in Ali's army) by singing epic poems, and by encouragement and enthusiastic lectures and speeches, inspired Ali's army against Muawiyah. After the Battle of Siffin and the death of Ali, Muawiyah ordered these women to be pursued in order to take revenge against the families. One of these women was captured and sent to Muawiyah's court in Damascus. Muawiyah told her that she had a very sinful past. She, in order to avoid Muawiyah's revenge, said, "God bless you. Overlook the past." But Muawiyah said, "Do you know that you shed the blood of our army when we fought by Ali's army in the Battle of Siffin?" She courageously answered, "God bless you that you gave me this blessed news [that I participated in that war against you and your army]."

This is the face of a Muslim woman. If we study the books which have been written about Muslim women, we will notice that wherever Islam ruled throughout history, Muslim women have shown the greatest talents in science, literature and social issues. But wherever Islamic societies have declined, women also declined. Our intellectuals have never found the opportunity to study the life and personality of Zaynab properly and to take note of her real figure and role.

When Zaynab saw that the revolution had begun, she left her family, her husband and her children, and joined the revolution. It was not for the sake of her brother Husayn, who was the leader of this revolution, that she joined it. She did so because of her own responsibility and commitment to her society, religion and God. When she saw that a struggle and revolution had begun against an oppressive system, she joined the revolution and was beside her brother Husayn in all stages in those difficult days. Even after the martyrdom of Husayn and his companions, she carried the flag of the continuation of Karbala's revolution. She performed her mission thoroughly, perfectly and fairly, with strength and courage. She expressed with words the truth that Husayn expressed with blood. She shouted out against tyranny in any land. She distributed the seeds of revolution in every land that she entered, either free or as a captive. It is no accident that Muslims, wherever they are, show a great and deep sympathy towards the Prophet's family and love them.

It was Zaynab, the Prophet's granddaughter, who stood against and confronted the ruling oppressive power and who destroyed all resistance. She accomplished all this against a tyrannical caliphate which had conquered Iran and Byzantium. She spread the thoughts and ideas of Husayn's school of revolution and martyrdom everywhere and in every land. She took the drops of the blood of Karbala as a symbol of courage and justice to all places and all times.

Yes! All of these miracles belonged to a woman! Thus when a woman, a conscious and responsible committed woman sees such heroics from a woman who belonged to Fatima's family, she understands where she must look and how she must be. She realizes that a woman of any age and any century can emulate this model.

These are the values that will not change or grow old nor do they depend upon the customs of the socio-cultural or economic systems. These are stable and permanent values which will be destroyed only when there is no longer any humanity in existence. Thus, the present day woman must know Fatima was a woman who was a warrior during her childhood, a woman who showed patience and tolerance in the hard days of the economic blockade, a woman who endured three years of imprisonment in the desolate valley in Makkah, and a woman who cooperated and showed great sympathy to the Prophet of Islam after the death of her mother. She was the woman who acted 'as his mother' and, therefore, was entitled to be addressed by the Prophet as 'her father's mother'. She was the woman who in Madinah, was the wife of Ali, the man whom she herself had selected. When she married Ali, she entered a home which lacked everything except poverty and love. Then as Ali's wife, she showed the highest example of companionship, fellowship, and the most ascending spirit. She was always beside Ali as a wife, a friend, a companion and a confidant who kept his secrets and bore his hardships.

And finally, she was the nourisher and trainer of Hasan, Husayn, Zaynab and Umm Kulsum. Her part in training Zaynab was even more important than Husayn because Husayn had grown up inside the Prophet's mosque and among the companions of the Prophet. He had grown up in Madinah at the

center and peak of the confrontations and great social events. But Fatima had trained Zaynab inside her home and in her lap. The role of Zaynab in the revolution of Karbala and its continuation and progress resulted from Fatima's teachings and from the high spirit of Zaynab.

From every corner of Fatima's house, a symbol and a manifestation of humanity appears. The Prophet's family was considered to be the benchmark of Islamic understanding in all ages and at all times. Even after the victory of the Prophet in Madinah, Fatima still was the emblem of the bearer of poverty and harshness outside the home and was the highest caliber mother inside.

At the peak of victory and the glory of Islam, when her father was the leader of Islam, Fatima was still the example of a woman who lived as our sister. She bore hunger as a slave. She bore hardships and tolerated deprivation for the glory of her husband and the leadership of her father. And after the death of her father, when those difficult days were renewed, she once again started the struggle. Throughout the crisis this solitary mother did not cease her resistance. She actively continued her struggle.

Even at nights she visited the companions of the Prophet and influential political personalities. She spoke with the great friends of the Prophet and important personalities. She brought awareness to all. She criticized all of them. She analyzed and foresaw the calamity. This was her social role at that stage until she died. But even with her death, she created a political event. She asked to be buried at night. Her memories, actions, and struggles created a revival in Islamic history. She became the manifestation of the search for justice and truth in all the revolutionary uprisings of the 2nd through the 8th centuries in all countries from Egypt to Iran.

Even at the present time, she acts as a model for Muslim women: as a daughter of God's Prophet; as a mother who trained girls like Zaynab and Umm Kulsum and sons like Hasan and Husayn; as a wife, a high, ascending and exemplary wife to her husband; and as the companion of Ali's solitude, hardships and difficulties. She was beside him everywhere as a committed social woman, a woman who from the early stages of her life never left her father and fought beside him and struggled with him. She was the woman who fought against tyranny on the external front and who fought against deviation, usurpation and oppression on the internal front.

She died in solitude and silence. She asked Ali to bury her in secret, at night. Here was a woman who even used her death and burial ceremony as a means for struggle in the way of truth. This is how it is to be a Muslim woman in the present age.

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/our-expectations-muslim-woman-dr-ali-shariati>

Links

[1] <https://www.al-islam.org/user/login?destination=node/43986%23comment-form>

[2] <https://www.al-islam.org/user/register?destination=node/43986%23comment-form>

[3] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/dr-ali-shariati>

[4] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/laleh-bakhliar>

[5] <https://www.al-islam.org/library/general-education-society>

[6] <https://www.al-islam.org/library/women>

[7] <https://www.al-islam.org/library/politics-current-affairs>

[8] <https://www.al-islam.org/tags/women-rights>