

FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN ISLAM

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Introduction

Female leadership is a question not unknown to the Muslim world. Although Muslim scholars have in the past discussed this topic, it first gained prominence in the twentieth century with the wake of the women's liberty movement. In recent years the question was further highlighted with the success of Benazir Bhutto in the 1989 elections in Pakistan and Khalida Zia in the 1991 election in Bangladesh.

Recently some women in South Africa also embarked on a similar campaign claiming the right of leadership even in Salâh. This article is a study of the position of female leadership in the Shariah and will be followed by a discussion on women leading the Salâh and delivering lectures from the mimbar (pulpit).

Can a Lady Rule a Country?

Prior to Islam, women were among the most oppressed creatures in the world. Neither did they have any rights nor were they regarded as human-beings in many communities.

Islam on the contrary, raised the social status of a woman and granted her many rights ranging from inheritance to the basic necessities of everyday-life. Regarding these rights Allâh Ta'âla says in the Qurân: *"And women have rights similar to the rights*

*against them (i.e. the right of men) according to what is equitable and men have a degree over them."*¹

Mufti Muhammad Shafi Saheb (RA) explains this verse: "The rights of women for which men are responsible are compulsory just as the rights of men that women are responsible for are compulsory. The right of both (men and women) have been given the same ruling . . . it is not necessary that the rights of both take the same form. Instead, if women are responsible for a specific duty then so are men. Household matters, training and looking after the children are the responsibility of the women whereas men are responsible for earning a living so that they may fulfil the needs of women (their wives). It is a lady's duty to serve and obey her husband and the mahr (dowry) and expenditure of the women is the husband's duty. (In short, even though each have different rights over the other, the rights of both are incumbent.) There is however one quality on accord of which man have superiority over women. This is why Allâh Ta'âla, at the end of this verse says: "and men have a degree over them."

Mufti Shafi (RA) thereafter explains that this degree of superiority that men have over women is explained in the verse: *"Men are overseers of women because Allâh Ta'âla granted virtue to some of them (i.e. men) over others (i.e. women) and because of their spending from their wealth."*²

¹ Surah Al-Baqarah, Aayah 228

² Surah An- Nisaa, Aayah 34

Shaikh Muhammad Rashid Rida offers a similar explanation: "..... the lady equals the man in all rights (i.e. in the ruling of all rights) except one which Allâh refers to in the sentence 'and men have a degree over them.'" This degree is explained in the verse "men are overseers . . ." ³

It is therefore necessary that we now focus our attention on this verse of the Qurân in the light of some acclaimed commentators of the Qurân.

"Men are Overseers of Women"

Allamah Ibn-ul-Arabi (RA) comments on this verse:

The meaning of this verse is: I have made men overseers of women because I have granted the former superiority over the latter. This is due to three reasons viz.

1. Perfect understanding
2. Perfection of deen and obedience in jihad and commanding the good and forbidding the evil etc. This has been explained by Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam in an authentic Hadith: "I have not seen any one of deficient intellect and deen who is more destructive to the intelligence of a cautious man than you women." The women asked: "Why is that, O messenger of Allâh?" He replied: "Do you not spend a few nights without performing salâh and without keeping fast? This is the deficiency of her deen and the testimony of one of you equals half the testimony of a single man – this is the

³ Huqooq-un-Nisaa Fil-Islaam

deficiency of her intellect. ". . . So that if one of the two women errs, the second would remind her."⁴

3. His spending on her in the form of dowry and other expenditure.⁵

Allamah âlusi (RA) writes in the commentary of this verse that it is the quality of men to oversee the affairs of women just as the rulers oversee their subjects by commanding them to do good etc. This ruling is attributed to two reasons: one being wahbi (this is granted solely by Allâh) and the other kasbi (i.e. achieved on account of his action):

- a. Because Allâh has granted him superiority as has been narrated (in the Hadith) that women are deficient in intellect and deen and men are the opposite, that is why risalat (prophethood), imamat-e-kubra and sughra (major and minor leadership), adhân, iqâmat, khuthba etc. are confined to men (meaning that only men were Rusul and Ambiya and only man can rule, lead the salâh etc.)
- b. Because men bear the expenditure of women.⁶

Before considering Maulana Shabbir Ahmed Uthmani's (RA) commentary, it is necessary that we first refer to the verse:

"And do not covet that which Allâh favours some of you with over others - men will receive the reward of what they earn and

⁴ Surah Al Baqarah, Aayah 281

⁵ Ahkâmul Qur'aan V.1 Pg.416

⁶ Ruh-ul-Ma'aani, V.5 Pg.23

*women will receive the reward of what they earn. And ask Allâh of his bounty. Verily Allâh has full knowledge of all things."*⁷

Hafiz Ibn Katheer (RA) narrates on the authority of Imam Ahmad and Imam Tirmidhi that Umme Salmah (RA) said: "O Messenger of Allâh! The men wage Jihad whereas we (women) do not and we receive half the inheritance." (I.e. blood-brothers receive double the share of blood sisters). Thereafter the verse "And do not covet . . ." was revealed.⁸

This verse would therefore mean that when Allâh has granted some of mankind (i.e. men) virtue over others (i.e. women) by means of certain actions, then it is incorrect to covet the favour of Allâh on them because each of them will be rewarded according to his actions. Envy and complaining is of no avail. On the contrary, it would be most beneficial to ask Allâh for more reward for one's actions. Complaining and envy yield no reward. However all good actions yield reward. Verily Allâh has knowledge of everything and knows fully well the wisdom in specifying certain actions for man only. He knows best which actions are appropriate for men and which are appropriate for women.

Commenting on the verse "men are overseers....." Maulana Shabeer Saheb Uthmani (RA) writes: "It was mentioned in the previous verse that the rights of men and women have been given full consideration. Had their rights been given a different consideration (women's right were not considered fully as men's

⁷ Surah An-Nisaa, Aayah 32

⁸ Ibn Katheer V.1 Pg.498

rights) women would be justified in complaining. This verse now explains that men have a status higher than women, women cannot complain because the difference of rules (regarding men and women) that result on accord of this additional degree of men is in total agreement with divine wisdom . . ."⁹

Summary

Just a few commentaries of the verses concerned have been mentioned above. Many other commentators have elucidated the meaning of these verses in a similar manner. The above discussions may be summarised in the following points:

- Although both men and women have rights upon each other that are compulsory, their rights do differ in many situations.
- Men have an additional right over women - they are their overseers and guardians.
- There are two reasons due to which men have been given this additional right over women.

Firstly, they have to give the women their dowries and they are responsible for all their expenses.

Secondly, Allâh granted man this favour when creating him, women had been created as the weaker sex. Besides, women experience monthly menstrual periods due to which they are unable to perform salâh and fast during that period. Thus the hadith has classified her as deficient in deen. The hadith has in a similar vein regarded her as deficient in intellect because

⁹ Tafsir-e-Uthmaani Pg.128

the Qurân has regarded the testimony of one lady equal to half the testimony of a single man.¹⁰

- Since the rights of women have been given the same amount of importance and consideration as the rights of men, women should not complain of men having an additional right over them. If they do, they would be questioning the wisdom of Allâh.

Conclusion

It may thus be concluded that although men and women are equal in that both have rights, they do not have the same rights. Among the sole rights of a male is that he is always the head of a family since he is the guardian of the women. Leadership of a country is in a similar vein the sole right of men. Most commentators of the Qurân have explained the verse under discussion that just as men only rule a country, lead the salâh etc. only men can be the head of a family. A few examples are:

1. Qurtubi ". . . the judges, rulers and mujahideen are among the men and this is not found among the women."¹¹
2. Ibn Katheer ". . . that is why nubuwat is reserved for men just as rulership . . ."¹²
3. Baydawi ". . . this explains why nubuwwah (prophethood), leading the salâh, leading a country and establishment of the

¹⁰ Surah Al-Baqarah, Aayah 282

¹¹ Qurtubi V.5 Pg.168

¹² Tafseer Ibn Katheer V.1 Pg.503

other sha-âir (distinguishing features) of deen (e.g. adhân, iqamah) are confined to men only.¹³

In short, this verse has encompassed a major reason why women cannot rule in the Shariah. Just as she cannot lead a home, she cannot lead a country.

Another Verse from the Qur'ân

Describing women, Allâh Subhanahu Ta'âla says in the Qurân: *"Is then one brought up among trinkets and unable to give a clear account in a dispute (to be associated with Allâh)."*¹⁴ In other words, women are generally brought up in decoration and adornment and are always occupied with jewellery. This is a proof of deficient intellect and understanding (because true beauty is the beauty of the Akhirah) and due to a weak understanding, women are unable to express themselves clearly when debating."¹⁵

This verse substantiates the claim that women are physically weak and unable to fulfil the duties of leadership. It has thus been made the right of men only.

¹³ Tafseer Al-Baidaawi Pg.111

¹⁴ Surah Az-Zukhruf, Aayah 18

¹⁵ Tafseer-e-Uthmani Pg. 652

Hijâb and Female Leadership

Hijâb is generally understood to mean the donning of a veil. This is however incorrect. The scholars of Islam have included the following verses in the discussion of hijâb:

- a. *"And stay in your houses. And adorn not yourselves with the adornment of the time of Ignorance."*¹⁶
- b. *"And when you ask of them (wives of Nabi Sallallahu alaihi Wasallam) anything, then ask them from behind a curtain."*¹⁷
- c. *".... therefore be not soft of speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease, aspire (to you) but utter customary speech."*¹⁸
- d. *"O Nabi! Tell your wives and daughters and the women of the believers to draw their jilbâbs (a special cloak that covers the entire body) close around them . . ."*¹⁹
- e. *"And they (the women), should not stamp their feet so as to reveal their hidden adornment."*²⁰

From these verses, the following rules of hijâb may be deduced:

1. The lady should at all times remain in her home.
2. If she has to leave her home due to any shar'i necessity (e.g. haj, visiting her parents, visiting the ill etc.) then she should cover her entire body including the face.²¹

¹⁶ Surah Al-Ahzaab, Aayah 33

¹⁷ Surah Al-Ahzaab, Aayah 53

¹⁸ Surah Al-Ahzaab, Aayah 32

¹⁹ Surah Al-Ahzaab, Aayah 59

²⁰ Surah An-Nur, Aayah 31

²¹ Ruh-ul-Ma'aani V.22 Pg.6

3. She has to communicate with men from behind a curtain.
4. She must not lower her tune when speaking with strange men.
5. She should not walk in such a manner that would attract the attention of men.
6. Intermingling of the sexes is prohibited in Islam.

Besides these, it has also been established from the Hadith that a lady cannot travel further than 77 kilometres without a mahram (any such male relative with whom marriage is prohibited).²²

It is clear from the above that the implications of Hijâb are in direct conflict with the duties of leadership. In order to ensure the welfare of his subjects, the leader has to leave his home daily, meet and consult with people (men in particular) and travel to various parts of his country and sometimes to other countries as well. These cannot however be achieved if a lady has to be the ruler and at the same time observe the rules of hijâb. It is on this accord that Shariah has prohibited female leadership.

Warning of Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam

A female leader would either be contravening the rules and regulation of Hijâb or neglecting the welfare of her subjects. Thus Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam said: "A nation that has

²² Sunan At-Tirmidhi V.3 Pg.472

entrusted its affairs to a woman can never be successful."²³ After narrating this hadith, Imam Tirmidhi (RA), states: "This is a sound and authentic hadith."

In another hadith we read: "Men are destroyed when they obey women."

Hakim (RA) writes that the chain of narrators is authentic and Hafiz Dhahabi (RA) has also agreed that this hadith is authentic.²⁴

Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam also said: "When your rulers are the best among you, your wealthy are generous, and your matters are decided by mutual consultation, then the surface of the earth is better for you than the belly of the earth. However, when your rulers are the worst among you, your wealthy are miserly and your matters are in the hands of your women, then the belly of the earth is better for you than its surface."²⁵

Commenting on the quality of this hadith, Imam Tirmidhi writes: "This is a gharib hadith."²⁶ We do not know it except from Salih Al-Murriy. There are some strange facts in the narrations of Salih in which he is the only narrator. He is, however, a pious man."

²³ Saheeh Al-Bukhari V.5 Pg.136, Saheeh Al-Bukhari V.4 Page 97, Nasa'i V.8 Pg.227, Tirmidhi V.5 Pg.457

²⁴ Quoted by Ml. Yusuf Ludhyanwi on the authority of Mustadrak Hakim V.4 Pg.291

²⁵ Tirmidhi V.4 Pg.459

²⁶ A hadith that had been narrated by only one person in one era or more until the codification period

Nevertheless all scholars of Islam; commentators of the Qurân, Hadith and jurisprudence have, on the basis of the Hadith "A nation will never be successful . . ." unanimously agreed that female leadership is not permissible in Islam.

Some Quotations

The reader has already seen the opinions of some leading commentators of the Qurân (âlusi, Ibn Katheer, Baidawi and Qurtubi). Here are a few more quotations from the writings of other scholars:

1. Hafiz Ibn Hajr (RA) and Hafiz Badruddin Aini (RA) write in their respective commentaries of Bukhari: "There is proof in this hadith that a lady cannot be appointed to the office of leadership or as a judge."²⁷
2. Qadi Abu Bakr ibn ul-Arabi (RA) writes in his commentary of Tirmidhi: "This proves that only men may be appointed as leaders (rulers). There is a consensus that women have no right to rulership."²⁸
3. Allama Shawkani (RA) writes in the commentary of this hadith: "In it is a proof that women do not qualify for any sort of leadership. It is not permissible to make a lady the leader because it is compulsory to abstain from anything that will result in failure."²⁹
4. Qadi ibn-ul-Arabi (RA) writes again in Ahkâm-ul-Qurân: "This is clear proof that a lady cannot become the khalifah (leader

²⁷ Fathul Bari V.8 Pg.129

²⁸ Aaridat-ul-Ahwadhi V.9 Pg.119

²⁹ Nayl-ul-Awtaar V.8 Pg.298

of the Muslim state) - There is no difference of opinion in this matter."³⁰

5. Allamah Mawardi (RA) and Shah Wali-ul-Ilah (RA) have listed "Zukoorah" as an essential requirement of a Muslim ruler."³¹
6. Allamah Shami explains: "... because women have been commanded to remain in their homes, their condition is therefore based on remaining concealed"³²
7. Qurtubi, after listing "being a male" as one of the necessary conditions of a ruler says: "They are unanimous that it is not permissible for a lady to become a leader."³³
8. Imam Baghawi after quoting the hadith "A nation can never be successful . . ." says that it is an authentic hadith and thereafter comments: "They have unanimously agreed that a lady neither has the ability to become a leader nor a judge because it is necessary for the leader to leave his home in order to establish jihad and see to the matters of the Muslims. Similarly the judge has to leave his home in order to pass judgement in arguments. A lady is however "Awrah" (something that must be concealed) and cannot (unnecessarily) leave. Because of her physical weakness, she is unable to see to most matters of the Muslims. A woman is also deficient whereas leadership and passing judgement are among the greatest appointments."³⁴

³⁰ Ahkaam-ul-Qur'aan V.3 Pg.29

³¹ Al-Ahkaam As-Sultaaniyyah Pg.4, Hujjatullah-il-Balighah V.2 Pg. 396, Izalatul Khifa VI. 1 Page 19, Shâmi VI. 1 Page 548

³² Shaami V.1 Pg. 458

³³ Tafseer Al-Qurtabi V.1 Pg.270

³⁴ Sharh-us-Sunnah V.10 Pg.77

Note: An extremely important point is made in the above quotations: There is "ijmâ" (consensus of opinion) among the ummah that female leadership is not permissible. Ijmâ is the third most important source of Islamic law and cannot be opposed.

Consider the Following

Protagonists of female leadership should consider the following:

- The messengers of Allâh were always men. Never was a lady deputed as a Rasul or Nabi. *"And We have not sent messengers before you except that they were men."*³⁵
- Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam had during his lifetime despatched many jamâts (for the sake of da'wah and jihad etc.) but never did he appoint a female as ameer of any of these jamâts.³⁶

Note: The scholars have enumerated approximately sixty jamâts of this nature that were despatched by Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam.³⁷ These jamâts are generally referred to as sarâya by the historians.

- Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam had on many occasions personally led military expeditions. On such occasions he would leave a deputy to see to the matters of the women, children, aged and ill people that were still in Madina. For

³⁵ Surah Al-Ambiyaa, Aayah 7

³⁶ Fataawa Mahmoodiyah V.10 Pg.129

³⁷ Zaad-ul-Ma'aad V.1 Pg.129

example, he made Hazrat Ali (RA) his deputy at the time of Tabuk and Abu Lubâbah bin Abdul Munzir at the time of Badr. These deputies were, however, never women.³⁸

- Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam had four muazzins: Hazrat Bilal, Hazrat Abu Mahdhoorah, Hazrat Abdullah ibn Umme Maktoom and Sa'd al-Qurdh.³⁹ None of them were women, and it has never been narrated from the salaf (pious predecessors from the Sahâbah, Tabieen and Taba-Tabieen) that women may give Azân. On the contrary, jurists have regarded it as makrooh.⁴⁰
- In a similar manner the duties of iqamat, khutbah of jumuah and the eids, imamat of salâh etc. can only be fulfilled by men.⁴¹

Besides ruling a country, standing as a candidate in a political party, leading any other movement or organisation and becoming a member of a masjid or madressah committee are also not permissible for a lady because:

- These are not her functions in society,
- If she does engage herself in such activities, she would be contravening the rules of the Qurân and Hadith regarding hijâb and female leadership.

³⁸ Fataawa Mahmoodiyah V.10 Pg.129, Zaad-ul-Ma'aad V.3 Pg.172 and 529

³⁹ Fataawa Mahmoodiyah V.10 Pg.127, Zaad-ul-Ma'aad V.1 Pg.124

⁴⁰ Ad-Durr-ul-Mukhtaar V.1 Pg.392

⁴¹ Fataawa Mahmoodiyah V.10 Pg.125-126

"Bilqees: The Queen of Saba"

Protagonists of female leadership normally justify their claim with an analogy of Bilqees of Saba - whose story is mentioned in the Qurân.⁴² This analogy is however very strange and can in no way substantiate their claim, because:

1. Bilqees was a disbeliever at that time as is clear from the verses:

*"I found her and her nation prostrating to the sun . . ."*⁴³

*"Verily she was of a disbelieving people."*⁴⁴

Later, with the invitation of Hazrat Sulayman (Alaihis salâm) she brought Islam. She said: *"Oh my Rabb! Verily I have wronged my soul and I have surrendered with Sulayman to Allâh, Rabb of the worlds."*⁴⁵

After embracing Islam, she also surrendered her kingdom to Sulayman (AS) as was the order of Sulayman (AS). This is apparent in the following verse: He said: *"Do you give me abundance in wealth . . . go back to them, for we will most certainly come to them with such armies that they will not be*

⁴² Surah An-Naml, Aayah 20-24

⁴³ Surah An-Naml, Aayah 24

⁴⁴ Surah An-Naml, Aayah 43

⁴⁵ Surah An-Naml, Aayah 44

*able to oppose, and we shall expel them in disgrace and they will be humbled."*⁴⁶

There is thus no indication in the narrative that Sulayman (AS) had approved of and permitted her to continue ruling her kingdom. It is sometimes argued that after Bilqees brought Imân, Sulayman (AS) married her and thereafter sent her to rule Yemen. This argument is however incorrect because it is based on very weak Israeli narrations and besides being weak, these narrations are very contradictory. While some say that after marrying Bilqees, Sulayman (AS) kept her with him, others say that he sent her to rule over Shâm (Syria). Allamah Qurtubi (RA) has in his tafseer also declared all these narrations as incorrect and unreliable.⁴⁷

2. The legislation of the previous ambiyâ is not necessarily a proof. The shariah of the previous ambiyâ can only be regarded as a valid argument if there is no verse of the Qurân or hadith contradicting it. We have however already seen that the Qurân, hadith and Ijm (consensus of the Ummah) do not permit female leadership.⁴⁸

Mufti Muhammad Shafi (RA) writes in Ahkamul Qurân:

"If it is argued that the trend in the Qurân is to boldly refute any evil action of the Kuffar that the Qurân quotes and (the

⁴⁶ Surah An-Naml, Aayah 37

⁴⁷ Awrat ki Serbarahi by Ml. Yusuf Ludhyanwi Pg.33 and Mufti Rafee' Uthmani in Al Farooq Arabic Quarterly, Rabee'-ul-Awwal (1410-1989)

⁴⁸ Ibid

absence of any refutation in these verses indicate permissibility), then our reply is:

Firstly, the generality of the claim is not known (meaning this is not an established fact).

Secondly: it is not necessary that such an act be refuted in the very same verse that discusses it. It will suffice if such an act is refuted in some other place (in the Qurân) or in any other shari proof.

Thus if female leadership has been refuted in the Hadith of Bukhari, it would be sufficient explanation of its evil (and impermissibility).⁴⁹

Hadhrat Aisha (RA) and the Battle of Jamal

Protagonists of female leadership substantiate their claim from Hazrat Aisha's (RA) participation in the Battle of Jamal. Hazrat Uthmân (RA) had been murdered just after the days of Tashreeq. The wives of Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam had, after completing the rites of Haj just left Makkah Mukarramah on their return journey to Madinah Munawwarah. Upon receiving the news of the murder of Hazrat Uthmân (RA) they changed the direction of their journey and returned to Makkah. The Muslims at that time were in utter turmoil. Hazrat Ali (RA) had taken the bay'at (pledge of allegiance) from the people of Madina and the assassins of Hazrat Uthmân (RA). He felt that it would be more appropriate to allow the turmoil and confusion to settle and

⁴⁹ Ahkaam-ul-Qur'aan V.3 Pg.29

thereafter avenge the blood of Hazrat Uthmân. Others however differed and thought it of greater importance to first avenge the blood of the assassinated Khalifah. Thus, a group of senior Sahabah (RA) including Hazrat Talha and Hazrat Zubair gathered in Makkah and persuaded Hazrat Aisha (RA) to use her influence as Umm-ul-Mu'mineen to help them unite the Muslims and thereafter demand the requital of the blood of Hazrat Uthmân (RA). Hazrat Aisha agreed and it was decided that they would proceed to Basrah. The rest of the wives of Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam refused to join Hazrat Aisha (RA) and returned to Madina. Although Hazrat Hafsah (RA) agreed with Hazrat Aisha (RA), her brother, Abdullah ibn Umar (RA) did not allow her to join the campaign to Basrah.⁵⁰

A closer study of the battle of Jamal and the events leading to it (most of which were mentioned above), would reveal the futility of justifying female leadership from it because:

1. Hazrat Aisha (RA) was not the leader of the army. Neither at the time of suggesting that she accompany the army did they consider making her their leader nor later during the cause of the expedition was she regarded as their leader. Hazrat Talha and Hazrat Zubair had asked her to accompany them so that she could use her influence to convince the masses of the nobility of their cause. This is why the rest of the wives of Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam were also requested to accompany the expedition and Hazrat Hafsah (RA) had even accepted the request.

⁵⁰ Summarised from Al-Bidaayah Wan-Nihaayah V.7 Pg.230

2. Neither was Hazrat Aisha (RA) intending to capture the khilafat from Hazrat Ali nor were Hazrat Talha and Zubair (RA) intending to do so. They were only demanding that the assassins of Hazrat Uthmân be brought to task.⁵¹ In fact, they had barely thought of meeting the forces of Hazrat Ali (RA) on the battle field.

Allamah ibn Taymiyyah (RA) writes: "Neither did Hazrat Aisha (RA) fight (in the battle) nor did she leave (her home) in order to fight. She had only intended to create peace among the Muslims and thought that the Muslims would benefit by her leaving (for Basrah etc.) . . . They did not have any intention of fighting on the day of Jamal. The battle however took place without their choice. Because when Hazrat Ali and Hazrat Talha and Hazrat Zubair (RA) had negotiated and agreed on re- conciliation and that after they had settled they would seek the assassins . . . The assassins therefore feared that Hazrat Ali would agree with them (Hazrat Zubair etc.) to capture them, and they therefore captured the camp of Hazrat Talha and Hazrat Zubair (RA). They thought that Hazrat Ali had attacked them and in defence attacked the camp of Hazrat Ali. Hazrat Ali (RA) thought that Hazrat Talha and Hazrat Zubair had attacked him and retaliated in defence. The battle thus occurred without their choice. Hazrat Aisha (RA) was seated (on the camel) - neither did she fight nor did she command anyone to do so."⁵²

⁵¹ Fath-u- Baari V.3 Pg.56

⁵² Quoted by Ml. Yusuf Ludhyanwi on the authority of Minhaaj-us-Sunnah V.2 Pg.185

3. Many Sahabah (RA) disagreed with her participation in the campaign. Many had written to her expressing their dissatisfaction. Hazrat Umme Salma (RA) wrote her a lengthy letter admonishing her: ". . . Had Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam known that women are able to endure (the difficulties of) jihad, he would have entrusted you! Do you not know that he (Rasulullah Sallallahu alaihi Wasallam) had prohibited you from travelling in the cities? Verily the pillar of deen remains firm with neither women nor wealth and it cannot be repaired by women if it has to crack (break). The jihad of women is the lowering of the gaze and the drawing of the hem and the intending of modesty. What would you say to Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam if he has to object to some of these mistakes - sitting on a camel travelling from place to place? I take an oath that if it has to be said to me: "O Umme Salmah! Enter Jannah! I would be ashamed to meet Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam while I had torn a veil (barrier) he had placed over me. Therefore make it your veil (barrier) also . . ." ⁵³
4. Hazrat Aisha (RA) had written a letter to Zayd bin Suhan encouraging him to join Hazrat Talha and Zubair and if he disagrees, he should dissuade the masses from joining Hazrat Ali (RA). He replied:

".... Verily I am your loyal son. If you leave and return home, (then I will obey you) otherwise, I would be the first to oppose you." He also said: "May Allâh have mercy on

⁵³ Quoted by Mufti R.Uthmani from Al-Iqd-ul-Fareed V.5 Pg.66

Ummul-Mu'mineen. She has been commanded to stay in her home and we have been commanded to fight . . ."54

Hafiz Ibn Hajar (RA) narrated that after the battle, Ammar Bin Yasir (who was from Hazrat Ali's camp) said to Hazrat Aisha (RA): "How distant is this journey from the command that was imposed on you!" (He was referring to the verse: 'And remain in your homes'). She replied: "Are you Abul Yaqdhan?" He replied in the affirmative, upon which she said: "In the name of Allâh, ever since I know, you always speak the truth." He said: "All praises are due to Allâh who has decided in my favour on your tongue."55

5. Hazrat Aisha (RA) later regretted joining the expedition to Basrah as is clear from the above narration. Later in her life she would say:

"I wish I had stayed behind just as others (the other Ummahaat-ul-Mumineen and many Sahabah) had stayed behind . . ."56

"I wish I were a fresh twig and I had not undertaken my journey ..."

⁵⁴ Ibn-ul-Atheer V.3 Pg.216

⁵⁵ Fath-ul-Baari V.13 Pg.58

⁵⁶ Fath-ul-Baari V.13 Pg.55

It is narrated that whenever Hazrat Aisha used to read the verse "And remain in your homes," she would cry so excessively that her veil would become soaked.⁵⁷

Can a Lady Lead the Salâh?

The Fuqaha (Muslim jurists) have discussed two types of Imamât viz:

- a. Imamât-e-Kubra: Major leadership, referring to the leading of a country.
- b. Imamât-e-Sughra: Minor leadership, referring to the leading of the Salâh.

Just as the shariah has reserved imamât-e-kubrah for men only, it has reserved imamât-e-sughra for men only. (Some jurists have permitted female imamât of the Salâh when the congregation is purely female. This will be discussed later Insha-Allâh).

Women Leading Men in Salâh

Most, if not all fuqaha (Muslim jurists) are of the opinion that women cannot lead men in salâh. If any man performs his salâh behind a female imam, his salâh would be null and void. Below are the opinions of each of the four madhahib.

⁵⁷ Quoted by Mufti Rafee' Uthmani in Al Farooq Quarterly from Siyar A'laam-in-Nubalaa V.8 Pg.80

1. Hanafi Madhab - "And it is not permissible for men to follow a lady in salâh."⁵⁸
2. Shafi'i Madhab - "And a male following a lady (in salâh) is incorrect."⁵⁹
3. Maliki Madhab - "Salâh will therefore be incorrect behind a lady (imam)."⁶⁰
4. Hambali Madhab - "It is not correct in the opinion of the general fuqaha, for a man to follow a lady (in salâh)."⁶¹

Ibn Rushd-al-Qurtubi writes: "... The jamhoor (general majority) are of the opinion that it is not permissible for her to lead the men in salâh ..."⁶²

Why Can She Not Lead the Men in Salâh?

1. Nothing has been narrated regarding this from Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam or the Sahabah (RA) or the Tabi-een. Had it been permissible, it would have definitely been recorded in the books of Hadith and Fiqh.⁶³
2. On the contrary Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam had commanded the women to stand at the rear of the congregation (if they do attend the congregational salâh). The reason being that women are to be hidden and have been commanded to observe hijâb. If men have to follow a

⁵⁸ Hidaayah (Ma'al-Fath) V.1 Pg.209

⁵⁹ Al-Minhaaj, Allaamah Nawawi V.1 Pg.241

⁶⁰ Bulghat-us-Saalik, Allaamah Saawi V.1 Pg.146

⁶¹ Al Mughni, Ibn Qudaamah V.2 Pg.199

⁶² Bidaayat-ul-Mujtahid V.1 Pg.105

⁶³ Bidaayat-ul-Mujtahid V.1 Pg.105 and As-Sayl-ul-Jarraar V.1 Pg.250

lady imâm in salâh, they would have to stand behind her. This is in total contrast with the rules of hijâb.⁶⁴

A hadith has been narrated regarding women standing at the rear of the congregation: "Place them in the rear as Allâh has placed them in the rear."⁶⁵

3. Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam said: ". . . and a lady should not lead a man in salâh . . ."⁶⁶
4. The generality of the hadith "The nation that has entrusted it's affairs to a lady cannot be successful," demands that women do not qualify to be entrusted with any sort of leadership duties. Salâh is the most noble and important matter of the Muslims. Can we entrust it to a lady and hope for success?⁶⁷

Ibn Qudamah Al-Maqdisi (RA) after explaining the opinion of the majority writes that some Hambali scholars are of the opinion that "it is permissible for her to lead the men in taraweeh salâh (but) she will stand behind them. It (lady leading the taraweeh) will be permissible because of the narration of Umme Waraqah (RA) that Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam had appointed a

⁶⁴ Bidaayat-ul-Mujtahid V.1 Pg.105 and As-Sayl-ul-Jarraar V.1 Pg.250

⁶⁵ Nasb-ur-Raayah V.2 Pg.36 – quoted from Musannaf Abdur Razzaaq. Although this hadith is mawqoof, (the chain of narrators terminates on Hadhrat Ali radhiallah anhu), the fact that men should occupy the first rows, thereafter the children and behind the children the women is established from other authentic ahaadith. See Bukhaari vl.1, pg. 211

⁶⁶ Sunan Ibn Maajah V.1 Pg.250

⁶⁷ As-Sayl-ul-Jarraar, Allaamah Shawkaani V.1 Pg.250

muezzin for her who would give azân for her and he commanded her to lead the people (ahl) of her dâr (house).⁶⁸

Ibn Qudamah however disagrees with these Hambali scholars and refutes their claim explaining that Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam had only permitted her to lead the women of her home (nisâ-e-ahle-dâriha) - this is how Dâr-Qutni has narrated this hadith. When an addition of this nature is narrated, then it is compulsory to accept it. Had the extra word 'Nisâ' (women) not been narrated, there would have been some possibility of substantiating one's claim from this hadith. Besides, this hadith does not pertain to Taraweeh or any other nafl or sunnah salâh because the hadith also says that Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam had appointed a muezzin to call the azân for her. Azân is not called out for nafl or sunnah salâh. It is only called for the fardh salâhs.⁶⁹ There is however no difference of opinion even among the Hambali Fuqaha that women cannot lead men in fardh salâh. This hadith is therefore referring to a purely female congregation only.

Apart from the jamhoor (majority), Abu Thour and Tabri have allowed women to lead the salâh even if there are men in the congregation. Ibn Rushd said that they have based their claim on the hadith of Umme Waraqah.⁷⁰

Ibn Qudamah's explanation of the hadith however leaves no doubt that they have erred. Other than Abu Thour and Tabri,

⁶⁸ Abu Da'ud V.2 Pg.161 (Beirut Print)

⁶⁹ Al-Mughni V.2 Pg.199

⁷⁰ Bidaayat-ul-Mujtahid V.1 Pg.105

there is ijmaa' (unanimous agreement) among the rest of the ummah that women cannot lead men in salâh.

Can a Lady Lead a Purely Female Congregation?

- Hanafi Madhab: If a lady leads the salâh of a purely female congregation, then salâh will be correct. It is however makrooh tahrimi for women to form their own congregation.⁷¹
- Maaliki Madhab: Under no circumstances can a lady can be the Imam, even if the congregation be entirely female. The salâh of even a lady behind a female imâm is invalid.⁷²
- Shaafi'i Madhab: A lady can be the imam of a purely female congregation. In fact, it is mustahab for them to form their own congregation.⁷³ ()
- Hambali Madhab: The salâh of a lady behind a lady imâm is permissible. There is however a difference of opinion regarding women forming their own congregation (behind a female imam).⁷⁴

The Shafi'i and Hambali scholars substantiate their opinion with the hadith of Umme Waraqah (RA) that was mentioned earlier.

⁷¹ Hidaayah V.1 Pg.305, Badaai-'us-Sanaai' V.1 Pg.157

⁷² Bulghat-us-Saalik V.1 Pg.146, Ashal-ul-Madaarik V.1 Pg.241

⁷³ Al-Mughni V.12 Pg.199 Al-Badaai' V.1 Pg.157

⁷⁴ Al-Mughni V.12 Pg.199

It is similarly narrated that Hazrat Umme Salmah (RA) and Hazrat Aisha (RA) used to lead the women in Salâh.⁷⁵

While it is narrated from Hazrat Ali (RA) that "a lady cannot be an imâm"⁷⁶ and from Nafi (RA) that: "I do not know that a lady can lead the women in salâh"⁷⁷, Hanafi Scholars also explain that when a lady does lead a purely female jamât, she has one of two options:

1. She stands in front of the first row (just as a male imam would do). This is however makrooh because it is contrary to the spirit of Hijâb.
2. She could stand in the middle of the first row (as Hazrat Aisha and Hazrat Umme Salmah did). This however is also makrooh because it is wajib (necessary) in a congregational salâh that the Imam stands a little in front of the first row.⁷⁸

Hanafi Fuqaha therefore explain the ahadith of Umme Waraqah, Aisha and Umme Salmah (RA) as mansukh (abrogated). Although Sheikh Kamal Ibn Humâm has after critically discussing the possibility of abrogation concluded that purely female congregations are makrooh-e-tanzihi, the general body of Fuqaha-e-Ahnâf regard it as makrooh-e-tahrimi. The fatwa (preferred verdict) is also on tahreem (prohibition). "And a

⁷⁵ Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah vl.2, pg.88-89

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Fath-ul-Qadeer V.1 Pg.306

purely female congregation is makrooh-e-tahrimi, even though in taraweeh."⁷⁹

Can a Women Deliver a Lecture from the Mimbar?

A few verses of the Qurân regarding hijâb have been previously mentioned under the caption "Hijâb and female leadership." Among these verses were: *"And stay in your houses and do not make a dazzling display like that of the former times of ignorance."*⁸⁰

This verse implies that it is necessary for a woman to remain in her home at all times. She may only leave her home on account of a shar'i necessity (e.g. haj, umrah, visiting the ill and visiting her parents etc.)⁸¹ Going to the masjid in order to perform salâh is not acceptable in the light of the general opinion of the Sahabah and the Ulama of Islam. A lady that leaves her home in order to deliver a lecture to a mixed gathering of men and women (from the mimbar) would firstly be contravening this important principle of the Shariah.

In another verse Allâh Ta'âla says:

*"And when you ask them of anything, then ask it of them from behind a curtain."*⁸²

⁷⁹ Ad-Durr-ul-Mukhtaar V.1 Pg.528

⁸⁰ Surah Al-Ahzaab, Aayah 33

⁸¹ Tafseer Ibn Katheer V.13 Pg.491

⁸² Surah Al-Ahzaab, Aayah 53

*"... therefore be not soft in speech . . ."*⁸³

These verses imply that if a lady has to communicate with a strange man while at home, then this communication should be from behind the curtain (she should not be seen at all) and when speaking, she should not speak in a lowered tone.

In yet another verse Allâh Ta'âla says:

*"Oh Nabi! Tell your wives and daughters and the women of the Believers to draw over them their jilbâb."*⁸⁴ The meaning of this aayah is that if a lady is compelled to leave her home due to necessity, she should cover herself with the jilbâb. The jilbâb is a large sheet that extends from above the head to the feet including the face. In other words, she is commanded to cover the entire body including her face.⁸⁵

A lady that delivers a lecture from the mimbar is unable to fulfil the demands of the above-mentioned ayât and her action is contrary to the spirit of Hijâb. In a purely female congregation too, the lady imâm stands in the middle of the first row and not ahead of the first row as a male imam would do.⁸⁶

⁸³ Surah Al-Ahzaab, Aayah 32

⁸⁴ Surah Al-Ahzaab, Aayah 59

⁸⁵ Ibn Katheer V.13 Pg.526 (There is consensus of opinion that the face must also be covered in times of evil and corruption.)

⁸⁶ Musannaf Ibn Abi Shaybah V.2 Pg.88-89, Hidaayah V.1 Pg.306, Al Mughni V.2 Pg.2

In view of the above, it is not permissible for a lady to deliver a lecture from the mimbar. Rasulullah sallallahu alaihi wasallam said: "A lady is 'awrah' (something to be concealed). Thus when she leaves, shaytân stares at her."⁸⁷

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⁸⁷ Sunan At-Tirmidhi V. Pg.

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