

Ghulam Ahmad Parvez on issues concerning women: A critical analysis

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Abstract: Ghulam Ahmad Parvez (1903-1985) provides a modern interpretation of Islam which in many cases contradicts the tenets and teachings of Islam. He rejects the authority of the *hadith* (sayings) of the Prophet (SAW). His modernist approach covers a wide range of issues including women. His views on women largely contradict the Islamic texts from the Qur'an and Sunnah. Relying primarily upon his writings in various magazines and also in his magnum opus *Tafsir Matalib al-Furqan*, this paper analyzes his views from an objective critical perspective based upon the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the writings of the prominent scholars. It has been observed that by way of rejecting Sunnah as the authority in *Shari'ah*, Parvez rejects many issues of *Shari'ah* which are accepted by majority of Muslim scholars.

Keywords : Ghulam Ahmad Parvez, Women's rights, Rejection of hadith, Women's leadership, Hijab, Niqab.

Ghulam Ahmad Parvez (1903-1985) rejects the authority of the *hadith* (sayings) of the Prophet (SAW) as an essential source of the *Shari'ah*. He wrote extensively on many issues including women and provided a modern interpretation of Islam. His views on women are not in conformity with the dictates of the Qur'an and Sunnah. This paper examines his views on such issues as woman's workplace, her testimony in courts, her role in politics, her inheritance and finally *Hijab* or *Niqab* (face veil). Relying primarily upon his writings in various periodicals and also in his magnum opus *tafsir Matalib al-Furqan*, this paper analyzes his views from an objective critical perspective based upon the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the writings of the prominent scholars. This is preceded by a brief introduction to the life and works of Ghulam Parvez.

Parvez: life and work

Born in a religious family in Gurudaspur, East Punjab, India on 9 July 1903, Ghulam Ahmad Parvez was raised and trained by his grandfather Moulvi Chowdhury Rahim Bakhsh, who was, as Parvez says, a great scholar of Hanafi School of law.¹ He was introduced to the art of debate at young age. He says, "As it was very much likely that a coastal child could easily learn how to swim, I also learnt the art of debating; for my locality was a breeding ground for many religious sects and groups."² He loved music and often listened to Mehedi Hassan, Nazir Faruqi and Rowshan Ara. Music, for him, was a source of relaxation, happiness and food for soul. He states, "If one does not appreciate music and declares it *Haram* (forbidden),

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he has no soul”.³ He claimed to have passed through three stages in his life: *Taqlid* (blind imitation), *Tanqid* (critical approach) and *Tajdid* (renewal). It was only in the last stage of *Tajdid* that “I came to know the truthfulness of the Qur’an and refreshed my *Iman* anew”.⁴ Parvez was greatly impressed by one *Aslam Joyrajpur* whom he first met in 1929/1930. It may be said that Aslam led Parvez first to doubting the veracity and gradually to rejecting *ahadith* (sayings) of the Prophet (SAW). Consequently, some Muslim scholars considered Parvez a heretic for denying the authority and authenticity of the *ahadith*. Parvez used to read Aslam’s writings and felt as if these writings beautifully expressed his ideas. He lived with Aslam in 1935 for about six months apparently to learn the Arabic language, but he says, “Most of our time passed in discussions of the secrets and treasures of the Qur’an.”⁵

Parvez had come in close contact with Allama Muhammad Iqbal and was very much impressed by him. In April 1938, Parvez took over the magazine *Tulu` Islam* “to translate Iqbal’s thoughts and propagate the message of the Qur’an”.⁶ The magazine initially was published by Nazir Niyazi, it had discontinued before Parvez revived it. Parvez had close ties with majority of rulers in Pakistan including Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Field Marshal Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The rulers loved his ideas as they promoted a modern secular interpretation of Islam. Ayub even expressed his desire for wider circulation of *Tulu` Islam Magazine* to “reform” and “modernize” ‘outdated’ Muslims’ minds in Pakistan.⁷ Though Parvez was always supportive of all the rulers (majority of whom were secular leaders), he did not like the rule of President Ziaul Haq who wanted to implement Islam and Islamic *Shari`ah* in Pakistan, and criticized many of his steps towards implementation of *Shari`ah*.⁸

Parvez and radical change

Ghulam Ahmad Parvez was not consistent in his opinions. He would change his opinion radically leading to replacing one strategy with another. Thus, Parvez was full of praise for Sayyid Abul A`la Mawdudi in his early age and regarded him as a prominent scholar of Islam. He even published articles in the *Tarjuman al-Qur’an* of Sayyid Mawdudi (before rejecting the authority of the Hadith of the Prophet) and also welcomed Mawdudi’s articles in his own magazine *Tulu` Islam*. In one of his articles, Parvez praises Sayyid Mawdudi in the following terms:

Allah has granted him exceptional abilities to serve Islam and reform it in the light of the Qur’an and *Sunnah*. He has gifted talent; deep understanding of Islam and the modern culture that he may beautifully analyze Western culture, identify its problems and present convincing solutions from Qur’anic perspective.⁹

He published Mawdudi’s article on ‘Nationalism’ in *Tulu` Islam*, and commented that “the opinion of Mawlana Mawdudi on this issue is exactly the same as mentioned in the Qur’an and *Sunnah*, and *Tulu` Islam* had the privilege of publishing his views on its pages”.¹⁰

But the same Parvez stood against Mawdudi and became his fierce opponent a few years later declaring Sayyid Mawdudi to be of no consequence. He wrote: “It is a reality that we do not regard Mawdudi as a religious scholar, nor an intellectual.”¹¹ He also said: “Mawdudi could not present any new ideas; for he does not have creative thought or intellectual skills. He only had the old information that is being brought to us for centuries”.¹²

Parvez did not reject the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW) in his early writings. He wrote articles to establish the authenticity of *Sunnah* and published one article titled “Religious status of the Sunnah of the Prophet” in Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi’s Journal *Ma`arif* in March 1935.¹³ He went through a brief period of confusion over the issue of *Hadith* and wrote to Mawdudi’s *Tarjuman* for clarification. Mawdudi dispelled all confusions rationally. But Parvez already set his mind to reject the *hadith* of the Prophet (SAW), and hence Mawdudi’s responses were of no avail.¹⁴ Mawdudi also published a special edition of his *Tarjumanul-Qur’an* on the *Constitutional status of the Sunnah of the Prophet*, and later it was published in book form entitled *Sunnat ki Aayini Haythiayt* (Legal Status of the Sunnah). Mawdudi quoted this confusion in detail, and then responded rationally which would easily convince a rational mind and objective reader, but perhaps not the *anti-hadith* group, who decided to blatantly reject the authority of the *Hadith* of the Prophet.

Parvez persisted in his opinion and used to deliver *Dars-i Qur’an* (Qur’anic lessons) in Karachi and Lahore continuously until the last days of his life. He covered the entire Qur’an twice in his Qur’anic lessons. He began to deliver the Qur’anic lessons for the third time, but his ill-health failed him. His last *dars* was on 15 October 1984,¹⁵ and died on at 6 p.m. 24 February 1985.¹⁶

Parvez on women issues

Parvez wrote extensively on issues related to women in different magazines and books including his famous *Tafsir*. He remained close to traditional values in his earlier writings, and then gradually shifted to modernist approach leading to rejection of the Sunnah of the Prophet. He was full of praise for the West for its approach towards women. According to him, the West granted “equal” or even “better” rights to women than to men.¹⁷ He dealt at length with, among others, the following issues:

- A. Women’s workplace
- B. Testimony in court
- C. Leadership role of women
- D. Law of Inheritance
- E. *Hijab* or *Niqab*.

Women’s workplace

Parvez initially advocated for women to live at home, educate children and perform household chores. He criticized Western culture for bringing women out of their homes and getting them engaged in jobs that are primarily meant for men. But gradually he became ‘modern’ and advocated for the equal rights of women and said that they should also contribute to all jobs besides men. For example, he says in his early writings:

From Qur’anic perspective, duties and responsibilities are divided between men and women. Man is charged with earning livelihood, and the woman with the most important duty of educating and training children. Therefore, it is evident that to perform such responsibilities, a man has to work outside his home, and a woman should remain inside. It is a real fact that home plays a significant role in the life of a human being. Home does not

refer to a mere building of bricks and stones; it is a place of peace and tranquility for both man and woman – training center for their gifted skills – a house of education and sound training. The women are charged to run this important training institution.¹⁸

Parvez made it clear that God does not distinguish between the status of man and that of woman except in their responsibilities. To him, “it is due to their biological differences in their creation that she is not able to perform regular activities during certain period of every month.”¹⁹ He also laid emphasis on the institution of family. He argued that a society that did not lay importance to this foundation destroyed future generations. He wrote: “The woman has to play a prime role in making home a safe haven and raising a quality generation. If she deserts this responsibility and takes the charges of men and their duties, it is an injustice to humanity itself”.²⁰ Parvez was highly critical of the Western perspective on women. He did not subscribe to the notion of ultra freedom for women and equal status of genders. He categorically declared:

Europe has realized its folly stand in bringing woman out of her natural limits; and now it wants to call her back home. But they do not perhaps realize that if woman advances a step forward, it goes beyond the ability of the Nature itself to bring her backward.²¹

Gradually Parvez changed and adopted a ‘liberal’ approach in his later life and desired that women also participate in all activities besides men. He wrote:

It is essential for a woman that she performs her prime responsibilities first, and then she participates in other activities like men.²² There is no difference between a man and a woman in any aspect of life.²³ Biologically, there is difference in the creation of man and woman. The difference is basically to perform their natural jobs as assigned by God. Apart from that, on the aspect of humanity, there is no difference between a man and a woman. Their workplace is same, and same is their job and the results it produces.²⁴

Parvez’s stand is at variance with the Islamic way of life. Islam adopts a moderate, balanced stance towards women’s right to work. It does not let her get engaged in jobs that are primarily meant for men; nor does it allow woman to get involved in *haram* jobs, such as working in a bar, serving *haram* foods, working as a stewardess in a ship or airplane which requires her to stay overnights in foreign lands without a *Mahrim*. There is no Qur’anic *ayah* (verse) that prevents women from working for livelihood. Rather, there are instances recorded in the Qur’an which show that women were involved in running the states (e.g. Queen of Sheba, see Surah Al-Naml 27: 22-25) and tending the flocks of the cattle, (e.g. daughters of the Prophet Shu`ayb A.S. see Al-Qasas 28: 23-25). Asma' bt. Abi Bakr (R.A.), the wife of Zubayr ibnul 'Awwam (R.A.) helped her husband Zubayr in daily chores.²⁵

Sometimes, society is in need of women’s work like nursing, gynecology, educating children, guiding girls, etc. These jobs are meant for woman. She might also live as a single parent, or her parents might need her help due to old age. The prime job of women is to train future generations with quality education. Mothers can give the best education to her children than any others can. Hafiz Ibrahim, the poet of Nile in Egypt, therefore, insisted on giving proper training to the mothers in order for them to raise a nation with the sound mind, intellect and pure lineage.²⁶ The permission for women’s work is subjected to the following conditions:

1. **Valid act:** Like man, woman should not engage herself in *haram* acts like working in a bar, in a pub, in a dance club, or to serve liquor, etc.
2. **Follow the limits of Shari`ah:** If she comes out of her home, she should wear proper *Hijab* and maintain modesty and decency.
3. **Observe religious observances:** Women's work should not be at the expense of important religious obligations like prayers, fasting, responsibilities towards husband, children and family, etc.²⁷

Testimony in court

The scholars of Islam generally agree that women's testimony will be accepted in matters related to them or to both men and women. There are issues where women's testimony alone, and not that of the men, will be considered, such as major or minor impurity, delivery of a child, breastfeeding, 'iddah or waiting period, issues concerning girl's swimming pool, etc. In the case of *Hudud* and *Qisas* (*shari`ah* prescribed punishments), since woman is not usually directly involved or can become extremely terrified, her witness will not be entertained.²⁸ Parvez and his followers disagreed with the above stance. The Qur'an, according to them, does not distinguish or "discriminate" based on genders in the question of testimony. Parvez declares:

The Qur'an, in no place, discriminates between males and females in giving testimony. The Qur'an simply mentions "Witness", regardless of being male or female. The Qur'an did not specify gender of the witness, nor declared it as a prerequisite. In a single place of the Qur'an, it talks about a male and two females in witness. If we understand this properly, it will not leave any confusion in the matter...²⁹

Parvez and his followers criticize this "discrimination" against women and claim that such a "law" was made by "men", who wanted to preserve their superior position over women. He says:

These laws have been enacted at a time when the women were purchased openly in the markets.³⁰ Our laws of jurisprudence were enacted by males, and they kept the males at the superior position, and the rights of women shattered.... Since such laws were made in an environment where injustice was prevalent over justice, and the women were treated as inferior to men; women were subjected to discrimination, injustice, humiliation and disgrace.³¹

Parvez would not hesitate to reinterpret the Qur'anic verses to suit his opinion. Thus, the Qur'anic verse 2:282, in translation, reads:

And get two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men (available), then a man and two women, such as you choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her.

This verse categorically declares about two women to replace one man. Parvez provides strange interpretation of the verse. He declares:

The Qur'an did not command for the testimonies of two women, one after the other, making it equal to one man. The Qur'an merely said: if one of the women gets confused due to fear or anxiety, then the other woman could remind her. This clearly proves that if

one does not face any confusion or forgetfulness, the other does not need to remind her, and her testimony alone will be sufficient.³²

This, in my opinion, is a clear distortion of the Qur'anic *ayah* as he tries to put the female testimony in an equal position as that of a man. The Qur'an does not want two female witnesses if the males were not present. If woman were to be equal of man, then two women would be sufficient instead of two men. Also, why she needs to be reminded only by a female friend, and not by her male counterpart as a compulsory witness? The fact is, if she alone testifies, and the other friend is present and remains silent, it would be considered from both. A closer analysis of the Qur'anic verse 2:282 makes the following facts clear:

1. The Qur'an's command to get two witnesses from men indicates that it is primarily the responsibility of men, and not of women.
2. The Qur'an clearly states that "If there are not two men", meaning that the second option could only be accepted when the first option is impossible or not available. But in the presence of the first option, the second becomes irrelevant.
3. The Qur'an does not stipulate two women as witnesses if two men are not present. Rather, it requires one man and two women. If she were to be equal to man, two women would be sufficient.
4. The Qur'an does not allow us to have witnesses only from women. For, this matter relates basically to man, and the man's testimony must be present.
5. The Qur'an asks for two women besides a man, so that the two women complement each other. If one errs, other may remind her. For, financial matters are basically men-related issues, and women may not have enough exposure to it.³³

Abdul Majid Daryabadi quotes some Western scholars who have confirmed above statements. Women, they argue, are usually led more by emotions than minds. Bauer says: We are again and again forced to admit that a woman is not in a position to judge objectively, without being influenced by her emotions.

Leadership role

Islamic scholars generally do not approve of the women to be the leaders of a country. Woman's primary job is to raise healthy and sound families through proper education and training the children. She has profound roles to play in jobs that are meant for women, or for both genders. Leadership of a country is a huge responsibility, which does not match with the nature of women. The above observation is based upon a *hadith* of the Prophet (SAW) which says that "A nation would never prosper if it assigns leadership role to their women."³⁴

Parvez and some "modern" scholars believe that women also can hold the post of leadership. Parvez presents the *ayah* of *Surah Tawbah* as a proof, in which Allah says: "The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity".³⁵ He interprets the *ayah* by claiming that Allah has assigned this noble task of *Amr bi'l Ma'ruf and Nahi 'ani'l Munkar* to both men and women; and this task could only be performed by the leaders of a state. This

proves that women can also be the leaders. Allah also says “You are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah”.³⁶ Parvez comments the following:

It is evident from this *ayah* that this noble job of inviting people towards nobility and forbidding evils is not the sole responsibility of men alone; women are also equal partners in this task. This *ayah* provides the answer to the basic question that whether or not women may participate in the leadership role of the country. It was also said that *Amr bi'l Ma'ruf and Nahi 'ani'l Munkar* is the responsibility of Islamic state (Al Qur'an 22:41), and according to the *ayah* of *Tawbah* (9:71), women may also participate in carrying out this responsibility. Therefore, they may take part in the leadership role of the country.³⁷

He also raises the same issue in his Journal *Tulu` Islam* and says:

It has been widely circulated that in Islam women are not allowed to take part in the leadership role of the state. This notion is contradictory to the teachings of the Qur'an. The *ayah* confirms that it is the responsibility of the state to command for nobility and forbid evils. In other places, it is clearly stated that the men and women both are charged with this responsibility, and not men alone.³⁸

Parvez's statement on the above *ayah* is not based upon a firm ground. It has never been a prerequisite to have “authoritative power” to command for virtue and forbid evil. The *ayah* of *Surah al-Hajj* (22: 41) simply confirms that one of the prime responsibilities of the men in power is *Amr bi'l Ma'ruf and Nahy 'ani'l Munkar*. It is an established fact that much of the crimes and evils of society can be reduced by a simple legislative rule enacted by the legislative assembly, which may not be achieved through years of preaching by the greatest preachers of the world. *Amr* is not used for power or authority alone; it is used in many other meanings, such as “encouragement”, “advice”, “persuasion”, “temptation,” etc. For clarification, it is necessary to look at the following two verses:

They said: "O Shu'aib! does your (religion or) prayer command you that we leave off the worship which our fathers practiced, or that we leave off doing what we like with our property? (Hud 11: 87). For he commands you what is evil and shameful, and that ye should say of Allah that of which ye have no knowledge.³⁹

The above two verses confirm the fact that the word *Amr* is not used for command with authority of power. What was the authority of power that Satan possessed over mankind to distract them from the Path of Allah and the Prophets! Or, did the prayers of Prophet Shu`ayb also possess some ruling authority to prevent his nation from following the religion of their ancestors?

The Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) did not enjoy any ruling authority while delivering the Divine Message in Makkah. He became the leader of the state only after migrating to Madinah. The *ayah* of *Surah al-A`raf*, which is unanimously a Makkan *surah*,⁴⁰ establishes that the Prophet performed the mission of *Amr bi'l Ma'ruf and Nahy 'Ani'l Munkar* in Makkah as well. The following Qur'anic verse is worth noting:

Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures) – in the Law and the Gospel – for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil.

This shows that commanding what is just and forbidding what is evil was among the prime responsibilities of the Prophet (SAW) in Makkah, which he delivered efficiently even though he did not hold any political power there. Finally, Sayyid Mawdudi highlights that in Egypt women were placed at the key posts of the country. It made the sensitive information of the country leaked out to Israel and other countries. He also added that the women could not perform jobs as efficiently and promptly as men especially in jobs requiring physical strengths and skills.⁴¹

In my opinion, Islam does not allow woman to be the leader of a country or state. In Islam, she is asked to employ the best of her efforts in raising sound generation of the *Ummah* through education and training of her children. The job of leadership at the state level is so hectic and tough that a woman can hardly handle. There may be some iron ladies stronger than men. But they are exceptions, and the rules of *Shari`ah* cannot be based on rare examples.⁴²

The scholars have different opinions about the validity of the post of Judges for women. Majority scholars including Maliki, Shafi`i and Hanbali do not allow this, as the earlier *hadith* includes the position of Judge as well. But Imam Abu Hanifah allows women to be the Judge in the matters other than *Hudud* and *Qisas*. That means, if she is allowed to give testimony, she is also allowed to be the Judge. Imam Tabari, the writer of *Tafsir Tabari*, mentions that she can hold the post of Chief Justice without any condition. For, she is allowed to be a *Mufti*; then she must have the privilege of being a *Qadi* as well. The same is held by Ibn Hazm.⁴³ Apart from that, the women are allowed to hold the post of Rector, Dean, Chair person of a foundation or institution, member of a parliament and so on.⁴⁴

Women and inheritance

The Qur'an has declared in the verse of *Mirath* in *Surah Nisa'* (4:11) that the man will get twice as that of woman in inheritance. This is due to his shouldering financial expenses in running the family and various other responsibilities. Woman, on the other hand, is relieved from such obligations. A man marries and spends dowers and pays for gifts, etc. But a woman receives dower and also the gifts, making her equal or even more than a man in wealth. That is why a woman usually gets richer than her husband. A survey of all the rich people in any Muslim country would show that the wives are usually richer than their husbands. For, he is charged with all expenses, and she is not, regardless of her financial status. The Qur'anic (4:11) guiding principle for inheritance is: "Allah (thus) directs you as regards your children's (inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females."

Parvez does not seem to agree with the clear statement in the above *ayah*. He denies the difference of inheritance as a Qur'anic principle and praises the West for granting women better opportunities and greater shares in inheritance. He states that it is false to say that the Qur'an made it a guiding principle that the women will get half the men in inheritance.⁴⁵ Europe is proud to grant women more rights than men. It made women participate daringly in

the jobs that are assigned primarily to men.⁴⁶ Parvez is full of praise for the Western culture and tries to interpret the *ayat* of the Qur'an to make it "closer" to the Western civilization. He seems to be ashamed to say that it is the Qur'anic principle to grant men inheritance twice as that of women.

Throughout Islamic history, no one doubted the *Shari'ah* ruling on inheritance that males will inherit double that of females. It is in accordance with the Qur'anic *verse* 4:11. This is not to discriminate women from men; but to ensure a fair and just distribution of the wealth among the heirs of the deceased. For, in the struggles of life, the men have to carry burdens which women don't usually have to. Sayyid Mawdudi mentions:

This is the guiding principle of Islam in the issue of inheritance that the male's portion is double the females. It was due to the fact that Islamic *Shari'ah* made men responsible for family expenses, and not the women. Therefore, it was the demand of natural justice that the ladies should get less than the gents in the shares of inheritance.⁴⁷

Abul Kalam Azad says, "The basic principle in this issue is that the boys should get double the girls."⁴⁸ Abdul Majid Daryabadi says:

This is a general principle that the boy should get double shares and the girl should get single shares, no matter what their number is, one or more. Many world religions and cultures do not give any shares to the females at all. Even in *Jahily* Arabia, women were totally deprived from any shares in inheritance. It was the males, and only the able-bodied males, who could take part in battles, will inherit. It was an unjust and unnatural law practiced by those people.... Moreover, a married woman gets inheritance from both her own parents and also from husband. So she does not get less in the real facts.⁴⁹

Yousuf Qaradawi explains it through an example. If a person dies leaving behind one son and one daughter, and an amount of 150 thousand dollars, naturally the son will inherit 100 and the daughter 50 thousand dollars. The son got married and paid dowers and expenses amounting approximately 25 thousand dollars; and the daughter got married and earned a dower and gifts of approximately 25 thousand dollars, making both equal. Moreover, the son has to spend continuously, which the daughter is exempted from.⁵⁰ This shows the equitable and just distribution of Islam in inheritance.

Hijab or Niqab

Hijab or *Niqab* has been a matter of serious concern among Muslim scholars. Some scholars do not allow woman to reveal her face outside her home. They discourage woman to come out of homes except in emergencies, in which case the women would cover herself completely in a '*Burqa*'. Sayyid Mawdudi believes that in the Islamic society of Madinah, *Hijab* included covering both the face and hands.⁵¹ Muhammad Qasimi argues that the Qur'anic command for lowering gaze is also applicable to her relatives at home.⁵² He differentiates between '*Satr*' and '*Hijab*'. According to him, the face and hands are not parts of *Satr* (coverable parts), and they can be uncovered in front of *Muhrim* males like father, brothers, uncles, etc. But '*Satr*' (the parts of the human body which must be hidden from every one) should not be exposed even before parents. It could be exposed before husbands only.⁵³

Some scholars support the face veil. In their defense, they present the incident of ‘Ayishah (R.A.) when she was mistakenly left alone behind the army of the Prophet (SAAS) in the campaign of Bani Mustalaq, as a proof. It is reported that she slept till the morning when Safwan bin Mu’attal (R.A.) passed by and identified her. On seeing Safwan, ‘Ayishah immediately covered her face with the scarf.⁵⁴ This is considered to be a proof that face is included in *Hijab*. Also in another incident Umm Salamah (R.A.) and Maimunah (R.A.) were together with the Prophet (SAW) when Abdullah bin Umri Maktum came for a visit. Thereupon the Prophet (SAW) asked his wives to observe *Hijab*. The wives exclaimed: “Is he not a blind man who cannot see us?” The Prophet (SAW) said: “Are you also blind that you cannot see him?” Umm Salamah clarified that this incident was after the revelation of *Hijab*.⁵⁵

There is another group of Muslim scholars who adopted a slightly different opinion on this issue. They base their argument on the Qur’anic verses (24: 30-31) which advise Muslim men and women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty and not to disclose their inherent beauty but what appears by itself, “*Illa Ma Zahara minha*” (24:31). These verses are interpreted as an injunction to cover the whole body except “face” and “hands”. This exception is to save the ladies from extreme hardships. This is in accordance with the Qur’anic verse: “He has chosen you and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion.” (22:78). However, these scholars insist that the Shari’ah does not allow a woman to expose her body in public to attract the attention of ‘men’. In a perverted society where crimes occur frequently, a woman may be asked to cover her face as well. For, if she keeps it open, she may face the dangers from people of evil character.

In sum, most of the scholars and the schools of jurisprudence agree that face is not an ‘*awrah*’ and hence can be exposed. The four schools of Islamic jurisprudence i.e. Hanafi, Maliki, Hanbali, and Shafi’i (in the famous report) all agree that face is not ‘*awrah*’, which does not need to be covered.⁵⁶ Imam Abu Hanifah is reported to have exempted the foot of women from coverable ‘*awrah*’ as she needs to keep it open for free movement, without which she faces hardship.⁵⁷ Ibn Hazm Zahiri, who is well-known for his literal interpretation of the Qur’anic verses, said: The Qur’anic verse (24: 31) “That they should draw their veils over their bosoms” indicates that the “face” is not an “*awrah*”, and needs not be covered.⁵⁸ It is reported in Bukhari and Muslim that Fadl bin ‘Abbas was with the Prophet (SAAW) in his last Hajj when a girl approached the Prophet (SAAW) to ask a question. Seeing that Fadl was staring at the girl, the Prophet (SAAW), instead of asking the girl to cover her face, turned the face of Fadl to the other direction.⁵⁹ This implies that face can be kept open. The ladies during the time of the Prophet (SAAW) used to perform prayers keeping their faces and hands open.

Parvez and his followers, contradicting their appreciation of Western culture, apparently agree with the moderate stand of Muslim scholars and advocate that the face and hands are not parts of *Hijab* for women. They can remain unveiled. *Shari’ah* does not require women to cover her face and hands. He criticizes the stand of the traditional scholars who propagate for *Niqab* or face veil:

It has been claimed by our scholars that the woman should remain imprisoned behind four walls of her home. Even if she needs to go out for serious necessities or any dangers, she should cover herself totally so that she looks like a ‘Walking Tent’. This practice is simply

imposed on them by their religious scholars who pose themselves like the *Ahbar* and *Ruhban* of Jews and Christians.⁶⁰

Umar Ahmad ‘Uthmani, an associate of Ghulam Ahmad Parvez, says:

In [the] Indo-Pak subcontinent, the common notion about *Hijab* is that the women should never go out of their homes. If they need to go out for journey or other reasons, they should veil themselves totally under *Burqa`* and cover her face, so that the people should not and could not see through their faces. The command to lower their gaze was simply given to men, so that they should not look at other women. But if the woman come out covering her whole body parts including face and hands, so why a man is then asked to lower his gaze? What is the need for it? Even though he looks up-down or to the front, what could he see from her?⁶¹

Parvez regards the verses of Surah al-Ahzab (33:32-33) for all Muslim females, whereas his disciple Umar Uthmani limits the rulings of the verses for the wives of the Prophet (SAAW). The verses read as follows:

O Consorts of the Prophet! Ye are not like any of the (other) women: if ye do fear (Allah), be not too complaisant of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak ye a speech (that is) just. And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance.

Umar Uthmani comments on the above verses thus:

The address in these *ayat* was made to the chaste wives of the Prophet (SAAS). From the beginning it was mentioned that the wives of the Prophet were not like ordinary and common ladies. This means the rulings mentioned in the *ayat* were special rulings for the wives of the Prophet alone, and not for others. But if the general Muslims and their wives treat themselves in the place of the Prophet and his dignified wives, they could follow this ruling; but we cannot regard this ruling as the general ruling for all Muslim ladies.⁶²

Regarding the verse 53 of Surah Al-Ahzab, in which Allah commands Muslims to maintain *Hijab* from the wives of the Prophet while asking them for any necessities; Umar Uthmani says:

Allah has commanded special guidelines in this regard for the wives of the Prophet: Do not enter the house of the Prophet for food without permission; do not go so early to wait for its preparation; do not wait for friendly chats after enjoying foods; and most importantly, don't ever desire to marry the wives of the Prophet after his demise are some of the rulings that are not related to the common Muslim women; but for the wives of the Prophet.⁶³

Conclusion

Ghulam Ahmad Parvez does not merely reject the authority of the *hadith* (sayings) as an essential source of the Shari'ah but also tries to present Islam from a modern perspective and to bridge the gap between Islamic and Western civilization. He overwhelmingly uses reason and rejects or manipulates the Qur'anic interpretation to befit his reasoning and the modern culture. On women's issues, he is much closer to the Western culture than to Islam. He encourages women's free mixing with the opposite gender in the struggle of life, rejects Qur'anic principle of inheritance, opposes the unanimous opinions of Islamic scholars

regarding woman's testimony in the court, and also regarding her leadership role in an Islamic state. In doing so, he tries to be modern and up-to-date perhaps to become widely read and accepted in the East and the West. The Western people undoubtedly regard him as an asset for them. He may be an asset for them, but not for Islam. He crosses all limits while declaring the Hadith of the Prophet irrelevant in today's socio-political context. He tries to follow the Qur'an, but his methodology is erroneous. The Qur'an cannot and must not be understood without the help of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAAS).

Endnotes

- ¹ *Tulu` Islam Magazine*, (Lahore, May-June 1960), 31.
- ² Ghulam Ahmad Parvez, *Shahkar-i Risalat*, (Lahore: Idarah Tulu` Islam, 1987), 29.
- ³ *Tulu` Islam Magazine*, March-April, 1969, 116.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, November 1973, 20.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, March, 1955.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, June, 1959, 51.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, January, 1984, 47.
- ⁸ Muhammad din Qasemy, *Tafsir Matalibul-Furqan ka 'Ilmiy awr Tahqiqi Ja'izah*, (Ph.D. thesis, unpublished, Punjab University: Lahore), 2006, p. 33.
- ⁹ *Tulu` Islam*, July, 1938, 73.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, June, 1948, 84.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, June, 1953, 6.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, March 1954, 52.
- ¹³ Qasemy, *Tafsir...*, 45.
- ¹⁴ *Qur'an ki Ma`nawi Tahrif*, (Lahore: Idarah Tarjumanul-Qur'an, 1992), 82.
- ¹⁵ Qasemy, *Tafsir...*, 134.
- ¹⁶ *Tulu` Islam*, April, 1985.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, June, 1941, 53.
- ¹⁸ Parvez, *Tahirah ke Nam*, (Lahore: Idarah Tulu` Islam), 1972, 200.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.
- ²¹ *Tulu` Islam*, June, 1941, 50.
- ²² *Tahirah ke Nam*, 232.
- ²³ *Tulu` Islam*, February 1973, 39.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, June, 1977, 17.

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- ²⁵ Al- Bukhari, *Kitab al-Khumus*, No. 2982.
- ²⁶ See Yousuf Qaradawi, *Malamih al-Mujtama` al-Muslim*, (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1993), 385-393.
- ²⁷ Ibid.,
- ²⁸ Abdur Rahman Al-Jaza'iri, *Al-Fiqh 'ala al-Madhahib al-Arba`ah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), 4/135, 212.
- ²⁹ *Tulu` Islam*, March, 1983, 54.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 47.
- ³¹ *Tahirah ke Nam...*, 21-22.
- ³² *Tahirah ke Nam...*, 67.
- ³³ See Abdul Majid DaryaBadi, *Tafsir Majidi*, vol. 1, (Lahore: Taj Company Ltd. n.d.), 196-197.
- ³⁴ Al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Maghazi*, No. 4163 & 6686.
- ³⁵ Holy Qur'an, 9:71.
- ³⁶ Holy Qur'an, 3:110.
- ³⁷ Qasemy, *Tafsir Matalibul-Furqan...*, 4/190.
- ³⁸ *Tulu` Islam*, January, 1980, 30; December, 1983, 54.
- ³⁹ Holy Qur'an, 2: 169.
- ⁴⁰ *Tafsir al-Qurtubi*, "Al-A`raf", 7/144; Mawdudi, *Tafhimul-Qur'an*, vol. 2, (Lahore: Tarjumanul-Qur'an, 1990), vol. 2, 5.
- ⁴¹ Qasemy, cited from Mawdudi, *Islami Riyasat*, (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd. 1967).
- ⁴² Qaradawi, *Fatawa Mu`asirah...*, 2/372-389.
- ⁴³ For details see, *Al-Mawsu`ah al-Fiqhiyyah*, on "Al-Qada". <http://feqh.al-islam.com/bookhier.asp?DocID=100&Mode=0>
- ⁴⁴ See Qaradawi, *Fatawa Mu`asirah*, (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1990), 2/372-389.
- ⁴⁵ *Matalib...*, 2/321.
- ⁴⁶ *Tulu` Islam*, June, 1941, 53.
- ⁴⁷ *Tafhimul-Qur'an...*, 1/326.
- ⁴⁸ *Tarjumanul-Qur'an...*, 1/361.
- ⁴⁹ *Tafsir Majidi...*, 180-181.
- ⁵⁰ Qaradawi, *Malamih al-Mujtama` al-Islamiy*, (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1998), 385-393.
- ⁵¹ Mawdudi, *Tafhim...*, 53, 4/121.
- ⁵² Qasimi, *Tafsir...*, 757
- ⁵³ Ibid., 758.

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- ⁵⁴ Al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Maghazi*, No. 2494; Muslim, No. 2770.
- ⁵⁵ Tirmidhi, *Kitab al-Adab*, No. 2778; Abu Da'wud, *Kitab al-Libas*, No. 4112.
- ⁵⁶ See Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Hanafi, *Al-Ikhtiyar li Ta`lil al-Mukhtar*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyyah, 2005), 4/156; Nawawi, *Al-Majmu`*, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2003), 3/167-168; Al-Shawkani, *Nayl al-Awtar*, 2/55.
- ⁵⁷ *Al-Ikhtiyar...*, 4/156.
- ⁵⁸ Ibn Hazm, *Al-Muhalla*, (Beirut: Dar al-Aafaq al-Jadidah, n.d.), 3/279.
- ⁵⁹ Al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Hajj*, No. 1442.
- ⁶⁰ *Tulu` Islam*, May-June, 1982, 89.
- ⁶¹ *Fiqhul-Qur'an...*, 3/305-318.
- ⁶² *Fiqhul-Qur'an...*, 3/306.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 307