

# Feminism & Islam



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- *By Sara Saigol*
- References:
  - <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/balancing-g-feminism-human-rights-faith>
  - *Against White Feminism by Rafia Zakaria*
  - *Women and Gender in The Quran by Celene Ibrahim*



# RECAP OF KEY QUR'AN QUOTES



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## THE EARLY COMMUNITY

- 33:35 “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.....**for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.**”

## COMMON ORIGIN

- 4:1 “O Mankind, Be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you out of **one living entity**, and out of it created its **mate**, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of Allah, in **whose name you demand (your rights) from one another, and of those ties of kinship...**”

## TAQWA AND ISTIKHLAF

- 49:13 “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. Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.

# RECAP OF KEY QUR'AN QUOTES: WILAYAH – PROTECTING FRIENDS



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(9:71) “The believers, men and women, are **awliya**’ of one another. They **enjoin the good and forbid the bad**, they observe salat and give zakat and obey God and His Prophet. It is these on whom Allah will have mercy. Surely, Allah is Mighty, Wise.

# RECAP – WOMEN IN THE QUR'AN

## THE QUEEN OF SHEBA



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- Surah al-Naml has **the most verses with female speech**. It is about how **two female leaders protect their people and negotiate a peaceful solution**.
- One is the Queen of Sheba, the other the ant queen.
- Queen of Sheba is a competent sovereign - her advisers respect her, she listens to advice.
- At **no point** do God nor Sulayman AS call into question a female leader.
- She immediately recognises Sulayman's letter as a Noble letter.



# RECAP – WOMEN IN THE QUR'AN

## THE WOMEN WHO SURROUNDED MUSA AS



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- **Mother** 28:7 'And we inspired to the mother of Moses, Suckle him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear and do not grieve. Indeed, we will return him to you and will make him one of the messengers.'
- 28:10 'And the heart of Musa's mother became **empty (faarighan)**. She was about to disclose (the matter concerning) him had we not **bound (rabatna) fast her heart** that she would be of the believers.'
- **Asiya, the Pharaoh's wife**
- **Musa's Sister**
- **Musa's Wife:** 28:26 'O my father, hire him. Indeed, the best one you can hire is the strong and the trustworthy.'



# RECAP – WOMEN IN THE QUR'AN

## MARYAM A.S



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### ‘And the male is not like the female’ (3:36)

- 3:42 “And (mention) when the angels said ‘O Maryam, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and **chosen you above the women of the worlds.**’
- 21:91 “We breathed into her of Our Spirit and We made her and her son a sign for the worlds.”
- “And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree. She said, Oh I wish I had died before this and was a thing long forgotten.”

# FEMINISM



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## ARE YOU A FEMINIST?



# FEMINISM

- **Feminism** is an Ideology/Movement
- There is no agreed upon definition of feminism.
- **Best definition:** **A movement for social, economic and political equality between men and women**
- Feminism is a **broad church**.





# WAVES OF FEMINISM

- **1<sup>st</sup> Wave**, late 19<sup>th</sup> Century:
  - Education, employment opportunities, right to vote, property, reproductive rights, criticised as exclusive to white women
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Wave**, 1960s and 70s:
  - Equal pay, birth control, abortion.
  - Betty Friedan “The Feminist Mystique” criticised the confining roles of women as wives and mothers.
  - Queer Theory
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Wave**:
  - Sexual harassment.
  - Judith Butler- gender is a social construct and we perform according to social norms prescribed by heterosexual normativity.
  - Kimberle Crenshaw-Intersectionality
- **4<sup>th</sup> Wave**:
  - Internet-led, Me Too movement, trans rights.

# What are your thoughts on the compatibility of some of the ideas of Feminism and Islam?

e.g. views on

motherhood/family, gender as a social construct, are men and women the same, do women need to lead prayer to be equal, is full time work and raising a family a difficult balance, should men and women be competing in the public arena and at constant war?



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- **Feminism aims to equalise men and women**

- **Are the roles of wife and mother constraining?**

**Qur'an 31:14** “And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years...”

Is motherhood honoured?

Is the nuclear family a source of subjugation?

- **Is gender only socially determined?**

Male and female gaze, physical strength

What is the consequence of arguing that gender is a social construct **only?**



- **Complementarity** between genders, or war?

Does Islam discuss power, or rights and responsibilities?

“Verily, women are the twin halves of men.” (Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi)

- **Do we seek leadership, or service?**

- Hadith: “Every one of you is a **shepherd** and is **responsible** for his flock. The leader of people is a **guardian** and is responsible for his subjects. A man is the guardian of his family and he is responsible for them.

A woman is the guardian of her husband’s home and his children and she is responsible for them. The servant of a man is a guardian of the property of his master and he is responsible for it.

No doubt, every one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock.”



# THE FAULTLINES!

- The **right to the vote** as well as **social, political and economic equality** – these parts of feminism **can be supported**
- Modernity rooted in the Enlightenment has led to moral autonomy, capitalism and secularism e.g. unfettered access to birth control/ abortion, sexual freedom.
- *Against White Feminism* by Rafia Zakaria: feminism has justified wars, pushed women into work even when low paid, pushed its own agendas eg birth control/LGBTQ issues, & has sidelined the voices of non white, middle class women.



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**AGAINST**

**WHITE**

'This is, quite simply, a transformative book'  
MERVE EMRE

**FEMINISM**



'Unputdownable, required reading for people of all genders, generations and races'  
ZAHRA HANKIR

**RAFIA ZAKARIA**

# A FEW THOUGHTS...



- **Equality of opportunity, or outcome?** Researchers found socially conservative countries, e.g. Albania and Algeria, have **more women** STEM graduates. Countries with high levels of gender equality e.g. Sweden and Norway have greater disparity in gendered careers eg teachers
- **Gender roles and expectations.** Women seek spouses to **support and protect** them due to vulnerability of birthing/rearing children. Men seek spouses to carry forward next generation. Role of men-often outward facing. Role of women-inward facing at many points in life.
- Some Muslims believe that women should **only** work within the private sphere.
- **Counter to this: Umar RA appointed Shifa Abdullah and Samra' bint Nuhayk to govern the markets of Medina and Mecca. Amra Abdul Rahman was a jurist, mufti and hadith specialist.**



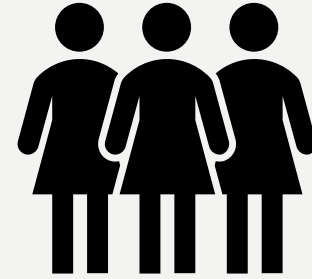


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- The pressure on women to work full time and raise families is heavy. Can we really manage it all? Priorities? The fracturing of the family is a crisis in the West.
- Gender is linked to biological sex which impacts dress, prayer lines, modest interaction and segregation. This is considered sacred by Muslims.



# ISLAM AND FEMINISM



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- Some Muslims see feminism as a Western threat to Islam
- **Meanwhile**, there are feminist Muslim thinkers with varied views. Some believe that Muslim women can take their place and have a voice within the feminist movement by reclaiming our theology from manipulation.
- Do you see a conflict between feminism and Islam? **Feminism means many things to many people!**
- We need to remain circumspect as to the underlying values of feminist ideology but be aware of the reality that leaves women subject to abuse, violence and silencing.

# RECOMMENDED LEARNING

**Works by  
Khaled  
Abou el Fadl**

<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/women-in-islamic-law-examining-five-prevalent-myths>

**Dr Shuruq Naghib  
Female companions  
of the Prophet AS**

<https://youtu.be/AikYjPFdc0w>

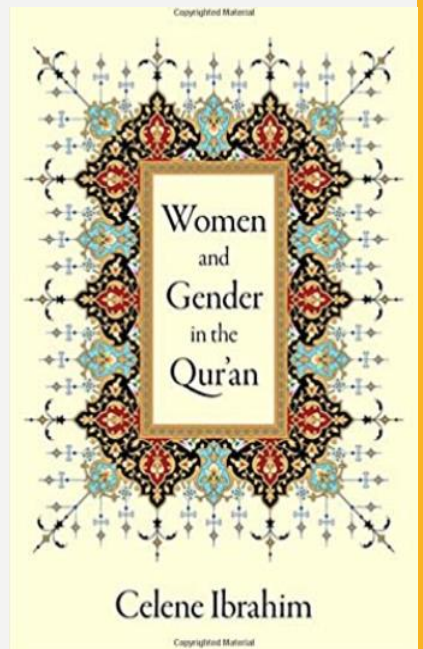
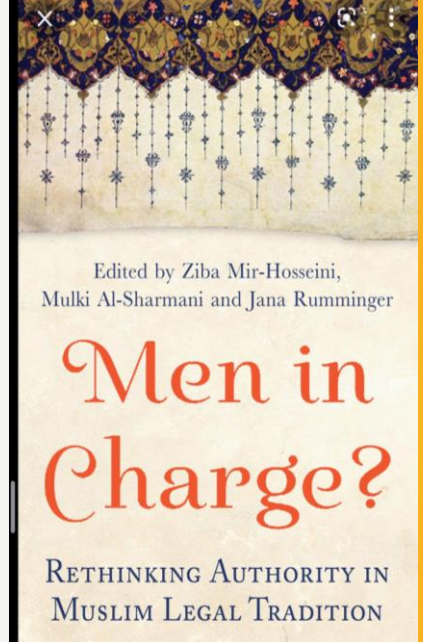
**Asma  
Lamrabet**

**Papers by  
Musawah**

**Women in  
The Quran  
by Celebes  
Ibrahim**



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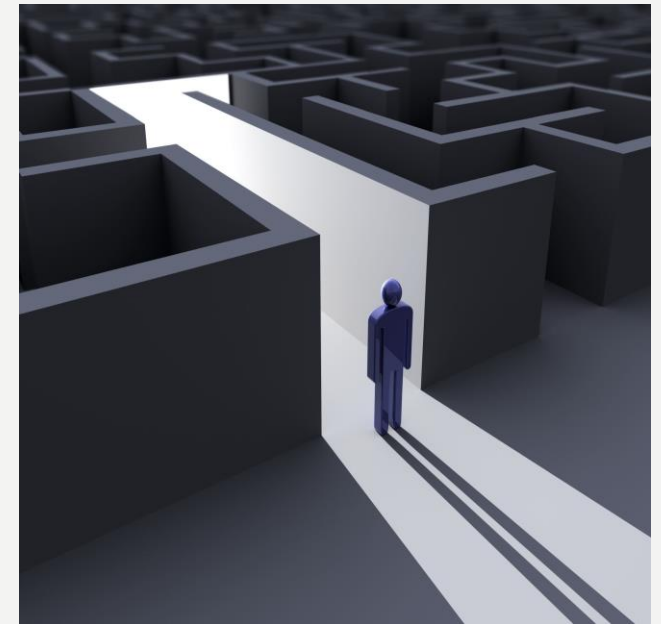


# THE BIGGER CHALLENGE!



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- **Muslim women will seek alternative ideologies (i.e. Western feminism) and spaces when their voices and presence are unwelcome.**
- Mosques and Muslim organisations **marginalise, discount** and are disparaging to the needs and contributions of women, to their peril.
- Perhaps this is where we should focus our energy to address the tide of women who see feminism as a space where they are heard and honoured!
- We need to **understand and emulate the teachings of the Quran, the Sunnah** and the role that formidable women played in our history and reclaim that!



# MISCONCEPTIONS AND THEIR CLARIFICATIONS



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- <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/women-in-islamic-law-examining-five-prevalent-myths>
- ↑ This paper is excellent in answering the following misunderstandings:
  - ‘Men are allowed to beat their wives’
  - ‘The witnessing by women is half that of men’
  - ‘Polygamy is unfair to women’
  - ‘Islamic inheritance laws are unfair on women’
  - ‘Women are not allowed to divorce their husbands’
- <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/is-feminism-the-problem-why-ideological-bandwagons-fail-islam>
- ↑ This paper looks at the hadith that, when misunderstood, can be used to describe women as intellectually and spiritually inferior and limited