

The Quran Speaks

BAHIS SEDQ

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*This book is dedicated to the hope and vision
of a world undistracted by religious divisions—
a truly wonderful world!*

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THE QURAN AND WOMEN

When women were viewed as inferior members of the human family and treated as property belonging to men, the Prophet Muhammad accepted women as equal partners in society, in business, and even in war. Islam codified the rights of women. The Quran elevates the status of women to that of men. It guarantees women civil, economic and political rights. —Benazir Bhutto¹

Benazir Bhutto is not alone in expressing these views. She echoes the feelings of all moderate Muslims who believe that Islam revolutionized the status of women by giving them rights as far back as the seventh century CE that non-Muslim women have only recently begun to realize. The Quran, they insist, honors women more than any other political system does.

Muslim clerics representing the other end of the spectrum also agree that Islam honors women, though they occasionally bring a different perspective to the debate. Consider the following discussion carried by an Egyptian TV channel involving the cleric Sa'd Arafat.²

Anchor: Wife beating is a serious allegation. Let us examine this bit by bit.

Cleric: Allah honored wives by instating the punishment of beatings. Honored them with beatings? How is this possible! The Prophet Muhammad said: “Don’t beat her in the face, and do not make her ugly.” See how she is honored. If the husband beats his wife, he must not beat her in the face. Even when he beats her, he must not curse her. This is incredible! He beats her in order to discipline her. In addition, there must not be more than ten beating, and he must not break her bones, injure her, break her teeth, or poke her in the eye. There is a beating etiquette. If he beats to discipline her, he must not raise his hand high. He must beat her from chest level. All these things honor the woman. She is in need of discipline. How should the husband discipline her? Through admonishment. If she is not deterred, he should refuse to share the bed with her. If she is not repentant, he should beat her, but there are rules to the beating. It is forbidden to beat her in the face or to make her ugly. When you beat her you must not curse her. Islam forbids this.

Anchor: With what should he beat her? With his bare hands? With a rod?

Cleric: If he beats her, the beatings should not be hard, so that they do not leave a mark. He can beat her with a short rod. He must avoid beating her in the face or in places in the head where it hurts. The beating should be on the body and should not come one right after the other. These are all choices made during the process, but beatings are allowed only as a last resort. The honoring of the wife in Islam is also evident in the fact that the punishment of beating is permissible in one case only: when she refuses to sleep with him.

Anchor: When she refuses to sleep with him?

Cleric: Yes, where else could the husband go? He wants her, but she refuses. He should begin with admonishment and threats—

Anchor: Allow me to repeat this. A man cannot beat his wife... over food or drink.

Cleric: Beatings are permitted only in this case, which the husband cannot do without.

It would be interesting to see who on the status of women represents the true face of Islam—Benazir Bhutto or perhaps Sa'd Arafat. Before we consult the Quran for an answer, it may not be out of place to take a quick glance at how women were treated prior to Islam.

STATUS OF WOMEN BEFORE ISLAM

There were pre-Islamic societies in which women not only inherited property but inherited on equal footing with men. Pompeii, which was destroyed by a volcanic eruption in 79 CE, is one example. Though Roman law may not generally have been entirely favorable to women, “in the inheritance of her father’s estate the daughter took an equal share with the son”—in certain circumstances, at least.³

There are also examples of societies in which women could rule. Queen Hatshepsut, for instance, was on the throne for about two decades in the first half of the fifteenth century BCE in Ancient Egypt—which was nearly two millennia before the advent of Islam.

Because our primary interest is the Bedouin culture of Arabia, it is worth noting that even amongst the Arabs of Mecca, women seem to have been well regarded. We know, for instance, that Khadija, Muhammad’s first wife, was a wealthy businesswoman. She engaged Muhammad as her trading agent before marrying him. This indicates that women were entitled to hold property and to engage in businesses in their own right. Khadija must also have inherited property from her family or previous husbands⁴ in order to be able to do so, which suggests that Islam did not bring any sea change by allowing Arab women a share in inheritance. Indeed, Quran may only have adopted the existing custom, as it did in many other instances.*

Particularly relevant in this regard is the fact (noted in the Quran) that there were a number of goddesses amongst the deities worshipped by the Arabs, some of which held prime positions in

* For instance, it adopted the same *hajj* rituals as were practiced by pagan Arabs prior to Islam.

the pantheon. This too is indicative of the position held by women in Arab society. Had women not commanded respect, the Arab pantheon may have consisted only of gods and no goddesses.

One also finds other indications of emancipation of women prior to the advent of Islam. The Quran accuses Abu Lahab's wife of slandering the Prophet,* which suggests that women were free to express themselves. One also learns from the Quran that the dress restrictions imposed by it on women were not the custom in Arabia, which shows that women were permitted to dress more liberally. Women were also not restricted from interacting with men and were not confined to their homes.

Although it may also be true that girls were occasionally buried alive upon birth,⁵ the practice could not have been widespread, as there was no shortage of women in Arabia—the Quran would not otherwise have permitted four wives to each believer, in addition to slave girls.

This is not to suggest that women were equal to men, but it does seem that they were quite well regarded in the pagan culture of Arabia. One would expect their status to only improve further with Islam, considering that women are one half of the population and Allah could not therefore be unmindful of their well-being, and also the fact that Muhammad did not have any male heirs, which too should have attracted greater focus on them. In this perspective, let us see if the Quran “elevates the status of women to that of men,” as Benazir Bhutto states in the opening quotation.

STATUS OF WOMEN AS REFLECTED IN THE QURAN

An initial flavor of the Quran's approach towards women is gathered from verse 16:72,⁶ which mentions sons and grandsons amongst the blessings of Allah but completely omits to include daughters and granddaughters. The impression thus conveyed by the Quran—that daughters are lesser blessings (if blessings at all)—is then reinforced by a series of verses (addressed to the

* According to some interpretations, at least.

polytheists, who considered certain goddesses to have the power of intercession with Allah) in which the Quran expresses annoyance: “Are the sons for you and the daughters for Allah? This would indeed be an unfair division!” (53:21–22).⁷

Verses 2:228 and 4:34 also do not disturb the balance. They clarify that “men are a degree above them [women] in status” as “Allah has made one superior to the other.”⁸

It would be interesting to see if this changes when the Quran comes to discussing the following specific issues.

- ***Inheritance shares***

In Chapter 2, we encountered verses from *Surah An-Nisa*, which give women half the share of men in inheritance. Whether it is the brother against the sister or the son against the daughter or the husband against the wife, the man gets twice the share of the woman, which is consistent with the proposition that men are a degree above them.*

Moderate Muslims feel uneasy with this grossly unequal division. The explanation they offer is that a woman also gets a dowry from her husband, which makes up for the lesser inheritance shares. Let us consider this argument further.

The Quran does prescribe payment of dowry “as an obligation of enjoyment of conjugal relations”⁹—which may seem a touch distasteful, as though conjugal relations are objects for sale, but the practice already existed among pagan Arabs, as recorded by the Quran.¹⁰ That aside, the argument that a dowry somehow makes up for the loss of inheritance is problematic. It does not address the case of many women who never get married or of those who get married to men who are unable (or decline) to pay adequate dowry. How are fairness and equality extended to such women?

The question also is, If the lesser inheritance shares are meant only to restore equality in favor of men (due to the imbalance created by dowry), would it not have been simpler and better to

* One exception is that the mother inherits equal to the father in the case of a child’s death.

allocate equal shares in inheritance and do away with dower altogether?*

This may also have been more respectful to women and given them the status of equal partners in marriage.

Moderate Muslims then resort to the argument that what the Quran implemented was nevertheless a huge advance in those times and must be viewed in that spirit. The difficulty with this argument is that even the pagans allowed inheritance to women. Can we be sure that the Quran took it forward, or perhaps even backward?

- *Witnessing of documents*

The Quran instructs the believers to record their debts in writing and to have the document witnessed:

O Believers when you contract a debt for a fixed term, you should put it in writing. . . . And let two men from among you bear witness to all such documents. *But if two men be not available, there should be one man and two women to bear witness so that if one of the women forgets the other may remind her.* (2:282)¹¹

Does the Quran treat two women as equal to one man in the above context? Not quite, as at least one man must always witness the document—four women thus are not adequate replacement for two men. Moreover, in the case of wills, which also are required by the Quran to be attested to, women are excluded as eligible witnesses altogether.¹²

Such treatment may have made sense in seventh-century Arabia, when women were probably illiterate—by and large, at least—and not likely to be familiar with financial transactions. It was a pragmatic solution that if two men were not available, then one man and two women could witness the document. What the Quran did not anticipate, though, was that women one day would be equal to men. Marie Curie, for instance, won two Nobel Prizes (one for chemistry and the other for physics) and is the first person to achieve this distinction. There are countless other

* As it is, dower can be waived by agreement and does not therefore provide adequate protection, and it may even have to be returned if the woman wants to be free of the bond of marriage.

examples of women excelling men in virtually all fields, which makes this restriction absolutely archaic in today's world.

A better solution would have been to stipulate that two persons familiar with such transactions should be asked to witness the document. This would have emphasized the need for reliable witnesses who could understand the transaction, but without drawing a line on the basis of gender. The Quran, of course, does not adopt this more neutral approach. As things stand, therefore, women are forever barred from being equal witnesses. The fact that the woman may be an expert banker and the man totally illiterate doesn't change the equation!

This rule also unfortunately reinforces the message that women are somehow inferior to men.

- ***Polygamy***

In light of the above discussion, one does not expect the Quran to restrict each believing man to just one wife—i.e., “one man one woman” is not the recipe one anticipates. In the case of polygamy, however, the ratio turns out to be even more skewed than in respects of inheritance and testimony. Each man is permitted to marry up to four women at a time:

[You] may marry two or three or four women whom you choose. But if you apprehend that you might not be able to do justice to them, then marry only one wife or marry those women who have fallen in your possession. This would be the better course to avoid injustice. (4:3)¹³

Moderate Muslims are troubled by this, and stress that this license to marry multiple wives is conditional on the husband determining first that he is able to do justice to all wives and that because this is not ordinarily possible, the Quran in fact encourages monogamous relationships. But if the Quran truly meant to encourage monogamous relationships, could this not be better stated? And would the Prophet have married thirteen times? The problem also is that even when the Quran suggests “if you apprehend that you might not be able to do justice to them, then marry only one wife,” it goes on to advise “or marry those

women who have fallen in your possession” (namely, slave girls). Is that truly a recommendation for monogamous relationships?

In fact, later in the same *Surah*, the Quran even recognizes that it is not possible for the husband to do complete justice to all his wives, but it does not withdraw the permission to enter multiple marriages.¹⁴ This was a perfect opportunity for the Quran to clarify that because a man cannot do justice to all, he must marry only one wife. But it did not.

The fact that men are permitted by the Quran to have multiple wives also, of course, reinforces the impression that women are inferior to men.

- ***Prostitution***

We noted earlier that the Quran permits men sexual relations with slave girls, including married women taken as prisoners of war,¹⁵ but can slave girls also be used towards prostitution? It seems unimaginable that the Quran would allow that. Consider the following verse, however:

And do not force your slave girls into prostitution for your own worldly gains *when they themselves want to keep chaste*; and if any one forces them into it, after such a compulsion, Allah will be forgiving and merciful for them. (24:33)¹⁶

Does this mean that should the slave girls be willing—which perhaps they may, in order, for instance, to pay their way out of slavery—they could be used for prostitution?

The following verse, which prescribes punishment for indecency by slave girls, also throws some informative light on the issue:

Whoever cannot afford to marry free Muslim women, should marry one of the Muslim slave-girls in your possession . . . and give them their dowries so that they may live a decent life in wedlock and not in licentiousness nor may have secret illicit relations. *Then if they are guilty of indecency, after they have been fortified by wedlock, they shall be given half the punishment prescribed for free women.* (4:25)¹⁷

According to this verse, slave girls “guilty of indecency, after they have been fortified by wedlock” attract half the punishment prescribed for free women. What is notable is that no punishment is prescribed for slave girls who are still unmarried. Is there a suggestion in this as well that unmarried slave girls may be used for prostitution (with their consent) and hence no punishment is prescribed for their indecency?*

The other possibility, of course, is that these verses meant to prohibit slave girls (whether married or not, and regardless of consent) being used for prostitution but faltered when articulating this simple proposition.

- ***Dress code and the command to stay at home***

Two noticeable features of all Islamic communities are that women dress conservatively, often covering their heads, and that the interaction between men and women outside the immediate family is generally restricted. It is instructive to trace the basis of this in the Quran. The first instruction in this respect was issued through the following verses:

And O Prophet, enjoin the believing men to restrain their gaze and guard their private parts. This is a more righteous way for them: Allah has knowledge of what they do. *O Prophet enjoin the believing women to restrain their gaze and guard their private parts, and not to display their adornment except that which is displayed of itself and to draw their veils over their bosoms* and not to display their adornment except before their husbands, their fathers, the fathers of their husbands, their sons and the sons of their husbands (from other wives), their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their female associates and those in their possession and male attendants incapable of sex desire and those boys who have not yet attained knowledge of sex matters concerning women; also forbid them to stamp their

* It may also be noted that the question of indecency does not arise in respect to sexual relationship between the master and the slave girl, as that is expressly permitted by the Quran and cannot therefore be considered indecent, so when the Quran contemplates indecency by a slave girl, it can only be with respect to someone other than her master or husband.

feet on the ground lest their hidden ornaments should be displayed. (24:30–31)¹⁸

Believing men and believing women are both guided to restrain their gazes—which naturally curtails interaction between the two genders and encourages segregation. Additionally, the believing women are asked to “draw their veils over their bosoms”; however, they are not required to cover their faces.

These verses were then succeeded by the following verse, which imposes greater restrictions:

O Prophet enjoin your wives and daughters and the women of the believers that they should let down over their faces a part of their outer garments; it is expected that they will thus be recognized and not molested. (33:59)¹⁹

Notably, this verse addresses not just the wives and daughters of the Prophet but also “the women of the believers.” It therefore lays down the dress code for Muslim women generally.

According to Maududi’s translation, the previous verses command women to cover their bosoms, whereas this verse takes it a step further and requires them to draw veils also over their faces. Yusuf Ali, however, holds a different interpretation.* According to him, there is no specific direction that the face be covered. This divergence of opinion explains the variation in recommendations made by different Islamic schools, some more restrictive than others.

There is no mention, though, in the above verses that women must stay at home. That is drawn from the following verses:

*Wives of the Prophet, you are not like the other women. If you are Godfearing, do not talk in a soft voice lest the man of the diseased heart should cherish false hopes from you, but speak in an unaffected manner. Stay in your houses, and do not go about displaying your fineries as women used to do in the days of ignorance. (33:32–33)*²⁰

* As follows:

O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested.

(Note: The last sentence evidences that women were quite emancipated in terms of dress before Islam.)

Even though the command is addressed specifically to the Prophet's wives, who are also cautioned "you are not like the other women," Maududi is of the view that the restriction applies to all Muslim women:

The verses from here to the end of the paragraph are those with which the Commandments of *Purdah* were introduced in Islam. In these verses though the wives of the Holy Prophet only have been addressed, the intention is to enforce reforms in all the Muslim houses. ... Could Allah have intended only this that the holy wives alone should be free from uncleanness and they alone should obey Allah and His Prophet and they alone should offer the *Salat* and pay the *Zakat*? If this could not be the intention, then how could the Command for them to stay in their houses and avoid displaying the fineries and abstain from talking to the other men in an alluring voice be meant particularly for them to the exclusion of all other Muslim women?²¹

Maududi has a point. Allah would not have instructed that the holy wives *alone* should stay away from uncleanness, but the fact that verses 33:32–33 (unlike verse 33:59 quoted above) command only the wives of the Prophet (and not the other believing women) to "Stay in your houses, and do not go about displaying your fineries" can't be easily ignored either. To the skeptic, this is because Muhammad (unlike Allah) was less concerned about other women.*

* The following account (recorded by Ibn Ishaq in the words of a woman of B. Ghifar) also suggests that the Prophet may not always have applied the same standards to other women as he did to his own.

She said, "I came to the apostle with some women of B. Ghifar and we told the apostle, as he was going to Khaybar, that we wanted to go with him where he went, to tend the wounded and to help the Muslims as far as we could. He told us to go with God's blessings, and so we went with him. I was a young girl and the apostle took me on the back of his saddle. When the apostle dismounted for morning prayer and I got off the back of his saddle, lo, some of my

The outcome at least of the Quranic verses quoted in this section is that there is marked gender segregation in most Islamic communities, not just in respect of physical space allowed to women (they are largely expected to stay at home) but also in terms of the roles they may fill. Muslim women have generally suffered as a result. And because these verses lend themselves to the construction that women must remain at home and must fully cover themselves on the odd occasion when they have to go out, those who do not follow these norms are often looked down upon, in certain segments at least. This mindset, which rests ultimately on the above-quoted verses, has prevented millions of women from participating in economic activities and leading fulfilling lives in Muslim societies. This has also thus prevented large-scale emancipation of women in Islam.

- ***Women and paradise***

One striking feature of the Quran is that it does not mention any companions for women in paradise. Some scholars are of the view that a woman will join her husband (if married and if the husband qualifies as well). According to others, women will enjoy the company of other believing women, such as the Prophet's wives.

All this is speculation, as the Quran is silent on the matter. Not so in the case of men, though. They are promised the company of *houris*,²² variously interpreted as gazelle-eyed women, fair-complexioned women, or women with swelling breasts. Men are also clearly promised young boys in paradise!

blood was on it. It was the first time that this had happened to me. I rushed to the camel in my shame. When the apostle saw my distress and the blood he guessed the reason and told me to cleanse myself; then to take water and put some salt in it, and then to wash the back of the saddle and go back to my mount." She added: "When the apostle conquered Khaybar he gave us a small part of the booty. He took this necklace which you see on my neck and gave it to me and hung it round my neck with his own hands, and by God it will never leave me." (Ibn Ishaq: *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 518)

One is entitled to doubt this account, however. The Prophet could not have asked an unrelated girl approaching puberty to accompany him on the saddle at night.

And there will go round to them young boys, exclusively appointed for their service, who will be as lovely as well-guarded pearls. (52:24)

They will be attended by brisk-moving boys who will forever remain boys. If you saw them, you would think they were pearls, scattered. (76:19)²³

- ***False allegations of indecency***

In one respect, the Quran does protect women—regarding accusations of indecency. For instance, if the husband accuses the wife of indecency but fails to produce a witness, the wife has the last say.²⁴

In the same spirit, while prescribing that impure women are for impure men and pure women (who “are free from those scandals, which the slanderers utter”)²⁵ are for pure men, the Quran (in recognition of the fact that false charges would eliminate the chances of a pure woman finding a pure partner) prescribes strict punishment for false accusations against chaste women:

As for those persons who charge chaste women with false accusations but do not produce four witnesses, flog them each with eighty stripes and never accept their evidence afterwards, for they themselves are transgressors, except those who repent and reform themselves; Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (24:4–5)²⁶

These verses were revealed after the slander incident described in Chapter 3 and formed the basis for punishing some who had participated in spreading slander against Aisha. In today’s jurisprudence, it would be unjust for a person to be punished for conduct that was not an offense at the time it was committed, or to be awarded punishment stricter than what was applicable at the precise moment of the offense, but then, recognition of this rule was centuries away. In any case, and whatever the true motivation behind the above verses, they have provided much-needed protection to women against false allegations.

- *Child brides*

According to Ibn Ishaq, the earliest biographer of the Prophet (who is supported in this behalf by other Muslim historians as well), Muhammad “married Aisha in Mecca when she was a child of seven and lived with her in Medina when she was nine or ten.”²⁷ The Prophet was fifty at the time of his marriage to Aisha (who outlived him by fifty-six years).^{*} If this account were true, one would expect to find some corroboration in the Quran as well, perhaps in the form of endorsement of girls being married before puberty. Let us see if we can find traces in the following verse, which prescribes the waiting period a woman must observe after divorce before marrying again.

And if you are in doubt about those of your women who have despaired of menstruation, (you should know that) their waiting period is three months, *and the same applies to those who have not menstruated as yet*. As far as pregnant women, their period ends when they deliver the burden. (65:4)²⁸

What is the most notable feature is that the verse applies as much to “those who have not menstruated as yet,” a point on which all translations find themselves in total agreement.[†] The Quran thus

* It also did not matter that she was his best friend’s daughter. Subsequently, Muhammad would also marry Hafsa, who was Omar’s daughter. Omar himself was twenty-odd years younger than the Prophet and would later marry Muhammad’s granddaughter (Fatima’s daughter) Umm Kulthum, who bore him two children (Rogerson: *The Heirs of the Prophet Muhammad*, p. 231; see also Reza Aslan *No God but God*, p. 123). Omar thus acquired the distinction of being Muhammad’s father-in-law and also ultimately his grandson-in-law.

† The other translations follow:

Such of your women as have passed the age of monthly courses, for them the prescribed period, if ye have any doubts, is three months, *and for those who have no courses (it is the same)*; for those who carry (life within their wombs), their period is until they deliver their burdens. (Yusuf Ali)

And those of your women as have passed the age of monthly courses, for them the *iddab* (prescribed period), if you have doubts (about their periods) is three months; *and for those who have no courses (i.e. they are still immature) their iddab (prescribed period) is three months likewise*, except in case of death. And for those who are pregnant

clearly recognizes marriages of underage girls. By not speaking up against the practice, it also endorses the custom—which of course is not surprising, considering Muhammad’s own marriage to Aisha.

“WIFE BEATING” IN ISLAM

How does one conclude from this entire discussion, much of it admittedly unfavorable to women, that “Allah honored wives by instating the punishment of beatings,” as claimed by Sa’d Arafat? That is addressed by the following verse:

As for those women whose defiance you have cause to fear, admonish them and keep them apart from your beds *and beat them*. Then, if they submit to you, do not look for excuses to punish them. (4:34)²⁹

Moderate Muslims are understandably embarrassed and try hard to soften the impact of this verse, as is apparent from Yusuf Ali’s translation:

As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) *beat them* (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance).

It is worth noting, however, that the words in parenthesis—first, Next, And last, lightly—are not part of the Quranic text but are inserted by Yusuf Ali on the pretext of the Prophet’s sayings. Why the Quran did not make this clear is not addressed.

Yusuf Ali’s additions, however, go against what the Quran intends. The Arabic word used in verse 4:34 is *wadribu*, which is also employed in verse 8:12 when instructing the believers to crush the disbelievers: “so smite their necks and *beat* every joint of

(whether they are divorced or their husbands are dead) their *Iddah* (prescribed period) is until they lay down their burden. (Hilali-Khan) And for such of your women as despair of menstruation, if ye doubt, their period (of waiting) shall be three months, *along with those who have it not*: for those who carry (life within their wombs), their period is until they deliver their burdens. (Pickthall)

their bodies.”* That being so, why should this word mean “beat them (lightly)” in the context of verse 4:34 when it obviously has the opposite connotation in verse 8:12?†

The other issue is whether the beating can be inflicted only when the wife declines the husband’s invitation to sex (as suggested by Sa’d Arafat). That may of course be one of the grounds. The following verse indicates that the wife would be ill advised to decline such invitation: “Your wives are your tilth; so you may go to your tilth as you please” (2:223).³⁰ There is absolutely nothing, however, in verse 4:34 that restricts the beating to only this kind of defiance.

In both respects, by proposing that the beating should be light and must be confined to the wife declining the husband’s invitation to sex, Sa’d Arafat suggests a softer construction than may have been intended by verse 4:34.

*

* Yusuf Ali’s translation is “smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them.”

† One unique interpretation of this verse is by Laleh Bakhtiar, an American woman who converted to Islam and who has also translated the Quran (*The Sublime Quran*). Leila Ahmad discusses this interpretation in *A Quiet Revolution*:

Her research, Bakhtiar explains, led her to challenge conventional readings of a key word in this verse—the word *daraba*. Conventional readings understand the word as being derived from the root verb “to beat” or “to hit”. ... Bakhtiar found that the root verb *daraba* had a number of possible root meanings besides “to beat” including “to go away”. ... The verse thus basically instructs men, as Bakhtiar interprets it, to leave—divorce—women who persist in challenging or resisting them. (pp. 266–267)

What is interesting is that the entire thesis is based on the interpretation of “a key word in this verse—the word *daraba*,” when in fact this word is not even used in verse 4:34. As noted above, the word used in the verse is *wadribu*, which is also used elsewhere in the Quran to mean “beat” or even “smite.” Besides, if verse 4:34 was meant only to instruct men to divorce defiant wives, one wonders why the Quran did not use the word *talaq*, which is the word it otherwise uses to refer to divorce. Indeed, there is an entire *Surah* by that title. Also, if one agrees with Bakhtiar, this would mean that Allah chose a word that would be misinterpreted for fourteen centuries, until the true meaning was finally located.

We should now be able to answer the question who better represents the Quran on the status of women. Is it Sa'd Arafat or Benazir Bhutto? Perhaps neither. The fact is that the Quran simply fails to honor women as they ought to be honored!

retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. And if any fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (No better than) wrong-doers.”

- 26 *Surah Al-Maidah* verse 38. Yusuf Ali’s translation: “As to the thief, Male or female, cut off his or her hands: a punishment by way of example, from Allah, for their crime: and Allah is Exalted in power.”
- 27 Ibn Ishaq: *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 84:
 Quraysh decided to rebuild the Ka’ba when the apostle was thirty five years of age. ... They wanted to raise it and roof it because men had stolen part of the treasure for the Ka’ba which used to be in a well in the middle of it. The treasure was found with Duwayk a freedman of B. Mulayh. *Quraysh cut his hand off.*
- 28 *De Ira* (On Anger), Book I, Chapter XVIII. The above passage is taken from Wikipedia.

Chapter 6: The Quran and Women

- 1 Benazir Bhutto: *Reconciliation*, p. 18
- 2 Al-Nas TV aired the discussion on 4 February 2010.
- 3 Couch: “Women in Early Roman Law,” pp. 39–50
- 4 Rogerson: *The Prophet Muhammad*, p. 73: “Khadijah was a beautiful, intelligent, wealthy woman who, through the death of her two previous husbands, now commanded a considerable fortune.”
- 5 The Quran gives an indication of this in *Surah Al-Takwir* verse 4, though there is also indication in *Surah Bani Israil* verse 31 that this practice was not just confined to girls: “Do not kill your off springs for fear of want: for it is We Who provide them and you as well. Indeed their killing is a heinous crime.” (17:31) (Maududi) Yusuf Ali’s translation: “Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin.”
- 6 *Sura An-Nabl* verse 72. Maududi’s translation: “And He alone bestowed upon you sons and grandsons from those wives, and provided you with good things to eat. What, do they then (even after seeing and knowing all this) believe in falsehood, and deny Allah’s favors?” (16:72) Yusuf Ali’s translation: “... and made for you, out of them, sons and daughters and grandchildren, and provided for you sustenance of the best: will they then believe in vain things, and be ungrateful for Allah’s favors?” Yusuf Ali translates the verse to include daughters and granddaughters; however, both Hilali-Khan and Pickthall clearly disagree with him, as can be seen in the appendix.
- 7 *Surah An Najam* verses 21–22. Yusuf Ali’s translation: “What! for you the male sex, and for Him, the female? Behold, such would be indeed a division most unfair!” The additional verses, along the same lines, follow (respectively, *Surah An-Nabl* verse 57, *Surah Bani Israel* verse 40, *Surah As-Saaffat* verse 149, *Surah Al-Tur* verse 39). Maududi’s translations: “They assign daughters to Allah. ... What an evil judgment they have about Allah!” (16:57); “What! has your Lord favored you with sons and adopted angels as daughters for Himself?” (17:40); “Just ask the people (whether it appeals to them) that their Lord should have daughters and they should have sons!” (37:149); “Is Allah to have daughters and you sons?” (52:39) Yusuf Ali’s translations: “And they assign daughters for Allah. Glory be to Him! and for themselves (sons, the issue) they desire!”, “Has then your Lord (O Pagans!) preferred for you sons, and taken for Himself daughters among the angels?”; “Now ask them their opinion: Is it that thy Lord has (only) daughters, and they have sons?”; “Or has He only daughters and ye have sons?”
- 8 *Surah Al-Baqarab* verse 228 and *Surah An-Nisa* verse 34. Maududi’s translations: “Wives have the same rights as the husbands have on them in accordance with the generally known principles. Of course, men are a degree above them in status, and above all is Allah, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.” (2:228); “Men are the managers of the affairs of women because Allah has made the one superior to the other and because men spend of their wealth on women.” (4:34) Yusuf Ali’s translations: “And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.”; “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means.”
- 9 *Surah An-Nisa* verse 24. Maududi’s translation: “With the exception of the above, all have been made lawful for you to seek in marriage with your wealth any other woman provided that you keep them in wedlock and not in licentiousness. Then you should pay them their dowries as an obligation

- for enjoyment of conjugal relations with them. However, there is no harm if a compromise is made in the dowry by mutual consent after an agreement about it; Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.” (4:24) Yusuf Ali’s translation: “Except for these, all others are lawful, provided ye seek (them in marriage) with gifts from your property, desiring chastity, not lust, seeing that ye derive benefit from them, *give them their dowers (at least) as prescribed*; but if, after a dowry is prescribed, agree Mutually (to vary it), there is no blame on you, and Allah is All-knowing, All-wise.”
- 10 *Surah Al-Mumtahina* verse 10. Maududi’s translation: “O you who have believed, when the believing women come to you as emigrants, ... do not return them to the disbelievers. ... *Return to their disbelieving husbands the dowers that they had given them.*” (60:10) Yusuf Ali’s translation: “O ye who believe! When there come to you believing women refugees ... then send them not back to the Unbelievers. ... *But pay the Unbelievers what they have spent (on their dower).*”
- 11 *Surah Al-Baqarah* verse 282. Yusuf Ali’s translation: “O ye who believe! When ye deal with each other, in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing ... and get two witnesses, out of your own men, *and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as ye choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her.*”
- 12 *Surah Al-Maidah* verse 106. Maududi’s translation: “O Believers, when the time of death approaches anyone of you, and he is going to make his will, *the principle of evidence is that two just men from among you should act as witnesses.* Or, if you are on a journey and the calamity of death befalls you there, the two witnesses may be taken from among the non Muslims.” (5:106) Yusuf Ali’s translation: “O ye who believe! When death approaches any of you, *(take) witnesses among yourselves when making bequests, two just men of your own (brotherhood)* or others from outside if ye are journeying through the earth, and the chance of death befalls you (thus).”
- 13 *Surah An-Nisa* verse 3. Yusuf Ali’s translation: “Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.”
- 14 *Surah An-Nisa* verse 129. Maududi’s translation: “It is not within your power to be perfectly equitable in your treatment with all your wives, even if you wish to be so; therefore (in order to satisfy the dictates of Divine Law) do not lean wholly towards one wife so as to leave the other in a state of suspense.” (4:129) Yusuf Ali’s translation: “Ye are never able to be fair and just as between women, even if it is your ardent desire: But turn not away (from a woman) altogether, so as to leave her (as it were) hanging (in the air).”
- 15 Chapter 5, “Quran and Justice,” may be referred to for further discussion.
- 16 *Surah An-Noor* verse 33. Yusuf Ali’s translation: “But force not your maids to prostitution *when they desire chastity*, in order that ye may make a gain in the goods of this life. But if anyone compels them, yet, after such compulsion, is Allah, Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (to them).”
- 17 *Surah An-Nisa* verse 25. Yusuf Ali’s translation: “If any of you have not the means wherewith to wed free believing women, they may wed believing girls from among those whom your right hands possess ... and give them their dowers, according to what is reasonable: They should be chaste, not lustful, nor taking paramours: *when they are taken in wedlock, if they fall into shame, their punishment is half that for free women.*”
- 18 *Surah An-Noor* verses 30–31. Yusuf Ali’s translation: “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do. *And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms* and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments.”
- 19 *Surah Al-Ahzab* verse 59. Yusuf Ali’s translation may be found later in the text.
- 20 *Surah Al-Ahzab* verses 32–33. Yusuf Ali’s translation: “O Consorts of the Prophet! *Ye are not like any of the (other) women: if ye do fear ((Allah)), be not too complacent of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak ye a speech (that is) just. And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance.*”
- 21 Maududi: *The Meaning of the Qur’an*, note 46 to *Surah Al-Ahzab*, Volume 4, p. 98

- 22 Respectively, *Surah Al-Waqia* verses 22–23, *Surah At-Tur* verse 20, and *Surah Ad-Dukhan* verse 54. Maududi's translations: "And for them there shall be beautiful-eyed *houris*, as lovely as well-guarded pearls." (56:22–23); "And We shall wed them to *houris* with beautiful eyes." (52:20); "And We shall wed to them fair-complexioned, gazelle-eyed women." (44:54) Yusuf Ali's translations: "And (there will be) Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes, Like unto Pearls well-guarded."; "And We shall join them to Companions, with beautiful big and lustrous eyes."; "And We shall join them to Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes." 23 Respectively, *Surah At-Tur* verse 24 and *Surah Ad-Dabir* verse 19. Yusuf Ali's translations: "Round about them will serve, (devoted) to them. Youths (handsome) as Pearls well-guarded."; "And round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness): If thou seest them, thou wouldst think them scattered Pearls."
- 24 *Surah An-Noor*, verses 6–9. Maududi's translation: "As for those who accuse their own wives but have no witness except themselves, the evidence of one of them is that he shall swear four times by Allah and declare that he is true (in his charge). Then the fifth time he shall declare that Allah's curse be upon him if he be false (in his charge). (As for the woman), *it shall avert the punishment from her if she swears four times by Allah that the man is false (in his charge) and the fifth time she invokes Allah's wrath upon herself, if he be true (in his charge).*" (24:6–9) Yusuf Ali's translation: "And for those who launch a charge against their spouses, and have (in support) no evidence but their own, their solitary evidence (can be received) if they bear witness four times (with an oath) by Allah that they are solemnly telling the truth; And the fifth (oath) (should be) that they solemnly invoke the curse of Allah on themselves if they tell a lie. *But it would avert the punishment from the wife, if she bears witness four times (with an oath) By Allah, that (her husband) is telling a lie; And the fifth (oath) should be that she solemnly invokes the wrath of Allah on herself if (her accuser) is telling the truth.*"
- 25 *Surah An-Noor* verse 26. Maududi's translation: "Impure women are for impure men and impure men for impure women, and pure women are for pure men and pure men for pure women. *They are free from those scandals, which the slanderers utter.* There is forgiveness for them and honorable provision." (24:26) Yusuf Ali's translation: "Women impure are for men impure, and men impure for women impure and women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity: *these are not affected by what people say:* for them there is forgiveness, and a provision honorable."
- 26 *Surah An-Noor* verses 4–5. Yusuf Ali's translation: "And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and produce not four witnesses (to support their allegations), flog them with eighty stripes; and reject their evidence ever after: for such men are wicked transgressors; Unless they repent thereafter and mend (their conduct); for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."
- 27 Ibn Ishaq: *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 792
- 28 *Surah At-Talaq* verse 4. Yusuf Ali's translation is provided further in the text.
- 29 *Surah An-Nisa* verse 34. Yusuf Ali's translation is provided further in the text.
- 30 *Surah Al-Baqarah* verse 223. Yusuf Ali's translation: "Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when or how ye will."

Chapter 7: The Sword Verses

- 1 *Surah At-Taubah* verses 5 and 29. Yusuf Ali's translations: "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful."; "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the *Jizya* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."
- 2 *Surah At-Taubah* verse 5 (9:5) was revealed at the time of *Hajj* in 9 AH, as can be gathered from the preceding verse: "This is a public proclamation from Allah and His Messenger for all the people on the Day of Great Hajj." This helps date it with absolute precision. *Surah At-Taubah* verse 29 (9:29), too, was issued the same year, at the time of the Tabuk expedition against the people of the Book.
- 3 These include *Surah Al-Baqarah* verse 114, *Surah Al-Baqarah* verse 190, *Surah Al-Baqarah* verse 256, *Surah Al-Maidah* verse 2, *Surah Al-Maidah* verse 69, *Surah Al-Anaam* verse 108, *Surah An-Nabl* verse 126, and *Surah Al-Kafirun* verse 6. Maududi's translations: "And who could be a