

Position Of Women In Islam

Dr Stuti Malhotra

Stuti29malhotra@yahoo.com

Abstract:

This essay aims to provide an academic exploration of the position of women in Islam. It delves into the historical context of the advent of Islam, examines the rights and responsibilities granted to women within Islamic teachings, and critically evaluates the varying interpretations and practices that have shaped the position of women. It explains the roles played by Muslim women in History. By adopting a comprehensive and balanced approach, this essay seeks to shed light on the complexities and nuances surrounding this topic, ultimately encouraging a deeper understanding of the position of women in Islam.

Keywords: #Muslim, #Women, #Islam, #Rabia Basri, #Hajira, #Asiya, #Khadijah, #Ayesha, #Freedom, #Husband and Wife.

Introduction

As one of the major world religions, Islam has attracted significant attention due to its impact on the lives of millions of adherents. The position of women in Islam is often a topic of debate, with diverse perspectives emerging from a wide range of cultural, social, and political contexts. This essay aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the position of women in Islam in light of the teachings of the Qur'an, Hadith (Prophetic traditions), and historical practices. To understand the position of women in Islam, it is crucial to consider the historical context surrounding the advent of the religion.

Pre-Islamic Arabia was characterised by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, where women often faced discrimination and marginalisation. Islam emerged in this milieu and introduced significant reforms to elevate the status of women within society. The Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam, provides fundamental guidelines for gender relations, addressing issues of equality, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and education.

According to studies, women possess specific inherent qualities that render them well-suited for fostering peace and harmony within society, particularly in times of upheaval.ⁱⁱ These qualities encompass gentleness, compassion, selflessness, kindness, and a spiritual perspective.ⁱⁱⁱ Islam is often regarded as a religion that aligns with the natural order, as it is founded upon principles that reflect the laws governing

the natural world.^{iv} The Quran explicitly articulates these laws, which have governed the universe since its inception. Understanding the role of women is a matter of the discovery of the creation plan of God. A study of the Qur'an and Hadith tells us that one of the laws of nature is that all the things in the world have been created in pairs. The Qur'an states: "And all things We have made in pairs, so that you may give thought." (51:49). The scientific study of the universe also corroborates this law of nature. As discovered by science, the primary unit of the universe, the atom, is composed of negative and positive particles.^v In the absence of any one of the two, the atom cannot come into existence. Just as humans are born in the form of males and females, animals are likewise male and female. Therefore, the whole world is said to exist in pairs. In this way, nature's entire factory has functioned on this dual basis.

Position of woman

The position of man and woman is like cogwheels in machinery, each facilitating the movement of the other. There is no divide in status or superiority; both are equal partners in the divine scheme of things. Therefore, both must contribute to taking the journey of life forward. Islamic teachings emphasise the inherent equality of men and women as human beings. The Quran affirms that both men and women are equal in their spiritual worth and are accountable for their actions.^{vi} In Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13), the Quran states, "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." This verse underscores the importance of righteousness and character as the basis for determining one's worth, regardless of gender.

Below are a few of the Muslim women who played a historical part in the history of Islam.

Rabia Basri

Rabia Basri, a prominent figure in Sufi history, holds a distinguished position as one of the most revered female mystics of her time. Born in 713 CE into a humble family in Basra, Iraq. Rabia dedicated her life to pursuing spiritual enlightenment and worshipping God.^{vii} Renowned for her ascetic lifestyle, she lived a profoundly austere existence, detached from material possessions and societal conventions. Rabia's unwavering devotion to God and her profound mystical experiences attracted a multitude of followers who sought guidance and inspiration from her teachings. Her wisdom and ethereal proverbs have transcended time and continue to resonate with seekers of spiritual truth. Despite the societal limitations imposed on women during her era, Rabia's spiritual

impact and influence were profound, testifying to the depth of her spiritual journey and her unwavering commitment to the divine path. Through her remarkable life and teachings, Rabia Basri remains an enduring symbol of spiritual dedication and a beacon of inspiration for generations to come. Because of her enormous spiritual character, people finally put their doctrinal differences aside and came together to support her.^{viii} She focused on the one thing that could reduce these differences, i.e., pure divine love.

Hajira

Hajira, also known as Hagar in biblical accounts, is significant in Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions. In Islamic tradition, she is revered as the wife of the prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) and the mother of Ismail (Ishmael).^{ix} The story of Hajira is one of faith, resilience, and unwavering trust in God's plan.

Hajira's story begins when Ibrahim, following God's command, leaves her and their infant son Ismail in the desolate valley of Makkah (Mecca). This act of separation, though difficult, serves as a test of Hajira's faith and trust in God's wisdom.^x Left with limited provisions, she faced survival challenges in the harsh desert environment. Despite the hardships, Hajira demonstrated remarkable strength and determination in caring for her child and establishing a life in the barren land.

One of the most pivotal moments in Hajira's story is her desperate search for water to sustain herself and Ismail. Overwhelmed by thirst and the fear of losing her son, she ran frantically between two hills, Safa and Marwa, seeking any signs of relief. During this poignant moment, her unwavering faith and reliance on God were rewarded as the miraculous Zamzam spring gushed forth, providing water and sustenance. Muslims commemorate this event during the Hajj pilgrimage as they retrace Hajira's footsteps between Safa and Marwa.^{xi}

Hajira's story holds profound spiritual and moral lessons for believers. Despite daunting challenges, her unwavering faith in God inspires her to trust in divine guidance and providence. Hajira's resilience and determination remind believers that trials and tribulations can lead to blessings and divine intervention. Her story is a testament to the strength of women and their pivotal roles in shaping the course of history. Her journey as the wife of Ibrahim and the mother of Ismail showcases her strength and determination in the face of adversity.^{xii}

Hajira's life serves as a symbol of faith and resilience. Her unwavering belief in God's plan, her ability to navigate difficult circumstances, and her ultimate reliance on divine mercy inspire believers to face their challenges with trust and perseverance.^{xiii} Hajira's example highlights the importance of

patience, contentment, and unwavering faith in navigating the tests and trials of life.

Hajira took the first difficult step, which marked a new beginning in the history of Islam. Today, Arabia has all conceivable material comforts, but at the time of Hajira, it was only a vast and empty desert. The role performed by her led to the formation of a team that revolutionised the thinking of its times and showed the world out of the dark ages ruled by polytheism and superstitions.

Asiya

Asiya was a descendant of the tribe of Banu Israel. Asiya is described as a woman of exceptional virtue and integrity, despite being married to one of the most oppressive and tyrannical rulers in history.^{xiv} Her righteousness and devotion to God were in stark contrast to the wickedness of Pharaoh. Despite the luxuries and power at her disposal, Asiya remained steadfast in her beliefs and refused to succumb to the corruption of her surroundings.

Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, is a notable figure in Islamic tradition who exemplifies courage, righteousness, and unwavering faith. Her story is narrated in the Quran, offering valuable insights into her character and the moral lessons she conveys. Asiya's character shines through in her acts of compassion and justice. When Pharaoh sought to kill Moses (Musa), a Prophet of God, Asiya secretly adopted and protected him from harm. Her courageous defiance of Pharaoh's orders demonstrated her commitment to righteousness and her willingness to challenge the unjust actions of her husband.^{xv} Asiya's unwavering faith in God is a central theme in her story. Despite the pressures and threats she faced from Pharaoh, she refused to renounce her belief in the oneness of God and embraced the message of Moses. Her steadfastness in the face of adversity showcases the strength of her faith. It inspires believers to remain firm in their convictions, even in the most challenging circumstances.

The Quran also highlights the eternal reward that awaits Asiya in the hereafter. It is revealed that God prepared a special place for her in Paradise, acknowledging her unwavering faith and righteousness. The verse where Asiya prays for the neighbourhood of God and the same being mentioned in the Quran as, **"My Lord, build me a house in nearness to You in Paradise" (66:11)** is a testimony of this. It serves as a reminder of the ultimate justice and reward that await those who remain steadfast in their faith and uphold righteousness despite their trials. Moreover, Asiya's story serves as a reminder that external circumstances do not define one's faith and character. Despite being in a position of power and luxury, she remained devoted to God and committed to living a

righteous life. Her example emphasises that true virtue lies in one's character and relationship with God rather than material possessions or societal status.

Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, stands as a shining example of courage, righteousness, and unwavering faith in Islamic tradition.^{xvi} Her story resonates with believers, offering lessons in standing up for justice, displaying compassion, and maintaining unwavering faith in adversity. Asiya's exemplary character inspires Muslims to uphold their values, maintain their faith, and strive for righteousness, regardless of their challenges.

Khadijah

Khadija was born into a noble and prosperous family in Makkah, known for her exceptional beauty, intelligence, and business acumen. As a successful businesswoman, she managed her own trade caravans and commanded respect in the business community.^{xvii} Her achievements and reputation as a self-made woman exemplified her resilience, intelligence, and leadership skills.

Khadija bint Khuwaylid, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, holds a revered position in Islamic history as a paragon of strength, wisdom, and unwavering support.^{xviii} Her remarkable life and profound contributions have left an indelible mark on the early development of Islam.

Khadija's life took a transformative turn when she married the Prophet Muhammad.^{xix} Their union was marked by love, trust, and mutual respect. Khadija's unwavering support and encouragement played a pivotal role in the early stages of Islam. She provided emotional solace and stood steadfastly by the side of the Prophet Muhammad during the challenges he faced in spreading the message of Islam.

As the first convert to Islam and a trusted confidante, Khadija's belief in the Prophet Muhammad's prophethood was unwavering. She provided invaluable moral and financial support to the nascent Muslim community.^{xx} Her wealth and resources were utilised to alleviate the early Muslims' suffering and further the cause of Islam. Despite persecution and hardship, Khadija's steadfast belief in Islam inspired and strengthened the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslim community.

Khadija's legacy extends far beyond her lifetime. Her unwavering faith, resilience, and unwavering support for the Prophet Muhammad serve as a model for believers. Her example highlights the vital role of women in the early development of Islam and the importance of their contributions to the Muslim community. Khadija's entrepreneurial spirit, strength of character, and unwavering

belief in Islam inspire Muslim women to excel in various spheres of life and make meaningful contributions to society.^{xxi}

The position of women in Islam is multifaceted.^{xxii} The Qur'an establishes the fundamental equality of men and women as creations of Allah. It recognises both genders' inherent value and worth, stating, "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while being a believer - those will enter Paradise" (Qur'an 4:124). Islam grants women numerous rights and protections, including the right to education, consent in marriage, and participation in public life. Women are also encouraged to seek knowledge and engage in intellectual pursuits.

Ayesha

Ayesha was born into a noble and well-respected family in Mecca around 614 CE.^{xxiii} Her father, Abu Bakr, would later become the first caliph of Islam after the death of Prophet Muhammad. Growing up in such an esteemed household, Ayesha received an excellent education and was known for her intelligence and eloquence. She became well-versed in various branches of knowledge, including poetry, history, and medicine.

Ayesha's marriage to Prophet Muhammad took place when she was quite young, around the age of nine or ten.^{xxiv} This marriage was not uncommon during that era and was in accordance with the customs and traditions of the time. Despite her young age, Ayesha demonstrated immense wisdom and maturity. She was known for her intelligence, quick wit, and strong memory, which enabled her to preserve and transmit numerous hadiths (sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad) to the Muslim community.

Ayesha's proximity to the Prophet gave her a unique opportunity to witness and learn directly from him. She absorbed his teachings, observed his character, and gained a deep understanding of the Quran.^{xxv} Her knowledge and understanding of Islam made her one of her time's most prominent female scholars. Ayesha's narrations of hadiths became an essential source for Islamic scholars, and her contributions to Islamic jurisprudence and the understanding of Prophet Muhammad's life are highly valued.

Ayesha dedicated her life to the cause of God and became instrumental in transmitting Prophetic wisdom till many years after the Prophet's demise. In those days, there existed no means of preservation or recording of events, which was problematic from the point of view of the transmission of the teachings of the Prophet to future generations. To accomplish this task, God chose two people – Abu Hurayra and Ayesha.

Abu Hurayra had a very sharp memory, which made him the source of full narrations of Hadith. He lived in Masjid-e-Nabvi and spent his time listening to the Prophet and memorising the Hadith.^{xxvi} Therefore, Hurayra's narrations are mostly verbatim and are called Marwiyat-e-Abu Hurayra (Narrations of Abu Hurayra). Despite the hard times that the family of the Prophet underwent, Ayesha remained patient. She used to live in a hut-like settlement with no amenities where even food supplies were insufficient.

Ayesha's role extended beyond scholarship and education. She actively participated in community affairs and played a significant role in spreading and preserving Islamic teachings. Her leadership qualities were evident during times of crisis, such as the Battle of Jamal and the Battle of Uhud, where she played a crucial role in motivating and supporting the Muslim army.^{xxvii}

Ayesha's life inspires Muslims, particularly women, who look up to her as a role model. Her intellectual prowess, dedication to education, leadership qualities, and unwavering commitment to Islam make her iconic. Ayesha's contributions continue to be studied and appreciated by scholars, ensuring that her legacy endures.

In conclusion, Ayesha bint Abu Bakr, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, left an indelible mark on Islamic history. Her remarkable intellect, devotion to scholarship, leadership qualities, and dedication to Islamic teachings continue to inspire Muslims worldwide. Ayesha's life is a testament to women's important role in early Islamic society and highlights the significance of education, compassion, and resilience. Her legacy will forever be cherished as an integral part of the rich tapestry of Islamic history and civilisation.

All things in the world have been formed in pairs, according to a study of the Quran and Hadith, one of nature's laws. According to the Quran, women have the same status as men in Islam. In the words of the Qur'an, "You are members, one of another." (3:195) In terms of quality, privileges and benefits, there is no distinction between men and women in this world and the next. When it comes to doing activities required for daily existence, both are equally involved.

The Quran says, "And We created pairs of all things so that you might reflect." (51: 49). This natural law has been confirmed further by science's study of the cosmos. Positive and negative particles make up the atom, the fundamental building block of the universe.^{xxviii} The atom cannot exist without either of the two, individually. Male and female traits can even be found in trees. The whole world is said to exist in pairs. The entire natural factory has operated on a binary basis all the time.

Man and woman differ biologically and physiologically, consistent with God's creation plan. God "made man's mate from the same soul" merely refers to women and men being members of the same species. God made them that way for there to be equality between the sexes. Men and women would not have gotten along if they had come from different species, such as if one had been created from fire and the other from the earth. Men and women would not have been able to work together to create a better society, and family life would not have been peaceful and harmonious.

At the time of the Prophet, women used to attend the night prayers, and occasionally, they would bring their young children with them. The Prophet used to be stringent and gave complete observance of prayer with great attention. But his concern for women was so profound that he occasionally shortened the prayers when he heard newborns crying. He once said: "Sometimes I stand up for prayer, I intend to make it a long one. Then I hear a baby crying. So, I cut short prayer, not wanting to make things difficult for the child's mother." (Al-Bukhari, Sahih, Kitab as-Salah, (Fath al-Bari, 2/160).

Islam views men and women as complements rather than biological twins since undeniable physical disparities result in the separation of spheres of influence and occupation. The strengths of the opposite sex can make up for the weaknesses of the first due to this division of work.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

There were additional instances of Muslim women getting involved in religious debates, one of which happened during the reign of the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab. It had to do with how much dower, in the form of money or goods, was required (given by the husband to the wife at the time of marriage as a token that he would meet all her expenses in future). This was a reasonably small sum during the time of the Prophet, but after the conquest of other nations, people started to assign larger dowries as resources increased.

'Umar once spoke to his people from the pulpit, declaring that he did not know who had raised the dower to more than 400 dirhams because he felt this was a dangerous trend. The Prophet and his Companions gave 400 dirhams or even less.^{xxix} Therefore, a dower of more than 400 dirhams shouldn't be fixed. I shall confiscate the surplus money for the State Treasury if I learn that anyone has exceeded this limit.

After he finished speaking, a woman stood up in one of the crowd's corners and addressed the chief of the faithful, asking, "O Chief of the Faithful, is the Book of God (Qur'an) to be obeyed or what you have to say?" In response, Umar stated that the Book of God must be followed. Then the woman responded, "You have just forbidden people to increase the

amount of dower, whereas God says in His book: O believers, it is unlawful for you ... To force them to give up a part of what you have given them ..." Qur'an, 4:20. The woman had misquoted the text, but 'Umar did not choose to assert himself and simply said, "Everyone knows more than 'Umar." (Al-Baihaqi, as-Sunan al-Kubra, Kitab as-Sudadq, 7/533). With these statements, he gave in on the dower issue. Here, a simple woman criticised an imperial emperor who retracted his remarks. As demonstrated in this episode, the right to free expression is unequivocal proof that women in Islamic society enjoy all of their legal rights.

Women have played important roles throughout the history of Islam. Their deeds show Islam's wide stage for performing noble and heroic deeds and women's lofty place in Islamic society.

Although the word "Muslim" is used in the masculine form in this saying and the word "Muslimah" is used in the feminine, research on the traditions by academics shows that Muslimah can be correctly inferred.^{xxx} This implies that Muslim women have a responsibility to learn new things.

The renowned religious scholar Imam ibn Jauzi is supposed to have acquired his early education from his aunt.^{xxxi} The women doctors of their time, Ibn Abi Asiba's sister and daughter, were medicine specialists.^{xxxii} Several female teachers are also recorded among Imam ibn Asakir's hadith scholars.

The Rights of Husband and Wife

To ensure a successful marriage, the husband and wife must continually foster trust and commitment. Hence, it is important to objectively analyse the detrimental consequences of extramarital affairs, adultery, and the objectification of women by individuals who willingly engage in these sins. Reformation measures should be implemented in order to foster a more harmonious society.

THE QUR'AN states: "They (women) are your garments. And you (men) are their garments." (Qur'an, 2:187) These verses from the Quran outline how men and women should connect, much like a body and its clothing. A body is worthless without clothing, and apparel is meaningless without a body. Since they serve little purpose separately, the two must work together. This represents the physical and spiritual connection between the two sexes.

How stunning a bird looks with its feathers, but if all of them were to be removed, it would become completely unrecognisable. The garment's significance to a man is comparable to the importance of the feather to the bird. A guy without clothing is like an animal without feathers. This illustration of clothing demonstrates the significant value that

men and women place on one another because, without the other, they would be lacking. They are each other's closest friends, and their bond is natural and unavoidable. Each serves as a bulwark for the other and draws strength from the other. A commentator of the Qur'an describes them as "fitting into each other as a garment fits the body." (Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's commentary of 2:187)

Both men and women were designed to be attracted to one another sexually. In the following words, the Qur'an makes this point: And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): Verily in that are Signs for those who reflect. (Qur'an, 30:21).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the position of women in Islam is a multifaceted and dynamic topic. Islam recognises the inherent equality of men and women while assigning them different roles and responsibilities based on their unique qualities. Islamic teachings emphasise the rights and dignity of women, granting them autonomy, protection, and the opportunity to contribute to their families and societies.

References

-
- ⁱ Quinn, C. A., & Quinn, F. (2003). *Pride, Faith, and Fear: Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- ⁱⁱ Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Faure, E., & Unesco. (1972). *Learning to be: The world of education today and tomorrow*. UNESCO.
- ^{iv} Breines, I., Connell, R., Eide, I., & Unesco. (2000). *Male Roles, Masculinities and Violence: A Culture of Peace Perspective*.
- ^v Ecklund, E. H., & Scheitle, C. P. (2018). *Religion Vs. Science: What Religious People Really Think*. Oxford University Press.
- ^{vi} KHĀn, V. (2005b). *Simple Wisdom: A Daybook of Spiritual Living*.
- ^{vii} Boursier, H. T. (2021). *The Rowman & Littlefield Handbook of Women's Studies in Religion*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- ^{viii} Ruthven, L. I. C. R. M., Ruthven, M., & Nanji, A. (2004). *Historical Atlas of Islam*. Harvard University Press.
- ^{ix} Zwemer, S. M. (1900). *Arabia: the Cradle of Islam: Studies in the Geography, People and Politics of the Peninsula, with an Account of Islam and Mission-work*.
- ^x Ghawri, A. S., & Ghauri, I. R. (2010). *The only son offered for sacrifice, Isaac or Ishmael*. Gyan Publishing House.
- ^{xi} Hussain, M. J. (2017). *Biography of Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.
- ^{xii} Arjana, S. R. (2017b). *Pilgrimage in Islam: Traditional and Modern Practices*. Simon and Schuster.
- ^{xiii} Al-Ahsan, A., & Young, S. B. (2017). *Qur'anic Guidance for Good Governance: A Contemporary Perspective*. Springer.

-
- ^{xiv} Vahed, G. H., & Waetjen, T. (2010). *Gender, Modernity & Indian Delights: The Women's Cultural Group of Durban, 1954-2010*. Human Sciences Research.
- ^{xv} Bouhdiba, A., & Dawālibī, M. M. (1998). *The Individual and Society in Islam*. UNESCO.
- ^{xvi} Ahmad, H. M. G. (2018). *Haqiqatul-Wahi: The Philosophy of Divine Revelation*. Islam International Publications Ltd.
- ^{xvii} Safi, L. M. (2021). *Islam and the Trajectory of Globalization: Rational Idealism and the Structure of World History*. Routledge.
- ^{xviii} Ghadanfar, M. A. (2001). *Great Women of Islam: Who Were Given the Good News of Paradise*.
- ^{xix} Ali, K. (2014). *The Lives of Muhammad*. Harvard University Press.
- ^{xx} Haylamaz, R. (2014). *The Luminous Life of Our Prophet*. Tughra Books.
- ^{xxi} Heft, J. (2006). *Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims*. Fordham Univ Press.
- ^{xxii} Ask, K., & Tjomsland, M. (2021). *Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations*. Routledge.
- ^{xxiii} Nasir, K. M. (2020). *Representing Islam: Hip-Hop of the September 11 Generation*. Indiana University Press.
- ^{xxiv} Salahi, A. (2014). *Muhammad: His Character and Conduct*. Kube Publishing Ltd.
- ^{xxv} Raheem, M. R. M. A. (1988). *Muhammad the Prophet*. Pustaka Nasional Pte Ltd.
- ^{xxvi} Ahmad, H. M. B. (2013). *The Life & Character of the Seal of Prophets - Volume II*. Islam International Publications Ltd.
- ^{xxvii} Iqbal, M. (2013). *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Stanford University Press.
- ^{xxviii} Anṣārī, M. (2007b). *Psychology of Mohammed: Inside the Brain of a Prophet*. Institute for Ethical.
- ^{xxix} El-Dash, A. A. (2012). *Origin of the Universe and Life on Earth*. Xlibris Corporation.
- ^{xxx} KHĀn, V. (2000). *Woman in Islamic Shari'ah*. goodword.
- ^{xxxi} KHĀn, V. (2000b). *Woman in Islamic Shari'ah*. goodword.
- ^{xxxii} Shabbar, S. (2014). *Story of the Holy Ka'aba and Its People*. Lulu Press, Inc.