

# Analyses of Fictional Readings for 7<sup>th</sup> Grade: Shabanu, The Beduin's Gazelle, & Seven Daughters & Seven Sons

## SHABANU, DAUGHTER OF THE WIND

### Book Review As It Relates to the Book's Use in Humanities For Complementing Studies About Islam and the Muslim World in the Context of World History & Social Studies

**Book Title:** Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind

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#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this review is to produce a synopsis of the book, Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind, and critically analyze passages that reflect positively and negatively on Islam and the Muslim world and to correct any misconceptions promoted by this story, as it relates to the book's use by the humanities for complementing the study of Islam & the Muslim world in the context of World History and Social Studies.

#### **Synopsis:**

The story is set in Pakistan in what appears to be the 1980's or later in the Cholistan Desert. It is centered on a young desert dwelling Pakistani girl, Shabanu, who is the narrator of the story. Always in fear of not having water, these desert dwellers follow the rains; yet try to stay in the same encampment as long as water exists in the local watering holes. She belongs to a family that herds camels and it is through the sale of camels at the yearly fair that they are able to finance their needs including planning a great wedding for their older daughter Phulan followed by Shabanu a year or two after that. Their camels are their most prized possessions and they look after them with great care.

The story begins with her family's preparations to marry her older sister Phulan, which is intertwined with Shabanu's thoughts about her own wedding day. She has not reached maturity yet, but as soon as she does she will be married. It is their custom that parents completely arrange the marriage. For Phulan, her parents have chosen Hamir, a farmer who managed to bring agriculture to a portion of the desert. For Shabanu, they are planning on marrying her to his younger brother, Murad. We find Shabanu at times dreaming of how marrying Murad will take her away from her desert life and her camels which she so dearly loves and at other times dreams of how wonderful life will be with him. She remembers Murad when she saw him years ago at the yearly fair as a young boy with ears that were too big for his head and she wonders if he still looks the same.

Shabanu is a strong willed girl of eleven or twelve years old, who is obedient in doing her chores and what she is told until she loses faith in her father, when he sells her beloved camel Guluband after he promised her that he would not. At this point she starts becoming more independent in her thinking, and even though she is still obedient there is a shift in her attitude towards marriage and her willingness to get married. She continually compares herself to her sister Phulan, who is completely submissive to the will of her parents, and at times wishes she could be more like her.

The story for the most part is quite uneventful until the family travels to the township where

Hamir's family lives and farms the land. It is when Shabanu and Phulan visit a watering hole to get water for the family and bathe that the story takes a drastic turn. Several men on a hunting expedition see the two girls and set up a bet amongst them that the one who can shoot the most quail will have Phulan. It was the custom that the landowner, Nazir Muhammad, would provide his guests with a girl from among the tenants of his land, and in this case the hunting party wanted Phulan. When they are finished with her, they give her some money and send her back to her family. Shabanu overhears their sinister plans, and in anger throws their water jars at one of the hunters, splashing mud on his fine silk trousers. This enrages him, and Shabanu and Phulan flee in fear on camel back to their encampment. They tell their father what happened and that when they finish the hunt, they will come for Phulan. He orders the girls, their mother and aunt to flee to a township called Derawar Fort, where he would catch up with them, then rushes to town to warn Hamir and Murad that they need to contact the landlord, Nazir Muhammad, and let him know that Phulan is betrothed. Hamir becomes enraged and after grabbing his gun, sets out to find the hunting party. Before he can leave his village the hunting party arrives in search of Phulan. A skirmish takes place and Hamir is shot and killed. Meanwhile, the Desert Rangers have taken the women into their protective custody at the advanced ordered by the father over radio. Their father eventually catches up with them covered with blood. Phulan goes into a state of depression after hearing that Hamir is dead. He is accompanied by Murad, whom Shabanu sees for the first time since he was a child, full grown into a handsome, strong and courageous young man.

The remainder of the story deals with a negotiation between the landlord, the governor of the area and the two families on how this incident should be resolved. By this time, Shabanu has become much bolder and independent in her manners and thinking, and a sense of rebellion toward the authority of her parents is evident. During the negotiations, Shabanu's two young nephews manage to get outside and get stuck in a tree. She goes outside to help them get down using a ladder. As she is climbing the ladder, it starts to slip just as a jeep pulls up to the house. From within the jeep an older distinguished gentleman emerges and holds the ladder for her until she can rescue her cousins. She smiles at him in gratitude; this proves later to be her undoing.

With the negotiations settled, the parties involved announce the outcome. Phulan will be wed to Murad, Hamir's younger brother. Shabanu is infuriated that her sister will marry the man she had dreamed of. Her fate is sealed however, when she learns that the landlord will not evict or cut off the water supply to the farm now tended by Murad, in return for his brother, the governor, Rahim-Sahib, marrying Shabanu. Rahim-Sahib is no other than the man who held the ladder for Shabanu who was smitten by her when she smiled at him. He is a man in his fifties with three previous wives. Shabanu protests vehemently but to no avail. The decision has been made that when she reaches the age of maturity she will be wed to him.

Shabanu turns to a cousin of her mother's for support. Sharma is a strong willed woman like Shabanu who herself has a daughter fled a bad marriage. They live alone and have a commanding presence. Sharma scolds Shabanu's father for his actions, but while he knows that Sharma is correct, out of stubborn pride and honor for the family, he sticks with his initial decision. Sharma gives Shabanu some personal advice on how to deal with the situation at a personal level, and assures her that she always has a choice, and offers her a refuge if she ever decides to leave. A few months after Phulan's wedding, Shabanu starts to menstruate, but keeps it secret from her parents for about three months, trying to avoid the inevitable. She also now starts to feel desire, and at night is embarrassed and ashamed when she hears her mother and father being intimate while they believe Shabanu is asleep. She decides that she cannot bear having a man old enough to be her grandfather in such a relationship. She decides to accept Sharma's offer of refuge, sneaking away one night on a camel on what she thinks will be a 24-hour journey. While out in the desert, her pet camel Mithoo falls into a foxhole and breaks his leg. In despair she stays with him fearing that jackals and vultures will eat him. Now, instead of fearing her father will find her, she is now in dire hope that her father will actually find her to save Mithoo. As dawn breaks, her father does find her, but instead of helping her, starts to beat her with a stick until he has bloodied her back. At the end she hears sobbing as her father embraces her but realizes that the sobbing is coming from her father and not her. She finds solace in the advice that Sharma has given her: "The secret is keeping your innermost beauty, the secrets of your soul, locked in your heart so that he must always reach out to you for it." This she does and this is what keeps her from crying and what will eventually give her the strength to be wed to an old man.

#### **General Critique:**

I found the book to be rather uneventful until the story picks up momentum after the hunting party incident, which changes Shabanu's life. But what is especially troubling about the book is that the author describes many rituals and practices without making any distinction between cultural traditions and Islamic teachings and practices, although the reader is left to believe that the behavior of the characters is based on Islamic teachings. In fact it was the lack of knowledge and adherence to Islamic Law that lead these people into committing gross violations of Islamic Law itself in regards to such aspects as worship, burial of the dead, using girls as gifts, arranged marriages, beating of children, and conflict resolution. The story's conclusion was probably the most frustrating, since it leaves the reader with a sense of hopelessness, oppression, and anger. Not only were the forced marriage, the beating, and the father's attitude totally un-Islamic, they were totally inhumane. A true understanding and adherence to the teachings of Islam would have prevented such things from happening. The book is filled with passages that indicate behavior and beliefs that are not Islamic at all, and which confuse the reader into thinking that they represent Islam. Even if one was to look at this book for cultural accuracy, it is not in any way reflective of the life style of most Pakistani girls, who today are educated, enjoy many freedoms, and choose their own spouse. For the seventh grader reading the book as a complement to their study of Islam and Islamic history, instead of being educated, they are being filled with stereotypical representations that they assume to be facts. This is a disservice both to Islam and Muslims, and the students reading it. Some of the specific criticisms are enumerated in the pages, which follow Other Reviewers Comments on Shabanu:

#### **Other Reviewers' Comments on Shabanu:**

"Shabanu is a fictional book that is being used by 7th grade humanities teachers to supplement the student's education about Islam. Although it is an engaging story, Shabanu presents an extremely narrow view of a subculture in Pakistan, and reinforces common stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. This defeats the entire purpose of teaching about other religions and cultures.

"The portrait this story paints may be true for the nomadic people that live in the desert of Cholistan in Pakistan, or other remote areas of the Muslim world. It is a far cry, however, from the lifestyle of the millions of Muslims living in large cities, in houses or apartment buildings, riding cars or buses, attending schools and colleges, and generally living a modern lifestyle.

"It would be similar to a book about a girl living in a cabin in Appalachia, without electricity or running water, who walks barefoot for miles to fetch water. Were such a book read in other countries as a supplement to the study of the US, it would indeed convey an inaccurate picture of the lifestyle of the common American.

"Add to this setting the story line of a prepubescent girl forced to marry a man old enough to be her grandfather as his fourth wife by her overbearing father. It would be hard to contrive a more stereotypical plot. And since the targeted audience - seventh graders - are generally not equipped to make the distinction between religion and culture, specific situations and broad generalizations, it is common for them to ask such telling questions after reading the novel as: "Do you drive?" "How old were you when you were married?", and "Were you forced to marry your husband?" There have even been instances of Muslim girls being teasingly called Shabanu.

"If the purpose of the expanded curriculum adopted by the California Framework is to broaden students' horizons and make them less intolerant and susceptible to stereotyping those who are different from themselves, it is counterproductive to have them read books like Shabanu.

"While there is no single book that we recommend as a replacement for Shabanu at this time, there are a number of alternatives offered in ING's catalog at [www.ing.org](http://www.ing.org)

#### **-Ameena Jandali, Islamic Networks Group (ING)**

"Please, please, please, throw out your copies of Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind – it is 'colonialist literature' – and don't even consider its sequel! It is a humiliation to every Muslim child in your classroom – and this alone ought to be cue to you to abandon it."

#### **-Audrey Shabbas, Arab World and Islamic Resources & School Services (AWAIR)**

" . . . While the character of Shabanu is somewhat "spunky" and independent at times, the main focus of the book is that worn-out 'who will I marry' story line which authors use to rope in every adolescent female reader. This continues the stereotype that the only thing on the mind of a young Muslim female is marriage . . . The ending of the book is quite unfortunate in that the last scene literally has her father catching up with his runaway daughter and beating her as the book closes!!"

**-Shabbir Mansuri, Council on Islamic Education (CIE)**

#### **Specific Analysis:**

**Page 3:** "If God had blessed you with sons, we wouldn't have to break our fingers over wedding dresses"

Analysis: This quote reflects the notion that sons are better than daughters. Islamic teachings place no greater worth on a son than a daughter and in fact both are considered a blessing from God. In fact, there is an Islamic tradition that states, "Whoever raises three daughters, treating them well, will be admitted to Paradise." No such tradition is mentioned with regard to sons

**Page 3:** "You'll spend your life's savings on two dowries and two weddings. Without a son, who will bring a dowry for you? And who will take care of you when you're old?"

Analysis: The term "dowry" as it used throughout the book is defined as the property and wealth that a woman brings to the household of the husband when married. This understanding comes from a practice in other faiths and does not fit the description of what is commonly practiced by Muslims. Islamically, when a man and woman are married, the contract that is executed between them has as one of its conditions a wedding gift, known in Arabic as mahr, which is a gift from the groom to the bride to show his affection and commitment to the marriage. This gift is her property once she receives it and no one, not even her father or guardian has any claim over it.

**Page 6:** "Dadi will give us each ten camels with our dowries."

Analysis: See note above on dowry.

**Page 18:** "Now that she is betrothed, she can't leave the house without a billowy veil..."

Analysis: The use of the word, "veil," here is misleading. The covering of the hair by a scarf and modest, loose-fitting dress, commonly referred to by Muslims as "hijab" becomes obligatory for a young woman when she reaches puberty. It should not be confused with the face veil, which is often cultural. The purpose of the hijab is so that a woman is not judged by her physical appearance or sexuality, but rather her character, behavior and intelligence. Also, Islamically, betrothal is not the discerning factor as to when the hijab needs to be worn by a woman. As stated earlier, it becomes required after she reaches puberty. And even then, it's an aspect of Islamic teachings that is not forced upon a woman, but is her choice. Of course, this reviewer understands that in some Muslim populated countries today, the hijab is forced upon women such as in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan, when the Taliban were in power. Hijab takes on the form of a "chador" or "burka" in South East Asian countries, and sometimes is imposed on women in certain rural regions.

**Page 28:** "In less than a year you'll be betrothed. You aren't a child anymore. You must learn to obey. Even when you disagree."

Analysis: According to Islamic teachings, a person has individual rights and his/her consent is required for decisions that may impact them. And as individual rights relate to marriage, Islamically, a woman's consent is required in order to validate her marriage. A woman cannot be forced to marry someone she doesn't want.

**Page 30:** "Dadi is a wise man, and I've never truly learned to obey him. How can I let a boy with a skinny neck and ears that stick out from under his turban tell me what to do?"

Analysis: Once again, according to Islamic teachings, a person has individual rights and his/her consent is required for decisions that may impact them. In a marriage situation, both husband and wife must consult with one another on matters concerning the family. In many instances in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, for example, he consulted with his wife on what to do and made

decisions based on those consultations.

**Page 38:** "Back beyond our camp...in the ancient mosque is a garden, where it is said that the Abbasid Prince kept seventy wives in richly decorated underground cells."

Analysis: A mosque is a place of worship to God. They can be decorated but usually they are simple peaceful structures designed to facilitate prayer. This passage has many problems in it. First, seventy wives is not permitted in Islamic Law. Islamically, a man is allowed to marry more than one wife, provided that certain conditions exist and he is able to maintain each household equally in every respect, otherwise he must have only one wife. So, the norm in Islam is monogamy, not polygamy. The verse of the Quran in which this issue is addressed was revealed in the context of a period of war in the life of early Muslims (who were being attacked by the Meccans for their monotheistic belief), leaving many women and their children without care or support. Rather than leaving these women and orphans to fend for themselves, early Muslims were given permission to take more than one wife provided that the man is able to care for his first wife, and any additional wives (limited to four) equally. But in the same verse of the Quran, God states that it is impossible to care for more than one equally, so it is best to keep only one.

Secondly, Islamically, keeping women or anyone in underground cells is a kin to imprisonment, and a person cannot be imprisoned without having committed a crime. But even imprisoned people have civil rights under Islamic law.

**Page 44:** "For the first time in my life, I pull the chador over my face and lower my head beneath the gaze of these men."

Analysis: The chador is a garment worn in parts of Pakistan & Afghanistan that covers the whole body and often face, and should not be confused by students with modest dress in Islam, commonly referred to as "hijab". (See the notes above for page 18.) This passage makes it seem like this is a monumental moment. However at the time this event took place, Shabanu still had not reached puberty and thus it was not an obligation for her to wear the hijab.

**Page 44:** "You know, little one," he says, "these men will kill the woman when they find her." I don't answer. He is reminding me that I must abide by the rules."

Analysis: This passage is in reference to the couple that eloped to get married. However, vigilante killings that this passage alludes to are absolutely prohibited according to Islamic teachings.

**Page 53:** "A man in a filthy tunic promises through a microphone that the dancing inside is performed by beautiful women who do forbidden things."

Analysis: This passage alludes to the subjugation of women in the pursuit of monetary gain. This has been a problem that has plagued human society for thousands of years. According to Islamic teachings, women are not objects that can be used and abused for the enjoyment of men. Islam places men and women on an equal footing before God.

**Page 61:** "I bite at him like a wild animal. With his free hand he slaps my face, sending me to my knees. He still holds my arm."

Analysis: According to Islamic teachings, beating another person, particularly a woman or a child, let alone an animal is strictly prohibited. If a parent does abuse a child, an Islamic judge can order the child to be taken away from the parent and given to another relative for care.

**Page 63:** "Dadi has made enough for Phulan's wedding and dowry and for mine next year."

Analysis: See the note about dowry from the passage on page 3 above.

**Page 66:** "A small boy joins in the snake dance, and the watching men twirl rupees over the dancers' turbans to ward off the evil eye."

Analysis: This scene describes a cultural practice, not based on any Islamic teachings.

**Page 74:** "'This is my wedding present for Phulan," says the shopkeeper handing it to me. "May

she have many sons.””

Analysis: The two aspects in this passage that are worthy of mention are generosity and the issue of sons over daughters. It is considered of good moral character in Islamic teachings to be generous, not only to friends and family but also to strangers. Secondly, sons have no more intrinsic worth to a family over daughters. In fact having daughters could be a reason for admittance into paradise, as stated in the notes above for the passage on page 3.

**Page 91:** “Our thoughts turn to Channan Pir, the desert shrine where women pray for sons and good marriages for their daughters.”

Analysis: This passage and ones referring to shrines & superstition are some of the most disturbing in the book. Islamically, prayer and supplication is directed toward God and God alone. Mosques, rather than shrines are the only places where congregational prayers are made to God. Praying to anyone or anything else negates a Muslim’s belief in God.

However, based on cultural practices, Pakistan is full of shrines, where people go to pray for many things. So, students reading these passages should be made to understand the differences between what Islam teaches and how Muslims pray versus cultural practices in certain parts of rural Pakistan that either pre-date Islam or are a degradation of Islamic teachings.

**Page 95:** “Every year we make the trek to the shrine to ask for some kindness from the saint who is protector of all children.”

Analysis: Prayer to saints is strictly prohibited in Islam as well as prayer to anything other than God. However, visiting the graves of deceased family and friends and of saints is recommended as it reminds the visitors of the inevitable and increases the ability to worship God more consciously.

**Page 95-96:** “I sing about a man whose lover God has taken away and sent to live among the stars where he sees her every night. He can never have her.”

Analysis: This passage may be representing a cultural superstition and has no basis in Islamic theology.

**Page 97:** “She disapproves of Sharma, who left her husband because he beat her. He was older and already had one wife who had borne him no sons. He married Sharma in the hope she’d bear a boy child. When Fatima was born he began beating both of them, and Sharma refused to lie with him.”

Analysis: Wife beating is strictly prohibited according to Islamic teachings. It has no basis and a man who beats his wife for any reason, can be imprisoned and punished severely. Also, as addressed earlier, according to Islamic teachings, men and women are equal before God. In some rural societies however, boys are usually favored over girls for purposes of labor, and possibly gifts brought them in marriage, as dowry is understand in this book, which is not based on Islamic teachings.

**Page 98:** “...his elder brother has just had a second child, a girl – too bad, it seems to run in the family.”

Analysis: In addition to the issue of bearing girls which we refer to above, this passage tends to imply that God’s decree has no bearing on whether a child born to a couple will be a boy or a girl. Islamic belief places that decision squarely on God. It has nothing to do with genetics or chance. According to Islamic teachings, God decides on the gender of the child at conception, which is why Islam teaches to be happy with the birth of any child, whether boy or girl.

**Page 99:** “Women kneel in rows in the packed mud courtyard of the mosque. Rotating their bodies, they toss their oiled hair over their heads, back and forth and around and around with a whipping motion like horses’ tails, in a frenzy of devotion. Women whirl like dervishes, ankle bracelets jangling, their skirts flying out like disks of color. All around are women: wailing women, silent women, with children clinging to their skirts, women dancing and playing flutes and singing songs about the life of Channan Pir. Beside the entrance to the shrine a woman, her head thrown back, wails her anguish at having lost a child.”

Analysis: No ritual in Islam bears any resemblance to the acts related in this passage. Worship in Islam is directed toward God, and is solemn and dignified. These maybe cultural practices in certain rural parts of Pakistan but even then, does not really reflect Pakistani culture either.

**Page 99:** "I pray with all my heart that Phulan will have sons. ... I pray she and Hamir will be happy and that life will not be too difficult for her."

Analysis: Such supplications as the one made in this passage are acceptable in Islam; however, Islamically, they must be directed toward God. The context in which these supplications were made imply they were being made toward the "saint" at whose shrine these women were praying. Again, the emphasis on sons is stereotypical.

**Page 101:** "...Dadi the favorite, has won. The crowd is nearly mad with ecstasy, calling for blood."

Analysis: This passage is in reference to a wrestling match that Shabanu's father had just won. While the women were at the shrine, the men were engaged in near fight to the death-wrestling matches. Such fighting expositions where the intent to is hurt the opponent is prohibited in Islamic Law.

**Page 104:** "Sharma tells a story about a woman, her friend, who was stoned to death because her husband accused her of looking at another man."

Analysis: The punishment mentioned in this passage, which is based on an ancient practice, was only executed after a husband or wife has been found guilty by a judge of committing adultery. Further, in order for a judge to give such a sentence, four independent witnesses, of outstanding character & reputation, must actually testify to having seen the actual penetration of the man's genitals into the woman's for this sentence to be executed. It is nearly impossible, and certainly would not be done by the mere accusation of 'looking' at another man. Mention of it in this passage is absurd.

**Page 106:** "...but Hindus and Muslims alike come to worship at the mound of rocks where the infant was thrown, and where his body lies today."

Analysis: This passage again implies worship of something other than God, which is considered unIslamic.

**Page 107:** "For the first time I feel a communion with the saint; his presence is like a soothing hand on my shoulder."

Analysis: Communion with the dead is not something that is accepted in Islamic belief.

**Page 119:** "'I want to die at Derawar," Grandfather says, his voice stronger now. "The nawab will bury me in a martyr's grave, with turquoise tiles and lapis carvings. He'll plant colored flags at the head of my resting place so people can pray at the grave of a man close to Allah."

Analysis: According to Islamic teachings, martyrs, who are people that die purely in the cause of God (and not anything else), are buried no differently than any other person. Planting colored flags at the head of a grave or people praying at the grave describes cultural practices, not found in Islamic teachings.

**Page 122:** "It is our custom never to get onto the camels in front of our house for fear we'll never return."

Analysis: Superstitions such as the one described here have no place in Islamic belief.

**Page 125:** The legend of the thirsty dead says if you find a thirsty man too late to save his life, he'll moan and clamor, his ghost following you the rest of you life."

Analysis: Likewise legends and stories of the unseen world outside of what is related in Islamic tradition do not have a basis in Islamic teachings, nor does the belief in ghosts. Islamically, once a person dies, their soul leaves the body and enters the next phase of its journey to God where it

resides in a world known as "Barzakh," which is a state between this life and the hereafter. That soul has no further interaction with this life and it definitely does not come back to haunt or follow people around.

**Page 126:** "I climb into the prickly shrub to retrieve his turban. Dadi turns the man's face toward Mecca and chants the prayers a family says for its dead. He pours water into his palm and sprinkles it over the lifeless face as a token of the ritual washing of the dead. He wraps the turban like a shroud about the man's head and shoulders, and we sit silently for a moment, wishing his soul well on its way."

Analysis: When a Muslim dies, it is incumbent upon the Muslim community to properly wash and dress the body of the deceased. The washing and dressing are described in detail in Islamic Law. Then the community will perform the funeral prayer, in which the living will pray to God for the forgiveness of the deceased. The body is then buried in the ground. This passage alludes to this burial custom and in fact given the circumstances by which this dead man was found, was handled admirably.

**Page 130:** "Dadi leaps up from his quilt and turns Grandfather's head toward Mecca so his soul can pray."

Analysis: The ritual prayer in Islam must be done while the person is facing Mecca. However that is in the case for those who are still alive. This passage takes place after the grandfather has died. Once dead, the soul leaves the body in Islamic belief, and prayer is no longer possible for such a person. This passage shows the ignorance among the characters of Islamic teachings or practices.

**Page 131-132:** "...mounded tombs to mark the place where the troubled and needy might find a place to pray besides a spirit that has influence with God."

Analysis: Again as mentioned above, prayers are directed toward God and not toward the dead in the hope that their prayers are answered.

**Page 137:** "Finally we secure the sticks with colored flags at his head where pilgrims might pray."

Analysis: This describes a cultural practice, not found in Islamic teachings. For Muslims, pilgrimage can only be made to the Mosque in Mecca for the purpose of the Hajj or the lesser Hajj known as Umrah. Pilgrimage to graves is prohibited. Visiting graves is on the other hand allowed and encouraged.

**Page 141:** "This will be my first year to keep the sacred fast, as children aren't required to do so until they stop growing."

Analysis: The actual time when a child is required to observe the ritual fast of Ramadan is when they reach puberty. In the story, Shabanu has not reached puberty yet and is still about 12 years old. However, students may be interested to know that it is customary for Muslim families to let children practice the fast at a younger age than puberty, where they may fast half the day or do without food or water for a part of the day so as to get prepared for the day when they have to fast as adults. Abstentions from the fast occur when the person is too young or too old, when a person is sick or on medication, when a person is traveling, and when a woman is pregnant or nursing.

**Page 144:** "Many young women come to their husband's houses as slaves to their mothers-in-law."

Analysis: This is a cultural practice in some societies without foundation in Islamic teachings. Nothing in Islam prohibits living with the in-laws after marriage, but the new wife does not become the servant or slave of the mother-in-law. The in-laws should however be treated with respect and dignity as one would treat one's own parents.

**Page 154-155:** "...Nazir Mohammad, the land-owner, has hunting parties. He offers each of his guests a girl, usually a tenant from his land, for the time they are with him. When the man is finished with her, he gives her cash and sends her back to her family. Some people are grateful for the money and are willing to forget the indignity."

Analysis: The custom described in this passage is nothing more than prostitution and sex slavery,

both of which are prohibited under Islamic teachings.

**Page 171:** "She raises her arms and throws back her head with another primeval wail. "God, my life was perfect, and you struck him down. Just when I'm happy, everything changes!""

Analysis: Islam discourages such displays of grief after someone dies and limits mourning to three days after the death of a person. Even though grief extends for sometime after three days, Islam encourages people to keep focused on life and the worship of God and not the person who died.

**Page 188:** "Shabanu, really. What we decide for both of you is what you will do. You aren't old enough to know what's good for you."

Analysis: According to Islamic teachings, a person has individual rights and their consent is required for whatever may impact them. And as individual rights relate to marriage, a woman's consent is required in order to validate her marriage. A woman cannot be forced to marry someone she doesn't want.

**Page 190:** "...I wonder if one of us is to be married to the Holy Koran, as some girls are, so that there's no question of sharing the land."

Analysis: This is a reference to an unusual practice, which has no foundation in Islamic teachings or practices.

**Page 191-192:** "'How many wives does he have?' I ask, my chin thrusting forward. "Three," Mama replies. "But you will be the youngest by nearly twenty years. You will be the last and always his favorite. He will provide well for you and your sons." "How old is he?" "He's only fifty or fifty-five," Mama says. "He's old enough to be my grandfather!..." "Shabanu, you are still young. You aren't even of age yet. You have another six months, perhaps a year, to get used to the idea."

Analysis: Islamically, Shabanu's protest to this marriage makes her marriage contract invalid, as the woman's consent to the marriage must be sought before she can be married to a man.

**Page 192:** "Your father was very angry with you for not keeping an eye on the boys and ending up in a tree when Rahim-sahib arrived in his car. He was angry enough to beat you."

Analysis: With regards to beating a child, see the note for the passage on Page 61 above.

**Page 193:** "I'll go live with Sharma" I say, and Mama's slap send my head flying back and my eyes reeling."

Analysis: See earlier notes regarding passage on page 61 above, regarding striking a child.

**Page 196:** "He has already bought you. He has paid more than a fair price for a troublesome girl like you. You may as well get used to the idea. Can't you see he wants you to be happy?"

Analysis: This passage is in reference to the gifts that Rahim-sahib keeps sending Shabanu and her family. Again there is no such thing as a bride price in Islamic law that is given to the family of the woman in exchange for her. Any gifts related to the marriage come in the "Mahr" or wedding gift to the woman as part of the marriage contract, as previously described in the notes regarding the passage on page 3.

**Page 200:** "Flags begin to appear around the house where Hamir's body lies buried under the floor. Someone brings inscribed marble slab with the promise of a full tomb after the first anniversary of his death. Word of his heroic death and our resultant wealth spreads wider and wider, like ripples in a pond, and Hamir's house becomes a shrine."

Analysis: See the earlier notes regarding passages on worship in shrines or the tombs of deceased persons.

**Page 202:** "Bride price is common here in the desert – I don't begrudge Mama and Dadi that. It has insured their future, and they won't have to worry about drought or anything else ever again."

Analysis: The bride price, a gift of monetary value that is given to the father of the bride for his daughter is strictly prohibited in Islam. The bride price is something of a relic of a practice in other faiths where a price was given to the family as the daughter was taken in lieu of the service she provided the family. It's a practice not accepted in Islamic Law.

**Page 205:** "“everything! She'll be his fourth wife. He already has seven sons. His youngest wife is still of childbearing age. He's not so rich that he can afford to leave all of them land and houses and money. They all live in one house now. That's difficult for women sharing a single man.” “Shabanu will be their slave; they're all uppity-uppity women. They get along all right. But what about her? Do you think they'll take a desert girl into their circle? And when he dies, the seven sons he has – and perhaps his third wife will bear him one or two more – will inherit his property. She'll be a penniless widow by the time she's twenty.”"

Analysis: Everything that Sharma says in this passage could conceivably happen to Shabanu. Many things are unacceptable Islamically with regards to having more than one wife. First, provided that the man has married these women in good faith and under Islamic law, is that each woman must be housed in her own home unless they agree to living under one roof, in which case they must each have their own room. However, Islamically, each wife will receive a portion of the inheritance, and not all of it will go to the sons as mentioned.

**Page 219:** “Dadi has given Phulan for her dowry with things for the house where she and Murad will live: a stone wheat grinder, goatskin water buckets, clay pots, butter churns, a sitting bed with carved wooden legs clothes, reed mats, goat hair carpets with saffron-dyed cords, woven bags for spice and rice.”

Analysis: See earlier notes regarding dowry. Although there is no prohibition in giving gifts to newly married couples. Islamically, however, it is not a dowry that becomes the property of the husband, unless it was a gift to the husband specifically.

**Page 221:** “A maulvi chants the call of the faithful in a high, nasal wail, and their vows are exchanged three times, with Phulan nodding her assent.”

Analysis: This passage describes a cultural ceremony of the marriage itself. The marriage contract, if carried out correctly validated the marriage, but the wedding ceremony itself is left open so that different cultures could maintain their traditions such as the ceremony described here.

**Page 222:** “Our aunts hold the Koran overhead between them, making an arch through which Phulan passes.”

Analysis: Holding the Quran overhead someone is a cultural practice, and not based on Islamic teachings. The Quran is a book of revelation that is recited and studied. It, like any other object in the world has no inherent power of its own.

**Page 231:** “Perhaps I can learn to read and write. Would he be afraid of a woman who can do such things?”

Analysis: Islam teaches that knowledge is the right of every man and woman and no one can be denied an education. Islamic teachings encourage Muslims to seek out knowledge even if it be in China, meaning even if a person had to travel a great distance to learn something it was considered a noble thing.

**Pages 236-237:** “I keep waiting for the enormity of my flight to frighten me or to make me sorry – knowing that I'm letting Mama and Dadi down, that Murad could lose his farm, that I could be caught and beaten. But nobody felt sorry or frightened for me when they offered me to Rahim-sahib. No one even asked how I felt.”

Analysis: As mentioned earlier, consent of the woman in a marriage is a necessity, according to Islamic law.

**Page 239-240:** “Without speaking he lifts me to my feet and brings his stout stick down across my shoulders. I stand straight and let the stick fall against my ribs and shoulders. I am silent.... I refuse to cry out, and Dadi in his fury is like Tipu, bloodlust in his eyes. He can beat me to death if he

likes. The pain grows worse as the blows strike already-bruised flesh.... I hear sobbing, as if from a great distance, and my knees crumple. Dadi catches me in his arms and buries his face against my bloody tunic. He holds me against him, and through the haze of pain, I realize it is Dadi sobbing not me."

Analysis: This is possibly the single most disturbing passage in the entire book. The issue of beating a child has been discussed in several passages above, but in this case the beating is quite severe and brutal and absolutely prohibited, according to Islamic teachings.

-End

## **THE BEDUIN'S GAZELLE**

### **Book Review As It Relates to the Book's Use in Humanities For Complementing Studies About Islam and the Muslim World in the Context of World History & Social Studies**

**Book Title:** The Beduin's Gazelle

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#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this review is to produce a synopsis of the book, *The Beduin's Gazelle*, and critically analyze passages that reflect positively and negatively on Islam and the Muslim world and to correct any misconceptions promoted by this story, as it relates to the book's use by the humanities for complementing the study of Islam & the Muslim world in the context of World History and Social Studies

#### **Synopsis:**

The story is set in 680 Hijrah, 1302 AD/CE (Common Era), in West Africa, most probably in Morocco, or just east of Morocco. It is a love story between a young man of the Bani Khaled tribe, named Atiyah and his betrothed from birth named Halima of the same tribe, who also happens to be his cousin. This tribe is one of several desert tribes that seem to be rivals that compete for dominance in the desert by raiding each other for wealth and livestock. The tribal chief of the Bani Khaled, Essafeh, is Halima's father and Atiyah's uncle. Atiyah also has a second uncle, Saladeen, who is an Islamic scholar who has designs of acquiring power over the desert tribes and particularly his own tribe, the Bani Khaled. Saladeen is portrayed as a corrupt, power hungry man who uses the Islamic faith as a means of acquiring power. As part of this plan he decides that it is imperative that Atiyah, who happens to be the up and coming leader of the bani Khaled, must come to Fez and study the sacred law of Islam. He attempts to win Atiyah's loyalty using religion to make him see that the warring tribes are misguided and that only he, with Atiyah's help, can liberate them. Atiyah, and Essafeh, however are upset by his plans and see this as a plot to destroy their tribal traditions. Atiyah tries to flee but is caught and eventually returns with Saladeen to Fez where he begins his studies. Once in Fez he finds that he is a misfit with his harsh tribal manners, and continually finds himself out of bounds when asking questions of his teachers. In Fez he befriends a French student Etienne, who is there to learn Arabic and Islamic Law, even though it is clear that he has not accepted Islam, although he often prays with the Muslims. Etienne becomes Atiyah's confidant while in Fez and eventually helps Atiyah escape from Fez.

In the meantime, Halima and her tribe, the bani Khaled, are forced to move due to a lack of rain

and grazing for their livestock. In love with Atiyah, Halima wonders if she will ever see her betrothed again, and dreams of the day they are reunited and married. Along the journey she falls asleep and somehow the camel she is riding becomes untied from the caravan and wanders off into the desert. She finds herself lost in the desert for several days before a lone horseman from the Bani Shummari tribe finds her and her camel near death. He rescues them and brings them to his tribe's encampment. After three days of recuperation she begins to interact with this tribe, who happens to be the main rival tribe of the Bani Khaled, led by a man called Raisulu. Treated as a guest in the Bani Shummari camp ensures that she will not be harmed, in accordance with tribal customs. She remains with them for several months and proves to be an asset to the tribe. Eventually Raisulu asks for her hand in marriage as his second wife. She agreed since she had gradually given up hope that Atiyah would ever return or find her living among this rival tribe. She made alliances with the women of the Bani Shummari tribe and in particular a woman named Saffiya who was Raisulu's first wife. It seemed that Saffiya, even though she was the first wife, did not live conjugally with Raisulu, which prompted him to take a another wife. Part of this was due to the fact that she was barren and could not give Raisulu a child.

After several months, the Bani Khaled tribe gave up looking for Halima and assumed that she was dead. Word was sent to Fez to inform Atiyah that she had been lost in the desert and died. Atiyah does not believe that she has died and vows to find her. With Etienne's help they manage to escape Fez and attempted to enter a horse race to win some horses for them to ride back to the tribe of Bani Khaled. The night before the race the two found themselves at a poetry competition in which Atiyah takes part. After he recites his poem, the crowd is pleased, particularly a man who tells Atiyah that his words deeply moved him and asks what he can give him. It was through this offer that they secured two horses and provisions for their journey.

On their journey, they meet the Bani Shummari tribe. Atiyah is surprised to find that Halima was living amongst them, and Halima was surprised that Atiyah had actually returned. She is also caught in a dilemma since Raisulu had been preparing for his wedding to Halima only a few days away. Atiyah is enraged to learn that Halima had abandoned him for Raisulu, but after Atiyah meets with Halima privately and is reassured by Halima that she still loves him, he vows to rescue her at any cost. The story grows quite tense as Atiyah plans to steal her away at night. She refuses, as she fears that Atiyah will be killed, and she prefers giving herself up to a loveless marriage with Raisulu than to see Atiyah killed. Convinced not to steal her away, Atiyah confronts Raisulu with the information that he is Halima's betrothed and that tribal customs do not allow Raisulu to marry her. Raisulu is annoyed and continues planning for the wedding. The Shammuri tribe arrive the day of the wedding joining Atiyah and his friend Etienne. The story takes a surprisingly pleasant turn when Raisulu stands to deliver his wedding speech. Instead of announcing that he will wed Halima himself, he actually acts as her father, and gives her in marriage to Atiyah. By doing so, he preserves and honors tribal traditions and seals a lasting peace with the Bani Khaled. The story ends with Atiyah becoming the leader of the Bani Khaled and making peace with his uncle Saladeen as well.

### **General Critique:**

The story portrays characters that are apparently Muslim by faith, however, they exhibit many tribal customs and beliefs that conflict with Islamic teachings and practice. The names of two of the characters Raisulu and Saladeen are portrayed as essentially wicked men, yet bear names of very noble and magnanimous real-life characters in Islamic history and tradition, namely the Prophet Muhammad, known as 'Rasul' Allah in Arabic – the Messenger of God, and 'Saladin', the 10th century Muslim Caliph who freed Palestine from the oppression of the Crusades and opened Jerusalem to all faiths. The issue of marrying multiple wives is also a practice that is not common as it is misrepresentative of the norm in marriage, which is monogamy. It further confuses the issue of the 'dowry', which in Islam is actually a marriage gift given by the groom to the bride, and not visa versa. It is her property and no one, not even her father or guardian has any claim to it. There is also a misuse of translated words for God interchanged with the word in Arabic, which creates the impression that God and Allah are not simply two words meaning one and the same. On the contrary, the interchange should demonstrate they are the same thing. Finally, with references to words like Jihad, it portrays Islam as an intolerant religion that views all others as heathens.

### **Specific Analysis:**

**Page 2:** "...even toward the boy to whom you were promised from birth, your own cousin."

Analysis: Being promised from birth for marriage is not an Islamic practice. The more common Islamic principle is that a woman's consent is needed to validate a marriage contract.

**Page 2:** "Halima dreamed of her cousin Atiyah, to whom she is promised, whose name meant the Gift of God"

Analysis: See above note on being promised in marriage. In addition, it is not clear to this reviewer that the word Atiyah means 'Gift of God'. The word 'Ata is an Arabic word which means 'to give'. It is unclear if this is an Arabic word or one of the tribal dialects found in West Africa. Berber is a common language among the West African desert tribes and it might be from that language. More will be commented on inaccurate translations the author uses.

**Page 3:** "...if she and Atiyah were found alone together before marriage, she would be put to death, and rightly so, to protect the honor of the tribe."

Analysis: Being put to death for being alone with another man and how this is related to the honor of the tribe is not an Islamic practice; There is no punishment for merely being alone with a man, and if any claims of fornication were made that might lead to any sort of punishment, then under Islamic law, the accuser must bring four witnesses with impeccable character that would have to testify that they witnessed the actual penetration of the man's genitals into the woman's, which is nearly impossible.

Also, 'honor killings' are not an Islamic practice, but rather the practice of pre-Islamic Arabs, which stemmed from tribal based communities. The reputation of the tribe and its honor were very important and losing it was disastrous for the tribe. Islam actually prohibited such practices and taught the importance of loyalty to God as believers over the loyalty to the tribe. Any practice of this sort is cultural than Islamic.

**Page 4:** "...Hamdillah...," she murmured, "the merciful, the compassionate..."

Analysis: The word 'Hamdillah', even though misspelled, is intended to mean 'all praise belongs to God' and not 'the merciful, the compassionate'. The correct transliteration of the phrase 'all praise belongs to God' is Al-Hamdu Lillah. The Arabic for 'the merciful' is Ar-Raheem and for 'the compassionate' it is Ar-Rahman.

**Page 5:** "...Go! Raid our enemies the Shummari..."

Analysis: Aggression in Islam is strictly prohibited. Such a command to raid another tribe unprovoked would be considered an unwarranted act of aggression, which Islam condemns.

**Page 10:** "...Saladeen had been sent to recruit warriors for a jihad: Saladeen claimed that jihads were holy wars; that their purpose was to convert the heathen to Islam. Essafeh said the wars were not holy at all, that their purpose was to increase the power of the caliph, who wanted to rule even the desert tribes."

Analysis: This passage has several problems with it. First, the name of the character Saladeen is portrayed as essentially wicked, yet he bears the name of one of the most noble and magnanimous real-life characters in Islamic history who was Saladin, the 10th century Muslim Caliph who freed Palestine from the oppression of the Crusades and opened Jerusalem to all faiths.

Other problems with the passage stem from the understanding of the word, jihad. Islamically, Jihad does not mean 'holy war'. Holy war in Arabic is *harb muqaddas*, a term which never appears in the Quran or other Islamic scriptural sources. The word stems from the root verb in Arabic *jahida*, which means to struggle or strive. Jihad in Arabic is a verbal noun, which is a noun that implies action. Thus jihad means a struggle, which occurs in two forms – internal and external. The internal jihad is the internal struggle that each person deals with to remove bad character from the self and to cultivate good character. As this is sometimes very difficult to do, this form of jihad is referred to as "the greater jihad". The external or lesser jihad is a physical struggle either with the heart, tongue, or one's hand to stop oppression and aggression on the earth. As Essafeh correctly notes, Islamically, the external jihad to stop oppression on earth should not be waged with the intention of converting others to Islam, or as a means of acquiring land and wealth.

**Page 13:** "Everyone is someone, Nazreen. And we are the Beni Khalid. No one goes hungry from our tents."

Analysis: Treating guests hospitably is greatly emphasized, and practiced Muslim tradition.

**Page 17:** "Halima reminded herself that women of the Beni Khalid worked, kept their counsel and did not question men."

Analysis: This is a tribal custom that does not have a basis in Islam. Women were active in the community of Muslims, even at the time of the Prophet Muhammad in the 6th century. Their counsel was sought and Prophet Muhammad devoted time to the women of Medina where they could address their needs and concerns directly with him. With regards to seeking a woman's counsel, the Prophet Muhammad did this on numerous occasions. To serve as an example, in one instance, at the critical juncture of the early Muslims, when they attempted to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca for the first time after migrating to Medina, the Meccans prevented them from doing so. The Prophet Muhammad then consulted with his wife on what to do, and then followed her counsel to perform the rituals that follow the pilgrimage, and returned home; thereby avoiding confrontation or hostilities.

**Page 23:** "... and make your contribution be the glory of Islam and peace among the tribes."

Analysis: An interesting passage, as Islam, 600 years prior to the time of this story, did bring peace among the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula.

**Page 24:** "'Your mind is supple and can grasp the wisdom of the ulama, the religious council...'"

Analysis: the word 'ulama' actually means scholars of any of the Islamic religious sciences and not a religious council. The word stems from the Arabic verb 'alama which means to teach. The word ulama, a plural, literally means 'those who know'.

**Page 25:** "... 'May fleas devour you slowly,' he said, once outside. 'May Allah scatter scorpions in your path.'"

Analysis: Making such a supplication to harm someone is not of the teachings and practices of Islam. Islamic tradition is to always repay a good with good and more amazingly, always repay an evil with good! Therefore, it is unfitting for a Muslim to make supplication to God for an evil, since supplications should only be for good.

**Page 27:** "...They ate outside, near the cook-fire, the women just after the men."

Analysis: Islamic practice is just the opposite. It is customary to let the women and children eat first before the men.

**Page 32:** "'Swear it in blood', Uncle, Atiyah begged..."

Analysis: Islamically, Muslims do not invoke oaths in the name of anyone or anything besides the name of God as it negates the belief that God is the source of everything. The use of blood also implies a commitment to violence or killing, which is not characteristic of an Islamic personality.

**Page 32:** "... 'Who knows?' said Essafeh cheerfully, half to himself, as they slowed to a walk nearing the corral. 'Perhaps if one of us learns the laws of the Prophet properly, Allah will reward us by sending us rain.'"

Analysis: While Muslims believe that by supplicating God for rain and other provisions, God may grant the supplication, this is not dependent on learning the laws of Islam, but rather the sincerity of the seeker and God's divine plan.

Also, reference is made to the laws of the Prophet, as opposed to the laws of Islam, which maybe misinterpreted by the reader. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad was a human being who was chosen by God as His messenger of God's revelation. Muslims do not believe that Muhammad created the laws of Islam but rather that he received them from God.

**Page 68:** "In one of the inner courts of the Mosque and University of Qaraouyine, there was something so beautiful, so magical and strange that Atiyah thought when he first saw it that he must be dreaming. In the middle of the courtyard grew a flower of stone, open to the sky, and from its calyx spurted a stream of the most precious substance on earth: water...."

Analysis: This is one of the great contributions that Islam made to civilization, the beautification of living spaces with such things as fountains, as well as running water to homes. Water is greatly valued by Muslims as a source of purification and tied to the five daily prayers through the required ablution (ritual washing).

**Page 71:** "There is a saying among the peoples of the desert that it is the Archangel Gabriel who drives the rain clouds across the sky...."

Analysis: Islamic belief actually places the Angel Michael as the angel charged with driving the rain clouds to where God will make the rainfall.

**Page 72:** "'For this I have tried to study, so that I might bring the law back to the Beni Khalid. I had hoped that in this way the Angel might drive more clouds to us.'"

Analysis: As stated earlier, while Muslims believe that by supplicating God for rain and other provisions, God may grant the supplication, this is not dependent on learning the laws of Islam, but rather the sincerity of the seeker and God's divine plan. Also, according to Islamic teachings, angels do not determine where rain will fall. Rain is considered to be among the sustenance of God and is only determined by God.

**Page 89:** "...'Did your father have many wives?' asked Saffiya. 'He has been sent courtesy wives, of course, because he is the sheikh...'"

Analysis: The term 'courtesy wives' is unclear in meaning. If it means a woman given to the leader of the tribe as a gift then it is not accepted in Islamic Law. In any case any conjugal cohabitation outside of a legal marriage is prohibited.

**Page 89:** "'Atiyah is my cousin. We have been betrothed from birth, in the way of my people. Is it done so among the Shummari?' 'Of course,'" said Saffiya, her voice growing hard. "How else would the clan stay pure and strong?...!"

Analysis: Being betrothed from birth and having to marry in the family to keep the blood pure is not an Islamic practice. In fact, while Islam allows marriage between cousins, Islamic teachings encourage people to marry people who were not related to them by blood so that their children would be genetically strong.

**Page 91:** "...Cousin Raisulu..."

Analysis: The name Raisulu raises questions. It is very close in pronunciation to the word "Rasul", which means messenger and is usually used to refer to the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets. Like the character Saladeen, Raisulu is somewhat of an antagonist in the story, which could shed a negative light on the Prophet Muhammad if a connection is made between the name Raisulu and the word Rasul.

**Page 106:** "A sheikh was allowed many wives, and many of them he took out of kindness.

Analysis: The above passage gives the sense that a sheikh (in this case, a leader of a tribe) can wed any number of women. Islamically, a man is allowed to marry more than one wife, provided that certain conditions exist and he is able to maintain each household equally in every respect, otherwise he must have only one wife. So, the norm in Islam is monogamy, not polygamy. The verse of the Quran in which this issue is addressed was revealed in the context of a period of war in the life of early Muslims (who were being attacked by the Meccans for their monotheistic belief), leaving many women and their children without care or support. Rather than leaving these women and orphans to fend for themselves, early Muslims were given permission to take more than one wife provided that the man is able to care for his first wife, and any additional wives (limited to four) equally. But in the same verse of the Quran, God states that it is impossible to care for more

than one equally, so it is best to keep only one.

**Page 107:** "Have you forgotten the time of exclusion? It is written in the Book that a man may not take a new-bought concubine or a foreign woman to wife until she has been in the care of his women for three full moons, that he may know that any child she bears will be his own and that she is not unclean."

Analysis: Concubinage was prohibited in Islamic Law. The word "exclusion" is in reference to waiting before marrying a woman who was recently divorced for three menstrual cycles to ensure that she was not pregnant. If she was pregnant, then the child's father would be responsible to provide for that child, exclusive of any other care the child maybe provided by the new father. The reference to the woman being "unclean" is not based on any Islamic teaching or practice.

**Page 111:** "...They have some horses. Some of our horses, in fact, since they raid us whenever our backs are turned.' 'And you, the Beni Khalid, raid them in turn?' Atiyah's eyes sparkled. 'Of course! We raid them even when they are watching! How do you think Essafeh's herds have become so numerous?'"

Analysis: See the note above about the mention of raids. The idea of raiding other tribes for the purpose of gaining property is more akin to robbery and is a pre-Islamic tribal custom common in many tribal areas throughout the world, but is not sanctioned by Islam.

**Page 121:** "...What a sham it was, Halima thought, grinding her teeth. Sheikh Raisulu was choosing his best animals, which would be given to her and then, because her father is lost to her, would go back to rejoin the sheikh's own herd..."

Analysis: This passage implies that the 'dowry' or marriage gift given by the groom to the bride actually ends up in the hands of her father. But in this case because her father is not present, the gift will end up returning to the groom. Islamic law requires a marriage gift, or mahr in Arabic, as a condition for the validity of the marriage contract between a man and a woman at the time the contract is executed. The marriage gift becomes the property of the bride and cannot be taken or used by anyone other than her. She has complete charge over it and can use it or put it in the trust of someone as she sees fit.

**Page 124:** "...Travelers!" came Raisulu's growl. The word hung in the air. Then: "I see that you are partaking of guest friendship. In the name of Allah the All-Merciful, you are welcome. But may I ask whom I have the honor of feeding in my tent?'"

Analysis: The passage indicates his displeasure at hosting guests, which on the contrary was considered a noble quality among Arabs and Muslims. A Muslim is supposed to show hospitality to guests for at least three days without any conditions or questions asked.

**Page 128:** "Much rests on his being a man of faith,..."

Analysis: This is a case in point that the characters are portrayed as practicing Muslims while misrepresenting Islamic beliefs and customs.

**Page 131:** "...Atiyah and I were betrothed at birth..."

Analysis: See the first comment above for the passage on page 3 of the book.

**Page 134:** "Even the thought of it made her shake. If she were caught, she would be brought before the tribe. Her throat would be slit like a camel's, her dishonor washed away in blood."

Analysis: Honor killings are strictly prohibited in Islamic law. This is a practice of pre-Islamic times and was abolished during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Any continuing practice is based on cultural practice or pre-Islamic tribal traditions.

**Page 145:** "He is called Etienne-Roum. His people have fought for the Christian God. Like us, he is a man of the Book."

Analysis: This is probably one of the more disturbing passages in the book as it tries to differentiate

between the God of the Christians and the God of the Muslims. In fact Muslims believe in and worship the same God as the Christians – The God of Abraham – who created everything.

**Page 147:** "In the name of Allah, and of the 'asabiyya, the code of the desert, which makes all of us as of one tribe, I relinquish the beautiful Halima to her first cousin Atiyah!"

Analysis: The coupling of the word 'asabiyya with God in the invocation is problematic. The coupling of God with anything such as 'asabiyya is not an Islamic practice and is prohibited. Further, the word 'asabiyyah' is more in line with the understanding of nationality than it is a code of the desert. It carries with it the notion of common identity that binds a people together and distinguishes them from others. It has both positive and negative connotations.

**Page 150:** "...fought battles as far away as Spain for the Marinid Empire, to extend Islam among the heathen."

Analysis: It is unfortunate that the book ends with this passage. It gives the sense that Islam and those that adhere to it are only concerned with extending their empire through fighting and war. Further, it portrays the people fought as "heathens". However if we look at the definition of the word heathen we find: "An individual of the pagan or unbelieving nations, or those which worship idols and do not acknowledge the true God; a pagan; an idolater." Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc.

"One who adheres to the religion of a people or nation that does not acknowledge the God of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam." The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

Thus the use of this word is incorrect at best. The people of Spain at the time of the setting of this story were most probably Christian and would not be considered heathen at all. Islam in fact considers the diversity of people as God's creation, and therefore respect for diversity is commanded. Especially noted in the Quran are "People of the Book", namely Jews and Christians, who were always given a special place in Muslim society. Muslims are commanded to safeguard their right to worship and their places of worship, a command that has been historically followed, as is evidenced by the existence of old churches and synagogues throughout the Muslim world in places like Turkey, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Bosnia. Contrary to the common stereotype, Islam was not "spread by the sword", nor people forced to convert, a fact again born out by the existence of non-Muslim populations throughout the Muslim world. This same respect and tolerance was extended to people of other faiths.

As Bernard Lewis states in his book, What Went Wrong, "Surely, the Ottomans did not offer equal rights to their subjects, a meaningless anachronism in the context of that time and place. They did however offer a degree of tolerance without precedent or parallel in Christian Europe. Each religious community - the Ottoman term was millet - was allowed the free practice of its religion. More remarkably, they had their own communal organizations, subject to the authority of their own religious chiefs, controlling their own education and social life, and enforcing their own laws, to the extent that they did not conflict with the basic laws of the Empire. While ultimate power - political and military - remained in Muslim hands, non-Muslims controlled much of the economy, and were even able to play a part of some importance in the political process."

-End

## **SEVEN DAUGHTERS & SEVEN SONS**

### **Book Review As It Relates to the Book's Use in Humanities For Complementing Studies About Islam and the Muslim World in the Context of World History & Social Studies**

**Book Title:** Seven Daughters and Seven Sons

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**Purpose:**

The purpose of this review is to produce a synopsis of the book, *Seven Daughters and Seven Sons*, and critically analyze passages that reflect positively and negatively on Islam and the Muslim world and to correct any misconceptions promoted by this story, as it relates to the book's use by the humanities for complementing the study of Islam & the Muslim world in the context of World History and Social Studies.

**Synopsis:**

The story is an Iraqi folktale that has been part of an oral tradition in Iraq since the 11th century. Set in Baghdad, it is the story of a young girl named Buran, who is the fourth of seven daughters of a man name Malik, a poor merchant and shopkeeper, who goes by the surname Abul-Banat, or "Father of Girls". His brother, Abu-Hassan, who is a very rich merchant has seven sons. His oldest son, Hassan, is about to embark on a journey to set up a shop in Alexandria, Egypt. Buran is in love with Hassan, and wants to marry him some day, but his father Abu-Hassan is proud of his wealth, and considers his brother's daughters unfit to marry his smart and soon to be wealthy sons. This attitude of contempt is displayed continuously as each of Abu-Hassan's sons leave home to a far off land to set up a shop for their father.

Buran is a feisty girl who unlike her six sisters does not like to gossip, sew, cook or clean. She prefers to spend time with her father, learning to read and write as well as to play chess, which she does each evening with her father. After being humiliated for the last time by her uncle Abu-Hassan, Buran comes up with a plan to bring wealth to her father's home. She explains the plan to her father and mother about how she will disguise herself as a boy and set out on a journey with the family savings to set up a shop in the city of Tyre, hoping to become rich. Her parents are appalled and refuse to allow her to go, as it was against traditions that a woman should go into business. The incident strains the relationship between Buran and her father for many months to the extent that he doesn't even speak to her. However, one day her father becomes very ill and can't operate his small shop in Baghdad. He calls for Buran and tells her that her idea might not be so far fetched. He gives her the family savings of 15 dinars. She goes to the marketplace to buy boy's clothing, pretending that they are for her brother. The next day she sets out to secure a passage on a caravan disguised as a boy. She finds that the fee for passage was more than she possessed, but cleverly manages to secure passage by acting as a servant to one of the merchants on the caravan. She assumes the name of Nasir Ibn-Malik.

The merchant she works for, named Jihha, is a foul mouthed, arrogant, rich man who is crude and demanding. Coupled with this is Buran's complete ignorance of how to care for camels or pack and unpack the loads attached to them. Her inexperience is evident and Jihha complains vocally about it. However, Buran is quick to learn by watching the other servants and Jihha notices that as well. At one point, being completely fed up with Jihha's treatment, she answers him back, but later apologizes to him; as a result he begins to treat her better. In their many conversations, she tells him how she is planning to get rich by identifying a needed commodity and filling that need. Jihha agrees to back her financially when she decides to pursue her plan.

She eventually decides to sell medicinal herbs and Jihha helps her open a shop in Tyre. The governor of Tyre has a son named Mahmud. He is treated as a prince and is well cared for. He is also bored with life and longs for true companionship that he can't seem to find between his two tag-a-long friends Uthman and Amin. Amin introduces Mahmud to Buran (Nasir) and the four of them immediately become friends, meeting for tea and backgammon, etc. They also start to take long walks and discuss philosophy and a myriad of other topics. Over time the two fall in love with each other and can't seem to be apart from each other. To Mahmud, this is very troubling because he can't understand the feelings he finds in his heart for this other man. Buran (Nasir) on the other and understands her feelings very well and is tormented by the dilemma she finds herself in. On the

one hand she wants to tell Mahmud the truth, but on the other hand she fears losing her very successful business and the money she sends home to her father. She also fears that telling Mahmud might end their relationship since it was built on a lie. Mahmud and his two friends have their own suspicions, and they devise different ways to determine if Nasir is really a man or a woman. They first attempt to see if Nasir can ride a horse, which certainly a woman could not do. Buran (Nasir) however, learned to ride on her journey, although not that well. When that test proved inconclusive, they ask Nasir to come and play chess, as no woman knows how to play chess. Yet Buran (Nasir) learned to play chess from her father and was quite proficient at it. Finally, Mahmud feigns illness and asks for Nasir to come and visit him. He makes Nasir promise him to come with him to the bathhouse after his illness has passed. To Buran, seeing her beloved Mahmud ill deeply affected her, and the thought of losing him was overwhelming, so she consented to the meeting. This test would be conclusive: if Nasir shows up to the bathhouse, he is a man, and if not, a woman.

Several days pass as Mahmud continues to feign illness. Finally he sends word to Nasir to meet him at the bathhouse. In the meantime Buran (Nasir) closes up the shop, and hours before they were to meet, goes to the bathhouse dressed as a woman. She leaves Mahmud a message with the gatekeeper to relay to Mahmud: "I came for a purpose and I left for a reason". This was proof enough for Mahmud that Nasir is actually a woman and this made him very happy. He set out immediately to find her, but just barely misses her. Buran, now dressed as a woman in fine clothing takes the first ship out of the port of Tyre leaving to Alexandria to escape before Mahmud finds her. Mahmud arrives at the port several hours later to find that another ship to Alexandria would not be ready to leave for several days.

When Buran reaches Alexandria, she bumps into her cousin Hassan who has squandered his father's wealth and is now working as a delivery boy and male prostitute. He offers himself to Buran but she refuses and instead offers Hassan 100 dinars to save face with his father in return that he tattoo the letter 'B' over his heart. He agrees. After that, she decides to visit each city where one of her cousins had gone to set up shops. She finds all seven in miserable situations after squandering their wealth. She manages to get each of them to tattoo a 'B' over their heart for the payment of 100 dinars or more. As she is now a savvy businesswoman, she also succeeds in doing more trading and increasing her wealth many times over.

After several years she returns home as she had promised her parents. She finds that the money she sent home went to improving the house and even hiring servants. Now wealthy and having gained a reputation, many suitors come to ask for her hand in marriage. She refuses them all as her heart is still attached to Mahmud, although she has little hope of being with him. She even refuses to marry her cousin Hassan by telling her father that she can never marry a man who was owned by someone else, and that she would only agree to marry him if he agreed to an examination of his body for tattoos and there were none. Hassan of course refuses, as do all of his brothers, which is humiliating for their father who used to ridicule them when they were poor. At length, her father, frustrated with her refusal to marry anyone asks her why, and she tells him the whole story. However try as he may, her father could not get Buran to tell him whom she had fallen in love with. So, he decides to go out and spread the story of how she gained her great wealth in the marketplace. Her story spreads far and wide over the land, and soon she is receiving suitors from as far away as Orontes. When she confronts her father with this, his only reply was, "Oh, good will come of it".

One morning, after the wedding of her sister Aminah, she could not sleep. She woke and left her house for a walk. She wandered for several hours heartbroken wondering what had become of Mahmud. As dawn was about to break, she found herself outside the city in a farmer's fields when she sees a small caravan in the distance. As it approaches a voice calls out asking what she was doing out at night alone. It was a voice that she recognizes and when she calls out to him, she finds it is her beloved Mahmud. She leads him back to her father's house and introduces him to her parents and they sit and listen to the adventure Mahmud undertook to find her. It was only hearing her story from a merchant that actually led him to Baghdad. In the end they marry and she moves back to Tyre to rule that city with Mahmud.

#### **General Critique:**

While the story is entertaining and perhaps reflective of cultural practices of the time, many aspects are directly contradictory to the teachings of Islam, and in fact reinforce common misconceptions

and stereotypes about the religion of Islam. Since the characters are all Muslim, who relate their actions to the teachings of Islam or invoke God or the Prophet Muhammad, students will assume their behavior is representative of Islamic teachings. It is therefore important to clarify aspects that are not representative of Islam.

### **Specific Analysis:**

**Page 1:** "...her father had taught her to read and write when she was very young, even though it was not the custom in their time for girls to learn such things..."

Analysis: This is not customary in Islam however. Both men and women are required to acquire knowledge. Many Islamic traditions speak in general (i.e. gender non-specific) about the importance and value of seeking knowledge.

**Page 3:** "...Allah had not seen fit to bless him with sons, and all that happened afterwards stemmed from that fact....the ways of Allah are beyond human understanding."

Analysis: This quote reflects the notion that sons are better than daughters. Islamic teachings place no greater worth on a son than a daughter and in fact both are considered a blessing from God. In fact, there is an Islamic tradition that states, "Whoever raises three daughters, treating them well, will be admitted to Paradise." No such tradition is mentioned with regard to sons.

Students should also know that the word "Allah" is the Arabic word for God, as are the Hebrew word, "Eloh" and Aramaic word, "Allaha". Aramaic was the language spoken by Jesus.

**Page 9:** "All of Baghdad considered him, with his seven daughters, as cursed as his brother of seven sons was blessed."

Analysis: Again as in the analysis of the passage on page 3, Islam places no higher blessing in a son than in a daughter. Both are blessings. In pre-Islamic times, baby girls were buried at birth as they were seen as a burden and an embarrassment. Islamic teachings prohibited such practices, instructing parents to treat their sons and daughters the same.

**Page 12:** "'I don't like to imagine whose sons they will be,'" he added unnecessarily, "'since you can provide them with nothing.'"

Analysis: This passage suggests that in a marriage contract, it is the bride's side that must provide a dowry or marriage gift to the groom's side. Islamically, when a man and woman are married, the contract that is executed between them has as one of its conditions a wedding gift, known in Arabic as mahr, which is a gift from the groom to the bride (not the other way around) to show his affection and commitment to the marriage. This gift is her property once she receives it and no one, not even her father or guardian has any claim over it.

**Page 16:** "Who were the husbands of girls without money? Poor farmers from the country, for whom a wife was a beast of burden, cheaper to feed than a donkey. Rich old men, who already had two or three others, and were looking now for a very young one to warm their ancient bones and to further increase the consequence of the first wife, the one who counted. Thieves and assassins who sought women with no family or with families powerless to protect their daughters from whatever abominations their husbands chose to inflict upon them. 'Think of your father,' my mother said. 'Think of him. He's my husband, and he took me though I came to him with nothing. Could I have gotten a better husband if I had brought with me gifts worth a thousand dinars?'"

Analysis: This passage again alludes to the status of women. According to Islamic teachings, women who become wives, and women in general, are not considered beasts of burden. In the Quran, God describes women and men as "protecting friends of one another."

This passage also alludes to the practice of polygamy, which prior to Islam was a practice that didn't limit the number of wives a man could marry. Islamically, a man is allowed to marry more than one wife, provided that certain conditions exist and he is able to maintain each household equally in every respect, otherwise he must have only one wife. So, the norm in Islam is monogamy, not polygamy. The verse of the Quran in which this issue is addressed was revealed in the context of a period of war in the life of early Muslims (who were being attacked by the Meccans for their

monotheistic belief), leaving many women and their children without care or support. Rather than leaving these women and orphans to fend for themselves, early Muslims were given permission to take more than one wife provided that the man is able to care for his first wife, and any additional wives (limited to four) equally. But in the same verse of the Quran, God states that it is impossible to care for more than one equally, so it is best to keep only one.

This passage also alludes to the abuse of women, which is categorically prohibited in Islam, as is abuse of any person or animal. It also implies once again that women give a dowry to the husband when they are married, which is contrary to what Islamic law dictates, as mentioned above.

**Page 20:** "It wouldn't have been three hundred years before, or two hundred years before, or two hundred years before, or even a hundred years before. I'd learned that from the books my father borrowed from my uncle and let me read too. Had not Shahrazad kept herself alive through a thousand and one nights by virtue of her cleverness and knowledge, to become the beloved and long-lived queen of the sultan Shahriah? Had not Buran, for whom I was named, influenced the policies of the caliph himself? Once women had been musicians, scholars, warriors, poets, and merchants. But the descendants of the caliphs who'd founded Baghdad forgot their desert heritage. Addicted to nothing but luxury, they'd permitted actual power to fall in to the hands of Persian conquerors, who brought with them their own customs, including the hijab, the veil for women. It was their way of distinguishing free women from concubines. Turks had followed Persians, but the veil remained. In the end, of course, all women wore it, and none of them were free."

Analysis: The paragraph speaks about the status of women centuries before the story takes place, including that fact that women had been musicians, scholars, warriors, poets, and merchants. She makes the little known point that the custom of wearing a face veil is not an Islamic tradition, but one which was adopted from the Persians, who used it to distinguish free women from slave women. While the head covering is mentioned in the Qur'an, it does not include covering the face as became a common practice in later times. Also adopted from the Persians women was the practice of seclusion and segregation of noble women as a means of elevating them above the commoner. The head covering or hijab, on the other hand came to honor, distinguish and protect all women from being viewed or valued for their physical characteristics, not to harm, oppress, enslave or abuse women. Wearing hijab or any other Islamic practice, Muslims believe, should be for the sake of pleasing God, not out of coercion or fear.

**Page 20:** "'You're very wise, Buran,' he said. 'You should have been born a man.'"

Analysis: This passage again is derogatory towards women by alluding that women cannot be wise. Many Islamic traditions tell of the wisdom of women, from the Prophet Muhammad's first wife of 25 years, Khadijah, who was a business woman for whom the Prophet Muhammad worked, to one of the most knowledgeable of women Aisha, who was known as a scholar. There are also many Islamic traditions that tell of women throughout Islamic history that enjoyed status and prestige for their intelligence and accomplishments, whom men sought for their wisdom and scholarship.

**Page 20:** "'Yes', I replied, letting out a little of the bitterness that had festered inside of me for as long as I could remember. 'If I were a man, I could help you; I could help my sisters. I could help myself. You know I'm as able as any man. It isn't fair. My being born a girl was a mistake.'"

Analysis: This passage once again is derogatory towards women in their abilities and potential. Students should understand that this same thread throughout the book does NOT reflect Islamic teachings or practice, but most probably the culture of the time. But even in Arab culture, Arab women today are some of the most educated and accomplished in the world.

**Page 23:** "'...except by selling herself. I'd kill her before I'd let her do that.'"

Analysis: Both ideas presented in this passage are prohibited in Islamic teachings. The first implying prostitution, and the second, vigilantism and honor killings.

**Page 25:** "...raise a great lamentation and rend our clothing, mourning for your lost reason."

Analysis: This passage refers to a pre-Islamic practice when women were hired to lament the death of person or some other catastrophe to increase the compassion of others for the plight that has befallen the family who hired the lamenters. Islamic teachings discourage such displays of grief

after someone dies and limits mourning to three days after the death of a person. Even though grief extends for sometime after three days, Islamic teachings encourage people to keep focused on life and the worship of God and not the person who died.

**Page 25:** "‘Women don’t go into business.’"

Analysis: This again is an idea that is not reflected in Islamic teachings or actual practices, which in no way prohibits women from such endeavors. In fact, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Khadijah was a successful merchant. She directed her business from Mecca and employed men to carry out the buying, selling and traveling across the desert by caravan to centers of commerce in her time. The Prophet Muhammad was one of her most successful employees and honorable agents and it was because of his honesty in business that she proposed marriage to him at the age of 40, when Muhammad was 25. She was his first wife for 25 years before her death. Another famous Muslim woman was As-Shifa bint Abdullah who was made the head of the marketplace at the time of Umar, the second caliph after Abu-Bakr. She held the position of what would be today, the Minister of Finance.

**Page 26:** "My mother turned to my father. ‘You could beat her,’ she said. ‘If the old woman’s elixir doesn’t work you could beat her. Beating is one of the best methods for driving out evil spirits.’"

Analysis: According to Islamic teachings, beating another person, particularly a woman or a child, let alone an animal is strictly prohibited. If a parent does abuse a child, an Islamic judge can order the child to be taken away from the parent and given to another relative for care.

**Page 30:** "If things kept on as they had been going just before my father fell ill, in time he might teach her to read and write as he had taught me."

Analysis: In the story Buran lost the favor of her father due to her plan to disguise herself as a boy and go out in the world to do business. As a result, he started to ask her sister to help him while he was ill. Buran felt that her father would only teach the one he favored.

In fact, Islam teaches that seeking knowledge and becoming educated is incumbent upon every individual and it is a parent’s responsibility to educate the children. It is also prohibited to favor one child over the other.

**Page 33:** "...let alone give you marriage gifts sufficient for a respectable match."

Analysis: This passage again refers to women giving a dowry to the husband. This is opposite to what Islam dictates, as mentioned previously.

**Page 33:** "It’s wrong to fly in the face of custom. Each of us has a place, and if we fall out of it, the world will turn upside down"

Analysis: The concept here of each having a place in the world is something that is acceptable according to Islamic teachings, however, advancing from that place to something better can only make the world better and not turn it upside down. Islam encourages the betterment of self, spiritually as well as materially so that civilization can be advanced for the good of humanity, not to the detriment of it. In fact, Islamic civilization was one of the most advanced & modern (in its time) in human history, and was the catalyst for the Renaissance of Europe.

**Page 38:** "I put the piece in my money belt. ‘It’s my talisman,’ I said, ‘my treasure. As long as I have it, I know I’ll be safe.’"

Analysis: The idea in this passage probably reflects a cultural practice than a religious one. The belief in Islam is that nothing can benefit or harm a person except God. Safety and security only come from God and harm and fear come when God’s protection is removed. Talismans play no part in protecting anyone any more than they can protect themselves.

**Page 42:** "Next to the gate, built into the wall, was a great tank hewn out of stone and kept full of water for the benefit of all who passed, thanks to an endowment left by a wealthy citizen insuring through blessed charity his place in Paradise..."

Analysis: The institution of endowments was one of the great contributions to civilization made by Islam and the Muslims. An Islamic tradition states that there are three things that will continue to acquire good deeds for a person after their death: a righteous child that prays for the parent, beneficial knowledge taught to others that benefits those it was taught to and who also teach it to others, and perpetual charity that continues to benefit others. It is in reference to the perpetual charity that the concept of an endowment came into existence. It is through endowments that water tanks were erected, hospitals and universities were built and even the care of blind cats until their death was instituted in the times when Islamic civilization was at its height.

**Page 51:** "It's lucky for you that you're down there and I'm up here, or I'd beat you within an inch of your life."

Analysis: Again physical abuse of employees was and is not a practice condoned by Islam. Islamic traditions instruct Muslims to never raise their hands against a woman, a child, nor an employee as a form of discipline or punishment.

**Page 73:** "On the other hand, the fortune-teller with whom you chatted in the suq [marketplace] said we're in a cycle of seven warm winters to be followed by seven cold ones. But then again, how much does a fortune-teller really know?"

Analysis: Seeking fortune-tellers for advice about the future is prohibited under Islamic law, as it again negates the belief in God's divine will. Muslims believe that only God knows what the future will bring.

**Page 84:** "I thought I was content with the slave girls I called for whenever the mood struck me. I did not need a wife, who would intrude upon my studies, my work, my recreations – at least not yet."

Analysis: Slavery was banned through Islamic law. Therefore, the student should understand that this passage, while it might reflect cultural practices of the time of the story, it does not reflect the religion of Islam. .

Also, marriage in Islam is considered an integral part of one's faith and therefore highly encouraged. There are many Islamic traditions that encourage marriage and speak to the nature and tone of marriage in Islam, such as "Marriage is half of one's faith"; "And among God's signs is that He created mates from among yourselves that you may live in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your hearts." (Quran, Chapter 30: 21). This verse in particular describes the idea of marriage as a place of tranquility, love and mercy.

**Page 85:** "In the name of the Prophet,..."

Analysis: Muslims do not invoke oaths in the name of anyone or anything besides the name of God as it negates the belief that God is the source of everything. Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad, as is the case with all the other Prophets was a messenger of God, and therefore not the object of worship.

**Page 95:** "'Of course, of course,'" I replied. "'But what are six daughters, or eleven daughters, compared to one son?'"

Analysis: Again, this passage degrades women, which does not represent Islamic teachings or practices. See earlier notes on the same subject. Men and women are equal before God.

**Page 104:** "'That's ridiculous, Nasir' I said. 'Women are concerned with children and housekeeping and adorning their bodies. How can you possibly share anything with any of them? Little Darirah will never really grow up. Women are like children.'"

Analysis: This is quite a derogatory remark concerning women and it is not the Islamic position. Women are highly respected members of the Islamic community, which gives them a very high rank, as opposed to how some cultures regard women. For example the mother is regarded as three times more important than the father in a family structure. The Prophet Muhammad was asked by a companion of his, "who was most deserving of his companionship" and the Prophet replied, 'your mother'. The Prophet was then asked two times again, "who after her [the mother]", and the

Prophet replied two more times, 'your mother' and then finally, 'your father'. Furthermore, there were many Muslim women who were intellectuals of their times. In Islamic history, there is no notable Islamic Scholar who did not have at least one woman in the list of his teachers, who was most likely, a scholar herself.

**Page 108:** "...my favorite, danced the most sinuously of all. But I did not call for her. I let her go, as was polite, to one of the guests."

Analysis: Once again, slavery was actually banned by Islamic Law.

**Page 122:** "Though wine is forbidden to the followers of Mohammed, we kept some in the palace with which to entertain our frequent Christian, Jewish and pagan guests. I sent for a bottle, drained it to the dregs, and then went to sleep."

Analysis: As mentioned in the passage itself, Islamic Law prohibits the consumption of wine or any other alcohol or intoxicating substance. It is also prohibited to serve it or sell it. The prohibition stems from the third purpose of Islamic Law, which is the preservation of the intellect. The other five being, the preservation of life, the preservation of religion, the preservation of wealth, the preservation of lineage, and the preservation of one's honor. Since intoxication relinquishes a person of their intellect while intoxicated, it is prohibited.

This passage also speaks to the good relations Muslims enjoyed with people of other faiths, which was characteristic of Islamic civilization.

**Page 155:** "As I put them on, their flimsy silk felt strange against my skin, but not uncomfortable. I veiled my face heavily because I didn't want to be recognized when I went out in the street, and I didn't want to appear anything but a modest woman."

Analysis: The use of the word, "veil," here is misleading. The covering of the hair by a scarf and modest, loose-fitting dress, commonly referred to by Muslims as "hijab" becomes obligatory for a woman when she reaches puberty. It should not be confused with the face veil, which is often cultural. The purpose of the hijab is so that a woman is not judged by her physical appearance or sexuality, but rather her character, behavior and intelligence.

**Page 158:** "I had been spared a fate I'd always dreaded. I would never have to share the bed of a man I didn't want or who didn't want me."

Analysis: Islamically, the bride has the final say as to whom she will marry. It is one of the Islamic conditions of marriage that she consent to her marriage. Therefore, Islamically, the marriage contract is not valid without the bride's consent.

**Page 167:** "'Lady', Hassan replied quietly, 'I don't know what your motive is, but I know perfectly well what it isn't. It isn't to fulfill the commands of Mohammed. Perhaps some man wronged you once, and you take revenge on me instead.'"

Analysis: Revenge is also discouraged in Islam and instead forgiveness with regards to being wronged is encouraged. Unless tried in court before a judge a person is innocent. Vigilantism and revenge is not considered valid law enforcement in Islam.

**Page 174-175:** "His tone implied his answer was self-evident. 'I want to ask him to give you in marriage to my son. We'll expect no wedding gifts. Your person will be sufficient.'"

Analysis: Again as mentioned in passages above, the marriage gift, or mahr in Arabic, is given by the groom to the bride and not the opposite in an Islamic marriage contract.

**Page 176:** "...you can't defy the laws of Allah, Women were meant to marry whomever their fathers decree.' I didn't know where in the Koran those words were written, but I didn't say that out loud either."

Analysis: This passage again conveys a common misconception about marriage in Islam. No such thing is written in the Quran. Based on Islamic teachings and practices, a woman does not have to marry the man her father chooses, and has the final say as to whom she will marry. She must

consent to her marriage in order for the marriage to be legal and valid.

**Page 202:** "I swear by my father's head..."

Analysis: As stated in an earlier passage, Muslims do not invoke oaths in the name of anyone or anything besides the name of God as it negates the belief that God is the source of everything.

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