Excerpts: Their Highnesses the Aga Khans III and IV on the Imam’s gender

Antonio Marujo / Faranaz Keshavjee: In Islam, as in Christianity, the role of the female has been debated. There are people who say that they would like to see your daughter, Princess Zahra, as the next Imam. However, tradition claims it has to be the eldest son...

Aga Khan: As far as I know, there is no Muslim community in history that has had a woman as Imam.

Antonio Marujo / Faranaz Keshavjee: In that case, we can never see a woman as Imam?

Aga Khan: Absolutely not. However, women in our society are capable of developing a leadership role. Zahra studied at Harvard, has worked in the sense of helping to create capacities in various parts of the world. She is the first woman in my family with a university education, and I would hope that the future generations will refer both to men and women. I do not want you to perceive that women are not valued. Women are very, very valued. If you look at the history of Islam, Khadija, the Prophet’s first wife, had an extremely important role, both in his spiritual life, as in his worldly life.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 2008 Paroquias de Portugal interview with Antonio Marujo and Faranaz Keshavjee (Lisbon, Portugal) [Translation] http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/8861/
**John Tidmarsh:** Ultimately, your turn will come to choose a successor, you have a daughter and two sons, could it be a daughter?

**Aga Khan:** You know traditionally, historically it’s been a man, the Imam keeps that choice to himself.

---

**Margot Dougherty / Richard B. Stolley:** You have two sons. One of them will succeed you, the other one will not. Yet, as a father, you obviously want to treat these two sons as equally as possible. What do you do?

**Aga Khan:** Well, during my lifetime, I will treat them absolutely identically. They must have the same education, some exposure, same understanding of their father’s work, I would not want to make any differentiation between them, any more than my grandfather made any differentiation between my brother and myself.

**Margot Dougherty / Richard B. Stolley:** And your daughter?

**Aga Khan:** Obviously, though my daughter cannot be Imam, there’s no reason that she should not be intimately involved with and contribute to Imamat programs, particularly women’s activities.

---

**Mansoor Ladha:** What was your reaction when you were told that Begum Salima had delivered a baby girl?
Aga Khan: You know, I have been brought up as a believing Muslim. And if that is the way you have been brought up and that is what you practise, you accept that there are certain things in life which are given to you by Allah; it is His decision and no one else’s. I wouldn’t want you to think however, that I am unaware of my hereditary responsibilities. I would be absolutely thrilled to have a son.

Mansoor Ladha: Is it possible for your daughter Princess Zahra to succeed you if you don’t have a male heir?

Aga Khan: No. It is not.

His Highness the Aga Khan’s 1970 Standard Tanzania Interview with Mansoor Ladha (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/1700/

"PARAGRAPH 8: APPOINTMENT OF SUCCESSOR"

"EVER since the time of my ancestor ALI, the first IMAM, that is to say over a period of thirteen hundred years, it has always been the tradition of our family that each Imam chooses his successor at his absolute and unfettered discretion from amongst any of his descendants whether they be sons or remoter issue ..."

Will of Sir Sultan Mahomed Shah, Aga Khan III, 1957
http://www.nanowisdoms.org/nwblog/10233/

"Succession to Imamat is by way of Nass, it being the absolute prerogative of the Imam of the time to appoint his successor from amongst any of his male descendants whether they be sons or remoter issue."

Preamble, Clause C
Ismaili Constitution, Ordained by His Highness the Aga Khan IV on 11 July

"Just as it was the prerogative of the Prophet to designate his successor, so it is the absolute prerogative of each Imam of the time to designate his successor from among his male progeny. Hence, according to Shia doctrine, the Imamat continues by heredity in the Prophet's progeny through Ali and Fatima."

Institute of Ismaili Studies
http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=110993

See also: His Highness the Aga Khan on his successor

Click here for this post in PDF format.