Chapter-5

Fundamentalism, Revivalism and Modernism
FUNDAMENTALISM, REVIVALISM AND MODERNISM

I will discuss here the status of women in three aspects:

1. Fundamentalist views on women
2. Revivalist views on women
3. Modernist views on women

Fundamentalist views on women:

Different questions become the topic of hot debates when we speak about ‘women in Islam’. In practice one often settles for a description of the fashions and customs in one or another Muslim society. I think it can be helpful, instead, to examine the points of views which exist and are propagated from within Islam, that is to say, how Muslims justify women’s position, rights and obligations with direct reference to Islam’s norms and authorities. It is not sufficient to consider the factual status of women in one or the other area. The intention here is rather, to take notice of how questions relating to women are understood on the basis of the Qur’an and sunnah of the Prophet among contemporary ‘fundamentalists’.

Fundamentalism could be called a synthesis between traditionalism and modernism. Here is an example: the traditionalists’ view regarding the regulation for purdah, property and differentiation between the sexes implies in practice that higher education is for men only. The modernist considered that this view is totally wrong. They expressed their thoughts that women’s equal access to heaven and the appearance of learned women in the history of Islam indicate that women and men should enjoy equal educational privileges. The universities should be open to women also. But according to fundamentalists: men and women should have equal opportunity to higher education but at separate universities. Such is the case in Saudi Arabia at present, and there are thoughts of applying the same system also in Pakistan.\(^2\)
Women in Islam is a controversial subject. There are few areas in which Muslims are more sensitive to western criticism than in this. It is vehemently maintained that westerners misunderstand and distort, that they fail to see how ‘progressive’ Islam is with regard to women and that Islam liberates rather than oppresses, women.³

According to the fundamentalists, inheritance, marriage and divorce regulation found in the Qur’an and Sunnah shall be applied as the law of the land, but the rules are defended with rational arguments which are not decisive yet. It is important that the regulation’s to be enforced in the case of women, are neither those of custom, not secular legislation, but those which originate in the Qur’an and the Prophet’s sunna. Because the regulations as understood are based upon divine revelations, they cannot be changed, they must, by definition, be the best for women and for humanity. Apologetics are carried out in various ways like⁴

- A comparison is made between the factual treatment of women down through western history and the Islamic ideal according to the Qur’an and certain hadiths. Furthermore, western promiscuity is set up against the Islamic family ideal.
- It is claimed that when applied correctly, the Islamic pattern of life allows women a decent position.
- It is claimed that the Islamic views on women correspond to their nature and genetical characteristics.
- It is insisted that the laws of ‘true Islam’ according to the correct interpretation of the Qur’an and Sunna, should be judged rather than the factual treatment of women in Muslim societies.⁵

The value of Islamic apologetics on this point should not be belittled: it leads to change of attitude among Muslims towards women and to concrete alterations in women’s position and status. The attitudes of the Muslim masses change when the Qur’an and especially the hadith material, and Islam’s own
history are read and interpreted selectively in order to vindicate the progressiveness of the Islamic views of women from western distrust and criticism. The apologetics uphold the positive and "progressive" aspects, keeping the traditions which devalue the women in the background, for instance, the hadiths which speak of women's naturally bad morals and irreligiosity.°

The resurgence of revivalist religious practice or fundamentalism in the late twentieth century has been described as a "historical counter attack" mounted by threatened religious traditions seeking to slow the spread of secularization and mitigate the perceived negative effects of modern life. Fundamentalist belief system typically call for a return to the "golden age" of some society or religion when, almost without exception, men enjoyed considerable social and economic power than women. But fundamentalist movements are not simply backward looking; rather they possess a political agenda that seeks to restore "last social virtues" to contemporary society, with specific and equal implications for the freedoms and advantages afforded to men and women.°

Fundamentalist Islam has garnered particular outside interest in recent years in part because of the unusually restrictive demands that it places upon women. In addition to beliefs typical of fundamentalist ideologies that favour men over women in employments and education as well as political opportunities.°

Islam is obviously an open indeed and inclusive faith and neither intolerant political ideology nor a religion which forces the people to embrace it. In this regard the verses of the Qur'an are very clear for example "there is no force in religion". However, the fundamentalists have exposed a face of the religion which is terrorizing global human security, especially for women. Islamic fundamentalism has displayed a terrifying face of Islam because of its character, mainly in exerting an aggressive agenda for the politicization of the religion to achieve certain objectives. Religious symbols have been used to
pursue political agenda. It is, therefore, important to distinguish Islam as a belief and cultural system as well as Islam as a tool to build political legitimacy by political authorities, oppositions and others fundamentalist movements.9

However, narrow western conception of religion is rejected by large groups in the Muslim world today especially by the movements and the opinions which we call fundamentalist. One should distinguish this from traditionalism. The fundamentalist understand Islam and position of women in Islam as a social order. The essence of religion is that it is God’s social order. Legislation is not determined by Islam’s values and principles. The regulations and commandments of Qur’an and Sunna are the laws determined by ijtihad. A dogma and a point of departure for this entire interpretation of Islam, is the fact that Islam is a natural religion. In as much as God is the creator of both the universe and man, the laws and commandments which he has given through His Prophet are expression of man’s true nature. From this follows, that if the laws of Islam distinguish between men and women, they are an expression of a natural, innate difference between the sexes. The law of Islam is liberation from the unnatural.10

Revivalist views on women

There seem to be divergent views among contemporary Islamic Revivalist thinkers on the issue of women’s participation in political affairs. Their views may be divided into two broad categories: traditional and moderate. The basic issue is the interpretation of Islamic texts concerning women in changing circumstances. Here the issues may be divided into two parts:

1. General political participation, which includes the right to vote, to join and campaign for a political party and put up candidate for any office, to run for any legislative assembly, the right for the post of any minister and any higher office except imamah.

2. The right to be considered for the imamah (leadership of the state).11

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General Political Participation:

According to those revivalists who present the traditional outlook, this group has limited and narrow perception about the role of women. Basically, their arguments are against women’s political participation in particular and public participation in general supported either by their own narrow interpretations of Islamic texts or invalid generalizations. As a result women are denied any active political role. The arguments of traditional revivalists that women are less rational since two women are equal to one man for commercial witnessing are rejected by moderate revivalists.\textsuperscript{12}

In support of the above rejection moderate revivalists argue that Islam has assigned a dynamic role to women as vicegerents of God and they also rejected the understanding of the traditional revivalists who confine the role of women to the house. Moderate revivalists argue that the issue of witness in economic transactions should be understood in its proper context because women were less interested and less involved in economic activities, especially during the time of Prophet Muhammad, and there was no system of written documentation, it was suggested that as a practical measure, at least two women should be witnesses so that one could remind the other if the other forgets. They also argued that if women are intellectually deficient as conceived by some, even two are more intellectually deficient. Women would not solve the problem but rather would argument which would increase confusion. Hence it contended that the tradition under discussion does not convey women’s intellectual deficiency, rather, it provides a practical suggestion for solving the problem at a particular time and place. With regard to certain other traditions, moderate revivalists contended that these are considered weak by attested traditions or go against the practice of the Prophet who consulted his wives on several occasions and followed their suggestions.\textsuperscript{13}

On the basis of all these arguments if traditional revivalists wish to maintain the importance of family responsibility as being prior to all other outside responsibilities, this is not disputed and rejected. In fact both the groups
of revivalists give first priority to the role of women in the institution of family, which is the most important and fundamental institution for the overall development of Islamic civilization. Here the role of the man in the family cannot be neglected but traditional revivalists reached a different conclusion that the only field of activity for women is the family.\textsuperscript{14}

The moderate revivalists talked about the equality of man and woman. According to them men and women as equal but not identical. They assign different roles to men and women but to some extent they seem to encourage women to participate in politics. Sayed Jalaluddin Umri (b. 1935, President \textit{Amir Jamat-i-Islami-Hind}) who is one of the well known scholars and activists of Islamic revival movements in India expresses his view that Islam stands for equality of men and women and inspires its followers to struggle against all kinds of oppression and injustice against women. He maintained different roles for males and females in different areas but did not deny the active role played by women particularly during the early history of Islam. He showed that how eminent women in Islamic history participated in all public activities, including politics. If we will go through his works on women he seems to encourage women to be active and energetic in all fields for the sake of Islam but the role of women in the family occupies priority over all other outside functions. He also encouraged women’s education at all levels. A great number of well educated women who are politically conscious are actively involved in the activities of Islamic revival movement.\textsuperscript{15}

An analysis of the views of Mawdudi, the founder of the contemporary Islamic movement in the Indian subcontinent, is appropriate here to gain a better appraisal of the moderate group growing stance within the contemporary Islamic revivalist movement as a whole. Mawdudi not only supported but also advocated strongly the rights of women to education and all other rights as granted to women by Islam. However he emphasized the different roles and segregation of men and women. Mawdudi supported his argument on moral grounds: the free intermixing of men and women in society causes moral decay.
and sexual lapses as, for example, evidenced in the west. To avoid the evil consequences of such unrestricted interaction, he recommended segregation. However, according to some revivalists, such an argument is unacceptable because women should not be victimized because of society’s moral deterioration. They argued that to check moral deterioration moral reformation is necessary not rigid gender based segregation. A more comprehensive reading of Mawdudi’s writings suggests that he recognized women’s right to education. While he was expounding his philosophy of education he suggested strongly that women should be given military training along with appropriate educational training.\textsuperscript{16}

Mawdudi, like Iqbal and others, asserted emphatically the necessity of ijtihad. This implies that Mawdudi viewed Islamic thought as not static but dynamic which develops on the spirit of the Islamic text while also being sensitive to empirical circumstances. Hence, following Mawdudi’s approach for the development of Islamic thought, it seems necessary that traditional revivalists should depart from their traditional stance and adopt the moderate’s stance on women. A close observation of the student circles of the Islamic revivalist movements in India and allies particularly the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) shows that there is a sign of departure from the earliest stance on women. However, as the Islamic revival movement in India has not yet taken part in parliamentary elections there is no empirical evidence of its stance on women’s political participation.\textsuperscript{17}

The stance of Arab revivalists on women can be traced back to the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt. He established a Muslim Sisterhood and mobilized women for the cause of Islam and supported fully such women as Zaynab al Ghazzali, whose imprisonment and brutal torture under Nasser’s regime has left great impact on Muslim women.\textsuperscript{18}

The position taken recently by some of the moderate revivalists, for example in Sudan, is again a step forward for the development of women. The
Islamic national front under the leadership of Hasan al-Turabi has not only endorsed theoretically the full political participation of women but has made it an empirical reality. In 1986, two women, Su'ad al Faith and Hikmat Hasan Syed Ahmad were included in the parliament under the aegis of the Islamic National Front (INF). Presently, 10 percent of the Sudanese parliament consists of women, three women have been appointed ministers, and one woman judge sits on the Supreme Court. Moreover, the government has established quotas to increase the number of women participants. The first strategic action undertaken by the INF for women’s public and especially political participation was the desegregation of its male and female wings and the institutionalization of a single structure for both in the mid 1970s. This has helped women revivalists to interact with their male counterparts, share experiences, and inspire each other to work for the cause of Islam. It does not mean that there are no separate women’s organizations to encourage women. There are many national and international level women organizations, such as the Sudanese Women’s Union (headed by Sumayyah Abu Kashhawa, a competent moderate revivalist) and the International Organization of Muslim Women (headed by Visal al Mahdi another moderate revivalist and the wife of Hasan al-Turabi). The women activists and Hasan al-Turabi support strongly the political participation of women.¹⁹

In an interview, al Turabi asserted emphatically that the Islamic Movement in Sudan (IMS), since its very beginning, has been very mindful of the need to create an active role for women in all spheres of life. Hence, the movement has encouraged women and given them all possible opportunities to enhance their abilities and devote themselves to the Islamic cause. Such views of the Movements’ leadership were reconfirmed and elaborated further by Zakariya Bashir, an intellectual ideologue and activist of the Movement, during an interview. He said that the IMS has surpassed all the other Islamic movements in the world in its attitude to women. Referring to the Popular

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Defence Forces, he pointed out that women are trained militarily to fight for the cause of Islam.  

During a series of formal and informal talks with Suad al-Fatih, a pioneering woman leader of the IMS, and others like Abu Kashhawa and Zakiya 'Awad Satt, it was quite obvious that they all supported fully women’s political participation. However, they did not deny that preference should be given first to the family and then to work outside. It was emphasized further and elaborated upon by Mahdi, during an interview that women should contribute to society in the field of their interests but not at the cost of the family especially of small children who require proper attention. It is clear from the above discussion that there is a similarity of opinion between traditional and moderate revivalists on the precedence of family over outside work. Sudan’s moderate revivalists differ from the traditional and moderate revivalists of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in their practical integration of women in politics and even jihad. Hence these moderate revivalists are better categorized as hard core moderate revivalists. There are some more moderate revivalists moving from moderate to hard core moderate revivalists, such as the Tunisian Islamic movement’s Rashid al-Ghanushi. 

In his analysis of the movement’s position on women in the past, he pointed out that it was defensive and reactive. He asserted that a moderate departure from the earliest stance was already in progress in the Islamic movement. Hence, the number of women has increased. Several steps have been taken to make it possible for women to enter leadership ranks and to ensure their membership in parliament. Women moderate revivalists are taking an active part in contemporary politics, and many have been imprisoned. They can be characterized as soft-core moderate revivalists. 

Leadership of the State

The subject of women’s leadership is controversial. All classical Muslim jurists, while discussing the qualification of the imam along with other factors,
emphasized that the Imam should be able to perform the ijtihad and strong enough to wage jihad. Even a cursory reading of classical juridical texts shows that what they meant by Imam is not a political head of a moderate nation-state, but rather the all embracing leader of the Muslim Ummah. He combines the function of Khalifah (being the highest authority in all social, political and economic affairs) and imam of the congregational prayers. This is obvious from al-Mawardi’s identification of seven necessary qualifications that include, more particularly, the abilities of ijtihad and jihad. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun’s specification of five important qualifications for Imamah (leadership) and his particular reference to the leadership of the congregational prayers also shows that he viewed the imam as the highest leader of the Muslim ummah. Hence, if leadership is perceived from the global perspective of a leader of the entire Muslim world all revivalists ranging from traditional to radical, do not consider women eligible for this office. Mawdudi’s discussion of the Islamic state shows clearly that the state envisaged by him was not the Muslim state of contemporary times.23

His envisaged state was modeled on the spirit of the Prophet’s four immediate political successors (al-Khulafa’al-Rashidun) but in context with the time and place, as is clear from his discussion of the legislature, executive, and judiciary. Such a state would not include, in the earlier stage, the whole Ummah. Since it is first established in one geographical location as a model for the world. However, it would be universal in its scope in the long term, as it would have been created so that the universal Muslim community could serve as a witness to the truth. Obviously, it might be for this reason that the qualifications attributed by Abul Ala Mawdudi to the leadership of the state resemble those of the office of the Imam or Khalifah of the Muslim ummah. It included, among other elements that the head should be a man, in accordance with the Qur’anic verse that “men are in charge of women” (4: 34). According to some Muslim scholars’, the leadership of women by men on the basis of the above verse is confined to the family only and therefore cannot be extended to
the political field. But some revivalists, for several reasons, do not prefer women for the leadership role. Badawi observed:\textsuperscript{24}

According to the Islam, the leadership of the state is no more figure head. He leads the people in the prayers, especially on Fridays and festivals. He is continuously engaged in the process of decision making pertaining to the security and well-being of his people. This demanding position, or any similar one, such as the commander of the army, is generally inconsistent with the physiological and psychological makeup of women in general.\textsuperscript{25}

Even Turabi did not assign the Khilafah to a woman. Bashir elaborated the views of al-Turbani as:

An enlarged social role for the Muslim women including her right to participate in the political process by nominating and electing on behalf of a candidate seeking even the highest Muslim office of Khalifah. Her right to consultation in political matters, as well as her right to stand for any public office (except the office of Khalifah) is emphatically asserted and defended.\textsuperscript{26}

Al-Turabi expressed his views that a woman can hold any high position except that of Khalifah. However Muhammad al Ghazzali, a famous Egyptian scholar, in one of his recent works argued that women can be accorded important position as judges, ambassadors, cabinet ministers, and rulers. To justify his views he has quoted some authentic juristic interpretation of Islamic law. Another Egyptian scholar Yusuf al-Qardawi holds that women can be allowed to hold high offices in parliament, serve as judges and issue fatwas. However, he makes it emphatically clear that woman, while holding such high public offices should not forsake their family role. All of this reveals that all revivalists have more or less the same opinion on imamah.\textsuperscript{27}

\textbf{Modernist views on women}

The modernist attitude is a reaction against this point of view. The main objection is that traditionalism does not function in the present day. Many Muslims give up Islam and become secularized. The modernist contends that
this happens because neither the secularized Muslims nor the traditionalists understand what Islam is all about. In the modernists' view Islam is always in accordance with common sense. It is just a matter of searching and recognizing Islamic values and principles and then of ordering society accordingly.\textsuperscript{28} This is to follow the Prophet's example. Islam's regulations and commandments are to be the objects of interpretation (ijtihad) which bring out the values and principles of which they are expressed. The question then is asked: what did Islamic Revelation mean for the women's position as compared with her prior status? The answer is that the revival of Islam indeed meant concrete improvements in all areas. For example, before the emergence of Islam unwanted female babies were buried alive, a practice which was later forbidden by the Qur'an. Islam signified greater security, justice, and economic liberty for women. To follow Islam's principles is, therefore, to continue in this path. In this manner it is possible to go against express Qur'anic regulations. For example, the Qur'an's inheritance regulation which, among other things imply that women should inherit half of what men inherit, represent a binding law according to traditionalists. The modernists on the other hand, say that this law represents a radical improvement on earlier practice according to which women inherited nothing.\textsuperscript{29} This means in time that, whenever possible, men and women should have equal inheritance rights. It may be that there are few modernists who really go this far in their new interpretation. The point is, that society's laws and ordinances are to stem from Islamic values. The Islamic sharia is the source of legislation but is not the law of society. This type of reasoning preceded Saudi Arabia's decision in the 1960s to forbid slavery.\textsuperscript{30}

The Qur'an does not forbid slavery but there are regulations and recommendations for the treatment and liberation of slaves. Saudi Arabian theologians and King Faisal himself held that the definitive purpose of the rules dealing with the status of slaves as found in the Qur'an and Sunna is the abolition of slavery when the time should be ripe. One can argue in precisely the same manner for alteration to the regulation concerning the status of
women. Modernists opinions have influenced legislation in most Muslim societies and are typical of the Muslim reformers in the first half of the twentieth century, Qasim Amin. The secularist, on the other hand dismisses the entire problem. He maintains that religion is not a social order but rather an individual matter. There is no compulsion in religion. This implies that the Muslim secularist has approximately the same view of religion and its functions as westerners have. The women’s status, rights, and obligations are, according to the secularist, questions, determined through secular legislation having nothing to do with the religious realm.\textsuperscript{31}

**Women and Modernism in Islam by Muhammad Iqbal**

The position of women in Islam is recognized on natural principles. She is as important and dignified as man and her rights as clearly defined as those of man. The *Qur’an* says: “And they (women) have rights similar to those (of man) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them” (ii: 288). And the benefits of the mutual company are best illustrated in the verse: “They are raiment for you and ye are raiment for them” (ii: 187).\textsuperscript{32}

From an economic point of view, Islam recognizes the right of a woman to inherit and entitled to exclusive *Mahr* from the husband and can own property independently. Besides marriage according to Islam, a social contract, the parties can appear before the Qazi, for its dissolution. Such is the position that women occupies in Islam.\textsuperscript{33}
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