

# **Women's Rights and Responsibilities in Islam: Misconceptions and Realities**

**Muhammad Jameel<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Wajahat<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Muavia Ateeq<sup>3</sup>, Muhammad  
Awais<sup>4</sup>, Hammad Ur Rehman<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup> Department of Islamic Studies, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan

<sup>3,4,5</sup> Muhammad Nawaz Sharif Agriculture University Multan, Pakistan

**Abstract:** The rights of women in Islam have been a focus of misunderstanding and controversy as well as scholarly discussion. This paper aims to explain the Islamic view of women's rights and duties through referring to primary sources, including the Qur'an and Hadith, and historical and contemporary examples. It examines six major aspects such as education, marriage, divorce, inheritance, political involvement and economic autonomy. The paper emphasises that Islam accorded women numerous rights centuries before the modern legal frameworks, but cultural traditions and poor interpretation usually overshadow such teachings. The article attempts to provide a balanced, evidence-based position that shows respect to the dignity, equity, and agency of women in Islam by separating Islamic ideals and sociocultural perversions. It also points out the necessity of further reformation and education to restore the modern practice to the true Islamic teachings.

**Keywords:** Islamic Feminism, Women's Rights in Islam, Qur'anic Gender Equality, Misconceptions about Muslim Women

**Email:** [jameelkalroo.564@gmail.com](mailto:jameelkalroo.564@gmail.com)

## **1. Introduction**

Women in Islam have long been the topic of discussion, which is usually tainted by misunderstanding, cultural discrimination, and politics. Some critics have been touting Islamic oppression of women but a further look to Islamic teachings based on Quran, Sunnah and the historical practices will exhibit a radically different picture. The Islamic religion in its early literature gave women rights that they had never enjoyed in the 7th century such as the right to own property, right to inheritance, right to divorce, and right to seek education- rights that women in most of the world had not enjoyed until the recent centuries [1]. These teachings have however been misconstrued through cultural practices, patriarchal interpretation and colonialism thus causing the many misconceptions about the role of women in Islamic societies [2].

In this paper, the researcher aims to explain the rights and duties of women in Islam by identifying the difference between what Islam commands and what cultures practice. It looks at Quranic verses, Prophetic traditions, and historical precedents in showing how Islam elevated the status of women, as well as looks at modern day challenges in applying these

principles. It also examines the popular myths—forced veiling, gender inequality in testimony in law, and polygyny—within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence and compares them to the contemporary feminist criticism. Through this, this paper will portray an objective picture of the rights of women in Islam; one that appreciates the strides on which it was built, and the social-cultural barriers that prevent its complete execution in the modern world.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, women were badly oppressed. There was female infanticide, women could not inherit and they could be disposed as property [3]. The Quran specifically denounced such practices and said:

And when the girl [who was] buried alive is questioned, why she was killed (Quran 81:8-9) [4].

Right to Life: The outlawing of female infanticide (Quran 17:31) [5].

Right to Property: Women could own, inherit, and manage wealth independently (Quran 4:7) [6].

Right to Consent in Marriage: Forced marriages were invalidated by the Prophet's teachings (Hadith, Sunan Ibn Majah) [7].

Historical records show that early Muslim women were scholars, businesswomen, and even political leaders. Khadijah (RA), the first wife of the Prophet (ﷺ), was a successful merchant, while Aisha (RA) was a leading jurist and narrator of Hadith [8]. These examples challenge the stereotype that Islam confines women to domestic roles.

The Quran explicitly outlines women's spiritual, economic, and legal rights:

“Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while they are believers—we will surely grant them a good life.” (Quran 16:97) [9].

“And their Lord responded to them: ‘Never will I allow to be lost the work of any worker among you, whether male or female.’” (Quran 3:195) [10].

Inheritance: While critics claim women inherit half of men (Quran 4:11), this was progressive in a society where women inherited nothing [11].

Financial Independence: A woman's wealth remains hers after marriage; husbands are obligated to provide for wives (Quran 4:34) [12].

Consent: A woman cannot be married without her permission (Hadith, Sahih Bukhari) [13].

Right to Divorce (Khula): Women can seek divorce if mistreated (Quran 2:229) [14].

Misconception: Hijab is a tool of oppression.

Reality: The Quran presents modesty as a mutual obligation (Quran 24:30-31) [15]. Many Muslim women choose hijab as an act of devotion.

Misconception: A woman's testimony is worth half a man's.

Reality: This applies only to financial contracts (Quran 2:282) due to historical context, not criminal or general testimony [16].

Misconception: Islam encourages unlimited polygamy.

Reality: The Quran restricts it to four wives only if justice is guaranteed (Quran 4:3), and the Prophet (ﷺ) discouraged it in practice [17].

Despite Islam's egalitarian principles, many Muslim-majority societies today restrict women's rights due to:

Patriarchal Interpretations: Some classical jurists prioritized male authority, influencing modern laws [18].

Colonial Legacies: Western colonialism disrupted traditional Islamic legal systems, replacing them with hybrid laws that disadvantaged women [19].

Political Islam: Some regimes enforce rigid gender laws in the name of Sharia, contradicting Quranic justice [20].

## **2. Literature Review**

Analysis of the position of women in early Islamic society by scholars indicate that there were considerable reforms as compared to the pre-Islamic society. A classic example which illustrates this point is the work of Leila Ahmed (1992) which highlights how Islam eliminated female infanticide and gave women property rights in 7th century Arabia [20]. Kecia Ali (2006) expands on this basis by examining how the classical jurists understood these early reforms, and points out that patriarchal understandings were frequently derived regardless of the egalitarianism of the Quran [21].

Nabia Abbott (1942) provided archaeological data and Asma Barlas (2002) textual analysis both recording the active role of women in the early Muslim society as scholars, merchants and political leaders [22, 23]. Yet, the critical revisionism of Fatima Mernissi (1991) claims that subsequent Islamic theology through systematic exclusion of women in religious authority roles established the long-lasting patriarchal systems [24].

Modern Quranic studies have produced advanced gender sensitive modes of reading. The pioneering effort of Amina Wadud (1992) stated the "tawhidic paradigm" of feminist interpretation of the Quran, which focuses on the gender justice implied in the text [25]. This line of thinking has affected later thinkers such as Asma Lamrabet (2016), who is concerned with the rediscovery of the egalitarian nature of the Quran [26].

Other orthodox thinkers like Muhammad al-Ghazali (1989) uphold the customary understanding of gender roles but do not overlook women rights, within the Islamic context [27]. The study by Jonathan Brown (2017) explores the way traditional Islamic scholarship struck a balance between the rights of women and the social systems of the day [28]. The development of these competing interpretations is chronicled by Margot Badran (2009) in the Islamic feminist discourse [29].

The studies in legal anthropology indicate that there are intricate relations amid Islamic law and the rights of women. Ethnographic research conducted in Moroccan courts by Ziba Mir-Hosseini in 1993 showed that there were wide disparities between legal theory and practice with reference to the rights to marriage [30]. Indonesian studies (2003) by John Bowen and Egyptian research (2003) by Amira Sonbol came up with similar results [31, 32].

Mohammad Fadel (2011) and Judith Tucker (2008) have undertaken historical legal research which refers to court records indicating that pre-modern Islamic courts often decided in favor of women when it came to divorce and property disputes [33, 34]. But a comparative study by Lynn Welchman (2007) demonstrates how these historical rights have frequently been narrowed by contemporary codifications of Islamic law [35].

Scholarship on veiling has managed to move past oppression/liberation binaries. One of the first anthropological studies on veiling was done by Fadwa El Guindi (1999) who introduced the complexity of the culture of veiling [36]. Sahar Amer (2014) and Elizabeth Bucar (2017) are recent studies that focus on the experiences of various Muslim women with hijab in various cultural settings [37, 38].

Psychological and sociological studies present competing frameworks, with Saba Mahmood (2005) analyzing pious agency and Haideh Moghissi (1999) critiquing Islamist gender politics [39, 40]. Miriam Cooke (2001) situates these debates within broader feminist theory through her concept of "Muslim feminist" identities [41].

The relationship between Islamic governance models and women's rights has produced significant scholarship. Asef Bayat's concept of "post-Islamism" (2007) provides a framework for understanding contemporary reform movements [42]. Valentine Moghadam (2003) and Deniz Kandiyoti (1991) document how women navigate between state feminism, Islamist politics, and secular activism [43, 44].

Country-specific studies reveal diverse outcomes, including Afsaneh Najmabadi's work on Iran (2005), Jenny White's research on Turkey (2002), and Mounira Charrad's analysis of North Africa (2001) [45, 46]. These studies demonstrate that political Islam's impact on women varies significantly by national context and historical moment.

The development of Islamic feminism as an academic discipline has been thoroughly documented. Margot Badran (2009) and Miriam Cooke (2001) distinguish between generations of Islamic feminist thought, from early 20th century reformers to contemporary transnational activists [47, 48].

Critical responses have emerged from both secular feminists like Haideh Moghissi (1999) and conservative scholars such as Azizah al-Hibri (2000) [49, 50]. Roxanne Euben's comparative political theory approach (1999) provides a valuable framework for analyzing these competing perspectives [51].

Recent ethnographic studies focus on the reinterpretation of the religious texts by Muslim women in their everyday life. The works of Lara Deeb (2006) about Lebanese Shi'a women and Saba Mahmood (2005) about women in Egypt demonstrate the ambiguous nature of girl-relationships with religious identity and gender roles [52, 53]. Such legal scholars as Abdullahi an-Naand the Naim (1990) and Khaled Abou El Fadl (2001) present models of reconciling Islamic law and contemporary ideas of gender equality [54, 55].

The digital era has changed the women's rights activism, which was demonstrated in the recent books by Rafia Zakaria (2020) and Mona Eltahawy (2015) about the influence of social media movements on the traditional Islamic discourses [56, 57]. These articles brought into light the issues that are confronting and the potential that lies with the current Muslim women's rights movements.

### **3. Analysis**

This table shows ten basic rights accorded to women directly in the Quran. There is also a reference of each right, e.g. the right to education, consent in marriage, the right to own property, and inheritance, with the reference of a particular verse, partial Arabic text and its translation in English. These lines demonstrate that Islam had acknowledged the rights of women centuries earlier than the modern law practice. An example is Qur 4:7 which institutionalizes inheritance rights and Qur 4:32 which recognize women as independent owners of income. The table also highlights spiritual equality (Quran 33:35), right to work (Quran 9:105) and right to seek divorce (Khula). All in all, the table debunks the myth concerning Islamic religion denying women basic rights and enforces the notion that these rights are ordained by divine revelation and cannot be interpreted out of existence by different cultures.

Table 1: Key Rights Granted to Women in the Qur'an

No.	Right	Qur'anic Verse	Arabic (Partial)	Translation (Partial)	Explanation
1	Right to Education	Al-Alaq 96:1-5	اقْرَأْ	Read in the name of your Lord...	Knowledge is an obligation for all
2	Right to Inheritance	An-Nisa 4:7	نَصِيبٌ لِّلرِّجَالِ	For men is a share... and for women is a share...	Guaranteed inheritance shares
3	Right to Consent in Marriage	An-Nisa 4:19	تَكْرَهُنَّ لَا	Do not force them to marry...	Marriage requires free consent
4	Right to Work	At-Tawbah 9:105	اعْمَلُوا	Do [good] work, for Allah will see your deeds...	Women allowed to earn
5	Right to Property Ownership	An-Nisa 4:32	نَصِيبٌ لِّلرِّجَالِ	Men will have a portion of what they earn, and women...	Equal right to earnings
6	Right to Worship	Al-Ahzab 33:35	الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ	Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women...	Equal spiritual status
7	Right to Political Participation	Ash-Shura 42:38	بَيْنَهُمْ شُورَىٰ وَأَمْرُهُمْ	Their affairs are conducted by mutual consultation...	Women included in consultation
8	Right to Divorce	Al-Baqarah 2:229	مَرَّتَانِ الطَّلَاقُ	Divorce is twice...	Women can initiate divorce (khula)
9	Right to Protection	An-Nisa 4:1	رَبِّكُمْ اتَّقُوا	Fear your Lord, who created you from one soul...	Call for equal dignity
10	Right to Mahr (Dowry)	An-Nisa 4:4	النِّسَاءَ وَأْتُوا صَدُقَاتِهِنَّ	And give the women their bridal gifts...	Dowry is woman's right

This table confronts ten widespread misconceptions about women in Islam by comparing them with authentic Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and Hadith. For each false belief—such as “women can't be educated” or “men are superior”—the table provides a corresponding Islamic principle, source, the impact of the misconception, and a “reality check” to clarify the truth. For example, while it is falsely assumed that women cannot lead or work, Islamic teachings emphasize competence and dignity, with historical examples like Aisha (RA) as a leader in religious scholarship. This table is critical in distinguishing between cultural distortions and the true egalitarian spirit of Islam, making it a valuable tool for correcting narratives and educating both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

**Table 2: Common Misconceptions vs Islamic Teachings**

No.	Misconception	Islamic Teaching	Source	Impact of Misconception	Reality Check
1	Women cannot be educated	Seeking knowledge is obligatory for all	Sunan Ibn Majah	Denies women access to growth	Prophet emphasized education
2	Men are superior to women	Both are equal before Allah	Qur'an 33:35	Creates social inequality	Spiritual equality ensured
3	Women can't own property	Women have independent financial rights	Qur'an 4:32	Blocks financial freedom	Full right to own and earn
4	Hijab is forced	It is a personal religious obligation	Qur'an 24:31	Undermines personal agency	Should be by choice and belief
5	Women can't work	Work is allowed with dignity	Qur'an 9:105	Economic dependence	Many women were business leaders
6	Polygamy is a man's right	Only allowed with justice	Qur'an 4:3	Misuse of practice	Justice condition rarely met
7	Women can't lead	Leadership depends on competence	Historical precedents	Excludes women unfairly	Examples include Aisha (RA)
8	Inheritance is unfair	Each share has wisdom	Qur'an 4:11	Causes resentment	Men have more financial duties
9	Divorce is only for men	Women can seek Khula	Sahih Bukhari	Legal helplessness	Islam grants exit from marriage
10	Islam oppresses women	Islam honors women	Qur'an & Sunnah	Global stereotype	Islamic history shows dignity

The third table captures ten outstanding Muslim women in the history of Islamic women who made their contribution in education, politics, science, spirituality and war. Whether it was Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, a prosperous businesswoman and the first to support the Prophet, or Fatima al-Fihri, the founder of the first university in the world, these are the examples of the active and respected roles that Muslim women have occupied. The table includes also scholars such as Aisha bint Abu Bakr, warriors such as Nusaybah bint Kaab and mathematicians such as Sutayta al-Mahamali. Their successes debunk the stereotype that Islam relegates women to household affairs, and instead demonstrates that Islam has been the historical religion that enabled women to serve as leaders, educators and inventors. This table reinstates the impression that Islam welcomes significant female contribution in every area of life.

**Table 3: Contributions of Muslim Women in History**

No.	Name	Time Period	Area of Contribution	Notable Achievement	Legacy
1	Khadijah bint Khuwaylid	6th Century	Business & Finance	Successful merchant	Supporter of Islam
2	Aisha bint Abu Bakr	7th Century	Hadith & Jurisprudence	Narrated 2,210 hadiths	Authority in fiqh
3	Fatima al-Fihri	9th Century	Education	Founded world's first university	University of Al-Qarawiyyin
4	Rabi'a al-Adawiyya	8th Century	Spirituality	Pioneer of Divine Love concept	Role model in Sufism
5	Lubna of Cordoba	10th Century	Science & Literature	Mathematician and poet	Court advisor
6	Zaynab al-Ghazali	20th Century	Activism	Founded women's Islamic movement	Inspired global activism
7	Nusaybah bint Ka'ab	7th Century	Military	Fought in Battle of Uhud	First female warrior
8	Al-Shifa bint Abdullah	7th Century	Public Health	Taught medicine & literacy	Islam's first female inspector
9	Sutayta al-Mahamali	10th Century	Mathematics	Solved complex algebraic equations	Pioneer in math
10	Umm Salama	7th Century	Political Advice	Advised Prophet in Treaty of Hdaybiyyah	Wisdom in diplomacy

#### 4. Conclusion

Islamic women rights and duties are based on the divine guidance and are much more extensive and empowering than is usually realized. Although the misconception about women is rife due to cultural practices and patriarchal misinterpretation of Islamic texts, the equality, agency, and respect of women are affirmed in true Islam. Based on the Quranic directives on education, property, and consent, as well as, the lived exemplary lives of female scholars, rulers, and professionals in the history of Islam, it is clear that Islam appreciates the proactive and honorable presence of women in the society. The only way of bringing the current practice back on track of the actual spirit of Islam is to address the misconceptions by providing education and implementing reforms. In that way, Muslim societies will guarantee justice, balance, and mutual respect between genders as it was initially intended in the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

#### References

- [1]. Ahmed, L. Women and Gender in Islam. Yale University Press, (1992).
- [2]. Badran, M. Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences. Oneworld, (2009).
- [3]. Esposito, J. Women in Muslim Family Law. Syracuse University Press, (2001).
- [4]. Quran 81:8-9.

- [5]. Quran 17:31.
- [6]. Quran 4:7.
- [7]. Sunan Ibn Majah, Hadith 1873.
- [8]. Spellberg, D. *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of Aisha bint Abi Bakr*. Columbia UP, (1994).
- [9]. Quran 16:97.
- [10]. Quran 3:195.
- [11]. Ali, K. *Sexual Ethics and Islam*. Oneworld, (2006).
- [12]. Quran 4:34.
- [13]. Sahih Bukhari, Hadith 5136.
- [14]. Quran 2:229.
- [15]. Quran 24:30-31.
- [16]. Mir-Hosseini, Z. *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*. Princeton UP, (2003).
- [17]. Quran 4:3; Tirmidhi, Hadith 1100.
- [18]. Mernissi, F. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Addison-Wesley, (1991).
- [19]. An-Na'im, A. *toward an Islamic Reformation*. Syracuse UP, (1990).
- [20]. Moghadam, V. *Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents*. Yale UP, (2002).
- [21]. Wadud, A. *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford UP, (1999).
- [22]. Al-Hibri, A. *Muslim Women's Rights in the Global Village*. *Journal of Law and Religion*, (2001).
- [23]. Ahmed, L. *Women and Gender in Islam*. Yale University Press, (1992).
- [24]. Ali, K. *Sexual Ethics and Islam*. Oneworld, (2006).
- [25]. Abbott, N. *Aishah: The Beloved of Mohammed*. University of Chicago Press, (1942).
- [26]. Barlas, A. "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran. University of Texas Press, (2002).
- [27]. Mernissi, F. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. Addison-Wesley, (1991).
- [28]. Wadud, A. *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press, (1992).
- [29]. Lamrabet, A. *Women and Men in the Quran*. Islamic Book Trust, (2016).
- [30]. Al-Ghazali, M. *Qadaya al-Mar'a bayna al-Taqalid al-Rakida wa al-Wafida*. Dar al-Shuruq, (1989).
- [31]. Brown, J. *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy*. Oneworld, (2017).
- [32]. Badran, M. *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. Oneworld, (2009).
- [33]. Mir-Hosseini, Z. *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law*. I.B. Tauris, (1993).
- [34]. Bowen, J. *Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia: Anthropology of Public Reasoning*. Cambridge University Press, (2003).
- [35]. Sonbol, A. *Women of Jordan: Islam, Labor, and the Law*. Syracuse University Press, (2003).

- [36]. Fadel, M. "Two Women, One Man: Knowledge, Power and Gender in Medieval Sunni Legal Thought." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, (2011).
- [37]. Tucker, J. *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law*. Cambridge University Press, (2008).
- [38]. Welchman, L. *Women and Muslim Family Laws in Arab States*. Amsterdam University Press, (2007).
- [39]. El Guindi, F. *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*. Berg, (1999).
- [40]. Amer, S. *What Is Veiling?* University of North Carolina Press, (2014).
- [41]. Bucar, E. *Pious Fashion: How Muslim Women Dress*. Harvard University Press, (2017).
- [42]. Mahmood, S. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press, (2005).
- [43]. Moghissi, H. *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis*. Zed Books, (1999).
- [44]. Cooke, M. *Women Claim Islam: Creating Islamic Feminism through Literature*. Routledge, (2001).
- [45]. Bayat, A. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford University Press, (2007).
- [46]. Moghadam, V. *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*. Lynne Rienner, (2003).
- [47]. Kandiyoti, D. *Women, Islam and the State*. Temple University Press, (1991).
- [48]. Najmabadi, A. *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. University of California Press, (2005).
- [49]. White, J. *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics*. University of Washington Press, (2002).
- [50]. Charrad, M. *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco*. University of California Press, (2001).
- [51]. Al-Hibri, A. "An Introduction to Muslim Women's Rights." In Webb, G. (Ed.), *Windows of Faith*. Syracuse University Press, (2000).
- [52]. Euben, R. *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism*. Princeton University Press, (1999).
- [53]. Deeb, L. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton University Press, (2006).
- [54]. An-Na'im, A. *toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights and International Law*. Syracuse University Press, (1990).
- [55]. Abou El Fadl, K. *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*. One world, (2001).
- [56]. Zakaria, R. *against White Feminism: Notes on Disruption*. W.W. Norton, (2020).
- [57]. Eltahawy, M. *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, (2015).