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Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**An Analysis of Women's Agency and Socio-Religious Participation in Early Islam: Evidence from *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* (The Sealed Nectar)****Ms Rabia Ahmad**

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dean.is@tuf.edu.pk**Abstract**

*This research work analyzes the agency of Muslim women and their socio-religious participation in the early Islamic community through the qualitative study of a literary text, namely, *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* (The Sealed Nectar) written by Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri. This analysis is grounded in Qur'anic principles and concepts from Hadith, tafsir, and contemporary Islamic thought. The role models for Muslim women include Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA), Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA), and Umm Salama (RA).*

According to the Qur'an, there is an inclusive foundation for the morality of responsibility as seen from verse 33:35 and 16:97 which states that there is an equality of accountability for the deeds of men and women in their spirituality and rewards. There is further reinforcement on this idea in the classical tafsir as explained by Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi. In hadiths, the role of women in the intellectual and sociological domains is well established through Aisha(RA), a narrator of many traditions, and Umm Salama(RA), whose consultations in significant incidents such as the treaty of Hudaibiyyah are notable.

*As indicated in *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*, women were actively involved in economic, intellectual, and socio-religious affairs at the time of early Islam. It is concluded from the study that the women of Islamic history are portrayed as proactive participants in the construction of their society.*

Keywords: *Women's agency, Early Islam, Seerah, The Sealed Nectar, Khadijah, Aisha, Umm Salama, Qur'an, Hadith*

1. Introduction

The study of women's roles within Islam has been extensively covered in academia throughout both the classical and modern periods. Whereas modern approaches to gender issues tend to explain the phenomenon of gender within egalitarian terms, the historical perspective of Islam provides a unique framework based on morality, accountability, and productive social contribution (Ahmed, 1992). Within the context of Islam, the issue of gender is not one of hierarchy and exclusion but that of complementary responsibility, whereby both genders are considered responsible beings in front of God, as can be seen from the Qur'anic verse which says: "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women..." (Qur'an 33:35).

In this regard, there are many instances in early Islamic history where women were found playing an active role in matters relating to religion, intellect, and socio-political aspects. The emphasis of this principle is also found in the Qur'an where it

is said, “Whoever does righteousness, male or female, while being a believer, We will grant them a good life.” This lays down an important foundation for women regarding their involvement. These principles are also backed up in the Hadith traditions where prominent female companions like Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA) preserved over two thousand Hadiths related to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar), one of the most important books on the biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in modern times, was written by Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri (1942–2006). He was a highly renowned Islamic scholar and historian who received his education in the various disciplines of Islam from some of the best centers of knowledge in the world. He was born in Mubarakpur, India, but later worked in some of the prestigious institutions of learning in the world. One of his achievements was that he won the first prize in a worldwide contest on Seerah organized by the Muslim World League in 1979.

In this context, The Sealed Nectar highlights many facts and pieces of historical evidence that show the positive involvement of women in early Islamic societies. Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA) is described in this book as a prominent example of an economically independent woman who provided moral support during the initial stages of revelation, whereas Aisha (RA) and Umm Salama (RA) have been mentioned due to their wisdom and consulting roles in important Islamic events (Mubarakpuri, 1995). Contemporary scholars, such as Leila Ahmed (1992) and Asma Barlas (2002), have further emphasized that these stories illustrate the model of gender relations, which includes ethics and intellect, rather than exclusion or discrimination.

In view of this, the current paper will examine how the concept of female agency and socio-religious involvement is depicted in the book Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum and how it shows the importance of certain women who played an influential role in establishing and developing the early Islamic society. By combining Qur'anic teachings, Hadiths, classical tafsir, and seerah, this study will present a fair perspective on the topic under discussion.

2. Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- Analyze the concept of women’s agency in early Islam.
- Examine socio-religious roles of women in *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*.
- Evaluate contributions of Khadijah (RA), Aisha (RA), and Umm Salama (RA).
- Contribute to contemporary Islamic gender discourse.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative design based on historical-textual analysis to examine women’s agency and socio-religious participation in early Islamic society. A qualitative approach is employed because the study seeks to interpret historical narratives and religious texts in order to understand meanings, contexts, and patterns of women’s roles rather than to measure variables quantitatively. The study is grounded in an Islamic epistemological framework that prioritizes revelation-based sources, particularly the Qur’an and Sunnah, while engaging with historical accounts to construct a contextually informed understanding of women’s participation in early Islam.

Sources that have been relied on in the study can be classified into two broad categories: primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are the Holy Qur'an as a source of Islamic teachings, Hadith literature from authoritative sources such as Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, and *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* (The Sealed Nectar) by Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, which is the best source for a structured narrative history of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) and the early Muslim community. Secondary sources will be Tafsir literature, which entails the interpretation of relevant verses of the Qur'an, including Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi. Contemporary secondary sources will be feminist and reformist literature on Islam and gender studies.

Thematic analysis and content analysis will be used in analyzing the data. There will be an examination of pertinent stories about significant women including Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA), Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA), and Umm Salama (RA) in order to come up with important themes in relation to the engagement of women in economics, intellectuality, social, and politics. Thematic analysis will be utilized in order to uncover larger themes about women's power and authority, while content analysis will aid in determining the meanings behind their engagement.

Additionally, the study also makes use of an interpretive historical methodology grounded on the Islamic epistemology, where interpretation is based on the sanctity of the Qur'an, Hadith, and Seerah texts. By doing so, conclusions will be arrived at through the lens of Islamic epistemology while also being able to understand reality from its own context. Moreover, it can be said that this research also follows a contextual approach whereby the textual information is analyzed through the socio-historical context of seventh century Arabia.

4. Literature Review

The academic discussions about women in Islam have brought varied interpretations depending on theological, historical, and socio-cultural perspectives. In general, the body of literature can be subdivided into two main traditions. One tradition is that of classical Islam, which holds that both sexes should complement each other and be differentiated in their functionality. The other tradition is Islamic feminism, which promotes egalitarian interpretations of Islam.

Gender relationships in classical Islamic exegesis find their root in the holy texts of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Fiqh. Classical commentators like Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi believe that both men and women enjoy the same spiritual significance in front of God although they play different social roles in accordance with Sharī'ah. Their interpretation of some Qur'anic verses, like those found in Qur'an 33:35, is based on the premise that despite the existence of some distinctions, both men and women have been created equally in terms of spirituality, worship, and reward from God.

On the other hand, recent scholarship in Islamic feminism posits that interpretations of Islam over time have been shaped by patriarchal social systems. According to Leila Ahmed (1992), most of the limitations imposed upon Muslim women arose from historical and cultural factors, rather than from core Islamic beliefs. Through her historical method, she analyzes the intersection between religion, politics, and society in the construction of gender roles. Unlike Ahmed,

whose concerns about patriarchal interpretations of the Islamic tradition run through her work, Asma Barlas (2002) takes an interpretive turn within the text. She states that the Qur'an upholds ethical egalitarianism and is critical of patriarchy, thus arguing that most gender-based hierarchies are created through interpretation rather than from religious sources.

The dispute between classical scholars and the Islamic feminist movement has largely focused on issues of authority, gender roles, and methodology. Classical scholars believe that traditional interpretations of the Islamic law reflect divine guidance, while modern Islamic feminists encourage a re-examination of religious sources through modern interpretive lenses. The critique of feminism asserts that feminist reinterpretations can apply modern perspectives to pre-modern literature; however, the defenders of feminism insist that interpretation is never final, but subject to revision according to changed social contexts.

The topic of female power and authority in Islamic history constitutes yet another controversial field of scholarly discussion. Traditional texts offer plenty of evidence of women's involvement in religion, scholarship, economics, and social activities. In terms of Islamic Hadith tradition, Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA) made great scholarly contributions by narrating more than two thousand Hadiths and being considered one of the prominent authorities among the Companions of Islam. Similarly, Umm Salama (RA) is known for her wise counsel and advice in political and social affairs. These historical instances refute any claims about the lack of involvement of Muslim women in social life.

Moreover, seerah writings reinforce this point of view. In *The Sealed Nectar*, for instance, Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri (1995) discusses many instances of women's involvement in the growth of the Muslim community at its inception. Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA), who is mentioned as being independent economically as an entrepreneur, emerges as the first person to believe in the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH). On the other hand, Aisha (RA) and Umm Salama (RA) are cited for their intellectual contributions.

Although much has been written about the role of women in Islam, there are still several lacunae in the existing body of literature. Previous studies often focus on either the legal rights of women, their family relations, inheritance practices, marriages, or gender issues in the contemporary context. Much less has been done in terms of analyzing the socio-religious engagement of women by using the conceptual framework of Seerah. In addition, very few studies are available that use the primary source of *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* (*The Sealed Nectar*). As a result, the socio-religious life of women during the nascent years of Islam has not been thoroughly analyzed yet.

This paper seeks to fill this void by analyzing the socio-religious role of women during the early period of Islam, utilizing the *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* approach, as well as traditional and modern viewpoints on the matter. The paper thus seeks to contribute to the discussions regarding the participation of women during the early establishment of the Islamic community.

5. Conceptual Framework: Women's Agency in Islam

Women's agency in the current research can be considered the capability of women to have an active role in the social, religious, economic, and political domains following Islamic ethics and laws. Unlike in other societies, in Islam, agency is not determined by freedom from restriction but rather by responsible behavior (*taklif*), which makes all individuals, both men and women, equal in front of Allah in regard to the responsibility for one's intentions and actions. In Islam, this idea is expressed by such a verse of the Qur'an: "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while being a believer, We will surely grant them a good life" (Qur'an 16:97). This interpretation is supported by classical interpreters like Ibn Kathir.

Similar emphasis on collective moral responsibility and equality of souls is made in many verses of the Quran. For instance, it states in Surah Al-Ahzab that "Surely, the believing men and the believing women... for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a magnificent reward" (Quran, 33:35). As explained by Tafsir al-Qurtubi, this verse confirms that men and women enjoy equality of rights in matters of religion, duties, and divine justice.

Based on the above theology, women's empowerment can be viewed from three perspectives:

5.1. Social Agency

By "social agency," we mean women's involvement in family systems, community building, migration, care-giving, and moral improvement within the early Islamic society. The role of the Qur'an is to lay out the moral basis for such involvement through its declaration that the believers, both men and women, are allies in enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong (Qur'an 9:71). This notion has been explained by classical scholars like Ibn Kathir.

The Hadith literature is another example that demonstrates how women were actively involved in the formation of the early Muslim society. Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA), according to the book *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*, gave not only psychological comfort to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ at the time of his first revelation but also stability in the early days of the formation of Islam (Mubarakpuri, 1995). The reaction of Khadijah to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was an exemplary form of social resilience and moral fortitude which, according to classical Seerah scholars, became instrumental in ensuring the survival of the early Muslim community.

In addition to being part of Hijrah to Madinah and Abyssinia, facing persecution in Makkah, and participating in social welfare programs, such as taking care of the wounded soldiers in the battles like that of Uhud, women's contribution to the society also took the form of protecting the Prophet in battlefields, like that demonstrated by Umm Ammarah (RA).

5.2. Economic Agency

Economic agency includes women's financial freedom, rights of ownership, and engagement in economic activities. As mentioned in the Qur'an, economic freedom is granted to both genders: "For men is a share

of what they earn, and for women is a share of what they earn” (Qur’an 4:32). In Tafsir Ibn Kathir, the above verse clearly indicates that the woman has an independent economic identity and the right of ownership without male interference.

Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA) serves as the best example of economic agency in Islam. In *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*, Khadijah’s status is mentioned as a successful businesswoman who used to lead trading caravans on her own in the pre-Islamic era in Makkah (Mubarakpuri, 1995). Her strong financial background helped her support Prophet ﷺ at the time of revelation, and thus, her financial contribution became the foundation for the survival of the nascent Muslim community.

The Hadith literature, together with Seerah accounts, show that Islam did not marginalize the economic roles of women, but organized and dignified them in ethical terms. Modern researchers like Leila Ahmed (1992) have maintained that early Islamic society maintained the economic rights of women, and Asma Barlas (2002) asserts that Qur’anic economics is gender-neutral.

5.3. Intellectual-Religious Agency

The intellectual-religious agency of women involves their participation in knowledge dissemination, knowledge analysis, religious instruction, and intellectual development. In the Holy Quran, knowledge is considered an obligation of all human beings regardless of their gender, as expressed in seeking knowledge and thinking about divine revelation (Holy Quran 96:1-5). The tafsir tradition underscores that the commands for knowledge are general in scope and not limited to males.

Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA) is a prominent historical personality in this respect. She relates more than two thousand Hadith and becomes an outstanding authority on jurisprudence among the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. Al-Bukhari’s authentic Hadith contains many reports from Aisha. Umm Salama (RA) has a special place in Hadith traditions as an intelligent lady whose advice had great weight in many political and legal deliberations, such as Treaty of Hdaybiyyah.

Similarly, the book *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* also indirectly provides support for this intellectual autonomy through its detailed depiction of the educational and advisory context within which women were participating in the Prophet’s ﷺ household (Mubarakpuri, 1995). The classical Islamic scholarship shows how women played an active role in narrating hadiths, reasoning in the field of law, and teaching religion during the Prophetic and early caliphate eras.

Moreover, some modern Islamic scholars, including Leila Ahmed (1992) and Asma Barlas (2002), also emphasize that early Islamic intellectual history is marked by gender-neutral knowledge systems in which scholarly authority depended upon piety, knowledge, and competency.

5.4. Theoretical Foundation

The basis for this framework rests upon the Islamic concept of ‘taklīf’ (accountability to God) which means that all accountable human beings are equally answerable to the commandment of God and hence rewarded accordingly. The concept of taklif is often reiterated in the Holy Qur’an which addresses all believers regardless of their gender and emphasizes the need for accountability through faith and deeds (Qur’an 33:35).

Within this framework, agency is not understood as unrestricted autonomy but as structured responsibility within the moral and legal boundaries of Shari‘ah. This ensures that social, economic, and intellectual participation is aligned with ethical obligations and communal welfare.

This approach is supported historically by the fact that Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum highlights several examples where the role of women involved emotional, economic, intellectual, and advisory participation within early Muslim society. The significance of such roles is proven by the fact that women were instrumental to the development of the early Muslim Ummah (Mubarakpuri, 1995).

6. Analysis and Discussion

6.1. Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA): Economic and Spiritual Agency

Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA) is one of the best illustrations of agency among women in the early era of Islam, both economically and spiritually. Before Islam, Khadijah (RA) enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for being an excellent woman who could conduct business and manage caravans on her own accord. The author of Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum mentions her reputation for honesty, wisdom, and business acumen as a woman in the predominantly male world of commerce (Mubarakpuri, 1995). The status of Khadijah (RA) proves the economic independence of women in Arabia, especially in affluent business circles.

Acceptance of Islam by her is a defining point in Islamic history. After getting the message from the Prophet ﷺ following the revelation, as soon as the Prophet ﷺ came back from the Cave of Hira with his heart full of fear because of the initial revelation, Khadija (RA) was there to give him emotional support and comfort. As mentioned in Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum: “Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you. You keep good relations with your kith and kin, help the poor and the destitute, serve your guests generously, and assist those afflicted by calamity.” (Mubarakpuri, 1995).

Khadija (RA) promptly accepted the truth of his prophethood and stood behind him with emotional and psychological backing. This aspect of her personality is indicative not only of faith but of logical and ethical insight as well. The Qur’anic teaching of spiritual equality validates this aspect of personal agency: “Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while being a believer, we will surely grant them a good life” (Qur’an 16:97). Classical exegeses by scholars like Ibn Kathir have explained this verse to affirm spiritual equality between men and women.

Khadijah (RA)'s responsibilities expanded far beyond just religious and spiritual support in the formative stage of Islam. Through her financial capabilities, she was able to help the Prophet ﷺ as well as early Muslims financially during their boycott by the Quraysh in Shi'b Abi Talib. This can be seen from the way she invested all her financial resources during this period, and this was her contribution in helping ensure the continuity of the early Islamic movement as shown in *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* (Mubarakpuri, 1995). This is consistent with the hadith narrated in *Sahih al-Bukhari* in which the Prophet ﷺ speaks about her unique support.

In a tafsir approach, scholars like Al-Qurtubi have noted that when it comes to Qur'anic teachings concerning financial rights and responsibilities, both male and female genders were meant to take equal parts in carrying out these teachings.

The contemporary academic scholarship of Islam also reinforces such interpretation of this matter. For instance, Leila Ahmed (1992) cites Khadijah (RA) as an important historical personality who served as a prominent example of feminine economic power and morality in premodern times in Muslim societies. In turn, Asma Barlas (2002) emphasizes the fact that early Islamic stories, which are free of patriarchal prejudice, demonstrate female involvement in the process of forming religious and social history. Furthermore, Fatima Mernissi (1991) underscores Khadijah's (RA) significance as a demonstration of the presence of women in early Islam in public and private spheres of life.

The example of Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA) shows an example of integration between economic independence, emotional intelligence, and spirituality. Through her efforts, as narrated in *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*, in accordance with the ethical principles of the Quran, Hadith, tafsir literature, and current feminist and Islamic studies literature, she has become a cornerstone in the formation of early Islam.

6.2. Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA): Intellectual and Political Agency

Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA) is regarded as an exceptionally influential woman in early Islamic intellectual tradition, embodying the full scope of knowledge-driven agency through Hadith transmission, juristic discourse, and socio-political consciousness. Aisha is well-known among the senior Sahabas for her transmission of over two thousand Ahadith, which places her as one of the most eminent transmitters of the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (Al-Bukhari, 2002; Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, 2007).

As for the Qur'anic basis of intellectual legitimacy, Aisha's case is based on the overarching theme in Islam regarding the importance of knowledge. Allah commands believers to reflect and ponder: "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" (Qur'an 39:9) Furthermore, Allah emphasizes the status of believers who possess knowledge: "Allah will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge

ني درجات (in degrees)" (Qur'an 58:11). According to classical commentators like Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi, both these verses are universally applicable, emphasizing that knowledge and scholarly standing are open to all irrespective of gender but subject to belief, diligence, and insight.

Literature on hadith contains substantial testimony about the intellectual authority of Aisha (RA). The senior companions like Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (RA) reported that when they confronted any problematic issues, they sought the guidance of Aisha (RA) (Tirmidhi, Sunan). Imam al-Zuhri also mentioned her as one of the most outstanding scholars of her time. Her commentaries cleared up the confusion prevailing among the companions, thus showing her involvement in *ijtihad* and hadith criticism regarding family law, inheritance, and worship (Sahih al-Bukhari; Sahih Muslim).

In Seerah studies, Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum points out that she was very close to the Holy Prophet in her house where she gained much knowledge about the rules of Islam and personal conduct of the Holy Prophet (Mubarakpuri, 1995). Thus, she had the opportunity of acquiring detailed information about the practices of the Prophetic life, which was not possible for many companions. Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum describes the close domestic and educational environment of Aisha (RA) in the household of the Prophet ﷺ, where she directly observed his practices, worship, and legal decisions. This unique proximity enabled her to develop deep intellectual insight into Islamic teachings, which later made her one of the foremost authorities in Hadith and jurisprudence (Mubarakpuri, 1995).

The classical interpretations of the Qur'anic verses also imply that she is a scholar. For example, in explaining the significance of *shūrā* in verses like (Qur'an 42:38), Al-Qurtubi notes that the act of consulting in the beginning of Islam involved people who possessed sound knowledge irrespective of their gender; this includes the contribution made by Aisha (RA).

Aisha (RA) had played an active role in the socio-political sphere too. Though there was divergence among classical scholars when it came to the explanation of certain political events, there was consensus regarding her credibility in knowledge and morality. This shows that she had contributed in shaping communal reason through her socio-political contributions.

This is supported by modern Islamic scholarship. Leila Ahmed (1992) refers to Aisha (RA) as a key personality in the development of Islamic intellectual tradition especially with regards to Hadith and legal sciences. In the same context, Asma Barlas (2002) states that Aisha's scholarly contributions have made the case against later imposed patriarchal constraints limiting women's engagement with religious authority. In addition, Fatima Mernissi (1991) notes that Aisha (RA) is an example of early Islamic epistemology that recognizes the ability of women to act as authoritative interpreters of religious knowledge.

Recent academic discourse in Islamic Studies also emphasizes Aisha (RA) as one of the pioneers in Hadith narration. However, several scholarly works continue to overlook her contribution towards juristic interpretation, an aspect explored in the current study.

In summary, Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA) is an example of a multifaceted model of female agency, which is characterized by intellectuality, religiosity, and socio-political agency. These contributions, backed up by epistemology within the Qur'an, Hadith literature, classic tafsir literature, historical biographies such as Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum, and contemporary women's movements within Islam, render Aisha among the most prominent intellects of early Islamic history.

6.3. Umm Salama (RA): Consultative and Legal Agency

The example set forth by Umm Salama (RA) is an exemplary case of a woman possessing consultative, legal, and socio-political authority within early Islamic history. She exemplifies a wise (ra'y) and well-judging person capable of giving strategic advice when necessary for significant episodes within the Prophetic era. In essence, this proves the participation of women during early Islam in decision-making procedures, especially in the areas of family law, politics, and governance.

The Qur'an emphasizes the significance of consultation (shūrā) within Muslim societies in verse 42:38, "And those who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation." According to classical commentators like Al-Qurtubi, consultation applies to all members of the Muslim society irrespective of their gender, provided that they have the right kind of judgment and wisdom, since consultation does not depend on one's sexuality.

Another clear indication of Umm Salama (RA)'s active role as an advisor comes from the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, which is recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari. In Sahih al-Bukhari, the Companions are seen to be reluctant to undertake the sacrifice when it is time to do so after signing the treaty. When that happens, Umm Salama (RA) advises the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ not to utter any words before doing the sacrifice. The Prophet follows her advice and acts accordingly; immediately the Companions follow suit. The above example indicates Umm Salama's (RA) practical wisdom and her power to shape communal action in a critical situation.

In addition, the character of Umm Salama (RA) is seen to be one of maturity, rationality, and emotional stability by ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum. In Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri's work, mention is made of the role played by Umm Salama (RA) in many important events in the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ (Mubarakpuri, 1995).

Further proof of her intellect and jurisprudence lies in hadith literature as she narrated many hadiths on issues such as family law, rituals, and manners that are documented in Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. Her reliability and comprehension were recognized by scholars of Hadith like Imam al-Dhahabi who included her among reputable women narrators of the Prophet's sayings.

Tafsir literature further validates the underlying principle behind her active role as a consultant for the Prophet. In explaining the verses of

consultation and justice, scholars like Ibn Kathir emphasize the importance of knowledge, wisdom, and consultation as foundational principles of Islamic rule that did not bar women from intellectual contributions. This is evident in the role played by Umm Salama (RA).

The importance of her contribution can also be seen through modern research in Islamic scholarship. Leila Ahmed (1992) presents women like Umm Salama (RA) as an example of the involvement of women in intellectual discussions within early Islamic civilization. Asma Barlas (2002) maintains that early Islamic texts represent an inclusive and ethical model of authority, which means that the basis for authority lay in moral and intellectual capabilities. Fatima Mernissi (1991) also mentions that women like Umm Salama (RA) had an important position in early Islamic consultation systems, especially in issues pertaining to the community.

In recent academic scholarship in the history of Islam, it has been acknowledged that Umm Salama (RA) played a significant role in the discourse of early Islamic jurisprudence. Her statements played an essential role in developing opinions regarding issues of inheritance, prayer, and social ethics.

In summary, Umm Salama (RA) is an example of a figure of consultative and legal agency based on wisdom, ethical reasoning, and judgment. Her work, as seen in *Ar-RaheeQ Al-Makhtum*, backed up by principles from the Qur'an about consultation, Hadith, classical and modern Islamic jurisprudence, shows that women took part in decision-making processes regarding law and politics during the early period of Islam.

6.4. Collective Female Participation in Early Islam

Whereas the roles of some well-known personalities such as Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA), Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA), and Umm Salama (RA) are known, there is no denying that early Islamic societies also came into existence through the contributions of Muslim women as a whole. It has been clearly stated that the Qur'an, Hadith, tafsir, and Seerah have shown that women played an important role in the construction of Islamic foundations from religious, social, educational, and ethical perspectives.

According to the Qur'an, the men and women should be partners in setting up a virtuous society; "The believers, men and women, are protecting friends of one another. They enjoin the doing of what is right, and forbid the doing of what is wrong" (Qur'an 9:71). The verses have been explained in many classical tafsirs. According to Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi, the two genders are equal in making contribution toward the creation of ethical values and ensuring welfare for their communities. *Ar-RaheeQ Al-Makhtum* consistently presents women not as passive background figures but as active participants in major historical developments such as migration, persecution in Makkah, and social consolidation in Madinah. The text records their sacrifices in Hijrah, their participation in supporting the wounded in battles, and their involvement in preserving the moral and social fabric of the emerging Muslim society (Mubarakpuri, 1995).

Support of Migration (Hijrah)

One of the earliest signs of the participation of women in various activities included their taking part in migration campaigns which were instrumental in ensuring the sustenance and growth of Islam. In this regard, Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum mentions the role of Muslim women in migrating to Abyssinia and then Madinah, noting the sacrifices they made in order to safeguard their faith (Mubarakpuri, 1995). For example, some women like Umm Salama (RA) had to undergo great hardships, leaving behind their families while migrating to another place for the sake of their religion.

In fact, the Holy Qur'an speaks about the significance of Hijrah when it comes to earning the blessings of Allah and assures rewards for those who leave their hearths and homes for the sake of Allah (Qur'an 4:100). It is noted in classical tafsir literature that these promises hold true for both genders.

Participation in Religious Education

It is well documented that the women had an important part to play in passing on the knowledge of Islam to future generations through the process of teaching the women. There were occasions when Prophet Muhammad (SAW) spent time with women answering their questions related to religion, thus highlighting the significance of educating women in early Muslim society. Many female companions took part in study groups and helped spread knowledge of religion by memorizing and reciting the messages of the Qur'an.

According to Hadiths, many Muslim women asked questions directly to the Prophet (SAW) on legal and theological aspects. For instance, Aisha (RA), Umm Salama (RA), Hafsa (RA), among others, became famous for offering religious advice. According to Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim, it is evident that women took an active part in educational sessions and made significant contributions to Islamic scholarship. Modern scholars such as Mohammad Akram Nadwi (2007) have documented the extensive contributions of female Hadith scholars throughout Islamic history, demonstrating that women's participation in religious education was not limited to the Prophetic era but continued across subsequent generations.

Preservation of Hadith and Sunnah

The preservation of the Sunnah is another vital legacy that women of Islam have passed down to us. Women companions narrated many Hadiths, some of which contain crucial information about family issues, acts of worship, ethical values, and social relationships. Aisha (RA), for example, has narrated more than two thousand Hadiths, thus becoming an invaluable source for later generations of jurists and scholars.

Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum illustrates the value of the contribution of women of Islam because the historical records contained in the book were narrated by female companions of the Prophet who preserved facts from his private and official life (Mubarakpuri, 1995). If not for their contributions, a great deal of religious teachings of Islam would be lost forever.

Female Hadith transmitters were highly valued by classical scholars, like Al-Dhahabi and Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, who acknowledged the importance of their works in terms of the credibility and scholarly level of their Hadith narratives.

Social Welfare and Moral Development

Women also took part in social and welfare activities and helped develop moral values within the nascent Muslim society. They nursed the sick people, helped the wounded in battles, and supported persecuted families. There are historical accounts about the involvement of women like Rufaydah al-Aslamiyyah (RA), who is considered to be one of the first caregivers and planners of medical care among Muslims.

The Qur'an encourages cooperation in righteousness and piety (Qur'an 5:2), and Muslims have historically made concerted efforts toward improving the welfare of their communities. Women were not only active members of families but also participated in communal activities.

Contemporary Muslim thinkers such as Leila Ahmed (1992), Asma Barlas (2002), and Jonathan A.C. Brown (2014) have found evidence that early Islamic history provides examples of dynamic female involvement in public and intellectual activities. These authors suggest that reductionist approaches which consider the role of women limited to domestic chores cannot describe the reality accurately.

Discussion

The proof of the role played by women as far as forming the early Muslim society is concerned can be found in the Koran, Hadith, Tafsir and Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum, and it indicates that women played a role in the creation and progress of early Muslim community. The participation of women in activities such as migration, learning, preserving Hadith, social service and morality shows that women did not play marginal roles in the making of Islamic civilization.

The significance of the above mentioned collective involvement of women lies in the fact that their involvement in early Islam did not only include a few extraordinary women; rather, it formed a social reality for women within the Islamic context.

The participation of women in Islam is another aspect that reflects the inclusive nature of the early Islamic community. The involvement of women through the various roles that they played, such as being part of the Hijrah, in religious instruction, preservation of the Sunnah, in providing social welfare, and in moral development, was a necessary factor in the establishment of the fundamentals of Islamic society. This was clearly

exemplified in *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* and is reflected in many Islamic traditions including the Qur'an and the Hadith.

7. Findings

The analysis of *Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum* (The Sealed Nectar) based on teachings from the Qur'an, Hadith, classical commentary on the Qur'an, and modern Islamic studies shows that women had a considerable part to play in the formation and growth of early Islamic society. This study counters the common perception of women as merely reactive actors and proves that women did have agency in the context of Islamic morality and law.

7.1. Women Exercised Meaningful Socio-Religious Agency

According to the findings of the research, women at the inception of Islam actively participated in religion and society. The Qur'an describes both men and women as being allies in ensuring that righteousness prevails and evils are avoided (Qur'an 9:71).

Interpreters such as Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi argue that the above verse indicates the collective obligation of Muslims in bringing about social reform. The facts presented in "*Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*" confirm the view because they show that women were active in helping the Prophet ﷺ in spreading the religion and building the Muslim community during those critical years (Mubarakpuri, 1995).

The examples of Khadijah (RA), Aisha (RA), Umm Salama (RA) and many others indicate that women did not only receive religion but also actively spread it.

7.2. Women Participated in Intellectual, Economic, and Political Spheres

The evidence suggests that women's agency in early Islam operated through three interconnected dimensions: economic support, intellectual authority, and consultative governance.

Intellectual Participation: Women were key players in ensuring the survival and transfer of knowledge related to Islam. Aisha (RA) was recognized as a prominent scholar amongst the Companions and became a significant scholar in the field of Hadith and fiqh. The scholarly works of Aisha (RA) can be traced back in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*. The significance of knowledge in the Qur'an (Qur'an 39:9; 58:11) and its promotion by the Prophet created an atmosphere for intellectual engagement of women.

Women Economic Empowerment: In this study, women's economic empowerment has been proved through the life history of Khadija (RA), who played a pivotal role in maintaining early Muslims through her business acumen and finances. Women's rights of property, trade, and finance have been acknowledged by Islam through the story of Khadija in the book "*Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum*" (Mubarakpuri, 1995). This study supports Qur'anic principles, which provide for women's economic rights (Qur'an 4:32).

Consultation and Governance: Women took part in consultation as well as governance-related affairs. One such significant example of this is the

consultation that was done by Umm Salama (RA) in the Treaty of Hudaibiyah. The concept of *shūrā* (consultation) as mentioned in the Qur'an verse (42:38) encourages the participation of women who have knowledge in the decision-making process.

7.3. **Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum Provides Substantial Evidence of Female Participation**

One of the important conclusions from this study is the fact that Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum provides extensive historical information on the role played by women in the development of Islam at its earliest stages. Even though the main focus of this piece of literature is the biography of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, there is a constant emphasis made on the contribution made by women in the formation of Islam. Among others, the following historical events are covered:

- The financial support of Khadijah (RA).
- The contribution of Aisha (RA) in terms of knowledge.
- The advice given by Umm Salama (RA).
- Sacrifices made by women who migrated as a part of the Hijrah.
- The involvement of women in social and developmental projects.

All these facts show that women actively participated in the formation of the Muslim society.

7.4. **Women's Agency Was Rooted in Islamic Ethical Principles**

Further, it becomes clear that women's roles in early Islam were predicated upon the Islamic ideas of *taklīf* (duty), *taqwā* (piety before God), and answerability before Allah. According to the Qur'an, righteousness and virtue are more significant than gender in determining one's position in the eyes of Allah: "Verily, the most honorable among you in the sight of Allah is he who has the greatest piety and God-consciousness." (Qur'an 49:13)

Also, according to Qur'an 33:35, both believing women and men have the same spiritual responsibilities and rewards. Classical tafsir literature always understood these verses as affirming the idea of spiritual and moral equality before God despite different social functions of males and females.

Thus, women's roles in early Islam were not based on the contemporary concept of individual freedom, but on their participation, duty, and contribution to the community in a certain ethical and religious setting.

7.5. **Early Islamic Society Demonstrated a Model of Inclusive Participation**

According to the paper, Islamic society at its earliest stages included women in its religious, educational, and social systems in a manner that would enable women to make contributions in accordance with their skills and situation. This can be observed in Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum and is also validated in Hadith and other sources from classical Islam.

In recent years, Leila Ahmed (1992), Asma Barlas (2002), and Mohammad Akram Nadwi (2007) have made arguments which are consistent with the conclusions found in the analysis of Ar-Raheeq Al-

Makhtum. These scholars also point out that women played a prominent role in early Islamic civilization as opposed to the common assumption today.

7.6. Summary of Findings

The research concludes that:

- Female figures played a considerable role in exercising socio-religious agency based on Quranic values.
- They contributed in fields such as education, economics, consultation, education, and social activities.
- Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum is an important historical source for women's contributions to forming the Muslim society.
- Gender relations within the Prophetic period involved responsibility, collaboration, and contributions rather than exclusion.
- Women were vital players in preserving, nurturing, and developing Islamic civilization in its early days.

8. Conclusion

The current research work analyzed the roles and participation of women in the early Islamic era through a critical analysis of a book known as Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum written by Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri. Utilizing Quranic references, Hadiths, classical tafsirs, and Islamic scholarly knowledge in the contemporary era, This study demonstrates that women functioned as active contributors to the formation of the early Muslim community. From the data generated through Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum, the conclusion drawn is that women were not only participants in Islamic events but were also instrumental in developing the Muslim Ummah.

The examination of the case studies of Khadijah bint Khuwaylid (RA), Aisha bint Abi Bakr (RA), and Umm Salama (RA) provides an insight into the three different dimensions of women's empowerment in early Islamic society. In particular, Khadijah (RA) exhibited her economic independence, strong faith, and staunch commitment to the Prophetic cause. Aisha (RA) was one of the prominent scholars and jurists who enriched the intellectual traditions of Islamic civilization through her teachings and legal verdicts. Umm Salama (RA) highlighted the significance of consultation, wisdom, and legal knowledge in the process of collective decision-making.

Furthermore, the study highlights the fact that these acts of devotion and service by Muslim women were not deviations from the tenets of Islam but were consistent with the Quranic worldview. These verses in the Quran highlight the spiritual and moral responsibility of men and women, stating that piety, knowledge, and righteousness are the real measure of one's excellence before God (Qur'an 33:35; 49:13). Commentaries by prominent expositors of Islam such as Ibn Kathir and Al-Qurtubi have interpreted these verses to mean the equality of Muslims in spirit regardless of their gender but with the collective responsibility of establishing a virtuous society. Similarly, there are many instances in which women played an

active role in learning, consultation, charitable activities, migration, and religious scholarship.

The conclusions drawn from this study reveal that Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum offers credible historical evidence for analyzing the active participation of women in early Islamic societies. Although this book can be characterized by the fact that it is a biography of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, nonetheless, throughout its narrative, there are references made to the positive role of women in contributing to the successes achieved by the Islamic community. The examples include Hijrah, assistance during persecution, maintaining the Sunnah, and the general benefit of the community (Mubarakpuri, 1995).

Additionally, the research questions reductionist accounts that define women's place in Islam merely in terms of their being at home or their absence in the public sphere. The examples taken from history presented here show that the early Islamic society functioned under a scheme of responsibility, involvement, and accountability, and where one's worth was measured by his/her faith, skill, and service to the community. Indeed, modern authors like Leila Ahmed (1992), Asma Barlas (2002), and Mohammad Akram Nadwi (2007) maintain that early Islamic texts present a more inclusive notion of women's involvement than is currently assumed.

In summary, the accounts and roles played by women found in Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum indicate clearly that women were critical participants in the creation of the Islamic civilization. The intellectual guidance, financial backing, consultative role, and social presence of women were fundamental to the shaping of the Muslim community. From an analysis of the Qur'an, Hadith, classical tafsir, and Seerah literature, it is clear that Islamic tradition acknowledges women as moral and social beings who have made invaluable contributions to religion and society.

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