

Laleh bakhtiar novel
translation of the
statement: will it be
accepted by
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Laleh Bakhtiar novel translation of the ment that deals with husband-wife relations: Will it be accepted by Muslim believers? Laleh Bakhtiar stirred controversy when she had a novel translation of the Quoranic verse daraba which is commonly interpreted as “ Men are the maintainers of women.... and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them” (Quoran, 4. 34). In reading the Arabic-English Lexicon by Edward William Lane, a 3, 064-page volume from the 19th century, she found that the definitions for “ daraba” was “ to go away” (Macfarquhar, 2007). She translated it as when the prophet had difficulty with his wives, he did not beat them as what the present interpretation of the verse daraba. She thinks that the present translation of daraba as “ beat” contradicts another verse “ which states that if a woman wants a divorce, she should not be mistreated” (Macfarquhar, 2007). Common sense dictates that no woman would want to stay in a marriage that keeps her beaten. It is just preposterous that a just God would sanction beating another human being as means of keeping a marriage.

The controversy and the opposition to Laleh Bakhtiar’s novel translation about husband-wife relations are no longer new. It happened in almost any society when the patriarchal status is challenged. It is expected that there will be rabid criticism against her translation because that would take away the license of Muslim men to beat their wives citing the Quran as a justification.

Laleh Bakhtiar is not alone in questioning the present interpretation of daraba in the Quran. Among early Christians, those who challenged the

interpretation of the church was either subjected to the Inquisition or burned at the stake. Daraba even has its equivalent in the Christian text of stoning an adulterer to death. Reinterpreting it used to be a source of controversy among Christians until eventually it was reevaluated and reinterpreted. Religious extremism such as the harsh interpretation of daraba as a license to beat a wife only prevails when the believers are uneducated that makes them susceptible to believe extremist interpretation of a religious text at its face value without questioning them. Conservatives in the mosques or churches will always protect the status quo by citing the literal interpretation of religious verses that favors them. It has already happen before in almost all faiths that underwent change and it will happen again among the Muslim believers.

Conservatives are slowly losing their influence as many Arab women take the Quran in a scholarly study. Already, many Muslim believers are already questioning the prevailing interpretation of the verse manifesting the discontent about the present interpretation of the text. Of course, the guardians of the status quo will reassert themselves because they are bound to lose a privilege with the new interpretation. But they can no longer stop the wave of change. As Sheik Gomaa of Egypt's grand mufti, Quoranic verses " must be viewed through the prism of the era. . . relevant to different cultures and in different times". Beating a wife at a time when the ethics of the modern age has a notion of human rights, will inevitably be replaced by an interpretation that is more acceptable with the times" (Macfarquhar, 2007). And that will tantamount to acceptance in Laleh Bakhtiar's novel translation of man and wife relationship.

References

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