

Islamic Feminism Discourse in the Muslim World

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Abstract

Feminism word itself is very powerful and often used in the contemporary world to assert the right of women. This paper is talk about Islamic feminism which is a subclass of feminism which explicitly emphasises and talks about the social and political empowerment of women in every sphere of life. Here paper talks about women's empowerment in the Islamic world, especially in Egypt, Morocco, Iran and Iraq. Despite the Islamic way of life, and highly conservative society, how Islamic feminism emerged in these countries. The paper also enquires about the links between Muslim feminist approaches in Islamic society and modern Feminism in Islamic World.

Keywords: Feminism; Empowerment; Women rights; Gender; Muslim.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic feminism is a subset of feminism that emphasises women's political and social empowerment and has been greatly influenced by the western feminist movement. The situation of women was the impetus for this movement. They have long been oppressed and subject to various

forms of subjugation worldwide. Every culture mistreats and disrespects women. Slavery was widespread, and all religions practised having men have several wives culture. Even their daughters were slaughtered in the Arabian peninsula's feudal, male dominated pre-Islamic society. Islam has altered societal norms and other harmful behaviours while ensuring women's inclusion in society. They now hold a prestigious position. Islam has brought about such social upheaval, including a more liberal and progressive position for women. Women have had a significant voice in daily social and political life since the advent of Islam in the seventh century, and they are now an essential component of dialogue. Women enjoyed unique significance during the time of the Prophet Muhammad; his wives Khadija and Aisha, daughter Fatima, and sister Aisha all played significant roles in deliberation and decision making. Up until the end of the Khilafat, the historical practice was

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properly maintained, but afterwards, because of religion, the part and liberal space shrunk.

In addition to this idea, several facts that are quite close to us show that the position of women in the area has gotten worse as a result of a protracted theological dispute within the same geographic area with another religious group. Due to the severe level of violence that women endured in Europe during the post-renaissance, there were some uprisings. Women's voices, led by Hubertine Auclert, took the initiative to defend their dignity and raised their voices against male dominance. They first started with women; eventually, they evolved into the feminist movement that appeared in France in the late nineteenth century. Some women's movement voices appeared after the French Revolution of 1789 but did not gain traction.

Therefore, Hubertine Auclert, a prominent French feminist who discussed equitable participation in a political voice for women, emphasised the issue of women's rights. One of the voices for women in Egyptian society also emerged from Egypt, and her name is Huda Shaarawi. She was a member of the Shaarawi family, which is well known and powerful in her hometown of Minya, Egypt, and was born there.¹ Huda was invited to attend a meeting of women held in Paris to advocate peace and women's suffrage.² She published a book titled *Harem Years: The Memory of Egyptian Feminists (1979-1924)*, which is still highly regarded in Islamic society's progressive female communities. Asma Lamrabet, who was born in Morocco, has many more names. Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Azizah al-Hibri, Fatema Mernissi, Leila Ahmed, and Riffat Hassan are a few additional notable Islamic feminist philosophers. These individuals are pioneers in their field of Islamic Feminism and have written extensively on feminist issues.

There are stages of feminism in the Islamic world, especially in Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Iraq and other countries that were part of different imperial power. Dr Margot Badran, an Al-Azhar University and Oxford University graduate, defines 'Islamic Feminism' this way....

A concise definition of Islamic feminism gleaned from the writing and work of Muslim protagonists as a feminist discourse and practice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Quran, seeking rights and justice within the framework of gender equality for women and men in the totality of their existence. Islamic feminist explicates the idea of gender equality as part and parcel of the

Quranic notion of the equality of all human beings (insaan) and calls for the implementation of gender equality in the state, civil institutions, and everyday life (Al-Jazeera, 2013).³

According to feminists, the main problem is usually equality and how it is manifested in a society that is controlled by men. Domestic violence causes pain and suffering, which is unfair in every way, but large populations are still engaging in it. Thus equality won't likely be attained until it stops.

Four arguments about the Quran and Islamic Feminism are covered here. There has been a great deal of academic research into feminist interpretations of the Quran. Feminism discusses bringing Islam to Eternal Life through Islamic Law in relation to another debate regarding Islamic Law. Sufism and Islamic feminism are the subjects of another argument, and the third and last one, which is broken into three parts, discusses post-colonialism and Islamic feminism. The conversations between post-colonialism and Islamic feminism before the Cold War and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, are the first. The second section examines the post-9/11 discussions about post-colonial Islamic feminism, and the third part explores the potential for a new decolonial Islamic feminism.

ISLAM AND GENDER JUSTICE

The western demand for gender justice and equality is nothing more than a drumbeat for the opinions of Islamic clerics. They argued that such pro-equality discourse increased inequality in western society and increased the number of rapes, assaults on women, and divorces reported in most western nations. They claim that the quest for "Gender Equality" is a myth. God created men and women differently, with unique qualities, abilities, and flaws that align with the roles given to them and safeguard the best interests of the home, family, and society. They cited passages from the Quran to support their claim that "a male is not the same as a girl" (Al-Imran-36).

They hold that Islam promotes "Gender Justice," which they define as treating people fairly according to their status, responsibilities, and rights. Islam strikes a balance between women's and men's obligations. It recognises that while not identical, men and women are complementary. Unfortunately, many Muslims in the West even those who are practising confuse the phrase

“Gender Equality” with the idea that equal representation for women in all spheres of life is the way to proceed. Even in religious settings like Masajid and Shura, many advocates for women to take the lead over men. Some have even gone so far as to demand that women have the same rights as men to lead prayers.

According to some Islamic and religious authorities, gender equality destroys the family unit and severely weakens it. Except for a few stragglers, the family structure in the West has already vanished. As if this weren’t enough, the devil (shaitan) created another catchphrase: “Gender Neutrality.” For those who are unfamiliar, it simply means that one’s own desires determine gender; there is no gender at birth. Being male or female has no strict rules. Anyone might be anything, which would cause unprecedented instability and lead to the society’s eventual demise.

However, a lot of progressives are pushing this agenda very strongly. It would undoubtedly be the final straw that broke everyone’s back (destroy the fabric of society if it is not already destroyed by feminism). It seems shocking to witness how deeply it has permeated the Muslim mentality in the current Islamic world and culture, even in homes, Mosques, institutions, youth, politics, and every aspect of everyday life. While as per the Quranic Ayah, some of the references are also here in which Allah (God) said:

“And of everything We have created pairs, that you may remember” (Adh-Dhariyat: 47)

“And We created you in pairs” (an-Naba:8).

“And Allah has made for you wives (azwaj) of your own kind.” (an-Nahl: 72)

“Allah created you from dust, then from a drop of semen, then He made you pairs (male and female).” (Fatir:11)

“He has given you spouses (azwaj) of your own kind.” (ash-Shura:11)

Many Muslims, willingly or not, embrace the aberrant, sick, and criminal behaviour of homosexuality as the norm, and these people are elevated to positions of leadership. This is done under the guise of freedom of choice, gender neutrality, and human rights.

Therefore, without most Muslims realising it, living in immigrant minority communities with non-Muslims in a totally materialistic environment devoid of Islamic principles, ethics, and morals

slowly but surely erodes their Islam and faith (Imaan).

In the 1,400-year history of Islam, nothing like the identity crisis that the immigrant Muslim population is currently experiencing worldwide. Except over the last few decades, when Muslims began travelling to non-Muslim areas in pursuit of their jobs and often at the sacrifice of their faith, Muslims were never permitted to live outside of Islam’s protective umbrella (Deen). More individuals are migrating as a result of the deplorable conditions at home, which are being abused by corrupt authorities and completely supported by global superpowers.

Things are becoming worse since there aren’t enough qualified researchers to steer and anchor the ship in these choppy waters. Islam in the West has become a pastime for many misguided people who are eager to interpret it to suit the whims of those who do not wish to modify themselves to adhere to divine rules but are instead interested in changing the divine system to their liking. While Islam was never revealed to be a subordinate religion and God (Allah) explicitly declared that it would triumph over all Adyan/isms/religions, HE (God) is sufficient to make it happen.

WHAT IS FEMINISM ALL ABOUT

Early in the 20th century, as modern nation states began to emerge, the women’s liberation movement known as feminism was born in Europe and the United States. It alludes to the actions taken in these nations by white middle-class women to protect their political and economic rights. Feminism emerged as a political movement that advocated for women to have equal legal protection and political rights.

The word “feminist” in English typically refers to equality. To do this, it actively engages in all issues that directly and indirectly affect women to ensure that they have a good level of living and influence in society. This isn’t meant to be anti-masculine, but it’s common to challenge patriarchy and misogyny. Feminism supports women’s equality and fights for their demands. It encompasses a range of movements that focus on gender issues, political and social theories, philosophies, and scientific awareness.

According to Dr. Susan Currie Sivek, Feminism is a movement that seeks equality for people of any gender. It is founded on the belief that people should

be able to pursue any opportunity and demonstrate any characteristic regardless of gender".⁴

The fact that both men and women can be feminists is an important aspect of feminism today. Feminism supported gender equality; hence they were fighting against gender discrimination. It's not that women rule over males.

According to Maggie Hum and Rebecca Walker, the history of feminism can be divided into three waves. The first is from the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries; it deals with property rights and the right to vote. The second wave is in the 1960s and 70s. It focuses on equality and anti-discrimination. The third wave started in the 1990s as a backlash to the second wave's perceived privileging of white, straight women.⁵

ISLAMIC FEMINISM & ITS APPROACH

The approach of Islamic feminism is not fully western, but it has a composition of Islamic narrative and is different from the west approach. Some so many authors have written extensively on the history of Islamic feminism in detail. The idea that these feminist/women encounters were frequently framed against the backdrop of a Euro-American white woman was criticised by black feminist theorists, including Alice Walker, Bell Hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins. Feminists from India and other developing nations have also voiced this critique. Despite the conditions in nations like India, Euro-American-centric feminist readings frequently make a Universalist case. Against this backdrop, feminism in its many forms spread around the globe. Islamic feminism makes the initial claim that "from the perspective of Islam in the 1990s," this is how Muslim women deal with this kind of relationship, which is often different from Euro-American feminism and needs to be understood differently from their interventions.⁶

The prevailing feminist thesis for a while has been that women who choose a religious path are not significant in social life. However, the social transformations of the 1980s, also known as the "return of religion," provided feminist politics with a fresh boost in how they approached religion. Women's politics were acknowledged as a component of the Islamic Christian movement as a result of religion's pervasive political involvement in Chicago, Iran, and Eastern Europe. As a result, there have been numerous readings of the feminist ideology on religion or secularism. In those readings, it is criticised that the limits of Islamic

inquiry are rigidly established by secular politics and epistemology.

The author explains very clearly how Islamic Feminism emerged as an academic term. In the 1990s, Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi and scholars Amina Wadud and Leila Ahmed criticised gender inequality in Islam. Later, their thoughts and stands were known as Islamic Feminism in public, academic discourse as a "school of thought".⁷ Then the term Islamic feminism has been a widely discussed phenomenon since its emergence in the 1990s. Margot Badran, the author of the book *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious convergence*, coined the term "Islamic feminism" worldwide.

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Islamic scholars assert that Islamic feminism is more extreme than secular feminism and is grounded in Islamic discourse, with the Quran serving as its primary book (central text).⁸ As "a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic framework," Margot Barden promoted a variety of Islam and feminism. Islamic feminists apply a feminist perspective to the interpretation of sacred texts. They can be viewed as a group of Muslim commentators who debate Islam's teachings, advocate for gender equality, and push for equality between men and women in both the public and private realms.

There are many divergent perspectives on Islamic feminism. During the Iranian revolution, Simone de Beauvoir describes women as naive and trying to let go of their minds. Liberal feminists in Kerala have the same concerns about allowing women to participate in public life. One of Kerala's first feminists, Sreeja Arangottukara, has brought attention to the large number of women demonstrating through communal and religious organisations (Devika and Sukumar: 2006). It explains the fundamental issues with feminist

politics' approach to religion on a worldwide basis. Recent years have seen a plethora of studies challenging the secular discourse's epistemic dominance. Two of the top post-secular feminist theorists, Judith Butler and Joan Wallach Scott, have contested this hegemony. They contended that feminism ought to be as secular as religion and that there shouldn't be any room for competing epistemologies.⁹

Islamic Feminism in the Prism of Islamic Law

The author mentions three primary methods of translating Islamic law into Islamic feminism in the book's foundation, "Islamic Feminism: Diversity, Complexity, and the Future". The Oxford Handbook of Islamic law, published under the editors Rumi Ahmad and Anwar Eamon, has research on gender and Islamic law by Saadiya Yaqub. It introduces three main feminist Islamic perspectives on Islamic law. It was created following the 1990s. The first reading examines how, over time, Islamic law has come to marginalise the ideological emancipation values of Islam. Laila Ahmad created this strategy in 1992 for her book *Women and Gender in Islam*.¹⁰ The legalisation of Islam is seen in this approach as an ideological decline.

A key Islamic assertion is called into doubt by Laila Ahmad's 1992 study of women and gender in Islam. (footnote) The following is a summary of Ahmad's claims: Contrary to what other Islamic feminists believe, Islam has not gradually paved the way for the emancipation of women. Before then, Islam was steadily working to enhance masculinity and develop new explanations for it in the Greek, Roman, and Christian civilisations. Islam undoubtedly possessed an egalitarian social concept but lacked the necessary social framework to survive. Islam has evolved into a hierarchical and, more importantly, a masculinity based religion. This is primarily due to Islamic law.¹¹ Islam has been turned into a war for equality and masculinity thanks to Laila Ahmad's feminism. Furthermore, the study of Islamic law is not just for those who practise it. Instead, they worked to make it a part of the history of masculinity. Fatima Sidatcriticises Laila Ahmad's action for initially neglecting the politics of masculinity in Islam and inadvertently attributing the causes of masculinity to outside forces.¹²

The second strategy emphasises the jurisprudence of religious law while reading from an Islamic feminist perspective (Usul al-Fiqh). The primary advocate for this reading was Aziza al-Hibri. This group of researchers focused on the

strategy that a correct understanding of Islamic law provides for Muslim women's rights. They believed that constructive women's politics might be based on Islamic law.¹³ Asifa Quraishi, Raga al-Nimr, and Aziza al-Hibri are investigating the potential of Islamic law and where women's rights may be found. They refused to interpret Islamic law as a mirror of masculinity, in contrast to Laila Ahmad. They considered it undesirable to completely reject Islamic law. They also noted that while certain legal provisions favour masculinity, others are opposed to it. In other words, what was established was a careful understanding of Islamic law, not a wholesale denial. Islamic law is moral and emancipatory on a reading level. In this sense, they contended, it was conceivable to alter the rulings of specific Islamic jurists. The new fatwas were formulated as a result. Textbooks on jurisprudence were revised. They made an effort to sway the Muslim community's legislators. They also see Islamic law as defending and upholding the value of masculinity. They explain this discrepancy in this manner. Although the terms "Sharia" and "Fiqh" refer to what appears to be Islamic law, Sharia actually refers to the ideal form of Islamic law, while Fiqh refers to man's attempts to achieve it. Islamic law becomes a hotspot of the struggle between divine justice and human impulses as a result of this discrepancy.

Islamic law can reveal divine justice in some circumstances while reflecting sectarian masculinity interests. In that regard, enacting Islamic law that preserves the actual intent of Sharia is advantageous to both feminism and Islam. Independent investigation (ijtihad) is a strategy to hasten the development of Islamic law. However, the social context-created interest in male ideals comes into play during this investigation, and the fiqh legal system disregards the divine interest. Not only Asifa Quraish¹⁴ and Aziza al-Hibri but also Raga' El-Nimr¹⁵ are developing this view. The second approach is Islamic feminist reading with an emphasis on jurisprudence (Usul al-Fiqh). However, Kecia Ali¹⁶ criticises that they often move directly to the Qur'an and politics outside of jurisprudence when the tools of Islamic law are shaken.¹⁷ It led researchers such as Kecia Ali and Hina Assam,¹⁸ and Marion Katz¹⁹ to view the masculinity of Islamic law differently, as it is always a limitation to not be able to rely on theology itself. It became the third way of reading Feminism in Islamic law.

The third section also covers the possibility of a legal subject position in Islamic law. The two prior methods are also contrasted in this. An effort to

acknowledge the significance of context has been made in response to the problem and potential within Islamic law. Kecia Ali presents a multi-layered critique of the historical reading of the law.

It is difficult to uphold women's rights while adhering to the underlying reasoning of existing Islamic law. Kecia Ali urged the historicisation of Islamic law to give up its view of Islamic law as a setting for establishing Muslim rights. (footnote) The third stage is best illustrated, in Saadiya Yacoub's opinion, by the essay *Progressive Muslims and Islamic Jurisprudence: The Necessity for Critical Engagement with Marriage and Divorce Law*. Ali believes that Aziza al-Hibri does not understand how the legislation operates on the inside. Additionally, according to Yacoub, this strategy does not conflict with the historically formed jurisprudence in Islamic law. According to Ali, this criticism, which ignores the jurisprudential components that have historically developed in Islamic law, merely widens gender disparities.

Ali exhorts us to examine the legal writings, the legal system, and the historical cultural setting in which law was developed. For instance, the definition of law and marriage varies depending on the stage of Islam. Ali believes there would be no use in trying to discover a similar legal remedy by consulting a law book written a thousand years ago that included an earlier concept of marriage. Only when one can examine the two concepts of marriage and divorce historically and observe their evolving implications is the reading of Islamic law complete. For instance, Ali contends that attempting to preserve the traditional pre-capitalist system's predominately nuclear family values would weaken the law itself.

The Islamic Law and its Reading Approach through Scholar

There were a number of scholars who talked about feminism in the framework of Islamic law, Ziba Mir Hussaini is one of them from Iran. Hussaini interprets Islamic law through practical involvement after realising the crisis. That is how these three approaches are biologically integrated.²⁰ She is a well known Muslim feminist. She deserves the title of independent Muslim female legalist. She is also an activist fighting for Muslim women's rights. Mir Hussein is a Shia Muslim feminist, which sets her apart from the other Islamic feminists examined here. She also wanted to know more about Iran's culture and values. According to Ziba Mir Hussaini, gender disparity is against heavenly gender justice, not a product of the

divine, not a lesson from the divine, and a product of Muslim judge's acts and perspectives. (footnote)

They draw attention to the numerous challenges that arise when trying to reconcile Muslim women's dedication to their religion with gender equality as the colonial West has impacted it. In the new legal system, the anti-democratic forces of contemporary nation states have built karma based on gender inequity. The power of the father and husband over the man's family and the husband's right to initiate a divorce is common. The substitution of women for sex as a kind of self-defence, and the obedience and disobedience of women are cited as the key gender issues globally. This kind of practical intervention is also a component of Mir Hussein's work.

Mir Hussein's primary focus is on family law reform.²¹ The Muslim family law happens when Islamic law is applied to the modern nation. Hussein describes what needs to be done to uplift the status of women in the realm of Islamic law:

Contrary to the existing provisions, the marriage contract should include a provision that allows women to take the lead and limit the authority of men. It makes it possible for women to compromise on their divorce.

- The moral and legal boundaries of marriage need to be redefined in order to limit the husband's unilateral authority and expand the wife's rights.
- Advocating for change based on the Qur'an's logic and the law's doctrine. Many laws need to be re-examined in light of the changes that have taken place in modern times regarding the status and gender of women.
- Attitudes that challenge the monopoly of men in epistemology need to be developed.
- The most active school of practical Islamic legal feminism is that of Ziba Mir Hussein. While theoretically interfering with the three currents above, Mir Hussein blends theory and practice. Their relationship involves a new praxis. It is an intervention that will result in current developments in feminism and Islamic law.

CONCLUSION

Feminism in the Islamic world has rapidly grown up and has now become a topic of discussion and widely read their approach and logical presentation. Initially, it was influenced by the West but the internal discussion and situation provided ground

in the Muslim countries about this movement. The discussion described regarding Islamic Feminism comes to a logical conclusion in the sentences that follow. White middle class women from the West dominate the feminist discourse. They base their arguments on the premise that most of them cannot begin on the side of the socio-political analysis of mainstream global feminism. Another alarming fact is the difference between how Islam is preached and how its courts operate. The latter falls short in administering gender justice, while the former is excellent.

Despite the claim that Islam is a religion where the detractors believe masculinity to be superior to the fair sex, they carelessly overlooked the fact that the Islamic Sharia (law) clearly ordered women's rights to property and a share in their ancestor's wealth. It should be emphasised that women's inherited property rights were rejected even in mediaeval Europe. In summary, it may be said that Islam recognises women as human beings with rights and obligations. The advancement of women to a coveted socioeconomic status and reading Islam from its original texts are therefore urgently needed; at one point, there was no feminist movement of any colour, neither white nor black. Additionally, it has been discovered that Islam held the key to women's freedom in the so called dark ages when women were often equated to witches.

The major can only relate to an "Islamic" feminist because they all view Islam as essential. As a result, many Muslim women select the lifestyle that Islam permits. We can see how Islamic feminism varies from Western feminism as a result.

In discussions of Islamic law and feminism, feminist studies recommend that the study of law be viewed as a hybrid study of Islamic law as not only legal texts but also legal specialists and common citizens who use the law should be taken into account. They alter the law to suit their needs. It forces us to reconsider how Islamic law operates in relation to gender politics rather than continuing to view it as a static body of law. All of the works to date have attempted to move beyond secular and orientalist interpretations of Islamic law and the role of women in it.

Rarely did it make int <https://www.msn.com/en-in/feed> entional efforts to adopt a distinctly feminist perspective. However, the political critique that enabled the formation of Islamic feminism was made feasible by the secular/modern/Orientalist critique of Islamic law, but there were ways to

achieve so in this circumstance. Therefore, a new Muslim feminist approach to Islam was made possible in the 1990s thanks to the fieldwork of Laila Ahmad, Keshia Ali, Aziz al-Hibi, and Ziba Mir Hussaini.

Attempts to consciously develop a clear feminist approach within it were rare. However, the secular/modern/Orientalist critique of Islamic law made possible the political critique that led to the emergence of Islamic Feminism, but; Ways to do that were available in this situation. Therefore, the intervention of Laila Ahmad, Keshia Ali, Aziz al-Hibi and Ziba Mir Hussaini in the field in the 1990s made a new Muslim feminist methodology of Islam possible. Whether it was Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Turkey, or even some of the GCC countries, many scholars talked about this movement and how it changed the social and political landscape due to huge pressure from these scholars and movement leaders. One thing is clear: all these demands for rights and political participation in the social political sphere increased in a very peaceful way under the Islamic framework's prism.

FOOTNOTE

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