



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

COURSE CODE :ISL136

COURSE TITLE:WOMEN IN ISLAM

**COURSE
GUIDE**

**ISL136
WOMEN IN ISLAM**

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Introduction

This course is a two-credit unit course for undergraduate students in Islamic studies. The materials have been developed with the cosmopolitan context of Islam in focus. This Course-Guide is an overview of the entire course. You will also read about how it is structured out as well as its requirements.

Course Aims

This course aims at making you comprehend the status of women during the pre-Islamic eras, the evolution brought by Islam and the challenges facing Muslim women in the contemporary society. This shall be achieved by:

- i. Introducing you to pathetic state of women before Islam in the Arabian society, great civilizations and religions of the world.
- ii. Expounding the stages of women's lives and the attendant challenges.
- iii. Enlightening you about the evolutionary reformation brought about by Islam on women matters.

Course Objectives

Towards achieving the above aims, there are overall objectives for ISL136. This is in addition to specific objectives which precedes every unit. You are strongly advised to read them before venturing into the subject matters as it will prepare your mind for better grasp of the message.

You would not have successfully completed this course until you are able to:

- a) Identify how women were treated during *Jāhiliyyah*.
- b) Explain the evolutionary impact of Islam on the status of women.
- c) Compare women status across ages and religions.
- d) Clarify the misconception about the Muslim women.
- e) State rights granted women by Islam.
- f) Explain the concepts of motherhood and widowhood in Islam.
- g) Discuss the concept of gender quality in Islam.
- h) Explain the facts and farce of feminism.
- i) Discuss challenges confronting Muslim women.

Working through this Course

For you to complete this course, you must read and understand all the study units and all the related materials. You will be required to submit written assignments at the end of each unit for the purpose of assessment. You are also going to write a final examination at the end of the course.

Course Material

The following are the major materials you need for this course:

1. Course guide
2. Study Units
3. Assignment File
4. Relevant Textbooks including the ones listed in each unit

Study Units

There are 15 units (of three modules) for this course. They are:

Module 1

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Unit 1 | Women in the <i>Jâhiliyyah</i> Societies |
| Unit 2 | Evolution of Women Status by Islam |
| Unit 3 | Comparative Study of Women Status |
| Unit 4 | Misconceptions about Muslim women |
| Unit 5 | Dress Code of a Muslim Woman |

Module 2

- | | |
|--------|---------------------------|
| Unit 1 | Islam and Sex Segregation |
| Unit 2 | Islam and Gender Equality |
| Unit 3 | Rights of Women in Islam |
| Unit 4 | Motherhood in Islam |
| Unit 5 | Widowhood in Islam |

Module 3

- | | |
|--------|---------------------------------------|
| Unit 1 | Feminism and Muslim Women |
| Unit 2 | Muslim Women and Politics |
| Unit 3 | Muslim Women and Education |
| Unit 4 | Muslim Women and Western Civilization |
| Unit 5 | Modern Society and Abuse of Women |

Textbooks and References

Some books have been recommended for the course, they will assist you a lot if you can purchase them for further reading.

Assessment File

You will be given an assessment file and a marking scheme. The assessment file will contain details of the works to be submitted to your tutor for marking. You will be evaluated in two ways: the tutor marked assignments and the written examination. Your final marks depend on what you score in these two. You must submit your assignment to your tutor for formal assessment which necessarily followed the stipulated schedule and deadline. Your submitted work for assessment will be 30% of your total score.

Tutor-Marked Assignment

You are expected to submit specified number of the 'TMA'. Each unit of this course has a TMA. You will be assessed on only four but the best three will represent your 30% grading. On completion of any assignment, you must send it with a TMA your form to your tutor. Ensure that the assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline for submissions. In the event of any logistics for incompleteness of any work to time, contact your tutor immediately for possible extension; for this shall not be granted after the due date unless for exceptional situations.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination will last three hours. You will be tested on all aspects of the course. Endeavour to read the units again before the exam. 70% is the score for the final examination out of the total course grading. The questions will be similar to the ones you have treated in the TMA.

Course Marking Scheme

This table represents the layout for the actual course mark:

Assessment	Marks
Best three Assignments	30%
Final Examination	70%
Total	100%

Presentation Schedule

The dates for submission of all assignments will be communicated to you. You will also be told the date of completing the study units and dates for examinations.

Course Overview

Unit	Title of Work	Weeks Activity	Assignments
	Course Guide		
Module 1			
1	Women in the <i>Jāhiliyyah</i> Societies	Week 1	Assignment 1
2	Evolution of Women Status by Islam	Week 2	Assignment 2
3	Comparative Study of Women Status	Week 3	Assignment 3
4	Misconceptions about Muslim Women	Week 4	Assignment 4
5	Dress Code of a Muslim Woman	Week 5	Assignment 5
Module 2			
1	Islam and Sex Segregation	Week 6	Assignment 1
2	Islām and Gender Equality	Week 7	Assignment 2
3	Rights of Women in Islam	Week 8	Assignment 3
4	Motherhood in Islam	Week 9	Assignment 4
5	Widowhood in Islam	Week 10	Assignment 5
Module 3			
1	Feminism and Muslim Women	Week 11	Assignment 1
2	Muslim Women and Politics	Week 12	Assignment 2
3	Muslim Women and Education	Week 13	Assignment 3
4	Muslim Women and Western Civilization	Week 14	Assignment 4
5	Modern Society and Abuse of Women	Week 15	Assignment 5
	Revision	Week 1	
	Examination	Week 1	
	Total	Week 17	

How to Get the Most from the Course

Since you will have minimal contact with the facilitator of this course, you are expected to do a lot of independent studying. As you study independently, take notes about points that you do not understand and endeavour to clear up such points at the various tutorials and discussions organized on the course. Each unit is interspersed with self-tests which are meant to enable you to evaluate yourself against the set objectives in the units as you progress. You are advised to take the unit objectives seriously since they will guide you in your reading of the unit contents. In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and

work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to the lecturer. In the same way a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units tell you where to read, and which are your text materials or set books. You are provided exercises to do at appropriate points, just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit, and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next to this is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. The moment a unit is finished, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If this is made a habit, then you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from a Reading section. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment
2. Organize a Study Schedule. Design a 'Course Overview' to guide you through the course. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Important information, e.g. details of your tutorials, and the date of the first day of the Semester is available from the study centre. You need to gather all the information into one place, such as your diary or a wall calendar. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates and schedule of work for each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything to stay faithful to it. The major reason why students fail is that they get behind with their course work if you get into difficulties with your schedule, please, let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to Unit I, and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. You will need your set books and the unit you are studying at any point in time.

6. Work through the unit. As you work through the unit, you will know what sources to consult for further information.
7. Keep in touch with your study centre. Up-to-date course information will be continuously available there.
8. Well before the relevant due dates (about 4 weeks before due dates), keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing the assignment carefully. They have been designed to help you meet the objectives of the course and, therefore, will help you pass the examination. Submit all assignments not later than the due date.
9. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor.
10. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
11. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also the written comments on the ordinary assignments.

12. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the Course Guide).

Facilitators/Tutor and Tutorials

There are eight (8) hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and locations of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments. Keep a close watch your progress and any difficulties you might encounter. You must mail your tutor-marked assignment to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutors and return to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor on telephone, or by e-mail or face to face if you need help. The following are circumstances in which you will find help necessary.

Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study unit or the assigned readings.
- You have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises.
- You have a question or problems with the assignment, with your tutor's comments on any assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them, you will learn a lot from participating in the discussions actively.

Summary

ISL 136 intends to introduce you to the basic tenets of Islam and also unveil the contributions of early Muslims to science generally. Therefore, upon completing this course, you will be able to respond to the following whats:

- (a) What was the status of women during *Jâhiliyyah*?
- (b) What is the evolutionary impact of Islam on the status of women?
- (c) What was the women status across ages and religions?
- (d) What are the misconceptions about the Muslim Woman and how do you clarify them?
- (e) What are the rights granted women by Islam?
- (f) What are the concepts of motherhood and widowhood in Islam?
- (g) What is the concept of gender quality in Islam?
- (h) What are the facts and farce of feminism?
- (i) What are the challenges confronting Muslim women?

Of course, the above questions are not exhaustive; hence, you should be able to raise more relevant questions from what you have digested from the course.

Wishing you success in the course, and it is hoped that you will find it captivating at the end of the day.

**MAIN
COURSE**

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MODULE 1

Unit 1	Women in the <i>Jâhiliyyah</i> Societies
Unit 2	Evolution of Women Status by Islam
Unit 3	Comparative Study of Women Status
Unit 4	Misconceptions about Muslim Women
Unit 5	Dress Code of a Muslim Woman

UNIT 1 **WOMEN IN THE *JÂHILIYYAH* SOCIETIES**

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Meaning of <i>Jâhiliyyah</i>
3.2	<i>Jâhiliyyah</i> Practices
3.3	Treatment of Women in Arabia before Islam
3.4	Women in the Early Civilizations
3.5	<i>Jâhiliyyah</i> in the Modern Times
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

The status and role of women in any society rest largely on the prevalent belief and norms in a particular society. In the same vein, the progress or retrogression of any society cannot also be isolated from the vantage position of women. Consequently, from time immemorial, women have been treated differently due to ignorance of their true worth. It is in this light that our study of **Women in the *Jâhiliyyah* Societies** will focus on the various ways by which women were treated before the advent of Islam. We shall also consider the meaning of *Jâhiliyyah*, the practices in Pre-Islamic Arabia, other civilizations and its rebirth in the modern times.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the meaning of *Jâhiliyyah*
- enumerate *Jâhiliyyah* practices
- describe *Jâhiliyyah* practices in modern times
- discuss the treatment of women in Pre-Islamic Arabia
- explain *Jâhiliyyah* practices in the early civilizations.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Meaning of *Jâhiliyyah*

Jâhiliyyah is an Arabic word which connotes ignorance, but not lack of knowledge. Thus, it is used in Islamic studies to refer to the period which predated Islam in the Arabian Peninsula. It means the age of ignorance when Arabs were grossly involved in practices which portrayed their ignorance of true belief, obedience to the Will of Allah (SWT) and prevalence of immorality. The atmosphere was generally devoid of worship of the real Creator of the world.

The word *Jâhiliyyah* has over the ages been used to connote all practices that are contrary to the spirit and letter of the *Qur'ân*. This is because men are still ignorant of the concept of worship and to whom it is due. *Jâhiliyyah* is ideological and historical as it reminds us of the prevalent lifestyle of the Arabs before Islam and is ideological as we now live in a world where terms are coined to denote political cum economic blocs. The two terms - *kufr* (unbelief) and *shirk* (polytheism) tend to be more ideological as they signify that man not only disbelieves in Allah (SWT) but also involves in other practices which are antithetical to that belief. A Muslim, in such an act might commit an act of *kufr* or *shirk*. Thus, *Jâhiliyyah* in its historical context will connote both and even more.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is *Jâhiliyyah*? Why were the Arabs referred to as people of *Jâhiliyyah*?

3.2 *Jâhiliyyah* Practices

The age of ignorance had some features by which it was known. It affected the lives of the Arabs religiously, socially, economically and politically.

Religiously, they worshipped idols. These they did as individuals, tribes and nation. The Ka‘bah was made to host 360 of their gods or idols. They consulted them for all affairs. They also used divination by arrows to decide some matters.

Socially, they consumed liquors, enjoyed fornication, involved in adultery, prostitution, degraded women, married their fathers’ wives, women displayed their nudity, practised infanticide, wailed on somebody’s death and many others. Economically, they were engrossed in *Ribā*, gambling and raiding of all sorts. Politically, stronger tribes dominated the weaker tribes. They also engaged in tribal incessant warfare arising from trivial issues, hereditary political leadership, etc.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Enumerate twelve *Jāhiliyyah practices*.

3.3 Treatment of Women in Arabian Peninsula before Islam

The pre-Islamic Arabia was heavy handed on women as life partners in the society. They were not given breathing space to enjoy life like men from birth till death. The following are the most prevalent ways by which women were treated in that society.

Men never considered them as their equals not to talk of treating them well. The general atmosphere was that men dominated everything except in certain cases of women who were affluent or had royal background. These too had their limitations. Here, names like Khadijah bint Khuwaylid and Hind bint ‘Utbah come to mind. So, women were not allowed in decision-making of the day. There was no place for their opinions no matter how valid. The tribal norms determined the status of a woman.

Women were generally treated with contempt and the female child courted little. The hardheartedness of the Bedouin Arabs came to bare on female infanticide. Female children were regarded as liabilities. They saw them as being unstable as they would leave for their husbands’ homes. They were seen as not being beneficial in fighting wars. In fact, they considered it a disgrace for their wives to bear female children. The *Qur’ān* narrates this thus:

“When news is brought to one of them of the birth of a female child, his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief; with shame does he hide himself from his people, because of the bad news he had heard. Shall he retain it in sufferance and contempt, or bury it in the dust? Ah! What an evil choice they decide on (Q16:58-59)

Consequently, most of them would go hiding when their wives were about to deliver and appoint somebody as their informer. If the news was that of a boy, they would come out of their hiding to rejoice. If the news was that of a girl, they would be sad and plan the next line of action. There were different instances of how young female children were buried alive. It was a common practice and so there was no moral law prohibiting it.

Their wives in this regard were helpless except for those who could prevail on their husbands or play on their intelligence. It was such a loathsome thing that some men buried four or eight of their female children alive at different times.

In the realm of economic transactions, they were seen as economic burdens. They were not given rights to own properties, as they were themselves chattels to be possessed by men. They had no rights to inherit properties of their deceased parents let alone relations no matter how close. In fact, they were regarded as part of inheritance. Whenever a man dies, his stepson or brother was entitled to the deceased's wife to use and dispose at will. The deceased's kinsmen could marry the widow or give her out in marriage. There was no room for her to give her consent. In some cases, the widows were prevented from remarriage except they pay back their bridal gifts.

Some used to marry their father's wives. This to them, was not considered as anything since they generally regarded women as the weaker sex and could be married by anybody. Besides, the society was so permissive that men could marry as many wives as possible and also divorce at will. In the event of not having enough means to take care of the children, they would drive them out to go and fend for themselves.

On the other hand, women were allowed to practise polyandry. Prostitutes had their centres with their flags manifestly hoisted. They were patronized by lewd men to satisfy their sexual urges. When such sexual intercourse resulted in pregnancy, the woman was at liberty to either give it to any of her customers or ask specialists to identify the real father.

Another practice was that when a man was impotent and could not impregnate his wife or saw a man of nobility, he would ask his wife to go and sleep with him so that she can bear for him a noble child.

There was scourge of women going about in skimpy dresses. On some occasions, men would ask women to appear naked or half naked before them in order to entertain them.

Women were made to suffer the consequences of *Zihâr*. By this, a man would divorce his wife by deliberately declaring to her that her back looked like that of his mother, that is to say that he would never have intercourse with her again. For cohabiting with her would mean doing so with his own mother. This automatically brings an irrevocable divorce.

They were also discriminated against with respect to food items. Some food items were prerogatives of men. Men reserved some kinds of better things for themselves and would decree that their women take the inferior ones.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Enumerate seven ways by which women were wrongly treated during *Jâhiliyyah*.

3.4 Women in the Early Civilizations

We have discussed the fate of women in the pre-Islamic Arabia. The fate of women in other parts of the world was not in any way significantly different. We shall here consider only the life of women in the early civilizations of the world namely; Greece, Rome and India.

a. The Greek Woman

At the beginning, not only did the Greek civilization relegate the status of women morally and socially, it also denied her legal rights. A woman was regarded as a sub-human being. She was in all ways considered inferior to man. Her status was however comparatively raised with the advancement in civilization.

Her major roles were restricted to the home where she was the defacto leader. At this period, Greek noble women had their residence separated from that of the men. They were hardly prominent in public. They did not sit in mixed gatherings. Prostitution was a mark of ignominy and chastity of women was glorified.

But when the society gradually relapsed into sexual perversion, all the previous values about women were thrown over board. Prostitution gained an unprecedented prominence. Marriage was thus regarded as bondage while fornication became a lawful pastime.

b. The Roman Woman

In the Roman setting, the woman was also initially disciplined and chaste. Abul A'la Mawdudi mentioned that:

They had such a high moral standard that when a Roman Senator once kissed his wife in the presence of his daughter, it was considered derogatory to the national moral character and a vote of censure was passed on him on the floor of the house.

The only legitimate relationship between a man and woman was marriage. But when decadence set in, prostitution took over, marriage as an institution and the restriction on divorce collapsed, the woman was liberated from the control of her father and husband. She could marry husbands at will and, of course, extra marital relations became pastime.

c. The Indian Woman

The honour and worth of an Indian woman was cast in the dust. It was such that a husband will use her as a deal for game of chance. Widows, especially where families claim noble descent, are required to burn themselves alive with high pile of wood on which their dead husbands were burnt for funeral ceremony.

So it is clearly perceptible that the position of women was not only humiliating in Arabia but in every part of the world. All the nations of the world could then be declared to be in *Jâhiliyyah* with regard to the treatment of women.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss the life of women under the Greek, Roman and Indian civilizations.

3.5 *Jâhiliyyah* in the Modern Times

The previous *Jâhiliyyah* was said to be based on a general ignorance, simplicity and primitiveness. That of the present is based on learning, complexity and frivolity. The modern society is witnessing a rebirth of *Jâhiliyyah* in all ramifications. Many things are worshipped in the guise of religion. This is reflective in various idolatrous festivals in the world today.

The preponderance of river, stone, star and sun worshippers is a clear evidence. Many shrines and various rites of sacrifices which accompany them are also symptoms of the modern *Jâhiliyyah*. The divination as existed in the old *Jâhiliyyah* order in these days is demonstrated by the belief in fortune telling, use of charms and magic. There are Soothsayers, Oracles and Magicians which most modern men consult for their affairs. Rigid adherence to dehumanizing customs, traditions and superstitions are reminiscence of *Jâhiliyyah* life.

Gambling has taken a global dimension through different lotteries and raffle draws. Nudity is conspicuous in skimpy dresses women put on these days. The modern degradation of the dignity of women through provocative advertisements, pornographic materials, music and in films among many others are replica of the nudity of women during *Jâhiliyyah*.

Fornication, adultery and prostitution have become pastime. Increase in children out of wedlock and confusion in the family lineage by women making some men claim pregnancy not their own is like the polyandrous life of women during *Jâhiliyyah*. Abortion and incidences of abandoned children in the streets, road sides and dumping grounds are just like infanticide of *Jâhiliyyah* era. Degradation of women is visible in the way they are used as sex objects.

The incarceration suffered by the slaves in the hands of their masters has appeared not to be much different in the modern times. Prisoners are subjected to untold and inhuman torture in the course of incarceration or because of their beliefs.

The rate at which alcohol is consumed is at an alarming rate. The world is witnessing wars in many ways at local and international levels. Many tribal wars are still being fought in the world today. Oppressive interests on loans, just like *ribâ* of *Jâhiliyyah* days have become a common denominator in modern global economic transactions.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

How will you describe the modern society as a *Jâhiliyyah* one?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The position of women in the pre-Islamic Arabia and other parts of the world was very pathetic. In all, the society was unfair to the plights of women as human beings and as a *bona fide* member of the society. The freedom granted her was for her to be promiscuous and become a tool for sexual gratification.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has given the literal and contextual meanings of *Jâhiliyyah*. It has further enumerated the prevalent *Jâhiliyyah* practices in the pre-Islamic Arabia and their rebirth in modern times. It has also discussed how women were directly affected during the *Jâhiliyyah* days as well as during Greek, Roman and Indian civilizations.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the meaning of *Jāhiliyyah* in ideological and historical perspectives.
2. Explain six ways by which women were treated in the *Jāhiliyyah* societies.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 EVOLUTION OF WOMEN STATUS BY ISLAM

CONTENTS

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2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Evolution of Women Status
3.2	Women in Other Religions
3.3	Prevailing Views
3.4	Gradualness
3.5	Marriage
3.6	Refinement
3.7	Rewards
3.8	Accountability
3.9	Women Rights
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The concern of this unit is to discuss how Islam evolutionarily raises the status of women. It starts by depicting their positions in other religions and in Arabia where Islam started. Thereafter, it identifies the strategies of gradualism and admonition as evolutionary tools; marriage, refinement, rewards and accountability were also considered vis-à-vis the prevalent traditions.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you should be able to:

- explain evolution of women status by Islam
- discuss the status of women in other religions
- state the strategies for the evolution
- discuss practical evolutionary steps for women status in Islam.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Evolution of Women Status

One of the immediate tasks before the nascent Islam in Makkah was to restore the dignity and honour of woman in a world that had suppressed

her for centuries. The restoration was evolutionary. It took into cognizance the reality of the day and universal objectives of Islam. The reality was that women were never in anyway equal to men. Islam was then a 'stranger' yet to be accepted. There was no state power to enforce its principles. Its universal goal was that it was meant for the entire mankind. The *Jâhiliyya* Arabia was a test-run for the viability of the views of Islam, especially, on Women. Hence, it was not possible or even logical to just discard the existing order. What Islam did was to emphasize the issue of faith and thereafter directed men to the equality of all men before God with superiority lying in piety and not in sex or nationality.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Why was Islam's restoration of women status evolutionary?

3.2 Women in Other Religions

To appreciate the evolutionary reformation brought about by Islam with regard to the status of women, it is necessary to discuss the position and treatment of women in other religions. The first unit only focused on the status of women in major early civilizations not on religions.

At the dawn of Islam, the Hindus regarded a woman as a slave to her husband. She remained at the mercy of her husband at all times. She had no legal rights to seek for divorce or re-marry as a widow no matter the oppression she suffered from her husband. A daughter could not also inherit in the presence of a son. Barren women were divorced or even sent out discreditably. An impotent male may arrange that any of his relations could sleep with his wife. Women were also not granted the opportunity to be educated in the Vedas.

Her fate in Buddhism was not different. She was regarded as an obstacle and danger to spiritual up-liftment. Thus, any man who had sex with a woman is not guaranteed salvation.

Both Judaism and Christianity cast aspersions on women as they were regarded as mothers of all evils. The story of Adam and Eve was elucidated to mean that the wife made him sinned.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How will you describe the fate of women in other religions?

3.3 Prevailing Views

The erroneous notions and beliefs as held by people and the religions of the world before Islam could have influenced people into making disparaging comments about women. Tertullian (A.D 150), an early Father of the Christian church described the Christian woman thus:

“She opens the door to satanic temptations; leads man to the forbidden tree, breaks the law of God, and corrupts man – image of God”

In a similar vein, St. John Chrysostom (C.345 – 407), a Greek Father of the Church also said:

“She is an inevitable evil, an eternal mischief, an attractive calamity, a domestic risk, a charming and decorated misfortune.”

Other unpleasant things said about women by others include:

"As to the counselling of women, it is a sign of the hour of doom." "Woman is not in charge of anything that goes beyond herself; for woman is a sweet basil not a governess. She should not promise by her own honour, nor should you provoke her ambition by asking for the mediation of another [woman]. "

“They are amiable with their husbands when they withdraw; when they go out, they are like snakes.”

Ibn `Abd Rabbih also quotes from the proverbs of the prophets: "In the wisdom of David, peace be on him, it is said, 'I found among men one in a thousand, but I found none among all women.' "

These statements are the worst anybody can ever make about women. If truly women are all these, then humanity has no pure origin. Life experiences have shown that we have men that are even worse than women. However, in Islamic context, all these statements are fallacies. All men and women are born virtuous. Both can become corrupt in the course of time. Thus, it is greatly unfair to attribute these kinds of comments to women.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Do you agree with the prevailing views about women? What are your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing?

3.4 Gradual Process

All the Religions of the world before Islam had either relegated women to the lowest ebb or passed one sentence or another on them. In all situations women were made to lose. It was such a terrible situation that women were put. Sadly, they resigned themselves to the situation. It was obvious that no religion or ideology was there to project women in their true nature, rights and duties. This being the lot of women in the world, Islâm sets out to eradicate all the injustices and oppressions against women. The piecemeal revelation of the *Qur'ân* is a methodology which permeates its messages. This could be seen in issues like the prohibition of alcohol, *ribâ* and the like.

The arrival of Islam was indeed timely. The degenerated life of women in Greece, Rome, Arabia, Persia, China and other places as well as in religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity was all pitiable. Hence, the gradual restoration of the status of women started in the desert of Arabia.

As the first step, Islam calls on all men to worship their Lord. It establishes the fact that they all have the same origin. This is encapsulated in the following verse.

“O Mankind, fear your Lord, Who created you of a single soul, and of the same created his mate, and from that pair spread countless men and women over the earth” (Q 4: 1)

By this, a message is passed that men and women are from the same parents. Thus it is not right to discriminate against each other. In another vein, the *Qur'ân* explains the objects of the differences in sex and tribes thus:

“O Mankind, we have created you from male and female and have made you nations and tribes so as to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah (SWT) is the most Pious....” (Q 49:13)

These *Qur'ānic* verses call on all men to fear the Lord who created them from the same source without anybody having superiority over the other.

Thereafter, the *Qur'ân* begins to spell out the worth of women vis-à-vis kindness towards them as mothers, widows, divorcees, sisters and giving them opportunity to partake in public transaction, etc.

The concept of Islamic way of life is holistic. Thus, it regards men and women as partners in progress in the achievement of the goal of life, which is to worship Allah. Being realistic, though given due regards to individuals, it apportions different roles to men and women based on their nature.

William Montgomery Watt has in this perspective observed and stated that:

Some of the early sources... seem to show that Muhammad made things better for women. It appears that in some parts of Arabia, notably in Mecca, a matrilineal system was in the process of being replaced by a patrilineal one at the time of Muhammad. Growing prosperity caused by a shifting of trade routes was accompanied by a growth in individualism. Men were amassing considerable personal wealth and wanted to be sure that this would be inherited by their own actual sons, and not simply by an extended family of their sisters' sons. This led to deterioration in the rights of women. At the time Islâm began, the conditions of women were terrible - they had no right to own property, were supposed to be the property of the man, and if the man died everything went to his sons. Muhammad improved things quite a lot. By instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance, education and divorce, he gave women certain basic safeguards. Set in such historical context the Prophet can be seen as a figure who testified on behalf of women's rights.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

The principle of gradualness employed by Islam in repositioning the women was laudable, discuss.

3.5 Marriage

Islam raised the position of women by institutionalizing marriage with basic conditions. It has prohibited all forms of illegitimate sexual behavior. It has categorized women men can marry and those they cannot. It has limited the number of wives a man can marry. It has put an end to the era of just marrying as many women as possible. It has banned the pagan customs of divorcing women unnecessarily; hence the reconciliatory alternatives. It has put an end to female infanticide. Islam goes further to exhort kind treatment of the widows and their being married in a normal marriage procedure.

It is noteworthy that despite the prevailing ill-treatment of women in the Arabian society, Islam encourages men to free the slave girls from the bondage of slavery asking men to pay the dowry of orphan girls in their care if they intended marrying them so as to eradicate marrying women against their wishes. It instructed that women should be accompanied by their husbands or family members during journeys. Women were also allowed to serve as witness in transactions as against the prevalent total exclusion.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What landmarks were brought about by Islam in restoring the dignity of women through marriage?

3.6 Refinement

It is also to the credit of Islam that it restores the status of women in the use of language. From the word *go*, it speaks well of women. It has elevated their position by placing paradise at their feet. Islam does not use any derogatory word against women. They are regarded as the best partners in the world. In the language of the *Qur'ân*, the creation of women as wives for men is one of the greatest doings of Allah. This is done so that men can derive solace in them. The Prophet himself did say that:

“Two things in the world please me the most: the women and the perfume; and in *Ṣalât* is the solace of my eyes”

Thus, by the power of language, Islam depicts women as special human beings like fragile vessels. By so doing, it changes the prevailing views about women.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Of what significance is the use of language on the status of women?

3.7 Rewards

Islam goes further to state rewards for good actions for both men and women, placing them on equal standard. In fact, a woman earns more rewards praying at home than going to pray in the mosque; whereas a man has to set out for mosque to get better rewards. The beauty of the balancing of rewards is encapsulated in this portion of the *Qur'ân*:

“The men shall have their due share according to what they have earned and the women according to what they have earned.”

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

In the light of the above verse, how will you describe the concept of rewards for women in Islam?

3.8 Accountability

Islam makes it clear that all men shall be held responsible for all their actions. Consequently, it does not in anyway reproach Hawâ' (Eve) as being the cause of the so called the 'fall of man'. Both of them were censured and forgiven. The *Qur'ân* balances its stories by depicting both good and evil men and women. On one hand, it narrates the story of Maryam (Mother of Isa) and wife of Fir'awn as being virtuous and thus destined for paradise. The story is also told of the wives of Prophets Nuh, Lut and Abu Lahab (Uncle of the Prophet Muhammad) as bad women and thus going to hell. In a similar vein, it apports hell to Fir'awn, Haman, Qarun and Abu Lahab.

In all these instances, the status of the Prophets does not influence a better reward for wives or family. This means that a woman has the moral responsibility to obey God as the man has. Islam frees her from obeying her husband or any other person in defiance of the laws of Allah.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

A woman's accountability is different from that of a man, discuss.

3.9 Women's Rights

It was a giant stride for Islam in a society where women were relegated to the background to grant and enforce the rights of women. Though Islam recognizes the natural differences between both, women, with the coming of Islam, practically, started to enjoy spiritual, social, political

and economic rights. It grants them economic rights but states clearly that men are responsible for the family upkeep. It abrogates all customs that deny her the right to inherit and apportions her shares in the inheritance. The provision for a woman to have a half share of man's portion of the inheritance and the permission that allows two women as witnesses in financial transactions are though alien to people, they must be seen as gradual process to launch women into their rightful places in the society. More of this aspect of women right will be extensively discussed in the subsequent pages, especially in module 2; "Rights of Women in Islam".

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

Islam granted women some but not absolute rights. Discuss.

4.0 CONCLUSION

These reforms were evolutionary measures of Islam in raising the status of women. The status of women today in the Muslim lands might be contrary to the reformation brought about by Islam. This is largely due to the dominance of cultural practices which in many quarters have been misconstrued to be part of Islam. The true status of the Muslim woman is as defined by the *Qur'an* and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Islam has evolved different strategies to restore the status of women so that they can play their natural roles in the society.

5.0 SUMMARY

The object of this unit has been specific ways by which Islam evolved the position of women. We have discussed women in other religions so as to appreciate the Islamic reforms, know the erroneous prevailing views about women and the gradualness of Islam in repositioning women. Marriage, refinement in the use of language, rewards, accountability and Women rights have also been discussed so as to depict the Islamic evolutionary approach to issues of women.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you think is meant by evolution of women status by Islam?
2. Discuss the prevailing views then in respect of women status in Islam.
3. Enumerate five ways by which Islam evolved women status.

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UNIT 3 COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WOMEN STATUS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Women have been differently viewed and treated; it is thus the object of this unit to look into this by comparatively considering the following aspects: Case of the first woman (Hawwâ' or Eve), position of female children, women education, Purity of women, bearing witness, punishment for adultery, ownership of property, kindness to mother, concept of divorce, inheritance by the female and treatment of widows.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- state the reasons for the comparative study
- list the aspects of the comparison
- discuss the areas of the comparison
- describe today's women in the light of the comparison.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Essence

Comparative study has become popular in virtually all fields of knowledge. It is done so as to identify weaknesses in one and learn from the other. In this context, it will grant us the opportunity to comprehend the fear of women overtime and to resolve whether to still retain some dispositions towards them or change them based on the superiority of the comparative analysis. We have before now discussed women across civilizations and religions. Here, we are going to be point-blank about some issues so that we can appreciate how Islam has shown much concern about women. It will also help to clear many misconceptions some people have against Islam with regard to women. We shall also see balancing nature of Islam.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Why is a comparative study of women status necessary?

3.2 The Views on Hawâ' (Eve)

It is universally accepted that the first woman was Eve. She is referred to as Hawâ' in Islam. The Bible reports how she was deceived by the serpent and thereafter she also seduced her husband, Adam to eat from the forbidden fruit. On inquiry by God, Adam placed the blame on his wife. Thus, God decreed punishment on her as follow:

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you."

Conversely, the *Qur'ânic* perspective posits that it was Satan who actually whispered to both of them to approach the tree. Thereafter, both were reproached by Allah. They sought His forgiveness and they were forgiven. Eve was never mentioned as a tempter or seducer. Neither of them was specially punished, they were both asked to descend from the Garden.

"O Adam dwell with your wife in the Garden and enjoy as you wish but approach not this tree or you run into harm and transgression. Then Satan whispered to them in order to reveal to them their shame that was hidden from them and he said: 'Your Lord only forbade you this tree lest you become angels or such beings as live forever.' And he swore to them both that he was their sincere adviser. So by deceit he brought them to their fall: when they tasted the

tree their shame became manifest to them and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden over their bodies. And their Lord called unto them: 'Did I not forbid you that tree and tell you that Satan was your avowed enemy?' They said: 'Our Lord we have wronged our own souls and if you forgive us not and bestow not upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be lost' "(7:19:23).

The major distinctions here are:

- The Serpent deceived Eve and the latter seduced Adam but the *Qur'ân* says Shaytân whispered into their hearts.
- The Bible says the forbidden fruit but the *Qur'ân* says the tree.
- According to Biblical records both Adam and Eve were given different punishments but the *Qur'ân* says both were asked to descend from the garden.

It is clear from the above that Islam does not discriminate between the sexes. It unfolds that both men and women have the same moral commitments. It also shows the true concept of God's forgiveness.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Hawâ' was the cause of the fall of Adam, discuss.

3.3 Position of Female Children

In Islam, both male and female children are treated equally. It is Allah (SWT) who grants either of them to whomever He wishes. The Prophet (SAW) was reported to have said that:

“The man who brought up two daughters, so that they attain maturity, will appear at my side on the day of Judgement as are my two adjacent fingers” (Muslim)

The prevailing pagan practice of the female infanticide was eradicated. In fact, taking care of female children has a special place in Islam which warns against any discrimination between both.

This negative attitude still prevails in some parts of the world. Most people always prefer to give birth to baby boys than girls; even some women prefer that because of inheritance factor. It has been erroneously believed that women have no religion, that their husbands determine which religion for them. This is not so in Islâm. A woman has right to the religion of Islâm.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

How is the position of Islam on female children better than that of other religions or cultures?

3.4 Women Education

The Prophet (SAW) declared that: "*Seeking for Knowledge is compulsory on all Muslims*". He does not discriminate between male and female. The history of Islâm is also a reference point on the indefatigable roles played by women in even teaching the men folk.

The story in Judaism according to some Jewish Rabbis is that:

"Let the words of Torah rather be destroyed by fire than imparted to women"

The story is not dissimilar in the New Testament when it states that:

"As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." (I Corinthians 14:34-35)

In Islamic context, men and women occupy the same pedestal. It is believed in Islam that educating a single woman is like educating a whole nation; while a man's education is individualistic. This laudable position of Islam is progressive and natural as women are the first teachers of children. Hence, efforts to educate them are a giant step in the right direction.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What is the dividing line between Islâm and Judaism or Christianity with regard to women education?

3.5 Purity of Women

This is another aspect where women have been degraded. Due to her physical feebleness, she has been declared as a weak. Consequent upon her monthly periods, she has also been castigated as being impure. All these are alien to Islam. Women in their periods do not have any contiguous impurity. They can carry on their normal life. Their husbands are even allowed to fondle them except that they must not have intercourse with them because it is not hygienically safe. This is

not however so in some religions and cultures. For example, the Biblical position is that:

"...anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening. Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean (Lev. 15:19-23).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

How does Islam treat women who are in their periods as against what holds in other cultures?

3.6 Witnessing

Women are allowed to bear witness in financial transactions (Q2:282) and some technical aspects of women life in Islâm. This is recognition of her place in the society. She is denied this opportunity in other ideologies. In fact, discounting as a witness is considered by the Rabbis as one of the nine curses on her. If accused, her defense is ignored. (*Deuteronomy 22:13-21*)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Why are women allowed to bear witness in Islâm?

3.7 Punishment for Adultery

The punishment for adultery in Islam and Christianity is death sentence. The culprits are to be stoned to death. This harsh penalty is aimed at deterring others from such act and protecting as well the family lineage. The prescribed punishment, in Islam, covers the married man and woman involved in the extra-marital sex. This is not so in the Bible as only the married woman is censured (Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22, Proverbs 6:20-7:27).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

What is the difference between the Islamic punishment for adultery and that of Christianity?

1.8 Ownership of property

Islam allows women the possession of personal property. The husband is her manager but she is never a slave or property to him. Men are unambiguously directed to give women their dowry

"And give the women (on marriage) their dower as a free gift; but if they, Of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take it and enjoy it with right good cheer" (4:4)

In the Judaeo-Christian perspectives, the husband's control over her includes owning her. She cannot own anything. This is alluded to in the Talmud as follow:

"How can a woman have anything; whatever is hers belongs to her husband? What is his is his and what is hers is also his..... Her earnings and what she may find in the streets are also his. The household articles, even the crumbs of bread on the table, are his. Should she invite a guest to her house and feed him, she would be stealing from her husband..." (San. 71a, Git. 62a)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

Compare the right of a woman to own property according to the Qur'ân and the Talmud.

3.9 Kindness to Mother

The *Qur'ân* and the sayings of the Prophet are very point blank on special place of mother in the society because of the pains she went through in delivering and rearing the child.

"And we have enjoined on man to be good to his parents: In travail upon travail did his mother bear him and in two years was his weaning. Show gratitude to Me and to your parents" (31:14).

"A man asked the Prophet: 'Whom should I honor most?' The Prophet replied: 'Your mother'. 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your mother'. 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your mother!'. 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your father'" (Bukhari and Muslim).

Although, the Bible talks about the parents but no special mention of mother is made to appreciate her suffering.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes,

even his own life--he can not be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

Are there justification(s) for special place of mother in Islam?

3.10 The Concept of Divorce

Islam regards divorce as a law but detestable thing. It considers it as the last resort where both parties cannot peacefully live together again and after all reconciliatory efforts have failed. It faces reality by granting either of the parties the permission to seek for divorce based on a laid down procedure.

But if you decide to take one wife in place of another, even if you had given the latter a whole treasure for dower, take not the least bit of it back; would you take it by slander and a manifest wrong? (4:20).

In the case of Christianity, it is out rightly resented. The Bible states that:

"But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery" (Matthew 5:32).

This position places a ban on divorce in all circumstances which realistically is not feasible. Separation of the couple might be better instead of perpetually bearing the agony of the inconvenient cohabitation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

Divorce is an outright permission by Islam, explain.

3.11 Inheritance by the Female

The demise of a daughter's father or a woman's husband or a mother's son is already a loss. It will take any of them sometime to overcome it. If such a man's estate is now shared and the woman is not given anything, it will have psychological impact on her as she had all along been with him. If these things are now shared without anything going to her, it will definitely affect her feelings negatively. Therefore, it is logical to let her have a portion of the inheritance. This among other

reasons is why Islâm has apportioned some shares to the women. The *Qur'ân* says:

"From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large --a determinate share" (4:7).

Conversely, Rabbi Epstein gave the position of the Bible as:

"The continuous and unbroken tradition since the Biblical days gives the female members of the household, wife and daughters, no right of succession to the family estate."

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11

Is there any human justification(s) for the women to inherit or not?

3.12 Treatment of Widows

Widows have no right to their husbands' property according to Biblical records. A childless widow is compelled to remarry her husband's brother so that his name will not go into extinction.

"Then Judah said to Onan, 'Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother' " (Genesis 38:8).

Islam condemns this practice and grants women the freedom to decide whom to remarry (4:22).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 12

Explain how the treatment of widows in Islâm is better than that of others.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It is abundantly clear from the above that Islam is fair to the plight of women than what is depicted in the Judeo-Christian traditions. This is in consonance with the Islamic equality of humanity. The woman is spiritually, morally, hygienically, economically, politically, historically and socially protected by Islam. Thus, only Islâm could be eulogized as a true liberator of women.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has comparatively unveiled the status of women in Islam and Judeo-Christian Scriptures. It achieved this by considering the following aspects: Case of the first woman (Hawâ' or Eve), position of female children, women education, Purity of women, bearing witness, punishment for adultery, ownership of property, kindness to mother, concept of divorce, inheritance by female children and treatment of widows.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. List twelve aspects of a comparative analysis on the status of women in Islam and other religions. Classify your comparison into realms like social, political, etc.
2. Discuss any five of these aspects and state their relevance in the modern society.

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UNIT 4 MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MUSLIM WOMEN

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The fact that the modern man now lives in a global village has not liberated him from myriads of misconceptions. This is very serious when it comes to the issue of woman in Islâm. Hence, this unit is devoted to discuss misconceptions about the Muslim Woman. It shall explain misconceptions and its causes. It shall also contextually discuss the following as the common areas of misconceptions: female circumcision, wife beating, women staying at the back rows, female share in inheritance, being an Imam, Polygamy, *Purdah* and the two female witnesses as against one man and wife's corporal punishment.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the causes of the misconceptions
- state the misconceptions
- discuss the misconceptions.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Causes of Misconceptions about Muslim Women

Misconceptions occur when either Muslims or non-Muslims especially have false impression about an aspect of Islam. As a result of their misconception, they will not be able to appreciate the good points of Islam as they would have been overclouded by mistaken beliefs. Such that it will not pave the way for tolerance and harmonious co-existence.

Misconceptions could arise for four reasons:

1. Natural variance in comprehending cultures
2. Misrepresentation of Islam by its adherents
3. Established superiority of a vogue
4. Unsolicited distortion of Islam by non-Muslims

People naturally grow up to embrace their culture as normal and logical when they are estranged by others, who do what is alien to their culture. Without proper orientation, others may be seen as being wrong even when they are right. In the modern times a Muslim clad in Islamic apparel is regarded as being uncivilized because her dressing does not conform to what is predominantly common in the society. Some Muslims even have the problem of distinguishing between their cultural leanings and Islam so as to be able to practise effectively the true Islamic teachings.

Another basic cause of misconception lies in the Muslims themselves. This happens when they portray Islam in a bad light. This may be largely due to faulty understanding of Islamic practices. At a result, non-Muslims who see them in such instance may regard their behaviour as a representation of Islam. Since they may not get avenues to be rightly guided, they can form wrong views about Islam. A Muslim husband who beats his wife arbitrarily in the neighborhood of non-Muslims will definitely leave enough opportunity for them to have the impression that Islam allows men to beat their wives.

The apparent superiority of a particular pattern of life might have beclouded the minds of people and made it difficult for them to accept another one which can keep them away from accepting the right thing. A modern girl brought up in the Western countries may never tolerate anybody wearing the Hijâb as she will consider it as being burdensome and not smart. Hence, such a person can have a catalogue of notions against Muslim women wearing the Hijâb.

The deliberate distortion of Islam which started in the medieval times still has serious impact on how people perceive Islam. The European

painted Islam in the darkest pictures. The Orientalists promoted a lot of fallacious things about Islam in writing and by using the media. Individuals who read or were taught with the aids of such materials were naturally misled in their judgment about Islam.

Resulting from one or a mixture of all these motives, there have been several misconceptions about Muslim Women. This is so pronounced due to specific provisions Islâm has made for women.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. What is meant by misconception about Muslim women?
2. Enumerate the causes.

3.2 Misconception about Purdah

The word Purdah is said to be an Indian word which allows women to completely seclude themselves to avoid intermingling with men other than their husbands and relatives. The word today has been identified with Islam, particularly Muslim women covering their faces by the use of veil and to some extent secluding themselves. The Glorious *Qur'ân* has depicted this practice thus:

“O Wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the (other) women: if you fear (Allah) be not too complaisant in speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak in a way (that is) just. And stay quietly, in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former times of ignorance...” (Q33:32-33)

The issue of women covering their faces has been greatly debated by Islamic Scholars. The general opinion, however, is that it was compulsory for the wives of the Prophets but also allowed for other Muslim women. Thus, women are to properly cover themselves but may leave their faces and palms. The wives of the Prophet were so enjoined because of their position as the “**Mothers of the Believers**”.

With this verse, Allah (SWT) was gradually preparing the grounds against the eye contact of men as they were not to be married by anybody after the Prophet. In addition, looking lustfully at women is forbidden in Islam. It therefore, becomes more heinous, to gaze at the wives of the Prophet. Thus by the injunction of veil, Allah (SWT) saved the Companions from this sin. As the responsibility of teaching and answering questions from the general public fell on them, as Mothers of Believers, the barrier of the veil was enjoined to safeguard against undue contact.

The concept of Purdah in Islam, that is, the use of veil, does not in anyway disallow women to go out to satisfy their needs if the need arises. The wives of the Prophet used to go out to satisfy their needs. It was also said by the Prophet that:

“Women are allowed to go out for their needs” (Bukhari)

Perhaps, people misconstrued the initial provision on the penalty for fornication which stipulates that they should be permanently shut behind doors; this was later abrogated by the verse which stipulates that they should be flogged.

Therefore, the practice by some Muslims to restrict their wives to the four corners of the house even when there is obvious need for them to go for some needs have no basis in Islam. The notion in some quarters that Muslim women are being forced to use the veil so that they can be subservient to men is equally erroneous. The use must be borne out of conviction.

Muslim women, especially, in the modern times, should be encouraged to go out in search of knowledge. This, they must however do with proper observance of the Islâmic guidelines on women appearance in public.

In fact, appearance of a Muslim woman in veil is an exercise of an exclusive right which allows her to see people but not seen by them. It gives her recognition as a special person who must be treated with honour instead of being seen as a mere object of sexual gratification.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

The Muslims could be blamed on the misconception about the practice of purdah more than non-Muslims. Discuss.

3.3 Misconception about Female Circumcision

Female circumcision has been a volatile issue in the recent times. It has been unfairly referred to as genital mutilation. The campaign for its abrogation has been aggressively mounted by the feminists, governments and various agencies.

It is noteworthy that this practice is not something new in many countries of the world before this modern time when we have become medically advanced. The argument, therefore, is that if people in the past had been applying it as a custom with several records of success;

then our advancement in knowledge should be an added advantage for such practice.

In Islam, circumcision is one of the recommended natural practices. It is the cutting of the least possible portion of the hood which passes over the clitoris. When the Prophet heard that a particular woman used to perform circumcision in Madina, his directive to her was:

“Do not cut severely as that is better for a woman and more desirable for a husband” (Abu Dawud)

It is evident from the above that the cutting should be minimal and not the removal of the entire clitoris. A female's genital is not at all like that of males where the foreskin which covers the tip of the penis is entirely removed.

The Jurists of the Shafiite School of Islamic law say that such practice is obligatory on both males and females. The Hanbalites say that it is mandatory for males but voluntary for females and this represents the majority opinion in Islam supported by the Hanafites and Malikites who say it is voluntary for both.

One could deduce from the above that only light cutting is required for females and not deep cutting. If however, a female does not do it, it is not a sin but just a deviation from the natural path.

It has been argued that female's circumcision does reduce the strong urge of a woman for sex but does not prevent promiscuity. It is believed that it makes her enjoy sex better. It is expected from antagonists that empirical studies be carried out in this wise rather than opposing it without concrete and convincing evidence.

The degree of attack on Islam from this angle is unwarranted if truly there is human right. A woman who feels she wants it done should not be said to be committing genital mutilation. The argument may be deduced that the young girls are still minors, so they should be left till when they can decide for themselves.

It is crystal clear from the above that Islam only encourages this practice for women but does not say it is binding on them. It does not also allow the inexperienced person to carry out the operation. Also, the recommendation of Islam only requires the cutting of only a little part of the clitoris. Sanction is also imposed on a person who does it without qualification. Most importantly, Islam is a divine religion. It values human life more than any other thing. So if there is anything, which can injure or cause death in the practice, Islam will be the first to fight against it.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss the Islamic guidelines with regard to the female circumcision.

3.4 Misconception about Share in Inheritance

The law of Islam states that a man should take twice of a woman's share. This is contained in the following verse of the *Qur'ân*:

“...to the Male, a portion equal to that of two females...” (Q4:11)

Critics have regarded this as an act of gender inequality. A thorough analysis, however, shows that women are not in anyway treated unjustly. Issues like this cannot be taken in isolation but should be viewed along with other aspects of Islam.

In the first instance, during marriage, a man is expected to give his would-be wife nuptial gift, which she is not bound to share with anybody.

Secondly, the man, apart from spending on the woman before marriage, the responsibility of providing shelter, feeding and clothing still rests on the shoulder of the husband. He is again enjoined by Islam to keep spending from his available resources on the woman after the marriage.

Thirdly, the fate of a woman before the advent of Islam and even now in some cultures is that she has no share in the inheritance. Islam, however, permits her as a daughter, wife, sister, mother or even grand-mother to have a fixed share from the property of her deceased father, husband, brother and son respectively. Still, her portion remains her own. The husband will still spend out of his own share of the inheritance on his wife. At the end of the day, she will have surplus while the husband might have exhausted his share. Thus, it is a sense of equity and justice in Islâm that it legislates that the male should have double of the female so that he can have enough to meet his demands. More so, there is no time a woman is not under somebody's custody which is not always so with the man.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Enumerate the reason (s) why the male's share of the inheritance is more than that of the female.

3.5 Misconception about Wife's Corporal Punishment

One of the goals of marriage is to achieve a union between two different individuals. The husband has been appointed by Allah (SWT) as the head of the family. As we all know that in human society, at times the followers are found guilty of some things against the leader, in such cases they are investigated and penalized. So, if in the event of a wife misbehaving, the *Qur'ân* 4:34 grants the husband the power to correct or discipline her through the redemptive measure.

It states thus:

“...As to those women on whose part you 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)...”

The above verse has stated the redemptive measure in descending order.

- a. He should urge her to mend her ways by way of verbal exhortation.
- b. He can suspend sexual relations with her.
- c. He may resort to slight corporal discipline, not injurious.
- d. The fourth step he can take is mentioned in Q4:35, which is the option of family council.
- e. If all these fail, he might resort to divorce if she is adamant on her misbehavior.

Imâm Shafii has considered the administration of corporal discipline permissible but it is inadvisable. Also, authorities in Islam do not sanction any cruelty whatsoever on the woman. They disagree on the exact meaning corporal punishment.

Some people's bone of contention with Islam is that it grants the man the power to beat his wife. An objective analyst will definitely know that Islam honours women more than any other ideology.

According to the Prophet, the best of men are the best to their women. He was reported to have equally said:

“The best blessing among the blessings of the world to a man is a virtuous wife.” (Nasāi)

It therefore, sounds self-contradictory to assume that Islâm with this stance still allows these same men to beat their wives! Naturally, many men beat their wives at will. This was not obligated because of women's

recalcitrance. Hence it was regulated that the beating should not be injurious to her body and should be after the other two redemptive steps.

Islam is not legislating something completely alien to real happenings in human society. It is realistic by recognizing the corrective measures of some women who can yield to correction instead of being divorced which would affect the proper upbringing of the children. The beating should be symbolic to make the wife realize her folly when she experiences from a husband who has never beaten her before. Islam is also aware of the excess some men may resort to, so, it warns that they should not beat their wives like animals and later go into bed with them again. A man who feels beating his wife is the last resort must make sure that:

- a. No injury is left on her.
- b. The beating should not affect any of her sensitive parts.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Wife's corporal punishment is encouraged by Islam. Discuss.

3.6 Misconception about Polygamy

Islam has been seriously attacked on the account of polygamy. Women are said to be on the receiving end. Even some Muslims, men and women, do not also like the idea of polygamy. The idea of polygamy is not limited to Islam alone. Most Prophets and religious people were also polygamous.

The injunction on polygamy is contained in this portion of the *Qur'ân*:

...Marry of the women that please you: two, three, or four. But if you feel that you shall not be able to deal justly, then only one or what your right hand possesses. That would be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice.” (Q4:3)

It is imperative to emphasize that Islam is not out to satisfy the selfish interest of any mortal. It is a divine way of life meant to solve all problems of man. Consequently, it allows men to marry more than one wife but not more than four. By that, it regulates the number of wives a man can marry. It makes justice amongst wives especially in respect of material things, a basic principle.

Most Critics of polygamy are only hypocritical. They allow men to have extra marital sex but kick against marrying them. The Islamic option of limited polygamy (polygyny) is a commitment of men to responsibility.

Islam is forward looking and realistic in legalizing polygamy. Many reasons could lead to it:

1. Strong sexual urge of some men
2. Barrenness
3. Aftermath of war
4. Widowhood or divorce

Instead of these men of strong urge engaging in an extra marital sex, Islam encourages them to marry another wife. In all situations of marrying another wife, the laid down process of marriage must be followed. When a woman becomes barren, widowed or divorced, three options are left before her:

- To re-marry.
- To remain unmarried.
- To engage in illicit sexual affairs.

The logical option for a woman, especially if she is still young is to remarry. The option of remarrying to a married person helps to stabilize her and prevent her from illicit sexual intercourse or harassments from the male counterparts.

Hence, polygamy is a panacea which accommodates the increasing population of women which is said to have been more than that of men. The women in United States, for example, are at least, eight million more than men; there are 122 women in Guinea for every 100 men and in Tanzania, there are 95.1 males per 100 females.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Polygamy is a panacea to certain problems. Discuss five of such problems.

3.7 Misconception about Two Female Witnesses

The Glorious *Qur'ân* says:

"... And get two witnesses of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as you content with four witnesses so that if one of them (the two women) errs the other can remind her..."

This verse is very clear on the reason why two witnesses are required. It does not in any where state that women are intellectually inferior. The society of ignorance was the one in which women had no right at all. So, it is a giant step for Islam to have granted them the opportunity to participate in public activities.

Moreover, women are expected to be primarily concerned with home affairs and not with financial matters. Since they are not always engaged in trade transactions, Islam, considering a situation whereby they may be called upon to serve as witnesses, puts a measure in place to prevent a wrong judgement, as a result of insufficient experience in such an endeavour.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Explain the main reason why two female witnesses are required in Islamic business transactions.

3.8 Misconception about Women Being Imams

Islam is always unequivocal about its guidelines. It makes sure they do not contradict themselves. As a matter of rule, only men can be Imams where there is mixed audience. A woman may lead fellow women in the absence of men.

Salât is a spiritual duty. Its observance in congregation is enjoined but it must be led by a man. The tendency of men becoming lustful when seeing a woman leading them standing, reciting, bowing and prostrating is very high. These acts may distract their attention from God. They may as well make the woman an object of lustful thoughts in the cause of fulfilling a spiritual duty.

The delicate nature of woman as regards her sonorous voice, bodily shape and the coming of her periods at an unexpected time serve as a barrier that prevents her from being an Imâm.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

That a woman cannot be an Imam is logical. Discuss.

3.9 Misconception about Staying in the Back Rows

Critics consider the staying of women at the back rows during prayers or Muslim gatherings as marginalization of women. Every religion has its norms, so Islam cannot be an exception. The Prophet did say that the best row for a woman is the back row. This has nothing to do with

gender question. It is a matter of safeguard against unwholesome sexual perversity which might arise out of undue free-mingling.

The fact that the women line up at the back row does not in any way mean that they are relegated. Interestingly, Muslim women have not complained of this. It is mostly those outside the fold of Islam that are raising objections. It suffices to mention that it is a religions directive. The wisdom behind this is logical. It takes the natural feelings of both sexes into consideration and thus specifies that the format of rows during Şalât should be men, children then women.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

Discuss the reasons why Muslim Women are always asked to stay at back row in worship.

3.10 Exemption of women in *Hayd* from observance of *Salât*

It is true that the menstruating women are not allowed to observe *Salât*, fast, perform *Tawaf* or sit in the mosque. This is a spiritual dimension of Islam. It does not in any deprive them of their spiritual status. It is a logical consideration for their physiological and psychological states at that moment. It is a relief for them so as to have a serene state of mind. In fact she is not expected to repay the missed *Salât* payers except fasting. This indeed is a special concession for women. This practice further demonstrates the sacredness of Islamic worship. There are some human customs too, where women in this state are not allowed to participate in some things.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

Why are women in their period not allowed to observe *Salât* in Islam?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have identified the major causes of these mistaken beliefs so that we will not be entrapped with one thing or another against the Islamic guidelines for women. There are other areas like the dress code and sex segregation which shall be discussed independently because of their direct bearing on women and society. Islam legislates but all it does about women is to safeguard their nature and rights.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have in this unit tackled the issues of misconceptions about the status of women in Islâm. We dealt with causes of Misconception about Muslim women by looking at the following: Purdah, female circumcision, inheritance, wife's corporal punishment, polygamy, two female witnesses, woman as Imam, staying in back rows and disallowing women in *Hayd* to engaging in *Şalât*.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Why do people have misconceptions about the Muslim Woman?
2. List and explain NINE of the misconceptions.
3. Tabulate and state one argument for and against FIVE of the misconceptions.

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UNIT 5 DRESS CODE (*HIJÂB*) OF A MUSLIM WOMAN

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
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3.6	Justification for <i>Hijâb</i>
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Islam envisages a society where women will be treated as dignified beings instead of sexual objects. It thus stipulates that the dressing of a Muslim woman is part of her faith. The natural shape of a woman requires that she should be clad properly so that her appearance would not seduce the onlookers. Various aspects of the dress code to be treated in this unit are the meaning, purpose, requirements and justification for *Hijâb*. It will also treat the nature of men and dangers of non-use of *Hijâb*.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that at the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the dress code of a Muslim Woman
- explain the nature of man
- discuss the purpose of dress code
- state its requirements
- justify the use of *Hijâb*
- discuss the dangers in disregarding the use of *Hijâb*.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Meaning of *Hijâb*

Hijâb is an Arabic word which means veil, barrier or screen. It has been adopted overtime to refer to a Muslim woman's dressing. There is no place however in the *Qur'ân* where the word is employed to mean what it is used for today. The word has been used in the following perspectives in the *Qur'ân*:

1. “..Between them shall be a Veil...that is a barrier between those in hell and paradise (Q7:46)
2. “Until the sun was hidden in the veil of night (38:32)
3. “...And between us and you is a screen...” (Q41:5)
4. “..Or from behind a Veil...” (Q42:51)
5. “..When you recite the Qur'ân , We put between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter an Invisible Veil” (Q17:45)
6. “..And when you ask (Prophet's wives) for anything you want, ask them from before screen...” (Q33:53)

We can see the varying usages of the *Hijâb* in the above *Qur'anic* verses. It is a veil, screen or barrier that will not allow one to see the other side. But no matter what a woman wears, one will still know that she is a female. Therefore, the employment of *Hijâb* for women dress code signifies that it should cover her in such a way that her shapes would not be seen as to cause sexual provocation. This is alluded to in the following verse of the *Qur'ân*:

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their private parts and not to display their adornment except that which ordinarily appears thereof and to draw their head covers over their chests and not to display their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands fathers, their sons." (Q24:31).

The term *Hijâb*, according to the description in this verse, can be assumed to be a Muslim woman's dress as well as the social rules and guidelines which govern her behavior in relation to the opposite sex.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is *Hijâb*? Relate its *Qur'anic* context with the contemporary usage.

3.2 Nature of Man

Islam takes the nature of man into cognizance and as such made realistic laws for men and women. The sexes have powerful urge for one another. Just as they also have for sex. Mawdudi corroborates this thus:

Man and woman have a perpetual urge for sexual love, with an unlimited capacity to attract and be attracted sexually. Their physical constitution, its proportions and shape, its complexion, even its contiguity and touch, have a strange spell for the opposite sex. Their voice, look, manner and appearance have magnetic powers

Of course, covering the intimate parts has been made an essential part of human nature. This informs why Allah (SWT) has not provided natural covering for the human body as in animals. Man has also been bestowed an innate feeling of bashfulness. This is evident in the fact that sane men will not ordinarily expose their intimate parts before others. But then, man is naturally after woman and can go any length in his attempt to possess a woman of his desire lawfully or unlawfully.

Taking this into consideration, Islam has pragmatically legislated a proper dress code for women, who naturally attract opposite sex because of their nature. No other form of dress can effectively conceal a woman's nakedness which is her entire body except the palm and the face. This dress suits their nature, as it will prevent them from tempting men or from being seduced by such men.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is the relationship between Hijâb and nature of man?

3.3 Purpose of Hijâb

Clothing is culturally a significant behavioral aspect of human beings. Its purpose is basically two in Islâm:

- a. To cover the intimate parts
- b. To adorn.

These two are intended in the following verses of the Qur'ân:

‘O children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment's upon you to cover your shame, as well as an adornment for you... (Q7:26)

‘O children of Adam! Wear your beautiful cloth at every time and place of prayer (Q7:3)

The purpose of Hijâb therefore, is not only to cover the intimate parts of woman but also to avoid the attraction of the opposite sex. Thus, in Islam, beautiful apparels are worn at the time of worship. It should not be for ostentation. Whatever a man or woman wears is part of her faith in Islam. Moral intent attached to covering the body is more important than the physical function. The quoted verses teach that veiling of the intimate parts precedes that of the adornment.

Hence Hijâb is a garment or covering of honour with spiritual underpinning. It distinguishes a Muslim woman from any other women. It accords her respect wherever she goes. Wearing Hijâb is a woman's assertion that she should be seen as a respectable being rather than a sex object.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Enumerate the reasons for the use of Hijâb.

3.4 Requirements for Hijâb

A Muslim woman's dressing is not just meant to conceal her nakedness and adorn her body. It must also glorify God. Hence, there are some conditions her outfits must fulfill especially while going out.

- (a) It should not be transparent, even when the cloth is loose as to show what she wears underneath.
- (b) It should not be tight fitting as to reveal her shapes or erogenous zones.
- (c) It should not be too exorbitant.
- (d) The dress should not incite haughtiness or pride in the wearer
- (e) The apparel should not be what makes her look like a male. This means that a Muslim woman is not allowed to wear male attires.
- (f) It should cover her entire body except her face and palms.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

State five requirements for the use of *Hijâb*.

3.6 Justification for *Hijâb*

The Islamic dress code is not entirely a novelty as people in one way or another have embraced something similar to it. The Bible has also

enjoined a woman to cover her head. It is a sign of great disgrace for her not to cover her head. (Numbers 5:16-18).

The practice of the Catholic Nuns in covering their heads confirms this practice. St. Paul also commented in the New Testament that:

And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head - it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or shaved off, she should cover her head. (I Corinthians 11:3-10).

Mother of Jesus wore something very similar, like the catholic sisters. The uninformed people see this as an Arab culture or an oppression of women. And so they clamour for the liberation of Muslim women from this old fashioned ways of dressing. The substances of their arguments include:

1. It makes them look old fashioned.
2. It does not allow them to be smart.
3. It denies them the display of their natural beauty.
4. It is also a form of slavery since they are not allowed to wear whatever they like.

As plausible as these arguments sound, they lack logical foundation. In the first instance, the same reason which makes other ladies go about in the streets wearing indecent dresses.

Secondly, the same right and acceptability which the Catholic Nuns enjoy is not exclusive, others have their own religious ways of appearance. The recent incident of French policemen preventing young Muslim women wearing headscarves from entering their high school is unforgettable.

That notwithstanding, a Muslim lady's dress has a religious and moral function. This is based on her faith. Fashion is never stable; it is ever changing. Islam simply gives the requirements and does not specify the colour or the type. A Muslim woman is not supposed to display her beauty as this is against the teachings of Islam. The issue of looking corporate at work place is subjective. What a woman wears has no relationship with the job she does. History testifies to how Muslim ladies have worked in high places and performed excellently.

The issue should be considered from the point of view of the status of women in Islam. In the guise of being corporate, most women have

resorted to wearing trousers like men. The proponents of this idea have never bothered to inform us how convenient it is for such wearers to ease themselves in the event of travelling and wanting to ease themselves in the open places! Some instances of improper or skimpy dressing have resulted in raping.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

The use of Hijâb is human right, discuss.

3.7 The Danger in Disregarding the Use of *Hijâb*

1. It can incite quest for materialism and show off by women.
2. It can have negative impact on a Muslim woman who wears it.
3. It can incite men to lust.

M. Thaxter Dickey has identified five reasons against indecent dressing:

1. It is unfair to men as they are easily aroused by sight.
2. It is a dangerous threat to chastity.
3. Immodest dress is unfair even to other women.
4. It is an indicator of one's character as your dressing is what you are.
5. It has negative impact on a religious woman's vocation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

State five evils of the non-use of *Hijâb*.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The place of *Hijâb* in Islam and in a Muslim woman's life is fundamentally ideological. It is just like an emblem of a woman's modesty and dignity. It also gives respectability to a woman wearing it.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has discussed *Hijâb* as a dress code for a Muslim Woman. It has considered the meaning of *Hijâb*, nature of man, purpose of *Hijâb*, justification for its use and the danger in the use of indecent dressing.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. How would you define *Hijâb* in a comprehensive manner?
2. State TWO major purposes of *Hijâb*.
3. Justify the use of *Hijâb* by Muslim Women.
4. Discuss the evils of indecent dressing.

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MODULE 2

Unit 1	Islâm and Sex Segregation
Unit 2	Islâm and Gender Equality
Unit 3	Rights of Women in Islâm
Unit 4	Motherhood in Islâm
Unit 5	Widowhood in Islâm

UNIT 1 ISLAM AND SEX SEGREGATION

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3.3	Basic Ethics of Islamic Social System
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Islamic laws guiding the social intercourse of men and women are not based on any superiority or inferiority of any sex. Its guidelines on segregating men and women regarding public affairs are as a result of the nature of both parties. This study will look at this issue by discussing Islamic concept of life, the spirit of Islamic law, the basics of Islamic social system, the protective strategies, reasons for segregation, areas of segregation and exceptions.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Students, at the end of this unit, should be able to:

- describe the Islamic concept of life
- discuss the philosophy of the Islamic Law
- explain the basics of Islamic social system
- give valid explanation for the segregation

- identify some areas of segregation
- discuss exception to the rule.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Islamic Concept of Life

The concept of Islam about everything in life can only be understood through the windows of the *Qur'ân* and *Hadith*. Bias and ignorance do make people castigate the principles of Islam. As long as other parameters are used to judge Islam without giving due considerations to the in-depth of any provision, there shall always be wrong opinions or misguidance.

Islam is ideological, comprehensive, practical and universal. It is meant to serve as a vehicle to convey humanity to God peacefully. It therefore, stipulates laws and rules guiding all aspects of man's life. It has rulings on his spiritual, moral, social, political and economic endeavours.

It beams light on men and women as stakeholders in building a powerful and mighty Ummah. It takes into cognizance their different nature. It does not leave them to wallow in misguidance or ignorance. It does not leave them to live in this world like animals. It fully recognizes the intellectual capacity of both man and woman. It acknowledges their weakness especially in the area of sex.

The issue of sex segregation is not a problem in Islam. It is in conformity with its ideals. The segregation is not because of inferiority or the like. Allah (SWT) has a reason for creating human beings and distinguishing between them inwardly and outwardly. The natural love between both sexes is inherent. Both can attract each other. The physical make up of one has unpredictable effect on the other. Thus, Islam considers it as a necessity to put measures that can safeguard both from falling into sin.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is the Islamic concept of life?

3.2 The Spirit of Law

The laws of Islam are meant to safeguard the life of man from danger, prevent him from falling into sins and prepare him for a harmonious religious life. The laws on prohibition are fewer than those on permissibility. Some laws are flexible while others are strict. One of such areas where the law is strict is the one that brings about

relationship between a man and a woman. Generally, the spirit of the Islamic law is preventive. This could be seen in how Allah (SWT) instructed Adam and Hawâ' not to come near the tree. The expression "do not come near" is preventive. Islâm believes in preventing crimes rather than proffering panacea. But when fabric of morality is torn, Islam recommends punishment. Since, Islam is practical in its ideals, its laws and etiquette are set out to safeguard human endeavors.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Describe the spirit of the Islamic law in relation to sex segregation.

3.3 Basic Ethics of Islamic Social System

The issue of sex segregation falls within the social realm of Islam. This system according to Abu `l – Ala Mawdudi has the following features:

1. Keeping the social environment free from all that can stimulate sexual feelings so that man can develop his physical and mental abilities purely.
2. Restricting sexual relations to marriage alone. This should be in addition with eradicating all pre or extra marital sexes.
3. Separating the sphere of work of both sexes based on their nature and physical abilities.
4. Positioning of man as the Maintainer of the family.
5. Granting all human rights to both sexes for the advancement of the society without either transgressing the limit set for it.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

List out the five basics of the Islamic social system.

3.4 The Three Shields

To strengthen the (five) basic ethics mentioned above, Islam has put some strategies in place. The first is that of self – purification. It imbues God-consciousness in an individual. Such an individual will not accommodate any sinful thought. Thus, man becomes a police of himself and this is the greatest shield of Islam for preventing individuals from sins and crimes. By this, he is able to caution himself from acts which are disallowed by Islam but has no any punitive measure. A woman, in this wise will not display her nakedness as this can stimulate sexual feelings in men. A man will also restrain his look, even when nobody is aware of his gaze, for that can also arouse sexual feeling in him. In the two instances, both man and woman try to purify their mind from these sinful acts.

The second shield is the Islamic criminal code. Islam is practical. It knows human beings would always remain humans. To safeguard the social system therefore, those who transgress the established bounds are publicly dealt with so that it will serve as deterrents to others and prevent the society from sliding into immorality. But sins like fornication, adultery and such like are severely sanctioned because of their terrible effects on the society.

In addition, Islam also puts preventive measures in place. The punitive laws prevent crimes by force while the self-purification strategies purify hearts from having any inclination towards evil. Islam however, goes further to create an impediment that strongly hinders perpetrating social crimes. In the event of somebody wanting to commit any crime, the laws have made the atmosphere unfriendly. Some of these preventive measures include the regulation on covering of intimate parts curbing of all that can incite sexual feelings and the like.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What is the relationship between the basic ethics and the shields in the social setting of Islam?

3.5 Reasons for Segregation

The basic reason for Islamic provision of segregation is to prevent falling into illicit sexual relations. It is also to protect the woman from being exploited by evil men due to her nature. It, on the other hand, wants to protect men from being seduced by lewd women. It also helps to balance the provision of the Islamic law on social relation. This is because the laws and etiquette are holistic, preventive and complimentary of one another. For example, having declared fornication and adultery unlawful, it proceeds to put in place measures that can help make it achievable. One of such is the prohibition of free-mixing between the opposite sexes which might lead to drawing closer to fornication.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Discuss the basic reason (s) for sex segregation in Islam.

3.6 Areas of Segregation

The bottom-line of all segregations is that men and women should not intermingle. The modern society believes that it is part of socialization for men and women to come together, and mix freely. But the attendant effects are seen all over. It may be true that some people can restrain

themselves during such intermingling, but Islam does not take any chance as nobody knows who is who. Some areas of the segregation include the following:

- **Separating Bedding of Children**

The Prophetic declaration is that moral training should start from tender age. He says, “*Order your children to observe Salât at the age of seven. Beat them lightly, if they do not by the age of ten. And separate them in their bedding*” (Abu Dawud). This is a clear issue and it is the best guidance for any healthy society. The modern society is witnessing a lot of incest, sexual harassment and such like.

- **Separate Rows in the Mosque**

Şalât is a serious affair when all men have to stand before God to demonstrate their loyalty. Judging from reality of the kind of relationship which exist between both sexes, Islam disallows them mixing freely in the presence of Allah (SWT). Hence, women occupy the back rows in the mosque not because they are inferior but to avoid satanic temptation. It is a matter of spiritual affair and is as well logical. For women to form their rows behind men is better than men doing so behind women in the sense that the tendency of temptation in the latter is very high.

- **Sitting Arrangement in Gatherings**

Apart from Şalât Islam still maintains that both sexes should sit separately in Muslim gatherings. This still aims at preventing unlawful relations that may develop and lead to sin. It is also to instill discipline in the Muslims.

- **Prohibition of Seclusion with the Opposite Sex**

Islam does not allow a man to be in seclusion (room office, etc) with any woman other than his wife or those in prohibited categories. It is a genuine preventive measure against fornication and adultery.

- **Ruling on Shaking Hands and Free-Mixing**

Islam rules against a permissive society where men and women shake hands indiscriminately, sit together and play without any restraint.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

List three areas of sex segregation in Islam and discuss their implications.

3.7 Areas of Exception

It is necessary to emphasize that the issue of sex segregation in Islam does not mean that both sexes cannot interact in their society. They can do so as long as they observe the limits of Islam. Women might have cause to take up appointment or attend same schools with men.

People have often used women observing *Ṣalât* side by side with men during Hajj as evidence to debunk sex segregation. Such situation of women and men mixing together is peculiar to only *Umrah* or *Hajj* season. The critics cannot give other example where such occurs even in other mosques in Makkah or Madinah. The major factor responsible for the intermingling is the impossibility of managing such a huge population of pilgrims that visit the place for pilgrimage at the same time.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Women are to be absolutely segregated from men in Islam, discuss.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The issue of sex segregation in Islam is not gender discriminatory but a preventive measure against all lewdness between men and women. The provision of Islam in this regard is in consonance with its global message which allows marriage as the only legitimate relationship between a man and woman. Islam strongly rules against social interaction that allows men and women to be in seclusion but some levels of interactions are allowed for men and women within the society with strict adherence to the Islamic social guidelines. The segregation should be seen as an antidote to social discipline and decorum.

5.0 SUMMARY

Our focus in this unit has been a discourse on the Islamic perspective on the issue of sex segregation. The following points have been considered: Islamic concept of life, the spirit of the law, basic ethics of Islamic social system, the three shields, reasons and areas of the segregation.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the connotation of sex segregation in Islam?
2. Discuss the basic ethics of Islamic social system in relation to sex segregation
3. Explain the reasons for sex segregation in Islam.
4. No exception to sex segregation in Islam, discuss.

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UNIT 2 ISLAM AND GENDER EQUALITY

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3.2	Equality of Origin
3.3	Deprivation of the Garden of Eden
3.4	Status of the Mother
3.5	Seeking Knowledge
3.6	Observance of Religious Rites
3.7	Women and their Duties
3.8	Home Management
3.9	Punishment
3.10	Striking a Balance
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Islam and gender equality is an exposition of the position of Islam on whether women are equal to men or not. The study has the following aspects in view: humanity of Women, equality of origin, deprivation of the Garden of Eden, status of the Mother, seeking knowledge, oath of Islam, observance of religious rites, women rights and duties, home management, rewards, punishment, striking a balance and the gender equality in present day.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that at the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the nature of gender equality in Islam
- explain the complimentary roles of men and women in society
- discuss aspects of gender equality in Islam
- compare gender equality in Islam to the modern society.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Humanity of Women

At a time when the so called religionists and philosophers were debating whether women had animal or human souls, Islam appeared to declare that:

And their Lord has accepted of them, and answered them:
“Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female: you are members, one of another (Q3: 195)

In Islam, a woman is an independent being who has a soul. The kind of soul a man has is what she has. There has never been any debate in Islam about her humanity. Disparaging comments are never passed about her in the *Qur’ân* and *Hadith*. Rather, chapters like *Nisâi* and *Nūr* were largely devoted to women affairs.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Describe the humanity of women in Islam.

3.2 Equality of Origin

In Islamic context, men and women are equal in their origin. This is mentioned in the following portion of the *Qur’ân*:

“O Mankind! Be careful of (Your duty to) your Lord, who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same kind and spread from these too many men and women...” (Q4:1)

All men emanated from Adam and Hawâ’. The process of birth and death of both are not different. Both cry at birth and bear the rigors of life. The pain a woman experiences during pregnancy and child delivery is not connected with any sin whatsoever. It is only a divine design to prepare and condition women for their primary task of children upbringing. It is logical that a woman who has carried pregnancy for about nine months will be more disposed to jealously caring for the child after birth.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How are women equal to men in origin?

3.3 Deprivation of the Garden of Eden

The popular belief in many quarters is that the woman was the cause of losing the Garden of Eden. That is, Eve was the one who made Adam disobey Allah (SWT). Islam does not for a moment allude to this erroneous belief. It puts the record straight by clearly declaring both as wrong. In fact, Q20:121 speaks more about Adam in this respect than Hawâ'. The woman was equal to man in disobedience to Allah (SWT). Thereafter, it presents how both of them repented and were forgiven. This is contained in the following verses of the *Qur'ân* (Q2:36, 7:20-24). Hence, the equal status of the woman to a man is clearly stated from the time of creation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

How does Islam treat the issue of Adam's garden?

3.4 Status of Mothers

The esteem position of Islam on mothers is unique. Apart from enjoining kindness to both parents, Islam exhorts great concern for mothers for their noble roles during pregnancy, childbirth and nursing. The mother is to be honored thrice before the father. Here, we can see that her status is above that of the father. This means that if she has six children, she is entitled to eighteen honours while that of the father is just six.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

There is gender inequality with regards to treatment of parents by children, discuss.

3.5 Seeking Knowledge

This is obligatory for both men and women. It is the bedrock of the religion. Islam in all ways resents ignorance. It encourages a knowledgeable daughter, wife and mother. It does not place any barrier in her search for knowledge. As men need it to discharge their duties, women also need it in their private and public life.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

How are women equal to men in the search for knowledge?

3.6 Observance of Religious Rites

Women are enjoined to observe religious rites just as the men. All must uphold the articles of faith. They are also expected to uphold all the pillars of Islam vis-à-vis the *Salât*, *Zakât*, *Şawm* and *Hajj*. Due to their physical and physiological nature, they are to maintain their dress code in *Şalât* and *Hajj*. Anything contrary to this will contravene the Islamic provisions which enjoin them to cover their nakedness. The required dress code of men during *Umrah* or *Hajj* is in conformity with the limits of their nakedness. It could even be argued that women are more favoured in this wise than men.

A woman, as a favour, is not allowed to observe *Şalât* or fast for some days during her periods.

The ritual bath of *janâbah* is compulsory for both sexes. The baths special to her are *hayd* and *nifâs*. This is understandable because of her nature. In this wise also, she is still exempted from prayers as long as her period lasts. There is never a time a man is exempted from *Şalât*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

The observance of religious rites favour men than women, explain.

3.7 Women and their Duties

Both men and women are Vicegerents of Allah (SWT) on earth. They are equal in terms of their rights and duties. Islam grants each of them a specific role to play in providing the society with virtuous citizens. They have equal rights to life, honour and privacy. The sanction of Islam on those who slander women is a capital punishment.

“It is forbidden for a Muslim to take the life, honour and property of another Muslim (Bukhari)

Women enjoy other rights as wives or daughters, freedom of expression and disposal of properties.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

What is your views on women rights not being absolute in Islam?

3.8 Home Management

A woman is in charge of managing the home under the supervision of the husband. Her primary duty is within the home. Some provisions guiding *Ṣalât Jumua 'h*, Jihad and the like were made flexible for her so as to allow her have enough time to play her role. She must not make it a rule to compete with men in public life. The Prophet (SAW) has said that:

“The woman is the ruler over the house of her husband, and she is answerable for the conduct of her duties” (Bukhari)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

Home management as a duty is restrictive of women's roles. Discuss.

3.9 Punishment

Gender equality holds for both sexes in punishment for sins and crimes. The hand of a woman who commits theft shall be amputated. There are other stipulated punishments for crimes like fornication, adultery, armed robbery and murder. Ordinarily, one may expect that, due to the soft nature of women, a female fornicator should have lesser strokes of the cane than the male fornicator. This is not so, as each soul shall be held liable for whatever it does. It is the same carnal desire which prompts a man to commit sin that induces a woman too. The position of Islam is that:

“Every soul will be (held) in pledges for its deeds” (Q74:38)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

Why is the criminal code applicable to both men and women alike?

3.10 Striking a Balance

Islam, as part of its preventive measures, prohibits a woman from using perfume in the public places but allows it for men. It also forbids men the use of gold. In the former, a man's role involves frequent interaction with the society, so he needs to appear nice and be amiable. Naturally too, he does not have physical shape which can attract the opposite sex like that of a female.

A woman's participation in the communal activities is not without some restrictions. She is naturally attractive. Her use of perfume will attract more attention to her. By her nature, she is expected to keep a higher level of hygiene. The use of perfume may conceal her body odour.

On the other hand, she can use gold. A man is to face serious business of the society. Thus, all that can serve as luxury and distract him are guided against. In the two cases, Islam has struck a balance of equality between both sexes.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

How does Islam bring about a balance in permitted or prohibited things for both sexes?

3.11 Islam and Gender Equality

The concept of equality of women and men in Islam is enviable and astonishing. Islam as a practical religion distinguishes between both sexes with regards to their special functions in life. This has been vehemently attacked by Non-Muslims and even apologetic Muslims. There are physiological, biological and psychological differences in men and women which determine their functions in the society.

Taking of oath is seen by Islam as a covenant between a man and his God. Issues of sex or status are no barriers. This is because all men have the same soul which commits them to moral obligations. During the time of the Prophet (SAW) people used to take oath to serve the cause of Allah (SWT). The oath, apart from the declaration of faith, was a formality of standing for Islam in all situations. The men folk will place their palms on that of the Prophet. This act was known as *Bay'ah*. Women's oath was also accepted. The Prophet (SAW) would simply take their statements. The women protested that he did not clasp their palms like that of men, but he told them that their statement was enough for Him. This shows that the oaths of women were different from that of men or their husbands. This removes any blind obedience to their husband's religion. It also confirms the independent identity of a Muslim woman. It further reflects her competence in discharging responsibilities and loyalty in Allah (SWT).

Thus, any oath taken is binding on both men and women in Islam. The following verse of the *Qur'ân* states how women took oath with the Prophet Muhammad:

O Prophet, When believing women come to you to make a covenant with you that they will not associate in worship anything with God, nor steal, nor fornicate, nor kill their own children, nor slander anyone, nor disobey you in any just matter, then make a covenant with them and pray to God for the forgiveness of their sins. Indeed God is forgiving and most merciful (60:12).

The case of women outside Islam is very different. A woman is allowed and expected to absolutely compete with men in all sectors. This has largely been a lip-service; and where it holds, women are negatively affected regarding the home front responsibilities. The right of a woman in Islam is to be gainfully employed if necessity arises and should not be discriminated against in her salary.

Therefore, Islam does not make women subservient to men. This is evident in her right to education. Islam recognizes her as a honourable human being that has roles to play in the society and in pleasing her Lord.

The knowledge of priorities (*awlawiyât*) in Islam often gives preference to what is of communal benefit than that of individual. So, a woman who is a specialist in an area of study cannot because of prevailing circumstances distance herself from the Ummah or with-hold her services from the benefit of all. Similarly, she cannot because of some aspects of the religion neglect acquisition of knowledge. She cannot also say because she does not intend to work in public or private establishment refuse to go for higher or further studies. She should see education as worship just as she sees her five daily *Ṣalât*.

She should also be prepared to render services to the society if required by the government or ministries. Apart from working, she will serve as a good model and teach her co-workers the beauty of Islam.

Islam has also placed both sexes on the same pedestal with regard to rewards and punishment. There is no discrimination as to the amount of rewards due to a man or woman for carrying out good deeds.

“Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily to him will we give a new life that is good and pure, and we will bestow on such their reward according to their actions (Q16:97)

The reward for observance of a congregational *Ṣalât* prayer is twenty five or twenty seven times that of individual. The question may arise as to what becomes of women who observe *Ṣalât* at home since congregational *Ṣalât* is more rewarding than individual's. The same principle holds that her *Ṣalât* at home is more rewarding. When men go for Jihad, the Prophet has said her own Jihad is the performance of Hajj.

The permission granted women not to compulsorily attend the mosque; *jumu'at* and *Eid Ṣalât* are spiritual rights which make women equal to men. The preference of women not being compelled to attend the five congregational obligatory *Salât* is in consideration of additional burden this might place on her as a wife or mother. The fairness of Islam is

demonstrated in allowing women not to repay the missed *Ṣalât* during their periods or after childbirth. Since these are natural things to women, they are freed from the obligations of having to repay five or forty day *Ṣalât*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11

- How is the modern gender equality a farce?
- How are women and men placed under the same cadre with respect to rewards?
- How would you treat oath taking by women as a matter of gender equality

4.0 CONCLUSION

The rights granted to women, roles assigned to them, abrogation of infanticide and the raised status of the mother above that of the father are evidence of rightful placement of women by Islam. They remain in the same realm with men in spiritual and moral matters. They play complimentary roles in other matters of life due to their natural make-up. The clamour for gender equality is alien to Islam. This is because Islam had from the word go granted women all their rights. More importantly, Islam does not believe in absolute equality of both sexes as this is against their natural gifts. The society cannot thrive with the absence or neglect of either.

5.0SUMMARY

The object of this unit has been a structured discourse on Islam and gender equality. The following were discussed: humanity of women, equality of origin, deprivation of the Garden of Eden, status of the mother, seeking knowledge, oath-taken in Islam, observance of religious rites, women rights and duties, home management, rewards, punishment, striking a balance in Islam and gender equality.

6.0TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Explain the humanity of women and their origin in Islam
2. List and discuss nine ways of gender equality in Islam.
3. Discuss the concept of gender equality.

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UNIT 3 RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN ISLAM

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3.2	Perspectives on Women Rights
3.3	Spiritual Rights
3.4	Legal Rights
3.5	Economic Rights
3.6	Social Rights
3.7	Political Rights
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The study of women rights is an enlightening aspect of Islam. It explains how Islam treats them as worthy human beings expected to play some private and public roles in the society. In this light we shall discuss the *Sharī'ah* framework and the Islamic perspectives on these rights. Thereafter, we would specifically treat the spiritual, legal, economic, social and political rights of women in Islam.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain the rights granted women in Islam
- discuss *Sharī'ah* framework on these rights
- mention specific rights of women.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Framework of the *Sharī'ah*

Sharī'ah remains the fountain of Islam. Muslims derive their guidance from it. The *Qur'ān* and the practices of the Prophet (SAW) are its primary sources. To accommodate the growing human society, some other secondary sources are put in place. As at the time of the *Qur'ānic* revelation, many challenges encountered by women are now non-existent. The educational setting was not as it is today. The political and

economic atmospheres were not also as it is today. But the universality of the *Sharī'ah* has taken care of this. Talking of women rights therefore, the law has put the unchangeable guidelines in place. And this has always safeguarded the women at all times.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How did Islam take care of non-existing women issues at the time of the *Qur'ānic* revelation?

3.2 Perspectives on women Rights

The issue of women right today is largely informed by people's ideological leanings. The problem arises when non-Islamic parameters are used to treat Islamic issues. The perspective from which the issue of the rights of a woman is considered will largely influence one's judgement. The wrong treatment of women in most Muslim enclaves has also informed many wrong notions against their rightful place within Islam. An instance is the feminist author, Nawal El-Saadawi, who states that:

Among the sacred duties of the wife is complete obedience to the husband. She is not allowed to differ with him, to ask questions, or even to argue certain points. The man, on the other hand, is not expected to obey his wife.

The above statement is far from the truth. The Prophet Muhammad has declared that:

"No obedience is due to any human being if he is commanded to do things which constitute disobedience to the Creator (Muslim)

It is an obvious fact that the practice of Islam in all ramifications has been distorted and bastardized in many countries of the world. So, it gives the critics an opportunity to nail Islam without having recourse to the original sources of Islam. Also, the biased and non-Islamic concepts have been used as parameters to determine the rights of a woman in Islam. This should not be so. Some others have limited the rights of women to the issue of marriage alone, especially on how a man has the right to marry four wives. All these and many more are not fair judgement of woman's rights in Islam.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How will you appraise women rights in Islam?

3.3 The Spiritual Rights

A woman is on the same pedestal with a man in spiritual rights. She is enjoined to serve her Lord to the best of her ability. Her husband has no right to debar her from her religious obligations. They are both accountable to Allah (SWT) in this regard. She has the right to observe *Ṣalât* in the mosque without anybody preventing her. She is entitled (in full measures) to rewards for all good acts. The *Qur'ân* states thus:

“Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily, to him will we give a life”

The only aspect she needs her husband's consent is when engaging in voluntary fasting and pilgrimage.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Describe the extent of a Muslim woman's rights in Islam.

3.4 Legal Rights

The legal rights granted women in Islam are unparalleled in the annals of history. The right to give testimony in respect of financial matters is put in place. In the event of being a victim of intentional or unintentional homicide, the blood money known as *diyyah* must be paid on her. The law of Islam does not discriminate in its criminal laws. It requires four witnesses to prove that a woman has committed fornication. It is also a heinous crime to wrongly accuse a woman of fornication. Such culprit shall be subjected to eighty strokes of the cane. A woman who is forced into sex is declared innocent under the law. The Qur'anic injunction in this respect is that:

“And those who launch a charge against chaste women, and produce not four witness , flog them with eighty stripes and reject their evidence ever after...”(Q24:4)

The above verse grants a woman the right to be honoured by protecting her dignity from the malicious ones.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

A Muslim woman has limited legal rights. Discuss.

3.5 Economic Rights

A woman in Islam is granted the right to own and keep property. Her wealth is her own belonging. Neither the husband nor the family can confiscate her property. She is also not bound to spend her wealth on the family. It is part of her financial right that husband provides food, clothing and shelter for her. Even if she is richer than the husband, she is not bound by Islamic law to spend on the family. However, she can out of her own volition participate in the financial maintenance of the home.

A Woman has the right of inheritance. She is allotted half of a man's share. That Islam even legislates that she is entitled to a specific portion is remarkable. Islam should have ordinarily been silent about her since she has no binding financial obligation on the family upkeep. Yet, it has by right given her a particular share which will be at her disposal in addition to what she possesses.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Justify the economic right of a woman under the Islamic law (bearing in mind that she has no binding financial obligation on the family).

3.6 Social Rights

Another golden right Islam grants a woman is that of spouse selection. Islam distinguishes between when she is a virgin and a widow. In the case of the latter, the parents have more active roles to play but must still seek her consent for final decision. She can reject the choice of her parents if she does not like the suitor. This is because love between the husband and wife is necessary in life partnership. There is no compulsion in Islamic marriage. However, the parents may exercise the power of *ijbar* (judiciously compelling) on their daughter if she is immature as to know the right choice for herself. As for a widow or divorcee the Islamic law does not allow anybody to inherit them. Their consent must be sought and the marriage must be consummated normally.

Dowry is one of the basic obligations in any legitimate marriage. Contrary to our cultural norms whereby the family will demand for many items on the daughter and share it amongst themselves, it is her right in Islam to demand for whatever she wants from her suitor. This issue of dowry is in recognition of the worth of a woman in the society. A man cannot just grab her like an animal. He has to follow due process. One of which is that he must give her the *Mahr*. The *Qur'ân* declares thus:

"And give women their nuptial gifts..." (Q 4:4)

The divorced woman is entitled to child support. The husband must pay for the breastfeeding of the child and other services rendered. The child will be in her custody till it attains the age of weaning. This surely guarantees the right of the child to breastfeeding and proper growth. Even if the wife refuses to breastfeed, the husband has to look for a woman who will do that and pay accordingly. It also grants the woman access to her child, unlike what prevails in other cultures whereby the wife may be denied such access.

Islam grants a Muslim woman the right to seek for divorce from her husband if she is being ill-treated or betrayed. If he refuses, she can take her case to an Islamic Court, where the husband will be directed to grant it if found guilty. The woman will only pay back her dowry in lieu.

Another right she enjoys is to retain her maiden name. Marriage in Islam does not erode away the identity of the woman. She remains the daughter of her father and a wife to her husband. She also has sexual right. She has right to her husband as he has towards her. He cannot without reason abandon her bed. Even where a man has more than one wife, he must share the nights and days evenly amongst them. The books of Islamic jurisprudence specify the number of days a man is allowed to stay away from his wife after which he is considered a sinner and will also be liable if she commits adultery.

A woman is also entitled to fair treatment. Islam has enjoined men to treat their wives fairly. The *Qur'anic* injunction reads:

"Live with them (your wives) on a footing of kindness and equity. If you dislike them it may be that you dislike something in which Allah (SWT) has placed a great deal of good" (4:19).

The husband must respect his wife. The Prophet regarded women as fragile vessels which must not be broken. He equally said that the best of men are the nicest to their wives.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

State the social rights of a woman in Islam.

3.7 Political Rights

Islam grants women political rights. They can participate in electioneering process so long as it does not affect the Islamic limits. There is no freedom or right without limitation. Islam disallows women from assuming political roles that will jeopardize the home front or invite temptations. It allows her freedom of expression in a polite manner. She can express her views and also criticize. We read of a woman by name Khawlah bint Thalabah who took her husband's case to the Prophet (SAW). She won the case as Allah (SWT) responded to her plight as revealed below:

Allah (SWT) has heard and accepted the statement of the woman who pleads with you (the Prophet) concerning her husband and carries her complaint to Allah, and Allah (SWT) hears the arguments between both of you for Allah (SWT) hears and sees all things.... (58:1).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Does political right of a Muslim woman has limitation in Islam?

4.0 CONCLUSION

The rights of women in Islam are never toiled with as they have great roles to play in the development of the society. All the rights granted them are meant to help them contribute meaningfully. These rights also show their worth as partners of men in progress. Denial of any of the rights will truncate the equilibrium in the society.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have been discussing the Islamic position on the rights of women. We have talked about the framework of the *Shari'ah*, the perspective on these rights and the specific rights vis a-vis the spiritual, Legal, economic, social and political.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is meant by women rights in Islam?
2. Differentiate between human rights and women rights.
3. Enumerate the basic women rights in Islam.
4. Try to identify the areas of women rights abuses among the Muslims today.

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UNIT 4 MOTHERHOOD IN ISLAM

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	<i>Qur'anic</i> Position on the Mother
3.2	Prophetic Position on the Mother
3.3	The four stages of Motherhood
3.4	Motherhood as an Institution
3.5	Role of Mother in Islam
3.6	Division of Labour
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is a study which has child care in focus. It is an institution which is central to societal reconstruction. It welcomes the baby into the world and caters for it till maturity. Reciprocally, the child is expected to be kind to the mother and also care for her most especially at old age when she would look like a child in her feebleness. This study will tackle the issue of motherhood in the following perspectives: *Qur'anic* injunction and Prophetic traditions in respect of mother, division of labour, institution, role and stages of motherhood.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that at the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the *Qur'anic* injunctions and Prophetic traditions on mother
- discuss motherhood as an institution
- explain the four stages of motherhood
- state the role of motherhood in Islam
- discuss the essence of division of labour in the family.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Qur'ânic Position on the Mother

Allah (SWT) attaches great importance to the place and position of parents to the extent that they are next after obedience to Him. The following verse of the *Qur'ân* declares:

Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, And that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: 'My Lord! Bestow on them your mercy as they cherished me in childhood' (17:23-24).

Thereafter, the *Qur'ân* devotes special attention to mothers for their pains in carrying, delivering and caring for children. The following verse explains:

And we have enjoined on man to be good to his parents: In travail upon travail did his mother bear him and in two years was his weaning. Show gratitude to me and to your parents (31:14)

These two portions suffice for this segment. You will note that the kindness to parents is juxtaposed with their worship of Allah. This implies that the success of children in this world in pleasing their Lord rests largely with the backgrounds the parents give them. God also enjoins kindness, respect and prayers for them. He calls on man to do all these while recalling how they cared for him while he was young; thus he is made to know that motherhood has to do with the care of children from childhood till maturity.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How will you describe the position of parents and mothers especially before Allah (SWT)?

3.2 Prophetic Position on the Mother

The noble Prophet (SAW) threw more lights on the strategic position of the mother. The most direct tradition on the position of the mother is the following:

A man came to the prophet and asked him: “O Messenger of Allah, who among the people is most worthy of my good company?” The prophet said, “Your mother. The man asked, “then who?”. The Prophet again said, “Your mother. The man asked, ‘Then who?’ The prophet again said, ‘Your mother,’ The prophet said, “Then who?” The prophet said, “Then your father” (Bukhari & Muslim.)

This only affirms further that motherhood is a very great institution. The mother ranks above the father; and this by implication also shows that she has three extra roles to play. When she performs these tasks diligently, then she would have lived up to expectation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Why in your own view do you think the Prophet (SAW) mentioned mother thrice before the father?

3.3 The Four Stages of Motherhood

One does not need to go too far before realizing the strategic place Islam has positioned women. It is a delicate pedestal. In line with the above *Hadith* of the Prophet, some reasons have been deduced why it is important for man to be kind to his mother.

The first reason could be the long period of pregnancy a woman undergoes. This is further referred to in the *Qur’ân* thus:

And we enjoined on man to be dutiful and kind to his parents. His mother bears him with hardship. And she brings him forth with hardship, and the bearing of him, and the weaning of him is thirty months, till when he attains full strength and reaches forty years..... (Q 46: 15).

The implication of this stage is that a mother who has borne the pain of carrying the baby for nine months or thereabout is naturally expected to be more caring about the child after birth. To be able to undergo this laborious task, she has been endowed with love, emotion and patience needed to bear the pain of child upbringing.

The second reason is that the period of delivery is another sacrifice a mother makes in the course of bearing children for the society. Islam apportions for her a reward in this respect as a compensation for her to the extent of her pain. She has been seriously warned not to abort, as this is tantamount to taking life and thus punishable.

The third reason, without mincing words, is that Islam has specifically directed mothers to breastfeed their babies for two whole years. Even in the event of divorce, a man must still pay a woman for this service.

The fourth stage or reason is that the actual children upbringing. This starts when the baby starts to eat solid food till maturity. Although the father participates in this regard, it never equals the concern of the mother.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss the four stages of motherhood.

3.4 Motherhood as an Institution

Motherhood is an institution in Islam. It is a trust as well as a responsibility. It is a serious task that swells the reward of mothers three times higher than that of a father. She is the Builder of the family, the society and the nation. She is regarded as a *madrasah* (School). This is because all children (male and female) must pass through her. She is the first Instructor of the children. The quality of the training she gives them would necessarily be reflected in the society. A virtuous and strong society is a reflection of the roles of mothers. But if the society is wallowing in moral depravity, the mother cannot be completely absolved.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Describe the institution of motherhood in Islam.

3.5 Role of Mother in Islam

When we talk of a Muslim woman as a wife, it is different from her being a mother. A wife may never become a mother, but a mother must have been a wife.

A Muslim woman as a mother has the focus for children upbringing and societal reconstruction. Her primary roles revolve around the child. Children are what their mothers make them. She must first and foremost, safeguard her pregnancy. On no account must she resort to the use of any means to terminate the life of the child except her own life is medically established to be in danger. The *Qur'ân* states that

“Do not kill your children for fear of want; we shall provide for them as well as for you: verily, killing them is a great sin” (Q 17: 31)

She must not discriminate among the children. Be it a boy or a girl, she must show gratitude to Allah. It is the right of the child that she properly breastfeeds him or her. She should take care of herself so as to be able to cater for the physical, psychological and intellectual need of the child. A Muslim Mother must maintain a high level of hygiene as a nursing mother. She should not through carelessness let the child suffer injury or contract diseases.

It is her primary duty to teach the child necessary Islamic ethics from infancy. It is the ideal that the first expression the child grasps should be the saying of *'lâ ilâha illallah'*. She is the first teacher of her child. Hence, she must provide her child with sound education in collaboration with the father.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

What are the specific roles of a Muslim woman as a mother?

3.6 Division of Labour

The responsibility of rearing and nurturing a baby till maturity is considered a Herculean task that is why Allah (SWT) has blessed them with maternal instinct to carry out their roles. To achieve the object of motherhood, which is to build a viable society fulfilling the will of the Creator, Islâm has divided jobs between men and women. In the first place, the task of bearing and rearing children are enough for a responsible mother. Imposing anything extra will be tantamount to overburdening her.

Therefore, Islam, while allowing a woman to work outside home, so far it does not jeopardize her primary roles, it encourages women to be closer to their children than being always outside at the expense of giving their children required time.

The feeding, clothing and shelter of the family are completely man's responsibility so that the roles will be balanced. The decadence in our society today could not be divorced from the absence or lack of women playing their roles as mothers. Due to economic consideration, most mothers now opt for jobs at places where they are cut off from their primary assignments.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

What implication has division of role on motherhood?

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have discussed the place of motherhood in Islam and the expected roles to be played by this institution. This role cannot be played by anybody but the mothers. The failure of the society is their failure. Hence, the society should create an enabling atmosphere for the women so that they can play their roles.

5.0 SUMMARY

The focus of this unit has been injunctions of the *Qur'ân* and *Hadith* on the delicate position of the mother as an institution, her roles and natural division of roles.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. How will you describe the *Qur'ânic* views on the position of women?
2. Discuss the institution of motherhood.
3. Is there any differentiation in roles played by father and mother?
4. Why is the mother's status three times raised above that of the father?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 WIDOWHOOD IN ISLAM

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
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3.2	Stages of Women in Life
3.3	The Muslim Widow
3.5	Waiting Period (<i>Iddah</i>)
3.4	Challenge of Widowhood
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Life is laden with several experiences of which widowhood is one. Islam as a way of life exhorts genuine concern for widows. Our discourse in this unit shall revolve around various experiences of a woman as a daughter, wife, mother, and divorcee, widow, during waiting period, practice of widowhood and challenges therein and thereafter.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this study, students should be able to:

- discuss different life experiences of a woman
- describe the treatment of widows in Islam
- identify wrong practices in widowhood
- explain custody of children in widowhood
- discuss the challenges of widowhood.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Concept of Widowhood in Islam

Widowhood is said to have occurred when either of the couple dies and when the surviving partner has not especially remarried. It is usually more telling on the women. This is because the husband is supposed to be the breadwinner of the family. On his death, she would be left with responsibility of fending for herself and the children. It is a stage in

most women's life. The experience could be bitter if the woman is jobless and has no responsible family members to come to her aid. There are different cultural practices of widowhood. Some of these practices undermine the mood of the widow and her worth as a dignified human being. So, Islam enjoins the Ummah to care for them.

Unfortunately, the Islamic concept of widowhood has been tainted with several cultural practices. Some impose stringent measures on women as they are even at times accused of being the cause of their husbands' death. Others restrict them to wearing black dress during the period of mourning. Sacrifices were required in some cultures before a woman could be set free from widowhood. Some do not allow their women to sleep throughout the nights of their husbands' death because they believe he will visit them that night. All these restrictions and excesses are unfair to women who have lost their husbands and have children to cater for. The women in most cultures are compelled to marry the husband's brother or any other member of the family. She has no right in the inheritance of her husband except through her male or at times female children.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Describe the concept of widowhood in Islam.

3.2 Stages of Women in Life

There are three basic stages a woman undergoes in life. Each of this stage has its peculiarity. These are stated below:

- **The Woman as a Daughter**

The first stage in any woman's life is to be a daughter. She lives under the care of her parents. Her feeding, shelter, training, clothing and education lie on them. Islam restrains a woman from staying alone without being under the care of anybody at any point in time. This is to safeguard her dignity and her soft nature so that no man will take that advantage to seduce her. One of the basic elements of marriage is the consent of the father or guardian. At this stage, she has her parents as her sponsors. The only major vicissitude of life she may suffer is to become an orphan.

- **The Woman as a Wife**

The next stage a woman undergoes is that of being a wife. This can only be through a legitimate marriage. Any wedlock outside marriage does not have any binding responsibility. Its legal implication however, is

that neither the wife nor the child can inherit the man. Similarly the law on widowhood cannot be applied on such a woman since she is nothing but a fornicator or adulteress. Apart from that, such a woman cannot legally report her sex partner for any ill-behaviour at the Islamic court. Here, it is the duty of the husband to fully provide shelter, feeding and clothing for his wife within his financial limits. A woman might become a divorcee or widow at this stage.

The woman becoming a divorcee is an unpalatable experience. The husband who divorces his wife would still have to provide her accommodation under his roof for probable reconciliation. If that fails, she will then return to her parents or guardian. Islam strongly detests divorce because of the attendant effects like family breakdown, emotional instability of the children and the woman herself not finding a home to settle.

- **The Woman as a Mother**

A woman who is legitimately joined in marriage to a man and thereafter have children. She will be entitled to all the rights of a mother in Islam. The husband (the father) must provide all the physical, moral and material support for her during pregnancy. It is a grievous sin to deny the pregnancy in an attempt to get rid of her. Should it happen that he either genuinely or wrongly accuses his wife of indecency, the Islamic court will wade in to separate both of them for life. At childbirth and thereafter, the father must shoulder the hospital expenses. He must actively assist her in upbringing the child.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Identify the most critical stage in a woman's life and state your reasons.

3.3 The Muslim Widow

The life of every man lies in the hand of God. No woman will go into marriage and prays to become a widow. But when this occurs, Islâm exhorts the society to rally around and take care of her. A woman might become a widow shortly after marriage or at another time. At any rate, a woman who is still young or has not become menopausal will prefer to re-marry than remain alone. There are, however, some who will prefer remaining single than remarrying. This is always personal. She might have had matured children that would take care of her. It could also be that she has taken a vow with her husband not to remarry. This, Islam does not support. She can break such a vow and remarry.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW), in word and action showed good examples in caring for the widows. His first and even most of his wives were widows. He showed compassion and had deep love for them. He gave the glad tiding that those who are kind and treat the widows kindly would be very close to him in paradise.

A Muslim Widow is not allowed to involve herself in wailing on the death of her husband. This is regarded as an act of *Jâhiliyyah* by the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). A Muslim woman, although sad, should not wail as to injure herself. She must take heart and know that it is the decree of Allah (SWT) that her husband will die before her. She should not utter words depicting unfaithfulness. She must repose her trust in Allah.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the Islamic treatment of widows.

3.4 Waiting Period (*Iddah*)

Islam stipulates that a woman observes *Iddah* in respect of her husband and not her father. This shows the kind of relationship Allah (SWT) has placed between the husband and wife. This signifies that a woman still respect her husband after his death. Hence, observance of the *iddah* is compulsory on the wife according to this verse of the *Qur'ân*:

“...the *Iddah* of widows is four months ten days... (Q2:234)

Iddah denotes the length of time a woman should keep herself away from remarriage if she were a divorcee or widow. The major wisdom behind the *Iddah* is to be sure that the woman is not pregnant. In the case of a widow, it is much more than that. It is a mourning period for her. She needs some times to get over the shock and be emotionally stabilized. Her immediate rush into another marriage might hit the rock as the disposition of the new husband might be sharply different from that of the former husband. That of the Divorcee has in addition to the earlier reason reconciliatory perspective.

In the case of the divorcee, her *iddah* is three months but will end if she is pregnant and delivers the second day; this is not so with of the widow, she has to wait for four months ten days.

The Muslim widow is expected to restrict her movement during this period but may go out if there is dire need for it. This could be work, schooling and fending for lawful sustenance. This is to prevent her from being too exposed as this might bring about some men wanting to seek

her hand in marriage. Her *Iddah* is a form of retreat at the end of which is expected to specially prepare herself for remarriage.

Islâm prohibits making formal marriage while in *iddah*. It would be nullified wherever it occurs. However, men with genuine interest could signify interest indirectly or diplomatically without uttering the formula of marriage.

Contrary to the prevailing practices of widowhood, a Muslim widow enjoys the following

- can change her cloth
- can go out to attend to her needs
- she is not bound to be wearing black colour unless that is her favorite colour
- she is not restricted to one sitting place all through
- She should live her normal life except for restrictions in interacting with the public.
- She is allowed to remarry any man of her choice and not by force, coercion or inheritance is as prevalent in some cultures.
- She is entitled to inherit her husband. If it is a childless marriage, her share is a fourth. But if they have children her share is an eighth. (Q4:12)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain the significance of waiting period for a Muslim woman.

3.5 Challenges of Widowhood

One of the challenges of widowhood in Islam is the custody of the children. Apart from the sharing of the inheritance which caters for the children, the heirs of the deceased are duty bound to show genuine concern in the overall welfare of the children by not leaving them alone to the widow. They must not devour the orphans' property.

If a child is still in infancy, the woman has the sole right to keep him or her in custody for proper care. What has been observed about some Muslims is that the woman is neglected; her share of the inheritance is not given especially if she is childless or only has female children.

Another challenge before the Widow is remarriage. Some of them make mistake in this regard. Few ones may get husband as soon as they are through with their *iddah*. Others may not, especially, where they have children. One of the mistakes some widows commit here is to be with a man as concubine so as to get money to take care of herself and the

children. There are others who would not be interested in remarriage but will be committing adultery. The fact that Islam rules against men disturbing them with marriage proposals but allows it to be said diplomatically is a concern for resettling them.

In this light the option of polygamy is left for men to prevent such deplorable situations. It is observed that most men do not like marrying a woman who had once married, especially, the ones that have children. This is why the Prophet (SAW) had declared that those who care for the widows would be close to him in Paradise.

The Muslim community must devote special attention to the affairs of widows by getting them husbands or attending to their needs. "All Muslims are brothers to one another" is an all time Islamic philosophy which must be upheld in all situations. The married and the unmarried men should be magnanimous with these widows by marrying them if they have the means. The married women should not dissuade their husbands.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Enumerate and proffer solutions to the challenges of widowhood.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Widowhood is something inevitable in most women's life. Islam has enjoined deep concern for them. The injurious cultural practices which have crept into Islâm in this regard are unfortunate. Nevertheless, the society, the Muslims especially, must put realistic arrangements in place for widows.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have in this unit dealt with the concept of widowhood, stages in a woman's life, the *iddah* period and the challenges of widowhood.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe the concept of widowhood in Islam.
2. Identify five non-Islamic practices of widowhood among Muslims today.
3. What challenges confront widowhood these days?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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MODULE 3

Unit 1	Feminism and Muslim Women
Unit 2	Muslim Women and Politics
Unit 3	Muslim Women and Education
Unit 4	Muslim Women and Western Civilization
Unit 5	Modern Society and Abuse of Women

UNIT 1 FEMINISM AND MUSLIM WOMEN

CONTENTS

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3.4	The Islamic Responses
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The illogical change in moral values today is eroding the real dignity of women. This has resulted in several dimensions to the issue of women. One of these is the feminist movement. This study will define it contextually, state its main points, and correlate it with women liberation. Thereafter the Islamic perspective would be given.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that at the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define feminism
- identify feminists' viewpoints
- state the Islamic perspective.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Meaning of Feminism

The Microsoft Encarta (2006) Encyclopedia explains feminism as a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. The word feminism was employed towards the 18th century for the women's rights movement. It is their belief that the structures of the society are in favour of men to the detriment of women

Feminism is not a modern invention, it had been one way or another propagated in the past. Plato in his Republic campaigned for the eradication of the family and social roles with sexual baseline. Engels, in 1884 also publicly declared marriage as 'a dreary mutation of slavery.' He thus advocated that children should be reared by the public. In the United States, feminism gained impetus in the movement for the eradication of slavery.

The Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, was a landmark in the history of feminism. Its resolution among many others include right of a woman to control her property, right to divorce her husband, right to equal pay with men, female franchise, etc. The initial feminist movement was a protest against bad treatment and abuse of women by drunken husbands, and demand for legitimate rights.

The modern feminism is radically a deviation from that of the first phase. This reached climax on August 26, 1970 when multitudes of women marched through New York with the following boldly written on their placards:

"Housewives are unpaid slaves! State pay for house work!
Oppressed Women! Don't cook dinner! Starve your husband
tonight! End human sacrifice! Don't get married! Washing
diapers is not fulfilling! Legalize abortion! Dependency is not
a healthy state of being!

Women liberation is another way by which feminism is expressed. It however wants women to have complete political, economic, and social equality with men.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define and trace the origin of feminism.

3.2 Feminists' Viewpoints

There are many demands by the feminists. These might have been probably influenced by the plight women encountered in some society which were actually pathetic. That notwithstanding, western civilization as ideology, the industrial revolution and modernism are also denominators which influenced and heralded feminism.

- One of the areas of attention to the Feminists is that men and women should be absolutely treated as equal. Women must never be considered as the weaker sex. They must have equal rights with men.
- They demand that all social roles based on sex should be eradicated. No job, dress or anything whatsoever should be exclusive for men.
- Women, they say, should actively participate in the sexual intercourse. She should not be treated as always being there for man who could grab her at will even when she is not willing.
- They demand for abolition of marriage, home and family. That no woman should be imprisoned at home in the name of taking care of the children while their men-folk go out on daily basis.
- They clamour that women should be free to have sex with whomever they want or like. A woman should be free to involve in kind of sexual behaviour so pleasing to her. So, she could be a lesbian that is nobody's business. All cultural stringent laws should be cast into the dustbin of history.
- They ask for removal of all laws on abortion. A woman should have the right to get rid of any pregnancy she does not like. After all, men do not get pregnant.
- They kick against breastfeeding of children as this makes their breasts floppy.
- They campaign for a permissive society of free mingling at whatever level – worship centres, school, etc.
- They demand for absolute political participation of women. They should not be discriminated against being Presidents, Prime Ministers, Religious leaders and the like.
- All this and many more are constituents of feminism and women liberation. The extent at which these have been achieved and the attendant effects are manifest in our so called global village today.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

State the main views of the feminists?

3.3 The Islamic Perspective

The entire issues revolving around feminism are alien to Islam. This is because of the divinity and universality of Islam. It is not an invention of man. Ignorance, deliberate distortion, misconception and westernization have made people think that Islâm suppresses their rights and relegates the status of women.

Debates abound among sociologists, psychologists and feminists on what a woman is or her true nature. The social scientists for example attribute her behaviour to the cultural life of her society. In Islam, men and women are equal in accordance with their relationship to Allah (SWT). (Q4:1, Q33:35, Q49:13)

Beyond this, Islam believes that there are physiological, physical and psychological differences between both sexes. This suited the role each was meant to play in the society. Both men and women have complimentary roles but are equally responsible to Allah. The natural make-up of a woman qualifies her to be the mother and thus primarily in charge of children upbringing because of the maternal instinct.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Describe the Islamic dimension of feminism.

3.4 The Islamic Responses

a. Social Roles Based on Sex

Islam does not leave any vacuum in this regard. It practically asserts that men are protectors of women. Thus, they are the head of the family. It therefore disagrees with the feminists that men are authoritarian for being the head. The best of men are the nicest to their wives so says Islam. It condemns ill-treatment of women in all ramifications to the extent that it says that men who have more than one wife but is unjust to one, shall have one of his sides paralyzed on the Day of Judgment.

Moreover, while feminists reject the idea of the man being the breadwinner of the family, Islam says he should be. This, on one hand, aims at removing double-tasking from the woman, who is to take care of the husband, the children and the home generally. In another way, it

relieves her of the burden of stress she may be subjected to in going out of the home. Despite all these, Islam does not still forbid her from going out if the need arises, but she must not let that jeopardize her primary roles.

Women, in Islam, are not slaves to men because of being encouraged to stay more at home than going about in the society like men. The modern society testifies to the ordeals the women undergo outside the home. Evil men seize the opportunities to exploit their soft nature and some rape them.

Sexually, men and women have the freedom to enjoy themselves within the confines of Islamic dealings. In fact, the entire processes of marriage in Islam guarantee the sexual right of women. A man is enjoined to fore-play before the actual sex, so that women would not be treated like animals. However, Islam does not allow men and women to have sexual freedom outside of marriage. The only legitimate means for sex is legal marriage. Thus, marriage as an institution, the home and the family are the bedrock of a good society in Islam. This has its historical, logical and sociological contexts. The first man and woman established a family of which all men are products thereof (Q4:1)

The sociologists have also unequivocally taken the home that is the nucleus family, as the smallest unit in the society. If there is no proper family, how then will the society be built?

b. Absolute Equality with Men

It is a mirage to assume absolute equality between men and women. Their absolute equality in Islam is in the areas of spirituality, morality and learning. In all other aspects of life, they are not equal but they play complimentary roles. This is a visible reality in every part of the world. So, Islam acknowledges this exception and thus put measures in place to create equilibrium.

With regard to equal pay, Islam has built an egalitarian society. It believes that each member of the society, regardless of sex, should be properly remunerated for his services. Each member of the society according to Islam, should have what he works for. Islam only discourages women from engaging in work that can affect their nature, primary roles or expose them to harassment.

c. Issue of abortion

Abortion remains a heinous crime in Islam. The position of Islam is clear on this. A woman may only abort if it is genuinely established that

the unborn can make her lose her life. The feminists believe that a woman should have freedom to dispose of any pregnancy she does not feel like carrying. Islam considers this as an affront on humanity and a serious injustice to the unborn. This issue bothers on life which is a prerogative of Allah (SWT) alone. There are several attendant dangers to abortion. So, the preventive law of Islam safeguards the life of the woman, the child and the society from promiscuity.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Mention three feminists' views and give the Islamic positions.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The on-going has clearly elucidated the stand of Islam on feminism. It sees the movement as alien to the spirit and letter of Islam. It compares the manifestation of the feminists to that of Islam. It provides brief explanation on some of the feminists' ideas. However, a distinction must be made between Islam and individual Muslims or nations. The position of Islam in this regard is clear but some Muslims misrepresent Islam through their wrong practices.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have in this unit defined feminism, established the correlation between feminism and women liberation, stated the viewpoints of feminists and the perspectives of Islam.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is feminism?
2. State six Feminists viewpoints. .
3. Discuss the position of Islam on feminists' views.

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UNIT 2 MUSLIM WOMEN AND POLITICS

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
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3.2	Political Rights
3.3	Headship of a Woman
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The study of Muslim women and their roles in Politics has continued to generate a lot of questions amongst people. This study will enlighten you with regard to the provision of the *Sharī'ah* on this issue and how consistent it is with other provisions of Islam. Other things to be considered are task of vicegerency, the political rights of women, Imamate of a woman, participation in *Shura*, headship of state and the traditional/modern perspectives on the issue of women.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that at the end of this unit, students should be able to:

- discuss the task of Vicegerency
- state the Islamic views on women participation in politics
- explain the consistency of the *Shari'ah* on women roles
- state women Political Rights
- discuss Imamate of a Woman
- expatiate on women participation in *Shura*
- discuss the Headship of State
- discuss traditional/modern perspective.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Task of Vicegerency

Man has been appointed by Allah (SWT) (SWT) as a Vicegerent on this earth. The woman has also been created to be his supporter. She is to use all the powers at her disposal to promote virtues and eradicate vices. In the Glorious *Qur'ân*, it is stated that:

"And (remember) when your Lord said to the Angels; verily, I am going to place a Vicegerent on the earth....." (Q2:30)

"It is He who has made you Vicegerents on the earth.....
(Q35:39)

A woman is duty bound by her political status as a symbolic Representative of Allah (SWT) on the earth to be active in the machinery of control in the society. This, she must embark upon within the confines of Islam.

The task of vicegerency is a trust. It stipulates the primary roles of a Muslim woman as that of being a wife and mother. A woman's success is measured from these two angles. She cares for the husband so that he can settle down for the serious affairs of the society. This will also prevent him from becoming promiscuous. She is to be a confidant and counsellor to him. So, she can objectively influence the policies of her husband in ruling the society. He returns to her after the day's official hours. As a good wife, she must have her strategies of knowing what he has up his sleeves and advise accordingly. The glory of a good leader also goes to the good wife.

As a mother, she must show utmost concern for her children's upbringing. These children are the leaders of tomorrow. A blemish in their character as a result of poor upbringing will affect the future of the society. Thus, well-trained children are signs of good future for the society. But in a situation whereby the wife is not at home when the husband returns from work and the mother is not there to guide and lead the children to maturity, it will definitely affect the society negatively.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is the place of vicegerency in a woman's political role?

3.2 Political Rights

The issue of political right impresses upon a Muslim woman, the commitment to the cause of Allah. The societal dynamism will dictate the kind and extent to which a Muslim woman can participate in politics. If Islam is the prevailing order, then she will be effectively placed to play her primary roles as a wife and mother. But if the order is un-Islamic, she might encounter some difficulties in playing her political roles as well as maintaining her nature and her roles as wife or mother. She might encounter conflict of roles. This might destabilize the home and make her lose Islamic status. The modern politics is fraudulently

complex and rough. A Muslim woman, in her innocence and modesty may not be able to cope.

Voting has become a major aspect of the modern politics. She is not debarred by Islam from exercising her voting right as well as nomination into some political offices. There is nowhere in the primary sources of Islam, where a woman is openly forbidden to exercise her voting right. She can meaningfully participate in public affairs. Early Muslim women attended the mosques, learning circles and expeditions and asked questions. Khawlah bint. Tha‘labah engaged the Prophet in discussion with regard to her husband, Aws ibn Samit when he declared *Zihâr* on her.

Moreover, Islâm, in the absence of men, allows a female Imâm to lead other women. This in a way shows that women have some political freedom. It shows that in the affairs pertaining to women they can be appointed. These may include children education, home management, market affairs and the like. Their participation in the mosque activities as well as the permission granted to correct the Imam by clapping their hands further establishes their competence and political roles.

The consistency of Islamic law is never negligent of the physiological and psychological nature of men and women. Its overwhelming framework is incomparably just and abundantly compassionate on women. Islam grants women their required political right to the extent that they will be able to serve their Lord and contribute to the society’s well being. Thus, Islam deserves commendation for taking the bull by the horn. It places women where they belong. Other political frameworks are hypocritical; they claim the woman has the right to vote and to be voted for, whereas they have consistently refused to vote her into power.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

State the political right of a Muslim woman.

Discuss the consistency of the *Sharī‘ah* in granting political roles to women.

3.3 Headship of a State

In Islam, the position of the *Khalifah*, *Ameer* or Head of State is a trust. It is not for ostentation or meant for figure headship. It is highly demanding. He has to lead the five daily *Ṣalât* in the mosque, he has to lead the *Jumah*, *Eidul Fitr* and *Eidul-Adha* *Salât* and give *Khutbah* (sermon). The decision process is continuous. He is ever alert on the security of the nation and well being of the citizens. He has to muster

the Muslim forces to protect the country. He has to be readily available to attend to the needs of all strata of the society.

It is an indisputable fact that a woman cannot discharge all these without creating a conflict for herself regarding her role as a wife or mother. There are many attendant questions which she has to answer. Judging by the fact that the husband is the Head of the home, how would she still be obedient as a wife on becoming the head of State? When would she have to discharge her duty as a wife? How will she have time to take care of the children?

Her physiology and psychology cannot withstand the rigor of the responsibility of a Head of State. The experiences of menstrual periods, pregnancy and nursing make a woman undergo some changes; such physiological states would affect her decision during emergency situation. The instinctive emotional nature of women is another factor, which may affect a decision requiring rationality instead of emotion.

However, in decision process, women can be consulted. The Glorious *Qur'ân* enjoins the Prophet (SAW) to consult his companions without any discrimination. Participation in decision-making may even be at times greater than the actual execution. In affairs pertaining to women, they are to be consulted. This will enrich the decision process and also make implementation feasible and realistic. It is on record that the Prophet (SAW) consulted one of his wives during the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah when his companions refused to comply with his directive. It was a woman's advice that saved the situation from going out of hand.

There is no express directive in the *Qur'ân* that says a woman cannot be a Head (*Amir*, *Khalifah*, President, Prime Minister, etc). A *Hadith* of the Prophet (SAW) however states that:

"A people who make a woman their leader will not prosper"

The above *Hadith* has been a serious subject of attack by Muslims and especially non-Muslim critics. It appears to be gender bias and also an affront on the sensibility of women. Examples are quickly given on the nations successfully ruled by women. They often refer to the case of Queen of Saba (Bilqis) in the *Qur'ân* as being a clear example of a good woman leader. Let us now consider the issues in proper perspectives.

i. Sensibility of Women

The quoted *Hadith* does not affect the rights or dignity of women. One should be objective by considering the Islamic position on women generally. The *Hadith* here is specific. It only shows a limitation, which is realistic if objectively considered.

ii Case of Bilqis

It is true that she ruled over a wide space of land. As at that time, she was a non-Muslim. The story is evident in the *Qur'ân* that she became a Muslim, got married to Prophet Sulayman and submitted herself totally to him. No record thereafter shows that she still returned to her being a Head of State:

"She was told, "Enter the palace." When she saw its interior, she thought it was a pool of water, and she (pulled up her dress) exposing her legs. He said, "This interior is now paved with crystal." She said, "My lord, I have wronged my soul. I now submit with Solomon to God, Lord of the Universe."

iii. Antecedents

The available records of Prophets and Messengers sent 'by Allah (SWT) do not have any mention of a single woman Prophet. There were great virtuous women like Maryam and others, yet they were not made Prophets. The list of the Caliphs in Islam is exclusive of women. Muslim organizations of men and women today too do not have women leader.

iv. Traditional/Modern Perspective

The cases of Shajar al-Durr (who ruled in Egypt around 1250 AC.), Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, Khalida Zia of Bangladesh and Tanzu Cicilia of Turkey are aberrations and (in the case of Bhutto, Khalida and Tanzu) underhand of Western influence in Muslim lands. It does not justify that Muslim women should troop out to become Head of States or Prime Ministers.

In most traditional setting, be it Africa or Asia, women were not generally allowed to assume leadership. Their own belief was that women were weaker sex, coward and inferior to be appointed as leaders. It is also rare in the modern times, except for insignificant instances to find women as Head of States. Where they had or are still heads, they are more or less figureheads.

One wonders why a developed country like the United States of America has not had a female President! Is it because they are

incompetent or backward? Or does it have any constitutional limitation on the right of women? Why are majority members of congress and senate not women? The logical reason could be the natural differences between the sexes.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss a woman becoming the Head of State from an Islamic viewpoint.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Women have political roles in Islam. They can participate in politics but are disallowed from assuming central roles like head of state as it will affect their roles as wife or mother. This, beyond insignificant achievement she might make as a good leader, will eventually affect the family and the society at large. She is the first undisputable Special Assistant to her husband in the running of the state. The role Islam apportions her is consistent with her nature and the provisions of the *Shari'ah*.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined the role of women in politics. It discussed her as a Vicegerent of God, her political rights and the realistic contexts of her being a Head of State, her being an *Imâm* and participation in Shurah have also been treated.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. How are Woman Vicegerent of God?
2. State the political rights of women.
3. Discuss the headship of women in a country.
4. Have women specific roles in decision process.

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UNIT 3 MUSLIM WOMEN AND EDUCATION

CONTENTS

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2.0	Objectives
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3.2	Purpose of Education for Muslim Women
3.3	General Precept of Women Education
3.4	The Early Muslim Women
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The premium Islam attaches to education is unequalled. Women have been accorded special place as Givers and Recipients. The prevalent backwardness in women education today is alien to the Islamic world view. This study will put you through the following: place of education in of Islam, purpose of education for women, scopes of her education and some early women scholars.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that at the end of this study, you should be able to:

- define education in Islamic context
- state its broad and specific aims
- discuss the purpose and scope of education for Muslim women
- mention its scopes
- discuss the major roles of early women in education.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Place of Education in Islam

According to the first revelation in the *Qur'ân*, education is the first obligation. This is because whoever does not know and understand what he wants to do may not appreciate its value. In many verses of the *Qur'ân*, the issue of knowledge has been raised (Q 12:76, 17:85). The Prophet (SAW) has emphatically enjoined that:

“Seeking knowledge is compulsory for every Muslim”.

The aim of education in Islam, according to Sheikh Ahmed Lemu, is to bring about:

the balanced growth of the total personality of man through the training of man’s spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings and bodily senses. The training imparted to a Muslim must be such that faith is infused into the whole of his personality and creates in him an emotional attachment to Islâm and enables him to follow the Qur’ân and the Sunnah and be governed by the Islâmic system of values willingly and joyfully so that he may proceed to the realization of his status as *Khalifatullah* to whom Allah (SWT) has promised the authority of the Universe.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Discuss the aim and place of education in Islam.

3.2 Purpose of Education for Muslim Women

The education of a woman is invaluable as that of a man. The Prophet (SAW) has expressly said that:

“If a person has a slave girl, then he educates her liberally and trains her in the best manner and culture, then sets her free and marries her, he has a double reward (from his Lord)” (Bukhari)

That is even in the case of a slave girl, how much more a free born. Islam does not differentiate between the sexes with respect to education. It emphasizes that the broad aim of her education is the one which makes her become a true Muslim, good wife, mother and housekeeper. There is no way a woman can fully and effectively discharge her duties as the builder of the society without having adequate education.

Educating a woman is like educating a nation. This is because a woman is at the centre of nation building. As a wife, she has ceaseless roles in counselling her husband who might be a political office holder. As a mother too, she is the first teacher of the children of the nucleus and extended family. Her roles have significant impact to make the society by guiding and producing good leaders and children. Hence, it could be argued that the level of a woman’s education will determine how effective she will be in achieving this.

Shaykh Uthman ibn Fodio had rightly laid emphasis on the education of women instead of being belaboured with household chores.

Said he: Muslim women, do not listen to the words of those who are misguided, they deceive you when they stress obedience to your husband without telling you of obedience to Allah (SWT) and His Messenger...And when they say that the woman finds happiness in obedience to her husband. They seek their own satisfaction and that is why they impose upon you tasks which the law of Allah (SWT) and that of His Messenger have never especially assigned to you; such as the preparation of foodstuffs, the washing of cloth and other duties which they like to impose upon you while they neglect to educate you on what Allah (SWT) and the Prophet (SAW) have prescribed for you.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Compare the role of a woman towards her education and her husband.

3.3 General Precepts of Women Education

There are many aspects to a Muslim woman's education. These include the following:

- **Scope of Her Education**

In Islam, distance, sex, age and scope are not barrier to education. A Muslim woman can seek religious and mundane branches of knowledge. This is in line with the all-encompassing nature of Islam. Thus, her education should not be limited to memorization of the religious texts alone. She should be exposed to all branches of knowledge.

- **Special Time and Venue for Women Learning**

The early Muslim women understand the value of knowledge, and they requested from the Prophet thus:

“Appoint a special day for us when we can learn from you, for the men have taken all your time and left nothing for us.” He told them, “Your time is in the house of so – and – so (one of the women).” So he came to them and taught them there (Ibn Majah)

This, in an ideal setting might signify the need for special attention on women education outside the general one. This might necessitate separate female school. In an ideal setting, a Muslim daughter should

attend a female school where the teachers are also females. This is a preventive measure to avoid some immoral tendencies which often exist in mixed schools. The dynamics of society today cum resources available and lack of female teachers have forced Muslim girls to attend co-educational schools.

- **Early Education**

The motto of a Muslim's learning is education for life. It is from the cradle that the parents start to teach her examples and precepts. This is because the Prophet (SAW) has said every child has a pure nature. This should be protected by sound early education. The Prophet said the children should go beyond observation by practically demonstrating what they have learnt at the age of seven. Sanctions are to be imposed from age ten. This shows how Islâm attaches importance to early education of children.

- **Course of Study**

She can study any course so far it does not prevent her from worshipping her Lord or affect her primary roles. Her priorities could be teaching, nursing and medicine. These three have direct effect on life of children and privacy of women.

- **Advancement in Knowledge**

She must advance in knowledge based on the verse which says:

“..O my Lord! Increase me in knowledge” (Q 20:114).

This implies that she must go for further studies after the First degree as there is no end limit to seeking knowledge in Islâm. It only terminates at death.

- **The Muslim Woman as a Teacher/Lecturer**

The Islamic legislations are devoid of contradictions. So, when it says a woman’s primary role is the child upbringing and care of the husband; this does not mean she must close her eyes to other important areas where her services are required in the society. Teaching as a profession suits the nature of women. She has a great role to play in preparing the children for future. It is ideal for her to teach in girl’s school only. She may also render this service in male schools in the absence of competent males. The society she lives in today, will however tell what roles she has to play. Her role as a teacher in nursery, primary, secondary or tertiary institutions have their dimensions.

- **Knowledge of priority**

Knowledge is obligatory in Islam. A Muslim woman should not refuse to learn because there is no female school or teacher. She only needs to comport herself within the framework of Islam. The alarming rate of immorality requires that there should be proper monitoring and supervision where male teachers teach young and matured girls.

The Muslim world is not divided on the fact that knowledge is obligatory. They, however hold different views on some other Islamic issues like a woman going to work outside the home, use of the veil on the face and many others. The premium on knowledge always takes priority. It is very glaring today that the education of women is lagging behind than that of men. It has been found out that throughout the history of Islam, there were 2,500 female jurists, narrators of *hadith*, and

poets. Female writers and Activists are said to be relatively on the increase but not female jurists for the past two hundred years.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Enumerate some general perspectives on a woman's education.

3.4 The Early Muslim Women

The early Muslim women at the time of the Prophet used to take lessons from the Prophets along with other Companions. The prophet's wives did not only teach women, they also taught men. Aisha especially was devoted to teaching the Companions and their followers. Most of these women were scholars in their own right. She narrated 2220 *Ahaadith*. She was third in the category after Abu Hurayrah (5374) and Abdullah ibn Abbas (2660). She was also a poet. Imam al-Zuhri was reported to have said, "If the knowledge of Aisha were to be gathered up and compared to the knowledge of all the other wives of the Prophet and all other women, Aisha's knowledge would be greater. Other narrators of Hadith include Hafsa bint Umar, Umm Habibah and Umm Salamah. Fatimah bint Abdul-Qasim al-Qushayri was a Calligraphist. Ruqayah bint Uthman b. Fudai was an Arabist & Poet. There were some of them who even established schools for girls.

They were also bold at seeking clarifications about some Islamic practices. Al-Bukhari reported Asmau bint Abu Bakr as saying that: The Messenger of Allah (SWT) stood up to address us (after the eclipse Salât), he spoke about the testing that a person will undergo in the grave when he mentioned that the Muslims panicked somewhat and this prevented me from hearing the latter part of his speech. When the hubbub died down, I asked a man who was nearby, 'may Allah (SWT) bless you, what did the Messenger of Allah (SWT) say?' 'He has been revealed to me that you will be tested in the grave with something similar in severity to the test of the Dajjal.'

Since she asked a man, that means the gathering must have been a mixture of men and women and that the women were not all that far from the men.

In fact, they were never ashamed to ask questions. They posed questions to the Prophet (SAW). Aisha reported that Asma bint Yazid ibn Al-Sakan al-Amsariyyah asked the Prophet about performing ritual bath after having a period. The prophet replied:

'let one of you (who has finished her period) take her water and purify herself properly, then pour water over herself, then

take a piece of cloth that has been perfumed with musk and clean herself with it. Asma asked, ‘How should she clean herself? The Prophet said, *Subhanallah!* You clean yourself with it! Aisha told Asma Yazid in a whisper, “wipe away the traces of blood”.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain the peculiarities of the early Muslim women to education.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Education is obligatory on Muslim women from cradle till grave. It is their first human right. They must pursue it and be given also. Education is the tool of motherhood. A woman who lacks it can not build a strong home.

5.0 SUMMARY

The subject matters of this unit have been the place of education in Islam, purpose, scope and perspectives on education for Muslim women and the role of early Muslim women in the acquisition of knowledge.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is the basic view of Islam on women education?
2. State the main purposes of a Muslim woman’s education.
3. Higher learning is only required for some women, discuss.
4. Make a comparative analysis of early and today’s women education.
5. What type of knowledge must they acquire?

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UNIT 4 MUSLIM WOMEN AND WESTERN CIVILIZATION

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Western Civilization
 - 3.2 Impact on Muslim Women
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Islamic worldview is different from that of Western Civilization. The former embraces man as a substance from spirit and matter, hence it treats and guides his spiritual and physical existence. The latter only promotes his physical or material being with no consideration for the transcendental values. This study will discuss the western way of life and its impact on Muslim women.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that at the end of this study, students should be able to:

- explain the Islamic way of life
- identify Western way of life
- state how Western outlooks affect the Muslim women.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Western Civilization

The Islamic philosophy of life believes in the Oneness of God. Commitment to it is the bed-rock of all actions. The two components of man, nay spirit and matter are balanced. Islam establishes equilibrium between the material and the spiritual aspects of life. It puts everything in the world at the service of man and man himself at the service of God to establish a moral and just order. Materialism is an excessive love for this world at the expense of the Hereafter. Islam exhorts man to purify his soul from it as it is a disease of the heart. Men are allowed to enjoy material things so long as it does not affect their spirituality. Islam believes in

transcendental values. Hence, it allows man to enjoy this life while also preparing for the Hereafter.

Western civilization on the other hand believes in matter. It greatly assumes the absence or de-emphasizes the spiritual side of man. This civilization is a conglomerate of old civilizations of Greek and Rome. It took a wild turn at the age of discovery and renaissance. This occurred when religion and moral values were weakened consequent upon erroneous and monopolistic attitude of the clergy. Scientists were ill-treated for their views. This led to a revolt against all religions. Eventually there were several struggles with diverse ends. Later, great strides were recorded in natural sciences, which gave birth to unprecedented utilization of steel power. In the wake of this industrial revolution, every other civilization was overwhelmed as the West had the power of armament. Its ideas were spread by force and colonization. The only stumbling block on its path was Islâm. So, different methods were contrived to crush it. It succeeded in influencing ways of lives of many Muslims except the ideas of Islam.

Western Civilization has a lot of dimensions at the centre of which is Materialism. This is the belief that wealth and material possession as well as physical enjoyment are more important than spiritual values. This aphorism was re-echoed by Engel when he said: “matter is the only real thing in the world”. Materialism as a concept forecloses any deep, significant, transcendental consideration of the worldly affairs. It breeds greed, narrow-mindedness and cruelty, egotism and money worship, exploitation and monopoly, colonialism and unending strife and war.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What are the dividing lines between Islamic Civilization and Western Civilization?

3.2 Impact of Western Civilization on Muslim Women

- **General Negative Impact**

Women's lives are more negatively affected by the so called western civilization than men. They are made to believe that they are enslaved and thus need liberation. Many cultural norms and ethics are eroded with due recognition given to that of the West. The aftermath of all these are motherless or homeless children, bastards, indecent dressing, lesbianism, prostitution, fornication and women abuse. Let us now consider this situation in the light of a Muslim woman.

- **Her Role as a Wife**

The ideal Islamic setting does not burden the wife to be unreasonably out of home. She only does that if there is need. The modern society has opened series of job opportunities for her. Even when she does not have the need she must still seek such jobs. Consequently, she will jeopardize her role as a wife. She may not be there when needed by her husband and thus deny him sexual right or expose him to satisfy himself through wrong means. In some cases, it makes the wife disobedient. Since she now has the economic power and might not feel the need to do what she would have ordinarily done for her husband. From another angle, the undisciplined wife might see better persons outside than her husband at home and thus find a way to break away. In some cases also, the instruction given to the wife at job might conflict with that of the husband. So, this can bring about marital discord.

- **Children Upbringing**

Without any doubt, it is now a global problem that women do not have time for the upbringing of their children because of their keen competition with men in the labour market. One of the primary roles of a woman in Islâm is children upbringing. In an attempt to make up for her absence, she would resort to the services of housemaids.

This has taken a dangerous dimension as such maids either become sex partners of their husbands or teach the children bad characters. But if it is a male, servant, having carnal knowledge of the young girls become a hobby in the absence of both parents. Children are further exposed to the risk of watching corrupting films on the television without anybody cautioning or guiding them.

- **Observance of Religious Practices**

This is another aspect where Muslim women have suffered. Most places of work are either un-Islamic or not having provision for her Islamic practices. So, there are times when they are denied the opportunities to observe their religious rites like *Salât*. Beyond that, there has been a serious influence in the conduction of a Muslim marriage. A Muslim woman has been so influenced that she is not comfortable with the Islamic simple manner of marriage. They will want to use the transparent white gown and follow the western ways.

- **Free Mingling**

The permissive western culture has affected many Muslim women who now freely mix with the opposite sex without restraints. This has been

seen as a result of socialization. It has led some into fornication or even adultery in some cases.

- **The Use of Hijâb**

The position of Islam is clear on the type of apparel a Muslim woman must wear. But western orientation has immensely affected the psyche of most Muslim ladies. One of the underpinnings of western civilization is to project women as sexual objects. This is achieved in the way different fashions are designed for women. They are made to pose nude for pictures meant for advertisement on the bill boards. They promote women singers. They remove all cultural barriers and accommodate women in all activities even if such are injurious to their physiological make-up. They promote beauty pageants and several sex films, literatures and erotica. The skimpy, sexy dresses are made the vogue. An unconscious Muslim woman finds herself at the crossroads. She wants to retain her identity as a Muslim but still wants to belong to the vogue. Most young Muslim ladies have cast the Islâmic dress code in the thrash bin. They embrace the dress in vogue.

- **Materialism**

This is the kernel of western civilization. It wants man to enjoy life, no matter the means he adopts to achieve such end. In fact, this orientation has permeated religious settings too. Women are encouraged to appear with pomp and ceremony. They are made to use wigs and attachments on their heads, to conform to the latest fashion of wears, to display their beauty in contests at the expense of being good wives or mothers. They are made to participate in the production of films which teach immorality before the glare of all because of money or popularity. This is against the Islamic spirit which wants women to be humble and devoted to Allah (SWT). It censors apparels of ostentation and absolutely bans women from involving in pageantry or act that will reveal their nakedness or portray them as irresponsible.

- **Education**

One of the great landmarks of Western civilization is advancement in knowledge and technology. By this, the West is ruling the world. It has through it been able to influence ideas and thoughts of other nations. Curricula are designed and books are written to teach their ideology and spread propaganda. A Muslim woman must, of course, seek beneficial knowledge at any length but must be cautious of being influenced by the ideas which are anti-Islam. As a result of this, some Muslim women studying in the West or reading their books have started questioning

some Islamic values. Some Muslim women even prefer some western ways of life to that of Islam.

- **Inferiority Complex**

The massive western propaganda through the media and other channels have imbued inferiority complex in some Muslim women. Serious objections are raised against some established Islamic provisions like *Hijâb*, Polygamy, circumcision, obedience to husband and the like. Invariably, some Muslim women have begun to feel that the West is right in liberating them from age-long bondage of Islam; whereas this same West is not better in this regard. Their women's dressing is socially outrageous to the sensibility of any reasonable human being. They condemn polygamy but practise it in the guise of having girl friends or concubines.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Enumerate ways by which western civilization has affected Muslim Women.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The rate at which sex without responsibility is on the increase is not quantifiable. Obsession for pre and extra marital sex is the vogue. In the guise of human rights, lesbianism has also been legalized in some western countries. Consequently, the Muslim woman who is not properly brought up or is living in a non-Islamic setting may have problem in applying the teachings of Islam in all her activities. There are established cases of some engaging in fornication, non-use of *Hijâb* and the like.

We have seen that the Western Civilization has more negative than positive effects on Muslim women and even the society at large. However, it should not be misconstrued that there is a perfect Islamic society in the world where the ideal practically prevails. Rather there are some where the rate of its negative effects is highly reduced. The appropriate line of action before the Muslim women is to be properly educated in an Islamic atmosphere so that they can clearly distinguish between Islamic and non-Islamic ways of life. There will also be the need to make a comparative analysis of the so called practices which is said to make Muslim women backward or oppressed.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has treated the Islamic philosophy of life, Western ways of life and its effects on Muslim Women.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Identify the differences between Islamic and Western ways of life.
2. Enumerate ways by which Western Civilization has affected Muslim Women.
3. Discuss the positive and negative impacts of Western Civilization on Muslim women education.

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UNIT 5 MODERN SOCIETY AND ABUSE OF WOMEN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Modern Society
 - 3.2 Moral Precepts of Islâm
 - 3.3 Patterns of Women Abuse
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The issue of women abuse is becoming a global phenomenon. Women are made to suffer physical injuries and emotional disabilities by the society and their male counterparts especially. This falls within what is contemporarily referred to as domestic violence. It is thus the focus of this study to look into the issue of women abuse within the contexts of the modern society and moral precepts of Islam.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is expected that at the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the modern abuses of women
- explain the moral precepts of Islâm
- describe the implications of the abuses on women.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Modern Society

Women abuse could be physical, intellectual and moral assault or degradation of dignity. Women by their delicate nature and cultural practices are always susceptible to some unpalatable occurrences. The case of divorce, rape, lesbianism, fornication, nudity, homeless children and a host of others are on the increase. Women either as students or workers are frequently harassed. The nature of western educational system has also exposed men to temptation. This may be due to what ladies wear or unbridled free mixing between the sexes. Most women in the modern times have lost the sense of modesty of which bashfulness is a core. They approach men at will and advance sexual proposal.

Culturally, the modern society and has no moral value. Thus, people become obsessed in personal aggrandizement.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What is women abuse?

3.2 Moral Precepts of Islam

The society of Islam cherishes moral value. It wants the women, the elderly and children to be treated with utmost tenderness. There is a relative feebleness in the physical strength of the three. Islam regards women as a fragile vessel. Thus men are seriously urged to treat them well. It is a sign of a true man to be nice to the women because abuse of women is detrimental to the spirit of Islam and building of a virile *Ummah*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How do moral precepts of Islam prevent women abuse?

3.3 Patterns of Women Abuse

- **Wife Beating**

Beating of wives especially indiscriminately is an act of women abuse. Islam only allows a light beating as a symbolic rebuke and last resort after taking several measures. The permissible beating should not be on any sensitive part of her body like the face, breast and the like. And it must not leave any bruise on her. Scholars describe this beating like a man keeping something in his armpit and still beating her without that thing falling. The reason for the beating must be a serious misbehaviour. It opens the door for divorce, if coping together becomes difficult. This is allowed instead of keeping her under torture of beating.

But these days, some Muslim men are not different from non-Muslims in how they beat their wives. They beat indiscriminately. Some women are even beaten at advance stage of pregnancy. Most often than not, the cause of this beating could be on trivial issues. When women are beaten anyhow it is a violation of their human and woman rights, insensitiveness to their physical nature and feeling and a demolition of the matrimonial pillar. It is nothing but an abuse. It is thus shameless of such men, having beaten up their wives like animals would still want to make love to them thereafter.

- **Divorce**

The right of a man to divorce has been another way by which women are abused. A man might for no cogent reason just send his wife packing. This might be because he had found another beautiful woman. Hence, he will create problem for the one at home or censor her for any slight error. A woman is always at the receiving end. She might be sent out along with her children. This could lead her into an adulterous life in an attempt to fend for the children as she may not get husband again.

- **Denial of Pregnancy**

Women are also made to suffer serious emotional pain when men reject pregnancy which belongs to them. This could be in different ways. A wife who has a questionable character might suffer this fate. The husband in attempt to do away with her can reject the pregnancy. Another man might not be ready to bear the responsibility, as a result can deny being the owner. No doubt, in these two instances, the woman will suffer a lot of physical and emotional disturbance. She will have to start bearing the financial cost till delivery and beyond.

On the other hand, women who are flirts and who become impregnated mistakenly but not ready for abortion might see their partner rejecting and driving them away. Here too, the woman still bears the brunt. In Islam, there is a provision in the law in the event of rejection of pregnancy between the married couples that both should swear to an oath and be separated forever. This is known as *Li'ān*. In the second instance, culprits are guilty of fornication or adultery as the case might be but if the man denies he is not bound to be forced to accept. The woman thereafter, suffers the consequence but when she hides under the guise of being raped her case lies with Allah (SWT) in the hereafter.

- **Workplace**

Industrial revolution actually opened the gate for women to go out for work leaving their homes behind. At the end of the day, they have two masters to obey, their husband and bosses at work. Their work at home is not an abuse but their normal responsibility. The women at work are at times compelled to succumb to undesirable sexual advances by men especially bosses. They are forced into it when they are left with only two options to retain the job or resign. This exploitation has no exemption, as single and married women are all involved. Some of these women are at times kept on job not meant for them so as to be readily available for the sexual gratification of men or are sacked as a result of non-compliance.

- **Sex Objects**

The modern society has been abusing women in different ways. It starts by the introduction of various beauty pageants. This has become global. There are various beauty pageants such as ‘Miss Nigeria’, ‘Miss World’ and the like. These pageants turn women into animals meant for exhibition. One wonders what moral values and teachings these pageants have for the young girls and the society at large.

In the same vein, scourge of female nudity is on the increase. Women wear just anything to impress men, even if such apparel will put them into discomfort. It is nothing but abuse of womanhood for a matured woman to appear in the public wearing transparent and tight fitting dress like ‘wicked straps’, ‘mono straps’, hot pants, ‘tubes’, ‘show me your belly’, ‘bare backs’ and the like. It is an affront on womanhood, a “gateway” for promiscuity. This is also a case of women abusing themselves under the guise of modernism.

Indecent dressing has been one of the causes of rape, fornication and adultery for women. This has further led them into prostitution. How could a normal or sane woman make herself available for sexual enjoyment of just any stranger?

Moreover, women are now used in advertisements for just any product. They are portrayed in scanty or skimpy dresses. Pornography is also nothing but exhibition of female genital organs. There are a million of sex magazines showing women in postures that will arouse sexual desire in men or even other women. Most musical albums these days have women as the real object of promotion. They are made to flaunt their buttocks. They, at times, almost dance nakedly for material gains.

The society has reduced them to sex machines. Their dignity as women has been eroded. Most men are made to see women as objects of sex before any other role they may want to play. Drawings and symbols are utilized to publicly exhibit the erogenous zones of women whereas, in Islam, a Muslim woman is enjoined to wear *Hijâb* which must properly cover her shapes. Thus she is to be seen as an intelligent and moral creature before any other thing.

- **Rape of Women**

In recent times, rape has almost become a normal trend in non-Muslim societies whereby men trample violently on the right of women. Men always capitalize on any opportunity to exploit women. Criminals like armed robbers these days consider raping their victims as part of their missions. Many causes could account for this. The case of strangers

raping women is less common than those men who have by one way or another known the women. A woman who has been exploiting men by way of taking money or other things might be dealt with in such violent manner. Ladies who keep late nights outside their homes or attend night parties could be victims. A lady who dresses skimpily and walks around might not be able to escape such violent encounter. Islam loudly advocates that women should not keep late nights and they should not in any way be involved in exploitation or acts capable of tempting the opposite sex. A woman who does that is regarded a sinner. A man who also assaults her is also regarded a sinner.

But when innocent women are raped, that is an abuse of woman dignity. If the aggressors are apprehended, they are severely punished in *Shari'ah*. Such women are enjoined to consult medical doctors for examination and necessary prevention so that she would not bear the burden of giving birth to a bastard.

- **Pedophilia**

Having carnal knowledge of young girls is one of the abuses of the highest order. This is perpetrated by men who have inflamed urge for sex. One of the avenues for this unwholesome behaviour could be that such young girls dwell in the same house with them. So, in the absence of their parents, they could lure them with material things or sweet words. Most of these young girls are often ignorant of such things. Some men could also seize the opportunity of teaching or being in their custody resort to this act threatening the girls so that they can play along with them.

From another angle, some sexual deviants among women do also introduce the young girls into lesbianism. They use them to arouse their sexual feelings.

In all these instances, Islam has prohibited *non-Mahram* (marriageable men) having access or interaction with the opposite sex. A mother who employs a male teacher for private lesson for her daughter must either be present or make an atmosphere for such act impossible. Young girls require necessary orientation, according to their age, that can make them know that such acts are not allowed in Islam and for them to report cases of such advances.

Any of the parents who employs male or female house-keeper must be aware of the consequences either on the husband or male children in the case of female house help or the girls in the case of male house help. Both parents leaving the home so early and returning so late is a vital factor which must be seriously considered so as to safeguard the chastity

of the children. This is why Islam has made childcare primarily the assignment of women. At least, a Muslim woman must try her human effort to protect her children from abuse of any sort.

Young girls could be exposed to this act when they are sent on hawking. They meet all kinds of men and may not be able to resist some advances. Since they are exposed to many males, this in turn affects their character negatively. Their modest or bashful nature might change to that of a wayward girl. At the end of the day, they might commit fornication.

These abuses have several adverse effects on women. Some of these are:

- Causing of early sexual arousal or experience in young girls.
- Damage to young girls' genital organs.
- Miscarriages in pregnant women.
- Destabilizing the home and sending bad signals to children by the time they watch their father beat their mother.
- Leading the husband into adultery.
- Sexual assault on women.
- Women can as a result of beating sustain physical injuries like cuts, bruises, burns, broken bones and death.
- Causing depression in women.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss five ways of women abuse stating their negative impact.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study has shown the rising cases of women abuse. It perceives women abuse as more than mere domestic violence; whatever degrades the dignity or nature of women is an abuse. A woman is first, a spiritual cum intellectual being before her material essence. Hence, limiting her abuse to physical aspect is unfair on womanhood. Also, the abuse is seen beyond what men or the society cause; women can also abuse themselves.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have in this unit treated concept of modern society, the definition of women abuse, moral precepts of Islâm and manners of women abuse.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is women abuse?
2. How does the modern society see it?
3. Enumerate ways by which women are abused.

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