

# **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF REFUGEE WOMEN LIVING IN MALAYSIA**

by

**Dr Maulana Akbar Shah @ U Tun Aung**



**Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman**

**Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science (AHAS - KIRKHS)  
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)**

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Author: Dr Maulana Akbar Shah @ U Tun Aung, Ph.D.

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# **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF REFUGEE WOMEN LIVING IN MALAYSIA**

**Dr Maulana Akbar Shah @ U Tun Aung**

Associate Professor and Heaed of Research

Chief Editor

Members of Researcher Team and Students of UNGS 2380 and 2290-SEM-2-2022/2023

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**International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)**

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## Authors Biography

**Dr. Maulana Akbar Shah (U Tun Aung)**, a Myanmar national, has been an Associate Professor at IIUM since 2013. His diverse career includes working for UN agencies (1989-1998) and teaching at Jamia Darul Uloom in Rangoon (1998-2007). From 2001 to 2007, he served as Secretary General at Jamiatul Ulama al Islam, Myanmar. An accomplished academic, Dr. Maulana has authored 22 books and over 50 articles, earning IIUM's Golden Researcher Award in 2021. He represents IIIT for Myanmar, is CEO of International Intellectual College Myanmar, and currently coordinates the UNESCO Chair at IIUM, contributing significantly to international education and cultural exchange over the past three decades.

**Assistant Professor Dr. Zuraidah Binti Kamaruddin** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies at KIRKHS, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). She earned her PhD in Islamic Thought from Universiti Malaya in 2015 and has contributed to several research projects, including as principal investigator for "Sisters in Islam and its Impact on Muslim Understanding of Women's Rights in Malaysia." She also served as a project member in various IIUM flagship projects from 2020 to 2022.

**Dr. Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak** holds a PhD in Education from IIUM. He earned his B.A. in Islamic Education from Universitas Ar-Raniry, Aceh, and a Master's in Educational Psychology from IIUM. Currently, he is an Academic Fellow at IIUM's Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, teaching courses on Islamic worldview, Knowledge & Civilization in Islam, and Ethics and Fiqh of contemporary ethics. Dr. Abbas is also a counsellor and has authored books and articles on psychology, spirituality, globalisation, and Iqbaliyat, contributing to local and international discussions.

**Dr. Bachar Bakour** is an Associate Professor at the Department of Fundamental and Interdisciplinary Studies, AbdulHamid AbuSulayman Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). He has two B.A. s in Shari'a and in Arabic from al-Azhar University, Cairo; an M.A. in Islamic Studies from Loughborough University, Leicestershire, U.K.; and a Ph.D. (2018) in Islamic Thought and Civilization from the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), IIUM. He has published five books in Arabic and five in English, including *Al-Buti and the Syrian Revolution* (Islamic book Trust, 2021), as well as many book chapters, articles, and reviews in both Arabic and English in academic journals. He has also translated many articles from Arabic into English, presented at conferences in Syria and Malaysia, and served as a manuscript reviewer for four journals.

**Dr. Mahmood Mai Jianjun**, born into an imam's family in China, is an assistant professor and lecturer at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). With a Ph.D. in Islamic Thought and Civilization, Dr. Mai has a strong background in Islamic studies. He has published many articles in indexed journals and authored a book on Hajj in Chinese. His research interests include Islamic dawah, Islamic philosophy and worldview, Muslim minority studies, and China studies.

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN MORAL SEXUALITY: INSIGHTS FROM ISLAMIC TRADITION

Bachar Bakour

## Abstract

Sexuality, an inherent aspect of human nature, is essential for the continuation of humanity. Recognizing this fundamental need, Islam establishes marriage as the principal institution for fulfilling this aspect of human life and promoting moral and harmonious living. Through marriage, individuals come together to find serenity and stability, guided by genuine affection, compassion, and unity. Islamic teachings emphasize gender equality, with a key focus on empowering women across various societal spheres, including raising awareness about their sexual rights and responsibilities, both permissible and prohibited. This research briefly outlines the significant aspects of women's and children's sexual empowerment within the unique epistemic and cultural framework of Islamic tradition. Drawing from selected hadith collections, particularly from *Jami' al-Usoul fi Ahadith al-Rasoul* by Ibn al-Athīr. An inductive approach is employed to glean insights and develop a broader understanding of sexual empowerment within an Islamic context. Central to Islamic sexual empowerment is the steadfast promotion of decency and ethical conduct in the interactions between genders, both in private and public spheres.

**Keywords:** Sex, morality, empowerment, women, hadith, marriage



## Introduction

Both men and women possess a combination of shared and distinct characteristics that shape their identities. These gender attributes influence sexuality to varying extents, while cultural and societal factors further impact sexual behaviors, desires, and relationships, as well as notions of gender roles, attire, rights, and obligations. Religion, as a social force, holds significant sway over practices related to gender and sexuality. While some religious traditions readily adapt to societal shifts, Islam seeks to guide transformations in these realms. Islam acknowledges the intrinsic importance of sexuality and enshrines marriage as the primary avenue for its fulfillment, emphasizing the pursuit of righteousness and harmony. As stated in the Qur'an, "And among His Signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy among you: verily in that are Signs for those who reflect" (30:21).

By fostering an atmosphere of love, mercy, harmony, and cooperation, marriage in Islam offers a sense of tranquillity to the soul and peace to the mind, enabling men and women to build a nurturing and sound environment for raising a Muslim family.<sup>1</sup>

Islam unequivocally rejects the concept of *rahbaniyyah*, or monasticism, prevalent in pre-Islamic societies.<sup>2</sup> While certain religions, like Christianity, venerate celibacy as a mark of piety, Islamic teachings advocate strongly for marriage. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) cautioned against eschewing marriage for religious reasons, emphasizing its alignment with his sunnah, or way of life.<sup>3</sup>

Concurrently, Islam champions gender equality as a cornerstone of its ethical framework. Professor Leila Ahmed characterizes Islam's ethical vision as "stubbornly egalitarian,"<sup>4</sup> underscoring its commitment to empowering women across societal strata. This empowerment entails raising awareness about sexual rights, responsibilities, and the delineation between lawful and prohibited conduct.

This study delves into the essential facets of sexual empowerment and education for women and children in Islam, drawing insights from the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his exemplary conduct. The selected hadith reports are sourced from *jami' al-Usoul fi Ahadith al-Rasoul*, a compilation incorporating six fundamental hadith books, including *al-Muwatta'*, *al-Bukhari*, *Muslim*, *Abu Dāwoud*, *al-Tirmidhi*, and *al-Nasā'i*. Through this examination, we aim to elucidate the principles underpinning sexual empowerment within the Islamic tradition.

I note here that, given the voluminous existing literature on sexuality education, it is not my intention to give minute details on the Islamic perspective of sexuality, nor to focus on sexual-

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<sup>1</sup>The Prophet (PBUH) advised young individuals that those who possess the capability, both physically and financially, to marry should proceed to do so. Marriage aids in safeguarding one's modesty. For those unable to marry, the Prophet recommended fasting as a means to decrease sexual desires. This advice is documented by both al-Bukhari and Muslim. Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami' al-Usoul fi Ahadith al-Rasoul* (Damascus: Maktabat al-Halwānī, 1969), 11: 426.

<sup>2</sup> Several hadith reports denounce the practice of *rahbaniyyah*. See Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *I'lam al-Muwaqqi'in 'an Rabb al-'Alamin*. Edited by Abu 'Ubaydah Mashour Al Salman (Riyadh: Dar Ibn al-Jawzi, 1423 AH), 3: 63. The editor's footnote; Al-'Ajlouni, *Kashf al-Khafa'*. Edited by Husam al-Qudsi (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qudsi, 1352 AH), 2: 377. On the history of *rahbaniyyah*, see Muffti Allie Haroun Sheik, *Sexual Issues in Modern Era and its Solutions in Islam* (New Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2008), 29-33.

<sup>3</sup> Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 1: 293.

<sup>4</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Moderate Debate* (Yale University Press, 1992), 63.

legal discussions and comments by Muslim jurists.<sup>5</sup> Only a skeleton outline along with basic themes of moral sexuality is presented.

Generally, the word ‘empower’ means the process of supporting an individual or a group to discover and claim their socio-political – social as well as economic power.<sup>6</sup> In the context of the status quo of unequal power relations between the genders, the empowerment of women signifies, ‘the process of increasing women’s access to control over the strategic life choices that affect them and access to the opportunities that allow them fully to realize their capacities. Women’s empowerment as an economic, political, and sociocultural process challenges the system of sexual stratification that has resulted in women’s subordination and marginalization to improve women’s quality of life.’<sup>7</sup> The term ‘women empowerment’ was used by feminist movements in the 1970s as an umbrella concept to describe women struggle for their rights of liberation, equality, justice, emancipation, etc., in economic, social, and political structures.<sup>8</sup>

Although both Islamic and Western agendas support the idea and practice of empowering women and children, the strategies, and approaches for achieving this objective vary due to diverse religious and cultural foundations.

Islam, a religion characterized by the doctrine of absolute submission to one God, (Allah), is a coherent system of life, a social order, a philosophy of life, a system of economic principles, and a rule of government, setting standards by which the individual and society lead an honest, sober and God-fearing life. According to the Qur’an, man accepted the *amanah* (trust or responsibility) to be God’s *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth, which He had offered to all creatures that were not able to carry it out. (the Qur’an, 2: 30; 33: 72.). By assuming this role, humans bear the responsibility to act according to God’s will on earth abiding by the blueprint provided by the Qur’an and the Prophet (PBUH).

In stark contrast stands the present Western modernity, the product of preceding significant events: the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment, secularism, etc. Significant changes have occurred in various aspects of society, including education, culture, ethics, politics, science, industry, and particularly in the field of religious studies. One of the most prominent characteristics of modernity is a clear departure from traditional and religious values, while strongly promoting secular and liberal concepts.<sup>9</sup> Speaking of the main target of Enlightenment, David Harvey observes, ‘Enlightenment thought embraced the idea of progress and actively sought that break with history and tradition which modernity espouses. It was, above all, a secular movement that sought the mystification and desacralization of knowledge

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<sup>5</sup> See chapter five “Fiqh Rulings on Sexuality Education.” In Muhammad Aftab Khan, et. al., *Sexuality Education from an Islamic Perspective* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 79-95.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Empowerment definition’, accessed August 24, 2022.

<https://www.yourdictionary.com/empowerment>.

<sup>7</sup> Yin-Zu Chen, and Hiromi Tanaka, “Women’s Empowerment.” In *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*. Edited by Alex C. Michalos. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014), 7154–7156.

<sup>8</sup> Srilath Batliwala, “The Meaning of Women’s Empowerment: New Concepts from Action.” In *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment and Rights*. Edited by Sen, G., Germaine, A. and Chen, L.C. (Harvard Centre for Population and Development Studies, 1994); Tanu Tandon, “Women Empowerment: Perspectives and Views.” *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 3, no. 8 (1994): 6-12.

<sup>9</sup> For different critiques of modernity, see Aslam Farouk-Alli. “The Second Coming of the Theocratic Age? Islamic Discourse after Modernity and Postmodernity.” in *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought*. Edited by Ibrahim Abu-Rabi. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 291-295; Abdelwahhab al-Messeri, “Of Darwinian Mice And Pavlovian Dogs: A Critique of Western Modernity.” In *Rethinking Islam and Modernity*. Edited by Abdelwahhab El-Affendi. (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2001), 1-8.

and social organization to liberate human beings from their chains.’<sup>10</sup> Given the big gap between Islamic and Western perspectives, the Islamic approach to empowering women and children must be implemented within the unique cultural and epistemological framework of the Islamic tradition.

### **Morality and sexuality**

The issue of morality has been a central theme to Islam since the time of the Prophet (PBUH), who encapsulated his entire message in his saying, ‘Verily, I was sent to perfect the moral character.’<sup>11</sup> Asserting the significance of ethics, the renowned jurist al-Shatibi says in his book *Al-Muwafaqat*, ‘Al-Shari‘ah in its entirety is to assume moral character’.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah aptly notes, ‘Al-Shari‘ah fundamentals are built on keeping the interests of the people during this life and hereafter. These objectives are built on justice, mercy, wisdom, and the interest of the creatures. Therefore, any situation which perverts from justice to injustice, from mercy to cruelty, from wisdom and utility to chaos and futility is outside the scope of Shari‘ah.’<sup>13</sup>

Islam’s approach to sexuality is holistic, encompassing physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. By adhering to the ethical guidelines outlined in Islamic teachings, individuals strive to cultivate healthy, responsible, and fulfilling sexual behavior while upholding the values of modesty, chastity, and integrity in their relationships and interactions.

To clarify, Islam does not prioritize educating its followers solely on the physical aspects of sexuality, such as human reproduction, sexual anatomy, and physiology, or preventing sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy. Instead, Islam places emphasis on the ethical considerations that underpin all aspects of sexual matters, aiming to exert moral control over the mindset and behaviour of Muslims, whether young or old, single or married. By upholding sexual morality, the Muslim community can avoid physical, spiritual, and psychological issues. Religion, particularly Islam, holds considerable sway over its adherents in discouraging premarital or extramarital sexual activity.<sup>14</sup>

Of significant procedures employed by Islam to ensure a virtuous and pious society is the principle of ‘prevention is better than cure’. Islam takes precautionary measures by blocking the means of evil and wrongdoings. If there are strong possibilities of negative outcomes of an action, then the action itself is prohibited. Every saying or act that is likely to lead to illicit sexual relations or promote indecency and obscenity is forbidden.

For instance, God prohibits adultery in His saying, ‘Do not come near *zina* (adultery). It is indeed an abomination and an evil way.’ (the Qur’an, 17: 32).

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<sup>10</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Post modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*. Edited by Shu‘ayb al-Arna‘ūt, et. al. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risalah, 1993-2001), 14: 513. For many prophetic traditions on the centrality of *husn al-khuluq* (good character), see Syed Ameer Ali, *The Ethics of Islam* (Calcutta: Thacker Spink Co, 1893), 1-51; Ibn al-Athīr, *Jāmi‘ al-uşūl*, 4: 3-8.

<sup>12</sup> Al-Shatibi, *Al-Muwafaqat*. edited by Abu ‘Ubaydah Mashour al Salmn. (KSA: Dar Ibn Affan, 1997), 2: 124.

<sup>13</sup> Mohammed Ali Al-Bar and Hassan Chamsi-Pasha, *Contemporary Bioethics: Islamic Perspective* (Springer, 2015), 50.

<sup>14</sup> Amy Adamczyk and Brittany E. Hayes, “Religion and Sexual Behaviors: Understanding the Influence of Islamic Cultures and Religious Affiliation for Explaining Sex Outside of Marriage.” *American Sociological Review*, 77, no. 5. (2012): 723-746. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122412458672>

The Qur'an even warns against 'coming near' to adultery, in order to give stronger emphasis that it is something to guard against. Since adultery is committed to satisfy a strong desire, steering away from it is safer. When adultery is made easy, resisting it becomes that much harder. Hence, Islam takes appropriate preventive measures. It dislikes the mixing of the two sexes where it is unnecessary, forbids that a man stay with a woman in a closed place, and prohibits the indecent appearance of women when they go out or attend social functions...<sup>15</sup>

It is quite evident that widespread moral laxity, on account of the negligent policy of this preventive measure, is responsible for lots of social psychological, and undoubtedly physical problems.<sup>16</sup>

### **Introducing Sex Education to Children**

Some Muslim parents may feel uneasy discussing sex with their children. This discomfort, often rooted in cultural norms rather than religious teachings, may not be warranted. It's important for parents to understand that the concept of sex itself is not inherently taboo; rather, it is inappropriate or harmful sexual behavior that should be avoided.

According to psychologists, parents should strive to be approachable and open to discussing mature topics with their children. These conversations can help foster self-esteem in children and promote a sense of morality and responsibility.<sup>17</sup> When children have questions about sex, it's crucial for parents to provide honest and age-appropriate answers. If children are hesitant to broach the topic, parents should take the initiative to initiate discussions using methods that they feel comfortable with.<sup>18</sup>

The following is an account of how young people and adults are and should be properly educated about sex:

#### *-Boys and Girls at Puberty*

Puberty is defined as 'the condition of being or the period of becoming first capable of reproducing sexually-that is brought on by the production of sex hormones and the maturing of the reproductive organs (such as the testes and ovaries), development of secondary sex characteristics (such as male facial hair growth and female breast development), and in humans

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<sup>15</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*. Translated by Adil Salahi. (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2002-2008), 11: 156.

<sup>16</sup> Among influential factors driving teens to have sexual activities in middle school in USA, is the daily confrontation 'with a culture that has become very sexy place indeed in which to live.' Anne Jarrell, "A Matter of Concern: Sex in Middle School." In *Teens and Sex*. Edited by Myra H. Immell. (San Diego: Greenhavens Press, Inc, 2002), 17. On the negative impact of adolescents' premarital sex, see Joe. S. McIlhaney Jr and Freda McKissic Bush, *Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Children* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> 'Sol Gordon's Crusade: Sex Education for Young People,' Susan Perry. Jan, 9, 1987, accessed August, 28, 2022.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-01-09-vw-2769-story.html>

<sup>18</sup> On parent-teens sexuality, see chapter seven "Problems of Muslim Parents in Imparting Sexuality Education to their Children." In *Sexuality Education*. Muhammad Aftab Khan, et. al. 109-122; Sheri McGregor, "Parents Can Help Prevent Teen Pregnancy." in *Teens and Sex*, 137-140.

and the higher primates by the first occurrence of menstruation in the female.<sup>19</sup> This physical change cannot be ignored by parents who are mainly responsible for introducing and teaching sex education to their children.

Parents at this critical age teach their children how to cover the 'awrah of boys and girls, as will be explained later. When children reach ten years old, they should sleep in separate beds.<sup>20</sup>

A particular emphasis is paid to *taharah* (purification and cleanliness). This includes rulings of *Istinja* (cleaning the genitals after urinating or defecating);<sup>21</sup> *al-hayd* (menstruation or period);<sup>22</sup>

the state of *al-janabah* (major impurity), which is caused by either 1) ejaculation resulting from *ihtilam* (wet dreams), intercourse, foreplay, or other means,<sup>23</sup> or 2) engaging in sexual activity, regardless of whether ejaculation occurs or not. *Ghusl* (bath) is required when the private parts come into contact with each other, even if intercourse does not occur.<sup>24</sup>

A mature girl who reaches the age of puberty needs to wear *hijab* (head scarf). God says, 'O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters, as well as all (other) believing women, that they should draw over themselves some of their outer garments [when in public]: this will be more conducive to their being recognized [as decent women] and not annoyed.' (The Qur'an, 33: 59).<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere, the verse reads, '...That they should draw their head-coverings over their bosoms.' (the Qur'an, 24:31).<sup>26</sup>

Addressing Asma, the daughter of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, the Prophet said, 'when a woman begins to menstruate, nothing should be seen of her except this and this,' and he pointed to his face and hands.<sup>27</sup> 'It is obligatory for the Muslim woman to cover her head, breasts, and neck completely so that nothing of them can be seen by onlookers.'<sup>28</sup>

#### -Proper manners at home.

God instructs, 'Believers! Let those whom you rightfully possess, and those of you who have not yet attained to puberty, ask leave of you at three times of day: before the prayer of daybreak, and whenever you lay aside your garments in the middle of the day, and after the prayer of nightfall. These are three occasions on which you may happen to be undressed. Beyond these occasions, neither you nor they will incur any sin if they move freely about you, attending to one another. Thus, God makes clear to you His revelations. God is All-Knowing, Wise. Yet when your children attain to puberty, let them ask leave of you, as do those senior to them [in

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<sup>19</sup> 'Puberty', accessed August, 28, 2022.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/puberty>

<sup>20</sup> Ibn al-Athir, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 5: 187.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 7: 133-134.

<sup>22</sup> See Sheik, *Sexual Issues*, 339-344; Ibn al-Athir, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 7: 341-359.

<sup>23</sup> No distinction here is made between men and women, and whether one is asleep or awake. The emission of semen makes *ghusl* obligatory. The Prophet taught Companions that water is for water (i.e., *ghusl* is must when semen is emitted). Muhammad Aftab Khan, et. al., *Sexuality Education*, 67. See Ibn al-Athir, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 7: 276-279.

<sup>24</sup> Ibn al-Athir, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 7: 268-274.

<sup>25</sup> On several hadiths about wearing the veil, see Ibid., 10: 643-647.

<sup>26</sup> Praising Muslim Women of her time, 'A'ishah notes: 'May God bestow His grace on the early Muslim women: when God revealed His order, 'Let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms,' they tore their dresses and used them to cover their heads.' (Narrated by al-Bukhari). Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, 12: 243.

<sup>27</sup> Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. Translated by Kamal al-Helbawy, et al. (Indiana, American Trust Publications, 1994), 153. The hadith is narrated by Abu Dawoud. Ibn al-Athir, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 10: 645.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful*, 154.

age]. Thus does God make revelations clear to you. God is All-Knowing, Wise.’ (The Qur’an, 24: 58-59).

According to the verse, slaves, and children below the age of puberty may enter rooms without knocking to seek permission, apart from three times a day. ‘These are periods of relaxation when adults may be undressed. These three occasions are: 1) shortly before the daybreak prayer, i.e., *fajr*, when people normally still wear their night garments, or they may be putting on their day clothes in readiness to go out; 2) about midday when people take a nap after changing into more comfortable garments for relaxation; and 3) after they have offered their nightfall prayer, i.e. ‘*ishā*’. At this time, people put on their night clothes for more comfort. When children attain to puberty, the same rules of entry apply to them as to those who are not related to the family. This means that they must seek permission before entering a room at any time.’<sup>29</sup>

### **Navigating Sexuality: Guidance for Youth and Adults**

#### ***- Lowering the gaze is required from both sexes.***

God commands, ‘Tell believing men to lower their gaze and to be mindful of their chastity. This is most conducive to their purity. God is certainly aware of all that they do.’ (The Qur’an, 24: 30). The companion Jareer ibn Abd Allah enquired about an accidental glance at women. The Prophet (PBUH) asked him to turn his gaze away.<sup>30</sup> Particularly, a Muslim must not look with sexual desire at *non-mahram* women.<sup>31</sup>

Also, the Prophet describes the lustful look and sexual gratification of the sight as *zina al-nazar* (fornication of the eye).<sup>32</sup> Commenting on the above verse, Sayyid Qutb says,

Lowering their gaze is an act of refining men’s manners. It represents an attempt to rise above the desire to look at women’s physical charms. As such, it is a practical step to ensure that the first window of temptation is shut. Minding their chastity is the natural result of lowering their gaze. It is indeed the second step that comes after strengthening one’s will and rising above the natural urge right at the beginning. Hence, the two are stated in the same verse as a cause and effect.<sup>33</sup>

A *non-mahram* man may look at a woman’s face and hands as long as the looking is innocent and does not involve lust and temptation.

#### ***- Looking at the ‘Awrah of Others***

Legally, ‘*awrah*’ denotes those parts of the body which Islam requires to be covered in front of others whether of the same or the opposite sex.

The Prophet (PBUH) is quoted as saying, ‘A man should not look at the ‘*awrah*’ of another man, nor a woman of a woman, nor should a man go under one cloth with another man, nor a woman with another woman.’<sup>34</sup> Generally, it is obligatory for man to cover the area between the navel and the knee<sup>35</sup> before others except his wife. Others, whether men or women, *maharim* or strangers, can look at the rest of man’s body.

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<sup>29</sup> Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’an*, 12: 277.

<sup>30</sup> Narrated by Muslim, al-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawoud. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami‘ al-Usoul*, 6: 660. Similarly, the Prophet commanded Ali Ibn Abu Talib not to follow the first look with the second one. Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> *Mahram* denotes a woman’s male guardian who is either her husband or a direct blood relation to whom she cannot get married, like her father, grandfather, son, brother, uncle or nephew.

<sup>32</sup> Narrated by al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Abu Dawoud. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami‘ al-Usoul*, 2: 371.

<sup>33</sup> Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur’an*, 12: 241.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful*, 150. The hadith is narrated by Muslim, Abu Dawoud, and al-Tirmidhi. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami‘ al-Usoul*, 5: 448.

<sup>35</sup> According to scholars, such as Ibn Hazm and some Maliki jurists, the knee is excluded. Ibid., *The Lawful*, 150.

The entire body of a woman, excluding her face, hair, neck, forearms, and feet, is considered her *'awrah* in front of *maharims*, such as her father, brother, and nephew. In this context, the Qur'an reads, '...and not to display their charms except what may ordinarily appear thereof. Let them draw their head-coverings over their bosoms and not display their charms to any but their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands' fathers...' (the Qur'an 24: 31). In the presence of a stranger or *non-mahram*, a woman needs to cover her whole body except the face and hands. Any part of the body that is not permitted to look at cannot be touched either.<sup>36</sup>  
-The ruling pertaining to *khalwah*

*Khalwah*, (privacy or seclusion) refers to the situation where a man and woman (who are not related to each other by *mahram* relationship) are in a secluded place without any risk of intrusion by others. This setting provides an opportunity for sexual intimacy, which may include touching, kissing, embracing, or even sexual intercourse.<sup>37</sup> The Prophet (PBUH) cautions that a person who believes in Allah and the Last Day should never be alone with a woman without the presence of a *mahram*, as Satan will become the third person with them.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, being in privacy with a girl or woman is disallowed in Islam for it is a means to a variety of sexual thoughts and temptations. And based on the notion of *khalwah*, Islam prohibits 'dating'<sup>39</sup> where he and she spend their time alone together and 'cohabitation' where they live together as if a married couple.

More, during the engagement period, a girl cannot be in a state of *khalwah* with her fiancé or have romantic talks with a view to getting married sooner or later. Another point of considerable importance here is that women should not be in privacy with male-in-laws such as her husband's brother or cousin, because people seem to be heedless of this ethically risky issue. The Prophet (PBUH) gives a dire warning about this particular matter describing *al-hamu* as death.<sup>40</sup> 'He meant that there are inherent dangers and even destruction in such privacy: religion is destroyed if they commit sin; the wife is ruined if her husband divorces her out of jealousy; and social relationships are torn apart if relatives become suspicious of each other.'<sup>41</sup>

#### -Social interaction between the two sexes

*Al-ikhtilat* (mixing of the two sexes) is not a black-and-white or straightforward issue. At an official and unofficial level, people speak of *al-ikhtilat* with various (or more accurately opposing) definitions, practices, conceptions, and forms,<sup>42</sup> making elusive any effort to

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>39</sup> Joshua Harris argues that dating promotes short-term, uncommitted relationship that focuses on the physical attraction. See his book chapter "Dating Influences Teen Attitudes Towards Sex." In *Teenage Sexuality: Opposing Views*. Edited by Tamara L. Roleff. (San Diego: Greenhavens Press, Inc, 2001), 43-50. This chapter is an excerpt from his bestselling book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, (Multnomah Books, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> *Hamu* here means a relative of the husband other than his father and sons (who are *mahram* to his wife), such as his brother, nephew, and cousins, etc., with whom marriage would be permissible for her, if she were to be divorced or widowed. Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful*, 148. Translators' note.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., *The Lawful*, 148.

<sup>42</sup> On the ambiguity of the term, see Annemarie van Geel, "Separate or together? Women-only public spaces and participation of Saudi women in the public domain in Saudi Arabia." *Contemporary Islam* 10, (2016): 365–367. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-015-0350-2>

provide a shared legal ruling on the term. In principle, *al-ikhtilat* is permitted provided that the Islamic code of conduct and ethics, such as wearing hijab, avoiding flirtatious behaviour, and keeping the gaze lowered, are observed, and there is no risk of breaching Islamic directives. It is permitted for a woman wearing decently<sup>43</sup> to walk down the street as she goes to the market, the school, or the mosque. According to authentic reports, early female Companions used to accompany the Muslim army led by the Prophet. They would prepare food for the fighters, nurse the injured, and the carry aside the martyred ones.<sup>44</sup> Speaking of how the Muslim society views women, the late sheikh Muhammad al-Ghazali notes,

I do not label the Muslim society as being closed or open. I would rather say that it is a very natural society governed only by the intact human nature. However, a closed society suspects all women's movements and interprets them as being a means to evil, or displays fear that they might be harmed. Therefore, it forbids what has been made permissible by the Islamic law, puts obstacles to women's rights, misinterprets the very explicit religious texts, or tries to label as 'weak' the *ḥadīths* graded as 'authentic' or vice versa. This eventually obliterates the personality of the Muslim woman. An open society gives women absolute freedom, makes them a prey for what we may call human wolves that look at women only as a means for fulfilling their sexual desires. Eventually, an open society exploits its acknowledgment of women's rights in subjecting them to its will. Both societies are truly evil. I really cannot see anything that can do better than the Islamic teachings as understood by the healthy minds rather than the insane ones. I would like to call your attention to the fact that the two genders' relationships come second in importance after other critical issues, including the establishment of the true Islamic beliefs, the values based on such beliefs as among which are faithfulness, fear of God, awe to Him, loyalty to Him and His Messenger, freedom from being infidels and disbelievers, and establishment of social ethical values of truthfulness, righteousness, honesty, and mercy.<sup>45</sup>

*-Every act that serves as a means to arouse sexual feelings is prohibited.*

An instance of this would be a woman describing the alluring attributes of her female friends to her husband as if he can envision her vividly. The Prophet disapproved of such conduct.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, when a woman speaks to a man in a gentle and submissive tone, it may awaken his desire. A Muslim woman is advised to refrain from this flirtatious manner. God says, 'do not speak too soft, lest any who is sick at heart should be moved with desire.' (The Qur'an, 33: 32). Imitating the other sex is rejected. The Prophet (PBUH) commanded that a woman should not wear a man's clothing nor a man a woman's. He even invoked curse upon men who imitate

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For contesting views on *ikhtilat*, see *ibid.*, 357–378; Jawaher Alwedini, "Ikhtilat as Patriarchal Expression: Gender Segregation and the Influence of Fathers." *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, 5, no. 1, (2017): 7-20; Roel Meijer, "Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Gender- Segregation Debate." *Middle East Policy*, xvii, no. 4. (2010): 80-100.

<sup>43</sup> On the ethics of Islamic dress code, see Munawar Haque, et.al. *Ethics and Fiqh for Everyday Life: An Islamic Perspective* (IIUM Press, 2010), 76-80

<sup>44</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 2: 615-615.

<sup>45</sup> Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Mi'at So'al 'an al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar Thabit, 1983), 192-195. Translation is taken from

<https://www.azhar.org/en/Islam/Society-and-Family/Women-in-Islam/ArtMID/10387/ArticleID/48821/Mixing-men-and-women-in-one-place>

Accessed 3, September, 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Narrated by al-Bukhari, Abu Dawoud, and al-Tirmidhi. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 11: 534.



women and women who imitate men.<sup>47</sup> The prohibition of imitation includes the way the opposite sex speaks, walks, dresses (transvestism),<sup>48</sup> behaves and so on.

### -The Etiquette of Copulation

One of the marriage objectives is to satisfy the sexual needs of a husband and wife. In Islam there are regulating rules of the sexual intercourse to fulfil the demands of the sexual urge adequately and, at the same time, to maintain a safe and pure sex relationship away from deviant practices. To be noted here is that act of sexual intercourse is considered a sort of rewardable charity. The Prophet is quoted as saying, ‘...and in the sexual act of each of you there is a charity. They said: O Messenger of Allah, when one of us fulfils his sexual desire will he have some reward for that? He said: Do you not think that were he to act upon it unlawfully he would be sinning? Likewise, if he has acted upon it lawfully he will have a reward.’<sup>49</sup>

1-It is recommended for the husband to make supplications to Allah to keep Satan away from him and his progeny. ‘With the Name of Allah, O Allah, keep Satan away from us, and keep him away from what You grant us.’<sup>50</sup>

2- A husband cannot have sex with his wife during her period. Some Companions asked the Prophet (PBUH) about whether it is permitted or not to approach menstruating women. The following verse was revealed: ‘They ask you about menstruation. Say: “It is an unclean condition; so, keep aloof from women during menstruation, and do not draw near to them until they are cleansed. When they have cleansed themselves, you may go in unto them in the proper way, as God has bidden you. God loves those who turn to Him in repentance, and He loves those who keep themselves pure. Your wives are your tilth; go, then, to your tilth as you may desire, but first provide something for your souls. Fear God and know that you shall meet Him. Give the happy news to the believers.’ (The Qur’an, 2: 222-223).

The verse denotes that menstruation is both a state of ritual impurity and carries health risks. Thus, husbands must not have intercourse with their menstruating wives, yet they can fondle their wives, play with them, and eat together as usual. It was the custom of the Jews and other nations not to touch their wives in their monthly period. Likewise, Arabs before Islam would not eat, drink, or sit with women during their menstrual period and would send them to separate dwellings. In contrast, Christians would have sexual intercourse with their menstruating wives.

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<sup>47</sup> Narrated by al-Bukhari, Abu Dawoud, and al-Tirmidhi. See Ibn Ibid., 6: 663.

<sup>48</sup> ‘The term originally was applied to cross-dressing associated with nonheterosexual behaviour. It was also used to describe cross-dressing with intent to derive sexual pleasure. Later in the 20th century, however, transvestism was distinguished from cross-dressing for sexual excitement, which became known as transvestic disorder, a recognized mental condition.’

‘transvestism’, accessed September, 2, 2022.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/transvestism>

Daniel Brown distinguishes between ‘transvestism’, a practice ‘limited to and refers only to the desire for and act of wearing the clothing of the other sex’. And ‘sex-role inversion’, which is ‘a much broader and more pervasive phenomenon, involving identification with, preference for, and adoption of the entire role of the other sex, of which dress is only one aspect. Brown, “Transvestism and sex-role inversion.” in *The Encyclopedia of Sexual Behaviour*, Edited by Albert Ellis. (New York: Hawthorn Books 1967), 1012.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Nawawi, *Al-Nawawi’s Forty Hadith*. Translated by Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies. (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 1997), 84-86. The hadith is narrated by Muslim. Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami’ al-Usoul*, 9: 560.

<sup>50</sup> Narrated by al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawoud, and al-Tirmidhi. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami’ al-Usoul*, 11: 443.

<sup>51</sup> The Prophet explained to Muslims that apart from sexual intercourse, a menstruating woman is treated quite normally.<sup>52</sup>

Once the menstrual period comes to an end, intercourse is allowed only at the place where fertilization may take place. God likens this mutual relationship to a farmer and his tith. 'A farmer approaches his field not just for the sake of pleasure, but to acquire produce. Similarly, man ought to approach the tith of the human race with the purpose of acquiring produce, that is, offspring. What is of concern to the Law of God is not the particular mode of cultivating one's tith, but rather that one should go only to one's tith and not elsewhere, and that one should go there for the purpose of cultivation.'<sup>53</sup>

3-In the process of sexual intercourse, any preferred position (front or back) is allowed as long as intercourse is through the vagina.<sup>54</sup> Having sex through the rectum is a major sin and the Prophet (PBUH) cursed those who commit such an abhorrent act.<sup>55</sup>

4-Another etiquette of copulation is Islam's emphasis on foreplay.

Foreplay between the couple before engaging into sexual intercourse is immensely important, especially for the wife whose sexual arousing takes a little more time than her husband does. Therefore, in order to fully satisfy his wife, a man should caress her and engage in foreplay so that both partners reach climax at the same time. Failure to observe this technique may result in terrible consequences on marriage.

Recognizing a wife's need for love, and affection, and her right to sexual pleasure, the Prophet (PBUH) disliked sexual intercourse without foreplay.<sup>56</sup> 'Where sexual attraction occurs there is generally a conscious effort to arouse and stimulate the partner by kissing, caressing, and general love play which is both pleasurable and gratifying in itself and a preparation for intercourse as a final act... Thus it is extremely selfish for a person not to sexually arouse his wife via foreplay and fulfill his carnal instincts like an animal whilst his spouse experiences (no sensation) whatsoever.'<sup>57</sup>

5- Islam strictly forbids the couple from disclosing the intimate details of their private sexual encounters to friends and associates. The Prophet (PBUH) instructed his Companions not to divulge what goes on in private between husband and wife.<sup>58</sup> He warns that among the most

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<sup>51</sup> Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful*, 189.

<sup>52</sup> Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, English version of *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*. Translated and edited by Zafar Ishaq Ansari. (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2004), 1: 172. See Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 7: 341-354.

<sup>53</sup> Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding*, 1: 173.

<sup>54</sup> The issue of sexual position during intercourse has been a matter of Concern and difference among Companions. On the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, who said: "The Ansar [Helpers] who had been polytheists, lived with Jews who were People of the Book. The former viewed the latter as being superior to them in knowledge and used to follow their example in many things. The People of the Book would only make love to their wife from the side, this being the most modest way for the woman, and the Ansar had also followed their example in that. The Quraysh, on the other hand, used to expose their woman in an uncommon manner. They took pleasure in them from the front, from the back, or laid out flat. When the

Makkans came to Madina at the time of Hijra, one of them married a woman from among the Ansar and began doing that with her. She disapproved of it and told him: 'We used to be approached from the side, so do that way or stay away from me.' This dispute became serious until it reached the ears of the Prophet. As a result, God revealed the verse (2: 223). Khan, et. al., *Sexuality Education*, 59-60.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 3: 551

<sup>56</sup> Sheik, *Sexual Issues*, 345.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

wicked people in the sight of Allah on the Day of Judgment is the man who has sexual intercourse with a woman and then divulges her secret.<sup>59</sup>

The very act of intercourse should be concealed and should be a completely private affair. It is definitely against the moral code of modesty for an intruder to be an eye-witness to such an intimate relationship, which could be mentally disturbing to the married couple. Such importance has been attached to this type of privacy that it is greatly disliked (*makruh*) for even a baby or an animal to be present during this particular moment. It is also detestable to engage in sexual relations in the presence of a sleeping person, an unconscious person, a child, or even an insane person. But modern civilization has progressively deteriorated to such an extent that not only their steamy sex sessions are broadcast live to all humanity but also microscopic devices have been inserted into their genitals to measure the gravity of their pounding orgasms, as a bonus to this live coverage.<sup>60</sup>

## Conclusion

The determinants of women and child empowerment include psychological, spiritual, and material components. With a growing sense of the boundaries of their rights and duties, women and adolescents can fully realize their capacities, control their choices, and avail the benefits of resources and power for the service of society.

In the body of Islamic norms and standards, there exist a set of instructions and rules on building women and child empowerment. I have attempted in this article to briefly present main features of the sexual domain of this empowerment by exploring prophetic traditions about women and child sexual rights and duties.

Unlike the secular Western culture, the linchpin of Islamic sexual empowerment is to staunchly advocate decency and maintain morality in the relationship between the two sexes in private and in public. Muslim men and women, as equal and active partners in society, must fully understand that ethics constitute the warp and woof of their social interaction and thus cannot compromise or neglect it at any cost.

Modern Muslim educators expressed their main concern about the absence of Islamic moral values in sex education taught to young Muslims in schools in Western countries.<sup>61</sup> A sex education model based on religion-driven values is the best alternative to the present secular-based sex education in school. Islam, in particular, presents a coherent system of life that encompasses various aspects, including sexuality, within the framework of moral conduct whereby Individuals lead sincere, modest, and devout life, fulfilling the *amanah* and striving to perfect their moral character, as emphasized by the Qru'an and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

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<sup>59</sup> Al-Qaradawi, *The Lawful*, 192. The hadith is narrated by Muslim and Abu Dawoud. See Ibn al-Athir, *Jami' al-Usoul*, 6: 522.

<sup>60</sup> Sheik, *Sexual Issues*, 352.

<sup>61</sup> Ghulam Sarwar, *Sex Education: The Muslim Perspective* (London: The Muslim Educational Trust, 1996), 7.

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

### WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

This collection of research papers presents a comprehensive examination of women's empowerment across various contexts in Muslim societies. The studies range from practical issues facing refugee women in Malaysia and the West to theoretical discussions of women's economic participation and political leadership roles in economic participation. The research highlights unique challenges and solutions, including the emergence of women's mosques in China and the role of moral sexuality in Islamic tradition. A significant focus is placed on refugee women's experiences, particularly their social status and lifelong learning opportunities. The Malaysian context receives special attention through analyses of women's political participation and economic empowerment. The papers emphasize how Islamic principles can support women's empowerment while addressing contemporary challenges. Topics cover practical aspects like refugee education and social integration, and theoretical frameworks for understanding women's roles in modern Muslim societies. The research demonstrates that women's empowerment in Islamic contexts requires balancing traditional values with modern needs while addressing socio-economic challenges facing Muslim women globally.

Dr Maulana Akbar Shah @ U Tun Aung  
Associate Professor  
International Islamic University Malaysia

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