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Original Article

Muslim Women in the Face of Feminism: Bint Ash-Shati's Concept of Equality and Emancipation to the Rescue

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, Feminism is said to be the movement to end women's oppression. Muslim feminism emerged as a challenge to patriarchy in Muslim societies in support of Western feminism. The discourse on Islamic feminism has generated an ideology that many young Muslim women have misconstrued because Islam is seen as the main factor in the subjugation of women in the world. Thus, this paper examined the complex relationship between Islam and Western feminism theories and their implications on contemporary Muslim women. The methodologies adopted are analytical; which aided in analyzing misconceptions of Islam and feminism and the view of Bint Al-Shāṭi on feminist interpretations, historical which was used in accounting for the biography of Bint Al-Shāṭi and the phenomenological method which was used to relate the discussion to contemporary society. The findings of the research revealed that there is a primary difference between a secular Muslim feminist and an Islamic feminist. It also revealed that Muslim women have been lost in the hands of erroneous interpretations by Muslim feminists while seeking to westernize gender equality, freedom, and liberation using a feminist perspective in re-reading the Qur'ān. The paper concluded that gender equity, women's emancipation and freedom have been an integral part of Islamic history. It therefore recommended that Muslim women should rediscover the true meaning of Islamic teachings on gender equity, gender justice, gender sexuality, women's dress, and patriarchy, among others that have been lost at the hands of erroneous interpretation. It also recommended that Muslim women should do away with the spirit of the inferiority complex that has been proposed by the Western feminism theory.

Keywords: Feminism, Patriarchy, Gender, Bint Shati, Equality and Emancipation.

Introduction

Muslim women are significant emblems of identity that portray an ideal society. They represent not only a socio-economic symbol but also their political influence cannot be over-

emphasized¹. Islam decrees the honoring of women as daughters, wives, mothers, and sisters and endows them with much respect. This has elevated their status, surrounded them with a fortress of protection, and ensured them a comfortable life². However, Islamic rulings influence the social roles, rights, and responsibilities assigned to men and women within Islamic societies. This is to recognize the identical nature and nurture inherent in them as both creations are not physically and biologically the same. Hence, Islam as a gesture of understanding both nature and nurture, influences their roles, rights, and responsibilities. This shows the divine nature of Islam and its rulings

The late twentieth century marked a turning point in Muslim women's intellectual engagement with their religion³, the moment they sought to address gender equality and women's rights using Islamic principles and texts as the basis for their advocacy and activism. It should however be noted that the interpretation of these Islamic sources can vary greatly, resulting in diverse practices and beliefs⁴. There are both conservative and progressive interpretations of Islamic sources when it comes to gender and this interpretation can shape various aspects of Muslim women's lives, including family dynamics, employment opportunities, educational access, and religious and leadership roles⁵. With the expansion of human rights and feminist discourse in the twentieth century many Muslims came to view these interpretations as unjust and discriminatory and hence began to challenge them from within. By the 1980s this challenge had acquired a label of Islamic feminism which at the time seemed a contradiction in terms⁶.

However, Muslim women like women from any other religious or cultural background, have diverse experiences and opinions when it comes to feminism. It is essential to remember that no single statement can encompass the perspective of all Muslim women, as they come from different countries, cultures, and interpretations of the Qur'ān. For some Muslim women, feminism aligns with their religious beliefs and values and they actively participate in the feminist movement. They advocate gender equality, challenge patriarchal structures within their communities, and promote women's empowerment. At the same time, some Muslim women might hold pristine or traditional views of Islam influenced by existing cultural practices that may differ from mainstream feminist ideals. They prioritize their religious identity and find empowerment within their faith while adhering to its gender roles and practices⁷.

From the above, it is crucial not to homogenize or stereotype Muslim women's experiences, as they are complex and multifaceted. Muslim women possess a range of opinions and beliefs when it comes to feminism and may define it in different ways. It is therefore important to listen to and respect their diverse voices and experiences to promote a more inclusive and intersectional understanding of feminism. This could be buttressed by Ambar Ahmad's

¹R.S. Whitcher, A.M. Baylouny. *The Effects of Western Feminist Ideology on Muslim Feminists*. (Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California, 2005), 1.

²A.S Tareq, *60 Great Women Enshrined in Islamic History* (Malaysia Dakwah Corner bookstore, 2020)7

³Whitcher and Baylouny: *The Effects of Western Feminist Ideology on Muslim feminists....*7

⁴A. Ahmad, *Islamic feminism-a contradiction in terms?* (New Delhi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015), 3.

⁵Whitcher and Baylouny: *The Effects of Western Feminist Ideology on Muslim feminists....*16

⁶Z. Mir-Hosseini. "The challenges of Islamic feminism." *Gender a výzkum/ Gender and Research* 20, 2 (2019): 108. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=z.+mir-hosseini+the+challenges+of+islamic+feminism&btnG=

⁷Whitcher and Baylouny: *The Effects of Western Feminist Ideology on Muslim feminists....*16

statements that “the best way to understand Islamic feminism is to study what Islamic feminists do”.⁸

Scholars like Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas and other feminists have generated a lot of controversies in their bid to prove their views regarding the status of women in Islam. They agitate for Gender equality and a patriarchy-free Islamic world. They opined that the Islamic rulings and injunctions are biased and favor the male folk. In their opinion, most of the verses in the Glorious Qur’ān are being misinterpreted by men to suit them, hence, the need for re-interpretation of Islamic text to suit contemporary issues. This study is therefore justified to expose the claims of these Muslim feminists with the view of ‘Ā’isha ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi. This will go a long way in reshaping the mindset of the contemporary Muslim women who have been brainwashed and inclined to westernization and civilization all in the name of feminism.

With this, the need to examine the faith of Muslim women in the face of feminism theories is not only necessary but also pertinent with a view to juxtapose them using a modern woman’s commentary (‘Ā’isha ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Bint al-Shāṭi). While she did not write an independent work of Quranic exegesis on women’s issues, she nonetheless articulated a new Islamic discourse on women that could be more in tune with her time. In a sense, she may be considered one of the precursors to the new prevalent discourse on women in Islam.

It is against this backdrop that Bint Al-Shāṭi’s view is to be studied in a way to present it as a rescue for the contemporary Muslim women who are in the face and hands of feminism theories. To accomplish the set objective the paper has been segmented into eight points which are, abstract, introduction, conceptual analysis of keywords, argument on Muslim and Islamic feminism, brief biography of Bint Al-Shāṭi, feminism theory, Bint Al-Shāṭi’s concept of equality and emancipation and conclusion.

Feminism, Gender Equality, and Women Emancipation: Conceptual Analysis

The word “feminism” is a direct anglicization of *féminisme*, but the original French word can be broken down etymologically as “feminine” and “isme”. Its origins are in the Old French word “feminine”, coming from the Latin word “femina” meaning “woman,” and “isme” comes from the Latin suffix “ismus”, which makes a noun into a practice, system, or doctrine⁹ Charles Fourier (1772-1837), a French philosopher and utopian socialist, is credited for the coining of this word in 1837.¹⁰ However, there is no fixed definition of feminism as it has a variety of meanings and interpretations.

According to Cambridge Dictionaries, feminism can be seen as “*the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state*”¹¹. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, “*feminism is the belief in the social, economic and political equality of the sexes*”.¹² In

⁸A. Ahmad, *Islamic Feminism A Contradiction in Terms?*. (New Delhi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2015) 3.

⁹C. Larkin, Meaning of Feminism (Babel magazine, march 6, 2023) available at <https://www.babel.com/en/magazine/meaning-of-feminism>

¹⁰S. Herouach. “Liberal Feminism Impact on Moroccan Educated Women”; Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, FLDM, as a Field Study. *Open Political Science*, 2(2019) 128.

¹¹L. Brunell, and E. Burkett, *Feminism, Encyclopedia Britannica*. (2019) accessed on 18, July 2023, available at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism>

¹²V. Bryson, “Perspectives on Gender Equality: Challenging the Terms of Debate. In J. Browne (ed.), *The Future of Gender*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 16

another definition, it consists of several social, cultural and political movements, theories, and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. In a subsequent case, it is against the abuse of power and seeks equality and justice under different domains, such as economy, class, caste, race, culture, religion, etc.¹³

From the above definitions, feminism is a diverse, rival and often opposing collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies. It takes the attempt to achieve the objective of equality, dignity, rights, emancipation and empowerment of women. The demands made by feminist movements included the right to vote, to own property, reproductive or health rights, and the right to their bodies. They emphasized the fundamental right to equality in every field of life and from this emerged the issue of equal pay for equal work, equal opportunity for careers and opposition to oppression, patriarchy, domestic violence and sexual harassment. Initially beginning in the Western countries, the movement for female rights spread far and wide and this has led to the development of a variety of feminisms all over the world.¹⁴

Islamic feminism is a discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm. It derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an and seeks rights and justice for women in the totality of their existence. However, there has been much misunderstanding, misinterpretation and mischief concerning Islamic feminism. Thus, the priority of Islamic feminism is to go straight to Islam's fundamental text, the Qur'an. However, some women center their attention on the re-interpretation of the Qur'an (Amina Wadud, Riffat Hassan, Fatimah Naseef), while others scrutinize Shari'ah law (Lebanese Aziza Al-Hibri, Pakistani Shaheen Sardar Ali) while others re-examine the *hadith* (Moroccan Fatimah Mernissi, Turkish Hidayat Tuksal) using methodologies and tools of linguistic history, literary criticism, sociology and anthropology in approaching the Qur'an.

Gender Equality

Gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men. Historically, the terms "gender and sex" have been used interchangeably. Although the two have different meanings, one is always used in the place of the other.¹⁵ According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, sex refers to either of the two major forms of individuals that occur in many species and that are distinguished respectively as female and male especially based on their reproductive organs and structures.¹⁶ Gender, however, is seen as a state of being male or female concerning the social and cultural roles that are considered appropriate for men and women.¹⁷ Gender also refers to the roles of a female and male in society, which is otherwise known as gender role or an individual's concept of themselves or gender identity.¹⁸

The term "Gender Equality" refers to equal treatment and opportunities for individuals regardless of their gender. It entails the concept that all human beings whether male or female

¹³C. Hundley, "Feminist Empiricism". in S. N. Hesse-Biber (ed.), *Handbook of Feminist Research* (2nd Ed), (CA: Sage Publications Ltd.2012)28-45,

¹⁴K. Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach", *Chicago Journal, the University of Chicago Press*, 14 No. 1(Autumn, 1988)122

¹⁵T. Newman, "Sex and Gender: What is the Difference?" Accessed on 10/2/19; <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com>.

¹⁶Merriam Webster, "Sex", accessed on 15/08/2023; <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

¹⁷Collins Dictionary, "Definition of gender", accessed on 15/08/2023; <http://www.collinsdictionary.com>.

¹⁸Newman, "Sex and Gender: What is the difference?..."

are free to develop their abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices.¹⁹

The Western view of gender equality is largely influenced by feminist movements and principles. In Western societies, there is a strong belief in the importance of gender equality and efforts have been made to promote gender equality in various spheres of life. To them, gender equality does not only mean equality of men and women, but fairness and justice to all genders, whether male, female, or even transgender. The term is especially used to connote freedom for women and their emancipation from inhuman treatment, discrimination, and other barbaric acts towards them.²⁰ However, the Western perceived meaning of equality is placing women as the same as men naturally, biologically, physically, and psychologically with no difference, nor distinction. In the 1990s, the prevalent argument was that there was no difference between women and men in every aspect of life. Many conferences and seminars were held just to tell the world that both males and females are created equal, and any individual, organization, or even religion that goes against this is termed barbaric.²¹

However, the West had added nothing to the position of women except unrestricted freedom and liberty for increased corruption and licentiousness.²² All in the name of freedom, equality and liberty, women now agitate for positions that are naturally reserved for men even when most of these positions are in contrast with a woman's nature. Nowadays a woman's good reputation and dignity do not come as they used to from her possession of moral excellence, education and knowledge but from promiscuity, lewdness and immorality which are seen as normal values all in the name of equality.²³

In Islam, gender equality is a concept that is rooted in the teachings of the Qur'ān and the exemplary *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad. Islam teaches that men and women are equal in their humanity and spiritual worth before Allah. They share the same rights and responsibilities in many aspects of life, including worship, education, and social interactions. Both men and women have important roles to play in the society and without one or the other, the society would not be viable. This is because each gender has his/her importance. It is important to note here that men and women have different roles in the household, family, and society. Both are smart, strong and capable of working. However, for a society to function properly, everyone has to perform according to their innate abilities and nature.²⁴

In addition, it is important to note that gender equality in Islam does not mean that men and women are identical or have identical roles and responsibilities. Islam acknowledges the inherent biological and physiological differences between men and women and recognizes that they may have different strengths, capacities and roles in society. This is why Gender "equity",

¹⁹ILO, "ABC of Women Worker's Rights and Gender Equality", (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2000), 48, Accessed on 15/08/2023; <https://www.ilo.org>.

²⁰R.F Bankole, "A Study of Selected Gender Issues Relating to Women in contemporary Nigerian society from an Islamic perspective", (Unpublished Masters Dissertation, Department of Islamic Studies, Faculties of Humanities and Social Science Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, 2019) 32

²¹A. Katecha, "Women in the View of Islam and the West; A Comparative Study" *Muallim Muslimah Magazine*, 1, 4 (2012) 17.

²²S. M. Musavi Lari, *Western Civilization through Muslim Eyes*, 2nd ed. (Ahlul Bayt Organization, Iran 2014) 135.

²³K. Okafor, "Gender Inequality in Nigeria Education System", Accessed on 13/2/19; <http://www.legit.ng>.

²⁴R. I. Malhi, "Women's Role in Islam", Accessed on 15/2/19; <http://www.independent.com>.

rather than absolute “equality” is emphasized, considering the unique qualities and needs of both genders. It is important to acknowledge that interpretations and practices of gender equality vary across different Muslim-majority countries and communities. Cultural and societal norms can sometimes overshadow Islamic teachings, leading to discrepancies in the implementation and understanding of gender equality.

It is apposite to state that there are Muslim feminists who advocate for gender equality and challenge patriarchal structures provided by Islam. Some of these Muslim feminists who are actively working towards these goals are:

- i. Amina Wadud: She is a Muslim feminist who promoted women's rights and gender equality. She is known for leading mixed-gender Friday prayers, challenging traditional gender norms within the Muslim community.²⁵
- ii. Asma Barlas: She is a Pakistani-American scholar and author who focuses on issues of gender equality and women's rights. Her work examines how interpretations of Islamic texts have perpetuated patriarchal structures and highlights alternative ways of understanding them. Her book titled "Believing Women" in Islam: Un-reading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran," is considered a groundbreaking work of Islamic feminism.²⁶
- iii. Mona al Tahawy: An Egyptian-American journalist and feminist activist. She has been vocal about challenging patriarchal systems within both Western societies and Muslim-majority countries. Her work aims to empower women through reclaiming their bodies, voices, and rights.²⁷
- iv. Leila Ahmed: An Egyptian-American scholar who explores the intersections of Islam, feminism, and gender equality. Her research has shed light on the historical contributions of Muslim women and their agency within Islamic societies. Her book, "Women and Gender in Islam," is considered a seminal work in the field of Islamic feminism.²⁸
- v. Zainah Anwar: A Malaysian Muslim feminist activist who challenges patriarchal structures within Islam and promotes women's rights. She co-founded the organization Sisters in Islam, which advocates for gender equality, re-interpretations of women's rights in the Qur'an and works towards legal reforms in Malaysia.²⁹

These are just a few examples of Muslim feminists who actively advocate gender equality, challenge patriarchal structures, and promote interpretations of the Qur'an. Their works highlight that Western feminism and Islam are not mutually exclusive, but rather can intersect in meaningful ways.

Women Emancipation

²⁵N.M. Shaikh, *Women in Muslim Society*, (New Delhi, Kitab Bhavan 2005)1, 56

²⁶Asma Barlas, "Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an" (Texas; University of Texas Press 2002)

²⁷Margot Badran, "Islamic Feminism Revisited", *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 9-15 February 2006, 781, <http://weekly.ahram.org>

²⁸Asma Lamrabet, *Qur'an and Women: A Reading of Liberation*, (Morocco, Kube Publishing 2016)

²⁹S. Nair. "Challenging the Mullahs: Islam, politics and women's activism, interview with Zainah Anwar." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 9,2 (2007) 240-248.

The term “emancipation” is often associated with the value of freedom. It implies freedom from legal, political, or social restrictions.³⁰ It is equally a process that enables the powerless social groups to gain access to and control of resources in a given society.³¹ The term “woman emancipation” is thus generally used to refer to the process by which women in general and poor women, in particular, are made to gain access and control of all forms of resources in a nation. It is a movement that aims at ensuring freedom of self-fulfillment and self-development for women, as well as equal access to domestic and community resources.³²

From the above, women's emancipation refers to the liberation and empowerment of women from social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities and discrimination. It involves challenging and breaking down existing barriers and norms that restrict women's rights and opportunities. Throughout history, women have faced various forms of oppression and discrimination, including limited access to education, religion, inheritance, and career opportunities. Today significant progress has been made toward women's emancipation and there is still work to be done.

In the West, women's emancipation has been a central issue of various social and political movements. The struggle for women's rights and emancipation gained momentum during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.³³ One of the key milestones for women's emancipation in the West was the Suffragette Movement, which sought to secure women's right to vote. Women activists organized protests, demonstrations and strikes, demanding political rights on par with men. The movement was successful in many Western countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and various European nations during the early 20th century.³⁴ Following the women's suffering movement feminist movement emerged advocating for broader social, economic, and political equality for women. This movement challenged traditional gender roles fought for reproductive rights and aimed to eliminate discrimination and gender-based violence. This activism led to significant changes, including the legalization of contraceptives, access to educational and career opportunities, and the dismantling of discriminatory laws.³⁵

From the Islamic perspective, women's emancipation was revolutionary to all values of pre-Islamic paganism and Western values. The status of women in Islam is something unique and

³⁰Merriam Webster, “emancipation”, accessed on 15/08/2023; <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

³¹F. Eric. "The Meaning of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation." *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 2 (1994): 435-460. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=F.+Eric+the+meaning+of+freedom+in+the+age+of+civilization&btnG=

³²Y. Arat “From Emancipation to Liberation: The Changing Role of Women in Turkey's Public Realm”. *Journal of International Affairs*. (Oct,2000)107. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=Y.+Arat+%E2%80%9CFrom+Emancipation+to+Liberation%3A+The+Changing+Role+of+Women+in+Turkey%27s+Public+Realm%E2%80%9D.+Journal+of+International+Affairs&btnG=

³³K. Lišková, Sex under socialism: From emancipation of women to normalized families in Czechoslovakia. *Sexualities*. 2016 Feb;19(1-2):211-35. https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=31.%09K.+Li%C5%A1kov%C3%A1%2C+Sex+under+socialism%3A+From+emancipation+of+women+to+normalized+families+in+Czechoslovakia.+Sexualities&btnG=

³⁴S.D. O'Connor, History of the women's suffrage movement, the. *Vand. L. Rev.*, 49, p.657. 1996.

³⁵Avdela, Efi, and Angelika Psarra. "Engendering 'Greekness': Women's Emancipation and Irredentist Politics in Nineteenth-Century Greece." *Mediterranean Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (2005): 67-79.

has no similarity in any other system, culture, civilization, or religion of the world.³⁶ Islam is the only religion that gives recognition to the rights of women economically, socially, educationally, and politically.³⁷ In realizing this, Islam gives women rights and privileges which they have never enjoyed under any other religion or constitutional system. Many of these rights were not given to women in the West until the 20th century, which accounted for one thousand, four hundred years later.³⁸ Therefore the call of some for supposed women's emancipation is nothing but a call to the quenching of their impulses and satisfaction of their desire. No legislation treats women with as much equity, honor, and humanity as Islam. The status of women in Islam is esteemed and honored, befitting of her essence. This is against the call and claim of some Muslim women such as Zainah Anwar, Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Riffat Hasan, and Asma Barlas among others that Islam has enslaved women, hence calling for Emancipation. By this, the view of Bint Al-Shāṭi will be needed to rescue the Muslim women from the obnoxious notion.

Muslim and Islamic Feminism: A Comparative Analysis

Feminism has been a major cankerworm in the religion of Islam which has led to various debates and disparities among the Muslim *Ummah*. It has been a controversial topic that has made several Muslim women deviate from their primary role as a caregiver to clamor for public acknowledgment and Gender equality. Scholars like Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas and other Muslim feminist have generated a lot of controversies in their bid to prove their views as regard the status of women in Islam.³⁹ They agitate for Gender equality and a patriarchy-free Islamic world. They opined that the Islamic rulings and injunctions are biased and favor the male folk. In their opinion, most of the verses in the Qur'ān are being misinterpreted by men to suit them, hence, the need for re-interpretation of Islamic text to suit contemporary issues especially relating to women.⁴⁰ This idea led to the argument that it is not possible to reconcile the Islamic faith with women's rights while others believe that Islamic feminism is a Western concept that is not compatible with Muslim societies.

The term Islamic feminism itself was not created by Muslim women engaging in feminist acts rather the label was created by observers who noticed the development of a feminist paradigm in the Muslim world. Islamic feminism and Muslim feminism are often used interchangeably to address female feminists. However, with the recent activities of Muslim feminists, there is a glaring difference between the two. The primary difference between a secular Muslim feminist and an Islamic feminist lies in their approaches toward feminism and the role of Islam in the feminist movement. This could be argued in the following:

Concerning their approaches, secular Muslim feminist advocates equal right and opportunities for women without necessary consideration of religious proof, rather

³⁶Sattar, "Women's Role under Islam (New Delhi; Random Publications, 2012) 2. <http://www.islamicpamphlet.com> accessed on 27, May 2018

³⁷R.F Bankole, "A Study of Selected Gender Issues Relating to Women in contemporary Nigerian society from an Islamic perspective", (Unpublished Masters Dissertation, Department of Islamic Studies, Faculties of Humanities and Social Science Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, 2019) 36

³⁸Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam*, (Chennai: One-word Publication 2011) 26

³⁹R.Raji, "A Contemporary Study Selected Feminist Issues in Amina Wadud's inside the Gender Jihad," (Unpublished Masters Dissertation, Department of Islamic Studies, faculties of Humanities and Social Science Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, 2019) 30

⁴⁰M. Badran, *Feminism in Islam, Secular and religious convergences...* 17

consideration is given to secular ideas, rights and norms. On the contrary, an Islamic feminist argues for rights and opportunities for women in line with available religious proof.⁴¹

It is also worthy to say that secular Muslim feminist have an individualistic approach to feminism, often emphasizing their agency or choice. They may view Islam as part of their cultural and personal identity but do not necessarily seek to re-interpret Islamic teachings or play an active role within religious institutions in their feminist activism. They often rely on human rights frameworks and Western feminist theories as sources of authority and advocacy, such that they draw inspiration from various feminist movements and theories, without necessarily prioritizing religious texts and teachings. Lastly, secular Muslim feminists often see the concept of gender equality and women's emancipation as something new in Islam and it's the right of their movement to challenge and fight for it.⁴²

On the contrary, Islamic feminists actively engage with Islamic religious texts and traditions to promote gender equality within Muslim communities believing that Islamic teachings can provide a framework for gender justice. They acknowledge Islamic texts, teachings, and traditions as the primary source of authority for their activism. They aim to reconcile their feminist belief with Islamic principles and promote the freedom and rights Islam has granted women. Therefore, Islamic feminists consider gender equality and women's emancipation to be a concept deeply rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and the exemplary sunnah of the prophet Muhammad.⁴³

Brief information on Bint al-Shāṭi

ʿĀ'isha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bint Al-Shāṭi was born in Damiet, on the Nile Delta in 1913.⁴⁴ Her early education was quite traditional. Schooled by her father, an ʿĀlim who studied at al-Azhar (Cairo) and who did not allow her to attend public school, she eventually attended a public institution from which she graduated as a teacher of Arabic language in 1929.⁴⁵ In 1936, she attended Fu'ad University which later became Cairo University where she completed a PhD in 1950 with a dissertation on the Arab poet, Abū ʿAlā' al-Maʿarrī (d. 1058).⁴⁶ She then became a Professor of Arabic literature at the ʿAyn al-Shams University in Cairo (1951).⁴⁷ Moreover, during her academic career, she was a Visiting Professor at several Arab universities: Islamic University in Umm Durmān and Khartūm University (1967–70) (Sudan), al-Qarawiyyīn University and the Faculty of Theology in Fez (1970), Beirut University (1971) and Algier University.⁴⁸

ʿĀ'isha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān took the pen name Bint al-Shāṭi to conceal her literary activities from her father.⁴⁹ During her lifetime, she wrote more than sixty books and articles on Qur'ānic studies, literary critiques, essays, novels, biographies, autobiographies, columns in the Egyptian

⁴¹M. Badran, *Feminism in Islam, Secular and religious convergences...*30

⁴²Ahmad A. *Islamic feminism contradiction in terms?* New Delhi: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung; 2015 May.

⁴³Marcotte, Roxanne D. "The Qur'an in Egypt: Bint al-Shatī'on Women's Emancipation," *Coming to Terms with the Qur'an: A Volume in Honor of Professor Issa Boullata, ed. Khaleel Mohammed and Andrew Rippin (North Haledon, NJ: Islamic Publications International, 2008): 179-208.*

⁴⁴Wadad Afif Kadi, "Biography of Aishat Bint Shāṭi", Accessed on 27th September 2020; <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>

⁴⁵Wadad Afif Kadi, "Biography of Aishat Bint Shāṭi" ...

⁴⁶Wadad Afif Kadi, "Biography of Aishat Bint Shāṭi" ...

⁴⁷ʿĀ'ishah bint Shāṭi; *ʿAla al-Jisr*, AutoBiography of Bint Shāṭi(Cairo:al-Hay'au al-Misriyyah li al-Kitab,1986) 5

⁴⁸ʿĀ'ishah bint Shāṭi; *ʿAla al-Jisr*, AutoBiography of Bint Shāṭi

⁴⁹ʿĀ'ishah bint Shāṭi; *ʿAla al-Jisr*, AutoBiography of Bint Shāṭi

magazine al-Hilāl and newspaper articles al-Ahrām, short stories and critical editions of classical texts, receiving numerous distinctions for her literary activities.⁵⁰ More than 40 of her works are dedicated to Qur'ānic and Islamic studies. Bint al-Shāṭi was a determined woman, unafraid of voicing her opinion.⁵¹

ʿĀishah bint Shāṭi married Shaykh Amin al-Khūli, her teacher at Cairo University during her undergraduate years and who also supervised her Master's Degree. He was a Professor of Qur'ānic Exegesis.⁵² ʿĀishah Bint Al-Shāṭi serves as a role model for all Muslim women in the world as she was the second modern female scholar to undertake Qur'ānic Exegesis after Nusret Begum and contributed to the development of Islamic knowledge. Professor Abdul Ali Hamad speaks about her, she explained some certain *Sūrah* of the Qur'ān in details that are not clear to people and she tried to interpret it in a way that would be understood and also used literacy skills to draw out the female voices within the Qur'ān and the life of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH without broaching towards a feminist critique.⁵³

ʿĀishah died of a heart attack following a stroke in Cairo on December 1st, 1998 at the age of 85 years old. She donated all her library to research purposes and a statue was built in her honor in Cairo.⁵⁴

Bint Al-Shāṭi's Concept of Equality and Emancipation

The feminist movement among Muslims can often be viewed from two perspectives; the western perspective and the Islamic perspective. As for the Western perspective that most Muslim feminists are inclined to, its scope is wide because of the mixing of all Western feminist ideas to meet up with Islamic customs. As for the Islamic perspective, it works within the boundaries of basic Islamic beliefs. One of the pioneers of this feminism is Nawwal Al-Saa'dawi who advocates women's rights within the Islamic framework. Another famous writer is Aisha ʿAbd al-Rahman Bint Al Shāṭi who was not only a writer but also a thinker, professor, and researcher. She was a rare and unique example of a Muslim woman who liberated herself through Islam. She recorded wonderful examples of women's liberation according to the feminist movement without exceeding the limits and provision of Islamic belief

Aisha ʿAbdur-rahman Bint Al Shāṭi, an Egyptian exegete, made significant contributions to the cause of gender equality and women's emancipation within the Islamic framework. Bint Al Shāṭi argues that the Qur'an explicitly emphasizes equal worth and dignity of all human beings. She believes that men and women have equal right and affirm that it is a principle that is enshrined in Islamic scriptures. She rejected any interpretations that sought to subordinate or discriminate against women, highlighting verses that promote justice fairness, and mutual respect between men and women⁵⁵: e.g., Q. 33:35; Q. 40:40; Q. 48:5–6; Q. 4:124, etc.

⁵⁰ʿĀishah bint Shāṭi; *ʿĀla al-Jisr*, AutoBiography of Bint Shāṭi

⁵¹Marcotte, Roxanne D. "The Qur'an in Egypt: Bint al-Shati'on Women's Emancipation,"....181

⁵²Abdul Ali Hamad "Aishat Bint Shāṭi", Accessed on 4th March 2020; <http://kfiip.org/professorAishaAbd-Rahman>

⁵³JamiyyatDirāsīt-Mar'ahwal-Haḍārah, Bint Ash-Shāṭi, Khitābul-Mu-r'ah 'Am Khitābul-ʿAsr? Mudārisat fi Geneologiyāh an-Nakhbul al-thakōfiyah...25

⁵⁴L. Van Zoonen; Feminist theory and information technology. Media, Culture & Society. 1992 Jan;14(1):9-29.

⁵⁵Mhd. Syahnan. "Reconsidering Gender Roles In Modern Islam: A Comparison of the Images of Muslim Women Found in the Works of Sayyid Qutb and ʿĀishah ʿAbd Rahmān." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 6, no. 10, 2017, pp. 37–42.

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَالْقَانِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّابِغِينَ وَالصَّابِغَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

Translation: Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fast women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them, Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward. (Al-Ahzab 33:35)

مَنْ عَمِلَ سَيِّئَةً فَلَا يُجْزَى إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَمَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ يُرْزَقُونَ فِيهَا بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

Translation: «Whoever does an evil deed will not be recompensed except by the like thereof; but whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - those will enter Paradise, being given provision therein without account» (Al-Ghafir 40:40)

Bint Al Shāṭi grounds her notion of gender equality using the exegesis. She argues that a close reading of the verses of the Qur'an shows no notion of inequality between sexes. She points to specific verses:

قُلْ لَا يَسْتَوِي الْخَبِيثُ وَالطَّيِّبُ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكَ كَثْرَةُ الْخَبِيثِ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَا أُولِيَ الْأَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

Translation: «Say, "Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you." So fear Allah, O you of understanding, that you may be successful» (al-Ma'idah 5:100)

لَا يَسْتَوِي الْقَاعِدُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ أُولِي الضَّرَرِ وَالْمُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ دَرَجَةً وَكُلًّا وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ الْحُسْنَىٰ وَفَضَّلَ اللَّهُ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

Translation: «Not equal are those believers remaining [at home] - other than the disabled - and the mujahideen, [who strive and fight] in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives. Allah has preferred the mujahideen through their wealth and their lives over those who remain [behind], by degrees. And to both Allah has promised the best [reward]. But Allah has preferred the mujahideen over those who remain [behind] with a great reward». (Al-Nisa' 4:95)

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

Translation: "Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Then will you not give thought?"» (Al-An'am 6:50)

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ۗ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

Translation: Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding» (Al-Zumar 39:9)

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَلَا الْمُسِيءَ ۗ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ

Translation: «And not equal are the blind and the seeing, nor are those who believe and do righteous deeds and the evildoer. Little do you remember» (Al-Ghafir, 40:58)

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ

Translation: «Not equal are the blind and the seeing» (Fatir 35:19)

In establishing her arguments, Bint Al Shāṭi focuses on the phrases *la yastawī*, *ḥalyastawī*, and *wa ma yastawī* to denote the area in which the Qurʾān discusses inequality. Four of the six verses she quoted pertains to religious aspect while two of them appeal to knowledge and intelligence. She uses these verses to circumscribe the moral and religious spheres the Islamic concept of equality encompasses and which articulates in terms of religious rights and responsibilities that both women and men have towards Allah. She concludes that the Qurʾān delineates differences only in terms of good versus bad, belief and disbelief, knowledge and ignorance, guided or lost. She states thus:

The extent of equality or its non-existence in the Book of Islam is by what is good or what is bad, with faith or unbelief, with being rightly guided or being led astray, with effort and exertion or abstention and prohibition, with knowledge or ignorance. It is not by masculinity and femininity.⁵⁶

Although Bint Al Shāṭi was not known as an active feminist she often discusses the issue of women bitterly and she explored some of the social problems that women face⁵⁷. Furthermore, Bint Al Shāṭi believes that the perceived gender equality by modern Muslim feminists is misconstrued. She believes that gender equality in Islam does not mean that men and women are the same or that they have identical roles and responsibilities. She acknowledges the inherent biological and physiological differences between men and women and recognizes that they may have different strengths, capacities, and roles in society. Gender equity rather than absolute equality is emphasized. Considering the unique qualities and needs of both genders she explains:

The new woman has truly liberated her understanding of this equality. For her, the matter is unambiguous and does not get mistaken for a transformation that eliminates the natural distinctions between male and female and the social distinctions between man and woman. For her, equality does not go beyond the [religious] rights and the corresponding duties (*wājibāt mutakāfaʿa*). The man remains a man, and the woman remains a woman. None of the two genders is transformed and becomes an in-between! The new conscious Muslim woman does not conceive that there exists a competition or an antagonism between her and man. This is

⁵⁶Bint Al Shāṭi: *Al-Mafhūm al-Islāmī li-taḥrīr al-marʿa* (Khartoum, Cairo 1967) 12

⁵⁷Marcotte, *The Qurʾān in Egypt: Bint al-Shati on Women's Emancipation*

because competition only occurs between two contenders, and dispute only occurs between those who hold animosity towards one another or disagreements. We, liberated contemporary women, believe that man and woman are complementary (*mutakāmilān*). Each one of them needs the other to realize his/her perfect existence. Husband and wife are partners, founders of one social cell, companions in a life-long journey whose common life is realized with a single pulse. They become united in agreement, harmony, and complementarity. They do not split on account of a struggle over power or authority. They do not perceive that equality (*musāwāh*) clashes with the logic of nature (*fiṭra*) and natural laws (*qānūnṭabīʿa*) that recognize complete equality neither between a man and another man nor between a woman and another woman, to say the least of the recognition of it between the two sexes.⁵⁸

Bint Al Shāṭi criticizes non-Islamic concepts of equality that sever Muslim women from their religious rights and duties. She believes that this foreign-imported gender equality constitutes yet another attack on Islam by the Orientalists. She severely criticizes;

Some of us continue to mistake the meaning of freedom and what it entails. They do not distinguish between the state of being emancipated and the state of [moral] disintegration, between equality (*musāwāh*) and transformation [of genders], between liberty and licentiousness. Some of us continue in this matter, those for whom the manifestations of their freedom and their progress are reduced either to being a loaned, foreign merchandise which transforms the purity of her origin or its retrograde understanding, as residues of the society of the harem⁵⁹

Bint Al Shāṭi further calls the attention of contemporary Muslim women to the fact that Islam is not the problem but the solution. She advises that Muslim women must rediscover the true meaning of Islamic teachings that have been lost at the hands of erroneous interpretation. She defines humanity as women's and men's equal religious duties and responsibilities she states.

Today, if we exercise our essential and fundamental right in life, this is not something that befalls upon us or [something] foreign and imported, it is rather the Book of Islam in us that does not allude at all, by near or far, to the story of the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam. Rather, it establishes that we all come from a single soul (*nafs*), and it refuses to deny the humanity (*insāniyya*) of woman, similar to the humanity of man, and in conformity with the unity of the origin: "O people! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty towards Allah in Whom ye claim [your rights] of one another, and towards the wombs [that bear you]. Lo! Allah hath been a watcher over you" [Q. 4:1]. Muslim women's freedom goes back to this established origin. According to the Islamic concept, it consists in the perfection of the humanity of women, regarding everything related to this humanity among the rights, what they carry of religious duties (*takālif*), and what follows from these. Our understanding of this Islamic concept of our freedom, of our rights and what follows from these is what distinguishes us from the generation of the harem.⁶⁰

Bint Ash-Shāṭi notes that equality has been conceived as either a reversal of natural conditions, a transformation of genders and a deterioration of the natural equilibrium of values, or as a foreign imported concept that transforms the real origin of the concept, that is, its

⁵⁸Bint Al Shāṭi; *Al-Mafhūm al-Islāmī li-taḥrīr al-mar'a*.....,6-7

⁵⁹Bint Al Shāṭi; *Al-Mafhūm al-Islāmī li-taḥrīr al-mar'a*.....,13

⁶⁰Bint Al Shāṭi; *Al-Mafhūm al-Islāmī li-taḥrīr al-mar'a*.....,10

Islamic roots. The former is a retrograde, understanding of equality fostered by a demand for the elimination of all distinctions between the genders and for complete equality at the expense of women's true nature. The latter, a foreign understanding imported from the West transforms the true essence of equality between the genders that is, in fact, an independent Islamic concept, established fourteenth centuries ago in the Book of Islam, the seal of the divine messages.⁶¹

In addition, Bint al-Shāṭi analyzes women's emancipation in terms of generations. The early generation who are illiterates and the generation of the new women have witnessed the tremendous transformation of society. In her view emancipation or freedom will mean different things for these two generations. Bint al-Shāṭi shows a keen awareness of women's social role, during the pre-Islamic times, women had no worth or status and were viewed as objects in most civilizations, including pre-Islamic Arabia. She explains that before the advent of Islam, women were considered shameful as female children were buried alive, prostitution was rampant, divorce was only in the hands of the husband, inheritance was from the strong, and oppression against women was widespread. Islam came and abolished these traits. She affirms that the true foundation of Women's emancipation is Islam.

It is important to note here that Bint al-Shāṭi conceived of women's freedom as an integral part of the Islamic paradigm and criticizes non-Islamic concepts of emancipation and equality that expose and restrict Muslim women from their religious roles.⁶² She highlighted the roles and achievements of many female companions of the Prophet who were active in various fields of knowledge, politics, and social affairs in her collection of write: *The Mother of the Prophet* (1966), *The Wives of the Prophet* (1959), *The Daughters of the Prophet* (1963), *Sayyida Zaynab, the Heroine of Karbalā'* (1972), *Sakīna, the Daughter of Ḥusayn* (1965) and *al-Khansā: a poet converted to Islam by Prophet Muhammad* (1957).⁶³

Bint al-Shāṭi presents a caricatured picture of freedom enjoyed by Western women that amounts to mere sexual permissiveness and objectification of women's bodies where women become solely sexual objects cut from their Islamic heritage. Women have become, in the name of freedom, captives to the whims and desires of men in modern times. This is nothing but a fraudulent freedom and misconceiving glimmer of light. She says:

They have freed themselves from an old slavery, to fall prey to more repulsive and oppressive contemporary slavery. The nature of this stage is that the burden of it be without mercy for the new woman and that she pays a high price for all her wrong steps on the path or errors in understanding her errors or errors of society.⁶⁴

She recommends that the only way to avoid numerous sacrifices is to forever give up the imagined and strange dispute between woman and man or between woman and society. She claims that this cannot be realized thus education becomes a necessity for the realization of one's true humanity. Bint al-Shati advocated the empowerment of women through education. She argues that the ability to speak, to understand and to reason are specific to the human species. The ability to acquire knowledge is therefore an integral part of humanity. Consequently, access to knowledge cannot be denied to women. To do so is un-Islamic she explains thus:

⁶¹Marcotte, *The Qur'an in Egypt: Bint al-Shati on Women's Emancipation* ...190

⁶²Marcotte, *The Qur'an in Egypt: Bint al-Shati on Women's Emancipation* ...189

⁶³Marcotte, *The Qur'an in Egypt: Bint al-Shati on Women's Emancipation* ...193

⁶⁴Bint Al Shāṭi, *Al-Mafhūm al-Islāmī li-taḥrīr al-mar'a*12

Today, we consider knowledge a substantial element among the components of our humanity, in the sense that this humanity does not become complete in us and for us if its conditions of speech and reason, by which [we] are raised above the animal species, are not realized. And they share the same right as us in our common animality, which is constituted of nourishment, refuge, care, and reproduction! From where comes this right we possess? It is not the modern West that has lent it to us. It is rather an established religious right that belongs to a woman by her humanity. The first verse of Revelation was revealed calling attention to knowledge as the exclusive possession of human beings: “Read: In the name of thy Lord Who created. Creates human beings from a clot. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous. Who teaches by the pen. Teacheth human beings which they knew not” [Q. 96:1–5].⁶⁵

Moreover, Bint Al Shāṭi emphasized the importance of education for women, as it allows them to acquire knowledge, develop their skills, and participate fully in society. She advocated equal access to education for both genders, challenging social norms that limited women's educational opportunities. By empowering women through education, she believed that they could achieve their full potential and contribute to the betterment of their communities. ʿĀ'isha Bint Al Shāṭi also emphasized economic emancipation as a means to empower women. She argued that women should have equal opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, and financial independence. By being economically self-reliant, women can assert their agency, make decisions, and break free from traditional gender roles that limit their autonomy.

The idea that men are the managers of women's affairs (*Qawāmah/Qiwāmah*) also comes to the fore in the discussion of Bint Al Shāṭi on gender roles. She quotes:

وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

Translation: And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable. But the men have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise» (Al-Baqarah 2:229)

She asserts that the idea of men being in charge of women is traditionally corroborated by such verses. She does not reject the notion of being in charge but refuses to accept man's absolute authority over women. She argues that male guardianship over women in the *Sharī'ah* is not absolute but conditional on the phrase *bi ma faddalla hub ba'dahum 'ala b' wa bima anfaqu min amwalihim*. In the absence of this condition, a man loses his right of guardianship. She states as follows:

The time has come for men to understand that the object of the “being in charge” that occurs in the Qur'ān is not merely a matter of maleness like in inheritance: “To the male the equivalent of the share of two females” [Q. 4:11]. Rather, this “being in charge,” according to the Islamic concept, is a right belonging to manhood. Likewise, the time has come for our men to understand that their religious legal right of “being in charge” of us is not absolute—of men, in general, over women, in general. It is rather restricted [as mentioned in the Qur'ān]: “Because Allah hath made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend wealth [for the support of women]” [Q. 4:34]. Therefore, if a man is unable to fulfill this restriction, his right of “being in charge” disappears: “And men are a degree above them” [Q. 2:228], but, [only] after

⁶⁵Bint Al Shāṭi, *Al-Mafhūm al-Islāmī li-taḥrīr al-mar'a*16

the origin of equality is established: “And [women] have rights similar to those [of men] according to what is equitable” [Q. 2:228].⁶⁶

Man’s responsibility is to ensure the material and financial well-being of his family. The religious duty of the husband is to be the provider of the household. She recommends that women should willingly accept the degree (*daraja*) of preference over them that Allah attributed to men. They should not consider this as a humiliation since the Qur’an had placed degrees of preference among its prophets too.

From the above, Aisha Abdur-Rahman Bint Al Shāṭi holds pristine or traditional views of Islam influenced by existing cultural practices that may differ from mainstream feminist ideals. She prioritizes her religious roles and identity and finds empowerment within her faith while adhering to its gender roles and practices. Therefore Aisha Abdur-Rahman Bint Al Shāṭi’s can be indicated as a fore runner of Islamic feminism even though she outrightly rejected to be termed a feminist. The ambiguous stances adopted by Bint al-Shāṭi may be the reason why, for some, she cannot be considered a feminist, while she is for others, despite her negligible role in the history of Islamic feminism. But then again, Bint al-Shāṭi states that she fought and struggled all her life to obtain more rights.

Conclusion

So far, an attempt has been made to discuss Feminism as a theory of political, economic, and social equality of the sexes. However, it is not just a theory but a collection of various ideas and actions which have similar objectives of ensuring equality between men and women. With the expansion of human rights and feminist discourse in the twentieth century many Muslim women came to see certain interpretations of women as unjust and discriminatory and began to challenge them from within: By the 1980s this challenge had acquired a label of Islamic feminism which at the time seemed a contradiction in terms. In a bid to discuss this, the paper analyses the concepts of feminism, gender equality and women's emancipation both in Islam and Western ideas. The paper further discusses feminism theory and its types. In a quest to save Muslim women in the face of feminism, a biographical sketch of Aisha Abdur-Rahman Bint Al Shāṭi, an Egyptian exegete was given, and her significant contributions to the cause of women's emancipation and gender equality within the Islamic framework. The paper also highlights misconceptions and arguments surrounding Muslim and Islamic feminism. It has also been discussed that Bint Al Shāṭi argues that gender equality, women's emancipation, and freedom have been an integral part of Islam. She thought that gender equality, freedom and liberation by modern Muslim feminists are misconstrued and hence, capable of misleading them from the pristine Islamic beliefs and robbing them of the rights Islam guarantees them. She therefore challenges erroneous re-interpretation of the Qur’ān by modern Muslim feminists.

Taking cognizance of the whole discourse, the paper proffers the following recommendations:

- i. Sensitization of Muslim women on the dangers of using their intellect in explaining some major rules and dictates under Islamic law.
- ii. Muslim women must rediscover the true meaning of Islamic teachings that have been lost at the hands of centuries of erroneous interpretation.

⁶⁶Bint Al Shāṭi ,*Al-Mafhūm al-Islāmī li-taḥrīr al-mar’a*12

- iii. Women's leadership in Islam is not encouraged in areas that are sensitive to women's natural disposition and limitation.
- iv. contemporary Muslim women should engage in standard Islamic education to benefit and protect the women gathering and the generality of Muslim *Ummah*
- v. Muslim women should do away with the spirit of the inferiority complex that has been proposed by the Western feminism theory.
- vi. Contribute to the development of their society with their knowledge and skills within the provisions made by Islam

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