



Assessing the Impact of Islamic Teachings on the Rights and Welfare of Muslim Women: A Policy and Social Justice Perspective

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“The ignorance of the ordinary educated Westerner about Islam is almost total; but the area where the vacuum of knowledge has been most effectively filled with misinformation is possibly concerning the role of women in Islam” Aisha Lemu [Lemu & Heeren, 1976, p. 52].

ABSTRACT

Research Problem: The rights and responsibilities of women in Islam have often been misunderstood, particularly in the international context. Predominant narratives from Western societies frequently depict Muslim women as oppressed and lacking gender equality. This study investigates a fundamental question: has Islamic teaching contributed to the social welfare of Muslim women by granting them equitable rights and responsibilities?

Research Purposes: This research aims to evaluate how Islamic teachings have influenced the social and economic well-being of Muslim women, emphasizing their rights and responsibilities. It also explores the role of religion-based policies in promoting social justice for Muslim women.

Research Methods: An exploratory, inductive, and analytical approach was employed to examine Islamic teachings using primary sources, including the Qur'an and Sunnah, alongside case studies of policies and social practices affecting Muslim women's rights. A life-cycle approach was adopted to provide a holistic view of women's status at various stages of their lives.

Results and Discussion: Findings indicate that Islam has granted significant rights and freedoms to Muslim women, such as access to education, employment, and legal protection—rights they did not enjoy prior to the revelation of the Qur'an. However, the implementation of these rights in policy and practice continues to face challenges, including social stigma and varying interpretations of religious laws. Islamic principles emphasizing social justice have demonstrably contributed to the improved welfare of Muslim women in public policy contexts.

Research Implications and Contributions: This study contributes to academic discourse by exploring the intersection of religious teachings and social justice. It opens avenues for further research into how religion-based policies can be adapted to support women's rights. These findings are particularly relevant for policymakers, activists, and scholars working on gender equality and social justice in religious contexts.

Keywords: Islam, Muslim women, rights, social justice, public policy, welfare, religious teachings, gender equality, women's empowerment, religious freedom.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of women's rights and responsibilities has long been a contentious topic, particularly when situated within the broader framework of human rights. This discourse becomes even more pronounced when examined in the context of Islam, where misconceptions and stereotypes have been politicized to influence both social and political narratives, especially regarding Muslim communities. As noted by Khan (2004), these external misconceptions often

aim to create a climate of animosity, while internal distortions serve to control and subjugate Muslims, particularly women. Such politicization has contributed to the prevailing narrative that Islam oppresses women, a perspective often grounded in Western secular values that fail to account for the socio-religious contexts of Islamic teachings (Klaina, 2024).

This research seeks to explore whether Islam has contributed to improving the well-being of Muslim women by granting them equitable rights and responsibilities, or whether it has perpetuated inequalities. To address this, it is first essential to contextualize the status of women before the advent of Islam. During Al-Jahiliyah (the pre-Islamic period of ignorance), women were often regarded as burdens and symbols of dishonor. This dehumanizing view led to atrocities such as female infanticide, as described in the Qur'an: *"When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief"* (16:58). Women were frequently subjected to oppression, such as being forcibly married by male relatives after the death of their husbands or denied the right to remarry entirely (Al-Shahat, 2021). Additionally, women captured during wars were enslaved and exploited (Asma, 2022).

Islam's arrival brought a transformative shift in the status and rights of women. Al-Hatimy (1979) highlighted the human, religious, social, and political rights granted to women by Islamic Sharia, emphasizing that these reforms significantly improved women's roles in society. Contrary to the widespread misconception that Islam oppresses women, Syed (2008) asserted that Islamic teachings empower women to make autonomous decisions in diverse areas such as education, business, and property ownership. Similarly, Asma (2022) concluded that Islam placed women's empowerment at the core of its principles over 1,400 years ago.

The misrepresentation of Muslim women in Western discourse has been a recurring theme. Janson (2011) observed that the Western media often portrays Muslim women as passive, victimized, or solely defined by their veils. Nour (2021) similarly noted that visual representations of Muslim women in art and media frequently perpetuate unease, violence, or categorizations that fail to reflect the diversity of their lived experiences. This superficial portrayal often neglects the historical contributions of Muslim women, as evidenced by Houmine's (2024) findings, which detail their roles in fields such as governance, medicine, teaching, science, literature, and charity throughout history. These contributions challenge the notion that modern charters of women's rights introduced in the 20th century were necessary for their empowerment.

Abu-Lughod (2002) further questioned whether Muslim women truly need to be "saved" by external interventions, particularly in the context of American justifications for military action in Afghanistan. This critique underscores the importance of examining women's rights through a lens that respects Islamic perspectives and avoids imposing external frameworks.

This study aims to dispel misconceptions and prejudices surrounding Muslim women by exploring two central hypotheses: has Islam contributed to improving the well-being of women by granting them rights and duties, or has it not? To achieve this, the study relies on primary Islamic sources, including Al-Qur'an and As-Sunnah, as well as renowned classical references by Muslim jurists, historians, and exegetes. It also incorporates international literature on women's status in Islam and other contexts. The research adopts an exploratory, inductive, and analytical approach, distinguishing itself by employing a situation-based analysis of the life cycle of women. This method enables a holistic understanding of their status, moving beyond Western frameworks of women's rights to evaluate the contributions of Islam to their well-being. Comparisons are drawn with pre-Islamic conditions, Western societies, and other religions to provide a comprehensive perspective on this complex topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Before the advent of Islam, Arab society was steeped in practices and myths that often marginalized and oppressed women. One of the primary objectives of Islam was to reform these practices and elevate the status of women by granting them rights and responsibilities as equal partners in family and societal development. This reform aligned with the Islamic vision of creating a just and harmonious society.

Although men and women are biologically distinct, Islam emphasizes their complementary roles. As the Qur'an states: *"And the male isn't like the female"* (3:36). This biological distinction is reflected in certain responsibilities, such as childbirth, breastfeeding, and maternal care, which are exclusive to women. These roles are balanced by men's physical capabilities in tasks requiring greater strength. Beyond these distinctions, Islam establishes equality between men and women in matters of personal responsibility, education, employment, legal capacity, testimony, and participation in public life. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) emphasized this balance, cautioning a camel driver: *"Drive the camels slowly, as they are carrying glass vessels"* (Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2734; Muslim, 1991, p. 1811). This metaphor highlights the unique care and consideration due to women in various aspects of life.

From a scientific perspective, Carrel (1935) acknowledged these biological realities, stating that the physiological and neurological distinctions between men and women necessitate that they develop their aptitudes in alignment with their nature. He asserted: *"Women should develop their aptitudes in accordance with their own nature, without trying to imitate the males. Their part in the progress of civilization is higher than that of men"* (Carrel, 1935, p. 51). This view underscores the wisdom of Islam's approach to gender roles, which values and upholds the unique contributions of women. Supporting this, neurological research by scientists such as Nobel laureate Roger Wolcott Sperry, Richard Lynn, and Xin et al. (2019) confirms gender differences in cognitive functions, emotional control, and neurological disorders, further validating the complementarity outlined in Islamic teachings.

The Qur'an's emphasis on gender-specific qualities and rights is particularly evident in the rules governing testimony. The Qur'an states: *"And get two witnesses out of your own men and if there aren't two men (available), then a man and two women such as you agree for witnesses so that if one of them errs the other can remind her"* (2:282). This verse, often misinterpreted, reflects an acknowledgment of differences in cognitive and emotional responses, particularly in high-stress situations, rather than an indication of inferiority.

The privileged position of women in Islam is further demonstrated by the significant focus on their rights and responsibilities in both the Qur'an and Sunnah. Two surahs, *An-Nisa* and *At-Talaq*, are dedicated specifically to women, addressing numerous aspects of their lives, including inheritance, marriage, and divorce. Additionally, other surahs, such as *Al-Baqarab*, *An-Nur*, and *Al-Ahzab*, contain extensive guidance on their roles and rights. The Sunnah also complements these Qur'anic injunctions by addressing both private and social matters related to women (Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 594; Al-Albani, 2001, vol. 1, p. 575; vol. 6, p. 873).

Islam's concern for women extends to all stages of their lives, starting even before birth. Women are recognized as integral to societal development and prosperity. They play a crucial role in nurturing and educating future generations, managing households, and contributing to the moral and social fabric of their communities. As emphasized in Islamic teachings, their responsibilities are complementary to those of men, ensuring balance and harmony within the family and society.

By preparing women from an early age for these pivotal roles, Islam not only acknowledges their potential but also empowers them as agents of positive change. This approach underscores the Islamic view that women are not secondary to men but are essential and equal partners in the shared responsibility of building a just and prosperous society.

As a Foetus, Baby, and Youth Girl

Islam guarantees comprehensive rights to children, making no distinction between boys and girls at all stages of their lives. For girls, these rights begin even before their birth, emphasizing the father's responsibility in choosing a righteous spouse and ensuring legitimacy and life for the unborn child. Abortion, except under specific conditions where the mother's life is in danger, is prohibited (Houmine, 2023). Upon birth, girls are granted the same spiritual and legal recognition as boys, including a prayer of *janazah* and inheritance rights if they pass away.

Islam provides numerous rights to baby girls, such as being called to prayer (*adhan* and *iqama*), being given a good name, receiving safe breastfeeding, proper education, healthcare, and protection of their inheritance, particularly for orphaned girls. Some of these rights are notably absent from modern frameworks like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (Houmine, 2023). The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) emphasized the care and dignity of daughters, promising great rewards for those who raise them well (Muslim, 1991, p. 2027; Al-Albani, 2001, vol. 6, p. 897; vol. 7, p. 593, 627).

In stark contrast, during Al-Jahiliyah (pre-Islamic times), practices like female infanticide were rampant. Fathers would bury their newborn daughters alive, viewing them as burdens or sources of shame. The Qur'an categorically condemned this practice, declaring it a grave sin: "*When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with inward grief*" (16:58). Similarly, in other ancient societies, including Greece and China, girls were subjected to systemic discrimination. In Judaism, a father could sell his minor daughter, while in China, a baby girl's death was often met with indifference (Al-Hatimy, 1979). Islam transformed these norms, elevating the status of girls and ensuring their protection and dignity.

As an Orphan

Islam places great emphasis on the rights of orphans, particularly orphaned girls, as a vulnerable group deserving protection and care. The Qur'an repeatedly addresses their rights, emphasizing justice, generosity, and the inviolability of their property (Al-Qur'an, 2:83, 177, 215, 220; 4:2, 3, 7, 36, 127; 6:152; 17:34; 76:8; 89:17; 90:15; 93:6, 9; 107:2). These provisions ensure that orphaned girls are treated fairly in inheritance matters, receive charity (*zakat, sadaqah*), and are shielded from oppression.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW), himself an orphan, emphasized the importance of caring for orphans, advocating for their welfare and social inclusion. He advised that an orphan girl's consent is essential in marriage; silence indicates agreement, while refusal nullifies the arrangement (Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 1, p. 328).

Historically, the treatment of orphans in other cultures was often inadequate. In ancient Greece, orphaned girls struggled with the lack of dowries, which prevented many from marrying (Fitzgerald, 2016). Early Christianity acknowledged orphans as a vulnerable group, but institutional measures to assist them were limited and ineffective, often prioritizing only those orphaned during wars. In contrast, Islam established a robust framework to protect orphans, ensuring their rights and dignity as an integral part of society.

As a fiancée and spouse

A woman's right to be asked to marry (khutbah) is permitted in Islam [Al-Qur'an, 2:235; Al-Bukhari, 2016, pp. 2310, 2339]. But, the fiancé has no legal rights over his fiancée. He's like any other foreigner until he enters into a legal contract with her. Also, the khutbah is reversible for both parties at any time.

Apart from the need for parental consent [Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 2, p. 321], Muslim girls of marriageable age have the right to be consulted by their parents on the choice of their future husband [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2335-2336] and a woman can ask for marriage [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2326].

The girl or woman who should marry has the right to have a dowry (mahr) given by her husband and it becomes her exclusive property [Al-Qur'an, 4:4, 20]. The value of the dowry doesn't have a specific ceiling, but the minimum is an iron ring [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2342].

Marriage in Islam is a covenant of commitment and legal union between spouses, not just love and passion [Al-Qur'an, 4:21]. The wife has some rights over her husband [Al-Qur'an, 2:228; Al-Qur'an, 4:19]. That's included maintaining and housing her, being kind to her, treating her with kindness and tenderness, protecting and defending her, being patient with what she does, having good faith in her, not to harming her, and being fair between her and his other wives, if there are any. The Prophet (SAW) had given a woman who complained that her husband wasn't providing for her the right to take from his property what was sufficient for her and her children without her husband's permission [Muslim, 1991, p. 1338]. The Prophet (SAW) also urged the men to treat their wives well [Muslim, 1991, p. 1091; Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 636].

In Islam, a married woman keeps her maiden name, i.e. her family name. She doesn't change it for her husband's surname. The husband can also help his wife with the household chores [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2440].

In return, the wife should be righteous and fulfil the rights of her home, husband and children. She must try to be good companion and adviser to her husband in the affairs of this life and help him in these of the Hereafter [Muslim, 1991, p. 1090; Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 596].

In comparison, in Hittite society, many marriages seemed to be arranged and were probably the subject of commercial contracts between the families of the bride and groom. In the language of the Hittites there's no specific word for 'to marry'. The bride's father gave her a dowry equal to his share of the family fortune [Bryce, 2016]. In northern Syria and Mesopotamia in the 14th to 13th centuries, the father or a widowed mother would adopt a boy and give him one of his/her daughters in marriage when he grew up. The dowry was practically managed by the husband [Justel, 2016]. When a Chinese woman married, she became subject to the authority of her husband and his family. All her property, except her personal ornaments, went to her husband's family. In the Slavic tribes it wasn't against the law for a man to take the wife of another man. In Christianity, marriage was valid without the girl's consent and she became the man's property [Al-Hatimy, 1979].

Motahari (1982) also mentions that in Al-Jahiliyah, many forms of marriage were practised, such as marriage before the girl's birth and the exchange of daughters between fathers without a dowry. Similarly, Al-Shahat (2021) mentioned that the fathers or guardians of daughters used to take their dowry when they married them and didn't give them any of it. In the culture of India, it's the woman who gives the dowry to her husband.

As a pregnant woman

A pregnant woman has the right not to fast during Ramadan if she's afraid of health problems for herself and her foetus [Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 533; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 2, p. 125]. But she must give food to a poor person every day [Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 2, p. 164].

And for the pregnant woman whose husband dies, her term of iddah ends when she gives birth, even if it occurs a moment after her husband's death [Al-Qur'an, 65:4]. She can remarry, but she must wait until she's clean [Muslim, 1991, p. 1122].

If the irrevocably divorced woman is pregnant, her ex-husband will pay all her expenses to the extent that's normal until she gives birth. However, if she's divorced revocably, she's entitled to receive her alimony, whether or not she's pregnant [Al-Qur'an, 65:6].

Also, a woman who has to pay a hudud (punishment) while she's pregnant will not be punished until she gives birth [Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 898]. The Prophet (SAW) classified a pregnant woman who dies with a foetus in her womb or dies in childbirth as a martyr [Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 937; Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 2, p. 396; Al-Nasa'i, 2014, p. 760].

A pregnant woman's duties include taking care of her foetus in terms of food, clothing, housing, work, hygiene, psychological balance, etc.

According to Lee (2012), pregnant women were sometimes forbidden to visit Greek sanctuaries of deities associated with childbirth, the hill in Arcadia that was said to be the birthplace of Zeus. The pregnant woman's social role was erased as she found herself between two social categories, that of a daughter and that of a mother. Also, according to Beckman (2016), among the Hittites, a pregnant woman could be sequestered by her family after a certain period of time until the end of her pregnancy.

As a mother

Islam has honoured and demanded respect for parents, especially mothers [Al-Qur'an, 2:83; 4:36; 6:151; 17:23; 19: 30-32; 29:8; 31:14; 46:15; 71:28].

Also, a man asked the Prophet (SAW) four times to whom he should be kind and dutiful. He replied three times "your mother" and the fourth time "your father" [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2666].

The preference of the mother over the father has its justification, namely pregnancy, breastfeeding and upbringing. These are the duties of the mother as half of society. That's why Allah made the mother responsible for the education of her sons and daughters, she's a shepherd and responsible for her flock. Al-Qur'an has given examples of good mothers: those of Musa and Isa.

Also, according to As-Sunnah “*the woman is a guardian and is responsible for her husband's house and his offspring...*” [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2367].

In comparison, according to the iconography of the Minoan and Mycenaean societies, motherhood wasn't a relationship of great importance to them and they didn't allow any importance to the mother-child bond. The motherhood wasn't highly valued in the Bronze Age Aegean, at least not publicly [Budin, 2016].

As a breastfeeding woman

A breastfeeding woman has the right not to fast during Ramadan if she's anxious of health problems for herself and her baby [Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 533; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 2, p. 125]. But she must offer food to a poor person every day [Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 2, p. 164].

The father or his heir cannot forbid her to breastfeed him and entrust it to another woman in order to harm his mother. Her food and clothing must be paid for by the father or his heir on a reasonable basis. The decision to wean (fitam) the child is made by mutual agreement between the parents [Al-Qur'an, 2:233; 65:6].

Also, if a breastfeeding woman is praying with her baby in the congregation, the Imam will ease his prayers if he hears the baby crying so as not to make it difficult for her [Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 1, p. 494; Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 456]. Furthermore, if she has to pay hudud (punishment) she will not be punished until she weans him [Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 898].

One of the duties of breastfeeding women is to suckle their babies until they're two years old, if they so wish but they shouldn't refuse to do so in order to harm the fathers [Al-Qur'an, 2:233]. But if she declined to breastfeed the child, the father has the right to search another woman in order to give suck for him with monetary compensation [Al-Qur'an, 65:6]. She also needs to look after her diet, her health and her peace of mind, as this will have a positive or negative effect on her baby.

In ancient Greek, nursing mothers were forbidden to visit the sanctuaries of the gods, for example the mysteries of Despoina at Lykosura [Lee, 2012]. According to Budin (2016), Minoan women practised prolonged lactation for several years. This fact implies a high incidence of osteoporosis among them and they died at a young age. Fox (2016) has confirmed this observation. Indeed, some research suggests that in some places in ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt, infants were weaned between the ages of two and four. This indicates that the child's health was more important to them than the mother's.

As an autonomous financial and business woman

Islam grants Muslim women full financial independence, a progressive concept that contrasts sharply with the practices of many ancient and even modern societies. A Muslim woman owns her personal property and has the autonomy to manage her finances and businesses without interference from her family or husband. She has the right to buy, sell, invest, and lend assets, including land, property, and money, independently [Al-Bukhari, 2016, pp. 1040, 1223].

Islamic law further provides specific financial benefits to women. For instance, jewellery intended for personal use and adornment is exempt from zakat, even if it meets the minimum taxable amount (*nisab*). This exemption is supported by the majority of scholars from the Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali schools of thought [Malik, 1997, vol. 1, p. 341; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 2, p. 84]. However, working women, like men, are obligated to pay zakat and *sadakab*, and they must ensure their financial dealings remain compliant with Islamic principles. This includes avoiding usury, fraud, unfair competition, breach of contract, and other unethical practices.

When compared to ancient societies, the financial independence of Muslim women represents a significant advancement. Historical documents from ancient civilizations show that women participated in economic transactions, such as contracts of sale, but their involvement was often constrained by legal and societal norms. For instance, women were typically required to have a male guardian—whether a father, husband, son, or brother-in-law—oversee or accompany them in economic dealings (Cohen, 2016). In many cases, married women had no separate financial identity, as their property was legally merged with their husband's assets, forming an indivisible economic unit (McCarthy, 2016).

In ancient Rome, legal rules and social conventions further restricted women's access to political and economic opportunities. Becker (2016) noted that women were largely excluded from economic independence due to their reliance on social networks controlled by men. Similarly, Scandinavian

women, whether married or single, were treated as dependents under guardianship. In Judaism, all property owned by a married woman became her husband's possession. As Annie Besant (1932) pointed out, European women were only granted the legal right to own property in the early 20th century, whereas Islam had recognized this right more than 14 centuries ago (Asma, 2022).

Islam's recognition of women's financial autonomy highlights its progressive stance on gender equity and social justice. By granting women the right to independent ownership and financial decision-making, Islam provided a foundation for their empowerment and equal participation in economic life, well ahead of many other legal systems and cultures.

As an active member of society

In Islam, women have the right to participate in all social and economic activities. Muslim women were very active members of society. Historically, their participation in the building of Muslim civilisation is evident. They were distinguished in many fields such as government, fighting, medicine, science, education, authorship, construction, waqf, art and so on [Houmine, 2024].

Ahmed & al. (2021) also mention that Muslim women worked in agriculture (vegetables, dates, beetroot and livestock) at the dawn of Islam. They also worked in tailoring, handicrafts and embroidery, nursing and surgery, breastfeeding and perfumery.

Muslim women have the right to participate in political and administrative affairs. This was concretised in the allegiance (Al-bayâh) of the Prophet (SAW) [Al-Qur'an, 60:12; Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 959; Muslim, 1991, p. 1489; Al-Nasa'i, 2014, p. 963; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 3, p. 62].

Also, other political rights were attributed to them. They served as advisors to the Prophet, the Rashidun Caliphs and other Muslim rulers. The Prophet (SAW) consulted his wife Umm Salama (RA) on the day of Hudaibiya and he agreed with it her opinion [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 1292-1298]. Also, Umm Hani bint Abu Talib (RA), a cousin of the Prophet (SAW), gave a guarantee to a captive during the conquest of Mecca, and her guarantee was accepted by the Prophet (SAW) [Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 3, p. 54; Al-Bukhari, 2016, 306].

Similarly, the Prophet (SAW) preferred the opinion of women over that of their husbands [Al-Albani, 2001, vol. 7, p. 191-193]. He also approved a woman's suggestion that her slave, who worked as a carpenter, make a pulpit for the Prophet's mosque in Madinah [Al-Bukhari, 2016, 316].

Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA) consulted al-Shifaâ bint Abdullah al-Qurashiya (RA) on several issues [Al-Saeed, 1985, p. 80]. He also revoked his directive to restrict the value of the dowry in matrimony, subsequent to a remark made by a woman [Ibn Kathir, 2010, p. 455]. This means that Muslim women have the right to freedom of expression.

And when Umar (RA) was died the members of the Shura committee meet in Fatima Bint Qays's house, because they believed that it would be suitable to refer to her. The same thing happened during the election of Othman as caliph where many women were asked to give their opinion [Asma, 2022]. This means that Muslim women had the right to participate in the elections and to vote. Other many Muslim women assisted her husbands in governance and were their political, economic and social counsellors [Houmine, 2024].

The Prophet (SA) permitted the eating of the meat of a sheep slaughtered by a woman, without making any distinction between her and a man, unusually the slaughtering is done by men [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2498].

In matter of duties, the active Muslim women are exhorted to respect the precepts of Islamic law mentioned in the section above. Also, when she goes out to participate in the renaissance of society in the areas cited above, it's her duty not to wear make-up, to respect the hijab, to avoid adornment and perfume, not to mix with men in crowds and not do anything to undermine her honour and dignity.

By comparison, in the 4th century BC, women were excluded from the right to citizenship according to "Politics", the Aristotle's book [Asma, 2022]. Additionally, in the context of scribal culture, women were marginalised, which has resulted in their thoughts and worldviews being excluded from the historical record (Orriols-Llonch, 2016). Also, Roman Women had no right to be a member of civil society or public affairs [Al-Hatimy, 1979].

As a neighbour

Islam recommends treating neighbours well on several occasions, and considers it un-Islamic to cause discomfort and harm to a neighbour. A Muslim woman has the right to be treated well by her neighbours. This treatment takes many forms, such as providing material and moral support, sharing food, visiting her when she's ill, congratulating her when she is happy and consoling her when she's sad.

As for women, there are several prophetic sayings that urge women to respect their neighbours, to be kind to them and not to harm them in any way [Al-Albani, 2001, vol. 1, p. 369; Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 1214, 2551, 2684]. It's also her duty as a Muslim woman to treat her neighbours well, even they were Muslims or not.

In Athens, between the 5th century BC and the 3rd century AD, Kreuz (2023) observed that the neighbourhood was characterised by a culture of gossip, curiosity, conflict and disorder, as well as a tendency towards involvement in the lives of others.

As a woman justiciable

Before the justice, women enjoy the same rights and are subject to the same penalties as men (homicide, theft, fornication "zina", etc.) [Al-Qur'an, 2:178-179; 5:38; 24:2]. If a woman is accused of adultery by her husband without witnesses, both spouses will give the same sermon before the judge (Liâan) [Al-Qur'an, 24:8-6].

If a woman is falsely accused of fornication or adultery, public flogging is the prescribed punishment for the perpetrators [Al-Qur'an, 24:4]. However, if it's proven that a woman was forced to have sex with a man (rape), she won't be punished [Malik, 1997, vol. 2, p. 278, 390].

Also, the Muslim women have the right to be a witness even she was a slave. The prophet (SAW) ratified the oath of a black slave woman who testified that she had nursed a man and his wife, and therefore this marriage was obsolete [Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 2, p. 354; Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2320]. What is more, breastfeeding is proven and the judgements are based on the testimony of one woman. This proves that the rule of the testimony of two men or one man and two women isn't a general rule.

In terms of her duties, a woman litigant must refrain from perpetrating injustice, engaging in falsehood, providing false testimony, and so forth.

To provide a point of comparison, the laws of Oriental Antiquity evidenced the inferiority of women's condition in legal terms through the segregation of them. In the Assyrian legal system, the wife of a rapist was subject to the same fate, namely rape. Furthermore, the husband is never held culpable for marital infidelity (Lafont, 1999).

As a divorced woman

In addition to many verses in several surahs of Al-Qur'an, there is a surah entitled At-Talaq. In Islam, divorce is permitted, but it is seen as the last resort [Al-Qur'an, 4:19; Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 650].

The process of divorce is organised by some Qur'anic verses of surahs Al Baqarah, An-Nisa and At-Talaq. They explained the conditions and methods as well as the rights of divorced women. The married woman can demand a divorce from a judge if her husband is prejudiced against her. She can also practise another way (Khulâa) if she wants to separate from him amicably (mutual agreement) [Al-Qur'an, 2:229]. But before divorce, two mediators, one from each family, meet with the spouses and try to reconcile them [Al-Qur'an, 24:35]. A divorced woman has material rights against the husband who divorced her:

1. Mut'âah, which is a sum of money according to his ability, capacity and energy [Al-Quran, 2: 226, 241].
2. The delayed dowry, if her he didn't give her the full amount of the dowry at the time of the marriage contract.
3. Maintenance and housing during the iddah (waiting period) in the case of a retroactive divorce, as he can take her back at any time during this period. This action is also obligatory if she was pregnant, whether her divorce is retroactive or abortive, until she gives birth [Al-Quran, 65: 6].
4. The breastfeeding allowance if she suckles her child [Al-Quran, 65: 6].
5. The maintenance of her minor children who are in her custody until they reach the age of majority.

In Islam, custody of young child goes to the divorced mother, even if she isn't a Muslim. But if she remarries, custody can be given to another woman in the family, such as the girl's grandmother or aunt [Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 2, p. 150]. The divorcee can remarry after her iddah [Al-Qur'an, 24:32] and she's free to marry whomever she wishes [Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 2, p. 98].

Among the duties of a divorcee is that she must observe the iddah (waiting period) for three Quru (menstrual periods) after the divorce. Also, a pregnant woman going through a divorce shouldn't hide her pregnancy if it isn't obvious [Al-Qur'an, 2:228].

In contrast, in Al-Jahiliyah and at the beginning of Islam and before the revelation of the verse (2:229), the husband had the right to take back his divorced wife even if he had divorced her a hundred times, while she was still in her iddah. After the revelation of this verse, divorce became three times. The husband is allowed to take his wife back after the first and second divorces, as long as she's still in her iddah. But the divorce becomes irrevocable after the third divorce [Ibn Kathir, 2000, p.288].

Also, on the issue of custody, and according to Hittite law (Turkey), children were treated as a kind of property, and when a couple of equal social status divorced, the man left with most of the children [Beckman, 2016]. The same was practised in Roman society around 230 BC. Still in the same context, but this time at the iddah level, a woman divorces her first husband and marries her second husband. But at that moment she was pregnant from her first marriage. When the son was born, he was returned to his biological father. A divorce is a sign of women's inferiority and of a mother's social and legal vulnerability [Lovén, 2016]. In case of divorce and her parents weren't able to take her back, Chinese woman will go out on the streets. In Christianity, only the husband has the right to divorce [Al-Hatimy, 1979].

As a widow

In Islam, when a husband dies, part of his property goes to his widow depending on the case [Al-Qur'an, 4:12]. The Prophet (SAW) encourages Muslims to look after and work for a widow [Muslim, 1991, p. 2286; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 3, p. 229; Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2680].

Also, widows can remarry after her iddah [Al-Qur'an, 24:32] and she marry whomever she wishes [Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 2, p. 98].

In matters of duty, she must observe the iddah (waiting period) of four months and ten days before remarrying includes not using beautification aids [Al-Qur'an, 2:234]. This is always the case, even if the marriage hasn't been consummated, according to the consensus of the scholars [Ibn Kathir, 2000, p.298].

In comparison to what happened in Ancient Times, the testator could insert a clause stipulating that his wife (widowed) shouldn't marry outside her family or clan after his death. Also, the widow didn't inherit the property left by her husband's will. However, there were clauses in these wills that prohibited her husband's descendants from abandoning their mother [Justel, 2016]. Also, in the Hindu religion, the woman is burnt alive during the cremation of her husband. After the death of her husband, a Slavic woman was killed [Al-Hatimy, 1979; Al-Shahat, 2021]. In Al-Jahiliyah, the woman would mourn for a whole year and she would be subjected to some bad rituals [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2468].

As a menstruating woman

Islam has taken into account the situation of women during menstruation, when they feel weak, tired and in pain, and has prescribed a set of rules to indicate what is permissible and what is prohibited for them. Some obligations such as prayer and fasting are dispensed with, and sexual intercourse is forbidden [Al-Qur'an, 2:222]. However, after she has been purified, she must fast for the remaining days. But, she mustn't perform the prayers that she missed [Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 207; Muslim, 1991, p. 265; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 1, p. 356; Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 289].

They're also not allowed to touch Al-Qur'an or enter the mosque. But in the Haj (pilgrimage), the menstruating woman can do all rituals except Tawaf (circumnavigation of the Kaaba). She does this after purifying herself [Muslim, 1991, p. 869; Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 277].

In Islam, a woman's menstrual period doesn't disqualify her from daily activities. The Prophet (SAW) ate and drank with his wives and prays beside them while they were menstruating [Ibn Majah, 1952, 211; Al-Nasa'i, 2014, p. 139, 181; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 1, p. 358; Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 274, 378].

Of course, these rights of menstrual women are in the same time their duties which they must respect.

In contrast, some nations used to do until now, which considered menstruating women unclean, so they wouldn't eat with them from the same plate, wouldn't eat some foods and wouldn't approach other members of society [Syed Abdullah, 2022]. In Jewish law, menstruating women can't share objects with each other, such as beds, food or instruments, or sit on the same couch cushion [Radford, 2000; Webster, 2017].

It was only at the beginning of the 21st century that international organisations began to pay attention to menstruation, with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) identifying four reasons why menstruation is a human rights issue (UNFPA, 2019).

As a puerperant woman

The woman who has given birth doesn't pray for forty days, unless she's clean before [Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 213; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 1, p. 362]. Furthermore, she isn't required to perform the missed prayers after her purification [Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 1, p. 125]. She also doesn't fast during Ramadan for the same period, but she must perform the missed fasting days after her purification. In the Haj, she can do all rituals except Tawaf. After purifying herself, she does this [Muslim, 1991, p. 869]. And if she has to pay hudud (punishment), she's also entitled to a postponement of sentence's execution [Muslim, 1991, p. 1330].

Among responsibilities of a puerperal woman is to provide comprehensive care for herself and her infant, encompassing aspects such as nutrition, attire, accommodation, domestic tasks, sanitation, and emotional well-being.

In comparison, according to Collins (2016), Hittite women were considered inherently impure, given their association with childbirth and menstruation. The mother who gave birth and her child didn't return to the community until three months had passed for a boy and four months for a girl. Also in the Jewish religion, women are physically impure and must be kept apart for a period after giving birth which varies according to the sex of the baby. If she is a female, the period is double that of a male [Radford, 2000]. In Pharaonic Egypt, women were considered impure after childbirth. The puerperous woman, with her hair tied back, and the child remained in a confinement area near or on the roof of the house under the supervision of young domestics for 14 days until she was purified [Feucht, 2016].

As a believer and worshipper

On the spiritual level, Allah Almighty has mentioned the good qualities of the believers, both men and women [Al-Qur'an, 9:71]. And He created the jinn and mankind (both sexes) only to worship Him [Al-Qur'an, 56:51]. Both are required to perform the same religious duties and are held accountable for them without discrimination and are rewarded or punished in the same way. There is no differentiation between women and men with regard to their reward in accordance with each of the five pillars of Islam: belief (iman), prayer (salat), fasting (siyam), alms-giving (zakat) and pilgrimage (haj). Several other Qur'anic verses imply this equality in judgement and reward [Al-Qur'an, 3:195; 4:124; 16:97; 33:31, 35; 49:13; 74:38]. The only difference in the performance of the Hajj and Umrah rituals is the dress of the ihram and the shaving or shortening of the hair, which is obligatory for men. Women keep their normal clothes and only shorten the ends of their hair by a few millimetres [Al-Nasa'i, 2014, p. 1130; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 2, p. 229]. It's very interesting to note here that Islam has established this inequality to preserve their beauty.

On the return journey from Arafat to Muzdalifah, the companions' Prophet presented their women and children in front of them in order to throw the jamarat in Minan before most of the people arrived [Muslim, 1991, p. 938; Malik, 1997, vol. 1, p. 524]. This shows respect and kindness to them. Also, men and women do their ablution in the same vase without any distinction. The Prophet (SAW) performed his ablution with the remaining water from Aisha's ablution [Muslim, 1991, p. 255-257; Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 132-133; Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 1, p. 60; Al-Nasa'i, 2014, 139, 172; Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 1, p. 316].

Additionally, Umm Umarah Al-Ansariyyah and Umm Salamah (RA) said to the Prophet (SAW) why is it that we aren't mentioned in the Qur'an as men are [Al-Tirmidhi, 2014, vol. 4, pp. 218, 333].

Then the Qur'anic verses [3: 195; 4:32; 33:35] was revealed, indicating that both men and women are entitled to equal treatment in terms of divine and spiritual rehabilitation.

It's evident that a woman's right to worship is, in essence, God's right to be worshipped. This is manifested in the unification of Allah and the avoidance of the association of any other deity. It's also evidenced in the demonstration of fidelity to Allah, obedience to His commands and the refraining from His prohibitions. This is corroborated by the hadith of the Prophet (SAW), which elucidates the rights of Allah with regard to His servants and the rights of His servants with regard to Allah [Al-Bukhari, 2016, p. 2664].

Among her duties, woman is expected to adhere to the teachings of the Prophet (SAW), demonstrate love and obedience, emulate his actions, hold him in high regard, honour his memory, glorify him, promote his biography, and pray for him [Al-Qur'an, 3:31; 4:13,14,59,65; 7:158; 8:20; 9:24; 24:31; 24:63; 33:56; 48:9,13; 49:1; 57:28; 59:7; 64:8].

By comparison, in Judaism, public prayers were only valid if at least ten men were present. If there were only nine, the prayer wouldn't take place even if many women were present [Al-Hatimy, 1979]. The Talmud prescribes that woman, whether wife or mother, free her husband or son from mundane household chores so that he can be free to study Torah. In general, women didn't study it [Radford, 2000].

As a fortified woman

Allah Almighty forbids forcing the girls into prostitution [Al-Qur'an, 24:33]. This verse was revealed about some people who used to force their slaves into prostitution [Ibn Kathir, 2000, p. 1332]. However, this gives rise to a Muslim woman's right to fortification and chastity.

In return, a Muslim woman must preserve her dignity and honour. When she goes out of the house or in the presence of men other than her husband or close relatives, she should wear a dress that covers all parts of her body and her charms, leaving only her face and hands exposed [Al-Qur'an, 23:5; 24:31; Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 3, p. 64]. This will protect her from sexual harassment, rape, prostitution and other evils. She should also refrain from using her body and charms in advertising and publicity or in hot shots in cinema, television and social media.

In ancient Greece, women were considered minors and had to obey their fathers, husbands, sons and even uncles. The prostitution of women was widespread. The Slavic girl who preserved her honour (virginity) before marriage was devalued. It was assumed that nobody had wanted her before [Al-Hatimy, 1979]. In the western world, the chastity isn't a general rule. According to Motahari (1982), an article in the American magazine "Coronet" reveals that after a ship returned from a mission with a crew of 40 women and 480 men, it was discovered that the majority of the women had had sexual relations with more than one man.

As an heiress

Because of the importance and seriousness of the inheritance, the Holy Qur'an has detailed its provisions, unlike those for prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, etc. Allah Almighty has laid down its provisions, which shows that they are permanent, binding for everyone and suitable for every place and time. To emphasise this, all the verses on inheritance are coupled with His knowledge in the interest and benefit of people: "*Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise*", "*And Allah is All-Knowing, Most Forbearing, God is all-knowing*", "*And Allah has perfect knowledge of all things*". These verses are followed by others which promise and threaten those who violate them [Al-Qur'an, 4:11,12,13,14,176].

A Muslim woman has the right to inherit. A daughter has a half of what a son inherits. At first glance, it might seem that a Muslim man inherits more than a Muslim woman. But the reality is different.

Firstly, this is because Islam places the responsibility of caring for women in society on the man. He's responsible for his wife, his daughter or daughters, his mother, and all his female relatives such as grandmothers, aunts and cousins who don't have a breadwinner. This responsibility justifies the imputation of a double share to the man. Allah Almighty has referred to this [Al-Qur'an, 4:34]. In contrary, a daughter inherits should remain her personal property and she shouldn't be obliged to spend it on anyone, even if her husband is poor, unless she voluntarily gives it out of charity. She will receive her dowry and her husband will provide for her.

Secondly, the rule that women inherit half of what a man inherits doesn't generally apply in all circumstances. In only five cases, a woman entitled to receive half of the inheritance. In five cases, women receive the same share as men. In ten cases, women receive a larger share than men. In seven cases, men don't receive any inheritance at all [Al-Barakati, 2008].

Thirdly, Islam is first and foremost a set of great moral principles that always call for good deeds of social order, charity, family support and guardianship. For example, Al-Qur'an calls for non-heirs of relatives, orphans and the poor to be given a share of the inheritance if they're present when it's divided [Al-Qur'an, 4:8].

Fourthly, Al-Qur'an speaks about orphans and warns against wasting their money, just before it deals in detail with the verses on inheritance, which is further evidence of Islam's keenness to protect the rights of vulnerable and fragile groups, including orphaned girls [Al-Qur'an, 4:9,10].

Inheritors are responsible for a number of duties, including: settling the deceased's funeral expenses from the estate, reimbursing any outstanding personal debts or loans owed by him, honouring any his unpaid Islamic obligations (such as fidyah, nothour or zakat), and disbursing the designated portion of the wasiyyah, if any, as specified by the deceased prior to his demise. They are obliged too to divide the remainder of the deceased's estate in accordance with the Qur'anic rules.

In comparison to the Ancient Times, it was usually the father of a family - and much less often the mother - who determined how property was passed on to the sons. Also, while sons received their inheritance on the death of their father, daughters only received their inheritance in certain cases, such as the absence male descendants or granting of male legal status to a female. But, this phenomenon is limited to inheritance. However, they were content to receive their dowry from their father during his life when they married. It was generally less than the inheritance received by their brothers [Justel, 2016]. In Judaism, if the woman has one or more brothers, she will not inherit. In India, women didn't have the right to inherit [Al-Hatimy, 1979].

In biblical law, when a father died, his property went to his sons. If not, it went to his daughters. If not, it went to the deceased's brothers, and if not, to his uncles. Other women, such as the wife, the mother's family, female relatives of the deceased and even his male ancestors were excluded. Furthermore, until the end of the sixteenth century, women in the Western world were entirely disenfranchised with regard to the right to inherit property [Radford, 2000].

As an old woman

Older women are accorded a high status in Islam because of their general frailty and physiological changes (Al-Qur'an, 30:54, 22:5).

Furthermore, a multitude of hadiths advocate for the respect, honour, observance of rights, fair treatment, courtship, polite speech, precedence in entering, leaving, sitting, eating and drinking, and protection from harm of this category [Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 3, p. 291]. These rights are enjoyed by them regardless of their familial or geographical proximity, as well as their religious affiliation, whether Muslim or not.

Elderly women have the right to discard their outer clothing (cloak) in such a way as not to show their adornment. This implies that they aren't required to cover themselves in the same manner as other women [Al-Qur'an, 24:60; Ibn Kathir, 2000, p. 1345]. She also has the right to not fast during Ramadan if she's afraid of having health problems. But she must give food to a poor person every day [Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 2, p. 164].

Among the obligations of an elderly woman is to augment her virtuous actions in accordance with the Prophet's teaching [Al-Tarmidhi, 2014, vol. 3, p. 414].

By comparison, poor elderly women in Ancient Rome who had no male relatives to support them were left to fend for themselves. These women were prone to abandonment and drunkenness [Hemelrijk, 2016].

As a died woman

When a Muslim dies, whether a man or a woman, they've the same rights and respect. The deceased woman is entitled to the same funeral rites such as ablution and a kafn (shroud) effectuated by women, a janazah prayer in the mosque or Muslim cemetery and burial in the latter accomplished by men, side by side with the deceased men and children. She will receive the same mercy and supplication

as a man, and her family will receive the same condolences. Also, she is treated in the same way, even if she died while menstruating or giving birth [Al-Nasa'i, 2014, p. 204; Al Bukhari, 2016, p. 290]. And if there are two deceased persons, a man and a woman, during the prayer, the woman's janazah must be placed first and then the man's behind her [Abu Dawud, 1996, vol. 2, p. 416; Al-Nasa'i, 2014, p. 204].

The heirs will then repay her debts from his estate and fulfil her will (wassiyah, waqf, etc.) before inheriting the rest of the estate.

The respect for the deceased woman is a general one without distinction of her religion. The mother of Al-Harith ibn Abdullah ibn Abi Rabia Al-Makhzoomi Al-Qurashi - a Christian - died after 69 AH/690 AD and the companions' Prophet attended her funeral [Al Bukhari, 1998, vol. 1, p. 344].

In accordance with Roman custom, the deceased woman was subjected to a series of rituals. It was customary to place food, drink or coin in her mouth. It was a compensation provided to the ferryman for facilitating the transition of the soul into the afterlife. Afterwards, her family mourns her until she was buried or cremated. Women washed and anointed the deceased even man or woman [Mogen, 2011]. In Islam, the practice of ablution is performed by men on men and by women on women.

Discussion

Islam's Historical Precedence on Gender Equity

During the Christian era, between the fifth and seventh centuries, debates regarding the fundamental nature of women dominated discussions in religious and social settings. Conferences were held to address critical questions, such as whether women possessed a soul, had the right to worship God, or could enter paradise. This historical backdrop highlights a period of significant uncertainty and inequality for women in many societies. In stark contrast, Islam, from its inception in the 7th century, unequivocally affirmed the humanity, dignity, and rights of women, granting them a comprehensive framework of rights and duties [Al-Hatimy, 1979]. These Islamic teachings revolutionized the position of women at a time when their status was highly contested and often diminished.

Islam's emphasis on gender equity is deeply rooted in its primary sources, the Qur'an and Sunnah. Both establish men and women as spiritual equals before God, with equal potential for salvation and accountability. The Qur'an explicitly states, *"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so – for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward"* (33:35). This verse underscores the spiritual parity of men and women, a principle introduced centuries before modern human rights frameworks acknowledged gender equality.

The historical precedence of Islam in championing the rights of women becomes even more evident when compared to key milestones in the evolution of human rights. Documents such as the American Declaration of Independence (1776), the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) are often celebrated as milestones in human rights advocacy. However, the principles of equality and justice articulated in these documents were introduced by Islam more than 14 centuries ago [Al-Hatimy, 1979]. For example, the Qur'an not only acknowledged women's right to inherit and own property (4:7) but also protected their financial independence, rights that were denied to women in many societies until the 19th and 20th centuries.

Furthermore, Islam's teachings on gender equity extended beyond rights to responsibilities, promoting a balanced and harmonious societal structure. While men and women were recognized as distinct in their biological and physiological roles, these differences were framed as complementary rather than hierarchical. The Sunnah illustrates this balance, with the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and kindness in marital relationships. He is reported to have said, *"The best of you are those who are best to their wives"* (Al-Tirmidhi, 2014). This statement highlights not only the ethical treatment of women but also the recognition of their intrinsic value in family and community life.

The early establishment of gender equity within Islamic teachings represents a transformative moment in history. At a time when women's rights were debated, ignored, or denied in other societies, Islam provided a framework that acknowledged their humanity, independence, and role as equal contributors to society. This historical precedence underscores the progressive nature of Islamic

teachings, challenging the notion that gender equity is a modern innovation. Instead, it affirms that Islam laid the foundation for a just and equitable society long before these principles gained global recognition.

Islamic Principles Versus Western Feminist Movements

The adoption of ideas from Western feminist movements and international organizations by some Muslim women has raised significant questions among scholars. Hussein (2019) argues that Islam already provides a comprehensive framework for women's rights that addresses their needs in various aspects of life, including education, financial independence, social participation, and personal autonomy [Al-Shahri, 2022]. This Islamic framework is not only rooted in divine principles but also accommodates the distinct roles and responsibilities of women within the family and society. It offers a balanced approach that recognizes both individual rights and collective responsibilities, providing solutions that are holistic and timeless. The Qur'an and Sunnah lay out these rights clearly, ensuring that women are treated with dignity and respect.

Despite this robust framework, the influence of Western feminist movements on Muslim women can be attributed to several factors, including globalization, exposure to alternative ideologies, and the misrepresentation of Islam in contemporary contexts. Western feminism, which emerged in response to the historical subjugation of women in Europe and America, often emphasizes individualism and secularism, framing gender equality primarily in terms of autonomy from traditional structures. While some of these ideas resonate with modern aspirations for equality, they often fail to account for the spiritual and moral dimensions of human rights. As a result, scholars like Rehan (2013) argue that Islamic teachings offer a more integrated approach, recognizing the inherent dignity of both men and women as derived from divine inspiration.

Moreover, the challenges faced by Western societies, such as moral decay, family disintegration, and gender inequity, underscore the limitations of secular feminist ideologies. The Qur'an provides solutions to these issues by emphasizing moral responsibility, family cohesion, and mutual respect between genders [Al-Qur'an, 21:107; 25:1; 38:87; 68:52; 81:27]. For example, while Western feminist movements often advocate for absolute autonomy, Islam emphasizes interdependence between genders, ensuring that rights are balanced with duties. This principle fosters family stability and societal harmony, addressing the root causes of many social problems prevalent in modern Western societies.

The divergence between Islamic principles and Western feminist ideologies becomes even more apparent when examining their respective approaches to family and community roles. Western feminism frequently advocates for the minimization of traditional family roles to achieve gender equality, often at the expense of family cohesion. In contrast, Islam recognizes the vital role of women in nurturing families while simultaneously encouraging their active participation in public life. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) himself exemplified this balance, supporting the roles of women as mothers, educators, and contributors to societal development while upholding their rights to education, work, and financial independence.

While Western feminist movements have undoubtedly contributed to advancing women's rights in specific contexts, Islamic teachings offer a more holistic and spiritually grounded approach. They address not only the material and social dimensions of equality but also the moral and spiritual aspects that are often neglected in secular ideologies. This study posits that the Western world, struggling with persistent social challenges, could benefit from adopting principles derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah to foster a more balanced and equitable society. By returning to the comprehensive framework provided by Islam, Muslim women can find empowerment that aligns with their spiritual and societal values, while also addressing modern aspirations for equality and justice.

Women's Roles and Responsibilities in Islam

Islam's approach to the elevation of women's status is multifaceted, encompassing not only the granting of rights but also the assignment of responsibilities that enable women to contribute meaningfully to society. Women are recognized as essential members of the community, with roles that span from daughters, fiancées, and wives to mothers, widows, and even leaders. These roles come with both rights and duties, tailored to their individual and societal responsibilities. Islam ensures that women are granted spiritual, political, educational, legal, social, and economic rights, empowering them to achieve well-being and societal impact. This balanced framework recognizes the unique contributions of

women while affirming their equality with men in areas such as accountability before God, access to education, and participation in public life.

The Qur'an and Sunnah provide numerous examples of the rights and duties granted to women. Spiritually, women are equal to men in their ability to attain God's favor and reward, as stated in the Qur'an: *"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do"* (16:97). Socially, women are entrusted with the upbringing of future generations, a role recognized as foundational to the stability and progress of society. Politically, Islamic history includes examples of women leaders and advisors, such as Queen Balqis in the Qur'an (27:23-44), illustrating the breadth of their potential roles in governance and decision-making.

However, the occasional lapses in the application of Islamic principles in contemporary Muslim societies often obscure this ideal framework. One primary cause is the misinterpretation of Islamic teachings, which arises from differing methods of interpreting the Qur'an and Sunnah. These discrepancies can lead to the implementation of practices that deviate from the principles of justice and gender equity emphasized in Islamic teachings. For example, cultural biases or patriarchal interpretations may be used to justify restrictions on women's rights, even when such practices have no basis in the Qur'an or Sunnah.

Another significant factor contributing to these lapses is the influence of cultural customs, socio-economic conditions, and political considerations. In many cases, deeply ingrained traditions that predate Islam continue to shape societal attitudes, often at the expense of women's rights. Poverty and illiteracy, especially among women, further exacerbate the problem by limiting access to education and perpetuating misconceptions about Islamic teachings. These socio-economic realities create environments where oppressive practices are normalized, despite their inconsistency with Islamic principles.

Islam's holistic approach to women's roles and responsibilities ensures their empowerment and well-being. While the principles of gender equity in Islam are clear and comprehensive, their application in contemporary Muslim societies is sometimes hindered by misinterpretation and cultural influences. Addressing these challenges requires a return to the original sources of Islamic teachings and a concerted effort to promote education and awareness. By adhering to the Qur'an and Sunnah, Muslim societies can fully realize the potential of women as equal and vital contributors to societal progress.

Addressing Misconceptions About Women in Islam

Islam's teachings regarding women have often been misunderstood, leading to misconceptions that portray Islamic principles as oppressive or degrading to women. These misunderstandings frequently arise from selective interpretations of Islamic texts or a conflation of cultural practices with religious principles. To counter these claims, Fatima Heeren, a prominent intellectual Muslim woman, provides a compelling perspective: *"This one sentence includes all that is necessary for my happiness as a woman. It grants me all rights for which I aspire—the right for education, for my own property, for being the guardian inside the house, and even for a job if circumstances demand it, to name only a few aspects. But most important of all, it grants me the right to depend on my husband, be it in matters of my livelihood or in regard to any important decisions that have to be taken for the benefit of the family"* [Lemu & Heeren, 1976, p. 43]. This statement encapsulates the essence of women's rights in Islam: a balance between autonomy and interdependence, allowing women to thrive in their roles as individuals, family members, and contributors to society.

Islam's comprehensive framework for women's rights addresses their needs across various dimensions of life. Women are granted the right to education, financial independence, and property ownership, ensuring their personal development and security. Additionally, Islam provides a framework for familial interdependence, emphasizing collaboration between spouses to maintain family harmony. As highlighted in Heeren's statement, this interdependence is not about subjugation but about shared responsibilities and mutual support. For instance, while women are encouraged to depend on their husbands for certain aspects of family life, this dependence is balanced by their rights to make decisions, manage property, and seek employment when necessary. This holistic approach enables women to fulfill both their personal aspirations and their roles within the family structure.

The misconceptions about women's rights in Islam often stem from the failure to distinguish between Islamic teachings and cultural practices. In many societies, patriarchal norms and traditions have

overshadowed the egalitarian principles embedded in Islamic teachings. For example, cultural practices may impose restrictions on women's education or mobility, even though the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) emphasized the importance of education for both men and women. The Prophet famously stated, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" (Ibn Majah, 1952, p. 224). Addressing these misconceptions requires a return to the Qur'an and Sunnah, which provide clear guidance on the dignity, rights, and roles of women.

Furthermore, the portrayal of Muslim women as oppressed in international discourse often ignores the empowerment provided by Islamic teachings. While Western narratives frequently frame gender equality as a product of secular feminism, they overlook the advancements in women's rights introduced by Islam over 14 centuries ago. These include the rights to inheritance, financial independence, and participation in public life, which were revolutionary at the time. Comparing these principles to the relatively recent recognition of women's rights in Western societies underscores the progressive nature of Islamic teachings. Rehan (2013) noted that the dignity and fundamental freedom of men and women in Islam derive from divine inspiration, offering a spiritually grounded alternative to secular human rights frameworks.

Misconceptions about women in Islam often arise from a lack of understanding of its teachings or the conflation of religion with culture. By providing a balanced framework that combines personal autonomy with familial interdependence, Islam offers women a dignified and empowered role in society. As Fatima Heeren's testimony illustrates, the rights granted to women in Islam are not only sufficient but also comprehensive, addressing their aspirations while ensuring societal harmony. To fully dispel these misconceptions, it is essential to distinguish Islamic principles from cultural distortions and promote a deeper understanding of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Through this approach, the true progressive and equitable nature of Islam's teachings on women can be appreciated.

CONCLUSION

Islam was the first religion to emancipate women and grant them rights equal to those of men, ensuring their dignity, respect, and equality. At a time when women were deprived of fundamental rights in many parts of the world, Islam provided a framework that recognized their intrinsic value and granted them the same rights and responsibilities as men, while also acknowledging their unique roles within society. However, the influence of socio-cultural practices in many Muslim communities has led to a departure from these principles, resulting in the partial or incorrect application of Islamic teachings. This highlights the need for a return to the authentic values of Islam to ensure women's rights are fully realized.

Despite misconceptions and misleading narratives, Islam continues to offer a comprehensive framework for addressing modern challenges related to gender equity and societal harmony. To fully realize these values, Muslim scholars and communities must revisit Islamic principles and engage with its teachings to uncover solutions for contemporary issues. This study serves as a starting point for further exploration and discussion, encouraging a deeper understanding of the real status of women in Islam and the timeless relevance of its teachings.

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