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## News and Notes

A Monthly Paper printed for the private use of the  
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1st February = 8th Dhu'l-Qa'da (11th mo.) 1353.

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### Women in Modern Islam

Some notes from a deputation address.

**S**UPPOSE one of you were asked to describe the life of an European woman. You would probably find it difficult to do so because the new situation and conflicting ideals are affecting women of the Continent in different ways. Similarly, in India the women in the various provinces are being affected in different ways. It is thus impossible in a short time to give an adequate general idea of Moslem women in that country to-day.

However, I think I may perhaps assume that the life of an orthodox Moslem woman is known to you and most of you are aware, also, of the way in which the political situation in India is affecting women. I want to suggest therefore that, on the present occasion, we shall be spending our time more profitably if we consider in detail some of the more prominent features of Moslem social life, and indicate something of the tension which educated Moslem women leaders experience in their efforts to introduce reforms. Then, in conclusion, I hope to show how all this is related to the Christian missionary enterprise.

As missionaries we welcome the evidence these reformers furnish of a changing outlook and a new standard of values. Here let me say that a number of these enlightened women have been in touch with missionaries for years. Indeed, an educated Moslem gentleman said to me at one of the All-India Women's Conferences that he considered such a gathering had been made possible by the work of the pioneer zanana missionaries.

There has been a marked improvement in the position of women in India during the last few years, one reason being that men have realised the need of their help in the political upheaval. Progress has been made in the matter of education and although about 97 per cent of Moslem women are still illiterate, yet thousands of girls are now

attending Primary Schools, and the number of girls in High Schools, Colleges, Health Centres and Medical Schools is increasing yearly. The long-lived aversion to secular education for girls is breaking down, and public opinion on this subject, though sometimes discouragingly slow, is yet real and steady. The Chief Inspectress of Schools for the Panjab, who holds the degree of Master of Oriental Languages, is a zealous Moslem. A lady who some years ago could only speak her village Panjabi now speaks English fluently and is welcomed at Government House. Another Moslem acquaintance of mine, who sees to her family of seven children, four years ago could not speak English, yet recently she read a paper in a women's meeting. Such facts indicate their grit and determination and present keen desire for education.

But in speaking of Moslem women we need to differentiate between the orthodox conservative masses (who still form the majority) and the relatively small reforming parties, chiefly the Ahmadis. For while the latter have desired to have in Lahore a Moslem University for women, the former represented in Deoband, the chief seat of orthodoxy in Northern India, recently passed a resolution protesting against the U.P. Legislative Council's decision regarding compulsory education for girls, saying that it was tantamount to destroying the time-honoured moral and religious traditions of Islam for girls. There you have a glaring instance of a conflict of ideals in Islam.

How is the question of purdah affected? This has frequently been debated in Women's Conferences. As you well know, the outstanding organisation in the Women's Movement is the All-India Women's Conference. There is also the Annual Conference of Indian Muslim ladies. Even as far back as 1919, the subject of purdah was under discussion and Begam Shah Nawaz, President on that occasion, said "that she felt the time was not yet ripe to come out of purdah." But she is out to-day. In 1931, Lady Abdul-Qadir addressed the Conference at Lahore from behind a curtain. She too is now out of purdah. At the All-Asian Women's Conference 1931, a delegate suggested that the purdah should be transferred to the mind of man. A shrewd and apposite remark! It is difficult to make general remarks on purdah for some university students wish their wives to come out and the wives refuse. Other women only keep purdah when in their own home town. For instance, when out walking in Darjeeling, I heard a voice calling me and on looking round saw a supposed purdah lady riding with her husband in full riding kit, with not even a hat. She was greatly amused at my surprise. Nevertheless, later, in her home town, we still held up curtains so that she might walk between them when she stepped out of her car to attend a Child Welfare Committee!

A Moslem woman school teacher one morning confidently said that she would take a procession of unveiled women through the city before ten years were out. Yet, that same day an orthodox Moslem,

speaking about the question of purdah, declared that if a woman showed a part of her ankle beneath her burqah, Muhammad had said that she was damned to Hell-fire. Elderly women are proud of the burqah. I should say that the opinion of the majority of educated Moslem women is not in favour of unrestricted liberty. They wish to visit friends and to have more freedom but any such free association of the sexes as is characteristic of western countries, they are against.

It is in these matters of social reform when the times call for advance, and religious custom forbids, that the modern educated women find themselves beset with difficulties. For, just what is their position? On the one hand the orthodox party claim that to walk according to their interpretation of the Quran and to follow in detail the example of Muhammad as given in the traditions, is the duty of pious Moslems. The orthodox Mullahs have proclaimed all down the centuries, and have practised and still do practise, polygamy, divorce, veiling of their women, etc. On the other hand, more enlightened ladies meet women of other communities in open Conference, women who because they know the facts of present-day Moslem society may not always have been sympathetic. In such an atmosphere, and knowing the expressed views of the orthodox, these Moslem women still claim that their religious laws and their prophet are flawless. The real issue before Moslem women then is this; Can they insist that these old customs must end? Can they break purdah? Can they join Hindus and Christians in denouncing polygamy, easy divorce, etc., and yet be true to their religion and their prophet? The orthodox masses say, "No." The enlightened women say, "Yes". The latter are proud of their religion, loyal to their prophet whose character has gradually been idealised, and their policy is so to rationalise the Quran, as to find in it sanction for their more advanced views. I cannot say that their reading of the Quran is historically correct, nor can I say that the orthodox are wrong in their interpretation, yet, though these women may not be good historians or even logical, we rejoice that they are exhibiting a power to discern good and evil and that they are choosing the good.

I think that Moslem delegate at the All-Asian Women's Conference must have been an advocate of this new view-point, who said: "In Islam women were given the highest position and there was no child marriage in Islam." Hindu and Christian women around me ejaculated with surprise. Those who have read Miss Rathbone's book on child marriage will know that the facts are, that the orthodox assert that the prophet married Ayesha at 9 and that they can follow his example to-day. In India Moslems have actually surpassed Hindus in the proportions of child wives. (Census 1931, p. 22). I cannot wait to tell you of the operation of the Sarda Act. You know that at present, it is not working effectively. The Women's Conference at Karachi passed resolutions concerning it, but public opinion in India is but very slowly aroused on such subjects.

But other subjects beside child marriage and purdah embarrass

the Moslem woman reformer. For instance, take the question of polygamy. At the Women's Conference in Karachi, 1935, a resolution was moved from the chair and passed unanimously against polygamy. But, "in this connection the Muslim delegates wished it to be recorded that while they were in favour of the abolition of polygamy, it was permitted by their religion only in case of strictest necessity arising, as for example, in the event of there being no issue from the first marriage." (Report p. 70). But in 1930 at the All Asian Women's Conference, a Moslem delegate explained, "As far as religion is concerned Islam has laid down strict rules against polygamy. It has only allowed it in case of war. . . . It is at such times only that man may marry more than one wife simply for her protection. . . . The Holy Koran, well aware of human nature says: 'Surely you will not be able to maintain justice, therefore have one wife and one alone.' The Holy Koran instead of bluntly prohibiting polygamy proves (sic) the problem for its devotees by saying 'marry more than one wife (in time of war) but maintain justice between the two, but it will not be possible to maintain justice, therefore marry one and only one wife.' "

These two interpretations differ but are interesting as representing views held by enlightened women. Some men uphold the women in these views, nevertheless, I am afraid that the great majority is against them. The Mirza of Qadian, Head of the Ahmadis, a small reforming group, is himself a polygamist. In their English paper, the *Islamic Review* published in Woking (1930) Khan Bahadur S. M. Husain, B.A., writes, "Islam permits polygamy because it means chivalry with additional responsibility, but guards against its abuses by enjoining equitable treatment among wives and restricting the number to 4. . . . It was possible for the prophet alone (the peace of God be upon him) to take the responsibility of even 9 wives at a time . . . far heavier responsibility than would be tolerable for an ordinary man. In countries where women preponderate, it is criminal that a man of means should be a bachelor, and it is not only unchivalrous but sinful, for wealthy men not to take to themselves second and third wives." The view of the orthodox is shewn in the following. A Maulvi when asked why he married four wives replied, "I have performed the custom of Muhammad and by marrying four wives I have shewn great respect towards him." Yet I want to assure you that in spite of these views, polygamy is not prevalent in India (though it is in some other Moslem countries) and the better classes are becoming really ashamed of it.

In view of what has been said you will more readily appreciate what it means to Moslem women to associate themselves with resolutions such as the one passed at Karachi.

There is moreover, a grievous ill of which not much is said nor can be said publicly, for the difficulty in Moslem lands is not so much in brothels as in the number of slave girls who are bought and live as concubines in rich Moslem houses. The orthodox claim religious

sanction for this, quoting the Quran and the example of Muhammad. I have only heard one Moslem lady who has spoken publicly against this. They are naturally diffident about it.

On another vexed social question these women are making a brave stand. The prevalent practice of divorce by men at their mere caprice, and the powerlessness of women to divorce their husbands at all, was discussed by the Panjab section of the Women's Conference and they claimed "the rights of women to divorce their husbands." The orthodox soon proclaimed that the women had no right to do so according to Islam. What "right" there is, is qualified. The woman may "seek divorce from her husband, but the husband has the option of refusing to assent." The Delhi section of the Conference refused to pass the resolution. The great majority of women present, both Hindus and Moslems, voted against it. In spite of this and greatly daring, the All-India Women's Conference with a majority of Hindus and representative Moslem women, tell the world that, "This Conference is of the opinion that the prevalent practice of divorce among Muhammadans, in so far as it allows an arbitrary power to the husband to divorce his wife at his mere caprice, is not in accord with the true interpretation of Islamic teaching, and places on record its considered opinion that the right to divorce as conceded by the Islamic law to Moslem women be recognised by the British Courts." (Report, Karachi, 1935, p. 119). What must those learned, bearded Mullahs of orthodox Islam, well-versed in Arabic, the Quran and Islamic Law, think of these audacious women?

Time forbids me to touch on other social matters. I hope that my remarks will enable you to see things in clearer perspective, for I feel that when you have read the statements of Muslim women, in the published Reports of these Conferences, together with the claims made by the Ahmadis and *then* listen to some of your missionaries speak on the actual life of Moslem women, you may be left in considerable uncertainty as to what are the actual facts.

I have here interesting confirmation of the position as I have represented it and of the conflicting ideals amongst the Moslems themselves, in an article which appeared recently in a journal of the progressive Ahmadis: "Woman has been the cause of turning Adam out of Paradise; such has been the verdict of Christianity; Paradise lies at the very feet of women; such has been the teaching of the Prophet of Islam. The religion which put Paradise at her very feet, thanks to the orthodox Mullah makes a veritable Hell out of her life, whereas the religion which drove her out of Paradise restores her to freedom and joy. . . . Perhaps nowhere is degradation more disgraceful than in the fate inflicted on woman in an average Moslem home. No education, no individuality, no right of inheritance, no freedom of will, she is denied the very air and sunshine of God which are enjoyed even by birds and beasts! A virtual slave to man, his sweet will must be hell to her or heaven to her just as the whim may be. A mere

word of Talaq uttered by him is enough to render her homeless and throw her, with the children he has given her, on the public street to beg, borrow or steal. Just mark the irony of things. The Prophet tells us that Paradise is at the very feet of woman—and yet what is the position to which she has been condemned in an average Moslem home? Why! 'The very shoe at the feet of man', that is how the common Panjabi saying goes."

These women have our sympathy in their struggle for progress and freedom but it is obvious that greater liberty is in itself not enough. They need spiritual power to control their life, to build up character, to fit them for this freedom. What essentially spiritual help has Islam to give to the modern woman? As we have seen, Islam in orthodox form has little attraction for the educated section. The appeal to which they respond comes rather from the rationalist parties, such as the Ahmadis, whose leaders are exerting themselves to commend Islam as they interpret it. Books are written by them to shew that Muhammad was in reality against polygamy—that it was merely benevolence on his part to marry 9 wives—that his favorite wife Ayesha was not sent to him at 9 but at 15—that Islam is the only religion which has given woman privileges and these often go out of their way to say that woman owes nothing to Christ. Thus: "Muhammad exalted womanhood by shewing deep respect to woman, he never denied his mother like the crucified God of the Christians."

One of their publications is a popular story called "*Isabella*" which tells of a Spanish nun who found a Quran and was converted to Islam. She was persecuted by the Christians but at last convinced the priests who interrogated her that Islam was the only true religion. Through this story the women get arguments to use against Christianity.

These ladies (as far as I know them) are keen on the religion of Islam as now expounded, and proud of their prophet. Some undoubtedly find real help in their devotional exercises. Consider for instance part of a letter written by a Moslem lady. "You have asked about the prayers. We pray to God to thank Him for all things which he has given to us. Personally I find much pleasure in praying. I feel very happy and light after every prayer and feel more prompt to please and make everybody happy. But I find this difference only when I say them with real attention." But for the majority, religion is merely a code of laws given to man for guidance in this physical world. One hears little of the need of purity of heart or a vital experience of God. A woman some time ago wrote to the editor of *The Light*, the progressive party's paper: "I am 20 years of age, and I have done every sin that you can think of. Alas! there is nothing left for me but Hell. I ask you sincerely what I am to do to be saved? I have put the question to a priest. He has told me to repent. But I cannot repent, for what I have done I have enjoyed doing. Advise me what I am to do to be saved from Hell." The editor replied,

"Turn a new leaf. Lead a righteous life henceforward. This alone can wash off past sins. This is the only atonement. Sins are washed off, the Quran assures us, by good deeds and these alone."

The essential problems of religion are evaded not solved. Islam is vindicated but not related to or confronted with the ultimate problems of life. Probably the opportunity for this will only come when the contraction due to self-defence has relaxed and a religious quest has begun. With at present little developed critical faculty, they are not humble bearers of a message, but self-conscious proclaimers of the truth of their religion, zealous for the propagation of their faith.

But they are not quite so fanatical as the uneducated masses. One day while I was sitting with a group of orthodox Moslem women, a number of Hindu women passed below in the street singing a marriage song. Hearing this, but with no other provocation, one of the group remarked, "God be praised. Those idolaters are going to hell!"

I was once asked to a *purdah* party given to welcome the wife of a well-known Hindu who had been converted to Islam. There were about twenty ladies present and two other Europeans beside myself, both Moslems. These ladies could not have given a warmer welcome to the new convert, and genuine pleasure was shewn. At the end a little child recited, shewing the glories of Islam and how it had helped women and then made the gesture that she would rather cut her throat than leave Islam. I was the only Christian there. When I was asked very graciously: "Sister, are you too a Moslem?" it made me realise something of what it must mean to an Indian Christian lady convert, always to bear her testimony faithfully. If it becomes known that one of their community is interested in Christianity, the women naturally seek to win such back to a greater admiration for Islam. A girl in a high school just before holidays was considering the cost of transferring her allegiance to Jesus Christ. She mentioned the matter on holidays and the parents got in touch with an Ahmadi missionary. The last we *heard* is that she expects assistance to finish her education in England and that she hopes to return as a Moslem missionary.

One method of propaganda lately used by them has been the free distribution of literature. One booklet called "Europe's Honiage" gives the testimony of some European converts to Islam. In England I found leaflets from the Mosque at Woking. One Easter-tide, cards were sent out by some Moslems in India refuting the story of the resurrection and on another occasion, nicely printed pamphlets were given to Christians as they left the services on Sunday, urging them to come to the true faith and forsake the heresy that Jesus is God. Many Moslem women write small books on religious subjects and some even write on these subjects in papers for men. Stories of Muhammad and Moslem heroes are written for children and there is a page for

children in an English Moslem weekly which appears to be written by an English Moslem convert to Islam who signs herself 'Ayesha I. Morrison.

I now turn to consider what bearing all this has on the Christian missionary enterprise among Moslem women. The new factor is that educated women of the type I have described are to be found throughout the mission field to-day, and our lady missionaries and Indian Christian women are meeting them. Girls of this type are in our high schools and they sometimes delight to bring up arguments for Islam and against Christianity in the Bible classes. One has to admit that even missionaries are not always prepared to meet them and some have sought help from the Henry Martyn School of Islamics at Lahore. But if the missionaries find it difficult, what about the Indian teacher, Biblewoman and student. Girls educated in our Christian schools are sometimes genuinely embarrassed when they meet keen Moslem girls, with their challenge, in college. One such student told me that she had not met Moslems before entering college. She had been through a Christian boarding-school and found herself in college with Moslem girls, to all appearances as good as she is herself, enlightened, religious, friendly. These tell her they believe all prophets are from God, that they honour Jesus, but that they consider the Bible to be corrupted and ask, "God couldn't have a Son, could He?" What answer has she to give? Is she prepared to reply?

It is with the intention of helping these and others like them, whether western missionaries or Indian Christian workers, that the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies has been started in Lahore. The main purpose of the School is to enable the Christian evangelist to relate his message to the religious background and social life of the Moslems. Students of the course are shewn how to lift religious discussion above the level of fruitless controversy on to the plane of vital religious experience, and are introduced to a new type of literature for Moslems which commends Christianity as the supreme way of life.

For after all, much as we admire the zeal and courage of the Moslem women leaders of whom I have been speaking we are left in no doubt that they still lack something—it is that which is for us the greatest asset in life, the Light of the knowledge of the character of God that has come to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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(Instead of publishing the foregoing in consecutive numbers of *News and Notes* we have thought it better to enlarge this month's number in order to have the whole in one number. Sometimes our members wonder what line they should take when presenting their work on deputation at home. The foregoing will provide some valuable hints. Editor.)

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## Henry Martyn School Extension Course, 1936.

It is now definitely settled that there will be a course at Nainital from May 25th to June 30th under the auspices of the United Provinces Christian Council's Moslem Work Committee. Please remember this when arranging for your hot weather holiday. The staff of the School will be present and as full a course will be provided as the limited time permits.

Rev. J. W. Sweetman will lecture at Kodaikanal from April 20th to April 30th, and in the Nilgiris till May 23rd. Fuller programme later.

### Financial Statement, 1935.

RECEIPTS.	Rs.	A.	P.	EXPENDITURE.	Rs.	A.	P.
Jan. 1st. Balance brought forward	37	7	6	Printing	294	2	0
Members subscriptions	418	7	3	Postages	189	15	6
				Sundries	2	2	0
<b>BALANCE OUT OF HAND</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>				
	<u>Rs. 486</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>		<u>Rs. 486</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>

Examined and found correct.

Vouchers support payments

(Sd) W. H. BAPTIST,

15-1-1936.

### Praise and Prayer.

*Merciful God, who hast made all men for love, and willest that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of thy truth; have mercy upon those that know thee not; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy Son who was lifted up to draw all men unto him, that they may be numbered among thy faithful servants and be made one flock under one shepherd.* J. H. OLDHAM.

LET US PRAY for the spirit of evangelism in the Church and that we may be filled with holy boldness in proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ.

LET US PRAY for enquirers in Lahore.

**LET US PRAY** for the Brotherhood of St. Andrew in the Panjab, that God may make it a completely effective agency in the spread of the Kingdom.

**LET US PRAY** that the spirit of enquiry which is abroad among the students in colleges and universities may find a response from those who are specially equipped to deal with their difficulties.

### NOTICE.

Any notification of change of address, names of new members or remittance of subscription, etc., should be sent to the Superintendent, Orissa Mission Press, Cuttack, India, and *not* to the Secretary of the League. The annual subscription to the League is Rs. 2-0-0 (English 3s. od.)

Matters of interest to members of the League, items of news and requests for prayer should be sent (if possible, early in the month) to the Hony. Secretary :—

Rev. J. W. Sweetman,  
Henry Martyn School,  
5, Egerton Road,  
Lahore, Panjab, India.

