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## *Exploring the Social and Religious Roles of Women in Hijāz during the Umayyad Period*

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the social and religious roles of women in the Hijaz under Umayyad rule (661-750 CE), a period marked by significant political consolidation and change in the early Islamic world. Using historical accounts, biographical records and Islamic jurisprudence, the study explains how women in cities, such as Mecca and Medina, had local power of influence both in religious, educational and social contexts. It looks at their involvement in religious learning, philanthropic activities and family systems, which are interconnected with political and religious power. The paper also takes into consideration how changing Umayyad administrative systems and urbanization had effects on the public visibility and agency of women. Placing the experiences of Hijazi women in the context of the larger framework of the early Islamic society, the paper attempts to shed light on their role in preserving and transmitting religious knowledge and their influence on the formation of community life during the Umayyad rule.*

**Keywords:** *Hijāz, Umayyad Period, Women in early Islam, Social Roles, Religious Authority, Mecca, Medina, Gender in Islamic History, Islamic Scholarship, Umayyad Society.*

### **Introduction**

Women's roles in early Islamic history have received growing scholarly focus with researchers trying to re-evaluate the traditional accounts, which often give little or no consideration to female voices. The Hijaz region, including the religious cities of Mecca and Medina, was not only a birthplace of Islam but also a centre of early religious studies and jurisprudence as well as religious authority. The Hijaz remained a centre of religion despite the political power moving to Damascus during the Umayyad period (661-750 CE) period. The social and religious roles of women in this area can provide a subtle account of how gender, piety and power interplayed throughout the first century of the Islamic era (Ahmed, 1992; Spellberg, 1994).

The Umayyad dynasty was an important part of the institutionalization of Islamic

rule and culture. As much as the administrative centre of the caliphate moved north, the Hijaz had been left to enjoy a symbolic and spiritual status as the home of the companions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the early jurists. The women of Hijaz, especially those belonging to the families of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the earliest generations of Muslims were the active participants in the preservation of the religious knowledge and moral traditions (Ibn Sa'd, 1904/1990). Their learning and social activity refuted subsequent assumptions of early Muslim women being confined in domestic life only (Mernissi, 1997).

History, by way of biographical collections (tabaqat) and chronicles, proves that in Mecca and Medina women have participated in various social and intellectual fields. They received and taught hadith, attended to religious meetings (Al-Baladhuri, 1996). Women like Aisha bint Abi Bakr, Umm al-Darda and Atika bint Zayd earned fame as a scholar and authority in the Islamic law and theology. Their functions show that the matriarchal religious knowledge was accepted in the early Islamic society, especially in the Hijaz, where the legacy of the Prophet (PBUH) was the most important factor (Spellberg, 1994).

The Hijazi social order offered an exclusive field of action to women. A large number of this was of leading Qurayshi or Ansari families and provided them with economic resources as well as social status. This helped them to become sponsors of education and providers of religious organizations (Ahmed, 1992). Their appearance to the world was frequently brokered by donation and charity (awqaf), scholar discipleship of younger scholars. These occupations put women at the cross-sectional point of religious devotion and social service, which are the moral equality and social service that was highlighted in the Holy Qur'an (Qur'an 9:71).

The Hijaz was an area of continuity as well as change under the Umayyad rule. As the political power began to be more and more concentrated in Syria, the region still affected the Islamic thought and practice. Women continued to take part in religion in informal forms of education networks and family study groups (halaqat). Women were able to maintain the culture of piety and education that differed with stricter gender norms in other provinces due to the relative autonomy of the Hijazi elite (Hawting, 2000). As a result, the Hijaz was a stronghold of ancient Islamic cultural and religious purity.

Hadith transmission was one of the areas of female power during the Umayyad era. Women were also often requested as trustworthy reporters since they were closely related to the Prophet and his companions. Their stories also supported the formation of the moral and legal system of the early Islamic society (Brown, 2009). This is an intellectual contribution that highlights the fact that women played a significant role in the advancement of the Islamic knowledge systems and were not just the passive consumers of the male scholarship.

Nevertheless, women became less represented in the history of the world, even though they played extremely important roles. The later political and legal trends- particularly during the Abbasids- had an inclination to entrench patriarchal

readings of the gender roles hence the contributions of the past generations of women were not to be traced (Mernissi, 1997). A re-evaluation of the Umayyad-era Hijaz would hence be able to recover one of the lost aspects of Islamic history when women and their piety, intellect and social activity were the cornerstone of Muslim communal identity.

Through the analysis of the role of women in the Hijaz in the Umayyad period, this research paper aims at shedding light on how gender, religion, and regional identity interacted. Through the study of early Arabic sources and modern scholarship, it proves that Hijazi women themselves were participants in the development of the discourse on religion and social life. Their involvement relates to the long-term tradition of egalitarianism of early Islam as well as to the specific socio-political situation of the Umayyad period. This question not only makes our comprehension of women historical agency enhanced but also serves as an addition to bigger arguments on the question of the persistence of female scholarship and leadership in Islamic civilization.

### **Historical Background: The Umayyad State and the Hijaz**

The Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE) becomes the first dynasty in the history of Islam, and officially started a large empire, which spread through the Iberia Peninsula to the Central Asian region. After the assassination of Caliph al-Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muawiyah ibn Abd al-Muttalib (also referred to as Muawiyah ibn Abd al-Sufyān) came into power and moved the political centre of Islam out of Medina in Hijaz to Damascus in Syria (Hawting, 2000). This movement was the one that marked a major restructuring of the Islamic rule, giving more weight to the administrative centralization, as well as the dynastic legitimacy, rather than the previous consultative model of the caliphate. Even with this change, the Hijaz still maintained great religious prominence being the birth place of Islam and the place of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina (Kennedy, 2004).

Under the Umayyad reign the Hijaz had acquired a unique dual position, a political fringe but a spiritual centre stage. When the Umayyads strived to unite the power over Damascus, the region remained the spiritual centre of the Muslim world. The pilgrimage (Hajj) that is conducted annually still served to highlight the importance of Mecca as a religious hub and as a commercial centre. Medina however was an important centre of Islamic learning, especially in the hadith collections and the formulation of early jurisprudence (Donner, 2010). This divisiveness allowed the Hijaz to maintain its custodial status in religious authenticity, as an ever-expanding empire grew under an ever-more bureaucratic rule.

The Hijaz was socially prone towards pre-Islamic forms of tribal organization, but the Islamic doctrine had redefined the aspects of kinship, succession and ethical duties. Early Islamic focus on moral equality and spiritual responsibility was ultimately benefiting women, especially (Ahmed, 1992). During the period of the Umayyads, these egalitarian values were in coexistence with firm social strata of the society, which complicated the social structure. The elite families (primarily,

the Quraysh and the Anṣaar) still had a strong impact on the life of masses, and the women of the respective families often exercised their authority either within the family or at the educational level (Mernissi, 1997).

However economically, the Hijaz never competed economically with the affluence of new Umayyad capitals in Syria or Iraq; still its trade routes and pilgrimage fees kept it relevant. The urban elite with women was regularly owning property and performing charitable endowments (*awqaf*), thus, proving a degree of financial independence that was hardly to be found in other parts of the empire (Lapidus, 1988). The circulation of money by the religious and philanthropic systems strengthened the nexus between economic stewardship and piety, therefore strengthening the stability of the local communities in Mecca and Medina.

The connection between the Umayyads and the Hijaz was often political. The first opposition movements, including the uprising of the Ali ibn Ali ibn Umar al-Zubayr, which was located in Mecca are examples of how the region opposed the centralized control by the Syrians (Hawting, 2000). Though the Umayyads later restored their supremacy, they had to recognize the religious control of the Hijaz which remained influential over the opinion of the people during the period of the caliphate. The Hijaz scholars and religious figures including the women were looked upon as custodians of the traditions of the Prophet and as such, acted as moral checks and balances to the imperial politics (Spellberg, 1994).

After all, the political and religious legitimacy were interdependent as it can be seen through the historical context of the Umayyad era. Even though it ceased to be the administrative centre, the Hijaz continued to be extremely important in the formation of the intellectual and spiritual identity of the Muslim community. In this environment, women played an insidious but long-standing role of knowledge keepers of religiosity and of social and family influence. The knowledge of the Hijaz at this age gives a necessary context to studying the way women were able to navigate the evolving political situation, yet preserve their religious and societal importance.

### **Women's Religious and Intellectual Contributions**

In the period of Umayyad, women in Hijaz took a central position in storing and passing on Islamic knowledge. Although the political power was rapidly becoming centralized in the caliphate, Mecca and Medina were still considered as dynamic scholastic centers where women participated actively in intellectual and religious activities. Women were also involved in teaching, recitation of hadith, memorizing the Holy Quran and training younger scholars. They have shown how development of early Islamic learning was not the individualized endeavor of just male scholars but a community effort where women played essential roles (Ahmed, 1992; Brown, 2009).

The science of hadith transmission, one of the greatest areas of female involvement, was called *ilm al-Hadith*. Women like Aisha bint Abi Bakr, the wife of the Prophet came out as authoritative reporters whose accounts became

considered to be foundational in the field of Islamic jurisprudence and ethics. The early scholars relied mainly on her as a source of authority in high regard as she had a great idea of what the Prophet said and did (Spellberg, 1994). Other women who became well known as jurists and teachers of hadith in Mecca and Damascus are Umm al-Darda al-Kubra and her pupil Umm al-Darda al-Sughra. Their names drew students throughout the Islamic world, which implies the validity and the respect toward female scholarship that existed in the early centuries (Brown, 2009). On top of the role of hadith, women also memorised and interpreted the Holy Quran. Hafsa bint Sirin was a famous scholar of Basra who had to travel much to the Hijaz and she was known to have mastered the recitation and commentary of the Holy Quran (Ahmed, 1992). The success of her intellectual career was part of a general tendency among religious women who introduced memorisation of the Holy Quran along with the exegesis to both men and women. These women were not just scriptural guardians but they were also scriptural interpreters who influenced early debate on piety, morality, and practice of religion. Their involvement in the study of the Holy Quran is another factor that illustrates the inclusiveness of religious education in early Islam especially in the Hijaz region, which the emerging Muslim community retained the strong traditions of female education.

Another significant environment in the intellectual life of women was the institution of the halaqah, a study circle that taught and discussed the scriptures. Women in Medina were known to host or attend such gatherings in homes, mosques or in their own private courtyards. These schools helped the sharing of ideas, learning of hadith and the Holy Quran and instruction in morals. Historical sources state that men of learning used to request permission to meet with women halaqat so that they could get their experience (Brown, 2009). This learning culture strengthened the community ethos of early Islam where knowledge was considered to be a common moral responsibility and not a privilege of gender. Besides functioning as transmitters and teachers, women were considered as mentors and moral role-models by the Hijazi people. Their piety, charity and following Islamic ethics were considered as exemplars of right doing. The moral authority of Aisha was not limited to her own lifetime, she was her own standard of religious knowledge and integrity to be followed by other generations (Spellberg, 1994). Women like Umm al Darad also mixed the scholarship with asceticism who encouraged both men and women to seek spiritual depths and moral purification. It was by means of such characters that the Hijaz fostered a unique tradition, where intellectual activity and moral uprightness could never be considered separate aspects of the religious life.

The fact that these women were allowed to be in religious and intellectual universities at the Umayyad period shows the inclusivity of early Islamic education and the role of the Hijaz in female scholarship. Their activity of hadith, interpreting the Holy Quran and teaching philosophy demonstrates a wider concept of Islamic education based on the mutual piety and the shared duty. The

examples of Aisha bint Abi Bakr, Umm al-Darda and Hafsa bint Sirin testify to the fact that women did not just spectators of the religious life but rather made significant contributions to the intellectual and spiritual pillars of the Muslim community (Ahmed, 1992; Brown, 2009; Spellberg, 1994).

### **Social and Economic Roles of Women in the Hijaz**

Although the women in the Hijaz in the Umayyad times are commonly recalled in relation to their religious scholarship; they also contributed remarkably to the social and economic life of their communities. Their efforts were not limited to the home aspect but were also applied in property management, commerce and even charity. The role of women in the early Islamic society based on the Quranic teachings and the example of the Prophet ensured that women could still have some rights to property and inheritance which was progressive on the times. Through these rights they had access to financial independence thus were able to contribute to the welfare of the society and family businesses (Lapidus, 1988).

One of the most influential sources of influence of women was property ownership. The Quran specifically provided women with independent rights to inherit, possess and dispose of property (Qur'an 4:712) and historical records show that women in Hijaz were exercising their rights. The affluent women of Mecca and Medina invested on land, trade and household administration and in most cases they retained control of their possessions even after marriage. This freedom was what made Hijazi women stand out among their peers in most other pre-modern cultures (Crone, 1980). The first wife of the Prophet, Khadija bint Khuwaylid, was also a role model in this culture of women entrepreneurship that continued during the Umayyad period.

The other socio-economic role that was significant to women was their participation in waqf (charitable endowments). By the creation of awqaf women gave some of their wealth to the mosques, schools, and the poor and thereby guaranteed religious merit as well as social prestige. These endowments in Medina and Mecca used to be more of both social responsibility and personal piety. There were women who gave properties to take care of pilgrims or gave education to orphans to strengthen moral and communal aspects that characterized the Hijazi society (Lapidus, 1988). The administration of these endowments gave women an honorable social role which involved spiritual worship and economic direction.

Weaknesses the family and tribal networks were connected to the social influence of women as well. The Hijaz was also the place of strong Qurayshi and Ansari families whose alliances contradicted the political and economic boundaries in most instances. Females in these families became the bridges and they established relationships by means of marriage, diplomacy, and blood (Mernissi, 1997). Their functions in forming alliances or in keeping families intact were essential to stability of elite families. In this respect, the power of women was conducted in the social context instead of the political authority, yet, it was essential in terms of preserving the power and continuity of significant lineages.

This sense of class, descent and mass opinion especially was noticeable in Hijaz,

where a connection with the companions of the Prophet or those who had converted with the Prophet was in itself a source of enormous social esteem. Women with noble descent had privileges that enabled them be more visible in the world and in the intellectual arena. Through patrons who could be elite women, the culture life would be influenced indirectly by sponsoring poets, scholars, and jurists (Crone, 1980). Nonetheless, this access was not universal; there were still class distinctions which restricted the chances of the lower-status women whose social role was mostly restricted to house-help or even work. Nevertheless, the general position of the women at the Hijaz was not worse than in most other areas of the Umayyad rule, due to the still-living memory of the original egalitarian ideas of early Islam.

To conclude, women in the Hijaz under the Umayyad period were an active participant in social and economic life as they owned property, gave endowments to charity and led their families. Their involvement of these issues emphasizes the multidimensionality of female power in the early Islamic society. Although they had a religious role, they also played an economic manager, philanthropic and social mediator roles. Through these activities, one can see that Hijazi women were not only the guardians of ethical principles but also the useful instruments of economic and social stability of the region (Lapidus, 1988; Crone, 1980; Mernissi, 1997).

### **Legal and Political Dimensions**

Legal and political context of Umayyad rule (661-750 c.e.) had a central role to determine the status and civic involvement of women in the Hijaz. Being the first Islamic dynasty, the Umayyads played a significant part in the formation of the initial administrative and judicial systems that would form the basis of the Islamic jurisprudence over the centuries. These monuments were based on the Quranic teachings, the traditions of the Prophet and the changing interpretations by the jurists. Even when political power was centralized in the Umayyad state, legal norms in the Hijaz still had propinquity with moral equality and family justice that was paramount in the early community (Ahmed, 1992). It was here that women enjoyed some rights of law especially in property, marriage and inheritance, but also experienced the slow social and institutional repression as the state became increasingly bureaucratic (Hallaq, 2005).

During the early years of the Umayyad rule, the law scholars in Medina wielded a lot of influence in interpreting the Quran and hadiths on the rights of women. These readings acknowledged the ability of women to possess and dispose of property, to divorce in certain circumstances, and even to enter into contractual agreements (Ahmed, 1992). Nevertheless, the codification of Islamic law with time contributed to the conservative interpretation of the gender relations. In one case, although the Holy Quran allowed women to testify in financial and moral matters, subsequent jurists began to limit its value, particularly in criminal cases (Hallaq, 2005). This was not only a process of legal evolution, but also showed social forces of conformity of jurisprudence to patriarchal norms that were developing in the

centres of administration in the cities, including Damascus.

Other major areas of influence of changing legal interpretations were marriage and mobility. Marriage remained in Hijaz as a contractual relationship, which had to be mutually consented and women had some agency in establishing the terms of their marriages. History records that the elite women usually impose terms in the marriage agreements, such as those about the right of travelling or owning property (Ahmed, 1992). But with the expansion of the Umayyad state, the application of such rights was unequally applied across regions. Most women were not able to walk and travel freely, especially in the areas beyond the Hijaz, because of the higher level of centralization, as well as the militarization of society, under the Umayyad rule, and the tightness of patriarchal tribal codes (Hallaq, 2005).

These limitations notwithstanding, some women were active politically and in various moral issues. Historical sources also refer to the cases when women were writing petitions to caliphs or giving moral advice to governors and scholars. They were usually involved in letters that stressed on justice, piety or moral responsibility. This was the early Islamic interpretation of *amr bi-l-ma kar wa-nahy an al-munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil), which was a civil responsibility, as well as gender independent (Ahmed, 1992). Women were not in formal offices, but their role in respect of counsel and mediation illustrates that their voices were still heard in the political debate, especially in the moral and scholarly elite in Hijaz.

Nevertheless, the more the Umayyad administration was institutionalized, the less women appeared in the scene of life. Professionalization of governance and the emergence of court bureaucracy concentrated power in the hands of male dominated structures, leaving informal processes of influence, which women could access, open (Hallaq, 2005). The increased focus on political acumen and birth right also reduced the responsibilities of women in political and intellectual domains. This change was also a wider change of the early Islamic society where legal formalism and state-building could easily be done at the cost of egalitarian ethos that had defined the community of the Holy Prophet (PBHU).

To conclude, the Umayyad era underwent some turmoil between the ideal vision of justice in the Quran and the realities of empire as understood by law and politics. Although in the Hijaz, women maintained some of their rights in property, marriage and even discourse of morality, the gradual codification of law and the growth of state institutions curtailed their role in the life of the state. But the persistence of the female agency in the changing system of administration and law can be emphasized by the fact that they remained active with petitions, counsel and religious research (Ahmed, 1992; Hallaq, 2005).

### **Regional Comparison: The Hijaz and Other Provinces**

The Umayyad polity covered a patchwork of provinces, and each province had particular socio-structural constellations, which, in their turn, influenced female agency differently. Urbanization was also uneven: in Syria and in Iraq, there were

large administrative and commercial centres, including Damascus and Kufa, and the Hijaz had smaller pilgrimage centres in Mecca and Medina. The strong urbanisation that was witnessed in Syria and Iraq created a stratified civil sphere that was full of professional bureaucracies and militarised elites. In these environments, women were often restricted in their public activities by new formulations of courtly behaviour, as well as provincial practices that favoured patriarchy (Kennedy, 2004).

There were also variations in the provision of education and scaffolding by the institutions in the territories. The Hijaz has maintained continuous circles of oral tradition and domestic education, which are capable of being traced to the Companions of the Prophet. With these informal but very dense educational webs, women were able to be transmitters, teach and preserve religious knowledge. Conversely, in the provinces where the urbanisation process was faster, like Iraq, cultural life increasingly became institutionalised in the form of nascent madrasas and court offices. This formalisation discriminated against male scholars who are in official positions and hence limited the representation of women in institutionalised learning structures (Donner, 2010; Kennedy, 2004).

The Hijaz had been most visible in early Islamic egalitarian traditions. In the fact that Mecca and Medina were centres of early collective memory, the norms praising the power of the household of the Prophet and his companions still retained the legitimization of the female role in religious and social life. The Hijazi women were able to use the reputational capital of descent and piousness to demand power in pedagogy, philanthropy and mediation in the locale. This continuity made it easier to preserve a space of female agency that became less readily available in the provinces where conquest, settlement and reorganization of administration created new elites and models of norms (Donner, 2010).

Gender practices were further mediated by the local practices and pre-existing social structures throughout the empire. The family law, patrimonial practice and the civic manners of Egypt and parts of Syria were under the perennial Byzantine and Coptic arrangements. Such practices at times spawned gender norms that were not similar to Hijazi ways especially on the mobility of women and their involvement in the market or civic affairs. In the same manner, the combination of tribal and sedentary aspects of Iraq led to the development of a culture that allowed elite networks of men to own land, military and administrative assets, thus reducing the chances of women participating in any form of public life (Kennedy, 2004).

These regional differences were also present in economic roles. Pilgrimage and trade in Hijaz provided women with chances to amass and control wealth, grant property and fund charitable projects that gave them social status in society. Smaller provincial cities, with the trade guilds, military stipends and state salaries as a more powerful force, on the other hand, were more likely to concentrate the power in the economic activities in the hands of males. Therefore, women were more economically independent and publicly patronised in Hijaz in comparison

to most other provinces of the Umayyad empire (Donner, 2010; Kennedy, 2004). Overall, a comparative study of Hijaz, Iraq, Syria and Egypt highlights the great influence of the regional setting on the status of women during the rule of the Umayyad. The religious centrality of the Hijaz, the regular educational networks and unique social memory opened broad possibilities of female religious and social agency. In other regions, urbanisation processes, administrative centralisation and local custom traditions reorganised gender practices, which tended to reduce the visibility of women in public. These regional divergences are essential to understanding gender in the early Islamic world in a subtle way.

### **Discussion and Interpretation**

A closer look at women in the Hijaz under the Umayyad rule will show that the early Islamic society already had a complex understanding of gender, an understanding that rested on moral equality and social limitations in particular situations. Women were recognized as effective carriers of religious wisdom, active in charitable activities and role models in terms of ethical behavior. This engagement in these spheres shows that early Islam did not emphasize total exclusion of people in the life of society but encouraged competence, piety and social responsibility (Ahmed, 1992; Spellberg, 1994). This advanced knowledge allowed women to have a substantive power even without a formal political power.

Hijazi women became the centre of Islamic scholarship by learning and teaching the Quran by heart, transmitting the hadith and attending the study circles (halaqat). Examples of women who created intellectual networks crossing multiple generations of scholars are given by names like Aisha binte Abi Bakr, Umm al-Darda and Hafsa binte Sirin. These women were able to guarantee the survival of religious education and the preservation of the original Islamic doctrines by spreading the knowledge directly to the students and to their peers (Brown, 2009; Spellberg, 1994). Their works highlight the fact that women did not play the peripheral role in the intellectual life of the early Muslim people but were part of the direction of this community.

Women had informal power and were able to maintain influence in social and family processes even though they had minimal formal power. Specifically, elite women used kinship ties, tribal ties and reputational resources as a source of power in education, charity, and mediation. Their involvement in the general and community activities was made possible by marriage bonds and management of domestic and community resources without going outside the social mores (Mernissi, 1997). Through these processes, it becomes possible to see how social capital has been used as a kind of soft power in the Hijaz, with women being able to indirectly influence moral and intellectual discourse.

Legal and administrative environment of Umayyad period posed limitations, and at the same time organized the role of women. In spite of the codified law whereby the male authority became more influential over time, the presence of the remnants of early Islamic normative in the Hijaz formed a relative window to the

participation of women. Cultural respect of lineage and piety, property rights, inheritance and autonomy to contract, accorded women opportunities to act as agents be it in the economic or religious realms (Hallaq, 2005; Ahmed, 1992). This equilibrium shows that the early rule by the Islamic allowed the differentiation of gender according to regional, social, and religious conditions.

The comparison between regions also helps to reveal the peculiar nature of the Hijaz. Iraq, Syria, or Egypt where women were often limited in visibility, by both urbanization and centralization of authority, and local traditions, the Hijaz maintained egalitarian conventions, based on the Prophet and the community of the first Muslims. This legacy kept women intellectually, socially and charitably active and helped to create a cultural memory that justified women involvement in the world. As a result, the Hijaz was used as an example of how a regional identity, religious power, and gender standards interacted (Donner, 2010; Kennedy, 2004).

To sum up, the discussion of the Hijazi women in the period of the Umayyad reign shows that the early Islamic society was not uniform in the way it perceived gender. The agency and the constraint were fixed on both legal and social frameworks that saw women exercise significant influence through scholarship, charity and the mediation of the social arena. They were able to preserve the knowledge of religion, strengthen moral and social order, and guarantee continuity in the traditions of Islamic intellectual knowledge through their contributions. The examination of these roles sheds some light on the larger meaning of gender in the early Islamic world and points to the long-term influence of the agency of women on religious and social life.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of the role of women in Hijaz under the Umayyad rule shows that early Islamic society gave women many channels of religious, intellectual and social interactions. Women were also involved in the passing of hadith, Quranic teachings and moral teachings and through that they played a vital role in preserving and shaping early Islamic knowledge (Brown, 2009; Spellberg, 1994). They were not only involved in theological studies but also in the social and economic life of the time, including property management, charitable endowment or the mediation of the family or the tribe (Lapidus, 1988; Mernissi, 1997).

Hijaz became a special place of female involvement and primarily due to its historical and religious value. Mecca and Medina also had strong ties with the Companions of the Prophet as well as with the fledgling Muslim nation which strengthened the legacy of empowering women in the socio-intellectual life. The persistence of these cultural and religious networks provided women with social capital and power, which helped them to bypass legal and social restrictions and still have a voice (Ahmed, 1992; Donner, 2010).

On the one hand, legal systems and the Umayyad government curtailed agency; on the other hand, it organized it. Even though women were limited through the codification of law and bureaucratic centralization in the exercise of political

power and movement of women, Hijazi women used property rights, inheritance and family networks to use soft power in the community (Hallaq, 2005). Their ability to adjust and work under these systems demonstrates the strength and mobility of the role of women in the early Islamic society.

The differences between regions also help to emphasize the distinctiveness of the Hijaz as the place where women could remain intellectually and socially active. Unlike in other provinces like Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, where urbanization, local culture and the centralization of government often restricted the role of women, the Hijaz had maintained egalitarian traditions based on the early Islamic society. The regional difference highlights the relevance of contextual issues in the understanding of gender roles in early Islam (Kennedy, 2004).

The Hijaz evidence denies the reductive accounts which marginalize the female in the history of early Islam. It shows that women were agents in the form of education, scholarship, charity, mediation, and they helped in the moral, intellectual and social integration of their communities. Their case demonstrates that there were no rigid, strictly hierarchical gendered roles in early Islam, as it was mediated by kinship, piety, education and local social organization (Spellberg, 1994; Mernissi, 1997).

To sum up, the Hijaz during Umayyad rule can be a good case study to comprehend the multidimensional roles of women in the early Islamic society. The area served as both a spiritual and intellectual centre and provided an opportunity for female involvement and impact. Exploring these contributions can help in the modern understanding of gender in early Islam because it shows that these women were not only participants in religious and social life but also without whom, the intellectual and moral foundations of the Muslim community cannot have been formed.

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