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CHAPTER 2



The Qur'anic View of Woman in This World

A thorough study of the Qur'anic treatment of the subject of woman must include a review of the roles fulfilled by the female characters mentioned, whether explicitly or indirectly, in the text. What is the significance of these women in the circumstance in which they have been mentioned? Are they mentioned for women in particular or for all readers, to fulfil the Qur'anic purpose of guidance? Does the Qur'an propose a single uniform role that women should play in society?

I propose that the Qur'an does not support a specific and stereotyped role for its characters, male or female. The roles of the women who have been referred to in the Qur'an fall into one of three categories: 1. A role which represents the social, cultural, and historical context in which that individual woman lived—without compliment or critique from the text. 2. A role which fulfils a universally accepted (i.e. nurturing or caretaking) female function, to which exceptions can be made—and have been made even in the Qur'an itself. Finally, 3. a role which fulfils a non-gender specific function, i.e. the role represents human endeavours on the earth and is cited in the Qur'an to demonstrate this specific function and not the gender of the performer, who happens to be a woman.¹

How the Qur'an Teaches the Reader through the Events in the Lives of the Individuals It has Mentioned

The Qur'an is a moral history. It proposes moral values, which are 'extrahistorical' and 'transcendental' in nature, such that 'their

location at a point in history does not exhaust their practical impact or, one might say their meaning'.² The time-span for the Qur'an is not limited to this present world. It is not limited to observable facts and events. It includes not only information about the actual events which occurred, but also about the intent behind such events and about their psychological effect. We have no sure indication for many accounts to determine if they are historical or metaphorical, literal or allegorical.

There are two significant concerns in our look at female characters mentioned in the Qur'an: the Makkan and Madinan chronological periods of revelation, and the references to known historical events. It has been argued that the detailed discussions during the Madinan period indicate accommodation towards the existing community and in some instances limit the universal objectives of the Qur'an. To overcome such a limitation, Muslim jurists and thinkers should give precedence to the universal revelations from the Makkan period.³

A hermeneutical model which derives basic ethical principles for further developments and legal considerations by giving precedence to general statements rather than particulars could solve many problems in application. However, there is no indication that all general principles were introduced in the Makkan period and all Madinan revelations were specific. Thus, although an analysis is needed which gives precedence to general principles over specific statements, it will not necessarily follow that this will be only a chronological consideration of the difference between Makkan and Madinan passages.

As for references in the Qur'an to well-known historical events, a significant part of Qur'anic exegesis is knowledge of *asbab al-nuzul*, often translated as the 'reason(s) for revealing (a particular verse or verses)', should more accurately be the 'occasions upon which (or, sometimes, because of which) a certain verse was revealed'. This distinction broadens the application of underlying principles.

If the 'reason' for a verse is a specific incident, then the universal 'extrahistorical' nature of the Qur'an is removed. It becomes a history book in the limited sense of a record of events. However, remembering that the Qur'an was revealed at a particular time in

THE QUR'ANIC VIEW OF WOMAN

history and within a certain social context helps one to understand the significance of some verses, without implying in any way a restriction of the Qur'anic principles to that context.

The Qur'an is quite selective about historical details which help to fulfil its purpose of universal guidance. It promotes the application of the precepts exemplified by those characters mentioned in the verses rather than merely gives a record of the events themselves. For if the reader assumes he is reading a record, what he reads may be insignificant to his own life. The Qur'an gives just enough—but not too much—details in order to facilitate its purpose.

The Qur'an does not distract the reader from the moral principles by overburdening him with details about particular individuals. Thus, a process of interpretation that gets at the significance of the references to particular characters needs to be applied. Fazlur Rahman proposes that 'the process of interpretation . . . consists of a double movement from the present situation to the Qur'anic times, then back to the present' because the

Qur'an is the divine response, through the Prophet's mind, to the moral-social situation of the Prophet's Arabia.... The Qur'an and the genesis of the Islamic community occurred in the light of history and against a social-historical background. The Qur'an is a response to that situation, and for the most part it consists of moral, religious, and social pronouncements that respond to specific problems confronted in concrete historical situations....⁴

In particular, he defines that double movement of interpretation to be from the specific—a study of the historical situation of the problem which the statement addresses, in order to understand its import or meaning—to the general—'generalize the specific answers and enunciate them as statements of general moral-social objectives that can be "distilled" from specific text in the light of the socio-historical background.'⁵

The Significance of the Women Mentioned or Referred to in the Qur'an

I have tried to demonstrate the significance of particular female characters mentioned in the Qur'an to the modern context, because 'if the results of understanding fail in application now, then

either there has been a failure to assess the present situation correctly, or a failure in understanding the Qur'an.⁶ To do so, however, I first demonstrate the significance of these women in the context of the text.

I have divided all of the women—whether mentioned explicitly or referred to in passing—into two major categories.⁷ Those with no independent significance I have placed into category 1. This category I have divided into two levels: those with very slight mention and those women who performed functions characteristic of the 'proper' role for a woman. At both levels the women are inconsequential to the overall Qur'anic purpose of guidance, but are necessary for the coherence of a story or event. At the second level of this category, the women functioned in accordance to the social constraints of their particular circumstance. The Qur'an does not portray them as universal 'examples'.

Qur'anic examples provide concrete information about the application of moral precepts. In order to apply the moral principles of the Qur'an, a reader must have some practical understanding. Practices are rooted in contexts. Readers who interpret the significance of the women cited in the Qur'an often come to the text with notions of appropriate functions for women. When these are supported on the surface of the Qur'anic portrayal, they do not look further at the examples. This has led to a great deal of oversimplifications and contradictions when the perspective of the individual exegete is superimposed on to the Qur'an itself.⁸

The Qur'an is not a manual of directives which only commands the individual reader to perform certain actions or fulfil particular characteristics. By citing concrete events, it makes conceptual ideas tangible. The female and male characters are particularly important to demonstrate certain ideas about guidance. The characters and events in the Qur'an should always be examined in the light of this overall goal.

It should be noted that all references to female characters in the Qur'an use an important cultural idiosyncrasy which demonstrates respect for women.⁹ Except for Mary, the mother of Jesus, they are never called by name. Most are wives and the Qur'an refers to them by means of a possessive construction (the *idafah*) containing one of

THE QUR'ANIC VIEW OF WOMAN

the Arabic words for wife: *imra'ah* (woman), *nisa'* (women), or *zawj* (spouse, or mate) pl. *azwaj*, and the name of a particular male; for example, the *imra'ah* of Imran, or the *zawj* of Adam.

Even an unmarried woman or one whose husband is not mentioned is linked with some male: Ukht-Musa, the sister of Moses; Ukht-Harun, sister of Aaron, another name for Mary; Umm-Musa; the mother of Moses. However, this particular manifestation of respect is restricted to that context. The general principle—that women should be addressed respectfully—is intended for those who read the Qur'an at other times.

The Qur'an presents examples through several methods. A specific event is spoken of in general terms and the general application of the principles which underlie the verse is emphasized. 'The Qur'anic *ayah* is intended as a continual reality independent of the individuals (mentioned), and the individuals are merely examples of this reality.'¹⁰

Other verses include information about very specific incidents, but the moral lesson to be drawn from the incidents can be generally applied once they have been interpreted. 'The method the Qur'an uses in this type of incident is to describe the activity which occurred and to describe with that activity, the apparent and hidden legalities (to be deduced from that incident).'¹¹

In *Surat-al-Tahrim* (66), the Qur'an points directly to some women as models:

Allah cites an example for those who disbelieve: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot, who were (respectively) under two of our righteous servants, yet they were betrayed them so that they (the husbands) were of no avail to them against Allah and it was said (to them): 'Enter the fire along with those who enter!'

And Allah sets forth an example to those who believe: the wife of Pharaoh when she said 'My Lord! Build for me a home with You in the garden, and deliver me from Pharaoh and his work, and deliver me from evil doing folk.

And Mary, daughter of Imran whose body was chaste, therefore We breathed therein something of Our *ruh*. She put faith in the words of her Lord and His scriptures and was among the *qanitin* (66:10-12).

These 'examples' which Allah specifically 'cites' for the readers are usually interpreted as being exclusively for women. Yet the verse

identifies them as examples for 'those who believe' and 'those who disbelieve'. In other words, they are non-gender specific examples—in this case, of the individual responsibility towards belief. No one is helped to salvation because of an affiliation with someone who strives for good—no matter how intimate that affiliation.¹² Each person must strive for good, or, at the very least, as with the wives of 'righteous servants', must not strive against the truth, and be condemned to the Fire.

Finally, on rare occasions, some incidents mentioned in the Qur'an have exclusive application. There is some historical information which can be extracted from them with very little or no significant application beyond that incident. These are Madinan verses, and the information includes something exclusive to the Prophet Muhammad and his household.¹³

Woman as an Individual

In my discussion of woman in the Qur'an, I have considered the difference between woman as an individual and woman as a member of society. For the most part, the Qur'anic consideration of woman on earth centres on her relationship to the group, i.e. as a member of a social system. However, it is also important to understand how the Qur'an focuses on woman as an individual because the Qur'an treats the individual, whether male or female, in exactly the same manner: that is, whatever the Qur'an says about the relationship between Allah and the individual is not in gender terms. With regard to spirituality, there are no rights of woman distinct from rights of man.

With reference to the individual, the Qur'an most often uses the term *nafs*. On earth, the individual is given responsibility and capacity. Both determine the recompense of the individual in the Hereafter.¹⁴

Individual capacity is expressed as follows: 'Allah does not tax a *nafs* beyond its scope. For it (is only) that which it has earned, and against it (is only) that which it has deserved' (2:286). There is no distinction between the male and the female with regard to individual capacity. With regard to their potential relationship with

THE QUR'ANIC VIEW OF WOMAN

Allah, they are the same. With regard to personal aspirations, they are also the same. This is important because:

In every society, in every century, people have assumed that males and females are different not merely in basic anatomy, but in elusive qualities of spirit, soul and ability. *They are not supposed to do the same things, think the same way, or share the same dreams and desires* [emphasis mine].¹⁵

When various social systems determine differences between men and women, they conclude these differences as indications of different values as well. There is no indication that the Qur'an intends for us to understand that there is a primordial distinction between males and females with regard to spiritual potential. Therefore, whatever differences existing between males and females could not indicate an inherent value, or else free will would be meaningless. The problem arises in trying to determine when and how these differences come into being.

Sayyid Qutb¹⁶ says that 'the *fitrah* [primordial nature] makes the man a man, and the woman a woman', but he goes on to emphasize that this distinction has no inherent value. Al-Zamakhshari,¹⁷ on the other hand, says that men are 'preferred' by Allah over women in terms of 'intelligence, physical constitution, determination and physical strength', although he cites no place in the text which states this. Such an assertion cannot be erased by saying that 'men have no right to overcome women by coercion, or display arrogant behaviour towards them'. Al-'Aqqad¹⁸ says that men deserve preference over women.

I hope to demonstrate the negative effects of interpretations which place an inherent distinction between males and females and then give values to those distinctions. Such interpretations assume that men represent the norm and are therefore fully human. Women, by implication, are less human than men. They are limited and therefore of less value. Such interpretations encourage the stereotypes about women and men which severely hamper the potential of each. In addition, these interpretations justify the restrictions placed on the woman's right to pursue personal happiness within the context of Islam. Most troubling is the tendency to attribute these interpretations to the Qur'an itself rather than to the authors who hold them.

I do not hold such views, nor do I find support for them in the Qur'an. It is interesting to note that even those Muslim authors who issue these interpretations accept that the Qur'an aims to establish social justice. However, it is obvious that their interpretation of social justice does not extend fully to women. It is like Thomas Jefferson and the writers of the American Constitution saying that 'All men are created equal' without intending in the least to include equality between black men and white men.

I propose that the Qur'an depicts human individuals as having inherently equal value by looking at three stages in human existence. First, in the creation of humans, the Qur'an emphasizes the single origin of all humankind: 'He created you (all) from a single *nafs*' (4:1). Second, with regard to development here on earth, the Qur'an emphasizes that the potential for change, growth and development lies within the *nafs* of the individual (or the group) as well: 'Allah does not change the condition of a folk until they (first) change what is in their *anfus*' (13:11). Finally, all human activity is given recompense on the basis of what the individual earns (4:124).¹⁹

This leaves me to ask the following questions: Is there any way to understand the distinction between individuals? Do these distinctions reflect a particular value system? Do they follow clearly delineated lines between the two sexes?

Distinctions between Individuals: Taqwa

The Qur'an does make distinctions between things and between people. It establishes that the Hereafter is of greater value than this world.²⁰ It also distinguishes within the Hereafter and on this earth. The value of the distinctions between humankind on earth can be clearly summed up by the Qur'anic statement in *surat Al-Hujarat* (49:13): 'We created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. *Inna akramakum 'inda Allah atqa-kum* [Indeed the most noble of you from Allah's perspective is whoever (he or she) has the most *taqwa*].'

This term *taqwa*, one of the most essential in the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung*, has various translations and definitions.²¹ For this

research I will consider it to mean 'piety', that is, a pious manner of behaviour which observes constraints appropriate to a social-moral system; and 'consciousness of Allah', that is, observing that manner of behaviour because of one's reverence towards Allah. In the Qur'anic *Weltanschauung*, this term always reflects both the action and the attitude. I do wish to reiterate that this multidimensional term is essential in the Qur'an.

The Qur'anic passage above reconstructs all the dimensions of human existence. It begins with creation. Then, it acknowledges the pair: male and female.²² These are then incorporated into larger and smaller groups, here translated as 'nation' and 'tribe' respectively²³ 'That you may know one another', or simply that being distinguishable allows identification. If we were all alike, with nothing to distinguish us, we would have no way of knowing each other or being known.

The culmination of this verse and its central aspect for this discussion is: 'the most noble of you from Allah's perspective is whoever (he or she) has the most *taqwa*.' The distinguishing value from Allah's perspective is *taqwa*. Provided that *taqwa* is understood in both its action and attitude dimensions, this verse is self-explanatory. Allah does not distinguish on the basis of wealth, nationality, sex, or historical context, but on the basis of *taqwa*. It is from this perspective then that all distinctions between woman and woman, between man and man, and between woman and man, must be analysed.

It is worth noting here that this verse follows verses which reprimand the individuals of both genders for mocking, defaming and backbiting one another (49:11-12). One might attribute greater or lesser value to another on the basis of gender, wealth, nationality, religion or race, but from Allah's perspective, these do not form a valuable basis for distinction between individuals (or groups)—and His is the true perspective.²⁴

Finally, I wish to point out that the three commentators whose exegetical works were consulted for this research all state that the apparent and worldly things which humans use to judge between one and another are not the true criteria for judgement. They do not agree, however, on what is included in these apparent things. In analysing this verse, only Sayyid Qutb²⁵ acknowledges that gender

is used as a basis for mockery and defamation, which then must be denounced as a false, worldly aspect of superiority. He states that the verses are inclusive of all the variations among humankind: gender, colour, etc., 'because all will return to single scale, that of *taqwa*'.

Al-Zamakhshari²⁶ mentions that the references to both males and females, with regard to mockery, is more emphatic than the omission of both would be, but does not go on to conclude explicitly that gender could be used erroneously for distinction or superiority.

Maududi²⁷ says that in these verses 'The whole of mankind is addressed' in order to prevent a great evil which is universally disruptive, and that is prejudice due to 'race, colour, language, country and nationality'. He does not include gender. He quotes Ibn-al-Majah as saying, 'Allah does not see your outward appearances and your possessions, but He sees your heart and your deeds.'²⁸ I believe that the heart and deeds are genderless on the basis of this verse: 'Whoever does good, from male or female, and is a believer, all such will enter Paradise' (4:124).²⁹

Distinctive Female Characters in the Qur'an

I will discuss only three Qur'anic female characters: the mother of Moses, Mary, and Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba. The details in the lives of these women are very different but their stories have been retold by exegetes without the female vision and without focusing on that which transcends their femaleness.

Moses was born at a time when Pharaoh was slaughtering all male Jewish infants. Allah decrees that this child will fill the office of prophecy.

And We inspired the mother of Moses, saying: Suckle him and, when you fear for him, then cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve. Lo! We shall bring him back to you and shall make him (one) of Our messengers. (28:7)

The first pronouncement in this verse speaks soft words to the mother of Moses. It promises to return the suckling child to her. Then it announces that Allah will make him a messenger. Note the tenderness the Qur'an demonstrates towards this woman's desire to nurture her child. Although the child is living under the threat of Pharaoh's orders to slaughter such children, the child is saved to fulfil

the decree of Allah. The desire of his mother towards the child is not directly part of that decree. Yet, the Qur'an details that aspect—in fact, mentions it first.

Returning the child so that he might suckle at the mother's breast will fulfil her maternal need, and presumably make it easy for her to remain silent about the child. Here sacrifice and struggle to fulfil Allah's commandments are tempered with sympathy and tenderness. She is not just a believer, she is a believer with love and concerns, fears and anxieties.

Not to be underestimated in its significance is that the Qur'an states that Umm-Musa received *wahy*,³⁰ thus demonstrating that women as well as men have been recipients of *wahy*. Thus Umm-Musa demonstrates the point that women are distinct with regard to some aspects, but universal with regard to others.

As I mentioned before, Mary is the only woman referred to by name in the Qur'an. This is because in the Qur'an, Jesus was created in the womb of Mary by special decree and not by normal biology. He is called 'the son of Mary' to demonstrate the significance of his birth. Family relations in the Qur'an are labelled in terms of the father or a male ancestor,³¹ but since no father is mentioned for Jesus, he cannot be called in this manner. Most important, from the perspective of the Qur'an, he was not the son of God. Although Mary is called by name in the Qur'an, she is also given one of the honorific titles common at that time in Arabia and employed in the Qur'an when specific women are mentioned: she is called 'sister of Aaron'.

In her story, a messenger appears before her carrying Allah's message that she is to bear a child. She responds, 'How can I have a child and no mortal has touched me, neither have I been unchaste?' (19:20). Once she has accepted the decree, the Divine *ruh* is blown into her, and she bears the child.

When the time for delivery comes, the Qur'an describes her pains of labour and her statement: 'Would that I had died before this time and been long forgotten (rather than to feel such pains).' (19:23). She is like every other woman who bears a child. Then the Qur'an demonstrates Allah's sympathy for her predicament: 'Grieve not!' (19:24) and she is asked to eat, drink, and be comforted (19:26).

Despite the centrality of Jesus to Christianity, no similar affirma-

tion of the unique experience of childbirth is given such detailed consideration in any Christian theological work—not even in the Bible. That special function is elevated to the status worthy of detailed mention to attest to its significance in the Qur'anic worldview. We are not left to just take it for granted.

Again, in this instance, as with Umm-Musa cited above, it is generally considered necessary only that a certain child be delivered to birth or to safety. Yet, the Qur'an includes these details to highlight the fact that the priority of saving the child, in each case, is also viewed in the light of the concern for the respective mothers.³²

Finally, one simple grammatical consideration with regard to the significance of Mary to all believers. The Qur'an classifies her as 'one of the *qanitin*'³³ (66:12), using the masculine plural form of the word that indicates one devout before Allah. There is no reason not to use the feminine plural form—except to emphasize that the significance of Mary's example is for all who believe—whether male or female. Her virtue was not confined by gender.

Finally, I will discuss Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba. Despite the fact that she ruled over a nation, most Muslims hold leadership as improper for a woman. The Qur'an uses no terms that imply that the position of ruler is inappropriate for a woman. On the contrary, the Qur'anic story of Bilqis celebrates both her political and religious practices.

Although the verse does point out (perhaps as peculiar) that she was 'a woman' ruling (27:23), this is nothing more than a statement quoted from one who had observed her. Beyond this identification of her as a woman, no distinction, restriction, addition, limitation, or specification of her as a woman who leads is ever mentioned.

The Qur'anic story continues: she was powerful, well provided for, and 'has a magnificent throne.' (27:23). However, she and 'her people [worshipped] the sun instead of Allah' (27:24).

Solomon sends a letter to the Queen of Sheba 'In the name of Allah' and invites her and her people to submit to worship of only Allah (27:29-31). When she reads the letter, she says to her advisers: 'Lo! there has been thrown to me—a noble (*karim*) letter.' (27:29). She then asks them to advise her in this affair of hers for 'I decide no case until you [advise me (on it)]' (27:32).

Although she operates within the normal protocol and asks her advisers for consultation on this matter, she has already given an indication of her perspective by describing the letter as *karim*. Thus, her postponement of the decision on this case is not for lack of decisive ability, but for protocol and diplomacy.

'They said: we are lords of might and lords of great prowess, but it is for you to command; so consider what you will command. She said: 'Lo! kings, when they enter a township, ruin it and make the honour of its people shame. Thus will they do. But lo! I am going to send a present to them, and see with what (answer) my messengers return.' (27:33-5).

Solomon rejects the gift, stating that he has no need because Allah has given him a good position in both worldly and spiritual terms (27:36-7).

In verse 42, the story resumes after she has decided to pay him a personal visit. As she is a ruler, such a decision carries importance. It means that she has determined that there is something special and unusual about this particular circumstance which warrants her personal attention and not just that of ambassadors. Perhaps it is his first letter which is written 'in the name of Allah'³⁴ or because he rejects her material gift.³⁵

While she is *en route* to him, Solomon has her throne (the same one mentioned above) miraculously transported to him and uses it to test her wisdom. She is led to it and asked, 'Is your throne like this?' She answers, '(It is) as though it were the very one.' (27:42). The existence of a throne so like hers, or of her throne itself, indicates something of the beyond-worldly power which Solomon commands. She goes on to say, 'Knowledge was bestowed on us in advance of this, and we have submitted to Allah (in Islam).' (27:42).³⁶

Some interpret her decision to send a gift rather than to show brute strength as 'feminine' politics. I place both her worldly knowledge of peaceful politics and her spiritual knowledge of the unique message of Solomon together on the same footing to indicate her independent ability to govern wisely and to be governed wisely in spiritual matters. Thus, I connect her independent political decision—despite the norms of the existing (male) rulers—with her independent acceptance of the true faith (Islam), despite the norms of her people.

In both instances, the Qur'an shows that her judgement was better than the norm, and that she independently demonstrated that better judgement. If her politics were feminine, then her faith was feminine, which, by implication would indicate that masculinity is a disadvantage. Her faith and her politics may be specific to females, but they both were better. They indicate one who has knowledge, acts on it, and can therefore accept the truth. This demonstration of pure wisdom exhibited in the Qur'an by a woman can hopefully be exhibited by a man as well.

¹It is this use of female characters which will be the focus of this chapter, because such characters demonstrate something of significance to fulfilling the Qur'anic purpose of guidance.

²Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 3.

³For a detailed discussion of this, see Abdullahi al-Na'im, *Towards an Islamic Reformation* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1990), especially pp. 34-68.

⁴Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 5.

⁵Ibid., p. 6.

⁶Ibid., p. 7.

⁷Please see Appendix for a complete list.

⁸I will note some specific examples of this in Chapter 4, and in the Conclusion.

⁹It is still used in many Arabic-speaking countries today.

¹⁰Qutb, Vol. VI, p. 3621.

¹¹Idem., Vol. V, p. 2817.

¹²This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 concerning the meaning of the word *zawj* in verses about the Hereafter.

¹³For example, the wives of Muhammad are not permitted to remarry after his death.

¹⁴Individual recompense and responsibility are dealt with extensively in Chapter 3. It is sufficient here to say only that the Qur'an emphasizes that the individual will be recompensed in accordance with the deeds he or she is responsible for performing.

¹⁵Carol Tarvis and Carole Wade, *The Longest War: Sex Differences in Perspective*, 2nd edn. (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), p. 2.

¹⁶Qutb, Vol. II, p. 643.

¹⁷Idem, Vol. I, p. 523.

¹⁸Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad, *al-Mar'ah fi al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Halal, 1962), p. 7.

¹⁹Which I will discuss at length in the next chapter.

²⁰'See how we prefer [some] above [others], and verily Hereafter will be greater in degrees (*darajat*) and greater in preference' (17:21).

THE QUR'ANIC VIEW OF WOMAN

²¹For example, Pickthall translates it as 'best conduct' and 'warding off evil'; Yusuf Ali has translated it 'most righteous' and Izutsu, *God and Man*, p. 44, defines it as 'fear of God'; Maududi, Vol. XIII, p. 117, has interpreted it as 'moral excellence'. Fazlur Rahman holds strongly to his individual interpretation of this term, as opposed to others: A 'unique balance of integrative moral action ... to be squarely anchored within the moral tensions, the "limits of God" and not to "transgress" or violate the balance of those tensions or limits.' (*Major Themes*, pp. 28-9).

²²This passage has also been interpreted to mean that each human is a descendant of a single male and a single female. See al-Zamakhshari, Vol III, p. 565. Also Maududi, vol. XIII, pp. 83 and 116.

Because of the *min* in this passage, it has also been interpreted, as I have used it, to mean that each of us is of one type or the other: male or female. See, for example, the translations of Pickthall and Yusuf Ali.

²³It is possible to define these groups in other terms and the Arabic lends itself to this, but for the sake of simplicity, I will keep those offered by Pickthall and only distinguish them as smaller and larger groups.

²⁴Or, as Sayyid Qutb, Vol. VI, p. 3344, says, 'the apparent or obvious [*zahir*] value' which men and women see is not 'the real [*haqiqi*] value', which might be hidden. Allah knows and judges by that real value.

²⁵Vol. VI, p. 3348.

²⁶Vol. III, p. 565.

²⁷Vol. XIII, p. 117.

²⁸Quoted from Muslim Ibn Majah, and translated in Vol. XIII, p. 117.

²⁹This verse and its implications are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

³⁰This term means that an individual received divine communication from Allah. It is distinguished from *risalah* which indicates that an individual has received divine communication from Allah and is responsible for transmitting the information to humankind at large. The significance of this to gender is discussed in Chapter 3.

³¹For example, Ali Imran, Bani Adam.

³²It is worth mentioning in this regard that the attitudes which promote unbearable suffering in this world for some delayed comfort in the Hereafter is contrasted here with the mercy and comfort extended to these women even above the concern for fulfilment of the divine decree.

³³The implications of this term are discussed at length in Chapter 4. For our present discussion, it can be translated as 'co-operative and subservient'.

³⁴Qutb, Vol. V, p. 2640.

³⁵Maududi, Vol. 9, p. 26.

³⁶I have chosen the translation by Yusuf Ali on this section of this verse over that of Pickthall's.