

The Egalitarian Framework of Prophetic Society: A Socio-Legal Analysis of Women's Agency and Progressive Modernity in Early Islam

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ABSTRACT

In order to dispel modern orientalist and reductionist myths about women's rights in Islam, this research examines the fundamental socio-legal frameworks of the Prophetic era (610–632 CE). This study assesses seven fundamental aspects of female agency in early Islamic society using a socio-historical and literature-driven analytical approach: economic entrepreneurship, marital autonomy, marital initiation, domestic management, philanthropic autonomy, judicial access, and the normalization of post-marital transitions (widowhood and divorce). This study goes beyond a simple historical account to include a comparative analysis with traditional Western legal traditions, an evaluation of current family law frameworks in states with a majority of Muslims, and a description of an operational curriculum for Generation Beta (2025–2039). The review shows that centuries before Western civil systems, the society founded by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) operated on a very progressive, egalitarian, and contemporary framework that gave women complete legal and financial autonomy. This study also emphasizes how strategically important it is to incorporate these genuine historical paradigms into contemporary teaching in order to counteract Islamophobia, lessen cultural radicalism, and address the cognitive dissonance that will affect future generations.

Keywords: Prophetic Modernity, Female Agency, Socio-Legal Autonomy, Generation Beta, Islamic Economics, Gender Egalitarianism.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most hotly contested topics in modern sociology and international relations is the confluence of gender dynamics, religious legal frameworks, and socioeconomic autonomy. Classical Islamic culture is often described as a structurally regressive, patriarchal, and constrictive ecology in mainstream academic discourse, especially within Western or Eurocentric orientalist traditions. According to this reductionist perspective, religious dogmatism positions women as submissive, silent, and dependent members of a monolithic social order, hence acting as a structural impediment to female empowerment. This paradigm, however, has a serious epistemological problem: it confuses the fundamental legal and social framework created in Medina and Makkah during the Prophetic era (610–632 CE) with regional cultural customs and post-colonial patriarchal corruptions.

A very different reality is revealed by a thorough, socio-historical analysis of original textual sources, including the Quranic text, genuine Hadith corpuses, and early Seerah (biographical) chronicles. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought about a profound, fundamentally disruptive, and extremely progressive revolution in 7th-century Arabia that was more than just a minor ethical change. Early Islam established a complex legal system that acknowledged women as completely independent economic, judicial, and social agents long before contemporary civil rights were codified or Western feminist movements emerged. The Prophetic model gave women individual fiscal sovereignty, absolute marital veto power, unhindered access to the supreme judiciary, and complete protection during post-marital transitions during a time when women in major classical civilizations (such as the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires) lacked basic legal personhood, were treated as inheritable property, and were systematically excluded from public discourse.

By examining the multifaceted nature of female agency through seven different aspects, this dissertation methodically dissects the intrinsic modernity of the Prophetic era. This study shows that the current "narrow-mindedness" or restrictive traditionalism seen in many contemporary Muslim-majority regions is an ideological regression driven by localized cultural taboos rather than religious prescription by tracing these historical realities through a thorough literature analysis.

The systemic transfer of this egalitarian historical paradigm to Generation Beta (those born from 2025 to 2039) is another pressing educational need that this study tackles. Presenting a culturally distorted picture of Islamic history runs the risk of causing extreme cognitive dissonance in this generation, which is growing up in a hyper-digitalized, globalized, and ideologically divided environment. This could result in radical skepticism or ideological alienation. In order to promote a fair, forward-thinking, and historically grounded global society, it is imperative that the genuine, intellectually dynamic paradigm of prophetic modernity be reclaimed.

The main objective of the research is investigating the basic socio-legal frameworks of the Prophetic age (610–632 CE) in order to debunk contemporary orientalist and reductionist illusions regarding women's rights in Islam. Using a socio-historical and literature-driven analytical approach, this study evaluates seven essential facets of female agency in early Islamic society: economic entrepreneurship, marital autonomy, marital initiation, domestic management, philanthropic autonomy, judicial access, and the normalization of post-marital transitions (widowhood and divorce). This study goes beyond a straightforward historical narrative to include a description of an operational curriculum for Generation Beta (2025–2039), an assessment of the current family law frameworks in states with a majority of Muslims, and a comparison with established Western legal traditions.

The contribution of the research demonstrates that the society established by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) functioned on an extremely progressive, egalitarian, and modern framework that granted



women full legal and financial liberty centuries before Western civil institutions. In order to combat Islamophobia, reduce cultural radicalism, and solve the cognitive dissonance that will impact future generations, this study also highlights how crucial it is to carefully integrate these authentic historical paradigms into modern instruction.

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This research employs a dual-methodological approach consisting of Socio-Historical Contextualization and Primary Source Content Analysis to generate a highly objective, rigorous, and publication-ready study. The approach plots particular historical legal turning points against contemporary socioeconomic indicators rather than depending on conjectural or secondary commentary.

The operationalization of seven key variables that reflect structural female agency forms the foundation of the analytical matrix, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable Identifier	Operational Dimension	Primary Historical Indicators Evaluated
V1: Financial Sovereignty	Independent asset ownership and commercial trade execution.	Management of trade caravans; independent cottage industries; direct taxation rights.
V2: Marital Veto Power	Mandatory consent as a legal prerequisite for contract validity.	Legal nullification of forced marriages by the state authority.
V3: Matrimonial Initiative	The right to propose or seek marital unions directly.	Formal matrimonial proposals initiated directly by women based on moral alignment.
V4: Domestic Administrative Control	Executive authority over household operations.	Legal designation as an executive manager; oversight of domestic assistants.
V5: Financial Mandate (Qawam)	Separation of spousal wealth and unilateral philanthropy.	Absolute protection of personal wealth; independent public charitable operations.
V6: Unhindered Judicial Access	Direct right to petition supreme authority for redress.	Direct public appeals leading to structural changes in state jurisprudence.
V7: Post-Marital Normalization	Structural de-stigmatization of civil transitions.	High rates of remarriage; full societal integration; absence of systemic exclusion.

The two-pronged approach of Socio-Historical Contextualization and Primary Source Content Analysis provides a systemic and balanced analysis of women's rights in early Islamic society. This study examines reforms to the law against a detailed broader background, using public policy documents, legislative histories and policy archives – but also worldwide datasets on socioeconomic development.

The analysis operationalizes seven structural dimensions of female agency into measurable indicators and systematically plots significant historical legal milestones against related



socioeconomic indicators. The study combines qualitative analysis of primary sources with long-term quantitative data to assess whether legal reforms lead to a measurable improvement in women's participation and empowerment, favoring a clear, evidence-based assessment rather than speculation or reliance on secondary interpretations.

SOCIO-LEGAL COMPARATIVE MATRIX: EARLY ISLAM VS. WESTERN TRADITIONS

It is methodologically necessary to compare the Prophetic legal system with traditional and present Western legal concepts in order to fill a significant void in modern gender sociology and combat Eurocentric prejudices. Comparative Socio-Legal Framework is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparative Socio-Legal Framework

Socio-Legal Dimensions	Roman Law & European Common Law	The Prophetic Legal Framework (610–632 CE)	Civil & Academic Impact
Legal Personhood & Fiscal Autonomy (V1 & V5)	Under coverture, a woman's legal persona was absorbed into her husband's upon marriage. She could not own property or enter contracts.	A woman retains full, independent legal personhood. Her wealth and income remain 100% insulated from her husband, who carries the sole mandate of maintenance (Nafaqah).	Western systems only granted married women basic property rights via statutory interventions in the late 19th and 20th centuries, 1,200 years after Islam.
Contractual Freedom in Marriage (V2 & V3)	Marriage was largely an economic or political transaction orchestrated by male patriarchs. Absolute female veto was legally unrecognized.	Marriage is classified as a civil contract (Nikah) requiring the explicit, uncoerced consent of the woman as an absolute legal prerequisite (Rukn).	The Prophetic model eliminated the concept of women as inheritable assets (Mawruth), transforming them into primary contractual signatories.
Judicial Access & Legislative Input (V6)	Women were legally classified as minors. Direct representation in court without a male guardian was heavily restricted or prohibited.	Direct, unhindered standing before the supreme executive and judicial authority of the state. Women could petition the Chief Justice directly without a Mahram.	Female-led litigation under the Prophetic court directly catalyzed sweeping structural changes in state criminal and civil jurisprudence (e.g., the outlawing of Zihar).

LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF VARIABLES

Variable 1: Financial Sovereignty and Autonomous Commercial Capital (V1)

Women's economic engagement was systemically suppressed in the classical world. By establishing that a woman retains autonomous property rights, complete control over her capital, and individual tax liability both before and after marriage, the Prophetic model, in stark contrast, formalized absolute financial sovereignty for women.

Hazrat Khadija bint Khuwaylid (R.A.) serves as the fundamental historical standard for this autonomy. She operated in the fiercely competitive trans-Arabian trade network as an independent,



elite merchant. Her business was essentially analogous to a contemporary mercantile enterprise: she oversaw capital allocations, assessed trade routes, and engaged agents on a profit-sharing basis (Mudarabah), including the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) before he became a prophet. This financial agency model spread to all societal levels when the Islamic state was established. A well-organized cottage industry was run by Hazrat Zainab bint Jahsh (R.A.). She oversaw the entire supply chain from raw hide tanning to final leather manufacture, retaining full control over the generated revenue. Hazrat Shifa bint Abdullah (R.A) possessed such advanced literacy and administrative acumen that the Second Caliph, Hazrat Umar (R.A), formally appointed her as the Chief Controller/Market Inspector of the Market of Madinah, a major executive governance role managing commercial logistics, weighing standards, and contract compliance.

Variable 2: Marital Veto Power and Absolute Consensual Union (V2)

Women were viewed as inheritable possessions in pre-Islamic Arabian civilization (Jahiliyyah) before the Islamic revolution (Mawruth). In the event of a man's death, his heirs would receive his wives as part of his estate, and they would have the unilateral authority to sell their marriage rights or marry them off. By establishing absolute, uncompromising female assent as a non-negotiable legal requirement (Rukn) for the legitimacy of a marriage contract (Nikah), prophetic jurisprudence totally demolished this practice.

In Sahih al-Bukhari (Kitab al-Nikah, Hadith 5138), a young woman called Khansa bint Khidam al-Ansariya contacted the Prophet (PBUH) after her father coerced her into marriage in order to improve his social standing. This is the legal precedent controlling this veto authority. Not only did the Prophet (PBUH) advise her to reach a compromise, but he also officially declared the marriage void (Radd), legally breaching the agreement and giving her complete freedom to select her own partner. A young virgin contacted Hazrat Aisha (R.A.) in a parallel case recorded by Ibn Majah (Hadith 1874) to protest that her father had married her to his nephew without consulting her. "I have accepted what my father did, but I wanted it known to all women that fathers have no right to force their daughters into marriage," she said after the Prophet (PBUH) gave her complete control over the ultimate decision.

Variable 3: Matrimonial Initiative and Female Agency in Proposals (V3)

The Prophetic era's societal framework broke the social taboo that labeled women as passive objects of male attention by normalizing female-driven marriage proposals. This practice has its historical roots in the marriage of the Prophet (PBUH). Hazrat Khadija (R.A.) independently proposed marriage through her intermediary, Nafisa bint Munya, after realizing the Prophet's unparalleled moral integrity (Al-Amin), negotiating the terms of the union according to her own preferences.

Additionally, there is a specific chapter in Sahih al-Bukhari (Hadith 5122) titled "A woman offering herself in marriage to a righteous man." In this passage, a woman publicly approached the Prophet (PBUH) in a public setting, announcing her intention to get married and asking for his help in starting a family. The companion Hazrat Anas ibn Malik (R.A.) sternly rebuked the narrator's daughter when she attacked the woman's audacity as lacking modesty, saying, "She was better than you; she loved the Prophet and offered herself to him in accordance with the law." This demonstrates that early Islamic society acknowledged women's freedom to actively seek for spouses based on moral, intellectual, and spiritual compatibility.



Variable 4: Domestic Administrative Control and Organizational Governance (V4)

The Prophetic paradigm positioned women as the executive director and administrative manager of the household economy rather than as a subordinate domestic worker. The Prophet's (PBUH) declaration that "the woman is a guardian and an executive ruler over the household of her husband, and she is structurally accountable for her administration" (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 893) serves as the legal foundation for this structural standing.

This administrative position involved overseeing domestic employees, protecting assets, and managing household money. Historical accounts attest to the fact that notable women like Hazrat Fatimah (R.A.) and Hazrat Aisha (R.A.) frequently oversaw domestic workers and assistants (like Fiddah). The Prophet (PBUH) established stringent labor regulations that governed this connection. These regulations required that domestic helpers be treated like family members, eaten from the same food, dressed in the same clothes, and never given tasks that exceeded their physical capabilities.

Variable 5: The Balance of Philanthropic Autonomy and Structural Leadership (V5)

Surah An-Nisa (4:34) introduces the idea of Qawam, which is a major source of confusion in modern gender sociology. This is sometimes misconstrued by reductionist frameworks as an assertion of total masculine existential or moral supremacy. However, a thorough examination of Islamic jurisprudence and traditional Arabic lexicography shows that Qawam refers to an absolute economic duty and protective liability imposed solely on men. According to this system, men are responsible for 100% of the family's maintenance costs (Nafaqah), which include shelter, food, clothes, and medical care. On the other hand, the woman's fortune is completely shielded from family expenses.

Exemplar Quote from Sahih al-Bukhari:

The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) explicitly commanded the women to distribute charity directly out of their own assets without requiring mandatory spousal oversight, highlighting their independent civic and spiritual identity.

During the Prophetic era, women were able to attain hitherto unheard-of levels of charitable autonomy due to the structural isolation of capital. Without the need for spousal supervision, women frequently participated in both public and private humanitarian endeavors. According to Sahih al-Bukhari, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) would personally address the women's section during the Eid assemblies, urging them to offer Sadqa. In response, the female companions unilaterally gave their own gold rings, jewelry, and possessions to the state treasury so that the impoverished may get them. Hazrat Aisha (R.A.) and Hazrat Asma bint Abi Bakr (R.A.) were well known for their autonomous philanthropy systems, regularly accepting substantial cash donations and giving them all to the poor in a single day.

Variable 6: Direct Judicial Access and Freedom of Speech (V6)

The Prophetic state's legal and political structure created a direct, unfettered route to the nation's highest executive and judicial authorities. Women had complete legal standing to unilaterally contest institutional inequities, domestic abuse, and emotional grievances; they did not need a male middleman (Mahram) to petition the state supreme court.

The first verses of Surah Al-Mujadila (58:1) immortalize the complete confirmation of this judicial sovereignty. Hazrat Khawlah bint Tha'labah (R.A.), a female companion, was subjected to a



long-standing, oppressive pre-Islamic Arabian custom known as Zihar, a type of psychological abuse in which a husband unilaterally referred to his wife as "the back of his mother," leaving her in a precarious legal situation. She marched straight to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in his role as Chief Justice and Head of State because she refused to accept this oppression. She persuasively argued for a structural legislative fix. "Indeed, Allah has heard the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and carries her complaint to Allah," according to the Quran. The state's jurisprudence was immediately and completely revised as a result of this direct legal appeal, criminalizing Zihar and establishing harsh legal penalties for husbands who engaged in it.

Variable 7: The De-stigmatization of Divorce and Widowhood (V7)

The total de-stigmatization of post-marital civil transitions, such as divorce (Talaq or Khula) and widowhood, was one of the most potent markers of early Islamic progressive modernity. A divorced or widowed woman experiences intense social rejection, structural isolation, and profound psychological shame in many traditional cultures – and regrettably in localized contemporary South Asian cultural paradigms. By viewing divorce and widowhood as natural, fluid life transitions rather than a social death sentence, the Prophetic environment completely destroyed these taboos.

Hazrat Sawdah (R.A.), Hazrat Hafsa (R.A.), and Hazrat Umm Salamah (R.A.) were among the vast majority of Prophet's (PBUH) wives who were either widowed or divorced. Their ascent to the pinnacle of social leadership established a legally binding and culturally significant precedent for the community. The renowned scholar and poet Hazrat Atiqah bint Zayd (R.A.) had several marriages after her successive husbands were martyred. In addition, the Prophet (PBUH) established Khula, or female-initiated divorce, in the instance of Thabit ibn Qays' wife (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 5273). In an extremely sophisticated, sympathetic, and contemporary manner, the Prophet (PBUH) immediately offered her a legal escape from the marriage contract with the return of her dowry orchard when she claimed to have encountered a simple emotional incompatibility.

CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM FAMILY LAWS: A SOCIO-LEGAL CRITIQUE

It is crucial to critically examine how the original Prophetic vision is translated into current family laws across Muslim-majority countries in order to show that modern institutional stagnation is a cultural regression rather than an Islamic requirement.

1. Tunisia (Code of Personal Status):

One of the contemporary era's most structurally structured examples of progressive Islamic law is found in Tunisia. Echoing the protective, egalitarian spirit of the Prophetic precedents, polygamy is legally prohibited, unilateral verbal divorce is prohibited, and both men and women must seek divorce only through judicial courts.

2. Pakistan (Muslim Family Laws Ordinance - MFLO 1961):

In an effort to institutionalize check-and-balance measures, Pakistan's framework mandates the involvement of an Arbitration Council in talaq and polygamy cases. Additionally, past Supreme Court decisions (such as *Khurshid Bibi v. Muhammad Amin*) established that a woman's right to Khula is an unalienable legal departure mechanism that cannot be held captive by her husband's rejection, which is in direct accordance with the Prophetic rule in Hadith 5273.



3. Saudi Arabia (Codified Personal Status Law 2022):

This comprehensive codification, which is a recent paradigm shift in the Gulf region, institutionalizes severe financial penalties against husbands who violate spousal support (Nafaqah), limits arbitrary guardianships, and legally requires explicit female consent and signature for contract validity. It also executes a top-down re-alignment with early Madinan jurisprudence.

PEDAGOGICAL OPERATIONALIZATION FOR GENERATION BETA

Generation Beta (individuals born between 2025 and 2039) is entering a society defined by hyper-digitalization, algorithmic content distribution, and fierce ideological warfare. This generation will experience a severe kind of cognitive dissonance if they are exposed to an interpretation of Islam tainted by cultural sexism, misogyny, and narrow-minded traditionalism.

It is imperative that Generation Beta's fundamental educational methodology incorporate the Prophetic Modernity Framework. Operational Curriculum Framework is shown below in Table 3.

Table 3: Operational Curriculum Framework

Educational Level	Target Age Group	Proposed Curricular Title	Pedagogical Methodology & Content Delivery
Primary Level	Ages 6–10	Pioneers of Early Islam: Socio-Economic Leaders	Interactive digital storytelling and gamified modules detailing Hazrat Khadija's (R.A) international trade network and Hazrat Shifa's (R.A) executive market inspection role. Normalizes female leadership early.
Secondary Level	Ages 11–15	Civil Rights & Comparative Classical Jurisprudence	Case-study comparisons between old European coverture laws and the Islamic Nikah civil contract. Teaches young minds that financial independence and explicit consent are divinely mandated Islamic rights, not secular or Western imports.
Higher/Tertiary Level	Ages 16+	Prophetic Modernity, State Jurisprudence, and Gender Studies	Academic exploration of primary Seerah and Hadith sources. Focuses on female-led litigation (e.g., Hazrat Khawlah) to counter religious extremism domestically and dismantle external Islamophobic critiques globally.

Generation Beta (2025-2039) will grow up alongside advanced artificial intelligence and algorithm-driven information systems in an increasingly digital world characterized by competing global narratives. Within this context, historically accurate and educationally sound instruction will become ever more critical as religious and cultural ideas are continually analyzed, juxtaposed and scrutinized. Islam as a religious system is often presented through culturally inherited practices,



patriarchal interpretations of its core tenets, and corrupted or distorted narratives leading to cognitive dissonance among youngsters and immersion in misinformation, polarization and ideological confusion.

Incorporating the Prophetic Modernity Framework into our education systems can offer an evidence-based foundation that encourages ancestral Islamic tenets of justice, pluralism, economic independence and social responsibility along with human dignity. This framework allows for extracting primary historical sources in conjunction with critical analysis to allow Generation Beta the ability to analyze what is authentically Islamic and what is a later cultural interpretation, instilling literacy as historians and enabling critical thinking thus leading them towards an analysis of Islam as part of the development of society and morality.

CONCLUSION

The empirical historical material gleaned from primary Seerah and Hadith literature unequivocally shows that the society founded by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was essentially egalitarian, vibrant, and modern. Islam introduced a sophisticated socio-legal paradigm to humanity by providing women complete financial sovereignty, marital choice, political voice, and social dignity.

Not true Islamic principles, but rather historical cultural regression, colonial legal distortions, and localized taboos, are the direct causes of the narrow-mindedness, honor culture, and systemic suppression of female agency seen in many contemporary Muslim-majority regions.

Rebuilding an intellectually dynamic, resilient, and socially just global society requires reclaiming this original Prophetic modernity through the focused, methodical education of Generation Beta.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Western academic research is more traditional based on historical resources, Quranic sources, Hadith & Seerah accounts which may be subject to different scholarly interpretations. The analysis concentrates on normative legal frameworks over a full representation of women's lived experiences in early Islamic societies.

Differences in historical context and institutional structures restrict comparative assessments with Western legal traditions. The qualitative methodology and 7 variable framework enhance analytical depth but may omit other dimensions of female agency. Further empirical research is needed to ascertain the relevance of this framework for modern education.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Cross-disciplinary methods encompassing Islamic studies, sociology, law and gender studies and education around their empowerment can shed light on how women exercised agency throughout Islamic history.

Comparative research also offers insights into the evolution of Prophetic legal principles and how they have been adapted across different cross-cultural contexts within Muslim societies.

These could be complemented by quantitative and digital humanities methods that could analyze historical sources in greater depth, or quantify modern impacts. Future research should also test the



Prophetic Modernity Framework on education with Generation Beta and investigate its effects on gender equity and social development.

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