



When Women Speak...

Webzine

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Discipleship

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Editorial

Welcome to the first of what is hoped to be many When Women Speak 'webzines'. It is my joy to have been invited to provide the first editorial: it has given me the privilege of having already read the engaging collection of articles you will find in the webzine, and of interacting with the godly, dedicated women who have prepared them. Now I find myself giving thought to you who will be reading and reflecting on the articles. I am assuming that most readers are sisters in Christ ministering in majority Muslim contexts, with friends born into Muslim families, or certainly dedicated disciples of Christ desirous of bringing others into the circle of His love. I join those who have written the articles in praying that what you find here will enrich you and the ministries you are involved in.

The profile of our readership alone provides adequate grounds for taking 'Discipleship' as the topic of this first webzine. We each desire to fulfil the mandate (2Timothy 2:2) to be good disciples who enable others to become disciples who disciple others, not least because we are aware that in initiating His ministry Our Lord Jesus majored on gathering to himself a group of disciples who were later commissioned to disciple others. However, whilst that core principle is straight-forward we also share in the common knowledge that for most of the last 1400 years effective discipleship in Muslim contexts has been limited: even where individuals have come to faith there has been little replication and no obvious wide-scale transformation of communities. It is a cause of rejoicing that the 21st century has seen unprecedented numbers of BMBs becoming followers of Jesus, and that not only do the statistics include women but they are accompanied by anecdotes of bold Spirit inspired initiatives of women that are bearing fruit. Yet even so, there remains much to be done, and wisdom needed, to overcome all kinds of challenges in order for there to be 'fruit that will last'.

Each of the webzine articles identifies such challenges and makes proposals about how to respond in a distinct way. The articles are not in competition, but in their differences remind us that both the discipler and the disciple are unique individuals. Indeed, 'The Glorious Messiness of Discipleship' has in view the quirky unpredictability which is a part of working with individuals whatever their culture. It invites us to consider when the process of discipleship begins: it provokes me to consider whether there is a sense in which all encounters, or at least ongoing-relationships, are in some way moments of 'discipling'. It also brings into view tricky questions of when and how we might know if someone is in Christ when their culture is antagonistic to a declaration of faith in Jesus, providing practical proposals about how we, as disciplers, should walk alongside amidst the uncertainties.

Frequently differences between discipler and disciple, in the contexts we have in view, are because they originally come from very different cultural backgrounds. Arguably the 'great leap forward' in the birthing of BMB movements has come as mission workers intentionally contextualized their approaches to witnessing and discipling. Whilst some of the terms and ideas continue to be contested (eg., articles by Travis et al and by Tennent in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23:3, 2006) there is a general consensus that even as the discipler is the means of inducting someone (or group) into new ways of understanding and living, principles of communication require ideas to be expressed through forms and language that are meaningful to the disciple(s). In the context of Islam and Muslim community there are also pragmatic reasons for taking on cultural forms and practices, to enable BMBs to remain and ultimately become transformative disciplers amongst their own people. Accordingly, all our articles touch on issues of contextualisation in some way, however 'Patronage and Reciprocity' (a tour-de-force in its review of current discussion around the subject of Honour-Shame culture, individual identity and mission

practice) and 'Sufi Women Saints: a paradigm for discipleship?' engage those issues directly. Both articles are prodding us to make changes in our approaches, and perhaps even re-work ways we think about our own faith or what we require of others. Both also take up the gendered perspectives of the issues they address. Aspects of the discussion on Honour-Shame, which is defined as a 'moral framework for social relationships', inform understanding of how those of us ministering as foreign women in the culture of the other might be (mis)understood. It can also give clues about how to engage meaningfully with our host society, and be a vehicle for explaining the Gospel. Nevertheless the article primarily sets out to show that having Honour-Shame as a framework of thought provides an ideal foundation for committed discipleship, and that, probably for all, but certainly for women, this discipleship should be grounded within 'the nurture of relationships'. Whilst the approach takes community values as its key, it is also shaped by respect and care for the fragility and importance of the identity of the disciple.

The question as to whether Sufi women saints provide a paradigm for discipleship explores a different aspect of the Islamic heritage of some. Like the Honour-Shame article this one also identifies elements within the experience of at least some Muslim women as exemplary. It introduces us to some great women from the past that have had significant impact both within Islam and beyond. In doing so it challenges stereotypes of the interests, capabilities and potential for spiritual influence present in the lives of Muslim women and which are constrained by misogyny but also by the unwitting presumptions of the discipler. The article gives opportunity to become more familiar with Muslim women who are concerned with the interior life, and to be more ready to recognise signs around us which indicate the pursuit of a more spiritual, rather than institutional, religion. Drawing on long and rich experience in Bangladesh, the author muses on discoveries and passes on insights to suggest how to empower women disciples to fulfil their spiritual vocations within Muslim background Jamaat.

The final article, 'Grace Environments', returns to addressing questions of how one individual disciples another. Sitting as background to the reflection on a genuinely grace-filled experience are the realities of a minority church which is reluctant to invest in a BMB and old patterns of missionary engagement which were reluctant to encourage close relationships between foreign workers and local individuals. 'Grace Environments' brings together testimony, and discerning reflection that draws on contemporary Christian writing on mentoring, to draw our attention afresh to biblical ways to be nurturing future leaders. This is not about workbooks and training manuals, but about the often ordinary, sometimes costly, 'sharing of our very selves' (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Yet, even as the article will be appreciated by individuals involved in discipling, its frank observations and constructive suggestions have important implications for agencies and those involved in the preparation of mission workers too.

All in all then, the articles are a rich mix of material around the single topic of discipleship. They are dealing with the real stuff of life and ministry: of the wonderful quirkiness of every individual made in the image of God, of the significance of 'when and where' ministry is taking place, of the relationship of a woman's identity to the community in which 'she lives and moves and has her being', of the ways hesitancy and reluctance within Christian communities has played its role in a stunted development of disciples in Islamic contexts, of false stereotypes and fantastic potential of women from those same contexts, ... and more.

So, as they say in lands in which I have lived for extended periods, 'Enjoy!' And do make use of options to respond, whether by a brief 'like', a comment, sharing a related anecdote, offering counter-perspectives or giving a critique. Let's use this first issue as a platform from which to engage in encouragement and in honing one another's understanding to the glory of our Saviour.

CMW

The Glorious Messiness of Discipleship

-By Margaret-

The discipleship of women from a Muslim background is not clear-cut. Consider Fatima and Karin...

Fatima decided to follow Jesus after overhearing Christian people singing. Their joy and commitment and hope were palpable and she knew she didn't have that in Islam. She wanted it. She wanted to know this Jesus that they were so excited about. Her Christian friend explained more about Jesus to her and then arranged for her to meet up with a male leader, and after that, a female leader, to teach her more. This however was all done in secret so that her new husband and his family would not find out. Lessons were taken from a book specifically designed for BMB's and were done as often as possible, lasting usually only 30 min. In recent months it hasn't been possible at all. She still sees her Christian friend regularly. In what sense can we say that Fatima is being disciplined?

Karin decided she wanted to be baptised after being disillusioned with Islam and hearing about Jesus on the internet. She went to a church far away from her home and a retired couple cared for her and went through a course called Christianity Explained with her. She was baptised 3 months later. The plan was for her to meet with another believer to continue teaching her and walking with her in her new life but sadly that hasn't happened. Karin hasn't ever grasped who Jesus really is (although she thinks he is beautiful) or what it is to follow him. She hasn't seen the importance of growing as part of a Christian community. She insists that she has changed religion but in what sense has Karin been disciplined?

In the western context, discipleship is often seen in terms of doing a course with the new believer so that they have the right information about God and about how they now ought to live. As new courses come out we established Christians (often from the West) can think of them as new ways to disciple people but they are all variations of the same theme – discipleship is about giving the right information.

As I have met with new believers from a Muslim background it is clear that this is woefully imbalanced and this approach can be frustrating for both the BMB and discipler. What does fruitful discipleship of BMB women look like?

Khadija began to get to know a community of Jesus' people just before her marriage broke down. It was this community who cared for her and provided for her when she was rejected by her family and Muslim friends. She was always interested in knowing what the Bible said and now, a few years on, continues to meet regularly with followers of Jesus to read the Bible, negotiate life in a new country & have fun. She joins with the wider Christian community each week as they praise God, read his word, pray and learn together. "You know I'm still a Muslim don't you?" she asked a new member of this community. It's too hard for Khadija to even contemplate changing her identity from Muslim to Christian but she loves Jesus. That she remains a Muslim doesn't stop Khadija sharing her understanding of Jesus and how his followers are to live with other Muslim women. In what sense is Khadija being disciplined?

Discipleship often begins before there is a commitment to Jesus. Evangelism and discipleship seem to be one continuum as women start to be interested in Jesus; then learn about him and what he said and did; and learn what this means for those who take him seriously. It's not necessarily a step by step process. It often all happens simultaneously. It's also a mix of talking & listening; living & observing followers of Jesus. It's a glorious mess of living honest lives together.

Ayesha was telling me some distressing news from within her community- intrigue, adultery, lies. She prefaced her comments solemnly – “I'm only telling you because I know you won't tell others.” She ended it saying “When he was telling me I didn't get angry. I wanted to act like you and other church people – calm, listening, patient, understanding.”

Ayesha has learned about Jesus from stories and discussions about the Bible. More than this, she has observed the lives of those who follow Jesus. I am convinced that Muslim women watch us before they listen to us. Are we worth listening to? Do our lives match the words we are speaking? Can we be taken seriously – in other words - are we honouring our prophet in our lives? Is what they see desirable? Do they want to be like us? What is the best way to live?

Ayesha has been around a community of people who follow Jesus for several years. She loves hearing stories of Jesus and she welcomes my prayer in Jesus name for her when I visit her. She admires and covets Christian relationships (including marriage) because she has observed that they are based on honesty and commitment and sacrifice. She has learned that this is a copy of how God has loved us in Jesus Christ. She is impressed and wants a life like that.

However, she cannot believe that Jesus is God. And this, she says, is why she remains a Muslim.

Khadija, Ayesha and even Karin can't quite get their mind around the deity of Jesus and other theological truths. However, they remain in a constant state of change as they continue to expose themselves to followers of Jesus– a change in their desires, a change in their interests and a change in their understanding. This is true for those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ as well as those who have not. The key it seems (humanly speaking, for the Holy Spirit can change hearts and lives without us or with us!) is contact with faithful, authentic, transparent followers of Jesus. The key truth our Muslim friends need to understand is that they are not subscribing to a particular institution (namely Christianity) but to the one they already admire – Jesus Christ.

Consider the long-term growth of the early church or even of Jesus' first disciples. Their understanding only came after years of observing Jesus and pondering his teaching. They loved him and followed him but didn't understand him nor his identity completely. After the resurrection that they had been warned about by Jesus himself they still didn't understand. Jesus' identity was a mystery to them for many years but they remained his followers, his church.

Evangelists and missiologists make use of objective markers to assess where people are in relation to belief in Jesus (e.g. Engels scale), but is this realistic for Muslim women- or anyone? The discipleship of Muslim women involves telling them about Jesus and showing them what it is to follow him in ways that intrigue them and in ways that feed them and transform their desires so that they want to know

more, so that they want to be like his followers, to follow him. At the same time, we are teaching and demonstrating who God is and who Jesus is by whatever means is necessary so that our Muslim friends can come to a point, suddenly or gradually, where they identify as a follower of Jesus, belonging to him. And at this point, they know how to live as the daughter of the living God.

What does such messy discipleship look like?

My experience is not extensive but here are my observations.

Discipleship of Muslim women/ believers from a Muslim background is about sharing your life with them and letting them share their lives with you. What this looks like will vary from woman to woman & culture to culture but the end result is that you get to know what they love and what they fear, what they need and what they believe. They get to know how you live, why you live like that & what you believe. All of this happens as you respond to the stuff of daily life as well as intentionally lead them into issues of faith.

It's about responding to whatever is happening at the time.

It's about giving her Jesus' perspective on whatever already has her attention. This can be done by Bible story telling or personal testimony or just talking about it. It's about using the opportunities before you.

To do this effectively we need to be good listeners and questioners.

Anesha was cooking and was talking about how stressed she was - every day she has to put so much time into preparing food and it just disappears so quickly she has to do it all over again- sometimes on the same night. I could launch into a story about cooking or food – maybe Jesus feeding the 5000 – to connect with her frustration or I could ask more questions. I did the latter. It turned out that her husband continually invited people home for meals without telling her. She had no idea how many to cook for so she always cooking to make sure there was plenty of food. The issue wasn't cooking as such but her relationship with her husband. I empathised with her; we talked about what an ideal marriage would look like; I shared God's thoughts on marriage with her; I prayed for her and for her husband – while stirring the curry.

It's about being intentional as well.

It's about knowing who you are discipling. As we get to know our friends we will get to know where they hurt, what they are hungry for, what delights them. We will make note of issues to visit or re-visit; think of passages in Scripture that will serve those immediate felt needs and prepare ways to communicate them.

It's about making plans to study certain issues that we know are confusing for a new believer from a Muslim background; issues that are vital for them to grasp otherwise they will have a distorted understanding of the gospel and Jesus; issues that are of specific interest to women e.g. the nature of Scripture; the nature of

God; nature of prayer and connecting with God; how to be pure; how to deal with spiritual forces; dealing with the burden of shame; death; the nature of grace and forgiveness. We need to think about what the Bible says about such things and also how a Muslim might understand them. How can we speak of them in ways our friends will understand? We need to consider not only the content of what we will talk about but the method of teaching/ learning.

So whether we are picking up on a current need or moving through some planned studies it is crucial that we equip our friends to read and understand the Bible for themselves and build their confidence in doing so. Helpful methods include Discovery Bible Studies¹ as well as pre-planned studies designed specifically for BMBs.²

It's about modelling a life lived for Jesus.

Our lives show our friends what it looks like to follow Jesus better than words. This then means spending time with them so they can observe us in different relationships; when stressed or relaxed; at work or leisure. This also means that we must be prayerful – that we will follow Jesus Christ faithfully and represent him well in our daily lives. We need to be in constant prayer that we will not be misleading.

Sadia was living with me for a few months. We were on our way out and we were running late. Sadia kept assuring me she was ready but still didn't emerge from her room. I spoke sharply to her and went and sat in the car. I felt like dirt and was thinking "what have I done?" After what felt like hours but was probably only a few minutes, Sadia got into the car. As we drove off I apologised for being so short - tempered. There was silence. I looked at her and she said "no one has ever apologised to me before. Why would you do that?" And so began a discussion on repentance and forgiveness; what is honourable and what is shameful.

It's about praying

We must pray for our friends because all of this is God's work isn't it? He is calling his people to himself and in his mercy he chooses to use people like us. We don't do it – we are totally dependent on God to use us for his good purposes.

We must pray for ourselves because we are representing Jesus Christ to our friends and we need his strength and power to speak and to act as authentic followers of Christ.

Mary can't trust men any more. She has been so badly abused in the past it's something she can't even contemplate. She loves hearing about Jesus and even

¹ Discovery Bible Studies involve the telling or reading of a passage of Scripture several times followed by

² For example Tim Green, *Come Follow Me* (Lulu, 2013) – a series of 20 studies tackling topics that are specific to believers from a Muslim background.

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reading the Bible but to trust the God we call 'Father' and who we talk of as 'he' is a step too far. I always pray for her when we talk – whether face to face or on the phone. "I love your prayers", she says, "send me some so I can pray. They are beautiful – it's like you know actually know God."

We must pray in front of and with our friends because this is how they will see more of who God is and what prayer is about – that it is God's children speaking with their perfect and trustworthy heavenly Father. This is how they will learn the greatest privilege of all as a follower of Jesus Christ - to pray.

Patronage and Reciprocity: Leveraging aspects of shame and honour in discipling women followers of Jesus from Islam

By C. Hine

An invitation to explore

Relationship is at the heart of discipleship for women followers of Jesus from Islam. “[The] [e]xperience of many practitioners and researchers, as well as the testimony of ex-Muslim believers themselves, shows consistently that the growth of a new follower of Jesus depends more on his/her warm personal relationship with a mentor and with fellow believers than on the particular teaching content of a discipleship programme.”(Evans 2009, p 160) Kathryn Kraft affirms this, asserting that relationships and social networks were of more importance in women’s conversion stories than those of men. (2012, p 8-9) This is consistent with the research of Sarah Yoon among women who follow Jesus from a Muslim background in Jordan. She states that a personal relationship with a mentor is critical for their spiritual growth. (2015, p 171) This is further confirmed by Fran Love in her reflections on interviews conducted with fifteen Algerian women followers of Jesus from a Muslim background. She says that they were more concerned with the social relationships of their new community than the doctrinal pillars of their new faith. (2006, p 6)

Understanding the dynamics of relationships in the cultural realities of these women followers of Jesus seems essential, therefore, in order to build appropriate contextual relationships that serve their discipleship journey.

Many of the societies where Islam is the dominant religion are primarily collectivist. This means that members of the community, from birth onwards, are integrated into strong cohesive in-groups. These are formed around the extended family, the tribe, the community and the nation, where unquestioning loyalty is given in exchange for protection and provision. Social harmony among the in-group is maintained by members subscribing to the established social norms, with shame and honour being the currency of exchange. Belonging and acceptance in the community is set against indifference or even hostility toward those who don’t belong or who break the accepted social norms. Hierarchy and harmony are emphasised within the community.

The cultural language of these societies is shame and honour. Shame and honour are about a person’s place of belonging, their acceptance and their relationships in the community. External sanctions moderate behaviour, creating moral boundaries that are enforced by the community. Everything is connected in a shame and honour culture. An individual’s identity is mediated by who they are connected to, requiring a secure network of relationships. Ethics are defined by relationships; it is a person’s moral duty to maintain relational connections with people. Maintaining social order is the moral thing to do.

Overlaying this moral framework for social relationships is the gendered nature of shame and honour. Socially legitimated constructs of gender, of what it means to be a woman, are informed by shame and honour. (Sen 2005, p 48) David deSilva speaks of the women being “embedded in the identity and honour of some male (her father, if she is unmarried, her husband after she marries).” (1999, p 34) Moyra Dale, in a series of blogs posted on the When Women Speak... website, explores this gendered nature of shame, describing how shame is ‘ascribed proportionally more to women’ (2017a), how women experience shame that is associated with their bodies (2017b), and drawing links between notions of purity and ritual uncleanness and shame. (2017c) Females are most often seen as symbols of shame, men as symbols of honour, and according to Bruce Malina this finds practical expression as “... feelings of ‘shame’ to reveal nakedness, modesty, shyness, blushing, timidity, restraint, sexual exclusiveness - all this is positive shame (sic) for the female and makes her honourable”. (2001, p 49) Moroccan sociologist, Fatima Mernissi, argues that there is a strong link between money and female sexuality on one hand, and the social construction of honour and purity on the other. She makes the point that although honour is linked to material wealth, it is firmly located in the bodies of women. (1987)

Hierarchy orders relationships in shame and honour cultures, is often gendered, and has particular importance in shaping the way women negotiate their daily lives. Directions are taken from above, behaviour is deemed appropriate according to role and is enforced through the limits set by the boundary makers, decisions are taken by those with power and authority, and complied with by others. Connectedness is hierarchical, with status, value and rank providing the framework for negotiating life and its relationships. The leader is “someone representing me and someone with whom I am linked. His victory is my joy. His shame is my shame.” (Edwards 2013, p 81) Identity is tied in with the leader.

Core to this relational paradigm is patronage. DeSilva talks of patronage as a ‘bond of society’ in shame and honour cultures, a basic model for structuring society. (1999, p 96) Patronage is an adaptive response to inherent inequality that is embedded in hierarchical systems, emphasising vertical lines that connect unequal relations in an exchange of mutual benefit. Under patronage, roles correlate to a person’s ascribed social status. Social relations across the spectrum of daily living are enacted through the patronage structure. Patronage then is the relational context in which women who follow Jesus from Islam have learned to operate, and so it shapes the ways they engage with others, including the new community of faith where they are seeking to understand their transformed identity and place of belonging.

This paper is an invitation to explore how this particular dynamic of shame and honour societies might help women followers of Jesus from Islam in the transitions that they make as part of their discipleship journey. I want to examine how patronage, understood particularly through reciprocity could be leveraged as part of the relational dynamics of discipleship. The exploration will traverse questions about what it is like to be a follower of Jesus for a woman whose identity, belonging and community has been defined within a culture of shame and honour and the religion of Islam; questions that examine the dynamic of patronage,

recognising the strengths and challenges of this structuring of relationships and asking whether this social structuring of relationships could be leveraged in disciple-making; questions about what it means to 'make disciples', asking what a contextual understanding of the Bible looks like for these women followers of Jesus; and questions about being a disciple-maker and how patronage could be one contextual model for this relationship.

The thesis of this paper is that patronage, expressed in reciprocity, provides aspects that inform a model for discipling relationships with women followers of Jesus from Islam, and that this is a dynamic developing relationship that will be reflective of the growth of the community and the individuals sense of identity and place of belonging within that community. So let's explore. Does this thesis stand up to examination?

What will it be like to be a follower of Jesus?

Women from within Islam have very practical concerns as they journey toward a relationship with Jesus the Messiah. They want to know what it will be like to be a follower of Jesus. They are concerned for the practical impact on their lives of a new allegiance. Evelyne Reisacher, in her research among North African women who became followers of Jesus, identified the following areas as marking out their move toward faith, particularly noting that many of these were areas of significant difference in the discipleship journey when compared to men: fear of being rejected by the family, some of which is because girls do not have the same freedom as males; women are more resilient than men because as women they often pay a higher cost to convert. Men have more freedom related to their choices and so do not have the same cost when they choose to follow Jesus; women are attracted to Jesus because of the way he treated women, they find their real identity in Jesus; women find it more difficult to define their identity as women who follow Jesus in a Muslim context, because they are seen as the representatives of Islam, embodying family, and symbolising the private sphere; shame, and the way women's decisions bring 'shame' on the family; the male guardian who protects/prevents women from independence in life and its choices; married women's role as guardians of Islam and those who pass it on to their children; women's emotional sensitivity helps them connect with Jesus; limited mobility which means women cannot freely go out or access the public square. (2005, p 50) The faith journey for women from Islam has been described by Fran Love as a 'process of discipleship' where women find answers to real life questions and issues, (2006, p 5) questions that are much more often practical than theological.

Within the shame and honour context of their collectivist societies, there are two particular issues that shape the discipleship of women following Jesus from Islam: identity and belonging.

The question who am I, when it is answered from within the structure of relationships, becomes fraught for women who have done the unthinkable and made an individual, independent choice that journeys them toward Jesus. Identity is a function of their membership of the group, of their social and religious community. In her book *Identity Crisis: Standing between two identities of women believers from*

Muslim backgrounds in Jordan, Sarah Yoon contends that identity confusion is a primary reason why many women who become followers of Jesus from within Islam do not continue in their new faith. (2015) This resonates with the earlier work of Kathryn Kraft that explores conversion in the context of a definitive “break with one’s former identity such that the past and the present are antithetical in some important aspects.” (Citing Baker and Currie 2012, p 4) There is a deep fracture that occurs in an individual’s rootedness within their heritage, family and community when they pursue new allegiances.

Group membership is an essential building block of identity in collectivist societies. Two African sayings capture the essence of this understanding: ‘you are therefore I am’ and ‘we are, therefore I am’. (Cited in Edwards 2013, 80) Reflecting on feminist theory, Kraft points to the way relationships and ‘affective ties’ are core to the way women define themselves. (2015, p 1) Suad Joseph identifies the place of connectivity as important in understanding self: “... connectivity as a notion of self in which a person’s boundaries are relatively fluid so that persons feel they are a part of significant others. Connective persons do not experience boundary, autonomy, separateness, as their primary defining features. Rather, they focus on relatedness...”. She speaks of identity being defined in familial terms, with kin idioms and relationships making up the warp and woof of society’s connective relationships, and goes on to assert that in Middle Eastern countries relationships are essential for successful social existence. (2000, p 24) In societies that are animated by patriarchy, women construct their notions identity within these gendered power structures, with both hierarchy and relatedness defining the self.

Kraft’s research demonstrates that relationships and social networks are central to women’s conversion stories. (2012, p 8-9) Discipleship must recognise the inherent links between relationships, connectedness and community in the way women construct identity. While it is easy to point to scriptures that speak of the new identity that a follower of Jesus is given as part of his family, and this is an important foundation for women followers of Jesus from within Islam, they need to experience that in the connective relationships of that family. They must reconstruct their personal narrative so as to create a new identity, (Kraft 2012, p 66), and this needs to be done in conversation with the new community of belonging. It must happen in the context of conversation and dialogue in community because women need to create new building blocks with which to construct a new identity. There is discombobulation when they seek to redefine self with its new allegiances using the old building blocks of identity construction. Affective ties that provide essential building blocks for identity need to be re-formed in the context of belonging in the community.

Identity and belonging represent the two axis that hold women true in shame and honour cultures. Brene Brown speaks of shame as the ‘fear disconnection’. (Cited in Mischke 2015) Not belonging, the loneliness brought about by disconnection, animates women’s choice to give allegiance to Jesus. Again, Kraft shows that belonging and attachment are important aspects of women’s discipleship. (2012, p 8) Belonging in collectivist societies means thinking the same, believing the same principles, values, ethos, acting according to same rules and laws, respecting the same hereditary leadership, living together, migrating

together, defending each there, fighting and dying together. It is a foundational shaping principle in shame and honour communities where the collective is of greater importance than the individual.

In the Muslim *ummah* belonging is important with that deep sense of belonging nurtured by the concept of *tawhid*, of oneness and unity. Even though women's place in the *ummah* is defined by an array of rules and obligations that they must navigate, they feel deeply their belonging. When they choose to follow Jesus those same rules and obligations tell them that they no longer belong, and so they look to their new community for connective relationships that enliven their sense of, and need for, belonging. For many there is a deep sense of disappointment that the oneness and unity that comes from belonging to the Muslim *ummah* does not seem to be replicated in their new community. Kraft suggests that they are seeking for reciprocal relationships in their new *ummah*. (2012, p 57) This means there is a need for significant others who provide fellowship and access into the new community because they help both to create a new sense of belonging and to create and maintain stability in these women's changing subjective realities.

What do those relationships with significant others look like for women whose worldview is framed through the lenses of shame and honour? We will continue our exploration through a consideration of patronage.

How can social structures of relationship inform discipleship?

Patronage is a way of structuring society that is particularly evident in shame and honour cultures. It is a dyadic alliance marked by inequalities in status and in access to power and resources. Dr Callum Johnson's study, *Patronage and Salvation in South Asia for Islam and MBBs: A socio-anthropological approach*, offers useful insights for understanding patronage. He says: "Patronage is an etic model that is usually set in a political or economic framework...". Drawing on the work of Eisenstadt and Roniger, he notes that inequality and power difference, solidarity in relations, personal honour and obligations, spiritual attachment, limited resources premised on the idea of limited good, simultaneous exchange of resources and binding long-term relationships are marks of patronage. (n.d., p 3) The patron-client way of organising social relationships operates in collectivist societies through strong hierarchical structures that mediate relationships.

Reciprocity is a key to understanding of patronage. Developing his work from the thesis of limited good, Bruce Malina suggests that "... the most significant form of social interaction in the limited-good world of the first century is an informal principle of reciprocity...". He explains this as a form of non-legal contractual obligation that is effected through the patronage in relationships of unequal status. (2001, p 94) This is also the conclusion of David deSilva. He notes that in the world of the New Testament people relied on patrons to help them access goods and resources that were not available to them through exchange at the market. (2000, p 96-99) Both the patron and the client have need of each other, which helps to establish longevity in these relationships. The client needs access to resources, relationships and other necessities of life, while the patron is able to display his honour and earn social capital through his generosity and benefaction.

For many people patronage is a negative concept, an inherently negative social structure because it embeds inequalities and power imbalances into social relations. Patronage is often linked to ideas of corruption, dependency, favouritism, exploitation and nepotism. If this relational construct is to be considered as one possible model for discipling relationships with women who follow Jesus from Islam, then its negative aspects, weaknesses and potential abuses must be acknowledged, and intentionally mitigated against. The discipling relationship must be enacted so as to address the way patronage can sometimes consolidate power imbalances and social inequalities. This may be effected through the teachings of scripture that we are all one in Christ, that difference does not mean inequality, that in Christ we have equal access to Almighty God and all of his resources, that the Kingdom of God will culminate with those from every tribe, tongue and nation together in worship around the throne, that there is only one mediator between God and man. Disciples do not need a patron to gain access to God, but there may be other ways such a relationship will enable them to develop important connective relationships. Patrons will need great humility, radical generosity, and a deep concern for the well-being of the other in order to prevent the exploitation and manipulation both of and by those they journey with in faith.

Reading the Bible through a shame and honour lens animates an understanding of patronage in scripture. The works of scholars that include David deSilva (2000), Bruce Malina (2001) and Lynn Cohick (2009) are informative in this area. Their work is informative on a number of levels. They show how patronage illuminates an understanding of grace. DeSilva argues that grace was not primarily a religious word, as it is today, but that it referred to the willingness of a patron to grant a benefit to another person or group, highlighting the generosity and disposition of the patron or benefactor. It gives attention to the gift, but also describes the gratitude of the one who has received the benefit. His point is that grace had specific meanings for the writers and readers of the New Testament that were formed in the context of social order. (1999, p 38-39) Grace, therefore, is understood in God showing radically generous favour or benefaction, even to his enemies, taking the initiative to the point of Jesus dying in a demonstration of his character and virtue, his righteousness. God's people must respond to this extravagant, radical generosity with a passion to increase the recognition of his honour and generosity. Grace must answer grace, says deSilva, the receiving of favour must lead to the return of gratitude. (2000, p 70) Cohick argues that grace and favour were descriptive of reciprocity and patronage (2009, p 286).

Cohick's work is of additional interest because of its focus on the benefits accrued by women through patronage and benefaction. Women were able to blur lines that separated the public and private spheres of their lives. When they acted as benefactors or patrons they were able to make significant contribution to the development and growth of the church. Cohick argues that patronage gave women access to halls of power and influence. She says that "For all its faults ... the institution of patronage was in many respects gender blind. As such, it allowed a freedom of movement at most social levels for women to participate in the social, economic, and political environment without any cultural condemnation... With the practice of public and private benefaction, women gained access to centres of

influence and persons of power.” (2009, p 320-323) Patronage was instrumental in enabling boundaries of status, the public/private divide and ethnicity to be crossed.

Conversion in the context of shame and honour is about transferring allegiance to Jesus. It is more than a personal religious experience, it is a fundamental relational shift of allegiance. Jayson Georges and Mark Baker argue that this means that loyalty to the new benefactor, Jesus, must then be demonstrated publicly. Drawing on the covenantal nature of the patronage relationship they argue that followers of Jesus pledge to remain faithful to him and to honour him by being obedient to his authority. (2016, p 198)

The organisation of relationships in shame and honour cultures, and in contexts where ideas of limited good mediate relationship connections, means patronage, reciprocity and benefaction provide a way of accessing resources. Through patronage honour is built. Patronage become a tool for blurring the lines of boundaries, and opening opportunities and entry into places of power and influence. How then could patronage be leveraged then in disciple-making?

What does it mean to ‘make disciples’?

A disciple of Jesus is someone who has given their allegiance to him, pledges to remain loyal and faithful to him, honours him, is obedient to his authority and speaks of him to others; a worshiper, a servant and a witness. Being a disciple of Jesus is about being in a relationship with him, and this relationship defining the person.

Making disciples, therefore, can be seen as inherently relational. In the research that is available on women followers of Jesus from within Islam, relationships figure significantly in many of their stories. (Kraft 2012, Yoon 2015) (see also Strong and Page 2006) As a caveat, it should be noted that there are women becoming followers of Jesus who do so outside of relational contexts. The stories of those who have encountered Jesus and follow him without making it known to anyone, either because of choice as a result of their context or lack of opportunity to tell someone, are largely unknown. However, our exploration here focuses on women who are seeking community in their new allegiance, and the stories of these women point to the role of relationships in the discipleship journey.

Most approaches to discipleship prioritise the message, the hearing of information that the person is then expected to process, but it is deep personal connection with Jesus that opens women from within Islam to a new faith journey. *Allah* is experienced as distant, within orthodox understandings of Islam, something that profoundly affects women. Matters of purity, and the limitations this sets on their practices of faith, profoundly shape the way they experience God. Women within Islam pursue a range of activities in order to find a connection with God that will address their real needs in negotiating a life that is often precarious physically, spiritually and socially. Experiential knowledge of, and personal encounter with Jesus and his people are important for women to become disciples of Jesus from within Islam. They need that relationship and encounter with Jesus to be made concrete in community that embodies connective relationships

As has been noted earlier as well, women are concerned about the relationships in their new community of allegiance. Because women's identity is negotiated in the context of relationships, their discipleship must include strong relational connections. Women grow in their allegiance to God when they are able to explore their social identity, and their roles and functions, in the context of relationships, their relationship with God and that relationship experienced in their new community. "...[S]ocial relationships play an essential role in helping them develop their new lives as religious changers." (Kraft 2012, p 79) Identity formation is not so much a matter of a paradigm shift as it is a person's continuing story developed through observing, learning and copying others as part of a relational community. Deep connective relationships with Jesus and with the community of his people need attention in disciple-making among women who follow Jesus from with Islam. This means making disciples is not a task but rather worked out in the nurture of relationships.

Making disciples must also be wholistic. Mary McVickers has shown in her work on South Asia that focusing on a cognitive approach alone does not help women on their faith-journey because they want to experience their felt needs being met. (2005) Many who trying to reach out to women living under Islam struggle with an apparent disinterest in conversations and studies about God, describing how women seem to only want to talk about life-issues and practical matters. However, it is a combination of Jesus actively touching their lives and the reality of what truth means for practical living and future security, physical, spiritual and social, that draws women on their discipleship journey. (Love 1996, p 126)

A range of practical family and social issues that concern women from within Islam have been identified. Marriage, childlessness, children, financial struggles, family conflicts, feelings of powerlessness, social pressures, and fear and insecurity are just some of them. Women want to know that their Jesus, the one to whom they have given allegiance, will provide for them, care for and protect them, as they negotiate life's challenges. These are very concrete issues that require more than a theory or teaching in discipleship. They require a wholistic transformational encounter, one that this is modelled in relational community.

The nurture of community should also be a key part of making disciples among women who follow Jesus from Islam. Community is essential for nurturing belonging in shame and honour cultures, and that community must embrace and nurture each of its members as with deep bonds of kinship. Belonging is important in the Muslim *ummah*, so new followers of Jesus want, and need, a place to belong. (Kraft 2012, p 57) The struggle for many women who become followers of Jesus from Islam is that there are a range of barriers that prevent their access to such a community. They must cross boundaries that limit their access to the public sphere. Whereas their place in the community has previously been mediated through their relationships to the father, brothers, uncles and/or husband, they now need new mediators of their access. The strains in relationships between Christian and Muslim communities mean they are often not trusted when they do try to enter a new community. Making disciples therefore includes not just creating communities but also mediating access for women who need to be given access to and nurtured in a place of belonging.

Within a guilt and innocence worldview, a series of propositional truths forms the core of declaring the changed relationship that has occurred for a follower of Jesus. In a shame and honour worldview, the relationships of affirmation that create belonging and enable the negotiation of identity, form the core of declaring a person's new allegiance. Making disciples, while having the same purpose, will be articulated differently. For women from Islam who declare their allegiance to Jesus, this will be a relational, experiential journey of transformation. The perilous nature of life means this needs to be firmly tethered in friendship and relationships.

What role does the disciple-maker play?

Intentional, relational and reproducible. Teaches, instructs, models, motivates, confronts, warns, comforts, forgives, restores, sends. Mentor for exponential growth, invest in a few, work relationally. These are some of the ways the plethora of books, articles, materials and websites describe the role and work of a disciple-maker. Exploring descriptions for disciple-makers among people living under Islam things like resilience, language learning, initiator of Bible Studies, relationship builder, pray, rely on the Holy Spirit, find a person of peace, engage families, baptise, teach to obey scripture are among the areas talked about. There is, rightly, a focus on seeking to understand the things that Jesus modelled and taught about being a disciple-maker. It is the more recently work of Georges and Baker (2016), the honour shame network at <http://honorshame.com/>, as well as Jackson Wu (2017, 2016), that has stimulated fresh understanding of some of the culturally nuanced expectations of that role within shame and honour cultures. What is the imperative upon disciple-makers in shame and honour cultures?

Disciple-makers can utilise the social networks and capital of relationships in making disciples. As Georges and Baker assert: “[p]atronage offers a framework for transmitting values to disciples in many non-Western societies. It is the ‘indigenous style of discipleship practiced naturally by many national leaders.’” (2016, p 152) Patronage is a moral obligation on relationships in many shame and honour cultures. When we fail to understand the relational economics of the patron-client mode of ordering society, we fail to leverage critical aspects of relational capital in responding to the identified need of women followers of Jesus from Islam for connective relationships and community.

In a 2011 article in *Mission Frontiers*, Jean Johnson suggested that much of the mission enterprise is actually build on a patron-client model, because the mission worker often works by establishing a role of being needed in the community, and then brings the resource, power and authority to meet that need. (2011) This asymmetry in power and resources has been identified by others also. Vinay Samuel points it out as an unacknowledged fact of mission relationships. (2015) Robert Oh has also explored this in his research on the relationship between Korean missionaries and Cambodian Pastors. (2015a, b) Whereas most Western mission workers engaging in making disciples want to emphasise unity in diversity through an egalitarian formula in structuring relationships, it is a disingenuous failure to recognise that already they are recognised as people of power, resource and

authority. An asymmetry in relationships already exists in mission, the question is how that is used to shape making disciples.

Kraft's work goes further, citing the way followers of Jesus from within Islam view the way missionaries work out their egalitarianism in shame and honour cultures. "In my research among converts, one of the most common critiques against missionaries cited by believers from a Muslim background was that they thought it disingenuous to attempt to separate the message from their lifestyles, which many evangelical missionaries were perceived as doing. Those who lived in nice homes and who sent their children to expensive schools, but who did not show generosity to their Muslim neighbours who were less well-off, were seen as hypocrites, as were those who made an effort to avoid providing material support to converts claiming they wanted to avoid accusations that they were bribing people to convert. (2015, p 10) In shame and honour communities the person who has the goods to share brings shame on themselves if they fail to live up to the expected practices of the community. There are expectations associated with the work and role of the disciple-maker in communities where shame and honour frame worldview that the disciple-maker must negotiate.

There are dangers: dangers from abusing power, from manipulating relationships, from putting oneself in the place of Christ, of building 'rice-Christians', from acting as gatekeepers to the community of God's people, of creating dependency, of lack of accountability, from ministry from superiority rather than humility, from historic links to colonialism. These dangers are real and require honest, humble, ongoing reflection in the context of a community of faithful followers of Jesus to be avoided. Equally, there are dangers in failing to acknowledge the social structures that mediate relationships and connectivity, formation of identity and belonging. Georges and Baker suggest that the disciple-maker can subvert the system while honouring the dynamics of shame and honour associated with it. They assert that "Jesus called his followers to go beyond patron-client reciprocity. One way to do this is to transform the aim of patronage. ... Christians should creatively use patronage for authentic relationships and kingdom purposes." (2016, p 150) The gospel subverts the way the world uses patronage to build an individual's own social capital and power base. Patronage may be enacted through radical sacrifice, the sharing of resources to meet needs that cultivate relationships for God's glory, displaying the interdependence of belonging to the community of God's people. Paul models a way of subverting the system in his response to the Philippians by bringing God into the centre of the relationship, so that the Philippians can no longer hold him to account to repay their generosity as their client. He trains them to look to Jesus. (See Philippians Chapter 4 Georges 2016, p 150) Patronage is sensitive to the honour and those it acts on behalf of and calls them friends. This is the model of Jesus.

Patronage creates access to people's lives through the established social structures. Expectations are understood, roles have definition and relationships have tracks on which to move. In a world where the individual is known through their belonging and participation in the collective, disciple-makers must let this structuring of society structure the developmental relationships of discipleship as part of God's greater community. Relationships are intentional, structured, have

expectations and obligations. Several writers describe a process in establishing a relationship modelled on patronage. (Chinchen 1995) The system requires the patron to be needy and empathetic, requires exchange visits and requires an exchange of gifts. The point is that the relationship is never assumed and drifted into. It requires active, intentional engagement from both persons. The patron has specific goals to support the person with a relationship that is strong and reliable in order to be in a position to help in crisis, and to influence the person they have the relationship with as a spiritual child. (Chinchen 1995)

The relationship is personal and enduring. It is voluntary, and above all else reciprocal. Disciple-makers must learn to need as much as to be needed, and for missionaries this has been identified as one of their great challenges. They come with the answers and stand aloof from those they minister among. Reciprocity, generosity and exchange describe the operation of relationships modelled on patronage. The disciple-maker among women followers of Jesus from Islam has a model for structuring their relationships that is known and understood by these women, aspects of which can be leveraged in making disciples.

What have we learned?

Shame and honour values and social structures prioritise identity formation and belonging within the context of community. While these values and social structures are often seen as unethical to those whose cultural constructs are not premised on shame and honour, they have dynamic relational aspects that can be leveraged in developing models for making disciples among women who follow Jesus from Islam. Patronage is one of those social structures. The patron-client relationship does not need to be paternalistic because it requires reciprocity. It requires the disciple-maker to be a person of humility who understands that they too are a recipient of God's grace and can live that humility out in relationships modelled on a patronage structure.

Patronage does have a dark side, but the gospel is good news that subverts the brokenness of social structures while transforming and redeeming them for the Kingdom of God. The gospel moves hierarchical social structures from the logic of superiority to the logic of identification. We see this demonstrated in the incarnation when Jesus situated "divine power in a human person but removed from earthly power." (Samuel 2015, p 8) Using the positive aspects of patronage as a model for making disciples must, therefore, include disciple-makers who are themselves being disciplined in intentional, accountable relationships of mutual submission.

Patronage, or sponsorship or benefaction, provides connections that are intentional, have associated expectations, and provide a logic to the mentor/disciple-maker role. It is a model for discipleship practiced by many indigenous leaders. Missionaries are often considered or assumed to be patrons because of their status, wealth and age. Whereas Western Christians are uncomfortable with the model, women from Islam, understand the social structure and how they negotiate life within it. The disciple-maker can create confusion and hurt when they 'rebel' against this means of social operations. Yoon quotes in her

study the way a local disciple-maker understands their role: "... Taking care of her was the most important thing as her new Christian family. In this relationship, making her feel at peace was very important. We are the new people and the new society. Even though she goes through many things, she has to feel welcomed by the new community. She knows that we take care of her. Even before teaching the Bible, this welcome and feeling of belonging in the new community is very important for her. This will make her fear slowly decrease. She will feel that she has another family and can overcome the persecution. We have to accept BMBs³ and help them feel at home. We have to spend more time with them and let them be assured they have a close relationship with us. They need to understand we love them and are not just making them believe in Jesus or teaching them the Bible." (2015, p 172) The social context of women followers of Jesus from Islam means they have high expectations on what it means to belong to the family of God.

There are some very practical areas where leveraging the role of patron could play an important role in assisting women followers of Jesus from Islam. They need a community in which to renegotiate their identity, to learn to live as a child who belongs to God and has joined his family. There is often great distrust between Christians and Muslims so that these women need someone to advocate their acceptance and participation, their belonging in their new community. They also need help to access the resources of provision and protection that come with belonging in a community. Their collectivist society has taught them that loyalty to the community is reciprocated with provision and protection. A disciple-maker can play a significant role in creating avenues of access resources, and in providing for these women across the range of their practical, spiritual and emotional needs. They have often paid a great price to follow Jesus and been left bereft of community networks of belonging and the provision and protection that comes with belonging.

Women followers of Jesus from Islam are looking for someone they can trust, who will not let them down, who will care for them, protect and provide for them. They are looking for a patron. While this is found firstly in Jesus, they need a context in which that is worked out in their every day experiences of life. They also need models, those who will show them how to live with the freedom that they enjoy as a child of God. Their shame and honour culture has given them a strong sense of community and belonging that needs to find a new rootedness in the community of God, and it is in that community that they learn how to live truly transformed lives, and what that life looks like. The patron is a gatekeeper who can give access to what the women do not have, and the disciple-maker can be that source of access to the community of God's people. Patronage allows these women to cross boundaries and enter spaces that they would otherwise be excluded from.

When we are seen as vessels of God's glory, ambassadors of God's righteousness, brokers of his benefactions to the nations then people encounter and experience God's salvation through us. Christopher Wright writes of the great honour of being an ambassador of the living God: "The person who is sent embodies the presence and authority of the person who sends. This was true of even ordinary

³ Believers from a Muslim Background.

human sending. To treat messengers with respect or with humiliation was effectively to honour or shame the person who sent them. The way you responded to messengers was taken as your response to their sender and treated accordingly.”

(2010, p 209) The disciple-maker has a privileged role, and when aspects of patronage form a model for the discipling relationship it is also a huge responsibility.

As noted previously from Cohick, patronage is in many ways gender blind and so allows freedoms that mean boundaries that would normally be barriers to be crossed. It gives allows women to participate in roles and places that would otherwise have been closed to them, without ‘cultural condemnation’. (2009, p 320) Cohick’s insights illuminate the potential of using aspects of patronage as a model for discipleship among women who follow Jesus from Islam. Our study has demonstrated the centrality of relationships and the social structures that mediate those relationships in shame and honour cultures, and the particular import of those for women. This paper demonstrates the veracity of our thesis, that patronage, expressed in reciprocity, informs a model for discipling relationships with women followers of Jesus from Islam, and that this is a dynamic developing relationship that will be reflective of the growth of the community and the individuals sense of identity and place of belonging within that community. It recognises the inherent dangers while suggesting that the gospel subverts and transforms these through the mutuality of interdependence and reciprocity. Leveraging patronage as an aspect for relationships in disciple-making is about identifying, understanding and utilising social patterns for the good of the kingdom.

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Sufi Women Saints: A Paradigm For Discipleship?

By Karen Scott, PhD

You may wonder how Sufism, specifically women Sufi saints, might intersect with Christian discipleship. Indeed, you may not be familiar with women Sufi saints to begin with. Historically, Sufi women saints have been models of piety, who dedicated themselves to serving Allah. They have been teachers in religious colleges and authorities in religion; at the same time, their hearts have longed for intimacy with their Creator. Might learning more about women such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya and Fatima bint al-'Abbas encourage women believers from a Muslim background to set aside stereotypical roles and move into responsibilities in the Jamaat/jamaat⁴ that they would never have dreamed possible? Could knowing more about Sufi women saints assist me as a Christian to deepen my own spiritual walk? I expect it to be an encouragement to people in discipleship programs, should it not also be to me? I suggest that this conversation will help those from a western worldview, men and women, discover biblical stories that will be meaningful for the life in Christ to believers from a Muslim background (BMB).

Introduction

'Where and how' discipleship happens is what most discussions of discipleship are about. This article will enter the conversation from an anthropological direction, with the premise that any discipleship program must take into consideration the worldview and socio-religious milieu and context (that is, the country or specific region/location). Accordingly, first I will describe the background of Sufism in South Asia, the country of Bangladesh in particular. Second, because of the close relationship between Sufism and popular Islam (also termed folk Islam) in religious practice, popular Islam will be addressed as an important part of the socio-religious context of women; examples of folk Islamic practices that influence the daily life of women will be related. Third, and most importantly, I will show how knowing about Sufi women saints and current belief and practices in popular Islam, can converge to be vital aids in the discipleship of BMB women. I firmly believe that there is important relevance to the study of historical Sufism that could be an encouragement to women believers coming from Islam to follow Isa. Deborah, the woman described in Proverbs 31, and other examples from early Hebrew history, offer me encouragement to challenge what is oftentimes typical - limitation of roles of women in the church, especially in the area of spiritual leadership positions such as not allowing them to become elders or pastors. In the same way, the example of women Sufi saints can offer this encouragement and inspiration to women believers coming from a Muslim background—it is not against culture for women to have their

⁴ Church/congregation

own strong devotional life, or have an independent quest for a relationship with God! Women Sufi saints offer role models that give hope and provide incentive for the deep spiritual life that can be theirs, a life ordained by Holy Spirit-inspired Old Testament accounts, profitable for nurturing the spiritual life of God's people, including women, and which Jesus and others demonstrate in the New Testament. Their hearts and imagination will be stirred to new activities and possibilities beyond what they had previously imagined. My hope is that through the following discussion we will be moved to deeper research on this topic.⁵

The Context

The long pluralistic history of South Asia, particularly the country of Bangladesh, has resulted in assimilation of many religious practices. This stems from the close association of animistic and Hindu beliefs and rituals. In combination with the Sufi-inspired Islam to be explained below, a Bangladeshi Muslim sub-culture has been birthed. Sufism, along with folk or popular Islam (I will use these two terms interchangeably) plays an important role in current Muslim religious expression in Bangladesh, something the Arab nations sought to impact following independence. Understanding the historical, religious, and cultural context of women in Bangladesh is strategic for purposes of discipleship. Though much applies to rural women, this topic crosses class and educational boundaries; women in more highly educated centers are not untouched by these issues. I contend that the information in this article will also apply to other countries and cultures where Sufism and popular or folk Islam are present.

Introduction to Sufism

“O my God, I invoke Thee in public as lords are invoked, but in private as loved ones are invoked. Publicly I say, ‘O my God! But privately I say, ‘O my Beloved!’”⁶ As human beings cannot seem to exist without religion, so they cannot make do with only rituals, they must seek an inner meaning of life in religion. This has taken the form of Sufism in Islam.⁷ Similarly, women believers from a Muslim background are seeking this inner life with the Beloved. They also desire to participate fully in the spiritual and religious life of the community. This article will set out the precedent for acknowledging this longing publicly and will encourage men and women to advocate for women in the emerging Muslim background *Jamaat*. It will also show the variety of essential roles women could and should be contributing— functions that will serve to strengthen and expand this growing *Jamaat*.

⁵ Although I am not familiar with the subject enough to include it in this paper, I have been alerted to the idea that the Sufi qualities I endorse in this paper, likely come from Christian ascetic traditions. Research in this area could deepen our understanding of the spiritual ‘full-circle’ for the woman coming from a Muslim background and offer her further inclusion and rootedness in the family of God.

⁶ Reynold A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd), p. 8.

⁷ Rafiuddin Ahmed, editor, *Islam in Bangladesh: Society, Culture and Politics*, (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, 1983), p. 56.

The tradition of Islamic mysticism known as Sufism appeared very early in Islam and became a popular movement emphasizing love of God rather than fear of God. Sufism stresses an unstructured, personal devotion to God rather than a rigid, ritualistic, and outward observance of the faith. Esposito reports that Sufism began in the hearts of pious Muslims for several reasons: (1) reaction to the pursuit of conquest and wealth, (2) the transformation of the caliphate into a dynastic monarchy with its trappings of imperial court life, (3) and the doubtful character of some of the caliphs.⁸ Devout Muslims believed that the Umayyad Dynasty's goals of power and wealth were in contrast to the early example of Muhammad and distracted from Allah, the true center and goal of Muslim life.⁹

William Stoddart describes Sufi Islam as having two domains, the outward and inward. These two domains stay distinct but have a definite relationship to one another. Representing this as two concentric circles the outward circle would be the *Shari'a*, or religion itself, and at the center lies the inner Truth, the heart of the religion. The line from circumference to center would represent the Sufi "path" that leads from outward observance to inner conviction, from belief to vision and from potency to act.¹⁰

One who practices Sufism is called a Sufi, a dervish, or a *fakir*. There are several Sufi brotherhoods or Sufi "orders", called *tariqas*, each led by a spiritual *shaikh*. Sufism swept across the Islamic world as Sufis became the great missionaries and popular preachers of Islam in Asia and Africa.¹¹

In his treatise on Sufism, Shaykh Haeri points out, "Whatever its origin, the term Sufism has come to mean those who are interested in inner knowledge, those who are interested in finding a way or practice towards inner awakening and enlightenment."¹² He also asserts that Sufism began in the first century of Islam despite distortions and misrepresentations of its teachings by Muslim leaders of the day. Sufis believe themselves to be completely orthodox, claiming that the *shari'a* is the doorway that opens to freedom, the "straight path that leads to life." Therefore, Sufism while outwardly conforming, is inwardly freeing.¹³

Women in Sufism

Giuseppe Scattolin paints a historical picture of women Sufis. As with women in mainstream Islam, he states that there is little official record of Sufi women in the common manuals of Sufism. However, historical sources have preserved a number of names of ascetic and Sufi women who are witnesses of the feminine side

⁸ A Caliph (leader) was appointed following Muhammad's death. There were four caliphates. The first four caliphs were all companions of the Prophet. The period of Muhammad and their rule became known as the Rightly Guided Caliphs and is regarded in Sunni Islam as the normative period. It has provided the idealized past to which Muslims look back for inspiration and guidance. The next caliph was selected from the Umayyad clan and thus began the Umayyad dynasty. The caliphate became an absolute monarchy.

⁹ John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991:51

¹⁰ William Stoddart, *Sufism*, New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1986: 20.

¹¹ Esposito, *Islam*, 101.

¹² Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *The Elements of Sufism*, Dorset, UK: Element Books Ltd, 1990:1-2.

¹³ Stoddart, *Sufism*, 41.

of Islamic mysticism. In fact, he reports that Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1200) has recorded more than two hundred of them. He declares that most of these women lived during the first and second generation of Islam. Names of later Sufi women are rarer. Scattolin questions if this is a sign of the decreasing status of Muslim women over time.¹⁴

The story of Rabi'a al- 'Adawiyya (d. 801), the most outstanding and celebrated of Sufi women, is mentioned frequently in historical writings. Rabi'a was a model of piety and love of God. She came from a poor family and was sold as a slave, however, her master freed her when he witnessed the signs of her extraordinary piety and sainthood. Scattolin further reports that she became a perfect ascetic woman, living in extreme poverty and seclusion, completely dedicated to the service of her Lord. "One of her basic thoughts was that God must be worshiped and loved for his own sake, not out of fear of Hell or desire of Paradise."¹⁵ During her lifetime, her dwelling became a meeting place for learned scholars.

Not all Sufi women were celibate, though even when in the married state, each devoted themselves to prayer and love of God. Scattolin also mentions that most were endowed with supernatural powers and miracles by which they gained respect and veneration among their own people.¹⁶

Fatima bint al-'Abbas (d. 1324), is another woman deserving special mention. Her biographers refer to her with titles such as *shaykha* (authority in religion), *mudarrisa* (teacher in the religious colleges), and *faqihyya* (doctor in Islamic law). Scattolin also mentions that a noted male contemporary was against her preaching and teaching saying it was un-Islamic until Muhammad appeared to him and warned him saying, "Fatima is one of the virtuous women."¹⁷

Scattolin offers several general traits that illustrate the roles and experience of these Sufi women saints: extreme asceticism, moving about freely in society, meeting people openly, mystical or pure love of God, and mystical union with a Beloved that was absent, or distant. Celibacy even though not usually praised in Islam, was another characteristic of women saints, one which gave them more freedom than marriage.

According to Leila Ahmed, Sufi views on women, and their rules and practices pertaining to them, differed in important ways from those of the Islamic establishment. Ahmed claims that Sufism implicitly challenged the way establishment Islam conceptualized gender by permitting women to give a central place in their lives to their spiritual vocation. By doing this they affirmed the importance of the spiritual over the biological.¹⁸ Sadly enough, she goes on to

¹⁴ Giuseppe Scattolin, "Women in Islamic Mysticism," in *Encounter: Documents for Muslim-Christian Understanding*. October. Justa Lacunza Balda, editor. (Rome, Italy: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1993), p. 198/10.

¹⁵ Ibid. 198/11.

¹⁶ Ibid. 198/11.

¹⁷ Ibid. 198/12.

¹⁸ Leila Ahmed offers a comprehensive description on how the political, religious, and legal authorities in the Abbasid period, heard only the androcentric voice of Islam. They interpreted the religion as intending to institute androcentric laws and an androcentric vision in all Muslim societies over time. She has topics of interest in this area throughout her book (1992).

relate, “Throughout history it has not been those who have emphasized the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the religion who have held power.”¹⁹

Although establishment Islam continues to ascribe complementary roles to Muslim men and women rather than an egalitarian status in all areas of life, Leila Ahmed and Giuseppe Scattolin offer renewed encouragement to Muslim women living in this generation. Their writings can serve as a reminder to women to express themselves more fully, especially in a spiritual sense, from the historical example of Sufism.

Sufism in Bangladesh

From earlier times Sufism has played, as it does today, an important role in Bangladeshi Islam. David Abecassis contends that the role of the Sufi messengers of Islam—the *pirs*, provides a clue to understanding why Islam appealed to the indigenous peoples of Bengal. The *pirs* came from North India, probably around the eleventh century, into the area that is now Bangladesh, bringing with them Islamic beliefs that had originated in places like Baghdad, Persia, Afghanistan, and North India. Abecassis asserts that these beliefs were more than likely a far cry from what the Prophet Muhammad had intended. “Sufi-saints” were people of considerable personal aura and power. They settled among the people, eventually spreading over all of Bengal. Sufis practiced their power among Hindus and Muslims alike, issuing charms, healing sickness and ever exuding the aura of holy men with direct communication to the All-powerful”.²⁰

Abdul Karim asserts that the chief contribution of the *Shaikhs*, a term which he uses interchangeably with *pir*, lay in their missionary activities. “They exercised great influence on many different people groupings through their spiritual and moral force.”²¹ Because of the harshness of life, the average Bangladeshi is focused primarily on survival. It is not surprising that many turned to the Sufi saints for intervention in the supernatural.

The shrines of Sufis and *pirs* have traditionally been centers for the preaching of Islam. There are hundreds of these shrines in Bangladesh today and people, including university professors, students, civil servants, army officials, journalists and even politicians, visit them to receive the blessing of the saints. The Biswa Zaker Monjil (International Mediation Centre) of Atrashi, Faridpur, is presently the largest Sufi shrine in Bangladesh.

Popular Islam

Islam is a religion known for its ability to adapt and assimilate local customs and traditions. Although basic tenets of the faith are adhered to wherever Islam has spread, this has resulted in a local expression of Islam that veers away from a

¹⁹ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992: 66-67.

²⁰ David Abecassis, *Identity Islam and Human Development in Rural Bangladesh*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: The University Press, Ltd, 1990: 11-12

²¹ Abdul Karim, “The Sadat, Ulama and Mashaikh in the Pre-Mughal Muslim Society of Bengal.” In *Islam in Bangladesh: Society, Culture, and Politics*. (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Itihas Samiti, 1983: 47.

rigid observance of the faith. “Popular Islam” or “folk Islam” as it is also termed, is seen negatively by strict *ulamas* (learned people) as well as modern intellectuals who condemn the practice which they see as a use of magical practices and superstitions.²²

John Voll suggests that one dimension of popular faith is the role of specially respected local holy men. He argues that as communities converted to Islam the functions of the local religious leader were taken over by Muslim guides. He also states that as the immanent aspects of God were stressed, not surprisingly, the explanations tended to take Sufi forms. He also contends that the coming of a “rightly guided leader,” the *Mahdi*, is a major theme in popular Islam. The more oppressed a people, the more fervent has been their longing for this restorer of Islam.²³

At a practical level, and I rely heavily on his description, Bill Musk offers clear reasons for people turning to popular Islamic practices. He explains that in every monotheistic faith a gap has developed between faith as defined theologically and faith as it finds expressions in the lives of people. He continues by saying that this distancing appears to happen more easily where monotheistic faith is presented in deistic—as opposed to theistic—terms. He reports that the deist tends to see God as responsible for creation but far removed from it (Islam). On the other hand, the theist tends to see God as responsible for creation, and continuing to be involved with it (Christianity). Thus, a deist would think of God as far off and would fill the gap with alternative “beings” to whom they can appeal for help.²⁴

Musk also contends that official religion provides a moral and ethical motive for its followers in which clear commands and expectations are expressed by God. These guidelines are codified and protected by the religious community. In contrast, popular religion tends to deal with the problems of everyday life. Disease, flood, barrenness, drought, war and accident will claim its attention, though there are few authoritative texts that relate to these problems. Continuity of tradition is maintained by heritage, whereby a grandmother or grandfather passes on to a younger relative the secrets of her or his expertise.²⁵

In addition, Musk states that popular religion is not highly institutionalized. The religious masses tend to manifest elements of popular religion in their allegiances according to their needs and customary rites of passage. This contrasts starkly with the relatively small community of official hierarchal specialists, who remain the protectors of the status quo. Authority within the world of folk religion depends on each practitioner’s proven power. “Popular religion is as a result informally organised, localised and closely linked to places or persons possessing intrinsic power.”²⁶

Musk maintains that those within any faith who live more in the popular expression, and who are normally denounced by the upholders of the orthodox

²² John Obert Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*. 2nd edition. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994: 20

²³ *Ibid.* p. 20.

²⁴ Bill Musk, *The Unseen Face of Islam*. Sussex, UK: MARC Publishers, 1989: 198.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 199.

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp.199-200.

religion, rarely see themselves as deviating from what is seen as substantial by the official faith. Therefore, those following popular Islamic practices would still see themselves as genuine Muslims.²⁷ Contrary to missionaries' early belief, popular religion is not dying out as Christianity spreads. Tragically, popular beliefs remain hidden from public view—Christianity being merely an overlay to deeply held folk religious practices. "People affirm orthodox theologies, but go to witch doctors, shamans, diviners, and healers during the week, often in secret for fear of the condemnation of church leaders. They are baptized in the church and initiated in traditional rites in the forest."²⁸

Popular Islam in Bangladesh

Having done extensive survey research on the topic, Razia Banu suggests three different types of Islamic belief in Bangladesh; modern, orthodox, and popular.²⁹ Banu offers that, in Bangladesh, modernist Islam tries to give a rational interpretation of the Qur'an and *Hadith*. Modernists emphasize the dynamic, scientific and progressive nature of Islam. "Modernist Islam envisages a narrowly personal and specific role of religion in life, and stresses self-determination rather than divine will in the affairs of man."³⁰

The orthodox belief, promoting a more literal Islam, requires a more complete, rigid acceptance and adherence to the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. Unlike a modernist Muslim, an orthodox Muslim would accept Islam as a complete code of life and believe in determination of all events by God's will. Neither modernists nor orthodox Muslims would compromise on monotheism, a core ideal of Islam, and each belief system would continue to interpret literally the Islamic Confession of Faith, "There is no god but God and Mohammad is His Prophet."³¹ In contrast, according to Banu's definition, popular, folk, or syncretistic Islam has polytheistic and animistic dimensions. Though a follower of popular Islam would subscribe to the confessional statement about the unity of God and the finality of Mohammad's prophethood, he/she would in practice acknowledge the sharing of supernatural power of God by the *pirs*, sacred places, Hindu gods, local deities and spirits by observing rituals and practices meant for cajoling or gratifying these near-godly forces.³² Banu reports that popular Islam seems to command the allegiance of nearly half of the Muslims in present-day Bangladesh.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 201.

²⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House Publishers, 1999:13.

²⁹ Razia Aktar Banu, *Islam in Bangladesh*, Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J.Brill, 1992: 65-79.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 54.

³¹ Ibid. p. 54.

³² Ibid. p. 55.

Bangladeshi Women and Popular Islam

Although Bangladeshis from all walks of life may subscribe to a form of popular Islam, it is especially enticing to women. Since, as Rippin recounts, women have generally been excluded from the outward expressions of Islam, this separation has not resulted in the establishment of rival female institutions in which women perform rituals separately. Rather, in many places in the world, popular or folk Islamic practices often associated with mysticism and saint worship, have emerged. These activities would be outside the male dominated institutionalized forms of Islam.³³ As the story of rural Muslim women in Bangladesh unfolds, a picture of their involvement with folk Islamic practices will emerge.

Muslim Women: Status and Role within Islam

During the discussion on rural women in Bangladesh, one must keep in mind that lines between religious and social status and role are fuzzy and overlapping. This is especially true in a country that views life from a holistic perspective.

For the most part, women in Bangladesh are not allowed to participate fully in the Muslim *Ummah* (brotherhood, community) in public festivals or prayer in the mosque. Although the literacy rate is rising dramatically, presently fifty-nine percent of the population are literate. There is gender disparity as the literacy rate for men is about sixty-three percent while it is fifty-six percent for females.³⁴ Most rural women are still not functionally able to read. As Islam is a religion of the “Book,” this means they are not privy to the discussions of the men. If they have memorized portions of the Qur’an, it would be done using Arabic, a language most do not understand.

Jitka Kotolova, after doing anthropological research in a rural area of Bangladesh, points out that since many village women are illiterate they remain unaware of the Hindu-Muslim syncretism that has been pervasive in the past and which is still a part of daily practice. She found that only a few women could recite the five pillars of Islam. The fatalistic belief of the villagers became evident in her research. “Allah’s will is inescapable—each person’s destiny is inscribed on the forehead at the time of birth. Salvation is attained by gaining merit through the practice of the five pillars (to outweigh the penalty of sin).”³⁵ She also maintains that religious faith is interpreted by the men from the local madrasa and nearby mosque. Kotolova reports that women have no access to these places.

Most women will know little about the theology of the Qur’an, however, they are well informed on the subject of judgement. They know their deeds will be recorded and weighed and they understand the consequences of a heavy accumulation of evil works—banishment to hell. They are also aware that a narrow

³³ Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, New York: Routledge Publishers, 1993:117.

³⁴ <http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/bangladesh/literacy-rate>, accessed May 2017.

³⁵ Jitka Kotolova, *Belonging to Others: Cultural Construction of Womenhood in a Village in Bangladesh*, Dhaka Bangladesh: The University Press, Ltd., 1993: 45.

bridge suspended over hell must be crossed, a bridge “sharper than a sword and finer than a hair.” As evidenced by this *gaza*³⁶ sung for me by Nesa, a rural village informant, these beliefs are close to the hearts of Bangladeshi women.

Oh! Muslims please listen to a story
When the Prophet Hazat Muhammad was in his mother’s womb he was
crying for his community.
Bibi Fatema cried in her *sezda* prayer having bowed and kept her
forehead on the ground. She said, “Oh! Allah, please forgive your
follower’s sin. Having cried and cried, and making his hands and feet
red, the Prophet will go to the doomsday meeting by running.
The road of Pul Cherat (a bridge’s name—the bridge separating earth from
hell) will be 30,000 miles long.
Oh! Allah, the road is narrower than hair and sharper than a sword.
Sinner servants would cross this shrine into hell.
The Prophet died on 12th Rabi-ul-awal month, please listen to that
date. When he was put into a burial cloth after his death, the cloth on
his mouth trembled.
Companions of the Prophet, please open your ears and listen.
The Prophet cried for his followers.
Alas! How my followers are behaving.
The Prophet died but he did not forget his followers.
All brothers and sisters, all together having raised our hands we pray to
the court of God.

When asked what this song means to her and why she sings it to her grandchildren, Nesa replied that when she thinks about Allah’s instructions and how we should follow his commands to live in this world, then she sings the *gaza* to her children.³⁷

While Muslim women have an amazing amount of influence over many areas of family life, especially as they grow older, they are still in a subservient role in a strongly male dominated society. This is particularly true of village women. Men’s opinion of women’s value and abilities remains low. I have heard it said more than once, “She is too stupid to cook rice, how can she understand anything else?” Words such as “liberalism” or “fundamentalism” would be meaningless to these women—they would not be aware of the vigorous debate over the status and role of women taking place today.³⁸ This does not mean they regard their spiritual lives as unimportant, on the contrary, one study suggests that in Bangladesh around half of all women claim to pray five times a day.³⁹

³⁶ A religious song or lyric sung usually by Sufis.

³⁷ Tahurunnesa Begum, Personal Interview with author, April 10, 2000.

³⁸ Leila Ahmed, (1992); Bodman, Herbert L and Tohidi (1998); Hijab (1998); Islam (2000); Mernissi (1991, 1993); Monsoor (1999); and Stowasser (1994), have introduced me to the Muslim feminist debate. While highly informative, this discussion is not pertinent to research on rural Muslim women in Bangladesh. This conversation carries on currently in heated debate.

³⁹ Abecassis, *Identity*, 40).

Rural Muslim Women and Popular Islam

Like their city counterparts, though on a lesser scale, rural Muslim women have been touched by modernism. Their children are becoming more educated—some of them going back and forth to the city for jobs and education. Conveniences such as electricity, medical care, and transportation services are improving. However, in the religious expression of their daily lives, especially in childbirth and the rites associated with it, according to Therese Blanchet, little has changed. Many of the *jinn* and *pori* (good or evil spirits) are related to fertility rites and therefore are in the domain of women. “These songs and rituals are not Islamic but since we cannot stop women who attach meaning and importance to these things, we just pretend to ignore them and stay a little distance away, explained a madrasa-educated informant.”⁴⁰

I was personally exposed to these same folk Islamic beliefs while doing research in southern Bangladesh.⁴¹ Women reported to me that diarrhea was often caused by *bhut*, *jinn* or *pori*. When that was the case, according to them, medical help was not considered. Rather, they would consult with a *fakir*.⁴² He might have them dust the child with leaves from a particular plant and will also usually give a *tabij*⁴³ (amulet) for the child to wear.

I was informed that there are certain times of day it is inauspicious to go outside alone: in early morning, at noon, dusk and at midnight. This includes all people but especially women. In addition, there are places that are not safe to be during these times of day: the edge of a pond, under the eave of the house, or in the doorway of the house. According to the women, spirits are particularly active at these times and in these places.

Nesa told of an incident where two of the *jinn* or *pori* studied in a *madrasa* (Islamic school). As per her story, these were very beautiful young girls. When the teacher asked them their father’s name they did not reply. One day the teacher followed them and saw them fly away. Once they knew they had been recognized, they did not come back to school again. With the enthusiasm they related these incidents, it was clearly apparent that women believe in these spirits even though, in the beginning, they wanted me to believe they were too sophisticated to do so. This information was corroborated by many women through other interviews and in focus groups.

Tragically, my husband and I had a personal experience with this popular belief system while working in a health and development project. On one occasion, a young woman came to the clinic for a pre-natal check-up. It was discovered that she was going to have twins and for that reason she was strongly advised to come to the hospital at the time of delivery. A few months later we heard that this young

⁴⁰ Therese Blanchet, *Meanings and Ritual of Birth in Rural Bangladesh*, Dhaka Bangladesh: The University Press Ltd., 1984:16.

⁴¹ Christina Shepherd (pseudonym), “The Holistic Contribution to the Family by the Rural Mothers-in-Law of Bangladesh.” Unpublished manuscript. Fuller Theological Seminary, 2000.

⁴² A *fakir* is a Muslim man that uses various religious rituals to heal, however, he is not a Muslim cleric.

⁴³ A *tabij* or amulet is a small led cylinder with Qur’anic verses inside and affixed to the person with a black string (which may have been placed in “holy” water and breathed on by the *fakir*).

mother-to-be had died in childbirth although the twins had survived. We learned that she was not brought to the hospital because it was believed that the complications were caused by evil spirits. For that reason, the family knew there was nothing that could have been done for her in the hospital.

Because of their exclusion from public expression of religious faith, women are forced to look elsewhere to express their spirituality—the ready availability of the ancient traditions is close at hand. Kotalova offers an interesting observation. She alleges that while men provide the family with material, moral, and spiritual needs from outside the parameters of the home, women’s role is to feed and protect the weak and to heal the sick. This the wives carry out in the home.

However, it is by a woman’s association with the supernatural realm that an increase of what has been provided by the householder, can be attained. The nature of a married woman’s contacts with the supernatural vary from that of men. Because the mosque is regarded as a male precinct from which mature women are strictly excluded, the point from which housewives communicate with Allah is quite circumscribed. On the other hand, the array of supernatural powers the wives invoke and elaborate on is much wider.”⁴⁴

Integration

Godly women have held a variety of official positions throughout history. Early Hebrew, Christian, and Islamic records reveal that women, though in lesser numbers than men, have had significant roles within these two respective religious traditions. Historically, as in many traditional societies today, the male was the head of the extended family and the family line was carried on through the male. A female was under her father’s authority until she married at which time she became subject to the male head of her husband’s family. Legally, women were considered property. A woman had few rights regarding her children and tended to exert influence through her husband⁴⁵ or oftentimes through trickery or subterfuge.⁴⁶ Laws of ritual purity stigmatized women especially during periods of menstruation or childbirth. Nevertheless, despite her second-class status, from time to time women acted with considerable initiative.⁴⁷ There is record of many women stepping outside their domestic roles to play a part in Israelite society. The wise woman of Tekoa persuades David of his sin, and Miriam, Deborah, and Hulda were prophetesses with considerable political power.⁴⁸ In addition, Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues that women did not have to choose between marriage and being a prophetess for Hulda and Deborah were clearly married.⁴⁹ *It would seem that when God called a woman with*

⁴⁴ Kotalova, *Belonging to Others*, 199.

⁴⁵ Sarah, Genesis 16:5; 21:10.

⁴⁶ Rebekah, Genesis 27; Rachel, Genesis 31.

⁴⁷ Shunnamite woman, II Kings 4:8-17; Abigail, I Samuel 25.

⁴⁸ 2 Samuel 14; Exodus 15:20; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14.

⁴⁹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Women,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*. (Electronic edition. San Francisco: Turper and Row, 1985), no page number.

special gifts or character, even during this early time, Israelite society allowed her to function in an atypical role.

Socially and religiously, Muslim women in South Asia find themselves in similar situations to the women mentioned above—having limited status and role in comparison to men. Nevertheless, though there is an overall impression of the submission of women in the *Qur'an*, there is precedent within Islamic history of a variety of roles for women. Khadija bint Khuwaylid, many years older than Muhammad and a business partner, was his first wife. She was a woman full of initiative in public and private life and strongly supported Muhammad as he began to receive his revelations from God. The *Qur'an* basically enjoins mutual respect and value of humankind regardless of gender or social situation.⁵⁰ Within Sufism, this more essential *Qur'anic* attitude has prevailed.

Women in the New Testament and in the early Christian church also had high status and significant roles. Jesus reveals this in his “upside down kingdom” attitude toward women. Contesting the cultural norms of his day, he permitted Mary to sit at his feet—a concept in biblical times that connotes being a disciple.⁵¹ He also acknowledged women’s ability to understand spiritual truth, exemplified in Martha recognizing him as Isa Mashi.⁵² Other verses show women as being prophets, apostles, businesswomen, teachers, witnesses and leaders of house churches.

Conclusion

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.”⁵³

Islam in South Asia has been highly shaped by Sufism. Presently, there is a fast-growing Sufi-influenced *Jamaat* from a Muslim background in this area. Within the *Jamaat* are many women with hearts that are longing to follow God, to call him “Beloved.” They are eager to serve him in a variety of capacities. Therefore, the precedence of significant public roles for women within Sufism and historical Christianity—including Jesus’ and Paul’s teaching in the New Testament—has great implication for women in the global church in general and the church in South Asia in particular. In addition, Sufism models relationship, intimacy, and an inner life of piety and relationship, unknown for the most part, in orthodox Islam. This is a natural bridge/link to understanding how close and intimate a relationship the Savior longs to have with them. Unlike in Sufism, women will discover the path for a true and meaningful relationship with their Heavenly Father. Additionally, the role

⁵⁰ Yusuf A. Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Washington D.C.: The Islamic Center, 1978, Surah 33:35

⁵¹ Luke 10:38-42.

⁵² Samaritan woman, John 4:1-42; Martha, John 11: 25-27.

⁵³ Psalm 42:1

models mentioned above serve as a reminder that now, as in the past, women are called and appointed by God to take up public spiritual and religious vocations.

I believe the journey towards a deep relationship with Isa Mashi, begins at birth. All of life formation contributes to how the discipleship process goes forward. In years of experience working in health and development projects, I witnessed firsthand, women growing in confidence and inner strength as they participated in community activities. As discipleship is approached in a holistic manner: life experience; secular and religious education; socio-religious context; including encouragement from the historical past – a maturing worldview will prepare her for stepping with confidence into the future. Learning of the expanded roles of women Sufi saints, leading them to God-inspired stories of women in the Old and New Testaments, opens vistas of possibilities for her as she walks in personal relationship with Isa. I contend that the physical and spiritual growth of the Muslim background *Jamaat*, depends on giving women believers from a Muslim background appropriate recognition, teaching and authority. We have seen the importance of the woman's involvement in the supernatural. Without her full participation, gaps between the formal and informal expression of everyday faith will be rife. The precedent has been set for involving women in all areas of participation in the church. However, they need advocates within the believing community that will work to release them from cultural and religious stereotypes that have limited their spiritual role. Will you be one of those advocates?

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Grace Environments

By *Kristine Pienger*

Teach older women to be reverent in the way they live ...

Then they can train the younger women...

TITUS 2:3 – 4A

Introduction: Need for Mentoring in South Asia

After nearly 20 years of work at L____, a rural South Asian health and development project, I have not seen the emergence of transformed Christian leaders for the next generation, male or female. We have offered substantive training opportunities, from orientation to and discussion of our Bible-based organizational mission, vision, and values, to short courses of Perspectives on the World Christian Movement (called *Kairos*) through to somewhat more academic theological education by extension. But our ongoing institutional efforts at training seem to have born little fruit in the way of overcoming problems such as inter-ethnic tensions and a lack of loving, generous behavior that would evidence changed lives. It is time for us to implement a more individualized mentoring program as a way to disciple a few.

We hope to offer “grace environments” of reflective learning to help overcome cultural and spiritual strongholds in the lives of both cross-cultural workers and nationals. In a book called *The Ascent of a Leader*, Thrall, McNicol and McElrath write about this concept, explaining how “[a]n environment of grace works hand in hand with relationships of grace to create cultures in which trust, creativity, hope, and other positive outcomes emerge” (1999: 32). Much of the writing on this topic is related to leadership development, and the individuals considered below are women leaders in a challenging Muslim-majority environment. Our mentoring approach must involve a commitment to discerning prayer and listening to God on behalf of a mentoree, possibly with considerable time commitment, in order to work through the complexities of Christian women in leadership in South Asia.

A classic in Christian mentoring literature, *Connecting*, by Stanley and Clinton, names discipling as one of several sub-categories of mentoring. (1992: 41) In their mentoring continuum, discipling is necessary early in Christian life to build basic spiritual disciplines; spiritual direction would be helpful with more mature Christians, with willingness to listen together to how God is bringing growth opportunities through experiences. This article will tell the story of a young woman believer of Muslim background, whose mentoring needs include discipling, some element of spiritual direction, and also other types of less-intensive mentoring.

Overcoming Challenges in Cross-Cultural Discipleship-Focused Mentoring

First, I will describe some relevant South Asian relational patterns as well as expatriate assumptions and practices. Next will be a section detailing ways mentoring can be a path to overcome our challenges in developing leaders in cross-cultural ministry, through telling one woman's story. I will illustrate the need to go deep with only a few, and consider questions of interest for women aspiring to be leaders, and to build future women leaders. I conclude with a personal reflection on the power of grace environments to restore and build through discipleship.

Cultural patterns of mentoring functions

In our South Asian country, nearly every student draws on perceptions of discipling and mentoring from the models provided by their school teachers, as they memorize expected answers in a rote-learning context. Another semi-feudal cultural pattern that shapes attitudes is the expectation that rich or politically-connected 'patrons' must provide resources or advancement opportunities (a role into which foreigners are almost always placed in our country).

A Zwemer Center writer, Dr. Warren Larson, describes how *pirs*, or saintly men, can be seen as a source for spiritual learning or blessing, continuing even after death. Most of the world's Muslims engage such Sufi-influenced practices (especially women seeking supernatural intervention for infertility or other struggles) even though Wahabbis (ultraconservative puritans whose influence has spread widely) strongly oppose them. This openness to connect to the supernatural is not restricted to women, and can be especially significant in working with women where participation in formal religious practices is limited.

L___'s country of service enjoys a communal culture, and any approach must resonate with local cultural values. A challenge to a discipling relationship may be the authoritarian model of local leadership. Servant leadership and reflective learning can be difficult to model, especially when Westerners are seen by nationals (whether believers or nonbelievers) as exhibiting unattainably different behavior (a spiritual stronghold of fixed, false belief).

Expectations of Western cross-cultural workers

Western missionaries work toward independence for church and project leaders. As opportunity and maturity increased, more nationals have been assigned leadership positions at L___. Through prayer, we expected the Holy Spirit to guide Christians' engagement with scripture and application to holistic ministry. But busyness has led to expatriates being involved more often in spontaneous or intermittent mentoring, essentially as a problem-solving mechanism. This leads to gaps in systematic development of spiritual knowledge, skills, and character as applied in a health and development project.

How mentoring will help: “grace environments”

In *Connecting*, Stanley and Clinton review factors which enhance Christians finishing well: a lifetime perspective, repeated renewals, spiritual disciplines, learning posture, and mentoring. (1991: Kindle loc 1617) I hope developing a mentoring culture at L___ will contribute to both expatriates and nationals finishing well. Developing deep relationships can foster grace environments, as will be needed in this culture where learning from experience, including mistakes, is not the common conceptualization of adult learning.

Women’s stories and struggles

L___ was originally established to reach a particular tribal group, so women from this tiny minority ethnic group have risen to positions of authority at L____. One of these Christian women in leadership was basically assigned, on the basis of her commitment to spiritual growth, to attend a training for initiating spiritual conversations and gospel discussions with Muslims. The training was intended to equip Christians to begin fostering home Bible study groups among Muslims, a strongly Spirit-led approach. However, she voiced a not uncommon, deep fear of Muslims during the training. To my disappointment (since I hoped to build missional vision for Muslim-majority outreach), she expressed her primary desire in terms of wanting to consolidate opportunities for her own growth, both personally and in advocating for her tribal community.

Khaleda, *⁵⁴Teacher at Mission School

Introduction.

Another woman who came only very recently into leadership at L_____ is a believer of Muslim background. She has struggled with suspicion from traditional Christian coworkers, where her Christian belief was only reluctantly acknowledged. She clearly feels mistrusted by other tribal (women) colleagues. She is from a more urban upbringing, with a breadth of experience, while the women at L_____ are more often rural.

A national of L___’s country, Khaleda grew up in Africa until her businessman father threw her, her mother, and sister out of their African home. All three women came to faith soon after returning to their home country. Though her father followed them back to their home country two years later, he is still violently opposed to their Christianity. She has had multiple strong Christian influences in her life, and has a soul deeply sensitive to where God is at work in people’s lives. Khaleda moved from the capitol city when God called her to spiritual warfare in the area where L___ is located. She teaches at the mission school here, but I didn’t really connect with her until about nine months ago. My (expatriate) prayer partner

*name changed

was leaving and told Khaleda and I we needed each other: both verbal processors in a group of mostly introverts. We meet most weeks for prayer and after we had been meeting together for some time, she asked me to mentor her.

Mentoring: A Range of Roles.

My time with Khaleda has been as a *coach*, helping her see parallels between her experiences and those of other expatriate missionaries. Her social contexts growing up were in an urban setting in Africa, so the culture of the rural nationals around L____ was startling to her. Like most expats, she can't easily read and write Bangla. I have been *teaching* her what I have learned of cross-cultural work and conflict resolution, which is relevant because as a (majority) Muslim-background person, the (persecuted minority) tribal fellow-teachers she works with have treated her with suspicion. I have also acted as a *sponsor*, talking about her unique perspective with our executive director, in order to highlight how she can contribute to identifying strongholds acting as barriers to change in the local church.

Mentoring Dynamics.

Initially our relationship was built around the dynamic of needing to talk through ideas. When we started praying together, I learned of her frustrations with life in a rural area. But I saw her as an answer to prayer, in our organizational desire to hire and encourage more believers of Muslim background. I was '*attracted*'⁵⁵ to her with a desire to encourage perseverance through the difficulties of cross-cultural adaptation. She in turn felt my interest in a deeper relationship through my probing questions into her relationships with her tribal colleagues. She wasn't sure she was going to be able to overcome their suspicions, and was consequently insecure in her leadership.

But she has been very *responsive*, in reading books and articles I have given her, and asking for books to read when I discuss learning from my Fuller classes (I am working toward a Master of Arts in Intercultural Studies). She now feels affirmed through our recent discussions to pursue a long-simmering goal of training in counseling and perhaps spiritual direction, as we mutually agree she has gifts of discernment and skills in reflection. Despite her rocky relationships with colleagues, she is solid in her calling to spiritual warfare, and wonders if breaking down the dividing wall between tribal traditional Christians and Muslims or believers of Muslim backgrounds might not be the key in that warfare.

⁵⁵ Described by Stanley and Clinton in *Connecting* as an affinity which brings a mentor and mentoree together.

Personal Takeaways.

Khaleda is the first person from this country with whom I have had an intentional mentoring relationship. She is learning with me the dynamics of attraction, responsiveness, and accountability. Meeting Khaleda affirmed that God will bring people into my life at his right time. This relationship came after a long-time lack of deep personal connection with nationals here, as well as not having a kindred spirit in a small community of foreigners. Just as I needed to learn more about being a mentor, along comes someone who asks me to be one. I want to be with her as we see how she uniquely fits into God's plan.

I believe areas of growth for women of these two very different backgrounds (tribal traditional Christian and Muslim) will require strong attention to biblical models of women outside of common roles, such as Deborah in Judges 4 and 5. Western women must acknowledge the even greater potential for insecurity among South Asian women. The risk of women trying to hide weakness (in an environment of usually male leadership) is reduced through identification with and affirmation of other women. Western and non-western women can benefit from informal but intentional lateral (peer) mentoring relationships for and with women, especially when there are few formal mentoring opportunities.

Slow, small, deep with a few

We can acknowledge that both Jesus and Paul most often worked with groups, not in what might be a sort of idealized one-on-one discipleship or mentoring relationship. However, I spent too many years setting up discipleship programs that seemed efficient for a large staff in a densely populated unreached country. My personal application of these principles is to facilitate L___ spiritual and leadership development focus around going small, slow, and deep with a few in a mentoring approach. Frank Hankins wrote of the need for "spiritual foundation mentoring", which he defined in terms of discipling (for basic spiritual disciplines) and spiritual direction (to deepen and widen the base for the more spiritually mature). These shape a leader's heart for a ministry that "flows out of being." (Hankins 2003: 194)

A heart is shaped through molding: this can come from close contact with a relationally safe mentor committed to building the next generation. Institutionalized training can be sterile, while exploring and reflecting on growth areas together with a mentor focuses on deeper needs and long term development. There are a number of scriptural models of long-term engagement where knowledge, skills, and character were developed in mentees: Barnabas with Paul and John Mark, Paul with Timothy and Silas; Elijah with Elisha; Moses with Joshua, just to name a few. Often long-term employment at L___ (or any institution) gives a context for formative relationships, adding mentoring accountability to that of organizational management, and to God for spiritual development. But given the cultural pitfalls noted above, where patronage and authority define expectations, get advice from experienced local workers on likely barriers to sharing at a deep level—or the

potential for disappointment when what you thought was a relationship built around mutual spiritual growth is then a platform for a request for preference. There might need to be some redefining of relationships to include more obligation that might be anticipated—again, to be worked out with help of experienced local cross-cultural workers.

Issues for women in leadership

I believe confidence is a huge struggle: in my experience, women tend to second-guess their own decisions. Not without exception, but in my professional life as a doctor, I have had women friends with whom I agonized over clinical decisions—while male colleagues were much less prone to this self-doubt. In Khaleda's case, her own self-doubt was magnified by the lack of trust afforded her across ethnic divides. I wonder how much of the fear of Muslims expressed by tribal Christians, and females in particular, is linked to their own self-doubt (inability to answer questions, inability to model a Christian life). A key question is how to nurture a woman's assurance of her place in God's kingdom and his plan to reach the nations—in a context where women are often offered only token leadership roles.

Discipling relationships can uncover commonalities among women and build trust, such as when one admits to self-doubt. This can help establish 'life-on-life' relational connections, a term coined by the discipleship-oriented parachurch group, the Navigators. Practical content can be framed around mentee self-disclosure, receiving a mentor's feedback, and then together reflecting on what has been shared. (Lewis, 2009: 183, 218) Underpinning everything, such discipleship must be built on a foundation of prayer, in grace environments such as that provided by Jesus when restoring Peter to ministry in the scene by the breakfast fire next to the Sea of Galilee in Jn 21.

Conclusion

L___ is in a new time of relying on the Spirit, discerning a way forward by listening. The group of medical missionaries there has been busy, but not necessarily as effective as we would have liked when it comes to the spiritual transformation of our South Asian colleagues, whether Christian, Muslim, or Hindu. With Khaleda, I am slowing down and going deep, with non-defensive, grace-filled humility allied with a confidence in the power of the Spirit.

I believe all the expatriates should be challenged as I have been by my need for mentors, in order to finish well. During a difficult few years for me personally, over the time when both my parents battled cancer, I have often neglected specific work tasks. This led to an overall sense of ineffectiveness, even shame over a lack of faithfulness. One scholar cautions workers to watch for 'emotional wounding' leading to burnout and not finishing well. (Quoted in Frank Hankins' thesis 2003: 198.) Grace environments help overcome those wounds. I have a sense of call to initiate an intentional mentoring program at L___ as a way to redeem the mistakes, and help both myself and others finish well.

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