
Rights of Women in Islam

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Abstract

The topic of women's rights in Islam has often been discussed, misunderstood, and sometimes misrepresented both within and outside the Muslim world. This study explores the rights granted to women in Islam from historical, religious, social, and legal perspectives. It analyzes Quranic verses, Hadith literature, and scholarly interpretations that establish equality, dignity, and justice for women. The research also evaluates how these rights have been applied or ignored in contemporary Muslim societies. The study uses a qualitative descriptive methodology, drawing from primary Islamic sources and secondary academic literature. Findings reveal that Islam, contrary to common misconceptions, granted unprecedented rights to women in the 7th century—rights to education, property, marriage, inheritance, and social participation. However, socio-cultural practices and patriarchal traditions have often overshadowed these principles. The paper concludes that a return to authentic Islamic teachings and greater awareness are essential for empowering Muslim women in modern times.

Keywords: Women's Rights in Islam, Gender Equality, Qur'an and Hadith, Islamic Law, Social Justice, Women's Empowerment, Islamic Teachings

Introduction

The issue of women's rights has long been a focal point in global discussions about justice, equality, and human development. Within the Islamic framework, women's rights are rooted in divine revelation rather than social evolution. Islam, revealed in the 7th century, revolutionized the status of women in Arabian society by introducing laws that guaranteed their spiritual, social, economic, and political rights. Before Islam, women were largely deprived of inheritance, education, and

independence. However, through the Qur'an and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Islam established a balanced system of rights and responsibilities for both genders.

Despite these foundational principles, the status of women in Muslim societies today varies widely, often shaped by local traditions, cultural interpretations, and political factors rather than authentic Islamic teachings. This study aims to revisit the original Islamic sources to highlight the rights of women as envisioned in Islam and assess how they align or conflict with current realities.

Literature Review

The scholarly discourse surrounding women's rights in Islam is diverse and complex. Various researchers, theologians, and feminists have analyzed the topic from historical, theological, and sociological perspectives.

Historical Context:

Before the advent of Islam, Arab women were often treated as property. They had no inheritance rights, and female infanticide was common. Leila Ahmed (1992) in *Women and Gender in Islam* notes that Islam introduced revolutionary reforms in Arabia, granting women unprecedented legal and moral recognition. Fatima Mernissi (1991) also argued that Islam's message was inherently liberating for women but was later constrained by patriarchal cultural influences.

The Quranic Perspective:

The Qur'an, Islam's primary source, clearly establishes the equality of men and women before God:

***“Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you”
(Qur'an 49:13).***

The Qur'an grants women the right to inheritance (4:7–11), property ownership (4:32), education (96:1–5), and marriage with free consent (4:19). Scholars like Dr. Jamal Badawi (1995) have emphasized that these rights were centuries ahead of similar legal recognition in the West.

The Hadith and Prophetic Tradition:

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) upheld women's dignity through his teachings and actions. He said:

“The best of you are those who are best to their wives.” (Tirmidhi)

Prophet Muhammad encouraged women's education, economic participation, and social involvement. Women like Khadijah (RA), Aisha (RA), and Fatimah (RA) played influential roles in early Islamic society, setting precedents for active female engagement in both private and public life.

4. Social and Economic Rights:

Islam granted women the right to earn and control their income independently. A woman's property cannot be seized by her husband or family. According to Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1996), women's economic independence was protected by Sharia centuries before the West recognized women's right to own property.

5. Political and Legal Rights:

Recent research shows a growing movement among Muslim scholars and activists advocating for gender justice within an Islamic framework. Works like *Qur'an and Woman* by Amina Wadud (1999) reinterpret sacred texts to affirm the spiritual and moral equality of both genders.

Overall, the literature establishes that Islam provided a comprehensive framework for women's rights but that implementation has often been hindered by cultural and institutional factors.

Research Questions / Objectives:

This study seeks to explore the following key questions and objectives:

- 1. What fundamental rights does Islam grant to women according to the Qur'an and Hadith?*
- 2. How do Islamic teachings on women's rights compare with pre-Islamic and modern Western perspectives?*
- 3. What are the social, economic, and political implications of women's rights in Islam?*
- 4. To what extent have Muslim societies implemented or neglected these rights?*

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5. *How do cultural and patriarchal practices distort the true image of women's rights in Islam?*
 6. *What reforms or educational measures can enhance awareness of women's rights within the Islamic framework?*
 7. *How can the authentic message of Islam contribute to global gender equality discussions?*

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and analytical methodology.

Primary Sources: The Qur'an, Hadith collections (Sahih Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi), and classical Islamic jurisprudence texts.

Secondary Sources: Academic books, journal articles, reports, and reputable online resources discussing Islamic feminism, theology, and human rights.

Approach: The research focuses on textual interpretation, comparative analysis, and thematic categorization to understand women's rights within Islamic doctrine and practice.

Scope: The study is limited to religious, legal, and socio-cultural aspects of women's rights and does not cover specific legal systems of all Muslim-majority countries.

Discussion:

The analysis of Islamic texts reveals that Islam established a moral and legal framework ensuring women's dignity, autonomy, and justice. In spiritual terms, men and women are equally accountable before God. In economic life, women have independent ownership and earning rights. In family matters, Islam grants women the right to choose their spouse, seek divorce under certain conditions, and receive financial maintenance.

However, in practice, many Muslim societies have failed to uphold these principles due to patriarchal traditions, colonial legacies, and misinterpretation of religious texts. Practices such as forced marriages, denial of inheritance, and gender-based violence are cultural deviations rather than Islamic injunctions. The Prophet's teachings emphasize mutual respect, kindness, and justice—values often neglected in male-dominated interpretations.

The modern feminist movement has revived interest in Islamic gender discourse. Muslim scholars now stress the need for ijihad (independent reasoning) to reinterpret classical texts in light of contemporary realities. Education is seen as a key instrument for restoring women's rights and empowering them to participate in public life, leadership, and decision-making.

Results:

The study found that:

- Islam granted women equal spiritual and human value long before modern legal systems.
- Many contemporary Muslim communities fail to reflect the true Islamic principles regarding women's rights.
- Misinterpretation of Sharia and patriarchal dominance contribute significantly to women's marginalization.
- Awareness campaigns, religious education, and scholarly reform are essential to restore women's Islamic rights.
- There is strong compatibility between authentic Islamic teachings and modern gender equality frameworks when properly understood.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Islam is not an obstacle to women's empowerment but a foundation for it. The religion, in its authentic form, provides women with dignity, security, and equal spiritual status. The challenge lies in distinguishing cultural distortions from divine injunctions. To improve the situation of women in Muslim societies, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Educational Reforms:** Include accurate teachings on women's rights in Islamic education curricula.
- 2. Scholarly Dialogue:** Encourage reinterpretation (ijihad) by qualified scholars, including women.
- 3. Public Awareness:** Promote campaigns highlighting Quranic verses and Hadiths on women's dignity.
- 4. Legal Enforcement:** Strengthen the implementation of Sharia-based laws protecting women's inheritance, marriage, and property rights.
- 5. Social Change:** Engage community leaders and families to challenge cultural practices that contradict Islamic values.

Restoring women's rights in Islam requires collective effort—through education, justice, and returning to the authentic message of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

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