

## **Interpreting Women's Emancipation in the Context of Islamic Multiperspectivism: An Analytical Approach**

**Dewi Widiyanti<sup>1\*</sup>, Muammar Firdaus<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Dinas Pendidikan Dayah Aceh, Indonesia, <sup>2</sup>Universitas Lampung

**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate, analyze, and establish a model for the study of women's emancipation from an Islamic perspective. The research methodology employs a qualitative interpretive paradigm, utilizing literature-based techniques. Data for the research was sourced from 50 different materials, including books, research findings, and digital news. The data search incorporated keywords such as women's emancipation, gender, and Islamic views. The results indicate that emancipation studies are conducted through a multi-perspective approach encompassing historical perspectives, Islamic law perspectives, and Al-Qur'an perspectives. From these three perspectives, it is evident that Islam has elevated the status of women, leading to equality between women and men. This study implies a shift in societal paradigms, recognizing that women deserve opportunities to contribute in all aspects of society. Such functionalization is implemented with consideration for religious norms, social conditions, and individual competencies.

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 Corresponding Author: [dewidiyanti.616@gmail.com](mailto:dewidiyanti.616@gmail.com)



**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah, menganalisis dan menemukan model kajian emansipasi wanita dalam pandangan Islam. Metode penelitian menggunakan paradigma interpretatif kualitatif dengan teknik kepustakaan. Data penelitian diambil dari 50 sumber buku, hasil penelitian maupun berita digital. Pencarian data menggunakan kata kunci emansipasi wanita, gender, pandangan Islam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan kajian emansipasi dilakukan melalui pendekatan multiperspektif antara perspektif sejarah, perspektif hukum Islam dan perspektif Al-Qur'an. Berdasarkan tiga perspektif di atas, terbukti bahwa Islam telah mengangkat derajat kaum wanita, sehingga terjadi kesetaraan antara wanita dengan laki-laki. Penelitian ini berimplikasi terhadap perubahan paradigma masyarakat bahwa wanita layak diberikan kesempatan untuk berkontribusi di segala aspek kemasyarakatan. Fungsionalisasi tersebut dilakukan mempertimbangkan norma agama, kondisi sosial dan kompetensi individu.

**Kata Kunci:**  
*Emansipasi Wanita,  
Gender,  
Multiperspektif, Islam,*

## INTRODUCTION

The prevalent stigma that portrays Islam as discriminatory towards women establishes a detrimental precedent that demands critical confrontation (Rehman, 2020). Scholars specializing in Islamic studies persistently engage in comprehensive research, counteracting the ceaseless misrepresentation of Islam portrayed by missionaries as intolerant towards women (Ennaji, 2022; Saat, 2018).

In the specific context of Indonesia, the subject of gender equality is frequently manipulated by certain factions to marginalize Islam, serving their political agendas (Segal, 2015). Nonetheless, a nuanced understanding of gender, considering its interactional identity within social and cultural spheres, significantly contributes to the development of inclusive political paradigms (Schneider & Bos, 2019).

Wieringa (2015) expounds on the intricate relationship between identity politics and gender issues, which were fervently propagated during the New Order regime (Bessell, 2016). Conservative Muslim entities asserted control over pivotal institutions, leading to a shift in societal dynamics. Under Soeharto's regime, the prevailing power hegemony ostensibly undermined women's societal status (Platt et al., 2018). Although the discourse on

women's rights emerged post-1998, it was subsequently supplanted by a heteronormative narrative propagated through the Family Planning program, thereby relegating women to a subordinate position (Varol, 2020; Warsah, 2019).

The premise that Islamic teachings inherently discriminate between men and women necessitates a thorough examination through an in-depth understanding of the religion's doctrines (Martin, 2017; Sonbol, 2020). An objective approach to the constituent elements of Islamic teachings is requisite for a fair interpretation (Subhan, 2015). The core of Islamic teachings encompasses both absolute and relative aspects (Hessami & da Fonseca, 2020).

The teachings are deemed absolute when they conform to the fundamental principles (ushul) embedded in the Qur'an and Sunnah (Wartini, 2014). Conversely, they are considered relative when they originate from human thought or *ijtihad* (Hulwati, 2015). The realm of thought extends to the interpretation or *furu'iyah* issues. The discourse on *furu'* represents an extension of the primary issues. The dynamic process of *ijtihad* invariably intersects with the prevailing culture in a given locale, resulting in a patrilineal intersection between *ijtihadi* issues and local societal norms (Tahiri, 2019).

The immutable core teachings, derived from *naqli* proofs (Qur'an and Hadith), delineate guidelines and principles promoting gender equality. The interpretation of this equality warrants a re-interpretation to yield an understanding that aligns with contemporary societal progression. Indicatively, this understanding fosters a moderate perspective that strengthens, rather than undermines, the essence of Islamic teachings.

## METHODS

This research employs a qualitative methodology, with a focus on literature review as a primary technique. The principal resources for this investigation are derived from an array of books, scholarly journals, and fatwas addressing women-related issues. Data were extracted from 50 references using key terms such as emancipation, gender, equality, Islamic viewpoints, and women. The accumulated data was then managed using data reduction techniques, followed by a comparative analysis conducted

across three distinct perspectives: Sharia (Islamic Law), historical, and Islamic.

## RESULT

### **The Fundamental Principles and Core Teachings of Islam**

Islam acknowledges teachings that are both absolute and relative. Teachings are classified as absolute when they stem from naqly proofs, specifically the Qur'an and Hadith. Core teachings (ushul) are sourced from the revelations embodied in the Qur'an and Hadith or As-Sunnah. Conversely, teachings are deemed relative when they are a product of human reasoning (ijtihad) pertaining to the elaboration and interpretation (furu') of the implementation of these core teachings (Suyuti, 1959).

In discussions concerning the furu' of Islamic teachings, they invariably intersect with social realities, particularly culture. The interactive pattern between religion and culture engenders a new paradigm wherein the thought process establishes a relational dynamic between religion influencing culture or culture influencing religion in gender studies.

Within the societal system, societal structures give rise to a patriarchal culture. The patrilineal structure, in practice, has been adopted by numerous governments since antiquity and is not directly linked to Islamic teachings. Through the lens of these seemingly patrilineal teachings, it can be inferred that culture exerts an influence on religion. If the inference is made that religion influences culture, it implies that the core religious teachings (ushul) have indeed influenced human culture (May, 2015).

When it is postulated that culture influences religion, it refers to the efforts of human thought or ijtihad. The process of ijtihad, embarked upon by humans, is influenced by various subjective elements such as scholarship, culture, and other social factors (Pulungan & Akbar, 2022).

In the context of research, the understanding of women's emancipation invariably occupies a significant segment. From its inception, Islam has accorded respect to the status of women, recognizing humans in Islam as beings of nobility. Regardless of racial and tribal affiliations, no distinctions are made. In the Islamic perspective, an individual's nobility in the sight of their Lord is determined by their level of piety. Piety entails adherence to religious mandates and refraining from religious prohibitions. Differences in

race and tribe do not factor into an individual's nobility (Ma'unah, 2021). This principle extends to distinctions between rich and poor, rulers and ordinary citizens, and men and women.

The gender discourse, which encompasses issues related to both men and women, is referred to as 'Gender'. In academic discourse, the term 'gender' is defined as a cultural and mental interpretation of sexual differences (men and women) (Marson & McKinney, 2019). Within organizational contexts, gender is typically applied to the division of labor, aligning with the capacities of men and women.

The concept of gender serves to identify disparities between men and women within socio-cultural contexts. Gender issues extend beyond the realm of biological concerns, hence cannot be interpreted literally. The exploration of gender issues in this research is conducted from three perspectives, namely religious, historical, and legal (Subhan, 2015).

### **Gender Equality from a Historical Perspective**

Before the advent of Islam, in the history of ancient Arabia, women's status was greatly disrespected. However, Islam came bringing changes in the aspects of Arab society's life (Atabik, 2016). Women became slaves who could be bought and sold at any time. Women were used as tools to vent lust, and women were not given the opportunity to engage in political education (Cepedello Boiso, 2015). In fact, women were considered as unworthy goods so that female infants at that time were killed. This contrasts with the birth of male babies, which was greeted with joy. Female babies were seen as a disgrace that must be immediately eliminated.

This discriminatory reality of old Arab society is one of the images of jahiliyah culture. Islam then came to restore women's dignity as a noble creature of God. Part of the Al-Qur'an verse about the eradication of such discriminatory efforts includes:

*"And do not marry women whom your fathers married, except what has already passed. Indeed, it was an obscene act and hateful to Allah, and an evil way." (Q.S. An-Nisa': 22)*

*"And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill*

*of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide." (Q.S. An-Nahl: 58-59)*

The reason for the revelation of the verses in Surah An-Nisa and Surah An-Nahl is to provide an understanding that women and men have a balanced position. The verse eliminates the discriminatory culture that develops in society. One of the principles in Islam aims to achieve gender equality between men and women. In another hadith, the purpose of creating women is mentioned:

*"Advise each other to do good to women, for they are created from a bent rib" (H.R. Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Tirmidzi, from Abu Hurairah).*

Hadith cannot be understood textually. Women are not only created from Adam's rib. This textual understanding invites interpretation that women have a lower position than men because they come from men's ribs (Tahiri, 2019). Some scholars explain that the word "rib" can mean metaphor - majazi-. The metaphorical meaning provides an understanding that men are required to be wise in treating women. Wise treatment because considering the difference in tendencies of traits and characters that are not the same between men and women.

Awareness of women's nature provides an understanding that men cannot impose attitudes and wills. On the contrary, if a man is not wise and tends to force women, it will have fatal consequences. Like the difficulty of straightening a bent rib (Shihab, 1996).

Islamic history also shows several events that can be taken as wisdom. The story of how the Prophet treated his wife. The story of the companions in interacting with their wives, and the story of Siti Fatimah as an exemplary woman and also the daughter of the Prophet. The wisdom of the story does not discriminate. On the contrary, the story becomes a picture of how to honor and treat women with respect.

The story of groups of men and women in history is no better than the historical story of the Prophet and the people who lived around him. The records prove recognition, understanding of the purpose, about the existence of equity between men and women. Islamic rules that command to respect

women starting from Mother, Wife and daughter become a consistency of teaching about loyalty to a purpose, that the role of Mother and wife as women has a significant impact in forming the stability of society (Bethmann, 1979).

The Prophet never discriminated against women. Muslims have the same position in front of the Prophet. In fact, women were willing to fight with the Prophet in spreading Islam. Prophet Muhammad was always egalitarian in front of his people. There can be no difference between women and men.

When the Prophet was surprised about the news of the death of a woman who lived around the mosque. After hearing the news from friends, the Prophet then asked to show his grave then pray for it becomes a real picture of the Prophet greatly appreciates women even just ordinary people (Cepedello Boiso, 2015).

In another history during the Abbasid Dynasty, in Delhi, India, a Sultanah named Radiyah held power (634 H./1236 M). Radiyah inherited the throne from her father, Sultan Iltutmish. Radiyah was titled Radiyah al-Dunya wa al-Din and Balqis Jihan for her role in nation-building. The currency inscribed: "Pillar of women, Queen of all time, Sultanah Radiyah binti Shams al-Din Iltutmish" (F. G. Mernissi, 1994).

Shajar al-Durr ascended the Egyptian throne in 648 H./1250 M. Similar to Radiyah, Shajar al-Durr obtained the throne from her husband, Malik al-Salih, the last Ayyubid ruler. The Ayyubid dynasty was founded by Salahuddin Al-Ayyubi (Saladin), the famous crusader hero. Although Shajar al-Durr's reign was not long, her people greatly respected her as a competent and good ruler. Among the recorded prayers uttered by the Muslims during her reign was: "May Allah protect the generous Queen of the Muslims who is blessed with worldliness and faith, the mother of Khalid al-Mu'tasimiyah, the loyal wife of Sultan Malik al-Salih" (F. Mernissi, 1991).

In Yemen, among the many women who held political power, there were two, namely Malukah Asma and Malukah Arwah, who had special criteria as heads of state. It was not uncommon for their names to be mentioned in the sermons in the mosques. This is an honor and respect that is hard to find in any Arab country after the advent of Islam (F. Mernissi, 2023). Asma binti Shihab al-Sulaihiyah (died 480 H./1087 M) ruled Yemen well,

wisely, and impressively. Arwah binti Ahmad al-Sulaihiyah also received absolute criteria as a head of state. She is Asma's daughter-in-law, and the wife of her son Al-Mukarram. Arwah held power for nearly half a century (485-532 H./1091-1138 M.). Both queens received the same honorary title of As-Sayyidah Al-Hurrah (Noble Princess who is free and independent or a female ruler who does not submit to any power) (Hitti, 1996; F. Mernissi, 1996).

The fact of these female rulers proves that Islam does not differentiate the degrees of women and men, this is equality in Islam. If some assumptions or attitudes seem to differentiate between men and women, it is the influence of the still patrilineal culture on Muslim society (Puspita, 2021).

### **Gender Equality from a Sharia (Law) Perspective**

Islamic Sharia has established the principle of emancipation both theoretically and practically (operational). Sharia treats all humans in the same position, whether male, female, rich, poor, old, young, and so on. What is lawful is lawful for all people, what is forbidden is forbidden for all people. Obligatory, sunnah, mubah laws, and so on are also for all levels of the ummah. Likewise, a legal sanction must be imposed and upheld for all people.

The Qur'an affirms that the obligations and rights of women to worship and live religiously as well as enter heaven are the same as men. This affirmation aims to erase previous opinions sourced from various beliefs or religions that believe that religious life and entry into heaven are the monopoly of men. Islam has raised women equal to men both in human dignity (social) and religious dignity. Islamic teaching recognizes full civil rights for women, this is a pride for Muslim women who know that their religion has given them rights, which by the Western world only thirteen centuries later such rights are recognized after their women fought hard demanding emancipation. Meanwhile, in Islam, women's rights are upheld and protected without waiting for demands for emancipation from women.

In Islam, women are also elevated in the eyes of the law, so in principle men and women are equal in the eyes of the law. In the matter of witnessing, the Qur'an affirms the validity of women's testimony, for example in the word of Allah:



*"And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men [available], then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses - so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her." (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 282).*

Understanding the above verse is explained in three discussions, First, women before that did not have this right and their presence as witnesses in court was not considered, then by Islam it was changed by recognizing it as a witness and confirming its validity. Second, the number of one man and two women must be understood correctly according to the context. The passivity of women in many aspects of life compared to men, at that time, made her less mentioned than men.

Intellectual capacity, crucial for tasks requiring meticulous cognition and precision, is contingent on adequate education - an opportunity often unavailable to women historically. Islam acknowledges this shortfall (Quisumbing, 2003) and recognizes the variability in emotional stability between genders. As societal advancements have improved women's quality, intellectual considerations must align with contemporary realities. Islam mandates knowledge-seeking for both genders, underscoring equality.

Historically, women were treated as inheritable property upon a husband's death. Islam abolished this, elevating women's status to inheritors, marking a significant shift from servitude to equality.

The issue of polygamy, prevalent among pre-Islamic Arabs, is often linked to women's issues. With the advent of Islam, this practice dwindled, as indiscriminate polygamy was replaced with limitations and regulations, reflecting societal attitudes towards women at the time.

Different in the teachings of Islam, polygamy can be done with certain limits (4 people). In addition, there is a special requirement which is fairness. The special condition gives consideration if you are not able, do not practice polygamy. Examination of the teachings of the Qur'an substantially is monogamy, which in Surah An Nisa verse 1129 is mentioned:

*"And you will never be able to deal justly between wives even if you strive [for that]." (Q.S. An-Nisa': 129).*

## **Women and Politics**

Islam never restricts political rights only to men. The proof is that many leaders in the Islamic government are women. The significant challenges faced by Muslim women in the Indonesian political arena regarding their ability to find a discursive space to voice their concerns. The prevailing discourses on Islam and gender, often propagated by Muslim male organizations, contribute to this limited space by portraying Islam as a monolithic entity detached from modern gender-egalitarian ideals (Hessami & da Fonseca, 2020).

These dominant discourses reinforce traditional gender roles and norms, marginalizing the experiences and perspectives of Muslim women. By depicting Islam as inherently patriarchal, these discourses relegate women to subordinate positions within society, further excluding them from meaningful participation in political discussions and decision-making processes.

Muslim male organizations play a significant role in perpetuating discourses that emphasize a narrow interpretation of Islamic teachings, aligning with conventional gender hierarchies. This propagation of the idea that Islam and gender-egalitarian principles are incompatible further narrows the discursive space for Muslim women to contest and redefine these narratives.

The ramifications of this restricted discursive space are extensive. Muslim women's voices and issues remain unacknowledged, hindering their capacity to advocate for their rights and contribute to the formulation of inclusive policies. Furthermore, the lack of diverse viewpoints in the political sphere undermines democratic principles of representation and inclusivity.

To rectify this, it is imperative to generate opportunities for Muslim women to reclaim their discursive space within the Indonesian political landscape. This can be accomplished by challenging and expanding the prevailing discourses on Islam and gender, fostering a more nuanced understanding that acknowledges the compatibility of Islam with contemporary gender-egalitarian principles (Hessami & da Fonseca, 2020). Amplifying the voices and experiences of Muslim women is crucial, providing platforms for them to express their concerns and actively partake in shaping policies that impact their lives.

The limited discursive space for Muslim women in the Indonesian political landscape is a consequence of dominant discourses depicting Islam as incompatible with gender-egalitarian principles. By contesting these narratives and creating inclusive platforms for Muslim women to articulate their concerns, we can strive for a more inclusive and representative political landscape that respects the rights and perspectives of all individuals, irrespective of gender or religious affiliation.

The right to leadership is only for men is more influenced by the background of socio-political conditions, customs, and individual tendencies (subjective) so it then affects their perspective and understanding of the texts of the Qur'an and hadith. M. Quraish Shihab opined:

“Understanding the verses of the Qur'an as a response to technological developments is the ease of access to information and knowledge wisely. Social realities and contemporary issues need to be understood from the perspective of Islamic values. The same goes for the opinions of experts or scholars, all of which lead to religious texts.” (Shihab, 2012)

Although the teachings of Islam guarantee women's rights the position of women in Arab countries is not guaranteed. The dictation of rigid norms causes this bias. Mansour, through his research, revealed the fundamental role of culture and politics in reconstructing laws that guarantee human rights, especially women, internationally (Mansour, 2014).

Feillard explained that there are still many people who turn a blind eye and try to deny the advantages bestowed by Allah to women. The influence of a patrilineal culture has indeed reduced and denied the principle of honoring women (Feillard, 2013). Therefore, in the symptomatic flow of change in various parts of the world, Muslims need to review and re-examine assumptions that demean women and return to the principles of Islam that honor women (Feillard & Marcoes, 1998). Men and women must both carry out shared responsibilities and support each other.

In the context of political roles, women are allowed, if they are indeed capable. In other words, the position of women in the nation-state system has been widely opened while keeping in mind that quality remains a measure, as are men (Feillard, 1997).

## Gender Equality from the Perspective of the Qur'an

The essence of human creation is to worship Allah as the Almighty God; therefore humans are called Abdullah - servants of Allah- (Reynolds, 2020). Essentially, humans consist of men and women, both of whom have the same degree in the sight of Allah, what distinguishes them is their piety. To achieve the degree of muttaqin, the Qur'an never distinguishes gender, race, or ethnic group. Allah's servants, both men and women, will each receive a reward from Allah according to the level of their devotion, not their gender. Even if there are issues that give certain specificity to men, it does not make men superior (noble) in the sight of Allah. The specificity is given in the capacity of men as heads of households and members of society who have a greater public and social role when the verses of the Qur'an are revealed. What is taken into consideration is not because of being male or female (Khan, 2022; Shihab, 2010).

In addition to humans as 'Abdullah, humans are also simultaneously Khalīfatullāh fil arḍ (God's caliph on earth). The word Caliph in the Qur'an does not point to a specific gender, race, or ethnic group. Men and women have the same function and role in their capacity as God's caliphs (Ibrahim, 2020). They will be responsible for their caliphate tasks on earth in the same position before Allah. In principle, the duties, and responsibilities of humans as the caliph of Allah are to create prosperity (maslahāt) and preserve and conserve the prosperity of nature.

Islam is a mercy for the universe. Therefore, every Muslim is obliged to realize this mercy in real life. Amid the rampant conflicts and hostilities in this world, Islam must be present as a driving force for peace and harmony, and amid situations of injustice, it must be displayed as a religion that realizes justice and eliminates tyranny. Islam must be present as a force that brings universal prosperity, enlightenment, and progress. This mission of mercy is not only important for the benefit of mankind, but also for the benefit of all God's creatures on this earth, such as animals, plants, the environment, and natural resources (Shihab, 2002).

Next, the Qur'an opens the same opportunities for men and women to achieve achievements from efforts made in various aspects of life. Allah in His word affirms:

*"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do." (Q.S. An-Nahl: 97)*

*"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 fasting 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." (Q.S. Al-Ahzab: 35)*

The verses above are a few of the many verses that speak on the same topic. The verse teaches about the concept of gender equality and provides certainty that an achievement, both in spiritual matters (ukhrāwiy) and professional career affairs (dunyāwiy), should not be monopolized by one gender. Men and women have the same opportunity to achieve optimal achievements. However, due to the strong influence of culture, this ideal concept of the Qur'an necessarily requires a process of understanding and serious socialization in the community to raise awareness.

Seeing, at least a few aspects of the Qur'an's conversation above, we can understand further that the Qur'an has proclaimed the principles of gender equality. There is no difference in degree between men and women in anything, including in marital life. The close bond between men and their wives is clearly defined in the Qur'an with the wording of equality:

*"They (your wives) are a garment for you as you are a garment for them" (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 187).*

In the analysis of the verses of the Qur'an, it was found that the concept of gender equality can be interpreted as the equal position of women and men in the sight of Allah SWT. The verses affirm that both men and women have the status as servants of Allah, and they will receive the same reward for their deeds. The difference between the two lies only in the level of piety or individual piety.

In addition, the Qur'an also shows that women have important responsibilities in the context of life. They are entrusted by Allah SWT to carry and give birth to His children and to be a manifestation of His love. As mothers, women play a central role in meeting the needs of their children and play a role in shaping their character.

In the public sphere, women also have a variety of roles that may exceed what men do. Although active outside the home, they are still responsible for taking care of their children and their families in the home environment. Thus, the privilege or traditional dominance usually associated with men can be shifted to women because of their significant contributions both in public spaces and in the family environment.

From a scientific perspective, this interpretation emphasizes the importance of appreciation for gender equality and recognition of the unique contributions brought by each gender in the social and family context. It reflects the importance of moving beyond traditional gender stereotypes and promoting inclusivity and equal rights for all individuals regardless of their gender.

The teachings of Islam through a multi perspective approach show that Islam respects women and elevates their status. Islamic teachings consider the same between men and women in various matters. A critical study of Islamic teachings notes the existence of the Qur'an and Hadith in the form of basic texts, and on the other hand there is understanding (fiqh) and interpretation which is the result of intellectual work (ijtihad) in understanding basic texts. The text of the Qur'an and Hadith is the final argument that cannot be changed, but the result of understanding the text cannot be said to be final, therefore it is still wide open for reinterpretation. to produce understandings that are under the principles and spirit of the main teachings of Islam.

## CONCLUSION

From a historical viewpoint, Islam has significantly enhanced women's status, as indicated by the comparison between pre-Islamic and post-Islamic conditions. The perspective from Shariah Law indicates an absence of gender discrimination within Islamic jurisprudence. Concurrently, the Qur'anic perspective asserts that Allah invariably positions men and women equally, with no evidence of discrimination within the Qur'an. Comprehending these tripartite perspectives elucidates the esteemed status accorded to women in Islam. Consistently, Islamic doctrines elevate the status of women, thereby affirming their parity with men in executing roles across various professional sectors and societal contexts.

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