



Status of Women in Islamic Society and Light of the Prophetic Sunnah

Tabassum Minhas

Faculty of Humanities, Alazhar University (Girls Branch), Cairo, Egypt

METADATA

Paper history

Received: 31 December 2024

Revised: 30 January 2025

Accepted: 25 April 2025

Published: 07 May 2025

Corresponding author

Email: tabassumminhas@hotmail.com

(Tabassum Minhas)

Keywords

Women rights

Islamic Principles

Social practices

Gender differences

Citation

Minhas T (2025) Status of women in Islamic society and light of the prophetic sunnah. *Innovations in STEAM: Research & Education* 3: 25030103.

<https://doi.org/10.63793/ISRE/0023>

ABSTRACT

Background: The Hadith and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad play a crucial role in Islamic theology, jurisprudence, and daily life. While the Quran is the primary source of Gods direction, the Sunnah complements and contextualizes it, providing practical applications and thorough explanations.

Objective: This study review investigates the varied roles of Hadith and Sunnah in developing the Islamic way of life, including legal, ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions. The article emphasizes the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ legislative authority, the Sunnah's role in understanding the Quran, and its impact on the development of Islamic principles. This assessment was supported by Quranic verses and authentic Hadith references and underlines how ancient and contemporary Islamic research maintains the interdependence of the Quran and Sunnah.

Methodology: The information and concepts included in this article were gathered from the Holy Quran, the Sayings of the Prophet, Islamic literature books, and literature available in different online sources.

Results: A critical assessment of Quranic and Hadith texts demonstrates that, while there are potential interpretations that favour gender equality, social and religious practices, but not completely represent these egalitarian principles.

Conclusion: This research confirms that ignoring the Prophetic legacy results in a fragmented perception of Islam, whereas devotion to the Prophet's Sunnah assures a complete and authentic Islamic identity. This study emphasizes that education and inclusive interpretations of sacred texts are key to overcoming patriarchal norms. These findings emphasize that increasing gender equality in Muslim communities necessitates both structural adjustments to social and religious practices as well as changes in how religious texts are interpreted.

INTRODUCTION

Societies, in one sense, are moving fast towards development and modernity, yet on the other hand, incidents that are proof of the downfall of human values and civilizations are taking place regularly. The Prophet ﷺ put special focus on the best treatment of the weak, and himself treated women with compassion, and put a lot of focus on good manners, kindness, and goodness towards women (Bano *et al.* 2025). Islam has determined the equality of men and women in areas where equality can be attained, and to what extent equality can be established. But Islam does not have faith in equality against the law of nature. As a human, women are equal to men in rights. But since the husband is active, the man possesses the personal virtue (not honor but mastery) which Allah has granted to the man with

complete justice "الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ" (Al-Baqarah, 228) "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women". This is a natural difference between men and women, accepted by the family system according to the laws of organization. The position of women in the time of the Prophet ﷺ can be observed by the position accorded to Hazrat Khadija, who was an exemplary figure, as were Fatima, daughter of the Prophet of Islam, and Ayesha, his second wife (Erwani and Siregar 2025). These were intellectual women who were politically involved and who had a very significant role to play in the propagation of Islam. Not like passive onlookers, women were instead active participants in studying, teaching, relating Hadith, and aiding in the promotion of Islam. Leading personalities like Hazrat Khadijah (RA), Hazrat Ayesha (RA), and Hazrat Umm Salama (RA) played a key role in constructing the early Islamic. Their houses

turned into schools, and their narrations and legal views became standards for generations. Female personalities like Hazrat Fatimah (RA), Hazrat Safiyyah (RA), and Hazrat Umm Ammarah (RA) integrated spiritual devotion with social activism and even war activities. Women companions made contributions to studies, medicine, memorization of the Quran, and calligraphy, highlighting Islam's support of women's intellectual development (Azam and Afzal 2025). Islam is an ideal religion that has directed mankind in all aspects, including social, educational, moral, and religious.

The teachings of Islam have placed not only men but also women. The Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ gives us knowledge, understanding, awareness, and honor. If we study the Seerah of the Prophet taht raelc semoceb ti ,ﷺ during the Prophet's era, women were not merely confined to domestic life; rather, they stood shoulder-to-shoulder with men in religious and educational fields. This article delves into the important religious, educational, and social functions that Muslim women held in Prophetic times and their important contributions to Seerah al-Nabi.

THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

Women make up half of the human population, and their contribution is fundamental to the moral, social, and economic health of any community. When women are valued, respected, and allowed to develop their abilities, society flourishes. When they are ignored or treated unjustly, the entire social structure suffers. History is filled with examples. Nations rise when justice, compassion, and equality prevail, and they fall when oppression and ignorance dominate (Anyango *et al.* 2025). In every successful society, each person, whether man or woman, understands their rights and duties and lives free from cruelty or tyranny. This principle is not a modern discovery; it is a truth that Allah's guidance has been established since the beginning of humankind. The place of women in Islam differs among Muslim nations, which differently perceive the Islamic religion and law, particularly in their perception of women's rights. The majority of these Islamic nations have certain conceptions regarding women and have prohibitions related to them.

Gender stereotypes of women in Islam trace their roots in the development of the Muslim religion (Sechzer *et al.* 2024). But it cannot be said that the Muslim woman's role is only in her home and family. It is a natural component of the employment of her inborn talents and an expression of female nature. Muslim women can establish their businesses or engage in the social and political life of society, work for the Muslim ummah (community) in various areas like medicine, education, fashion, and cooking. The wife of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ ran a successful business and provided the Prophet with reliable material and spiritual support during the most difficult times to help him achieve his goal. Therefore, Islam does not make a woman stay at home or be discriminated against, but

instead equates her daily work at home and childcare with a hard and responsible occupation, which is superior to an expensive male job. A lot of emphasis is laid upon the education and training of other people. Perhaps education is more of a duty than a privilege. The initial responsibility of a woman in the household, as quoted earlier, is to raise a good child. It is a known fact that children pick up good habits at a young age. This was best expressed by our ancestors in the following words: "A tree bends when it is young". It is necessary that the woman who brings up the children is devout and educated. Husbands are likely to love educated, godly, and virtuous women. Indeed, during the heyday of Islam, the Ambassador of God strongly advised women to learn to read and write, as well as to know what they needed in everyday life: *"Learn from the cradle to the grave and seek knowledge! If you must travel to China, seek knowledge! Seeking knowledge is the responsibility of all Muslims women and men"* (Surah An-Nisa; Ayah 51). In Islam, it is a firmly established truth that a woman, according to Islamic law, possesses the same soul and human value as a man. The religion recognizes the natural role of women, especially as the foundation of family life through motherhood. A mother has the power to nurture and build a strong society or to weaken it, for the future of any community depends largely on the upbringing she gives her children. She stands as one of the key pillars of society, shaping its values and directions. A woman's deepest sense of fulfillment often begins with the blessings of motherhood. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ greatly honored mothers, saying, "Paradise lies at the feet of your mothers," highlighting their immense status and importance as mothers.

ISLAM'S REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Before the coming of Islam, women in many cultures were denied even the most basic human rights. In some societies, daughters were considered a burden, leading to cruel practices such as burying newborn girls alive. Islam ended these injustices and replaced them with mercy, respect, and fairness.

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ ۚ يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِن سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهَا ۚ إِنَّهُمْ يَكْتُمُونَ عَلَىٰ هُوءٍ أَم يُنْسِيهِ فِي الْكُرَابِ إِلَّا نِسَاءً مَّا يَخْكُمُونَ (Surah An-Nahl; Ayahs 58–59)

"And when one of them is informed of the birth of a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide."

Marriage is one of the oldest social institutions in all known forms of history. For Islam, marriage is neither an intellectual and spiritual concept nor a secret; marriage is a social contract that assigns certain rights and responsibilities upon men and women:

وَأَنْكِحُوا الْأَيَامَىٰ مِنْكُمْ وَالصَّالِحِينَ مِنْ عِبَادِكُمْ وَإِمَائِكُمْ إِنْ يَكُونُوا فُقَرَاءَ يُغْنِهِمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

"Marry off the singles among you and the righteous among your male and female servants. If they are poor, Allah will enrich them from His bounty. And Allah is All Encompassing, All Knowing."

Marriage is a social obligation from society's perspective, designed for the preservation of human life, and for the individual, it is an exercise of compassion between a man and a woman:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً

"And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy."

The Quran provides a beautiful picture of the natural affinity between a man and a woman:

هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لِهِنَّ

"Your wives are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them."

Marriage has been described as a source of love, compassion, and understanding by the Quran. In particular, men are encouraged to treat their wives with care and kindness, as stated in the words of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: *Each of you is a shepherd and will be asked about his flock. A man is a shepherd of his wife, so he must know her and take care of her. To a man: a woman is part of your very being, without whom you cannot live. To a woman: you were created from a man, who is your origin, and you cannot live without him. The Quran also emphasizes that normal family relationships involve agreement between husband and wife. While they are two distinct halves, they are united in essence, body, and soul. As per Islamic law, a married woman cannot be treated as a servant in her husband's home, and likewise, her husband is not her employer.*

Marriage is a special area of human relations with certain characteristics concerning the rights and responsibilities of the couple, in which the husband holds the position of the head of the household, while the wife is a helper and advisor. However, a Muslim woman must attend to the needs and well-being of her family members, show love, and perform household work with sincerity. A wife should not hesitate to fulfill her household responsibilities, assist her husband, and bring happiness to him. For a Muslim woman, her home and family are the joy and fulfillment of her life. She is entrusted with the household, manages it as her own, and strives to maintain it in the best way she can.

In all the verses of the Holy Quran that command obedience to parents, the mother comes first by being mentioned first. A Hadith is reported that one day a man came to the Prophet ﷺ and inquired, "Which of the people is to be respected and heard more than anyone else?" The Prophet answered, "Your mother!" The man repeated his question, "Who comes after her?" The Prophet replied, "Your mother!" The man repeated his question once again, "Who comes after her?" For the third time, the Prophet

replied, "Your mother!" The man repeated his question one more time, "Who comes after her?" The Prophet replied, "Your father!" (Sahih al-Bukhari; Book of Manners, Hadith 5971).

This Hadith clearly states that a mother is three times more likely to educate a child than a father is. In Islam, a woman holds a central role in the upbringing and development of a child. She is responsible for guiding the child's moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth from an early age. The values, habits, and knowledge that a child acquires at home largely depend on the mother's influence. This emphasis highlights the importance Islam places on women as nurturers, educators, and moral guides in the formation of generations to come. In an Islamic family, a woman is mainly addressed as the rightful wife of her husband and the administrator of the household.

EQUALITY AND HONOR

Islam teaches that men and women come from the same origin and are equal in their humanity. Neither gender is superior simply by birth. True honor lies in piety and righteousness.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

"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. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted."

Islam promises equal spiritual rewards and responsibilities to men and women. Good deeds are valued regardless of gender, and sins are judged by the same standard for everyone.

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while they are a believer, We will surely cause them to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward according to the best of what they used to do."

Islamic society is based on cooperation between men and women in building a life based on justice and obedience to Allah.

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَٰئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

"The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise."

It is narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: *"عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: 'اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا'"*

(رواه البخاري (5186) ومسلم 1468)

"I advise you to be kind to women."

Abu Hurairah (RA) reported that the Prophet ﷺ said:
عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَالَ: "أَكْمَلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِيمَانًا أَحْسَنُهُمْ خُلُقًا، وَخَيْرُكُمْ خَيْرَكُمْ لِإِنْسَانِيَّتِهِمْ"

رواه الترمذي (حديث 1162) وقال: حديث حسن صحيح

"The most complete of the believers in faith are those with the best character, and the best of you are the best to their women".

THE PROPHET'S EXAMPLE IN VALUING WOMEN

The determinants of women's empowerment are numerous, including both the material and psychological dimensions of rights, power, and perception. The expression "women's empowerment" blends between women's perception of themselves as worthy persons, management of their options, their rights to benefit from the use of resources, and the power to control their lives. The corpus of Islamic doctrines, perhaps, has numerous pillars of women's empowerment that may be accessed by investigating the parts of the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ biography. The Islamic importance of empowering women may be exemplified by studying his vision on the topic of women's rights. Moreover, the Prophet's vision for women's empowerment can be best understood by focusing on the status of the nearest women members of his own family. Amongst the female relatives of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ with whom he had a chance to repeatedly interact for a significant amount of time were his wives and daughter. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was a model of compassion, respect, and fairness in his treatment of women, both in his family life and within the wider community.

In his own home, he shared household duties, mending his clothes and helping with chores. With his wives, he showed deep affection and care as he would speak kindly, listen attentively, and engage in moments of joy such as racing playfully with Ayesha (RA) or drinking from the same spot on a cup she had used. He upheld the dignity of women by safeguarding their rights to property, inheritance, and education. He strongly condemned any form of oppression, declaring that the best man is the one who is best to his wife. His love for Khadijah (RA) endured even after her passing, as he would often speak of her virtues and maintain ties with her friends. Towards mothers, he placed extraordinary honor, repeating three times that a mother is most deserving of her children's good companionship before mentioning the father. In public matters, he listened to women's voices seriously, addressing their concerns and granting them authority in decision-making. In every role as husband, father, leader, and teacher, he embodied mercy and fairness, setting a timeless example for how women should be valued and treated with respect.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was a living example of how Islam elevates women.

مَنْ غَالٍ جَارِيَتَيْنِ حَتَّى تَبْلُغَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَنَا وَهُوَ وَضَمَّ أَصَابِعَهُ

"Whoever raises two daughters until they mature, he and I will come on the Day of Resurrection like this, and he joined his fingers together."

Islam's measure of worth is not gender, wealth, or status. It is contribution and sincerity. A woman may surpass many men in her service to her family, society, and humanity, just as a man may surpass many women.

CONCLUSIONS

From all the above, a Muslim woman is not merely the most active member of socio-political life, but also a supporter of a man, a necessary assistant in the family, and a prudent adviser. Women in Islam performed many duties, including the propagation of Islam. Thus, in Islam, the principle of femininity (mother, wife, sister, daughter) is honoured. The life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ stands as a timeless example of dignity, respect, and empowerment for women. At a time when women were denied basic human value, he ended practices like female infanticide, restored their right to inherit, and recognized their voice in public matters.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data will be made available on a fair request to the corresponding author.

ETHICS APPROVAL

Not applicable.

FUNDING SOURCE

No specific funding was acquired for this work.

REFERENCES

- Anyango C, Goicolea I, Lövgren V, Namatovu F (2025) The feeling that I'm unimportant: Epistemic injustice lens on formal support for women with disabilities survivors of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*: 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1332/23986808Y2025D000000074>.
- Bano M and Ahmad A (2025) A study of the iconography in the narrations of the wives of the Holy Prophet in terms of women, children, orphans and widows. *Journal of Religion and Society* 3(2): 907–934. <https://www.islamicreligious.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/183>
- Erwani I, Siregar AS (2025) The role of women in Islamic sacred texts: A critical study of women's narratives and authority in Islamic tradition. *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106: 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.6>.
- Azam M, Afzal HM (2025) Women's role in religious and educational activities in the Prophetic era. *Journal of Religion and Society* 4: 480–494. <https://islamicreligious.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/231>.
- Sechzer JA (2004) Islam and woman: Where tradition meets modernity: History and interpretations of Islamic women's status. *Sex Roles* 51: 263–272. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:SERS.0000046610.16101.e0>.