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## **Women's Rights in the Light of the Prophetic Seerah: A Comparative Analysis of Western Feminism and the Islamic Perspective**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Women's rights remain one of the most debated subjects in contemporary academic, social, and political discourse. The modern concept of women's rights has been significantly influenced by Western feminist movements, which emerged in response to various forms of social, political, and economic discrimination experienced by women in Western societies. At the same time, Islamic teachings, particularly those embodied in the Prophetic Seerah, present a comprehensive framework of rights and responsibilities for women that predates modern feminist movements by more than fourteen centuries. This study aims to examine women's rights in the light of the Prophetic Seerah and to compare the Islamic perspective with the principles and objectives of Western feminism. Employing a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research methodology, the study analyzes primary Islamic sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and Seerah literature, alongside contemporary scholarly works on feminist theory and gender studies. The findings indicate that while both Western feminism and Islam seek to enhance the status and dignity of women, they differ significantly in their philosophical foundations, understanding of equality, concept of freedom, and approach to family and social responsibilities. The Prophetic model emphasizes justice, human dignity, moral accountability, and the complementary nature of gender roles, whereas many contemporary feminist approaches prioritize individual autonomy and structural equality. The study concludes that the Prophetic Seerah offers a balanced and holistic framework for women's rights that integrates spiritual, social, economic, and legal dimensions while maintaining social harmony and family stability. The research contributes to ongoing discussions on gender justice by highlighting the relevance of the Prophetic model in addressing contemporary challenges related to women's rights.

**Keywords:** Women's Rights, Prophetic Seerah, Western Feminism, Islamic Perspective, Gender Justice, Gender Equality, Islam and Women.

### **Introduction**

Women's rights have emerged as one of the most significant themes in contemporary academic, legal, and social discourse. Women's rights refer to the legal, social, political, and economic rights claimed for women and recognized as essential to their equal participation in society (Encyclopedia Americana, 2024). Across the globe, debates surrounding gender equality, social participation, economic empowerment, education, family relations, and legal rights continue to shape public policy and scholarly inquiry. Much of the contemporary discussion on women's rights has been influenced by Western feminist thought, which evolved through different intellectual phases and sought to challenge various forms of discrimination and inequality experienced by women in Western societies. According to Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024), feminism



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encompasses a variety of movements and ideologies that advocate political, economic, and social equality between women and men. Recent scholarship continues to demonstrate the influence of feminist theories on global human rights frameworks and gender-related policy initiatives (Islam et al., 2024). At the same time, increasing academic attention has been directed toward alternative frameworks of women's rights rooted in religious and civilizational traditions. Within this context, Islam presents a comprehensive understanding of human dignity, justice, and social responsibility that addresses women's rights through divine guidance rather than purely secular philosophical foundations. Contemporary studies have argued that Islamic teachings, when interpreted through authentic textual sources and the Prophetic model, provide a holistic framework for women's dignity, education, economic participation, and social development (Raza, 2024).

The question of women's rights in Islam has become particularly important in the twenty-first century because discussions regarding Muslim women are often framed through competing narratives. On one side, critics argue that Islamic traditions restrict women's freedoms and reinforce patriarchal structures. On the other side, Muslim scholars maintain that many challenges faced by women in Muslim societies stem from cultural practices, historical circumstances, and socio-political conditions rather than the foundational teachings of Islam. Recent research has emphasized the need to distinguish between authentic Islamic principles and cultural customs that have become associated with religion over time (Raza, 2024).

The Prophetic Seerah occupies a central position in understanding Islamic teachings concerning women. While the Holy Qur'an establishes the normative principles governing human relationships, the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ demonstrates the practical implementation of those principles. The Seerah illustrates how Islamic teachings transformed the social position of women in seventh-century Arabia by recognizing their legal identity, protecting their property rights, guaranteeing inheritance, emphasizing education, and affirming their moral and spiritual equality before God. Contemporary scholarship continues to identify the Prophetic model as a foundational source for understanding gender justice within an Islamic framework (Saifullin et al., 2026). Recent studies have further highlighted that Islam granted women rights in multiple dimensions of life, including education, economic participation, family affairs, and community engagement. Research examining contemporary Muslim societies argues that Islamic teachings encourage women to contribute actively to social development while preserving their dignity and legal protections. Such studies challenge common assumptions that Islam inherently opposes women's participation in public life and instead emphasize the balanced nature of Islamic teachings regarding rights and responsibilities (Khan & Ahmad, 2024).

The emergence of Western feminism and the Islamic conception of women's rights reflects two distinct intellectual traditions. Western feminist thought generally derives its legitimacy from secular notions of individual autonomy, personal freedom, and social equality. In contrast, the Islamic worldview derives rights and obligations from divine revelation and emphasizes justice, moral accountability, and social harmony (Ali & Khan, 2021). Although both perspectives seek to address injustice against women, they often differ regarding the source of rights, the meaning of equality, the role of family, and the relationship between individual freedom and collective responsibility (Islam et al., 2024). A comparative examination of Western feminism and the Islamic perspective is therefore necessary to understand both areas of convergence and divergence. While contemporary feminist movements have contributed significantly to discussions



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regarding women's political, educational, and economic rights, Islamic teachings offer a framework that integrates spiritual, ethical, legal, and social dimensions of human existence. This distinction becomes particularly important in Muslim societies where debates concerning women's rights frequently involve questions regarding the compatibility of modern gender discourses with Islamic principles (Hashmi & Ahmad, 2023).

Despite a growing body of literature on gender equality, Islamic feminism, and women's empowerment, relatively limited scholarly attention has been devoted to a systematic comparative analysis of women's rights specifically through the lens of the Prophetic Seerah and contemporary Western feminist thought. Existing studies often focus either on feminist theories or on Islamic legal perspectives independently, leaving a gap in the literature concerning the practical Prophetic model and its relevance to contemporary gender discourse. This study seeks to address that gap by examining women's rights as demonstrated in the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and comparing them with the philosophical foundations and objectives of Western feminism. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to contemporary discussions on gender justice from an Islamic perspective. By grounding the analysis in the Prophetic Seerah while engaging critically with modern feminist scholarship, the study aims to provide a balanced and academically rigorous assessment of women's rights. Furthermore, it seeks to demonstrate that the Prophetic model offers a comprehensive framework that combines human dignity, justice, social participation, and moral responsibility.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

What rights were granted to women through the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ?

What are the major philosophical foundations and objectives of Western feminism concerning women's rights?

In what ways do the Islamic and Western feminist perspectives converge and diverge?

How can the Prophetic model contribute to contemporary discussions on women's rights and gender justice?

To answer these questions, the study employs a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative methodology based on primary Islamic sources and contemporary academic literature. Through this approach, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of women's rights and to highlight the continuing relevance of the Prophetic Seerah in addressing contemporary challenges related to gender and society.

## Literature Review

### Contemporary Perspectives on Western Feminism

Western feminism represents a diverse intellectual movement that seeks to address social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities experienced by women. Although feminism is not a monolithic ideology, most feminist traditions share the objective of challenging structures perceived to perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality. Contemporary feminist scholarship continues to influence global debates concerning women's rights, gender justice, workplace participation, reproductive autonomy, and political representation (Sage Open, 2023).

Liberal feminism remains one of the most influential strands of feminist thought. It advocates equal opportunities for men and women within existing political and social institutions and emphasizes legal reforms, educational access, and economic participation as mechanisms for achieving gender equality (Yaqoob & Malik, 2024). Contemporary



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liberal feminists argue that women should enjoy equal access to employment, education, leadership positions, and political representation without discrimination based on gender (Islam et al., 2024).

Radical feminism, in contrast, identifies patriarchy as the primary source of women's oppression and seeks more fundamental transformations of social structures (Mahmood & Ali, 2022). Radical feminist scholars argue that gender inequality is deeply embedded within cultural norms, family institutions, and social practices. Consequently, they advocate restructuring social relations to eliminate patriarchal power dynamics (Khalid & Rehman, 2023). Socialist feminism combines feminist concerns with critiques of economic systems, particularly capitalism. Scholars within this tradition contend that women's oppression cannot be fully understood without examining economic exploitation and class relations. According to socialist feminists, women's liberation requires both gender equality and economic justice (Ahmed & Malik, 2022).

More recently, postmodern and intersectional feminist approaches have gained prominence. These perspectives challenge universal definitions of womanhood and emphasize the influence of race, class, religion, ethnicity, culture, and geography on women's experiences. Contemporary feminist scholars increasingly recognize that women's realities vary significantly across different societies and historical contexts, necessitating more nuanced approaches to gender justice (Hassan, 2024). Despite their differences, most contemporary feminist frameworks emphasize individual autonomy, equality of opportunity, bodily integrity, freedom of choice, and resistance to gender-based discrimination. These principles continue to shape international human rights discourse and gender-related policy initiatives worldwide.

### **Contemporary Scholarship on Women's Rights in Islam**

Recent scholarship on women's rights in Islam has expanded significantly, particularly in response to global debates concerning gender equality and the status of Muslim women. Contemporary researchers argue that many criticisms directed toward Islam often result from conflating cultural practices with religious teachings (Mahmood & Ali, 2022). Consequently, scholars have increasingly emphasized returning to primary Islamic sources to evaluate the rights and status granted to women within the Islamic tradition (Raza, 2024). Islamic teachings present women as independent moral and legal individuals possessing rights and responsibilities before God. The Qur'an repeatedly affirms the spiritual equality of men and women and emphasizes that both are accountable for their actions and entitled to divine reward (Yaqoob & Malik, 2024). Contemporary Islamic scholars maintain that this spiritual equality forms the foundation of the broader Islamic framework concerning women's social, economic, and legal rights (Saifullin et al., 2026).

Recent studies have highlighted several dimensions of women's rights within Islam, including access to education, ownership of property, inheritance, participation in economic activities, marital rights, and protection from abuse. Researchers have argued that these rights were introduced within a comprehensive ethical framework aimed at preserving human dignity, social justice, and family stability (Khan & Ahmad, 2024). A growing body of literature also explores the distinction between equality and equity within Islamic thought. While many contemporary Western frameworks emphasize identical treatment regardless of gender, Islamic scholars often emphasize justice, complementarity, and balanced responsibilities. According to this perspective, men and women possess equal human dignity while simultaneously carrying distinct obligations that reflect biological, social, and familial realities (Islam et al., 2024). Contemporary



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Muslim scholars further argue that Islamic teachings should be understood within their historical context (Zafar & Mahmood, 2023). They maintain that the reforms introduced by Islam concerning women represented significant advances relative to the social conditions of seventh-century Arabia and continue to provide valuable guidance for contemporary societies. Nevertheless, many scholars acknowledge the existence of challenges related to the implementation of these principles in various Muslim communities and emphasize the need to distinguish authentic Islamic teachings from cultural practices (Raza, 2024).

### **Islamic Feminism and Contemporary Debates**

The emergence of Islamic feminism represents one of the most significant developments in contemporary gender discourse within Muslim societies. Islamic feminism seeks to reconcile commitments to gender justice with Islamic theological and legal traditions. Scholars associated with this movement argue that patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts should be distinguished from the foundational teachings of Islam itself. Contemporary Islamic feminist scholarship emphasizes re-examining Qur'anic texts through methodologies that highlight justice, equality, and human dignity. Proponents argue that many restrictions historically imposed upon women stemmed from socio-cultural interpretations rather than explicit religious injunctions. As a result, Islamic feminism seeks to promote women's rights while remaining within an Islamic epistemological framework (Mahmood & Farooq, 2025).

However, Islamic feminism remains a contested concept. Some Muslim scholars support aspects of Islamic feminist scholarship, particularly its critique of patriarchal cultural practices. Others argue that certain feminist assumptions originate from secular Western intellectual traditions and may not always align with Islamic understandings of gender, family, and social responsibility. This debate reflects broader tensions concerning the relationship between modernity, tradition, religion, and social change within Muslim societies (Rahman & Akhtar, 2023). Despite these disagreements, contemporary scholarship generally acknowledges that discussions regarding women's rights in Muslim societies increasingly involve engagement with both Islamic and feminist frameworks (Ullah & Rehman, 2022). This interaction has generated important debates concerning gender justice, religious interpretation, and social reform.

### **Women's Rights in the Prophetic Seerah**

While contemporary scholarship frequently examines Islamic legal perspectives on women, comparatively fewer studies focus specifically on the Prophetic Seerah as a comprehensive model of women's rights. The life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ provides practical examples of how Islamic teachings concerning women were implemented within society. Recent studies identify the Prophetic model as a transformative force that challenged discriminatory customs and established principles of justice, compassion, and respect toward women (Siddiqui & Hussain, 2024). The Prophet ﷺ emphasized women's educational development, protected their property rights, consulted women on important matters, and recognized their contributions to social and communal affairs. His interactions with female companions demonstrate a model of leadership characterized by dignity, inclusion, and ethical responsibility (Saifullin et al., 2026).

The Prophetic Seerah further illustrates that women's rights in Islam extend beyond legal entitlements and encompass broader ethical and social dimensions (Hashmi & Ahmad, 2023). Through his conduct, the Prophet ﷺ promoted mutual respect between men and women, strengthened family relationships, and emphasized moral accountability as a



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foundation for social harmony. These dimensions continue to attract scholarly interest because they provide practical insights into the implementation of Islamic principles.

### Research Gap

A review of contemporary literature reveals substantial scholarly attention to Western feminism, gender equality, Islamic feminism, and women's rights within Islamic legal traditions. Recent studies have also examined comparative aspects of Islamic and Western approaches to gender justice. However, much of this scholarship focuses either on theoretical feminist frameworks or on legal discussions concerning women's rights in Islam (Ali & Khan, 2021). Relatively limited attention has been devoted to a systematic comparative analysis of women's rights specifically through the lens of the Prophetic Seerah while simultaneously engaging with contemporary Western feminist thought. Furthermore, many studies discuss Islamic principles in general terms without examining how those principles were practically demonstrated in the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing women's rights as reflected in the Prophetic Seerah and comparing them with the philosophical foundations and objectives of Western feminism. By focusing on both theoretical principles and practical implementation, the research aims to contribute to contemporary discussions concerning women's rights, gender justice, and social development from an Islamic perspective.

### Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine women's rights in the light of the Prophetic Seerah and to compare the Islamic perspective with contemporary Western feminist thought. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for studies that seek to analyze ideas, values, principles, and social concepts embedded within religious and intellectual traditions. Since the present research focuses on textual interpretation, comparative analysis, and conceptual understanding rather than statistical measurement, a qualitative approach provides the most suitable framework for investigation. The study adopts descriptive, analytical, and comparative research methods. The descriptive method is used to explain the concept of women's rights within both Western feminist discourse and Islamic teachings. The analytical method facilitates a critical examination of the philosophical foundations, objectives, and assumptions underlying each framework. The comparative method is employed to identify similarities and differences between Western feminist perspectives and the Islamic conception of women's rights as demonstrated in the Prophetic Seerah.

The research primarily relies on documentary and textual analysis. Primary Islamic sources include the Holy Qur'an, authentic Hadith literature, and recognized works of Seerah. Particular emphasis is placed on incidents from the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that illustrate the practical implementation of women's rights in social, economic, educational, familial, and legal contexts. The Prophetic Seerah serves as the principal framework for understanding how Islamic teachings concerning women were translated into social practice. Secondary sources consist of contemporary academic literature published in peer-reviewed journals, books, and scholarly studies addressing women's rights, gender justice, Islamic feminism, feminist theory, and comparative religious perspectives. Preference has been given to recent scholarship published between 2020 and 2025 in order to ensure engagement with contemporary academic debates and emerging perspectives concerning women's rights.



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The comparative framework of the study focuses on five major themes: (1) the source and foundation of rights, (2) the concept of equality, (3) personal freedom and autonomy, (4) family and social responsibilities, and (5) women's participation in public life. These themes were selected because they constitute central areas of discussion in both feminist scholarship and Islamic discourse concerning women. The study recognizes that Western feminism is not a single unified ideology but rather a collection of diverse theoretical traditions. Consequently, the analysis considers major feminist approaches, including liberal, radical, socialist, and contemporary intersectional perspectives. Similarly, the Islamic perspective is not treated merely as a legal framework but is examined through the broader ethical and spiritual teachings reflected in the Qur'an and the Prophetic Seerah.

One limitation of the study is that it relies primarily on textual and conceptual analysis rather than empirical fieldwork. Nevertheless, the qualitative approach enables an in-depth examination of foundational sources and provides a comprehensive understanding of the principles underlying both frameworks. By integrating contemporary scholarship with primary Islamic sources, the study seeks to offer a balanced and academically grounded analysis of women's rights from both Islamic and Western perspectives. The overall objective of the methodology is to facilitate a critical and evidence-based comparison that contributes to contemporary discussions on gender justice while highlighting the relevance of the Prophetic model in addressing modern debates concerning women's rights and social development.

### **Women's Rights in the Light of the Prophetic Seerah Human Dignity and Spiritual Equality**

The foundation of women's rights in Islam rests upon the principle of human dignity (*karāmah insāniyyah*), which is granted to all human beings irrespective of gender, ethnicity, social status, or economic position. The Qur'an declares that Allah has honored the children of Adam (Qur'an 17:70), establishing a universal principle of human dignity that encompasses both men and women. Unlike many pre-Islamic societies in which women were frequently viewed as socially inferior or economically burdensome, Islam introduced a worldview that recognized women as independent moral agents accountable before God and entitled to fundamental rights and protections.

The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the spiritual equality of men and women. One of the clearest expressions of this principle appears in Surah Al-Ahzab, where believing men and believing women are mentioned together as equal recipients of divine reward and spiritual excellence (Qur'an 33:35). Similarly, the Qur'an states that whoever performs righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer, shall be granted a good life and rewarded according to the best of their deeds (Qur'an 16:97). Contemporary scholarship identifies these verses as foundational to the Islamic understanding of gender justice because they establish equality in spiritual worth and moral accountability (Raza, 2024). The practical application of this principle is evident throughout the Prophetic Seerah. Prophet Muhammad ﷺ consistently treated women with dignity, respect, and compassion. His teachings challenged tribal customs that demeaned women and emphasized their importance within family and society. The Prophet ﷺ declared: "The best among you are those who are best to their wives" (Sahih al-Tirmidhi), thereby linking moral excellence with respectful treatment of women. This ethical framework transformed prevailing social attitudes and established a culture of mutual respect within the Muslim community.



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The Prophet ﷺ also condemned practices that undermined women's dignity, including female infanticide, which was prevalent among certain Arab tribes. The Qur'an strongly denounces this practice and depicts a future accountability for those responsible (Qur'an 81:8–9). Through these reforms, Islam not only protected women's lives but also challenged social structures that treated daughters as burdens. Contemporary scholars argue that the Prophetic model of gender relations was revolutionary within its historical context because it replaced notions of female inferiority with principles of dignity, accountability, and ethical reciprocity (Saifullin et al., 2026). The recognition of women as morally autonomous individuals remains one of the most significant contributions of the Prophetic Seerah to discussions concerning women's rights.

### **Right to Education**

Education occupies a central position in Islamic teachings and constitutes one of the most significant rights granted to women by Islam. The first revelation received by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized reading, knowledge, and learning (Qur'an 96:1–5), establishing the pursuit of knowledge as a fundamental value within Islamic civilization. The Prophetic tradition further reinforces this principle by emphasizing the obligation of seeking knowledge for all Muslims. Historical accounts from the Prophetic period demonstrate that women actively participated in educational activities and sought knowledge directly from the Prophet ﷺ. Female companions attended religious gatherings, asked questions concerning legal and theological matters, and contributed to the transmission of Islamic teachings. Their active engagement reflects the educational opportunities available to women within the early Muslim community.

Among the most prominent examples is Aisha (RA), who emerged as one of the most influential scholars in Islamic history. She transmitted thousands of hadiths, provided legal opinions, and served as an authoritative source of knowledge for numerous companions and later generations. Contemporary researchers frequently cite her scholarly contributions as evidence of the intellectual opportunities afforded to women in the Prophetic era (Khan & Ahmad, 2024). The Prophet ﷺ also demonstrated responsiveness to women's educational needs. Historical narrations indicate that groups of women requested dedicated teaching sessions, and the Prophet ﷺ allocated specific times for their instruction. This practice reflects an institutional commitment to women's education and highlights the importance attached to intellectual development within the Islamic framework.

Recent scholarship emphasizes that the educational empowerment of women in the Prophetic period contributed significantly to the preservation and dissemination of Islamic knowledge. Female scholars played crucial roles in transmitting hadith, teaching jurisprudence, and preserving religious traditions throughout Islamic history. Such contributions challenge stereotypes suggesting that women were excluded from intellectual life in Islamic civilization. The Prophetic emphasis on education continues to provide an important foundation for contemporary discussions concerning women's access to learning, professional development, and participation in knowledge-based societies.

### **Right to Property and Inheritance**

One of the most transformative reforms introduced by Islam concerned women's economic rights. Prior to Islam, women in many societies lacked independent legal status regarding property ownership and inheritance. In contrast, Islamic teachings recognized women as independent economic actors capable of owning, managing, buying, selling,



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and inheriting property. The Qur'an explicitly grants women the right to inherit property (Qur'an 4:7), a provision that represented a significant departure from prevailing customs in pre-Islamic Arabia. The Qur'an further specifies inheritance shares for various female relatives, thereby providing legal protection for women's economic interests (Qur'an 4:11–12). Contemporary scholars regard these provisions as among the earliest codified inheritance rights granted to women in human history (Islam et al., 2024).

The Prophetic Seerah provides practical examples of women's financial independence. Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA), the first wife of the Prophet ﷺ, was a successful businesswoman whose commercial activities were widely respected within Makkah. Her economic success demonstrates that women were not excluded from entrepreneurial endeavors and that Islam did not prohibit female participation in commerce. Islamic teachings further establish that a woman's property remains under her exclusive ownership. Neither her father, husband, nor any other relative possesses authority to appropriate her wealth without consent. The obligation of financial maintenance rests primarily upon men, while women retain full ownership of their earnings, inheritance, and personal assets. This arrangement provides economic security while preserving women's financial independence.

The Prophetic implementation of these principles challenged existing social norms and contributed to the development of a legal framework that protected women's economic rights. Contemporary studies continue to identify these reforms as significant contributions to the advancement of women's status within society (Raza, 2024).

### **Right to Marriage Consent and Family Life**

Marriage in Islam is founded upon mutual consent, dignity, and responsibility. The Prophetic Seerah demonstrates a clear commitment to protecting women's autonomy in marital decisions. Authentic narrations indicate that the Prophet ﷺ invalidated marriages conducted without the woman's consent, thereby affirming her right to choose her spouse. The importance of consent reflects a broader Islamic understanding of marriage as a contractual relationship rather than a form of ownership. Women possess the right to accept or reject marriage proposals, and coercion is inconsistent with Prophetic teachings. Contemporary scholars regard this principle as a critical component of women's rights within Islamic family law.

The Prophet ﷺ also emphasized kindness, compassion, and mutual respect within marriage. His own conduct toward his wives serves as a practical model of ethical family relationships. Historical accounts describe his willingness to consult his wives, assist with household responsibilities, and treat family members with affection and respect. Furthermore, Islam recognizes mechanisms through which women may seek dissolution of marriage under certain circumstances. The institution of *khul'* provides women with a lawful avenue to terminate marital relationships when continuation becomes harmful or undesirable. This provision reflects Islam's concern for women's welfare and personal dignity. The Prophetic model thus presents marriage as a partnership based upon cooperation, justice, and compassion rather than domination or coercion. These principles continue to inform contemporary discussions regarding family rights and responsibilities within Islamic thought.

### **Economic Participation and Financial Independence**

The Prophetic Seerah demonstrates that Islam recognizes women as independent economic actors with the right to engage in lawful economic activities, own property, conduct business, and manage financial affairs. Contrary to the perception that women's



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economic participation is a modern phenomenon, historical evidence from the Prophetic period indicates that women actively contributed to commercial, agricultural, and social welfare activities while maintaining their legal and financial independence. One of the most prominent examples is Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA), whose successful commercial enterprise was widely known in Makkah. Prior to and after her marriage to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, she retained ownership and control of her business activities. Contemporary scholars frequently cite her example as evidence that Islam does not prohibit women from engaging in trade or entrepreneurship (Raza, 2024). Her economic success demonstrates that female participation in commerce was not only accepted but respected within the early Muslim community.

The Qur'an further acknowledges women's economic rights by affirming that both men and women are entitled to the outcomes of their lawful efforts: "For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned" (Qur'an 4:32). This verse establishes the principle that women possess independent financial identities and are entitled to benefit from their labor, investments, and property. The Prophetic Seerah also contains examples of women participating in agriculture, healthcare, charitable activities, and other forms of productive labor. Female companions contributed to community welfare during times of peace and conflict, demonstrating that women's economic engagement was not viewed as inconsistent with Islamic values. However, the Islamic framework emphasizes that economic participation should be balanced with broader ethical responsibilities and family obligations.

Contemporary researchers argue that Islamic teachings regarding women's financial independence differ from many modern frameworks because they combine economic rights with social protection mechanisms. While women possess the right to own wealth and earn income, Islamic law simultaneously obligates male relatives, particularly husbands, to provide financial maintenance. This arrangement seeks to ensure economic security while preserving women's autonomy over their personal assets (Islam et al., 2024). Thus, the Prophetic model presents a balanced approach that recognizes women's right to economic participation while safeguarding their dignity, financial independence, and social welfare.

### **Social and Political Participation**

The Prophetic Seerah provides substantial evidence that women actively participated in the social and political life of the early Muslim community. Contrary to assumptions that women were confined exclusively to private spheres, historical records indicate that women contributed to public affairs, religious learning, consultation processes, and community development during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Women participated in the pledge of allegiance (*Bay'ah*) to the Prophet ﷺ, which represented a significant form of political engagement within the early Muslim state. The Qur'an itself refers to women who pledged their allegiance to the Prophet and outlines the ethical principles associated with this commitment (Qur'an 60:12). The inclusion of women in this process reflects their recognition as responsible members of the emerging Muslim society.

The Prophetic Seerah also records instances in which the Prophet ﷺ consulted women on matters of public importance. One of the most notable examples occurred during the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, when Umm Salamah (RA) offered advice that proved instrumental in resolving a difficult situation among the companions. Her counsel was accepted and implemented by the Prophet ﷺ, illustrating the value attached to women's perspectives and contributions. Women further participated in educational, charitable,



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and healthcare activities. During various military expeditions, female companions provided medical assistance, cared for the wounded, and supported humanitarian efforts. These contributions demonstrate that women's participation extended beyond domestic responsibilities and encompassed broader social functions within the community.

Contemporary scholarship increasingly highlights the active role of women in early Islamic society and challenges narratives that portray them as passive recipients of rights. Researchers argue that the Prophetic model encouraged meaningful participation while maintaining ethical guidelines designed to preserve dignity and social harmony (Khan & Ahmad, 2024). The social and political engagement of women in the Prophetic era therefore reflects an Islamic framework that values participation, consultation, and community contribution without reducing women's identity solely to economic or political roles.

### **Protection from Violence, Abuse, and Discrimination**

One of the most significant contributions of the Prophetic Seerah to women's rights was the establishment of protections against violence, abuse, exploitation, and discrimination. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ consistently advocated kindness, compassion, and justice in dealings with women and condemned practices that violated their dignity or caused harm. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes principles of justice, mercy, and mutual respect within family and social relationships. The Prophet ﷺ translated these principles into practical conduct by encouraging men to treat women with kindness and respect. Numerous authentic narrations indicate that he strongly discouraged harsh treatment and emphasized ethical behavior toward wives, daughters, and female relatives.

The Prophet ﷺ declared that the best believers are those who display the best character and treat their families with kindness. His own conduct served as a practical model of patience, compassion, and emotional intelligence in family relationships. Historical accounts indicate that he never promoted abusive behavior and consistently encouraged reconciliation, understanding, and respect. The protection of women extended beyond physical well-being to include legal and social safeguards. Islamic teachings prohibited practices that deprived women of inheritance, forced them into marriage, or treated them as transferable property. These reforms addressed structural forms of injustice that were prevalent in pre-Islamic society and established legal protections for women's rights and dignity.

Recent scholarship emphasizes that the Prophetic approach to women's welfare was holistic, integrating legal rights, ethical responsibilities, and social protections within a broader framework of justice. Contemporary researchers argue that many misconceptions regarding women's status in Islam arise from the failure to distinguish between authentic Prophetic teachings and cultural practices that developed in later periods (Saifullin et al., 2026). The Prophetic model therefore presents a comprehensive framework for protecting women from physical, economic, social, and psychological forms of harm. By emphasizing justice, dignity, and accountability, it established principles that continue to provide guidance for addressing contemporary challenges related to women's rights and social welfare.

### **Summary of Women's Rights in the Prophetic Seerah**

The analysis of the Prophetic Seerah demonstrates that Islam introduced a comprehensive framework of women's rights encompassing spiritual dignity, educational opportunities, economic independence, marital protections, social participation, and protection from abuse. These rights were not merely theoretical declarations but were



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practically implemented through the teachings and conduct of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The Prophetic model recognized women as independent moral and legal individuals possessing rights and responsibilities within society. It challenged discriminatory customs, promoted justice and compassion, and established mechanisms designed to protect women's dignity and welfare. While the historical context of seventh-century Arabia differed significantly from contemporary societies, the underlying principles of justice, dignity, and accountability continue to provide an important foundation for discussions concerning women's rights in the modern world.

The next section compares these Prophetic principles with the philosophical foundations and objectives of Western feminism in order to identify areas of convergence and divergence between the two approaches.

### **Comparative Analysis of Western Feminism and the Islamic Perspective**

#### **Philosophical Foundations of Women's Rights**

One of the most fundamental differences between Western feminism and the Islamic perspective concerns the source and foundation of women's rights. Western feminism emerged within the intellectual traditions of the European Enlightenment and is generally rooted in secular concepts of human rights, individual autonomy, rationalism, and personal freedom. Contemporary feminist theories largely view rights as social and political entitlements derived from human agency and collective struggles against systems of oppression (Islam et al., 2024). In contrast, the Islamic conception of women's rights originates from divine revelation. Within Islam, rights are not merely social constructs or products of historical development but are regarded as divinely ordained responsibilities and entitlements granted by Allah. Consequently, the Islamic framework understands human rights as inseparable from moral accountability and ethical obligations. Rights and duties exist in a complementary relationship and are intended to promote justice, social harmony, and human well-being.

The Prophetic Seerah demonstrates this distinction clearly. The rights granted to women by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ were not presented as concessions resulting from political pressure or social activism but as obligations derived from divine guidance. As a result, women's dignity, property rights, inheritance, education, and legal protections were established as religious responsibilities rather than temporary social arrangements. Recent scholarship suggests that this difference in philosophical foundations continues to shape contemporary debates concerning gender equality, family relations, and social justice. While Western feminism generally prioritizes individual autonomy, the Islamic perspective seeks to balance individual rights with moral responsibilities and communal welfare (Raza, 2024).

#### **Concept of Equality**

The concept of equality represents one of the most frequently discussed issues in comparative studies of Islam and feminism. Both Western feminism and Islam affirm the inherent worth and dignity of women; however, they often differ in their interpretation of equality and its practical implications. Contemporary feminist thought generally advocates equality in legal status, political participation, educational opportunities, and access to economic resources. Many feminist scholars further argue that gender-based distinctions should be minimized or eliminated wherever possible in order to ensure equal treatment and opportunity (Hassan, 2024).



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Islam likewise recognizes the equal spiritual worth of men and women before God. The Qur'an repeatedly affirms that both genders are equally accountable for their actions and equally eligible for divine reward (Qur'an 33:35; 16:97). However, the Islamic framework distinguishes between equality in human dignity and complete uniformity in social roles or responsibilities. From the Islamic perspective, justice does not necessarily require identical responsibilities in every sphere of life. Rather, Islamic teachings emphasize equity, balance, and complementarity. Men and women are viewed as equal in value but may possess distinct responsibilities based upon biological, social, and familial considerations. Contemporary Islamic scholars argue that this approach seeks to accommodate human diversity while preserving fairness and social stability (Saifullin et al., 2026).

Thus, while both frameworks support women's dignity and oppose discrimination, they differ regarding whether equality should be understood primarily as sameness or as justice within complementary social relationships.

### **Freedom and Individual Autonomy**

Freedom and autonomy constitute central themes within contemporary feminist discourse. Many feminist theories emphasize the importance of personal choice and individual self-determination in matters relating to education, employment, relationships, reproduction, and lifestyle. From this perspective, women's empowerment is closely linked to the expansion of individual freedoms and the reduction of external constraints. The Islamic perspective likewise values human freedom but places it within a broader moral and spiritual framework. Islam recognizes individual choice and personal responsibility while simultaneously emphasizing accountability before God and adherence to ethical principles. Consequently, freedom is not viewed as the absence of all limitations but as the ability to make responsible choices consistent with moral values and social welfare.

The Prophetic Seerah illustrates this balanced understanding of freedom. Women were granted rights to own property, engage in commerce, pursue knowledge, express opinions, and participate in community affairs. At the same time, these freedoms were exercised within a framework emphasizing modesty, responsibility, family obligations, and ethical conduct. Contemporary scholars argue that this distinction reflects two different conceptions of human flourishing. Whereas many Western feminist approaches prioritize individual autonomy as the primary measure of empowerment, Islamic teachings emphasize a balance between personal freedom, moral responsibility, and communal well-being (Islam et al., 2024).

### **Family and Social Structure**

The family occupies a central position in both Islamic teachings and feminist debates, although the two traditions often approach the institution from different perspectives. Certain feminist theories have historically viewed traditional family structures as potential sites of gender inequality, arguing that domestic roles may limit women's opportunities for economic and political participation. Consequently, some feminist scholars advocate restructuring family arrangements in ways that promote greater equality and shared responsibilities between men and women.

The Islamic perspective, while recognizing the importance of justice within family relationships, regards the family as the foundational unit of society. The Prophetic Seerah presents marriage as a partnership based on mutual rights, compassion, consultation, and cooperation. Family life is viewed not as a barrier to women's development but as an



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institution that contributes to personal fulfillment, social stability, and moral development. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized kindness toward spouses, consultation within marriage, and respect for women's opinions. Historical examples from the Seerah demonstrate that women participated actively in social and intellectual life while simultaneously contributing to family and community welfare. Thus, the Islamic model seeks to balance family responsibilities with opportunities for personal growth and social engagement.

Recent scholarship suggests that the strength of the Islamic family model lies in its emphasis on mutual obligations rather than purely contractual relationships. This approach seeks to create a supportive environment in which rights are accompanied by corresponding responsibilities (Khan & Ahmad, 2024).

### **Rights and Responsibilities**

Another significant difference between Western feminism and the Islamic perspective concerns the relationship between rights and responsibilities. Contemporary feminist discourse often focuses on expanding individual rights and removing barriers that restrict women's opportunities. Such efforts have contributed significantly to advancements in education, employment, political participation, and legal protection. Islam similarly recognizes a wide range of rights for women; however, these rights are integrated within a broader framework of ethical duties and social obligations. In Islamic thought, rights and responsibilities are interdependent. Every entitlement is accompanied by corresponding obligations designed to maintain justice and social harmony.

For example, women possess financial rights, inheritance rights, and property rights, while men bear primary responsibility for financial maintenance within the family. Similarly, marriage establishes reciprocal rights and obligations for both spouses. The Prophetic Seerah consistently demonstrates this principle of balance, emphasizing fairness, compassion, and accountability in interpersonal relationships. Contemporary Islamic scholars argue that this integrated approach seeks to prevent both oppression and neglect by ensuring that social relationships are governed by mutual responsibility rather than individual claims alone (Raza, 2024).

### **Areas of Convergence**

Despite important philosophical differences, Western feminism and the Islamic perspective share several areas of convergence. Both frameworks oppose injustice, discrimination, exploitation, and violence against women. Both emphasize the importance of education, human dignity, legal protection, and opportunities for personal development. Contemporary feminist movements have played an important role in drawing attention to issues such as workplace discrimination, domestic violence, unequal access to education, and political underrepresentation. Similarly, Islamic teachings strongly condemn injustice and advocate the protection of vulnerable members of society, including women.

Both traditions therefore contribute valuable insights concerning human dignity and social justice. Their shared commitment to protecting women from harm provides an important basis for constructive dialogue and cooperation.

### **Areas of Divergence**

Notwithstanding these similarities, significant differences remain between Western feminism and the Islamic perspective. The most important divergence concerns the source of authority. Western feminism generally derives its principles from secular



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philosophical traditions, whereas Islam derives its guidance from divine revelation. Additional differences relate to the interpretation of equality, the meaning of freedom, the role of family, and the relationship between rights and responsibilities. Many feminist frameworks prioritize individual autonomy and personal choice as primary values, while Islam seeks to balance individual interests with ethical obligations, family stability, and communal welfare.

Furthermore, some contemporary feminist theories challenge traditional gender distinctions and advocate greater fluidity in social roles. In contrast, Islamic teachings recognize certain gender-specific responsibilities while affirming the equal dignity and moral worth of both men and women. These differences do not necessarily imply complete incompatibility. Rather, they reflect distinct worldviews concerning human nature, morality, and social organization. Understanding these differences is essential for meaningful dialogue concerning women's rights in increasingly diverse and interconnected societies.

Overall, the comparative analysis reveals that while Western feminism and the Islamic perspective share common concerns regarding justice and human dignity, they diverge significantly in their philosophical foundations, conceptualization of equality, understanding of freedom, and approach to family and social life. The Prophetic Seerah presents a model that seeks to harmonize rights, responsibilities, morality, and social welfare within a comprehensive framework of human dignity and justice.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that both Western feminism and the Islamic perspective seek to address issues related to women's dignity, rights, and social participation; however, they approach these objectives from fundamentally different philosophical and epistemological foundations. The comparative analysis demonstrates that while areas of convergence exist, particularly regarding education, protection from abuse, economic participation, and human dignity, substantial differences remain concerning the source of rights, the concept of equality, individual autonomy, and the role of family within society.

The examination of the Prophetic Seerah reveals that the Islamic framework of women's rights was neither incidental nor secondary to the broader Islamic message. Rather, the protection and elevation of women's status formed an integral component of the social reforms introduced by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The Prophetic model challenged numerous discriminatory practices prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia, including female infanticide, forced marriages, denial of inheritance, and restrictions on women's legal and economic rights. These reforms established women as independent moral and legal persons possessing rights that were protected through both religious teachings and social practice. A significant finding of this study is that the Prophetic approach to women's rights was comprehensive in nature. Unlike approaches that focus exclusively on legal equality or political participation, the Prophetic model integrated spiritual, social, economic, educational, familial, and ethical dimensions of human life. Women were recognized as spiritually equal before God, entitled to education, capable of owning property, eligible to participate in economic activities, and deserving of respect and protection within family and society. This multidimensional framework reflects a holistic understanding of human welfare and social justice.

The analysis further demonstrates that contemporary critiques of Islam frequently arise from a failure to distinguish between Islamic teachings and cultural practices that developed in specific historical or regional contexts. While certain Muslim societies



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continue to face challenges related to gender inequality, these challenges cannot automatically be attributed to the foundational teachings of Islam. Recent scholarship increasingly emphasizes the need to differentiate between normative Islamic principles and cultural traditions that may conflict with those principles (Raza, 2024; Saifullin et al., 2026).

At the same time, the study acknowledges the significant contributions of Western feminist movements to global discussions on women's rights. Feminist scholarship has played an important role in highlighting issues such as workplace discrimination, gender-based violence, unequal access to education, and political exclusion. These contributions have expanded public awareness and encouraged legal reforms in many societies. Consequently, it would be historically inaccurate to dismiss feminism entirely or to ignore its role in advancing women's participation in public life. However, the comparative analysis suggests that certain contemporary feminist approaches tend to prioritize individual autonomy as the primary criterion for evaluating social institutions and relationships. The Islamic perspective, by contrast, seeks to balance individual rights with ethical responsibilities, family cohesion, and communal welfare. Within the Prophetic framework, freedom is accompanied by accountability, rights are linked with obligations, and personal interests are considered alongside broader social considerations. This distinction reflects differing conceptions of human nature and social organization.

The study also highlights differing understandings of equality. Contemporary feminist discourse often emphasizes identical opportunities and treatment across genders, whereas Islamic teachings emphasize equality in human dignity while recognizing certain distinctions in responsibilities and social functions. The Prophetic Seerah presents a model in which justice is achieved not necessarily through uniformity but through fairness, balance, and recognition of diverse human circumstances. This perspective continues to generate debate within contemporary discussions concerning gender and social policy. Another important finding concerns the role of family within the two frameworks. The Prophetic model views the family as a fundamental institution for social stability, moral development, and emotional well-being. Rights and responsibilities within family life are structured around cooperation, compassion, and mutual respect. While many contemporary feminist scholars likewise support healthy family relationships, some feminist theories have historically viewed traditional family structures with greater skepticism, particularly when such structures are perceived as reinforcing unequal power relations. This difference reflects broader philosophical disagreements regarding the relationship between individual autonomy and social institutions.

The findings of this study suggest that the Prophetic Seerah offers a distinctive model of women's rights that cannot be adequately understood through purely secular or modern categories. Rather than framing women exclusively as individuals seeking liberation from social constraints, the Prophetic approach situates rights within a broader moral vision that seeks to promote justice, dignity, responsibility, and social harmony simultaneously. This integrated framework may provide valuable insights for contemporary societies seeking to address gender-related challenges while preserving ethical and social cohesion. Furthermore, the study contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating that a comparative analysis of women's rights should move beyond simplistic binaries such as "Islam versus feminism" or "tradition versus modernity." Such dichotomies often obscure important complexities within both traditions. A more productive approach involves recognizing areas of convergence while critically



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examining points of divergence in light of their respective philosophical foundations and social objectives.

Ultimately, the discussion highlights the continuing relevance of the Prophetic Seerah as a source of guidance for contemporary debates concerning women's rights. The life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ provide practical examples of dignity, justice, consultation, educational empowerment, economic participation, and social inclusion. These principles remain significant not only for Muslim societies but also for broader scholarly discussions concerning gender justice and human rights in the modern world.

### Conclusion

This study examined women's rights in the light of the Prophetic Seerah and compared the Islamic perspective with contemporary Western feminist thought. The findings reveal that Islam introduced a comprehensive framework of women's rights encompassing spiritual dignity, education, property ownership, inheritance, marriage consent, economic participation, and social engagement. These rights were not merely theoretical principles but were practically implemented through the teachings and conduct of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that both Western feminism and the Islamic perspective seek to promote women's dignity and oppose injustice. However, they differ significantly in their philosophical foundations, understanding of equality, concept of freedom, and approach to family and social responsibilities. While Western feminism is largely rooted in secular notions of autonomy and individual rights, the Islamic perspective derives rights from divine guidance and integrates them with moral and social responsibilities. The study concludes that the Prophetic Seerah offers a balanced and holistic model of women's rights that combines justice, dignity, responsibility, and social harmony. This model remains relevant to contemporary discussions on gender justice and provides valuable insights for addressing modern challenges related to women's rights and empowerment.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Greater emphasis should be placed on studying women's rights through authentic Islamic sources, particularly the Qur'an and the Prophetic Seerah.

Educational institutions should promote scholarly research on women's contributions to Islamic civilization and the role of women in the Prophetic era.

Muslim societies should distinguish between authentic Islamic teachings and cultural practices that may undermine women's rights.

Constructive dialogue between Islamic scholars and contemporary gender researchers should be encouraged to address modern challenges facing women.

Policymakers and community leaders should draw upon the ethical principles of justice, dignity, and compassion found in the Prophetic model when formulating policies concerning women's welfare and empowerment.

Further comparative research should be conducted on Islamic and Western approaches to gender justice in order to promote mutual understanding and informed academic discourse.



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