

Women's Rights in Islam: Historical Evolution from Pre-Islamic Arabia to Modern Times

Araj Sekh ^a

^a Department of Civilizational Studies, Darul Huda Islamic University, Kerala - India

Keywords: Women's Rights in Islam, Gender Equality, Feminism, Islamic History, Muslim Women Scholars

Article Information			
Received	5 th Jan 2026	Accepted	10 th Mar 2026
Published	30 th Mar 2026		

Abstract

Women's rights in Islam are often debated and frequently misunderstood due to cultural practices and selective interpretations. This paper examines the historical evolution of women's rights in Islam from pre-Islamic Arabia to modern times. It aims to show how Islamic teachings brought significant reforms in the social, legal, and moral status of women. Before Islam, women faced severe discrimination, denial of inheritance, and lack of personal choice. Islam addressed these injustices by granting women rights to inheritance, consent in marriage, education, religious responsibility, and participation in social life. The study also highlights the important contributions of Muslim women scholars, jurists, and educators during the prophetic and medieval periods. In addition, the paper briefly discusses Muslim feminism and contrasts it with Western feminist thought to clarify key ideological differences. Based on Qur'anic teachings, Hadith, and historical evidence, the paper argues that Islam fundamentally supports dignity, justice, and equity for women. The study concludes that many contemporary challenges faced by Muslim women arise from cultural misuse of religion rather than Islamic principles themselves. Understanding Islam through authentic sources is essential for an accurate view of women's rights.

Introduction

It is questioned from Muslim and non-Muslim about women's rights in Islam. Moreover, there are different types of debates and discussions brought about in the modern era. It is also to know that some misinterpretations and misconceptions have been presented throughout the world. Therefore, I want to shed light on this topic that is crucial and necessary to everyone. Whenever we get the whole concept of Islam which provides different sorts of fundamental principles and advocates for women's rights, equality and equity. An illustration that there are various things which talk about women's rights, which are endorsed, and upheld via prophetic perspectives. Those activities instigated during the beginning of Islam, approximately 1500 years ago, in the Arabian Peninsula. Even the prophet Muhammad (SAW) neither implemented such special regulations and laws nor made distinctive and discriminated the people in order to gender. However, Islam guaranteed that the women could live and engage their lives in society from an Islamic perspective, which is not a burden and tough on women.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative and descriptive method. It is mainly based on the study of historical texts and written sources. The primary sources used in this research are the Qur'an, Hadith, and early Islamic historical writings. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and scholarly studies related to women's rights in Islam. The study also uses a comparative approach to understand the differences between Islamic views and Western feminist ideas. The aim is to present a clear, fair, and balanced understanding of the topic by

carefully examining both classical and modern interpretations. The information collected is studied under different themes to show how women's rights developed and changed across various historical periods.

Women's Rights in Islam

The most fundamental principle of Islam that is given to women is that almighty Allah created the human being from male and female and made peoples and tribes that may know each other. Indeed, the most noble people in the sight of the almighty are the most righteous of you. It indicates that male and female are equal in the status of Islam regardless of gender and emphasizes that one's worth is determined by their piety and character.

Islam also granted the women several legal rights that were groundbreaking in the historical context of the religion's emergence. For instance, the conditions of women in pre-Islamic Arabia were treated as property and they thought that women have no right in the proportion of inheritance property as heirs. However, Islam abrogated and expelled the worst determinations and desires of pagans from the pages of Islam and guaranteed to them that they can receive a fair share of family's wealth. Therefore, this was a revolutionary step towards economic independence and financial security for women.

An illustration of marriage, Islam has placed great importance on the concept of consent and choice. A woman has a right to get married to someone in order to their choice and free will, they have bestowed the right to accept or reject a proposal in terms of their intention and desire. Moreover, Islam law recognizes the importance of a safe and respectful circumstance within marriage, emphasizing kindness and equity between spouses. It is essential to understand that Islam, at its cover, advocates for the rights and dignity of women. The prophet Muhammad (SAW) drafted a golden history, which uplifted the status of women. The Muslim women during the prophetic era were energetic. They participated in different fields. Few women were experts in seeking knowledge, memorizing the hadiths etc.

There is another view of the prophet Muhammad (SAW) that juxtaposed gender under the shadow of equity, and universal brotherhood. And the prophet Muhammad (SAW) among his community: 'almighty Allah will bestow the paradise to those parents, who have a daughter and nurtured her without any types of discrimination among their family and neither kill her nor perceive any sorts of hesitation until her marriage.

Right of Education

There is another right which is unique and appropriate to know the anti-Islam i.e., education's right. Islam does not bifurcate the human being in terms of gender on learning the education and knowledge for men and women. Such as the first word of the holy Quran revealed "Iqra (read)" it emphasizes the importance of seeking knowledge without discrimination in the gender system. And the prophet Muhammad (SAW) did not prevent the knowledge but encouraged the woman to learn and their parents to inspire their daughters on education. Thus, the prophet Muhammad said that: compressing and seeking knowledge is obligatory and mandatory for Muslim, women and men. So, hadith indicates that women and men are in the same position to learn.

Longing of Women for Learning

Occasionally, a woman came to the prophet Muhammad (SAW), and asked, oh the prophet of almighty Allah! Can you fix an opportunity for women to listen to your delicious words as well as men to learn what was bestowed upon you by the blessing of Allah? Then the prophet Muhammad (SAW) replied okay and mentioned a place. Then he was teaching them on that fixed day. The Ansari woman was devoted to acquiring the knowledge, therefore the beloved Ayesha (R) admired them on account of their dreams and interest, that's obviously! The women of Ansari were good. Because their shame ought not resist the learning.

So, the interpretations are beckon which elaborates that the eagerness of women jumped on the seeking of knowledge to know the women's dignity in Islam, but also gave servants the same rights and equity before society. Therefore, the prophet Muhammad (SAW) proclaimed, those people have two rewards, who has a servant and neither persecuted not scolded, even taught her Islamic principles politely and leave her way and got marriage with her as his wife. Such kind of prophetic thoughts ignited the minds of people especially women heeded to discuss Islamic knowledge.

According to the Quran, women are equal to men before the almighty Allah and have similar religious obligations. Many women had played important and unprecedented roles and norms in the fields of transmission of hadith. So, this process instigated from the wives of the prophet Muhammad (SAW). Such as Ayesha[®] and Umm Salma[®] were epitome of women scholars in the field of hadith and Islamic jurisprudence in the periods of caliph Abu Bakkar and Umar[®]. So, it is a huge influence that wives of the prophet Muhammad (SAW) had learned from him, but he did not deny and resisted them to learn education. Which became a role model in medieval time, and they dedicated their activities in the organization of court life, and the welfare of Islamic families and children.

There are numerous analyses and studies of Muslim scholars on women's rights. Who is involved in the field of teaching of core principles' Islam and transmitting its tradition. And they were famous in different fields viz. Sufism, medicine, war welfare, Islamic jurisprudence, hadith transmission and so on. Rabia al-Basaria and Fatima of Nishapur, both were well known as women Sufis in Islamic history. They acquired primary and main principles and propagated those things throughout the world especially among the women. So, they had an impact and adhered to the Islamic ethics and practices of Sufi's principles. Umm Muayyad al-Asaradi, was another figure of women scholars, who was significantly linked in and affiliated with the transmission of the collection of hadiths. So, we can't dislike the Islamic religions because of women's rights. There are different types of documents indicating women in the Islamic golden age. Ibn Saad, who introduced about 700 women, reported hadiths from the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his companions directly.

Furthermore, the great scholar Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani mentioned in his compendium, (a collection of Muslim women's lists more than 15000) were engaged and devoted their lives for the sake of knowledge and their invaluable principles had been empowered, flourished and ranked the women in the top of society. Thereby if we referenced women's history in the golden age, we could get dozens of women's expertise in various fields, even in the prophetic periods. Such as Al-Khunsa, she was a pre- and post-Islamic poet and speaker. She wrote different types of poetries to the admiration of the prophet Muhammad (SAW) after accepting the Islam. Someone was expert in the field of medicine, whenever, the companions of the prophet Muhammad (SAW) left their home for fighting against infidels and anti-Islam, then got injury because of offensive war, they used to treat them, even they caught swords for the sack of Islam with the messenger of God. One of them, Nusaiba-bint-Ka'b-al Ansari, was a well-known women doctor and medicine doctor in Madinah.

Muslim Women Jurist

The Islamic medieval period signals towards the heap of Muslim women scholars' expertise in the field of Islamic jurisprudences, and worked as jurist and Muhaddith such as, Khadija-al-Kairwania daughter of Imam Sahnun from school of Maliki, Umra al-Najjaria student of Ayishah (R), Fatima bint-Muhammad al-Samarkandi, daughter of Imam Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Samarkandi and soon.

Fatimah bint Yahiya bin Yusuf al Magami was sister of well-known jurist Yusuf bin Yahiya al-Magami, she was educated and a good behavior woman and jurist. She lived in Qurtuba and died there in 319 H and was buried at Rabaza. Asma-bint- Asad-bin- al-Furat- al-Quirwaniyah was a daughter of an African scholar and judge, and she was a student of great scholarship. Abu Yusuf and Malik bin Anas. She grew up in the cradle of her father and nobody else. During her childhood, she possessed sublime character and knee-jerk behavior. Despite this, she was attending the educational council and made educational discussions and debates with

other scholars in her colony. Therefore, she became well known and renowned as Hanafi jurist and Muhaddith over Iraq.

Muslim Feminism

Feminism: it referred to the belief that women should have economic, political and social equality with men. It advocates women's rights, gender equality and social justice grounded in the Islamic framework. It seeks to highlight the deeply rooted teaching of equality in the Quran, Hadiths and Sharia.

Role of Muslim Feminists

There are several Muslim feminists on the face of the earth, and they neither preach the Islamic principles, nor propagate rumors about the Islam throughout the whole world. They were neither influenced by western ideologies, nor conveyed any sorts of misconceptions, misinterpretations and misconceptions about Islam. Such a figure is Zaibab-al-Gazzali al-Jubaili, who was one of the Muslim feminists born in Egypt, worked for Muslim women and to raise women's intellectual and moral level to obtain political, social, and legal equality. Other words are education right, reforming marriage law for polygamy, and divorce.

She is an epitome of real women Muslim feminist. She raises her voice against the Egyptian feminist movement, which was led by Huda al-Sha'rawi. In that time, Huda al-Sha'rawi was influenced by western feminist's ideologies and implemented by Egyptian feminist. She also made an in-road protest and so on. However, Zaibab-al-Gazzali al-jubaili opposed her, left her forever, and blanked out all ideologies, and she said that I made a mistake to join with her, and Islam did not discriminate against anyone in terms of gender. Thus, it gathers the people in the shade of peace and justice without dispute and oppression. She also encouraged the women to live on the Islamic perspectives.

Western Feminism

It is a campaign for women's rights including the right to vote, hold public office, equal rights within marriage, and receive education. It also worked to ensure legal abortion and social integration, and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence, changing in female dress standards and acceptable physical activity for female, and equal rights as well as men.

Western feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft known as first western feminist, and their few ideologies are well and moderate, otherwise rest of ideologies nothing. Nowadays, western women dove into ignorance, and they started to exchange their structure as men. Most women were influenced by them therefore some Muslim women broke down in-road protest to down the veil system. Even they were opposed to pregnancy in their womb. They sank into the gay, homosexuality, and harassment that lead towards the abortion because of nasty work.

Contradiction between Muslim and Western Feminists

However, there is a contradiction between Islam and western liberalism because of abortion their pregnancy, homosexuality, and marriage between females and males. Because, they think, that kind of stuff is good for them as well as female and male marriage and soon.

However, western women think that their lives are a personification of the incubation of birds. Thus, they cannot bear their wombs before society because of shame. Thus, copulation between females and males, hegemony, manipulation, and persecution of women etc. are good for them in order to understand their concepts. As a result, Islam neither endorses nor legalizes it. It is a beckon between Islamic religions and other religions. In addition, Islam does not promote the patriarchal system, which was survival in the Jahiliya era, and women persecuted through their society, and threw them away from humanity. However, the prophet Muhammad (SAW) blanked out and polished all kinds of malevolent and nasty from the face of earth

especially from Mecca. Therefore, the prophet Muhammad (SAW) ranked them on top status among the society.

In conclusion, Muslim women were experts in different fields because of their dedication and activities. Which started from the prophet Muhammad (SAW) implemented various stuff in favor of women which uplifted them in society. In addition, there are not any boundaries, obstacles and shackles to resist and prevent them from living in their perspective in Islamic Sharia. It is essential to understand that Islam at its core, advocates for the rights and dignities of women. The religion emphasizes equality, economic independence, education, and the importance of consent within marriage. However, like any faith the interpretations and practices of Islam can differ among individuals and communities. It is our responsibility to promote a nuanced and accurate understanding of women's rights in Islam fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

References

- Abdur Rahman. (n.d.). Women in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Center for Islamic Legal Studies, Ahmadu Bello University. Retrieved from https://www.iium.edu.my/deed/articles/woman_quran.html
- Patoari, M. H. (2020). The rights of women in Islam and some misconceptions: An analysis from Bangladesh perspective. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(2), 136–147. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2020.82013>
- IslamQA. (n.d.). What are the rights of women in Islam? Retrieved from <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/70042/what-are-the-rights-of-women-in-islam>
- Badawi, J. A. (n.d.). The status of woman in Islam. Retrieved from <https://www.iium.edu.my/deed/articles/statusofwomen.html>
- Pew Research Center. (2013, April 30). The world's Muslims: Religion, politics and society – Women in society. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-women-in-society/>
- TeachMideast. (n.d.). Women in Muslim history: Traditional perspectives and new strategies. Retrieved from <https://teachmideast.org/>
- Musta'id, A. (2023). The position of women in Islamic history. *Journal of Islamic History and Manuscript*, UIN Saizu. Retrieved from <https://ejournal.uinsaizu.ac.id/index.php/JIH/article/view/>
- Hassan, S. (n.d.). The role of women in the time of Prophet Muhammad. (Publisher not specified).
- Yamani, A. Z. (n.d.). Women during the Prophet's lifetime. Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation. Retrieved from <https://al-furqan.com/women-during-the-prophets-lifetime/>

Article Information and Declarations

Declarations
Author's Contribution:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions, Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript▪ The author agrees to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed
Conflict of Interest: NIL
Funding Sources: NIL
Correspondence:
Araj Sekh
arajsekh3201@gmail.com
How to Cite: Women's Rights in Islam: Historical Evolution from Pre-Islamic Arabia to Modern Times. (2026). Wah Academia Journal of Global Religions, 2(1), 01-06. https://doi.org/10.63954/qw9hfg29
Open Access: Publication is Open Access
Licensing: Creative Commons Attribution License - CC BY- 4.0
Copyrights: The author retains unrestricted copyrights and publishing rights