

# Rise and expansion of islam essay



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The rise and expansion of Islam has had a significant impact on the role and rights of women throughout history. Since its origin in the seventh century until modern times, the Muslim faith has somewhat broadened, but has mostly restricted women's rights in numerous Islamic communities. The history of Muslim women is complex, as it involves many advances and declines in numerous locations, such as Egypt, Afghanistan, and Iran, concerning several subjects, including both civil and social rights. Thus, in general, the rights of Islamic women did not improve significantly over time, instead, conditions remained the same or became worse for women as Islam evolved and spread as a world religion.

From the beginning of Islam, women were somewhat equal, but society was still mainly patriarchal. Sections of the Quran state that both women and men are both believers in Allah, regardless of gender, but they should also be protected so that they will not be hurt (Doc 1). Muhammad also had equal views of men and women, as many strong women during his time, including his wife Khadijah, played important roles in the development of Islam (Doc 2). This excerpt from a widely used world history textbook can be trusted as an accurate source because the author, Peter Stearns, is an educated, well-known professor proficient in his studies. However, according to Document 3, men were still seen as superior to women, and they had control over their wives.

This specific document provides many different sources, including an excerpt from the Quran, two politicians, Ibn Umar and Abu Ali Talq ibn Ali, and the point of view of a woman, Umm Salamah. These widely spread sources show that the belief of superior men was generally accepted in the Muslim world.

However, the excerpts are heavily Islamic, and may have been influenced by others, including Muhammad himself. These relatively early documents clearly depict the original Muslim view of women, providing a basis to which later developments can be compared.

As the Muslim empire grew and evolved, the role of women fluctuated and changed as well. The varying rights of women in different social classes can be seen in an Abbasid wall painting from the ninth century. While the slave girls in the harem demonstrate the seclusion of women during this period, the fact that they are unveiled show that there still is some freedom in the dress of lower-class women (Doc 4). After the fall of the Abbasids, the Ottoman Turks rose to power. Ogier de Busbecq, a European diplomat who lived in 16th century Istanbul, described the rights of Turkish women in his Turkish Letters.

Women were hidden away from most males besides their direct relatives, and also had restrictions regarding household life and divorce settlements (Doc 5). However, de Busbecq's attitude may be biased, as he was a non-Muslim European who may have been shocked or overwhelmed at the vast differences in Islamic culture, which may have led to exaggeration or focus on negative aspects of women's rights. Thus, while Muslim men and women were originally seen as essentially equal, as Islam grew and developed, women became increasingly more secluded and unequal in terms of rights.

More recently, there have been attempts to give more rights to Islamic women. For example, after over 50 years of women's rights groups fighting for fairer treatment in Egypt, women received the right to vote in 1962.

Qasim Amin is credited with the beginning of this movement after the publication of his book *The Emancipation of Women*, where he called for simple reforms regarding civil rights (Doc 6). Additionally, another advancement occurred in 1935: as a result of Reza Sha Pahlevi's controversial attempts to "enlist women in the resurrection of Islam" and ultimately change the status of women, the veil was finally banned entirely (Doc 8). These changes show that regardless of backwards movements in women's rights, attempts are still being made to modernize and resolve this significant element of Islam. However, Islamic women still do not possess the freedom that men have.

For example, after the overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the rise of an Islamic republic in 1979, Iranian women's rights declined drastically, as can be seen in the political cartoon from *The Minneapolis Star*. In this cartoon, a wilted flower represents Iranian women's rights, and a devious Muslim man is seen in the background, which presumably symbolizes the new Islamic government led by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Thus, the creation of this new government has greatly diminished whatever women's rights were previously established in Iran (Doc 9). This source, an American newspaper, may not be as accurate as, for example, a Muslim source because of a general American unfamiliarity with Islam. Princess Ashraf Pahlavi, a high-class Islamic woman, described her experiences as a Muslim female during this period in her memoir *Faces in a Mirror: Memoirs from Exile*. This specific excerpt depicts the immediate obedience of high-class Islamic women to their male superiors, despite their own intentions (Doc 10). Thus, although there were sparse attempts to reform the status of Islamic women in the

20th century, in general, the role of women remained the same, or in some cases it was even worse than before.

One of the main disputes in the battle of Islamic women's rights is the conflict over dress. According to a popular Islamic leader and Egyptian television personality, the sight of women is so alluring that it can be "intolerably distracting to men" and can "even lead to social disorder." This is where the Islamic belief in veiling arises, as it is in order to prevent temptation and maintain proper social behavior (Doc 7). Additionally, the controversy over clothing was one of Reza Shah Pahlevi's main battles. However, eventually, women were allowed to appear in school without the chador, a thick head covering, in 1934, and the veil was completely banned by the government in 1935 (Doc 8).

However, strictly modest Muslim dress is still apparent in some Islamic states, such as Afghanistan, where women wear burqas, bulky garments that cover most of their bodies, and do acknowledge others in public, or they risk a beating by their husbands. This strict protocol shows that even today, Islamic women are still not treated fairly or justly in some Islamic nations (Doc 11). Thus, although some progress has been made regarding the freedom of clothing for Islamic women, their rights are still not up to the standards of other modern states, even in the 21st century.

All eleven documents clearly show the evolution of Islamic women through the views of many different people. However, because most of the more recent writings are from outside sources, such as American newspapers and scholarly works, additional documents featuring the perspectives of Islamic

people from this period would effectively provide a balance of outlooks on the role of Islamic women over time. These documents would provide an opinion on the subject from those who directly participated in Islamic society. Additionally, documents from lower classes of women such as slaves or concubines may act as insight on the differences in treatment between various classes of Islamic women.

The status of Islamic women is a prime example of continuity and change over time. Many elements of gender inequality have been addressed during this extensive struggle, including voting rights and freedom of dress. From the time of the prophet Muhammad, where women had a more prominent position in society, to the height of the classical empire, where Abbasid and Turkish women grew more secluded, and finally modern times, where reformation attempts were made in the interest of women, but the general negative view towards Muslim females remained constant, Islamic women's rights have been a major focus for much of history. Thus, while Islam has been one of the most radically changing religions in the world, the restriction of women's rights has, for the majority, grown more strict and controlled during the development, rise, and expansion of the Islamic faith.