

## Contribution of Women to Quranic Studies, With Special Reference to Laleh Mehree Bakhtiyar.

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Date of Submission: 25-06-2020

Date of Acceptance: 13-07-2020

Woman has played an indispensable role in the dissemination, development and propagation of Islamic knowledge from early Islamic period. Since the inception of Islamic civilization in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (A.d.) Khadijah a business women who became Muhammad's (SAAS) employer and 1<sup>st</sup> wife was also the first Muslim converted to Islam. Almost 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the whole hadith literature has been narrated by Aisha. The greatest Muslim scholars of early times would not have reached the zenith if not groomed and given primary education by their mothers. Most of the books on biographical literature about companions of the Prophet and early scholars have separate sections for woman which highlights their contribution to Islamic knowledge. There have been a large number of female saints throughout the Islamic world spanning the highest social classes. In this postmodern era and the growing trend of the feminist movement more and more woman are contributing to the Islamic literature which otherwise has been male dominated. It is beyond the scope of this paper to highlight the stupendous role of woman to Islamic literature because of limitations of time and space. This paper will only highlight life and work of Laleh Mehree Bakhtiyar. Lale Bakhtiyar was born in New York city. At the age of 24 she moved to Iran where she began to study Islam and converted to Islam in 1964. She has written a combination of 25 books about Islam many dealing with Sufism and has also authored and co-authored a number of biographical works. Her translation to the Quran is the 1<sup>st</sup> translation by an American Women published in 2007.<sup>1</sup>

**KEYWORDS:** Sublime Quran, Women Identity, Beat, Go Away, Contribution.s

### I. INTRODUCTION

There were times in the human history when only men were considered the Centre of creation and

universe, while the women were considered lesser beings with no human or social rights what so ever and who only served as a means of sexual gratification and subservience to men, however the scenario was 1<sup>st</sup> changed fourteen hundred (1400) years ago when Islam appeared in the land of Arabia. From its initial days, Islam worked on creating equality among people and tried to eliminate the different barriers created by people that distinguished them from one another and let them feel superior to inferior among the different segregations in the society the one Islam targeted the most was women segregation who at that times were considered a different part of society, with no living standards what so ever. Islam in order to create a peaceful and balanced society entailing good Muslims, considered women an equal entity and claimed their status as a productive and imperative part of society and did whatever possible to ensure that women experienced and enjoyed the same respect in society like men. It is imperative that Muslim women understand their rights that Islam has given to her and then in the light of their rights and obligations. She must perform all the social and matrimonial roles with utmost dedications and commitment If the history of Islam be viewed and analyzed from an objective point of view then one would ultimately rich to the conclusion that women have great role and status in Islam and throughout the Islamic history. They have made their contribution and for those contributions they have been served and appreciated like renowned and great men on Islam these Muslim women as well as who have left their mark on Islamic history and who stand as a role model for Muslim women to follow and seek guidance from them e.g. names of few women are mentioned below like...

Hazrat Khadija(ra). Hazarat Aisha (ra) Hazarat Fatima (ra) Hazarat Maryam (ra) and Hazarat Asiya (ra).

Aforementioned are just examples from the history of women in Islam .By looking at life of Hazarat

<sup>1</sup> Ritual ives of Muslim women agency in everyday life.

Khadija (ra) Muslim women with wealth can take inspiration, by looking at the life of Hazarat Aisha (ra) Muslim women can get inspiration to give life in an Islamic way and develop interest in Quran and hadith, by looking toward life of Hazarat Fatima (ra) Muslim women with modest means can take inspiration, by looking life Hazarat Maryam (as) Muslim women facing hard ship in life can take guidance and by taking life of Hazarat Asiya (ra) as an example. Muslim women can find inspiration to stick with truth and righteousness no matter how unfavourable the odds are in any phase of life. Several studies have investigated the contribution of Muslim women in various fields of the classical civilization of Islam such as in hadith transmission, jurisprudence (Fiqh), literature and education. Until now few sources mention the role of women in the development of science, technology and medicine in the Islamic tradition. In scholarship there are isolated and scattered references to the famous women who had a role in advancing science and who established charitable, educational and religious institutions.

The present study is going to highlight the contribution of Laleh Mahree Bakhtiyar in the field of Quranic studies. She belongs to 21<sup>st</sup> century and has written many books. Laleh Mehere Bakhtiyar became the first woman to publish an English translation of Quran in 2007. Syrian-American woman Barazingai asserted the importance of women remembering that they are individuals as well as members of community, in order to shift the discussion from consideration of women roles as simple complimentary to that of men to consideration of women as individuals who are to be judged on the basis of their piety (Taqwa). This interpretation asserts that the only difference Allah recognizes between human being in the level of taqwa rather than gender, tribe and birth

**“O mankind indeed we created you from male and made u peoples and tribes that u may no one another. Indeed the most notable of u in the sight of Allah is most righteous of u .indeed Allah in knowing”.**<sup>2</sup>

Historically the interpretation of Islam has been largely a male endeavor. Although the first convert to Islam was a woman Khadijah (RA) and women played an important role in the transmission of hadith and the development of Sufism, women have generally been marginalized the male centers of Islam interpretation including both sculpture,

law and leadership roles in public worship. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the combined spread of literacy, the availability and promotion of public education for both girls and boys expansion of job opportunities of women and the rising number of conversions to Islam from other religious traditions particularly in the west have added to the desire of Muslim women for greater empowerment in the practice and interpretation of their faith, as in other areas of life Muslim women have prevented to be resource full, creative and dedicated to claiming ownership and responsibility for their faith lives both individually and commonly today Muslim women are active in Quran study circles mosque based activities. Community services sponsored by religious organizations and Islamic education as both students and teachers, there are rising number of female Quran reciters, lawyers and professors throughout the world. Contemporary Muslim women's venture into Quran interpretations both in Muslim world and in the west dates till the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1909 long Egyptian activist Malak Hifni –Nasif proposed a ten point program for change that included as its first demand the teaching of the Quran and sunnah to girls primary and secondary education and adherence to sharia in 1937-38 the Muslim ladies association was formed by Zaynab- al-gazzali to carry out social activities, however it quickly expanded to train women to perform dawah as well as to teach religious principles to other women. Training sessions were established to provide women with knowledge of exegesis on the Quran and hadith at the same time the prohibition against delivering the Friday kuthba or serving as imams was not challenged. Al- gazali was one of the 1<sup>st</sup> contemporary women to publish commentaries on the Quran and hadith and remain one of the most respected women interpreters she died in 2005. Similarly in Indonesian women have been encouraged to study the Quran since the turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1917 the largest national organization for Muslim women combined the study of Quran with programmed improve women's economic condition and assert their basic human rights. A similar organization was founded in 1946 to improve the condition of women by focusing on legal issues and calling for the reinterpretation of texts that were used to justify a lesser status for women. Today Indonesia is the home of thousands of institutions, the product of these institutions are experts in Quran reactions, intellectuals and activists. With expertise in Islamic studies and in Islamic law interpretation and the reinterpretation of quranic texts is a critical aspect of social activism because of the powerful role religion plays in Indonesian society. Major steps in asserting

<sup>2</sup> Al-Quran, C-49, V-13.

women voice into Quran interpretation have been taken by scholars based in the west and this has expended throughout the Muslim world, for e.g. the African American scholar Amina -wadud was on the first to publish a deliberately female inclusive exegetical work that asserted female equality with men at the time of creation in land terms of religious obligation and as frame work for challenging gender roles as the product of culture rather than religion.

### Laleh Mahree Bakhtiyar

Born to an American mother and Iranian father in new York city, Laila Bakhtiyar grew in los Angeles and Washington Dc as a catholic at age of 24 moved to Iran with her Iranian husband an architect and their two children, where she began to study Islam under her teacher DR Syed Hussein Nasr at Tehran university studding Quranic Arabic and eventually converted in 1964. She divorced her husband in 1976 and returned to U.S.A in 1988. She holds BA in history and MA in philosophy and counseling Psychology and PhD in educational foundations. She is also a nationally certified counselor, Bakhtiyar is a licensed professional psychotherapist she also taught courses in Islam at the university of Chicago she lives in Chicago where she is president of the institute or traditional Psychology and scholar in residence at kazi publications she has translated and written a combination of 25 book about Islam many dealing with Sufism. she has also authored or co-authored number of biographical works for translation of the Quran first published in 2007 and called "The Sublime Quran" is the first translation of Quran into English by an American women. Bakhtiyar's translation attempts to take female perspective and to admit alternative meanings of many Arabic terms that are ambiguous or whose meaning scholars have had to guess because of the antiquity of the language her work seeks to create understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. She has written a book which contains the biographies of over six hundred (600) women companions of Prophet (SAAS) including her name, her mother's name the names of her children the names of her husband's and were information available from the earliest sources of Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Sa'd she has also translated a book Al-Ghazzali on knowing yourself and Allah which was written Muhammad Nur Abdus Salam.

### SUBLIME QURAN

After having spent many years studying the various English translation of the Quran and realizing the sincere efforts of the translators in this great

divinely blessed task it became clear that English translation lake internal consistency and reliability . Clearly no translation of Quran compare in beauty and style with the original Arabic, the translation of a sacred text which will never equal the original, still has certain criteria it should meet. When the context is same if the same English word is not used for the same Arabic word throughout the translation it becomes difficult for someone who wants to learn to correlate the English and the Arabic to be able to do so in other words the twenty are so English translation put in emphasis on interpreting a Quranic verse without precisely representing the original Arabic word. The Arabic language is much more precise than present translations would indicate that Allah used a different word in each case, therefore a translator should do the same to the extent possible in order to give the English reader more of a sense of the depth to the Quran. This Arabic English version the sublime Quran is best way for a student of a classical Quranic Arabic to learn to read the Quran because of the internal consistency and reliability of the translations, for the Muslim the Quran is the word of (ALLAH). It is this word of Allah that has inspired artists, artisans, poets, philosophers and writers, those who had been the exponents of Islamic culture and civilization for almost fifteen hundred (1500) years. Yesterday and today's Muslims want to know more about each word that Allah chose for his revelation through the Quran, this realization in turn prompted this translation an attempt to give the sense of unity with the revelation to a non-Arabic speaking readers.

In writing about the Quran Al-Gazzali says each person should read or recite it not as a historical document, because then it loses its eternal quality, but as it relates to the person reading or reciting it. He asks how can one suppose otherwise when the Quran was revealed to messenger (SAAS) not only for him particularly, but as a spiritual cure, guidance, mercy and light for all the works as the Quran says

**"we send down in the Quran what is hilling and mercy for the once who believe."**<sup>3</sup>

The Quran is not a historic text frozen in the time period of its revelation to this end there are no parenthetical phrases in the sublime Quran further interpreting and elaborating a verse, thus allowing the translation of the Quran in itself to be free of any transient political, denominational or doctoral bias. There are numerous reasons for the importance of Laleh Bakhtiyar's translation of the Quran at least of which is that he sublime Quran provides a sensible and humanistic interpretation for the holly

<sup>3</sup> Al-Quran, C-16, V-126.

book. The Significance about Lailah Bakhtiyar's translation is that it opens new interpretive possibilities for Muslims. the Quran says

**“those who read it for their best meanings are the once whom Allah has guided.”<sup>4</sup>**

this suggest that we can –and should have more than one reading, interpretation so that we can find the best among these. In this the translation the sublime Quran she gives more emphasis to a verse...

**“Men are in charge of women by (right of) what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend (for maintenance) from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. But those (wives) from whom you fear arrogance-1<sup>st</sup> advice them. Them if they persist, forsake them in bed, and finally strike them. But if they obey you one more, seek no means against them. I deed Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.”<sup>5</sup>**

for the interpretation of this verse the translator say that this is the first English translation of the Quran that uses the original meaning of “to beat” which was “to go away” the translator give three arguments for this is...

1. The words “beat them” in 4:34<sup>6</sup> are a command, an imperative form of the verb. Yet the Prophet (SAAS) never carried out this command. Even if one were to say that just because a word in the Quran is grammatically a command does not mean that the Prophet (SAAS) had to carry it out; it means it is permissible for him to do or not to do. The retort: He chose not to do it. Therefore, whoever follows the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAAS) should also choose not to do it.

2. The word interpreted as “to beat” for over 1400 years in the Islamic world has over 25 meanings. Why chose a meaning that goes against both the legal and moral principles of the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAAS).

3. The strongest argument for why the Arabic word does not mean “to beat” but rather means “to go away” is because interpreting the Arabic word as “to beat” contradicts another verse in the Quran. We start with a premise: Islam encourages marriage and while divorce is allowed, it is discouraged. The Prophet said:

“Marriage is half of faith.” He also said: Divorce is deplorable.<sup>7</sup> In 2:231 the Quran says as translated in the *Sublime Quran*:

**“When you divorce wives, and they are about to reach their term, then hold them back honorably or set them free honorably; and hold them not back by injuring them so that you commit aggression, and whoever commits that, then indeed he does wrong to himself; and take not the Signs of God to yourselves in mockery; remember the divine blessing of God on you and what He sent forth to you of the Book and wisdom; He admonishes you with it; and be God-fearing of God and know that God is knowing of everything.”<sup>8</sup>**

All English translations translate this verse in a similar way.

That is, a husband may not hold back his wife from divorce by hurting, harming, injuring her or using force against her. Reading this verse as if for the first time, it suddenly occurred to the translator that what the Quran says in 2:231<sup>9</sup> contradicts the way 4:34<sup>10</sup> has been interpreted over the centuries by everyone accept the blessed Prophet (SAAS). The translation in the Sublime Quran of 4:34<sup>11</sup> reflects the interpretation as the blessed Prophet understood it:

**“Men are supporters of wives because God has given some of them an advantage over others and because they spend of their wealth. So the ones (f) who are in accord with morality are the ones (f) who are morally obligated, the ones (f) who guard the unseen of what God has kept safe. But those (f) whose resistance you fear, then admonish them (f) and abandon them (f) in their sleeping place, then go away from them (f); and if they (f) obey you, surely look not for any way against them (f); truly God is Lofty, Great.”<sup>12</sup>**

## II. CONCLUSION

One can only understand the sublimity of the Quran if one begins with some standard that establishes a system based in justice and fairness in order to be able to enter the world of the spiritual and intuition. The discernment between right and wrong, good and evil, lawful and unlawful, truth and falsehood the Quran as the criterion is the

<sup>4</sup> AL-Quran C-39, V-18.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Quran, C-4, V-34

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.....

<sup>7</sup> Al-Hadith

<sup>8</sup> Al-Quran, C-2, V-231

<sup>9</sup> Ibid...

<sup>10</sup> AL-Quran, c-3, V-34

<sup>11</sup> Ibid...

<sup>12</sup> AL-Quran, c-4, V-34.



standard by which to determine the correctness of a judgment or conclusion. It is the measure the reference point again which other things may be evaluated. A Muslim woman who wants a divorce must be set free without injuring, hurting, or using force against her, but a Muslim woman who wants to remain married does do under the threat of being beaten. If Muslim wives knew their rights, which one would want to stay married under such circumstances is this encouraging marriage? Does this make sense? 4:34 as presently interpreted contradicts 2:231. How can we eliminate this contradiction? There is a very simple solution: Revert the interpretation back to how the blessed Prophet understood it through his behavior. It has been a great blessing that the *Sublime Quran* is the first English translation to use “go away from them” instead of “beat them” in English translation. This verse in the *Sublime Quran* reads:

**“Men are supporters of wives because God has given some of them an advantage over others and because they spend of their wealth. So the ones (f) who are in accord with morality are the ones (f) who are morally obligated, the ones (F) who guard the unseen of what God has kept safe. But those (f) whose resistance you fear, then admonish them (f) and abandon them (f) in their sleeping place then go away from them (f) and if they (f) obey you, surely look not for any way against them (f); truly God is Lofty, Great.”**

We are told by jurists that the word “beat” in this verse (4:34) is a transitive verb. That means it can only take a direct object. As this verb is transitive it can only mean “beat them.” If it means “to go away from them,” the verb becomes intransitive, taking an indirect object (“from them”). There are two arguments against this rationalization of an immoral act. Based on his character, a model for all of humanity, he knew innately that it was wrong to harm another human being. He knew that according to 16:126 one is commanded to chastise with the same  
Chastisement that that person has been given.

**“And if you chastise then chastise with the like of that with which you were chastised.(16:126). Or, “And whoever chastises for injustice with the like of what he was chastised and after that again was to be wronged, God wil certainly help him, truly God is Pardoning, Forgiving” (22:60).**

Therefore, conceivably if a husband harms his wife by beating her, according to 16:126, his wife would be allowed to chastise her husband in return. The Prophet would have intuitively known that if a

husband were to beat his wife, she would have recourse to her husband. He clearly believed that it was not within his Sunnah to do such a thing. Therefore he showed by his behavior that 4:34 and the use of the word Zaraba means “go away from them” or “leave them” and let the emotions subside. The Prophet’s (SAAS) respect for the female gender was legendary. This included not only his wives, the mothers of the believers, but his daughters as well. He had a very special relationship with his daughter, Fatima, the only one of his daughters to survive him. How could he beat his wives and not consider that someone might beat one of his beloved daughters. The Prophet (SAAS) knew that marriage was based on mutual respect and love. The Quran often tells husbands and wives to consult on issues with each other. It would be unfair and unjust to think that God would have revealed a verse that allowed husbands to beat their wives instead of separating for a short period of time and allowing the anger to subside. Then they would be able to once again consult with one another. Therefore anyone who claims to follow the Sunnah of the Prophet must do the same thing because the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAAS) is not to beat, hit, hurt, spank, or chastise any woman. The word idrib is a command, an imperative form of the verb, yet a command the Prophet (SAAS) did not carry out if it means “beat them.” However he did carry it out.

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**International Journal of Advances in  
Engineering and Management**  
**ISSN: 2395-5252**



# IJAEM

**Volume: 02**

**Issue: 01**

**DOI: 10.35629/5252**

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