

The Effects of Islam's Sociocognitive Transformation on Female Rights and Roles

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Abstract: The advent of Islam resulted in an extraordinary revolution in human history because of the new intellectual ideology that transformed the way of thinking that was prevalent in 7th-century pre-Islamic Arabian society. This sociocognitive transformation occurred because the 'aṣabiyyah' concept was abolished and replaced with a sense of brotherhood based on shared creedal bonds. The innovative vision of the new religion rejected all kinds of discrimination, be they related to ethnicity, race or gender. A notable consequent transformation was that of the status of women, who were subjected to any number of abuses and injustices. Islam announced wide-ranging equality between the sexes in all aspects, including females' rights to a prosperous social, educational and political life. Many Muslim women emerged as scholars, and some played pivotal political and social roles during the Golden Age after the advent of Islam.

Keywords: Islam, female rights and roles, sociocognitive transformation, theological bond, 'aṣabiyyah, jāhiliyyah.

الأثار المترتبة على التحول الإسلامي المعرفي الاجتماعي على أدوار المرأة وحقوقها

هدى محمد حسن هلال

باحثة من ألمانيا-آخن

ملخص البحث: لقد أدى ظهور الإسلام إلى ثورة استثنائية في تاريخ البشرية بسبب الأيديولوجية الفكرية الجديدة التي قادت التحول المعرفي الاجتماعي في العقلية السائدة لعرب الجاهلية، وذلك بالقضاء على مفهوم العصبية، ليحل مكانه الشعور بالأخوة القائم على روابط عقدية. استطاع التصور الإبداعي للدين الجديد القادم على أرض الجزيرة العربية التخلص من كل أشكال التمييز سواء المتعلقة بالعرق، أو الجنس. كما أن هناك تطورا ناتجا ملحوظا في مكانة المرأة التي كانت تعاني من الاضطهاد، أو الظلم، حيث أعلن الإسلام مساواة واسعة النطاق بين الجنسين في كل المجالات بما في ذلك حقوق المرأة في حياة اجتماعية وتربوية وسياسية مزدهرة. ونتيجة لهذا التحول المعرفي الاجتماعي برزت نساء عالمات بعضهن لعبن أدواراً حيوية سياسية، وأدواراً اجتماعية خلال العصر الذهبي في صدر الإسلام.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإسلام، أدوار المرأة وحقوقها، التحول المعرفي الاجتماعي، الرابط العقدية، العصبية، الجاهلية.

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Introduction

Amidst the screams of girls being buried alive for no fault of their own other than being born a girl, a peaceful and radiating light emerged from Arabia to spread across much of the globe. It was the Islamic revelation that produced an ideological revolution resulting in one of the most profound changes in human history. The revolution re-established the rights and dignity of women, who had been subjected to many abuses and injustices. We should shed light on the sociocultural and historical context in which Islam had emerged in order to comprehend the changes accomplished by the Prophet. Against all odds, Islam reversed the principles and cognitions of the people in the *jāhīliyyah* period (the pre-Islamic period of ignorance) so that they met the divine standards. This transformation is illustrated by two Qur'ānic verses. The first depicts the Meccans' perception of females: "When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain her on (sufferance) and contempt, or bury her in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decide on?" (Qur'ān, 16:58-59).

The second verse states a more favorable perception of the female gender: "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women, And fear Allah through whom you ask one another, the wombs" (Qur'ān, 4:1). This verse indicates the commonality of the two genders: male and female are created from one soul. Consequently, they are entitled to the same level of human dignity. This verse, along with others, repudiates the pre-Islamic attitude mentioned in the first verse whereby women were considered a source of shame and ruin. In such a way, the Qur'ānic message transformed the status of women and ensured her just treatment and equal nobility.

Durant portrayed the situation of women in the pre-Islamic era as follows:

She might be buried at birth if the father so willed; at best, he mourned her coming and hid his face from his fellows; somehow, his best efforts had failed. Her winsome childhood earned a few years of love, but at seven or eight, she was married off to any youth of the clan whose father would offer the purchase price for the bride. Her lover and husband would fight the world to defend her person or honour. She formed part of the estate of her father, her husband or her son, and was bequeathed as part of that estate; she was the servant, rarely the comrade of the man, he demanded many children of her, or rather many sons, her duty was to produce warriors. She was in many cases but one of his wives. He could dismiss her at any time at will.⁽¹⁾

Arab women were subjected to many types of abuses, including being buried alive, despised from birth due to being an omen of ruin, forced into marriages and married as minors, treated as merchandise that could be inherited and sold, seen as lower than men, exploited in their domestic tasks, and subject to divorce without a reason.

Nonetheless, throughout the centuries, historians have had different opinions about Muslim women. Christie S. Warren said: "As a result of their new rights and improved status, women attained important positions in early Muslim society. During the Prophet's life, women played prominent roles in religious, political, educational, legal, moral economic and military arenas, and the wives and daughters of the Prophet were instrumental in assisting him as he established the new religion. The Prophet reportedly sought the counsel of his wives on many important matters".⁽²⁾

The topic of women in Islam has been researched from different angles. The most relevant research to my article is the dissertation entitled "The changing position of women in Arabia under Islam during the early seventh century".⁽³⁾ by Faryal Abbas Abdullah Sulaimani. Sulaimani's major aim was to compare the status of women before and after the Prophet's time. The current study shares some common points with the

(1) Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, (New Delhi: Cosmo Publication, 2011), Vol. 4, p.158

(2) Christie S. Warren, *Lifting the veil: Women and Islamic Law*, Faculty Publication, (2008), No. 99, p.42.

(3) Faryal Abbas Abdullah Sulaimani, *The Changing Position of Women in Arabia Under Islam during the Early Seventh Century*, (1986), (unpublished Master Thesis), University of Salford, international studies Unit, England.

abovementioned dissertation regarding the advantages of new position of females; however, there are some differences in other aspects, such as the sociocognitive transformation studies provided in the present article that were not mentioned by Sulaimani. Sulaimani's work was only about highlighting the period of the Prophet and his companions as the Golden Age for Muslim women. Fatima Mernissi, while acknowledging that the Islamic message brought rights to women, nevertheless claimed that the Prophet's male companions were resistant to changing their pre-Islamic ways and consequently sought refuge and justification for themselves through reinterpreting ambiguous texts, such as by claiming that the word (*al-sufahā'*, meaning "the foolish ones") Qur'ān, 4:5 refers to women.⁽¹⁾

This paper examines the impact of the Islamic ethical revolution on the status of females in Arab customs and how the revolution inspired dynamic female participation in the early Islamic period.⁽²⁾ Therefore, this article aims to do the following:

- 1- Illustrate the psychological phenomena that were at play in the nascent Muslim community that led to the reshaping of the personality of Muslim individuals according to the new concepts and principles.
- 2- Address the numerous rights, duties and roles of women in social life that that Islamic teachings brought to women in order to liberate them from male domination.
- 3- Articulate the contributions of women in the educational field in the earliest Islamic period as well as the privileged status granted to them in societal and political movements due to Islam's influence.

In the subsequent centuries of Islamic civilization, female participation declined gradually. Islamic jurisprudence and legislation were overwhelmingly written by male jurists. Moreover, the books of Qur'ānic interpretation were written almost exclusively by male interpreters.⁽³⁾

This article consists of three sections. The first section analyses how Islam changed the way of thinking that was prevalent in 7th-century pre-Islamic Arabian society. The second section contains a comparison of women's social rights before and after the advent of Islam. The third section addresses women's participation in educational and political fields.

1. The sociocognitive transformation of Arabia

The Prophet Muḥammad's mission emerged in the Arabian Peninsula. Arabia had no king and lacked a central governing body. Durant described their political system in the following way: "The political organisation of pre-Islamic Arabia was a primitive kinship structure of families united in clans and tribes".⁽⁴⁾ Social and political structures were based on blood ties known as 'aṣabiyyah, "group loyalty" or "group solidarity".⁽⁵⁾ Ibn Khaldūn described the concept of 'aṣabiyyah in his *al-Muqaddima* thusly: "'aṣabiyyah resulted from coherence in lineage"⁽⁶⁾. The concept reveals a sort of connectivity between the human being and the social group to which he or she belongs.⁽⁷⁾ There was no more important group in Arab life than the

(1) Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam, an Historical and Theological Enquiry*, translated by: Mary Jo Lakeland, (Great Britain: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp.125-126.

(2) For more information, see: Souad T. Ali, Feminism in Islam; A Critique of Polygamy in Mariama Ba's Epistolary Novel *so long Aletter*, *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World (Brill)*, (2012), 10, p.180. DOI: 10.1163/15692086-12341236.

(3) See: Mohammad Akram Nadwi, *Al-Muḥaddithāt: The Women Scholars in Islam*, (London; Oxford: Interface Publications, 2007), p. 246.

(4) Durant, *The Story of Civilization, Vol. 4, p.157*.

(5) Yusuf Sidani, Ibn Khaldūn of North Africa: an AD 1377 theory of leadership, *Journal of Management History*, (2008), Vol. 14, No.1, p.77.

(6) 'Abd al-Raḥman ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn: al-Muqaddima*, ed. 'Abd Allah al-Darwīsh, (Damascus: Dār al-Balkhī, 2004), Vol.1, p. 256 .

(7) See: Maḥmoud Dhaoudi, Ibn Khaldun: the founding father of eastern sociology, *International Sociology*, (1990), 5:3. p.319-335.

tribe.⁽¹⁾ The so-called 'aşabiyyah existed in very primitive cultures such as those in the Arabian Peninsula and Africa. It stemmed from family and blood relationships, which is the core element of this concept.⁽²⁾ Ibn Khaldūn developed his theories on the rise and fall of civilizations based on the concept of 'aşabiyyah. 'Aşabiyyah was significant, as it drove people to defend their tribes and choose what was in the best interest of their tribes, which provided a flawed yet working sense of governance and security. He said: "Leadership is based on conquering, and conquering is based on 'aşabiyyah. The leadership must come from the stronger 'aşabiyyah that overcomes every other 'aşabiyyah⁽³⁾".⁽⁴⁾

Five-sixths of the population of pre-Islamic Arabia were nomadic Bedouins or herdsmen.⁽⁵⁾ who shifted their flocks from one pastureland to another according to the season.⁽⁶⁾ The Bedouin spent his life engaged in tribal war and was very proud of his dignity and pure, often inbred blood.⁽⁷⁾ This unstable lifestyle had many effects on the sociocultural background of the Bedouins. A major concern in Arab life was blood relationships, as Smith clarified: "It has already been remarked that before the time of Muḥammad the old notion of an absolute blood-bond binding the whole group together had been greatly relaxed. Family feeling was stronger than gentile or tribal feeling, and the mark of this is the numerous fratricidal wars that raged all over Arabia just before Islam".⁽⁸⁾

With the advent of Islam, the Prophet Muḥammad transformed this concern to a global scope called the 'ummah, which transcends all narrow relationships, and he invited people to be part of this universal fellowship. To abolish 'aşabiyyah, the Prophet implemented a creative system reflecting the theological ties among Arabs and non-Arabs who converted to Islam. This fellowship is based on faith, not biology or tribal bonds. The Prophet united the migrants (*Muhājirūn*) and helpers ('*Ansār*) in such a way that each member of the first group found a brother among the other group. The formation of this new society bound in faith and united in vision is recognized as a major goal of the Islamic mission and vision. Bennabi viewed this step as the first in establishing a new society:

It is a known fact that the first task a society carries out in the course of changing its status is conditional upon the completion of the network of its relations. Accordingly, one can assert that the construction of the network of relations is the first historical task a society carries out upon its birth. By the same token, the first task the Islamic society undertook was to draw the covenant which laid down the basis for the relationships between the *Muhājirūn* and '*Ansār*.⁽⁹⁾

The divine revelation induced a significant change in the way of thinking that was prevalent in 7th-century pre-Islamic Arabian society. When the Prophet heard that one of his companions practiced some sort of 'aşabiyyah, he said: "Leave it, for it is something disgusting"⁽¹⁰⁾. The Qur'ān announced the universality of the Islamic mission: "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 most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you" (Qur'ān, 49:13). The Prophet eliminated all kinds of discrimination by saying: "Allah (SAW) removed from you the pride of ignorance and boasting about ancestors, people are either pious

(1) Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 4, p.157.

(2) Asyiqin Abdul Halim, Mohd roslan Mohd Nor, Ahmad Zaki Berahim Ibrahim and Faisal Ahmad Faisal Abdul Hamid, Ibn Khaldun's Theory of 'aşabiyyah and its Applications in Modern Muslim Societ, *Middle-East of Scientific Research, IDOSI Publication*, (2012), 11 (9), p. 3. DOI: 10.5829/idosi.mejsr.2012.11.09.227010.

(3) Author's translation.

(4) Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn: al-Muqaddima*, Vol.1, p.261.

(5) Ibn Khaldūn described Arabs as the people of camels, who moved from one place to another seeking trees and springs and avoiding cold weather. See: Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn: al-Muqaddima*, Vol.1, p.246.

(6) Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 4, p.157.

(7) Ibid., Vol. 4, p.158.

(8) William R. Smith, *Kinship & Marriage*, (London: Dar Publishers, 1990), p.189.

(9) Malik Bennabi, *On the Origins of the human society*, ed. Muhammad Tahir al-Mesawi, (Malaysia: The Open Press, 1998), p.29.

(10) Abū al-Husain 'Asākīr al-Dīn Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj ibn Muslim ibn Ward ibn Kawshādh al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī, *Ṣaḥīh Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Bāqī, (Cairo: Dār 'Ihyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, n.d), Vol. 4, p.108.

believers or miserably wicked. People are Adam's children, and Adam was from dust".⁽¹⁾

The new Qur'ānic vision was global and rejected all discrimination, be it based on race, gender, or ethnicity. The major shift from a very narrow community to one open to all took place in only a few years. The speed of this transformation has piqued the interest of many who have sought to discover the secret of its success. Malik Bennabi said the following of it:

Whether we are concerned with the Islamic or the Christian society...we can be certain that the idea which runs deep throughout the entire history of mankind is a religious idea. It follows from this that the exceptional circumstances which leads to the birth of a society coincide in reality with the advent of a religious ideal that would comprise all the societal potentials as the drop of sperm would contain all the filaments of the being which will come into existence.⁽²⁾

Ibn Khaldūn considered religion to have the unique power to influence Arabs and provoke change in their society. Arabs at that time had a competitive nature that often led to hatred and fighting, yet the religion of Islam replaced their tribal arrogance with a sense of universal fraternity.⁽³⁾ Salime Leyla explained Ibn Khaldūn's theory thusly: "Religion, by leading the members of a tribe to a common goal, eliminates rivalries among its different houses or dynasties and thus strengthens the dimension of solidarity in the already existing group feeling of the tribe".⁽⁴⁾

After articulating the roles of women in the new society, the question remains: what are the factors behind this tremendous change that took place in the Arabian Peninsula, and what factors led to the complete transformation from nomadic to urban lifestyles that achieved high levels of success? Bennabi remarks that "there are numerous instances testifying to the fact that the Islamic ideal manifested its full efficacy in recognising and orientating the vital energy that the Arabian Peninsula bequeathed to the age of the Prophet".⁽⁵⁾

By engaging the psychological methods that assisted in liberating the spiritual energy in the newly established society, Islam sought to shape the personality of Muslim individuals according to its new concepts and principles. For this, two processes were applied successfully. The first was *filtration*, and the second was *selection*.⁽⁶⁾

(i) Filtration

Muslims became irresponsible to *'aṣabiyyah* stimuli that would have once led to civil feuds. New impetuses were cultivated by reorienting priorities to defend Muslim fellowship and help the poor and the oppressed. Bennabi described this process as follows: "The end result of the psychological process in both cases is the same in that the individual gets rid of a set of anti-social trends and attitudes and acquires, instead, the new trends and attitudes compatible with the needs of a society".⁽⁷⁾

There are many examples in the Qur'ān and Sunna that elucidate this notion. The first deals with the concept of *'aṣabiyyah* towards a "filtration process". The Qur'ān says the following of *'aṣabiyyah*: "And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and do not become divided. And remember the favour of Allah upon you when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together and you became, by His favour, brothers. And you were on the edge of a pit of the Fire, and He saved you from it" (Qur'ān, 3: 103). The metaphor of a rope that ties Muslims together was taken from their practice of binding their camels to pre-

(1) Muḥammad Shams al-Haqq al-'Azīm Abādī, *'Aoun al-Ma'būd 'alā Sanan Abī Dāwūd*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1415/1995), Vol. 13, p.18.

(2) Bennabi, *On the Origins of the human society*, p.64.

(3) See: Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn: al-Muqaddima*, Vol. 1, p.289.

(4) Salime Leyla Gurkan, Some Implications of Ibn Khaldun's Approach to the History of the People of Israel: The Relation Between *'Aṣabiyyah* and Chosenness, *Journal of Faculty of Theology*, Sakarya University, *Ilahiat Fakultesi Dergisi*, (2017), 19:35, p.104. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17335/sakaifd.298032>.

(5) Bennabi, *On the Origins of the human society*, p.127.

(6) *Ibid.*, pp.77-78.

(7) *Ibid.*, p.78.

vent them from straying, and the image of fire represents the doom that awaits if they fail to observe the divine commands. The scene that directed their behavior inspired their belief that all Muslims should be united as a large family. Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671), the famous Qur'anic exegete, said: "You became by the grace of Allah (SAW) Muslim brothers in the religion"⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾.

(ii) Selection

The second example was in implementing the "theological bond" in order to be under the "selection process". The Prophet depicted the relations of the Muslim brotherhood based on faith as that of a single body; if one part is ill, the entire body will be affected: "The similitude of the believers in their kindness and mercifulness and compassion as the one body, if one part of it is complaining, the whole body would be fallen in sleeplessness and fever"⁽³⁾. Bennabi said that "it is the spiritual relationship between God and Man that creates and determines the social bonds which link every individual with his fellow humans"⁽⁴⁾.

After the advent of Islam, women were freed from the chains of ignorance to enjoy numerous privileges in their social, educational and political lives. Islam is viewed as an anti-feminist religion by many non-Muslims, and Iman Hashim comments on such views as follows: "Islam in particular has a reputation for being anti-woman and for supporting a segregated social system where women are economically and politically marginalised"⁽⁵⁾.

2. The societal roles of Muslim women

The dominant view of women in the pre-Islamic period was that they were inferior to men and a burden. Burying girls alive and infanticide were common practices in pre-Islamic Arab society. Al-'Abshīhī describes this custom as follows: "One of the Arabs' strange habits was burying girls alive; in ignorant times if they were granted a female baby, they would bury her alive, there was a mountain in Mecca called Abu Dulāma, in which the Quraish used to bury their girls"⁽⁶⁾. The Qur'an condemned this practice: "And when the girl (who was) buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed" (Qur'an, 81: 8-9). There were many reasons for this offensive custom. Shehadeh and Maaita enumerated them as follows: intense jealousy, disabled newborns, poverty, and sometimes a covenant to slaughter one of their children for some agreed-upon reason.⁽⁷⁾ Burying newborn girls alive was sometimes also done because fathers were afraid that the girl's honor would one day be violated.⁽⁸⁾

The Qur'an mentioned the Arab aversion to girls⁽⁹⁾: "And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief" (Qur'an, 16:58). This verse is evidence of the humiliation associated with females in Arab culture. The Qur'an condemns this habit of being ashamed because of newborn girls and condemns discrimination against females in general. Ibn Kathīr said: "If he let her live, she would be dishonoured, and unqualified to inherit. He would not take care of her, and his male children would receive preference. Otherwise, he would have buried her alive as was custom in the *jāhīliyyah* period"⁽¹⁰⁾.⁽¹¹⁾ The Qur'an returns the right to life for female babies by saying: "And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you. Indeed, their killing is ever a great sin"

(1) Author's translation.

(2) Muḥammad B. Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, ed. Aḥmad al-Bardūnī & Ibrāhīm Atfīsh, (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Maṣriyya, 1964), Vol. 4, p.156.

(3) Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Vol. 4, p.2000.

(4) Bennabi, *On the Origins of the human society*, p 64.

(5) Iman Hashim, Reconciling Islam and Feminism, *Gender and Development*, 2019, Vol. 7, No. 1, p.7. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4030365>.

(6) Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad al-'Abshīhī, *Al-Mustaṭraf fī kuli Fanen Mustazraf*, (Beirut: Dār al-Hayāt, n.d), Vol. 2, p. 81-82.

(7) Omar 'Abdallah Aḥmad Shehadeh; & Reem Farhan Odeh Maaita, *Infanticide in pre-Islam era: phenomenon investigation*, p. 6-7, (accessed November 13, 2016). <http://www.eis.hu.edu.jo/deanshipfiles/pub103314692.pdf>.

(8) Ibid., p.7.

(9) Jawad 'Alī, *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab kabla al-Islam*, (Iraq: university of Bagdad, 1993), Vol. 4, p.651.

(10) Author's translation.

(11) Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, ed. Sāmī B. Muḥammad al-Salāma, (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayba, 2002), Vol. 4, p.579.

(Qur'ān, 17: 31). The Qur'ān announces the right to life for all human beings, male and female, master and slave in a culture that had given authority to the strong to dominate the weak. The Qur'ān forbids killing an innocent soul: "And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right" (Qur'ān, 17: 33). As a second step to eliminate this problem, the Prophet encouraged Muslims to have daughters and raise them as a means to enter paradise, "Whosoever is put to trial by these daughters, and treat them with dignity, then these daughters will act as a shield for him from the Hell-fire".⁽¹⁾ The Qur'ān announced spiritual equality in gender, saying: "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward" (Qur'ān, 33: 35). This message was not familiar to the Arabs, who were subjecting women to different kinds of humiliation. The rise of Islam can, in this sense, be seen as providing the spark for the feminist movements throughout history.⁽²⁾ Fatima Seedat said: "A further alternative privileges a historically located Islamic struggle against patriarchy and sex inequality. In this latter construct, the struggle for equality is not a new one inaugurated by modern Muslim women but a struggle with a long Prophetic and Qur'ānic genealogy".⁽³⁾ Indeed, one can see that women were always present in daily scenes in the Qur'ān; they are with the Prophet Moses and the Prophet Essa and even with Abu Lahab and Pharaoh. The commands in the Qur'ān and its speech were generally addressed to women and men alike, such that the equality of the sexes is familiar in Islamic history in general and in the Islamic call in particular.

Likewise, the Qur'ān gave females the right to inherit. The Qur'ān issued a general rule: "For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives, be it little or much an obligatory share" (Qur'ān, 4: 7). Ibn Kathīr said: "All are equal in the legal ruling of Allah (SAW), they are all fundamentally equivalent in terms of inheritance, but they differ according to their share imposed by Allah"⁽⁴⁾. In the pre-Islamic period, women and children were not entitled to inherit that was exclusive to adult males.⁽⁵⁾ The newly converted women comprehended their rights well. A hadith narrates the circumstances under which this Quranic command was given⁽⁶⁾:

The wife of Sa'd bin Ar-Rabī' came with her daughters from Ar-Rabī', and said: 'O Messenger of Allah (SAW)! These two are the daughters of Sa'd bin Ar-Rabī' who fought alongside you, on the day of 'Uhud, and was martyred. Their uncle took their wealth, without leaving any wealth for them, and they will not be married unless they have wealth.' He said: 'Allah will decide on that matter.' The ayah about inheritance was revealed, so the Messenger of Allah (SAW) sent (word) to their Uncle saying: give the two daughters of Sa'd two thirds, and give their mother one eighth, and whatever remains, then it is for you⁽⁷⁾.⁽⁸⁾

Shabana Fatima described the situation of the new Muslim women as follows: "The women apparently hoped to see things change with the new God. They were so successful that a *sūra* bears their name, *sūra An-Nisā* women containing the new laws on inheritance, which deprived men of their privileges. Not only would a woman no longer be inherited like camels and palm trees, but she would herself inherit"⁽⁹⁾.

(1) Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad B. Ismā'īl ibn Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mughīra ibn Bardizba al-Ji'ī al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Damascus, Beirut: Dār Bin Kathīr, 1994), Vol. 2, p.514.

(2) For more information see: Souad T. Ali, Feminism in Islam; A Critique of Polygamy in Mariama Ba's Epistolary Novel so long A letter, *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World (Brill)*, (2012), 10, p.180. DOI: 10.1163/15692086-12341236.

(3) Fatima Seedat, Islam, Feminism, and Islamic Feminism: Between Inadequacy and Inevitability, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, (2013), Vol. 29, No. 2, p.38.

(4) Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Vol. 2, p.219.

(5) Ibid., Vol. 2, p.219.

(6) Mwaffaq al-Dīn 'Abdullah ibn Aḥmad ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *Al-Mughnī*, (Beirut: Dār 'Ihyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1985), Vol. 6, p.162.

(7) Author's translation.

(8) Sulaymān B. al-Ash'ath abū Dā'ūd, *Sanan Abū Dāwūd*, (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, n. d), Vol. 3, p.121.

(9) Shabana Fatima, *Women and Islam*, (India: New Delhi, Summit Enterprises, 2007), p.153.

Fatima Mernissi discussed the male companions of the Prophet who rejected the unexpected new rights granted to women, which were not in harmony with Arab customs. She said: "They began first of all by rejecting these new laws, wishing to continue to apply the customs of the *jahilliyyah* despite their conversion to Islam. Then, they complained to the Prophet and tried to put pressure on him to change the laws".⁽¹⁾ She assumed that some male scholars had misinterpreted Islamic texts to degrade women's rights: "Finally, in desperation, they took to interpreting the text as a means of escaping it".⁽²⁾ Different interpretations of Islamic texts were made by various scholars; however, there was often a tendency to regard women as inferior to men. Rashda Sharif said: "However, one factor that is common to all interpretations is their aim to keep Muslim women subordinated within male role expectations".⁽³⁾

Marriage

The Qur'an focused on marriage because it was such a major part of the progressive social reforms introduced by Islam.⁽⁴⁾ Various kinds of marriage existed in pre-Islamic Arab society including monogamy, polygamy and polyandry. 'Aisha, the Prophet's wife, told her cousin 'Urwa that there were four types of marriage during the *jahilliyyah* period.⁽⁵⁾ The first was similar to the current type of marriage: a man proposed a woman through her guardian. The second type was when a husband asked his wife to have intercourse with someone because he desired a noble lineage, and he deserted her until she became pregnant. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī defined the *istibḍā* ' marriage based on what 'Aisha said as follows: "Offspring were sought from leaders so that they might inherit their best characteristics such as courage and generosity".⁽⁶⁾

The third type of marriage was when a group of less than ten men, gathered around and imposed upon a woman to have sex with her one by one, if she got pregnant and delivered her baby, she would call upon all of them, and choose one of them to be the father of her baby and no one could refuse. The fourth type was a prostitute who set up a flag as a sign and would not refuse any man; when she got pregnant, she would call all of them and enlist the help of a physiognomist (*qā'if*) who was skilled in distinguishing the likeness of a father and his biological son. The physiognomist would point out one of the men who looked like the real father and give the baby to him.⁽⁷⁾ 'Aisha said that all of these types of marriage were rejected by Islam except the first, which is still practiced today.⁽⁸⁾

Another abusive marriage is *al-maqt*, in which the oldest son of a deceased father would marry his dead father's wife as a part of his legacy, whether she accepted or not.⁽⁹⁾ The Qur'an prohibited this marriage, describing it as horrible: "And do not marry those [women] whom your fathers married, except what has already occurred. Indeed, it was an immorality and hateful [to Allah] and was evil as a way [of marriage]" (Qur'an, 4: 22). Al-Ṭabarī, in his exegesis of the Qur'an, narrated how the son of a deceased father had the right to inherit his father's wife; he might marry her or leave her, and if he were young, she would be held until he grew up, at which point, he would choose to have sex with her or leave her.⁽¹⁰⁾ Moreover, he narrated how an intimate friend of a deceased man would throw his garment on his friend's wife if she was beautiful he married her, but if she was ugly, he held her in suspense until she died.⁽¹¹⁾

A *badal* marriage involved two men exchanging their wives without paying their wives a *mahr*.⁽¹²⁾ In

(1) Mernissi, *Women and Islam, an Historical and Theological Enquiry*, p.120.

(2) Ibid., p.120.

(3) Rashda Sharif, women in Islam, *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, (2019), Vol. 21, No. 1, p.28.

(4) Judith E. Tucker, *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge, 2008), p.39.

(5) Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 5, p.1971.

(6) Ibid., Vol. 9, p.91.

(7) Al- Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 5, p.1971.

(8) Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 9, p.91.

(9) Jamal J. Nassir, *The Status of Women under Islamic Law and Modern Islamic Legislation*, (Boston, Leiden: BRILL, 2009), p. 21.

(10) Muḥammad B. Jarīr bin Yazīd abu Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, *Jām' al-Bayān fī Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, (Cairo: Dār al-M'ārif, n. d), Vol. 7, p.104.

(11) Ibid., Vol. 7, p.107.

(12) 'Alī, *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab qabl al-Islam*, p.537.

the book *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid*, ibn Rushd said: “All [jurists] agreed that its description is two men exchanging their sisters or daughters with no *mahr*. All are agreed that this marriage is clearly prohibited⁽¹⁾”⁽²⁾. The Prophet forbade it⁽³⁾ because women were deprived of their right to the *mahr*.

As we see, pre-Islamic marriages perpetuated the degradation of females in a culture that believed men were permitted to exploit females because the latter had no power to defend themselves. Such a culture, as I see it, reflects the rigid environmental circumstances surrounding the Bedouin’s life in the desert wherein he struggled with everything, resulting in the use of power and force even in regards to his wife or daughter.

To eradicate the poor treatment of females in Arab society, Islam issued several rules related to marriage that removed such prejudice. The Prophet stated that women should be consulted in their marriage: “A widowed woman should not be married until she requests, and the virgin should not be married until she agrees to it, the Prophet’s companions asked: How can we know her consent? He replied: If she keeps silent”⁽⁴⁾. Al-Imam Mālik, in his *al-Mudawwanah*, replied to a question about an orphan virgin girl⁽⁵⁾: “Her silence is not her agreement, and he-the guardian-should not give her in marriage until she has been consulted. If he does so without her consultation while she is in the same state and she accepts, then it is lawful. But if he does so while she is in a different state, and she knows about it later, then it is unlawful even if she accepts”⁽⁶⁾.

When Mālik’s students asked about a father giving his daughter in marriage without consulting her, he replied: “This is our practice for virgins”⁽⁷⁾. However, if she is widowed, “it is unlawful for her father to do so until he solicits her permission”⁽⁸⁾.

Al-Sarakhsī, in his *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ*, did not differentiate between a virgin and widow concerning permission. Virginitude has no effect on the legal ruling. He said: “If the father gives his daughter in marriage, and the daughter has already reached the age of menstruation, and she is virgin, when he informed her, if she does not refuse, then this marriage is lawful. But if she refuses, then this marriage is unlawful⁽⁹⁾”⁽¹⁰⁾.

However, al-Shāfi‘ī granted the father the right of giving his virgin daughter in marriage in his *Kitāb al-Umm*: “The father has more right than his virgin daughter in giving her in marriage”⁽¹¹⁾. Nevertheless, there is an exception: “The father’s command in the marriage of his daughter is lawful, if it is in her good interest, and not derogatory to her. But if it is not good, or otherwise harmful, then this marriage is unlawful⁽¹²⁾”⁽¹³⁾.

Despite the fact that these instructions were new and their applicability was challenging, the newly Muslim women appear to have comprehended it and went further by requesting their fathers not to exploit their fatherhood and force them into marriage. A girl raised a complaint to the Prophet that her father had given her in marriage to his brother’s son. The Prophet gave her a choice, and she said: “I approved of what my father did, but I wanted women to know that fathers have no right in this matter at all”⁽¹⁴⁾. This event

(1) Author’s translation.

(2) Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad bin Rushd, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid*, (Beirut: Dār Ibn Hazem, 1990), Vol. 1, p. 440.

(3) See: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 5, p.1996.

(4) Ibid., Vol. 5, p.4843.

(5) Al-Imām Mālik B. ‘Anas bin Mālik al-‘Asbahī narrated by al-Imām Sahnūn, *Al-Mudawwanah al-Kubrā*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1995), Vol. 2, pp.102-103.

(6) Author’s translation.

(7) Al-Imām Mālik, *Al-Mudawwanah al-Kubrā*, Vol. 2, p.103.

(8) Ibid., Vol. 2, p.103

(9) Author’s translation.

(10) Muḥammad B. Aḥmad ibn Abī Sahl Abū Bakr al-Sarakhsī, *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ*, (Beirut: Dār al-M‘ārifā, 1989), Vol. 5, p.2.

(11) Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad B. ‘Iḍrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, *Kitāb al-Umm*, (Beirut: Dār al-M‘ārifā, 1990), Vol. 5, p.18.

(12) Author’s translation.

(13) Al-Shāfi‘ī, *Kitāb al-Umm*, Vol. 5, p.20.

(14) Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad Ibn Yazīd Ibn Māja al-Rabī‘ī al-Qazwīnī, *Sanan Ibn Māja*, (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Ilmiyya,

marked a major historical transition. Al-Sarakhsī, in his *Kitāb Al-Mabsūṭ*, mentioned Abū Ḥanifa's opinion that women are allowed to marry without a guardian. He said: "Abū Ḥanifa has the same view when he said: either a virgin or a widow, if she gets married without a guardian, it is permissible, and whether the husband is qualified or not, the marriage is valid⁽¹⁾".⁽²⁾

Additionally, Muslim jurists in general acknowledge the right of women to get married to a suitable man of their choice. If a guardian restrains a woman from exercising her rights, she should take the matter to the judge, who has the right to give her in marriage if she has received a good proposal and the man is qualified.⁽³⁾ This is called *'aḍl*; the Qur'ān says: "And when you divorce women and they have fulfilled their term, do not prevent them from remarrying husbands if they agree among themselves on an acceptable basis" (Qur'ān, 2: 232). Al-Shāfi'ī gives the judge the right to marry off a woman in this situation: "If they have a conflict, the judge should determine so; if the guardian restrains the woman, he should be ordered to let her get married. If he refuses, then the judge can marry them or appoint another guardian".⁽⁴⁾ In the case of wives who are not satisfied with their husbands, the Qur'ān provides a solution whereby initiating a divorce is not the exclusive right of men.⁽⁵⁾ The Qur'ān says: "But if you fear that they will not keep [within] the limits of Allah, then there is no blame upon either of them concerning that by which she ransoms herself" (Qur'ān, 2: 229). The jurists call this solution *khul'*. Al-Qurṭubī explained this verse⁽⁶⁾:

The first who used *khul'* in Islam was the sister of Abd Allah Bin 'Ubayy; she came to the Prophet and said: O Messenger of Allah (SAW)! my head and his head will not be gathered at all, I uplifted the corner cover, and I saw him coming within a group, he was the blackest and shortest, and his face is the ugliest. The Prophet asked her: "Will you give him back his garden"⁽⁷⁾; she said: "Yes and more if he wanted"; the Prophet separated them. This Ḥadīth is the origin source of *khul'*, and all jurists agreed upon it.

Imām Mālik, in his *Mudawana*, said: "It is lawful if there is no harm from the husband's side"⁽⁸⁾ And al-Sarakhsī considered it equivalent to a permanent divorce.⁽⁹⁾ Likewise, al-Shāfi'ī said in his *Kitāb al-Umm* that the husband has no right to remarry her if she pays him compensation.⁽¹⁰⁾ *khul'* might be regarded as a "woman's divorce".⁽¹¹⁾ Tucker provides a reasonable definition for it: "A divorce desired by the wife in return for compensation paid to her husband".⁽¹²⁾

3. The educational and political roles of Muslim women

The Prophet Muḥammad specified one day a week for women to enlighten their minds with the divine wisdom and to state their right to education after they asked of him the following: "Please devote from your time a day on which we come to you that you may teach us of what Allah (SAW) has taught you".⁽¹³⁾ In addition, he said: "Pursuing knowledge is an obligation of every Muslim".⁽¹⁴⁾

Moreover, a Qur'ānic verse commands women to be teachers: "And remember what is recited in

n. d), Vol. 1, p.603.

(1) Author's translation.

(2) Al-Sarakhsī, *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ*, Vol. 5, p.10.

(3) Abū Zakariā Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Rauḍat al-Ṭālibīn wa 'Umdat al-Muḥtājīn*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islamī, 1991), Vol. 3, p.54.

(4) Al-Shāfi'ī, *Kitāb al-Umm*, Vol. 5, p.14.

(5) See: Nadia Sonneveld, *Khul' : Local Contours of a Global Phenomenon, Islamic Law and Society (Brill)*, (2019), 26, p.3.

(6) Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, Vol. 3, p.129.

(7) Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 5, p.2022.

(8) Al-Imām Mālik, *Al-Mudawanah al-Kubrā*, Vol. 2, p.241.

(9) Al-Sarkhasī, *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ*, Vol. 6, p.171.

(10) Al-Shāfi'ī, *Kitāb al-Umm*, Vol. 5, p.212.

(11) Tucker, *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law*, p.95.

(12) *Ibid.*, p.95.

(13) Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 6, p.273.

(14) Abū al-Hasan Muḥammad B. 'Abd al-Ḥadī al-Sandī, *Ḥaṣhiyyat al-Sandī 'alā Ibn Māja*, (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, n.d), Vol. 1, p.99.

your houses of the verses of Allah and wisdom” (Qur’ān, 33: 34). This order was directed to the Prophet’s wives.⁽¹⁾ Al-Qurṭubī said in his exegesis: “Allah (SAW) orders that they should narrate the verses recited in their homes, and the Prophet’s actions they have seen, and the Prophet’s sayings they have heard, so people might imitate them⁽²⁾.”⁽³⁾ Ibn ‘Āshūr added that “in their—the Prophet’s wives—study of the Qur’ān, their knowledge will be revived, and the hidden lights will be illuminated; they should participate in teaching the Qur’ān. All of the Prophet’s companions referred to them for legal rulings related to women and to a man’s personal family affairs⁽⁴⁾.”⁽⁵⁾ Nassir mentioned that because the verb “*uzkurna*” (to teach) is used in feminine form, the Prophet’s wives became teachers.⁽⁶⁾

Although Arabs were largely illiterate people at the time,⁽⁷⁾ the Arabic language was eloquent, especially the Quraysh,⁽⁸⁾ and many women emerged as scholars. For the transmission of information and knowledge to others, there is a need for reliable narrators as primary original witnesses. A large number of women who accompanied the Prophet were the original sources of Ḥadīth.⁽⁹⁾ Al-Mizzī, in his book *Tahdhīb al-Kamāl*, and ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, in his book *al-Taqrīb wa al-Taḥthīb*, mentioned more than 2764 Ḥadīth narrated by Muslim women.⁽¹⁰⁾

‘Āisha was the archetype among *ṣaḥabiyyat* in narrating the Prophet’s traditions. She is the primary narrator of 2081 Ḥadīth.⁽¹¹⁾ Bukhārī and Muslim agreed on 174 Ḥadīth of her transmissions and included them in their collections, and Bukhārī alone included another 54 of her Ḥadīth, while Muslim included 69 of her Ḥadīth.⁽¹²⁾ She is also the primary source of 83 Ḥadīth in Mālik’s legal compendium.⁽¹³⁾ The oldest companions of the Prophet used to consult her in Islamic law on heredity,⁽¹⁴⁾ and she had a profound ability in giving *fatwas* (legal judgements).⁽¹⁵⁾

‘Āisha was not the sole woman acting as a primary source who transmitted the Prophet’s traditions even though she is considered the most prominent female transmitter. ‘Umm Salama was a primary narrator of 378 Ḥadīth. The Bukhārī and Muslim canonical collections agreed on reporting 13 of them; Bukhārī alone included three more, and Muslim included 13 others.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Prophet’s wives became regarded as ideal role models in learning and teaching. ‘Āisha⁽¹⁷⁾ was

(1) Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, Vol. 14, p.167.

(2) Author’s translation.

(3) Al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, Vol. 14, p.167.

(4) Author’s translation.

(5) Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir B. ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, (Tunisia: Dār Ṣaḥnūn, n.d), Vol. 23, p.18.

(6) Nassir, *The Status of Women under Islamic Law and Modern Islamic Legislation*, p.17.

(7) Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. 4, p.158.

(8) ‘Abd al-Raḥman ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn: al-Muqaddīma*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1992), Vol. 1, p.643.

(9) Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*; from Ibn Sa‘d to Who’s Who, (USA & United Kingdom: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 1994), p.27.

(10) Jamāl al-Din Yūsuf ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Mizzī, *Tahthīb al-Kamāl fī ‘Asma’ al-Rijāl*, ed. *Bashār Ma’rūf*, (Damascus: Mūāssasat al-Risāla, 1992), Vol. 35, P. 123-401; Al-Ḥafīz Shihabuddin Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Taqrīb wa al-Taḥthīb*, ed. Abu al-Ashbāl Ṣaḡhīr al-Bakistānī, (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Aṣīma, 2000/1421), Vol. 12, p.1398-1400.

(11) Ibid., Vol. 12, p.1398-1400.

(12) Abī ‘Abd al-Raḥman Khālīd B. Ḥusain B. ‘Abd al-Raḥman, *Jamī‘ Akhbār al-Nisā’ min Siyar A’lām al-Nubalā’ with the missing chapter of Al-Siyar*, (Saudi; Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rashīd, 2004), p.118.

(13) Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, p.28.

(14) Abū ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn Sa‘d ibn Manī‘ al-Baṣrī al-Zahrī, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), Vol. 8, p.52.

(15) Qudriyya Ḥusain, *Shahīrāt al-Nisā’ fī al-‘Ālam al-Islāmī*, (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1924), Vol. 2, p.53.

(16) Bin ‘Abd al-Raḥman, *Jamī‘ Akhbār al-Nisā’ min Siyar ‘Ālām al-Nubalā’*, p.138.

(17) See: Sulaimani, *The Changing Position of Women in Arabia Under Islam during the Early Seventh Century*, p.143-

a scholar whom the prestigious companions of the Prophet used to consult in juristic issues⁽¹⁾ particularly those related to the Prophet's private life,⁽²⁾ and she was gifted in public speaking.⁽³⁾

Political Participation of Women

For numerous reasons, Muslim women are rarely depicted in Muslim history as participants in politics. Some are related to the sociocultural background of the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic period. Historians regard pre-Islamic Arab society as patrilineal and patriarchal.⁽⁴⁾ Other reasons are related to a Ḥadīth transmitted by only one companion in the time of the Battle of the Camel. Abu Bakra narrated the Ḥadīth of the Muslims' allegiances were split between 'Āisha and 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib. Abu Bakra told this Ḥadīth to justify his stand in avoiding *fitna* (rivalries and adversarial conflict) that had been revealed by the Prophet. The Ḥadīth is as follows: "A people will not be successful who entrust their affairs to a woman".⁽⁵⁾ The authors of the book *Faith and Power* make an interesting comment about this hadith, "Al-Bukhārī compiled all Ḥadīth that dealt with the issue. Abu Bakra was included with the others, but he was the only one that used the gender of one of the opponents as criteria for neutrality. In this way he has an answer for both 'Āisha and 'Ali for his lack of support".⁽⁶⁾

Many circumstances bring into question the validity of this Ḥadīth and it has been argued that it should not be a valid evidence for legislation.⁽⁷⁾ Nevertheless, this Ḥadīth dominates the attitudes of many Muslims today and has contributed to constructing a tradition among Muslims in which even today, many Muslims do not accept women in leadership positions.

Muslim women have participated in politics since the beginning of the Islamic community. Khadīja, the Prophet's first wife, might be considered the first political female participant in Islamic history when she provided the Prophet with protection to preach to Islam. She was born from the best genealogy of Arabs, and she was wise and determinant.⁽⁸⁾ She is the first to convert to Islam. She supported the Prophet financially and spiritually. Ibn Ḥajar said that whenever the Prophet was insulted by the pagans, she was there to relieve his pain, and reminded him of the insignificance of their views and opinions.⁽⁹⁾

Several rights were given to Muslim women that might be classified as political. The first political right given to them was *al-bay'a* "women's oath". The first *bay'a* took place in 'Aqaba before a *hijra* in which Ibn Sa'd counted eight women.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the second *bay'a*, Muslim men and women pledged allegiance to the Prophet, vowing that they would protect him as they would their own women and children.⁽¹¹⁾ It was the first political coalition in the growing Muslim community.

Another political right the Prophet gave to Muslim women was participating in battles against pagans to protect the new Muslim society. Most of the women filled supportive roles in the fights, treating the wounded and giving water to the thirsty.⁽¹²⁾ Few of them were fighting with the sword. Perhaps the most famous female companion in this regard was Nusayba bint Ka'b, who fought in many battles; she fought

148.

(1) See: Nadwi, *Al-Muḥaddithāt: The Women Scholars in Islam*, p.283.

(2) 'Alī 'Izz al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥassan ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī, *'Uṣd al-Ghāba fī Ma'rīfat al-Ṣaḥābah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1994), Vol. 7, p.207.

(3) Zaynab al-'Amīlī, *Mu'jam A'lām al-Nisā'*, (Beirut: Mū'ssasat al-Rayyān, n.d), p.466.

(4) Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*, p.22.

(5) Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 4, p.1610.

(6) Ros M. A. Zakaria, Assim Z. M. Qisho & Badriya Y. Dowe, *Faith and Power; Women in Islam*, (Malaysia: Islamic Art Museum Malaysia, 2008), p.35.

(7) Huda Hilal, Qirā'a Taḥlīliyya fī Tawālī al-Mar'ah Manṣīb al-Qaḍā', *Islamiyyat al-Ma'rīfah*, (2011), No. 64, p.107-109.

(8) Ibn al-'Athīr al-Jazarī, *'Uṣd al-Ghāba fī Ma'rīfat al-Ṣaḥābah*, Vol. 7, p.82.

(9) Al-Ḥafīz Shihabuddin Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Al-'Iṣābah fī Tamayyūz Asmā' al-Ṣaḥābah*, (Bagdad: Maktabat al-Muthanā, n.d), Vol. 4, p.281.

(10) Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, Vol. 8, p.9.

(11) Ṣafīur Raḥman Mubārakfūrī, *Al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*, (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2004), p.176.

(12) *Ibid.*, p.328.

in 'Uḥūd when Muslim men ran away because of the severity of the war. The Prophet noticed her bravery and ranked her as better than men.⁽¹⁾

The Prophet also accepted Ummu Salama's consultation in political affairs without any feeling of embarrassment that a female was interfering in the administrative affairs of the ruler. Ibn Kathīr, in his book *al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, stated the following⁽²⁾:

When the peace treaty in Hudaibiyya was written down, the Prophet told his companions: "Get up and slaughter your sacrifices and have your heads shaved". One of the companions of Allah's Messenger related: By Allah none of them got up, and the Prophet repeated his order thrice. When none of them got up, He went to 'Ummu Salama and told her of the people's attitude. 'Ummu Salama said: O Messenger of Allah (SAW)! Do you want your order to be carried out? Go out and do not say a word to anybody until you have slaughtered your sacrifice and call your barber to shave your head. The Messenger of Allah did as 'Ummu Salama suggested. Seeing the Prophet, the companions got up, slaughtered their sacrifices and started shaving the heads of one another.⁽³⁾

After the Prophet's death, 'Āisha made many courageous political stands. She played a pivotal role during the caliphate of 'Othman. Moreover, she delivered a speech reminding Muslims of their obligation to take revenge for 'Othman's assassination. Her speech elicited people's emotions.⁽⁴⁾ Another political role 'Āisha played was in growing the opposition against 'Alī during his caliphate. Her conflict with him led to a tragic war between various Muslim groups at the Battle of the Camel.⁽⁵⁾

The Prophet agreed with the female right to *bay'a*, "the women's oath" to protect the new religion; the Prophet allowed them to fight in war and consulted them in public affairs. All of these actions might be considered participating in politics. Nevertheless, it was rare to see women as politicians. This discrimination had its roots in the sociocultural context of the Arabian Peninsula, which has been depicted in historical books as patriarchal and patrilineal.

4. Summary and Conclusions

This article has shown that many teachings from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth brought revolutionary changes to the status of women. Very few people would disagree with this in principle. This article highlighted the influence of Islam on the way of thinking that was prevalent in 7th-century pre-Islamic Arabian society concerning the perception of females. The status of women was articulated based on the new religion, which led them to play key roles in Islamic civilization. Many writers have documented how women gained important positions in their communities after the advent of Islam and played essential roles in all aspects of life. Some thinkers look at these changes differently; their view insists that Arab society remained male dominated, with the newly converted people trying to avoid applying the new laws by misinterpreting the corresponding verses. My purpose has been to investigate the impact of the birth of Islam on the status of Muslim women and their active participation in the early Islamic era. The first section showed how the Qur'ānic message abolished the feeling of *'asabiyyah* by using the *filtration* process and applying the principle of Muslim brotherhood through the *selection* process. Islam announced full equality among all human beings, male and female, Arab and non-Arab. It was a revolutionary transformation that liberated women from sociocultural obstacles and released their creative mental capabilities for the benefit of society. The second section reviewed the social roles of Muslim women. To abolish the custom of burying newborn girls alive, Islam condemned this habit, forbade infanticide, announced the right of women to life and inheritance and promised Muslims Paradise if they reared girls. Then, the Qur'ān announced equality in gender and declared the right of females to inherit. It was a paradigm-shifting change that woman would not be

(1) Bin 'Abd al-Raḥman, *Jami' Akhbār al-Nisā' min Siyar 'Alām al-Nubalā'*, p.338.

(2) Author's translation.

(3) See: Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa al-Nihāya*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2003), Vol. 6, p.608.

(4) Al-'Amīlī, *Mu'jam A'lām al-Nisā'*, p.466.

(5) *Ibid.*, p.466.

inherited like camels but would themselves inherit. The Prophet eliminated all of the abusive marriage types that dominated the Arabian Peninsula. Arab women comprehended their rights well and took them further by preventing fathers from forcing them into marriage and by obtaining their rights in divorce in the form of *khul'*. The third section discussed the educational roles of Muslim women. The Prophet scheduled one day every week exclusively for women in order to teach them and assert their right to learning. In addition, the Qur'ān commands women to be teachers. Some Muslim women emerged as scholars as a result of the new system. The houses of the Prophet became schools for believers. A number of Muslim women were the original and reliable sources of Ḥadīth such that Muslim and Bukhārī included their transmissions in canonical collections. It should be noted that there are also other Islamic texts that might be seen as problematic regarding the status of women, but I did not attempt to explore the authenticities and varying interpretations of these because I feel they do not impact my central thesis.

The position and status of women today is degraded as a result of many factors, including social, political and historical causes. Mainly, misinterpretations of the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and juristic studies have the strongest influence. On the other hand, women distance themselves from these Islamic sciences and are mostly compelled to limit their efforts to life inside the house and family responsibilities. The rationale given for these restrictions is typically warding off sexual attraction and temptation.

Given these restrictive tendencies, over time, new legislative norms arose, and Islamic jurisprudence was structured under the influence of the sociopolitical system. The conceptualization of the ideal Muslim female role, symbolized by Khadīja, 'Āisha and Fātimah, changed to suit the different cultures and societies that came under Islamic Caliphate. Rashda Sharif said that "the ideal female role type developed by the *'ulamā'* suited the political rulers and remained intact for centuries in the male dominated society".⁽¹⁾ Nevertheless, when this situation is questioned, the answer is that Fiqh is a human formation, while the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth are the only divine sources of Islam.

There has been much discussion over what forms of Islamic feminism are credible and to what extent Islamic scholarship is patriarchal, and these discussions will likely continue. In modern writings, the struggle is to reconcile the gap between feminism and Islam by reinterpreting the Qur'ān as the only source of Shari'a.⁽²⁾ Iman Hashim represents such an intellectual direction in her article titled "Reconciling Islam and Feminism"; she says: "The Ḥadīth, the Sunna, are commentaries on the prophet's life, tradition and saying, while the Shari'a refers to the laws created in the first centuries after the prophet's lifetime. In other words, all these sources are the outcome of human understandings of the Qur'ān".⁽³⁾ She concluded that Islamic Shari'a was made by only men: "As this was an era which was organised hierarchically and patriarchally, these sources inevitably reflect this reality, and the identity of the commentators, who were overwhelmingly men".⁽⁴⁾ Excluding Ḥadīth from the sources that are divine to Islam is questionable, as in the Qur'ān, it is stated: "And whatever the Messenger has given you take; and whatever the Messenger has forbidden you refrain from" (Qur'ān; 59: 7). Rather, legislators should examine Ḥadīths in light of their specific circumstances and actual context to create legal rulings for specific incidents. It can be argued that only in this way will the original and true Islamic objectives be achieved.

Women benefitted greatly from the Qur'ānic message, but they left their posts empty sometime after the Prophet's death; the Islamic sciences, in all aspects, whether in Qur'ānic interpretation, Ḥadīth science, Fiqh, Aqīdah or Islamic legislations, are written and formulated by men. It is very rare to find women's names among these sources. The factors behind this phenomenon require further investigation. However, in light of the sociocognitive factors I have discussed in this article, I feel that there is a central question that underpins all of these discussions and on which the success of all reform attempts critically hinges: how and to what extent can Muslims today use the "religious ideals" of Islam to spark the same sort of change as the ideals did in the beginning of Islam? What sorts of religious "filtration" and "selection" are possible in a modern, more secular world in which people (including Muslims) are more fragmented than ever before?

(1) Sharif, *Women in Islam*, Vol. 21, No. 1, p.28.

(2) Hashim, *Reconciling Islam and Feminism*, p.11.

(3) *Ibid.*, p.11.

(4) *Ibid.*, p.11.

Halim et al have argued that in order to solve the malaise of Muslims today, it is important to address the concept of *'asabiyyah* in the modern context, but their article speaks very little about the status of women. My article has argued that Islam's transformation of the concept of *'asabiyyah* was critical in improving the status of women and therefore provides support for their rise in society.

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