

An analysis of the Qur'anic Bases for Women in Management, Focusing on Three Approaches in Islamic Social Theory

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ABSTRACT: The issue of management by women has been studied with three approaches namely 'Islamic traditionalism,' 'Islamic modernism' and 'Islamic civilisationism' and one can find in these approaches three main attitudes of minimalist, maximalist and balanced. This paper attempt to demonstrate that the foundation of all three approaches is the concept of 'interest' while this concept is a qualitative matter with no objective criteria for a concrete measuring, and there are also various controversial factors which contribute to its definition.

Considering the above, and taking the Qur'an as a starting point for this research, the paper aims to examine the nature and extent to which various interests play a role in issues involve in women's management.

KEYWORDS: women's management, Islamic traditionalism, Islamic modernism, Islamic civilisationalism, interests, demands from women, aptitude.

Introduction

Muslim scholars have adopted three main approaches in the study of management by women. These approaches have been given various names, among which are 'Islamic traditionalism,' 'Islamic modernism' and 'Islamic civilisationalism.'¹

Phenomena related to the social presence of women, especially women's management, are among the topics examined by each of these three approaches and are worth being examined, since:

- An improvement in women's social potential as a result of access to further education has significantly improved women's social awareness and promoted their social role;
- Society needs to optimally benefit from the talents of this half of the population, provided it does not weaken the principles of the family according to Islamic teachings;
- There are many serious challenges involved, most particularly due to disputes over human rights and related matters;
- There are diverse and contradictory views on this topic.

This study thus seeks to take a fresh look at the three approaches mentioned above, based on Qur'anic teachings regarding the topic of women's management.

1. Islamic Traditionalism

This has provided the dominant model of religious thinking in certain periods of contemporary history, and is still strong in the Islamic seminaries and among very religious Iranians.² By emphasising particular aspects of the religious law (which in turn results in individualistic interpretations, even if social norms are considered), this approach does not involve an inclusive religious attitude, and does not regard women's management as a social issue, i.e., it does not opt for a social plan.

Two main beliefs prevail in this approach:

- Women should be socially present only if necessary;
- Women's social presence should be kept to a minimum.

The first belief limits management by women to family issues, and concerns no social or political roles.

The second belief approves of women's management in social and cultural contexts which involve only women, and emphasises that women cannot occupy any social or political position above that of men, for women do not principally have any type of dominance over men.³

1.1. The Qur'anic Bases of Islamic Traditionalism

Advocates of this traditional view do not discuss women's management in the first place. However, since they have been challenged by advocates of other social and political views, including that of a woman's right to have access to high-ranking official positions such as the presidency, jurisprudence and the government ministry, they have referred to certain Qur'anic verses to prove that women are ineligible for occupying high social positions:

- a. Men are in charge (as caretakers) of women (4:34).

By referring to this verse, they have assumed men's charge over woman beyond the relationship of a couple in the family and extended it to all aspects of life, which entails men generally being in charge of women, but not the other way round. In defence of their position, some of them have interpreted 'charge' as referring not only to the couple's relationship, but beyond that to the permission of men to dominate and discipline women as they see necessary.⁴

Certain others do not regard this control over women as one which dominates them and restricts their freedom, but they do consider it generally applicable. In other words, all men basically have charge over all women, not just a husband over his wife.⁵

b. and men are a degree above them (2:228).

This 'degree' has been generalised to the whole of society in certain exegeses of the Qur'an,⁶ allowing the advocates of traditionalism to conclude that women are ineligible for high managerial positions, since the verse means that all men are above all women, and since, rationally speaking, the most competent should rule society.

c. And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance (33:33).

A justification is made based on the belief that this verse is addressing all women rather than just the wives of the Prophet.⁷ The contribution of women in politics, and particularly the taking of the chair or a managerial position, requires that they leave their homes and communicate with men, but the verse seems to forbid women from doing this, and hence that God does not approve of it.⁸

d. (Liken they then to Allah) that which is bred up in outward show, and in dispute cannot make itself plain? (43:18).

The two attributes of being 'bred up in outward show' and the inability to be plain in disputes are assigned to women, and indicate that women are by nature more tender, more compassionate and less rational, while men are by nature less emotional and more rational. Women are strongly attracted to adornments, which is one of the clearest signs of their emotionality, but they are, on the other hand, weak in rational argument, which requires the power of intellect.⁹ Since presiding over public matters or occupying a governmental post requires rationality and intellectual power, the verse is regarded as a justification for women's inability to perform such tasks.¹⁰

e. And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts (33:53).

There is a justification based on this verse where God guards women's modesty (the addressees are the wives of the Prophet) in a given situation, giving rise to the least possibility of corruption. Accordingly, limits for social or vocational relationships have been established for all other Muslim women.¹¹

2. Islamic Modernism

Having accepted the principles of modernity, this approach seeks to provide an interpretation of Islam which would be concur with modern concepts.¹²

Among its components is the Western model of women contributing to society, which is based on gender equality and is most visibly present in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. According to its advocates, there should be no restrictions on women in management. Using new methods of philosophical hermeneutics, they have provided new interpretations and explanations for those Qur'anic verses to which the traditionalists refer.¹³ The reader's understanding of a text is regarded as the criterion which determines its meaning. Obviously, a reader in another period of time would have his own understanding suitable to the time and place.¹⁴ They thus conclude that verses which restrict women's management essentially belong to the time of their revelation.

2.1. The Qur'anic Bases of Islamic Modernism

The arguments made by this group are diverse, some of which come from the religion, while others are from external sources.

a. Abū Zayd believes that one should not search for matters of social relevance to women in the religion since they are unrelated. 'Religious discourse confuses the issue of women,' he writes, 'for it seeks to solve problems by referring to religious injunctions, and thus overlooks the fact that women's issues are essentially social matters.'¹⁵ From another, more moderate view, some writers have made a distinction between the devotional codes of the religion and social codes, and have rejected the idea that social codes promote

hidden (religious) interests, stating that such codes only have an 'obvious worldly interest.' They claim that 'if we keep one eye on hidden [religious] interests, we will not be able to make the necessary changes to political and social rules.'¹⁶

b. Adopting an atomistic view to the text of the Qur'an, i.e., taking into consideration only certain verses of the Qur'an, some writers arrive at their desired conclusions when discussing certain juridical issues related to women.¹⁷ For example, referring to the verse 'O Children of Israel! Remember My favour wherewith I favoured you and how I preferred you to (all) creatures (2:47 and 2:122),' they argue that since the 'favour' in the case of the Children of Israel was bestowed only in a particular period of history, so the advantage of men over women stated in the verse 'Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other (4:34)' is likewise contemporary, and was valid only at the time of the Qur'anic revelation. They disregard other verses which mention lasting favours, for example the following: 'Those of the believers who sit still, other than those who have a (disabling) hurt, are not on an equality with those who strive in the way of Allah with their wealth and lives.....He hath bestowed on those who strive a great reward above the sedentary (4:95).'¹⁸

c. Most scholars pursuing this line of thought believe that the verses of the Qur'an, including those about women, belong to their own time, and therefore today have a historical application. 'We should avail ourselves of the teachings of the Qur'an by understanding their notion and spirit,' they write. 'The Prophet challenged the blatant discrimination against women in his society and changed the situation as far as the understanding of justice would allow at the time, and by this he pointed to an ultimate justice to be achieved over time. The message of these changes is that other forms of discrimination practised against women throughout history should also be prohibited. This is the general message of the Prophet's move.'¹⁹ According to this view, then, equal rights for men and women in occupying various managerial positions should be sought.

These scholars insist that the verse ‘Men are in charge of women (4:34)’ does not provide ultimate proof of the superiority of men over women, since it is also stated in the Qur’an concerning the Children of Israel that ‘...I preferred you to (all) creatures (2:47),’ which is a fact appertaining to a particular period of time, but not to all times.²⁰

d. The intellectual ground of this view is the assumption that the interpreter’s presuppositions influence his or her interpretations of the Qur’an. Mujtahid Shabistari believes that Islamic jurists have presupposed that the family is a natural institution and that God cannot, and would not, want to establish rules for the family which would contradict what He has created. However, he continues by pointing out that we need to adopt a historical point of view when exploring the Qur’an and the tradition (*sunnah*); in other words, the natural structure of the family can be changed, and other forms of family life can be suggested, based on alternative legal and labour systems.²¹ Other scholars argue that the gender of the interpreter of the Qur’an influences his or her interpretations.²²

e. Abū Zayd suggests that the polemic style of debate should be taken into consideration regarding some of the verses about women.²³ This is also suggested by scholars with frameworks of thought different from his.²⁴ In the verse ‘that which is bred up in outward show, and in dispute cannot make itself plain (43:18),’ for example, they presume a polemic style of debate and hence argue that here, to provide an answer to the disbelievers, the Qur’an is adopting their own assertions about women, i.e., that women are brought up with adornments and are unable to make themselves plain in disputes; or that alternatively, the Qur’an is describing an actual situation.²⁵ Therefore, the verse does not indicate any limitation placed upon women.

f. For exploring the Qur’an’s views on women, Moḥsen Kadivar has grouped relevant verses into unequivocal (*muḥkamāt*) and equivocal (*mutashābihāt*) categories. Regardless of the positive or negative returns of this new viewpoint, and despite his elaborate discussions on equivocal and unequivocal

verses in the Qur'an, Kadivar has not provided any scientific grounds for this distinction in the first place. According to him, most verses about women are grouped as unequivocal verses, while others, which need discussion and explanation, fall into the equivocal group. As an example, verses about the advantage and charge of men over the family, positive discriminations for women such as the dowry and life expenses, or positive discriminations for men such as occupying high political and jurisprudential positions, should all be regarded as unequivocal verses in any discussion on women.

3. Islamic Civilisationism

This system of thought seeks to logically and appropriately integrate both the constancy and dynamism of Islam into one theory.²⁶ Therefore, it builds on theoretical grounds which address human happiness, such as strengthening the family and bringing up children in a peaceful home under the mother's care, to examine religious topics in which men and women are addressed differently, particularly those related to social presence, with regard to the requirements of the time.

By adopting a comprehensive viewpoint distanced from inexcusable biases, and by taking into consideration conditions resulting from advancements in technology and communication and the increasing presence of women in higher social positions, this framework aims to present a plausible interpretation of the Qur'anic verses about women.

3.1. The Qur'anic Bases of Islamic Civilisationalism

Following the demands of feminism for gender equality on the one hand (which includes equality in taking high-ranking social positions), and seeking to prove the Qur'an's inclusiveness on the other, this approach discusses the following verses in terms of their relationship to women's management:

- a. Men are in charge of women (4:34).

Islamic civilisationists claim that here the charge of men over women is

restricted to the marital relationship and the family. Therefore, interpretations which consider this verse as a justification for the illegibility of women for official occupations are regarded by them as incomplete,²⁷ and that ‘the verse is establishing a code between the husband and wife, and not between all men and women, for which there are two evidences: the first is that in the same verse the husband is introduced as the best person to commend (his wife) to the good and forbid (her) evil, i.e., to protect her from sin; and the second is that the next verse is about a “breach between a husband and wife.”’²⁸

As for the ‘charge’ of men over the family, it has been interpreted as a man’s social responsibility to acknowledge his wife’s rights, and not as an indication of his dominance over her. Furthermore, according to the scholars in this group, this charge is even conditioned by the two following phrases in the verse: *because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other*, and *because they spend of their property (for the support of women)*, and therefore the charge does not indicate a binding legal matter.²⁹

b. And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them (2:228).

The justification here is made by reference to the theme of the verse, which, according to this group of scholars, does not indicate any absolute advantage of men over women from which discrimination against women in seeking official posts in society could be inferred. The arguments are as follows:

Some scholars, in consideration of the whole verse (which is about divorced women), believe that the pronoun ‘they’ refers to divorced women, not all women.³⁰ Some others, considering the style of argument in the verse, believe that the word ‘degree’ indicates an advantage if certain conditions are met, but not an absolute advantage. Therefore, the word refers to the charge of a husband over his wife for protecting her in the marital relationship.³¹

Moreover, according to Ṭabarī, the best interpretation of the word ‘degree’ is

provided by Ibn 'Abbās, who believes that it is a higher status that a man acquires as a result of his respect for his wife's rights being more than hers for him, such as if he fully acknowledges her rights and forgives her, even if she does not fully acknowledge his.³²

c. And stay in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance (33:33).

The corresponding argument is as follows:

Firstly, with regard to the whole verse, i.e., what comes before and after the above words, the content is specifically addressed to the wives of the Prophet.³³

Secondly, even if we assume that the verse can be generalised to apply to all women, it remains a directive with no obligation, and this is why no jurist who derives rules from the Qur'an has issued any juridical decree that obliges women to stay in their homes and not appear in public.³⁴

Therefore, a woman taking up a position in the government or as a manager, which would also involve communicating with men and debating with them publicly for the good of the people, is not principally forbidden. However, modesty presupposes that the wearing of appropriate clothing should be maintained – something which is not incompatible with fulfilling a role in society.³⁵ The only thing considered to have been forbidden in the verse is stepping out in public with an immoral intention.³⁶

d. (Liken they then to Allah) one brought up in outward show, and in dispute cannot make itself plain? (43:18).

It is argued here that The Holy Qur'an adopts a polemic style of debate in this verse and in others such as 'Are yours the males and His the females? That indeed were an unfair division (53:21-22),' and makes use of what the adversaries take for granted to defeat them in the debate. The verses are, therefore, polemics and not arguments. In other words, they falsify what the disbelievers say on the basis of what they already acknowledge, and not on the basis of the truth in the view of the Qur'an.³⁷

e. And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong (9:71).

The argument based on this verse is as follows: Good and bad take various forms in different situations. Considering this, one will realise the extent to which Islam has assumed a role for women alongside men, opening up for them doors to the challenges of social life in order that they, in cooperation with men, take the path of perfection.³⁸

Accordingly, both men and women have the responsibility to confront social, doctrinal, moral and social discrepancies within society, without the role of men being emphasised. As the directions for men to take care of the family do not annul their responsibilities to society and the religion, in the same way, neither do the directions for women to acknowledge the rights of their husbands.³⁹

f. Sūrah al-Naml, verses 21-44, on the story of the Queen of Sheba.

The argument is as follows: The Qur'an speaks of a woman, a queen, who has a strong mind and is in full control of her emotions, for her responsibilities as a queen have provided experience, knowledge and emotional control to the extent that the men she is ruling over find in her a strong personality furnished with wisdom and capable of governance.⁴⁰

g. One scholar has referred to the word *ummah* (nation), used in some verses such as: 'And there may spring from you a nation who invite to goodness, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency (3:104),' to argue that the Qur'an does not discriminate on gender in social issues, for the word *ummah* includes all people, both men and women.⁴¹

4. An Analysis of the Concept of 'Interest'

A review of the above justifications based on the Qur'an regarding the conditions and limitations of women in management, brings to mind the question of why there are so many diverse viewpoints. Scholars in the three groups all sincerely wish to provide solutions based on the Qur'an. Is it

possible to find, through a comprehensive overview, a common ground based on which an analysis of all the viewpoints would become feasible? A general and vague concept like 'the appropriate place for men and women' would not provide us with an operational parameter as such, but we might consider 'justice' as a criterion⁴² to begin with.

Since one of the cases which justifies variations in the codes of the religion is when changes occur in the capacities of individuals or the society, we can identify the consideration of interests as a determining factor for resolving a problem and suggesting an alternative interpretation.⁴³ Moreover, given that the main difference in the three approaches mentioned is the extent to which they acknowledge developments within society when deriving rules from the Qur'an concerning women, it could be said that the consideration of interests plays a key role, and that it would provide the common ground for the diverging opinions, provided that it does not make sweeping assumptions or statements. But first of all, the place and limits of the consideration of interests in deriving religious rules should be examined.

4.1. Definition of 'Interest'

Interest has been defined as the absence of wrong-doing and the presence of virtue. Interest and wrong-doing, however, are not necessarily opposites; that is to say, the absence of wrong-doing does not necessarily indicate the existence of some kind of interest. However, they can be opposites while equally absent in a particular instance; in other words, 'interest' and 'doing right' are not guaranteed merely by the absence of wrong-doing. Therefore, there are matters or activities in which there is no harm, but which are not in anyone's interest either.⁴⁴

Concerning the relationship between interest and the religion, we could be said that the intent of the divine Law (*shari'ah*) is nothing other than to lead mankind to a pure life, as well as being of benefit to their happiness and interests, and this intent, together with its results, come together like the spirit

to the body of the Law.⁴⁵ Therefore, where two major viewpoints are present in issues related to women in management, the relationship between jurisprudence and interest should be examined:

a. A consideration of interests in a ruling, as a jurist finds proper, is just as much a valid source of the Law as others, such as the Qur'an, the tradition (*sunnah*) and the consensus. This viewpoint is adopted by those who believe there are issues on which the religious Law is silent.

b. A consideration of interests in a ruling is proper only in the practice of an already established, but ambiguous ruling, i.e., interest must not be taken into account when examining concrete rules. It should be pointed out that in a case where an established rule can be interpreted in alternative ways, but interest is involved in one of them and fault in the other, or there is more interest in one than the other, then the consideration of interests serves a key role.⁴⁶

Whichever view is adopted, the crucial role that interests have in discussions on women in management is evident. According to the first view (the consideration of interests of rulings as a source of the Law), interest is taken into consideration when deriving rules on matters on which the Law is silent. Here, if faced with an individual's need, the jurist may supplement the primary rule with a secondary one. But if faced with a social necessity on which the religion is silent, the jurist should rule in the interests of society.⁴⁷

According to the second view, disagreements on issues of women in management mainly concern the determination between the priorities of a woman's responsibilities at home and at work, for the social presence of women is not unconditional. In this regard, since there could be a clash of responsibilities, a consideration of interests for determining priorities is a criterion approved by all jurists.⁴⁸

In what follows, we examine the position of the Qur'an regarding each of the three approaches, focussing on how interests are addressed.

4.2. *An analysis of Islamic Traditionalism*

In the case of the verse 'Men are in charge of women (4:34),' which is a clear statement supported by two clauses and considered as forbidding the charge (i.e., management) of women over men, most exegetes who follow this approach state that the one who has charge is in charge of the well-being, righteousness and discipline of all concerned. Therefore, the man has charge over the woman for her own sake, and endeavours to protect her.

القوام هو القائم بالمصالح و التدبير و التأديب فالرجل يقوم بأمر المرأة و يجتهد في حفظها.⁴⁹

Alternatively, men are in charge of women in order to ensure that they acknowledge the rights of God and act accordingly, and protect them from sin.⁵⁰

Regarding the verse 'And stay in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance (33:33),' Mughniya writes in his exegesis of the Qur'an the following about social interests at the time of the Prophet: 'The age of the Prophet was the best of ages; however, God prohibited his wives from speaking softly to men, and from stepping out of their houses in makeup and decoration, in order that such actions would not cause corruption and make sinful minds greedy.'⁵¹

All these directives are given since God desires that the family of the Prophet be kept safe from any accusation of wrongdoing, and that they might be purified in the most perfect way. By following these instructions, they do good to themselves, which is simply what God intends for them:⁵² 'This is to secure your rank, which is above that of other women,'⁵³ and 'To inspire respect for them and secure for them reverence.'⁵⁴

Therefore, they should comport themselves diffidently and stay within their homes and private spaces, and not involve themselves in public gatherings or otherwise chaotic events which would diminish their sacred dignity.⁵⁵

All the above interpretations indicate the fact that exegetes, without using the actual word 'interest,' have considered women's individual or collective interests when they used such phrases as 'to protect them from sin,' 'to care

for them,' 'to secure their rank' and 'to inspire respect for them,' for this would be the most sound method of protection.

4.3. An Analysis of Islamic Modernism

The advocates of Islamic modernism submit six arguments, i.e., (a) the inconsequence of social matters for the religion, (b) the drawing of analogies between verses, (c) that certain Qur'anic verses apply to their own time, (d) the exegete's presuppositions influence his interpretation of verses, (e) the polemical style of some verses, and (f) categorising Qur'anic verses as unequivocal (*muhkamāt*) and equivocal (*mutashābihāt*). As discussed above, the first argument is based on the view that rules in the Law concern only the individual's relationship with God. This argument thus refuses to make references to religious injunctions concerning women in the first place. Therefore, as far as a discussion based on the Qur'an is concerned, this argument is irrelevant.

In example (f), verses which are seen to relate to women in management are considered in respect of certain equivocal verses, indicating that social interests are given a key role, and that both men and women should contribute in social activities for the benefit of society. In examples (b) to (e), the arguments are all somewhat based on the assumption that certain Qur'anic verses have a historical value and should be interpreted differently today.

4.4. An Analysis of Islamic Civilizationism

Regarding the verse 'Men are in charge of women (4: 34)' and the two clauses that follow it, exegetes in this group interpret the word 'charge' as 'responsibility to protect' instead of 'dominance,' and restrict it to the family and the marital relationship. Using another example, they argue that the verse 'And stay in your houses (33:33)' is addressed to the wives of the Prophet, and that the verse addresses other women only if they go out in public with the intention of performing or causing immoral deeds. Yet in another example, certain exegetes claim that the style of the verse 'that which is brought up in

outward show (43:18)' is polemical. These three cases demonstrate that this group of interpreters of the Qur'an are addressing the interests of all women, as well as those of the family and society. For example, concerning verse 34 of Sūrah 4, it has been stated that: 'The community needs to be organised, and in order to be organised it needs one who is in charge to manage it, and to quell rebellion and disorder.'⁵⁶ And also: 'In this verse God Almighty addresses the fortitude of the family, which supports the institution of the family like a column, without which it would fall apart, its ties being severed, its condition worsened, and fall short of being what it is meant to be.'⁵⁷ Both of these statements indicate considerations of the family when interpreting the verse.

But what if certain social interests should gain priority over the interests of the family? Should the interests of the family still be considered? Or, acknowledging the aims of the Law, should we conclude that the interests of the Islamic society are the most important?

5. The Pathology of the Views Regarding the Concept of Interest

It should be clear so far that 'interest' could be considered the common ground of the three approaches, because they all seek to consider some type of interest. However, despite the common ground, the question still remains as to why there are diverging opinions on the issue of women in management. The answer perhaps lies in each group's attitude to the concept of interest. Among the factors which result from the different interpretations is the qualitative nature of interest. There is a lack of clear, objective criteria for evaluating it, since various issues are involved in determining what interest is, including the influence of the researcher's mentality in the way he determines priorities. As should be clear from the review of the Qur'anic references provided by each group to justify their approach, the Islamic traditionalists have only taken into account the individual and general interests of women, and overlooked any historical or social change of circumstances. Yet changing circumstances are where the importance of interest becomes evident. This group therefore adopts a minimalist perspective regarding the issue.

Islamic modernists also have a one-dimensional view of the concept of interest, and have only considered social interests with regards to social development, giving it more weight than other sources of the Law such as the Qur'an, the tradition and the consensus. By assuming that certain Qur'anic verses belong to their own time and only have historical value, they have in fact assumed that the interests in each era are such as the jurist understands conditions to have been according to his interpretation of the Qur'an, which would naturally include issues related to women in management. Therefore, this group's attitude toward the role of social interests when deriving rules – particularly those concerning women – is maximalist.

Taking into account the interests of women as individuals and as a whole, plus the interests of society and those of the family, the Islamic civilisationalists adopt a balanced, comprehensive position. However, they no criteria for determining the priorities of different types of interest in the Muslim woman's individual and social life.

6. A Formulation of the Idea of 'Interest'

By examining these three attitudes to Islamic society, it becomes clear that they all take some type of interest into consideration, but the results are different. This is for different reasons, as discussed. Some adopt an atomistic view and thus merely consider a woman's individual interests; others only account for the interests of the family as an invariable factor, and that it should remain so; while still others merely consider changes within society, and thus give weight only to social interests; and finally, there are those who take into account all types of interest, but provide no objective criterion for determining them.

Having pointed out these weak points, it is now necessary to find a solution that would crystallise the notion of interest, in order to establish priorities and ensure the maximum advantage and keep any disadvantages to a minimum.

7. Relationships between 'Demand,' 'Aptitude' and 'Interest'

In order to determine parameters, we should first consider the general criteria used in juridical discussions to determine priorities of interests, i.e., authentic religious injunctions, juridical necessities and reason. As far as reason is concerned, a further set of criteria are introduced for determining the priority of a given interest: its relationship to the religion and the Hereafter, its social aspect, its general application, whether it is urgent or commonplace, or commonplace rather than complementary, whether it conforms with innate human nature and disposition, its feasibility, whether it conforms to (the purpose of) creation, etc.⁵⁸ However, the aim of this study is to provide a more applicable formulation than that provided by jurisprudence. In this regard, by taking another look at the Qur'anic bases of the three approaches, it is revealed that in some cases, the religious, personal and familial responsibilities of women are given weight, and these could be called what is required by God. In some other cases, social norms are highlighted, which could be called what society demands of people. And in yet other cases, aspects of changes within society are considered, which involve the development of the aptitudes of women in different areas. Accordingly, two parameters – demand and aptitude – are suggested as those which, in effect, crystallise the notion of interest. But first they have to be defined.

7.1. An Analysis of the Concept of 'Aptitude'

Aptitude includes a person's general abilities in addition to his or her special abilities, and is defined philosophically as follows:

There are various kinds of change in the universe, among which there is one which is distinct and superior to the others. This may be called a 'directed change,' and brings enhancement and evolution to the changing object, and becomes possible through a particular relationship between the evolving object and another object into which the evolving object will next transform. This possibility is interpreted in philosophy as 'aptitude.' The relationship is,

in fact, not between two separate objects, but between two phases in the existence of a single object.⁵⁹

There are three factors which help us recognise aptitude: empirical methodology (trial and error), reason and the divine Law.

The empirical sciences, due to the tools at their disposal and their aim of discovering particular details of the relationships within phenomena, can merely study the ‘low-level’ or physiological needs and aptitudes of human beings. This is because science is defined by the limits of experimentation, and thus has no access to knowledge of the value of existence, insight into the human being, or knowledge of the Divine, all of which are crucial for recognising a person’s true needs and original aptitudes, as well as determining his ultimate goals.⁶⁰

In addition to religious teachings and scientific findings, considerations of factors such as the individual’s circumstances, the facilities within society, the culture of the society, the climate, etc., are involved in determining aptitudes.

The enhancement of the human aptitudes is discussed in the Qur’an, as in the following verse:

And covet not the thing in which Allah hath made some of you excel others. Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned (or gained), and unto women a fortune from that which they have earned (or gained). (Envy not one another) But ask Allah of His bounty. Lo! Allah is ever Knower of all things (4:32).

Lexicographers have made a distinction between the two words *kasb* (earn) and *iktisāb* (gain), indicating that there is a sense of ‘collecting’ in the first, whereas the second is used in many cases to refer to qualities that are not in one’s control, for example, as in the sentence: ‘She gains attention with her beauty.’ Thus, the meaning of the verse will be: ‘Do not wish that you too had the advantages that others have, which are bestowed upon them by God.’ In other words, men should not envy the advantages of women, and women

should not envy those of men, since advantages are not given without a cause. The person either has them as qualities with which he or she was created, or earned them through his own will, for example, by hard work, business and the like. It is obvious that when someone earns something, they presumably gain some benefit from it, and any advantage is due to the things he or she has gained. God has advised: ...*Ask Allah of His bounty*, but the kind of bounty the person should ask for is not specified. Instead, it is left ambiguous by stating 'of His bounty.

Qualities which are out of the person's control, as referred to in the verse for both men and women, include the different abilities and aptitudes which are found in all people. Therefore, from the phrase: *Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned (or gained), and unto women a fortune from that which they have earned (or gained)*, it can be understood that any person, man or woman, may gain some advantage because of their aptitudes, a fact which reveals the Qur'an's emphasis on enhancing human aptitudes. Furthermore, since 'a fortune' is used in the verse, and not 'the fortune,' it can be understood that the reward is incomplete. That is to say, there are conditions and limitations to such a reward, as there are to the enhancement of aptitudes.

7.2. An Analysis of the Concept of 'Demand'

Demand has a general application and includes the demands of the Law, of society and of the person. It should be pointed out that the demands of the Law take priority over the others. The demands of society and of the person stand next, and are determined by reason and experience.

Each of these demands should accord with a number of jurisprudential criteria for determining the priorities of interest, as mentioned above. For example, to determine what society demands of a woman, the following criteria are considered: the generality of the interest, its social characteristics, its justification according to social norms and ethics, its importance for the development of society, the priority of urgent interests over common interests, etc.

In addition to the above, other factors such as social necessity, time and place, and the culture and social habits of the society are all involved in determining the demands placed upon all people, including women.

Another important point is that juridical considerations influence any discussion on aptitudes and demands, as well as determining priorities. For example, a discussion of women in management, from the point of view of reason, entails that both men and women can take responsibilities within society and occupy managerial positions. However, from the point of view of jurisprudence, the priorities (for both men and women) are different, for there are verses in the Qur'an which address the code of social conduct for women, as well as clothing, speaking, looking at others, etc. Therefore, in the formulation of aptitudes and demands, by referring to the Qur'an, it appears that some occupations are either forbidden or of a low priority for women. The Law is the ultimate source in such cases. In other cases, where the Law has not provided rules, (i.e., as long as management by women does not involve forbidden or low-priority occupations stated in the Law), the source will be reason.

8. Interest as the Common Criterion in the Three Approaches

As interest was identified as the common criterion in the discussions on the three approaches to women's management, the next step was to delineate the concept. This in turn led us to the criteria used in jurisprudence for determining the priorities of interests, and the different factors in the three approaches for justifying their arguments. One or more general parameters were necessary to crystallise the concept and facilitate research on the topic. It appears that the two parameters of 'aptitude' and 'demand' can serve this role. To determine priorities in this way, we need to acknowledge that each Muslim woman has her own particular responsibilities, and therefore, no blanket view can be suggested when discussing women's management. Instead, with reference to all the factors involved for a given woman, a viewpoint should be adopted which considers her personal and social interests, plus changes within society, as well as her own abilities, for only then could a discussion on management take

place. If we admit that the only reasonable suggestion regarding the issue of women's management is the individual case study, then solutions for the problems that we face might produce two results: the first is that they would increase capacities to a maximum, and the second is that they would keep any disadvantages to a minimum. In an approach based on case studies, the types of occupation can be taken into account and then separate suggestions made for each type; or alternatively, and in a more comprehensive manner, separate suggestions can be made for each woman and occupation. At any rate, the fact is that it is not possible to propose a uniform solution for all Muslim women with their various personal, social, and cultural backgrounds, nor for all types of occupations. The two following case studies will further clarify this.

The First Case

As an example concerning aptitude, a given woman is physically and mentally capable of dealing with the difficult problems involved in working for a government ministry, i.e., she is not typically vulnerable. As far as specialities and managerial abilities are concerned, she is better than, or equal to, her male counterparts.

As far as demands are concerned, she is middle-aged and thus has less responsibility as a wife and mother, i.e., she is not required to be at home so much, and has more free time. As for the type of occupation, it is one which permits her to adhere to the limits of modesty and wholesome behaviour. Also, as a middle-aged woman, she is less attractive than if she were young. Moreover, the type of the occupation allows her to delegate authority in situations which might involve a large amount of confrontation with men.

By considering this woman's individual background, her occupational priorities can now be determined.

The Second Case

As far as her aptitudes are concerned, a given woman is physically and

mentally able to cope with the difficult situations that a university chancellor or school principal might face. She has the relevant qualifications, and there is no other woman who could take her place.

Regarding demands, she has recently got married and has responsibilities as a wife and mother. In the workplace, all the employees are female, and therefore, considering the limits of modesty, it is better that their manager also be a woman.

We may conclude that, given that social interests have priority over those of the individual, this occupation has a priority for this woman, provided that she can find time for her individual responsibilities by using resources such as delegating authority, or hiring a nursemaid to take care of her children in her absence.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to provide a suitable solution to the disagreements over women in management by examining three major currents in Islamic social thought. The main question was why there are so many diverging opinions on the issue, when most jurists and scholars who study the Qur'an are concerned with the interests of both the individual and society. Then common ground was sought from where all the approaches could be examined.

A major difference between the three approaches was the extent to which they considered developments within society when deriving rules from the Qur'an. References they made to the Qur'an were examined, and it was concluded that one of the cases which justifies variations in religious rulings is when changes occur either in the capacities of individuals or within society. We identified that a consideration of the various interests involved would be a determining factor for resolving the problems over such rulings and reconnecting the diverging opinions. There are, however, differing opinions, for interest is a qualitative matter with no clear objective criteria for measuring it, since it involves various factors which can change according to circumstances. In

addition, the researcher's viewpoint can influence the way priorities of interest are determined. It was revealed in an analysis of the views on interest that the Islamic traditionalists had a minimalist attitude towards the concept, for they only considered personal interests; the Islamic modernists had a maximalist attitude, since they regarded the consideration of interests as a basis for the Law; and the Islamic civilisationists had a balanced attitude, since they considered all types of interests, i.e., the interests of women individually and as a whole, the interests of the society and those of the family, but nevertheless, they did not provide any criteria for determining the priorities of the different types of interest involved in the particular cases of each Muslim woman's personal and social life.

In order to determine a method for determining priorities of interest, the two general parameters of 'demand' and 'aptitude' were identified, which would include both juridical criteria and the other factors involved in any discussion of women's management. The Law has to be considered in the first place in order to determine priorities in what is expected from a woman together with her aptitudes and abilities, and if the Law has not provided any ruling, the answer should be derived from reason and experience. The final conclusion was that the result of a formulation of priorities based on demands and aptitudes would be different for each individual woman in Muslim society, and that there is no single solution for all women, since every case is different. Furthermore, the study also concluded that this formulation would differ according to the type of occupation, any conflicts of interest involved, working hours, degrees of physical strength, emotional factors, and degrees of delicacy regarding communication with men, etc. In other words, the result would be different for each woman and each occupation.

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