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## **REVISITING THE MUSLIM FEMINISTS' DISCOURSE ON GENDER EQUALITY**

### **Abstract:**

The concept of gender deals with women's and men's place in society and social expectations from them. Gender relations vary from society to society and they are shaped in historical process. Gender equality, concisely defined as equal rights, opportunities and treatment between men and women, is yet an on-going contentious concept among Muslim feminists and women activists. Of late, gender studies have garnered a large number of interests from researchers across the globe, not to mention the Muslim World. The awareness of gender and Feminism in Muslim societies emerged by end of 19th century, namely in Middle East countries like Egypt, Turkey and Iran. Initially, Muslim women's movement had been focusing on claiming women's rights in public sector particularly in education, along with the Nationalism campaigns. However, as the Muslim feminist scholarship expands and grows, the discourse is shifted to contending Islamic Law pertaining women, attempting to reinterpret and re-read Islamic sources, and eventually reconstruct the Shari'ah or Islamic Law.

The Muslims by and large are looking into this debatable notion from three standpoints. First, those who advocate total equality between men and women in every spheres of life, regardless of the differences in the natures and traits between both parties, physically and psychologically. Second, at the opposing end those who deny much of women's rights and inevitably practice bias towards women in their customs and traditions, which subsequently create some kind of defensive and rebellious reactions from women. Third, those who advocate the moderate approach in dealing with gender issues, and seeking for the best appealing viewpoint by highlighting the 'complementary idea' in men-women relation. Hence, this paper attempts to revisit the trajectory of Muslim feminists and put forward the discursive notion of gender equality among Muslim scholarships, accentuating the various perspectives and approaches in dealing with it. It proposes that even though gender is not specifically discussed as a distinctive theme in Islam by early Muslim scholars, it nevertheless allocates distinctive status, rights and opportunities for women, corresponding to their distinctive natures and traits.

### **Keywords:**

Muslim feminist, woman, gender, equality, feminism