Analysis of the Islamic Foundations of Women's Empowerment in the Quran and Hadith: A Critical Examination of Competing Approaches

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The concept of women's empowerment, prevalent in global discourses and development programs, is rooted in feminist economics and liberal-secular approaches. These approaches, which assume universality, face challenges in Islamic societies due to differing foundational beliefs. This research aims to elucidate the Islamic foundations of women's empowerment based on the Quran and hadith, comparing them with competing frameworks. Data were collected through library studies of the Holy Quran and authentic hadith sources, analyzed using thematic analysis in three coding stages. The findings reveal that Islamic foundations of women's empowerment consist of three overarching themes: ontological, anthropological, and axiological. Among the ontological foundations, the organizing theme of "the fundamental nature of woman's creation" contrasts with theological interpretations of sacred texts and supports women's attainment of their true human status. The theme of "the purposeful creation of women" challenges demeaning views that regard women as secondary or inferior. The anthropological foundations highlight "equal will and freedom of choice" for both genders and "equality in the purpose of creation," affirming the Quranic justice-seeking perspective on women's empowerment. The integration of these themes with "natural sexual differences" constrains the conceptual scope of women's empowerment, emphasizing legal distinctions rooted in nature and prioritizing family interests over individual ones. Lastly, the axiological themes affirm the equality of men and women in dignity while emphasizing feminine and maternal roles, which are often neglected in other perspectives.

Introduction

The profound transformations in women's roles and status across social, economic, and political domains have significantly heightened the imperative for empowerment initiatives. In this context, multilateral institutions, including the United Nations, the World Bank, and various civil society organizations (NGOs), have increasingly sought to reconceptualize development paradigms and address implementation gaps through the framework of "women's empowerment." Empowerment, as a concept, refers to the process by which individuals acquire agency to exercise strategic life choices within structures that have historically constrained such capacities (Kabeer 1999, 437).

The United Nations has identified five core elements of empowerment: a sense of self-worth; the right to ownership and decision-making; the right to access opportunities and resources; the right to control one's life both within and outside the household; and the power to influence social change to create a more equitable socioeconomic order at both national and global levels (Tajeddin & Rahmati Vala, 2014). To operationalize these definitions, the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, which committed member states to two fundamental actions regarding women: first, a pledge to develop policies and planning frameworks aimed at empowering women and enhancing their participation at foundational societal levels; and second, the establishment and advancement of capacity-building mechanisms to strengthen institutional capabilities for more effective environmental governance and planning (Niyāqī 2019, 1328).

In Iran, recent years have witnessed efforts to operationalize these commitments and improve women's status, particularly through initiatives targeting female-headed households. Domestic research has also emerged, drawing upon prevailing concepts and frameworks of empowerment. However, these initiatives and studies appear to suffer from a discursive disalignment regarding women's empowerment between theoretical approaches and policy implementation (Bajilan 2023, 11). Additionally, the prevailing models of women's empowerment are predominantly rooted in materialist philosophies

aligned with global governance agendas, which often overlook the needs and contextual specificities of nations that formulate policies based on Islamic teachings.

The concept of women's empowerment has gained prominence in global discourses and development programs, emerging from specific theoretical foundations primarily rooted in feminist economics and liberal-secular approaches (Kheiri Doost Langroodi et al., 2019). These foundations advocate for absolute gender equality, unrestricted individual autonomy, and the redistribution of power within social structures. For instance, global indicators of women's empowerment, such as those developed by the United Nations Development Program, emphasize increasing women's economic and political participation, enhancing access to financial resources, and reducing domestic workloads. However, these indicators often overlook natural biological differences, family functions, and the values of religious societies. Such universal assumptions have encountered challenges in Islamic societies, which are based on different foundational beliefs. In Iran, for example, where laws and values are shaped by Islamic principles, reducing empowerment to "numerical equality with men" or "absolute freedom from familial constraints" is not only impractical but may also result in cultural conflicts and diminished social acceptance (Hosseini et al., 2025).

The Holy Quran and the traditions of the Infallible Imams (a) provide a wealth of conceptual and strategic resources that can offer both theoretical foundations and practical frameworks for women's empowerment within an Islamic context. Given the existing research gap in formulating Islamic foundations for women's empowerment specific to our national context, this study aims to extract these foundations through a rigorous examination of the Quran and Shiʿite hadiths. This investigation seeks to establish a culturally grounded empowerment model aligned with Iran's Islamic values. The significance of this research is twofold: it aims to enrich theoretical discourse on women's empowerment while generating culturally responsive policy solutions. Thus, the central research question is: What foundations for women's empowerment can be derived from the Quran and the hadiths of the Infallibles (a)?

Literature Review

The literature on women's empowerment primarily encompasses three approaches. The first approach examines the determinants of women's empowerment, while the second investigates various indicators and measures of empowerment (Dandona 2015, 2). The third category focuses on modeling, conceptual review, or evaluation of women's empowerment. Research in Iran has largely followed this trajectory, with one key distinction: most Iranian studies over the past two decades have concentrated specifically on empowering female-headed households or rural women, often neglecting other demographic groups.

Another notable gap in the literature is that only three domestic studies have explored empowerment concepts from Quranic and hadith perspectives. These studies employed descriptive-analytical methodologies, which differ methodologically from the present study's approach. For example, Rezazadeh Askari et al. (2021) examined the challenges and solutions for women's social empowerment in the Quran and hadiths using qualitative content analysis. Their findings revealed that women encounter obstacles to social participation at individual, familial, and societal levels, such as weaknesses in faith and personal development, undefined familial rights and responsibilities, and concerns about gender mixing in society. The study identified several Quranic and hadith-based empowerment strategies, including clarifying divine duties and worship, presenting exemplary female role models for social participation, establishing conditions for women's public presence, and prioritizing key objectives.

In another study, Hashemian et al. (2022) explored Islam's potential for women's empowerment in Muslim countries through Quranic analysis. Their findings revealed two distinct perspectives: one group critiques Islam's approach to women's rights as inherently unequal and discriminatory, while the other argues that Islam can enhance women's status, asserting that current conditions stem from non-religious factors. Complementarily, Heidari Rad and Tohidi Manesh (2023) analyzed the components of socio-economic empowerment for female-headed households through Quranic exegesis. Their textual analysis yielded family-centered solutions, such as revitalizing family structures and expanding kinship networks, as well as general empowerment strategies, including adopting Quranic models of successful women, institutional support from Islamic governance, and emphasizing spiritual and educational development.

1. Concepts

1.1. Empowerment

The term "empower" is defined by The Random House Webster's College Dictionary (1991) as "to give official or legal authority/power; to equip with ability; or to enable." The suffix "-ment" signifies a result, action, or process, thereby indicating that "empowerment" refers to the process or result of enabling. From an alternative etymological perspective, the concept of "empowerment" derives from the Latin word "potere," which means "to be able" or "to have the power of choice" (Gibson 1991, 535). This term is also linguistically connected to "potent," which connotes strength, persuasiveness, and the possession or exercise of significant influence.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary further expands on the term "empowerment," defining it as "to give official authority or legal power to someone or something, to delegate legal authority, and to provide means or capabilities" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 1993, 744). Similarly, the Oxford Lexicon defines empowerment as "legal or formal investment with power or authority for a specific purpose or objective, enabling, permitting, obtaining, or assuming power" (Oxford Dictionary 1989, 192). These definitions collectively highlight the multifaceted nature of empowerment, emphasizing both the delegation of authority and the enhancement of individual capabilities.

Empowerment has been defined in various ways across multiple disciplines, including social work, psychology, education, public health, sociology, economics, management, and nursing. The term encompasses a wide range of approaches, such as women's empowerment, the Black Power movement, community empowerment, and the empowerment of marginalized groups, students, teachers, and patients (Febriana 2011, pp. 176-177). One prevalent definition characterizes empowerment as a process through which individuals, groups, and organizations gain control over the issues and challenges they face, effectively conferring power to individuals (Kermani et al., 2018, 34).

The World Health Organization (1998) defines empowerment as "the process of enabling individuals to gain greater control over their health and improve it." In the context of health promotion, this definition emphasizes the necessity of ensuring that people possess the resources required to maintain their health and well-being (Faulkner 2001, 676). Broadly speaking, Rappaport (1984) conceptualizes empowerment as a process through which individuals, organizations, and communities acquire mastery and control over their own lives (Rappaport 1984, 2).

Kieffer (1984, 26) identified several essential conditions for the empowerment process, which include: 1) a personal attitude or self-perception that enhances active social participation; 2) knowledge and capability for critical analysis of political and social systems that shape one's environment; 3) the capacity to develop action strategies and mobilize resources to achieve personal goals; and 4) the ability to act collectively with others to define and attain group objectives. These components resonate with Solomon's (1976) definition of empowerment as "a feeling, firm belief, or perception of intrinsic and extrinsic worth, whose external manifestation is goal attainment through personal resources and skills" (as cited in Parsons 1991, 11).

In discussions of women's empowerment, terms such as autonomy, power, status, and agency are frequently used interchangeably. However, it is crucial for researchers, evaluators, and policymakers to recognize the nuanced distinctions among these concepts, particularly the differentiation between autonomy and empowerment. Autonomy typically denotes independence and represents a relatively static concept, whereas empowerment encompasses interdependence and fundamentally signifies a dynamic process (Malhotra et al. 2002, 10). This distinction highlights the complexity of empowerment as it relates to women's experiences and societal structures, emphasizing the importance of understanding empowerment as a fluid process influenced by various social and contextual factors.

Another concept closely associated with empowerment is agency. Agency carries both positive and negative connotations. On one hand, it refers to the "power to" act, highlighting individuals' capacity to make and implement life choices even when faced with opposition. On the

other hand, it signifies "power over" others, representing the ability of certain actors to override the agency of others through the exercise of authority, violence, or various forms of coercion. Importantly, power can continue to operate even in the absence of overt displays of agency (Kabeer 2005, 14).

In the context of empowerment, agency involves not only the active exercise of choices but also the challenge to existing power relations. The empowerment process often originates from within the individual, especially given the significant role of beliefs and values in legitimizing inequalities. This concept extends beyond mere "decision-making" and observable actions to encompass the meanings, motivations, and purposes individuals attribute to their actions. Empowerment is fundamentally rooted in individuals' self-perception—their sense of self-worth—which is intrinsically interconnected with how they are perceived by their immediate social circles and the broader society (Kabeer 2005, 15).

1.2. Women's empowerment

There are multiple definitions of women's empowerment, all of which derive from broader conceptualizations of empowerment. For example, Kabeer (1999) defines women's empowerment as "women's ability to make strategic life choices" (cited in Malhotra 2009, 4). Other definitions include "control over decision-making" (Kabeer 2001, 17, 28), "the capacity to formulate strategic choices and control resources needed to achieve desired outcomes" (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005: 71), and "possessing power to attain desired results" (Moonzwe et al. 2014, 481). Additionally, empowerment can be seen as the expansion of assets and capabilities of marginalized individuals to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable the institutions that affect their lives (Dandona 2015, 36).

Sara Longwe, an African women's rights activist, offers a definition of women's empowerment as the provision of capacity and power to women to resist external pressures and discrimination, thereby enabling them to reclaim their lost rights. In her theory, she identifies five stages of women's empowerment: welfare, access, awareness, participation,

and control. The implementation of these stages can ultimately lead to the elimination of gender inequality (Longwe, 1993: 29-32).

Friedmann (1992, pp. 136-139) proposed an empowerment approach that establishes connections between knowledge and power. He describes three types of power: social, political, and psychological, noting that social and psychological powers are more fundamentally related to the concept of empowerment. Social power encompasses information, knowledge, and skills. Accordingly, women's empowerment is defined as a dynamic process of transforming existing norms in the societies where women live to improve their well-being.

The Commission on Women and Development describes women's empowerment as "providing greater control over resources, enhancing personal agency, and creating expanded socio-political spaces." Empowerment occurs at two levels: individual and collective. At the individual level, empowerment allows individuals to achieve greater autonomy, develop self-determination capacity, and gain increased opportunities. At the collective level, groups enhance their ability to influence social change. However, it is important to note that this model primarily emphasizes the individual aspects of empowerment (Commission on Women and Development, 2007).

2. Research Method

This study employed an integrated approach combining Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic analysis process with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model. This methodological synthesis serves dual purposes: it facilitates the identification of latent patterns in the data while compensating for Attride-Stirling's relative inflexibility through the incorporation of Braun and Clarke's framework. The research process started with a comprehensive review of existing theories, findings, procedures, and prior scientific studies related to women's empowerment to delineate the dimensions of the subject. The objective was to derive research questions from current theoretical perspectives and then systematically examine these questions in the Quran and authentic hadith sources. Additional data emerged during the coding process. In this phase, preliminary codes were generated and a coding

framework was established. Subsequently, potential themes were identified and extracted, with codes being matched to them. Concurrently, themes were refined and reviewed, resulting in their systematic organization and categorization. The obtained data were then analyzed to appropriately address the research questions. Finally, to validate the findings (ensuring reliability and validity), the results were presented to five religious scholars specializing in women's studies, and their corrective feedback was incorporated in two phases.

This study represents fundamental research in terms of its orientation and employs a qualitative approach utilizing thematic analysis to explore the foundations of women's empowerment as derived from Quranic verses and hadith sources. The thematic analysis integrated rational arguments and logical reasoning, highlighting the researcher's active role in interpreting the findings.

The study utilized library research methods combined with document analysis for data collection. The scope of the research encompassed the complete text of the Holy Quran, along with chapters related to women and family from the four Shia hadith collections: *Al-Kāfī*, *Man Lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, *Al-Tahdhīb*, and *Al-Istibṣār*. To ensure data adequacy, additional hadith sources were examined through lexical dictionaries, utilizing keyword searches.

Theoretical sampling was employed as the sampling method, with the criterion for determining when to stop sampling being the theoretical saturation of themes. This means that sampling continued until no additional data could be identified that would contribute to the development of a theme's characteristics. Data analysis and coding were conducted through an iterative back-and-forth process.

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empowerment to delineate the dimensions of the subject. The objective was to derive research questions from current theoretical perspectives and systematically examine these questions in the Quran and authentic hadith sources.

During the coding process, additional data emerged. Preliminary codes were generated, and a coding framework was established. Potential themes were subsequently identified and extracted, with codes matched to them. Concurrently, the themes were refined and reviewed, resulting in their systematic organization and categorization. The obtained data were then analyzed to adequately address the research questions.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, the results were presented to five religious scholars specializing in women's studies, and their corrective feedback was incorporated in two phases. This collaborative approach helped enhance the robustness of the study's conclusions and provided a deeper understanding of the themes related to women's empowerment in the context of Islamic texts.

4. Findings

In the initial phase of the analysis, a thorough and repeated examination of the Quran and hadith sources led to the extraction of primary or raw codes from the relevant research notes. These primary codes served as the foundational elements for developing core themes.

The second phase, which constitutes the main thematic analysis stage, involved deriving core themes from the primary codes. These core themes were then organized into organizing themes and ultimately abstracted into overarching theme(s). In this context:

- **Core themes** represent the fundamental codes and key textual elements that emerged from the data.

- **Organizing themes** arise from the synthesis and consolidation of core themes, allowing for a more structured understanding of the data.

- **Overarching themes** represent the highest-level themes that encompass the governing principles of the text as a whole, providing a comprehensive view of the foundations of women's empowerment as articulated in the Quran and Hadith.

Table 1 presents the core, organizing, and overarching themes related to the foundations of women's empowerment, which were extracted from primary codes through this three-stage coding process:

Table 1. Themes extracted from Quran and Hadiths regarding Islamic Foundations of Women's empowerment

Frequency	Source	Basic/Core Themes	Organizing Themes	Overarching Themes
23	Quran 4:1/ Quran 30:21/ Quran 32:7-8 / Quran 11:61/ Quran 53:32 / Quran 71:17/ Quran 22:5/ Quran 35:11/ Quran 15: 26,28 / Quran 55:14 / Quran 6:2/ Quran 7:12/ Quran 25:54/ Quran 21: 30 /Quran 16:4/ Quran 36:77/ Quran 76:2/ Quran 23:14/ *Wasā'il al-Shīʿa*, vol.20, p.13[1]/ *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol.11, p.112[2]/ ibid, vol.57, p.265[3]/	The same essence of creation	The essence of male/female creation	Ontological Foundations

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[1]. عَنْ زُرَارَةَ بْنِ أَعْيَنَ عَنْ أَبِی عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ﷺ فِی حَدِيثٍ قَالَ: «إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ خَلَقَ آدَمَ مِنْ طِينٍ ثُمَّ ابْتَدَعَ لَهُ حَوَّاءَ...».

From Zurarah bin Aʿyan from Imam Abu Abdullah: "Allah the Almighty created Adam from clay, and then created Eve for him…"

[2]. «إن الله تبارك و تعالى خلق آدم من الماء العذب و خلق زوجته من سنخه...».

"Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, created Adam from fresh water, and created his wife from his kind…"

[3]. «ألقى الله النوم على آدم فأخذ ضلعه القصير من جانبه الأيسر فخلق منه حواء...».

Frequency	Source	Basic/Core Themes	Organizing Themes	Overarching Themes
12	Quran 16: 98-100/ Quran 4: 31/ Quran 24: 3, 24/ *Al-Kāfī*, vol.5, p.325[1]/ *Al-Tanbīh al-Khawāṭir*, vol.1, p.114[2]/ *Ghurar al-Akhbār*, p. 64[3]/ *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, vol.20,	Possibility of deviation		

"Allah cast sleep upon Adam, then took his short rib from his left side and created Eve from it..."

[1]. «ألاَ أُخْبِرُكُمْ بِشِرَارِ نِسَائِكُمْ. الذَّلِيلَهُ فِي أَهْلِهَا، الْعَزِيزَةُ مَعَ بَعْلِهَا، الْعَقِيمُ الْحَقُودُ، الَّتِي لاَ تَوَرَّعُ مِنْ قَبِيحٍ، الْمُتَبَرِّجَةُ إِذَا غَابَ عَنْهَا بَعْلُهَا، الْحَصَانُ مَعَهُ إِذَا حَضَرَ، لاَ تَسْمَعُ قَوْلَهُ وَ لاَ تُطِيعُ أَمْرَهُ وَ إِذَا خَلاَ بِهَا بَعْلُهَا، تَمَنَّعَتْ مِنْهُ الصَّعْبَةُ عِنْدَ رُكُوبِهَا وَ لاَ تَقْبَلُ مِنْهُ عُذْراً وَ لاَ تَغْفِرُ لَهُ ذَنْباً».

"Be warned, for I shall inform you about the worst of your women: A woman who is humble (lowly) in her own family but domineering toward her husband, barren and resentful, who does not refrain from evil. In her husband's absence, she adorns herself and exposes herself (to others), yet when he returns, she withdraws and acts chaste. She does not listen to his words nor fulfill his wishes. And when he seeks intimacy with her, she resists him like a wild beast refusing to be mounted. She accepts no excuse from her husband and forgives no mistake or sin of his."

[2]. «فَقَالَ يَا نَبِيَّ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ هَلْ يَزْنِي الْمُؤْمِنُ قَالَ قَدْ يَكُونُ ذَلِكَ فَقَالَ يَا نَبِيَّ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْكَ هَلْ يَكْذِبُ الْمُؤْمِنُ قَالَ لاَ ثُمَّ أَتْبَعَهَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَ آلِهِ فَقَالَ هَذِهِ الْكَلِمَةُ إِنَّما يَفْتَرِي الْكَذِبَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ لا يُؤْمِنُونَ».

He said, "O Prophet of Allah, may Allah's blessings be upon you, can a believer commit adultery?" The Prophet replied, "It may be possible." He then asked, "O Prophet of Allah, may Allah's blessings be upon you, can a believer lie?" The Prophet replied, "No." The Messenger of Allah, may Allah's blessings be upon him and his family, followed this by saying, "Only those who do not believe fabricate lies against Allah."

[3]. «يا محمد إن عليا راية الهدى، و إمام أوليائي، و نور أهل طاعتي، و الكلمة التي ألزمتها المتقين، فمن أحبه فقد أحبني، و من أبغضه فقد أبغضني...».

"O Muhammad, verily Ali is the banner of guidance, the leader of My allies, the light of those who obey Me, and the word I have made binding upon the righteous. So whoever loves him has loved Me, and whoever harbors enmity toward him has harbored enmity toward Me…"

Frequency	Source	Basic/Core Themes	Organizing Themes	Overarching Themes
	H:186031[1]/ *Man lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol.3, p.575[2]/			
1	*Man lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol.2, p.621, H: 3214[3]/	Woman as a God's blessing	The purposeful creation of woman	
7	Quran 30: 21/ Quran7: 189/ *Man lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol.2, p.621, H: 3214[4]/ *Wasā'il al-Shī'a*, vol.20, H: 25115[5]/ ibid, H: 185221; *'Awālī al-Lā'ālī*, vol.3,	Woman as means of comfort and intimacy for men		

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[1]. «المرأة إذا طاوعت الرجل فنال منها حراما و قبلها و باشرها حراما أو فاكهها أو أصاب منها فاحشة فعليها مثل ما على الرجل فإن غلبها على نفسها كان على الرجل وزره و وزرها».

"If a woman willingly consents to a man, and he unlawfully takes pleasure from her—whether by kissing, touching, speaking indecently, or committing immoral acts with her—then she bears the same sin as the man. But if he overpowers and coerces her, then the sin falls solely upon the man, and he will carry both his own burden and hers."

[2]. «و من اجتنب الكبائر كفر الله عنه جميع ذنوبه».

"And whoever avoids the major sins, Allah will expiate all his minor sins."

[3]. «فَتَعْلَمَ أَنَّ ذَلِكَ نِعْمَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ عَلَيْكَ....».

"So that you may know that (your wife) is a blessing from Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, upon you."

[4]. «وَ أَمَّا حَقُّ الزَّوجَةِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ اَنَّ اللّهِ عَزَّوَجَلَّ جَعَلَها لَكَ سَكَنا وَ أُنْسا ...».

"The right of your wife is that you should know that Allah, the Almighty and Majestic, has made her a source of tranquility and companionship for you."

[5]. «مِنَ السُّنَّةِ التَّزوِيجُ بِاللَّيلِ لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ جَعَلَ اللَّيلَ سَكَناً وَ النِّسَاءُ إِنَّمَا هُنَّ سَكَنٌ...».

"Marrying at night is part of the Prophetic tradition, as Allah designated the night for repose, and women are truly meant to be a comfort ..."

Frequency	Source	Basic/Core Themes	Organizing Themes	Overarching Themes
	p.280; *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, vol.14, p.313[1]/			
1	*Wasā'il al-Shīʿa*, vol.20, H:185221[2]/	Transmitting Religious Knowledge		
2	Quran 76: 3/ Quran 2: 256/	The same Path of Guidance	will and freedom of choice	
2	Quran 18: 29/ Quran 13: 11	The Will for Happiness or Misery		
1	Quran 51: 56/	Servitude as the Ultimate Purpose of Creation	ultimate purpose of human creation	Humanistic Foundations
4	Quran 11: 7/ Quran 67: 2/ Quran 18: 7/ Quran 2: 30/	Trial as as the Ultimate Purpose of Creation		
1	Quran 76: 5/	The perfect creation of both genders		
3	Quran 4: 34/ *Wasā'il al-Shīʿa*, vol.20, p.170[3]/	Differences in physical capacities		

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[1]. امام صادق ؑ : «... فَقَالَ آدَمُ يَا رَبِّ مَا هَذَا الْخَلْقُ الْحَسَنُ الَّذِي آنَسَنِي قُرْبُهُ وَ النَّظَرُ إِلَيْهِ فَقَالَ اللَّهُ يَا آدَمُ هَذِهِ أَمَتِي حَوَّاءُ ، أَ فَتُحِبُّ أَنْ تَكُونَ مَعَكَ تُؤْنِسُكَ وَ تُحَدِّثُكَ وَ تَكُونَ تَبَعاً لِأَمْرِكَ فَقَالَ نَعَمْ يَا رَبِّ...».

Imam Sadiq (a): "… Adam said, 'O Lord, what is this beautiful creation whose nearness comforts me and whose sight delights me?' Allah replied, 'O Adam, this is My servant Hawwa (Eve). Would you like her to be with you—to keep you company, converse with you, and follow your guidance?' Adam said, 'Yes, O Lord …'"

[2]. امام صادق ؑ : «فَقَالَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ رِضَايَ أَنْ تُعَلِّمَهَا مَعَالِمَ دِينِي فَقَالَ ذَلِكَ لَكَ عَلَيَّ يَا رَبِّ إِنْ شِئْتَ ذَلِكَ لِي...».

Imam Sadiq (a): "So Allah, the Almighty and Majestic, said: 'My pleasure lies in you teaching her the principles of My religion.' Adam replied: 'This is my duty to You, O Lord—if You will it to be so for me…'"

[3]. «إِنَّ المَرأَةَ رَيحانَةٌ وَ لَيسَت بِقَهرَمانَةٍ...».

"… The woman is a sweet-smelling flower, not a champion …"

Frequency	Source	Basic/Core Themes	Organizing Themes	Overarching Themes
	Biḥār al-Anwār, vol.3, p.88-89[1]/		Sex Differences	
4	Quran 7: 189/ *Wasā'il al-Shīʿa*, vol.20, H: 25115[2]/ ibid, p.350[3]/ *Man lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, vol.2, p.618[4]/	Women's greater capacity for providing tranquility		
7	Quran 33: 32/ *Wasā'il al-Shīʿa*, vol.20, H: 25287[5]/ Al kafi, vol.5, p.505[6]/	Condemnation and commendation of specific feminine virtue		

[1]. «وَ الْمَرْأَةُ إِذَا أَدْرَكَا نَبَتَتْ لَهُمَا الْعَانَةُ ثُمَّ نَبَتَتِ اللِّحْيَةُ لِلرَّجُلِ وَ تَخَلَّفَتْ عَنِ الْمَرْأَةِ لَوْ لاَ التَّدْبِيرُ فِى ذَلِكَ...».

From the Hadith of Tawhid Mufaddal: "If there is no divine wisdom behind it, then why is it that when a man and woman reach puberty, pubic hair grows for both, yet a beard grows only on the man while the woman's face remains smooth?"

[2]. عن أبي الحسن الرضا ﷺ ، قال : سمعته يقول في التزويج قال : «من السنة التزويج بالليل ، لان الله جعل الليل سكنا ، والنساء إنما هن سكن...».

From Abu al-Hasan al-Rida (a), who said: I heard him say regarding marriage: "It is from the Sunnah to marry at night, for Allah has made the night a [time of] repose, and women are indeed a source of tranquility..."

[3]. «وخلق للرجال النساء ليأنسوا ويسكنوا اليهن ويكن موضع شهواتهم وامهات أولادهم ...».

"And He created women for men so that they may find comfort and tranquility in them, and so that they may be the object of their desires and the mothers of their children."

[4]. «وَ أَمَّا حَقُّ الزَّوْجَةِ فَأَنْ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَ جَلَّ جَعَلَهَا لَكَ سَكَناً وَ أُنْساً ...».

"The right of your wife is that you should know that Allah, the Almighty and Majestic, has made her a source of tranquility and companionship for you."

[5]. عن أبي جعفر ﷺ قال : «ان اللّه لم يجعل الغيرة للنساء وانما جعل الغيرة للرجال».

From Abu Jaʿfar (Imam Muhammad al-Baqir, peace be upon him), who said: "Allah has not placed jealousy (*al-ghayrah*) in women, but has placed it only in men."

[6]. عن أبي جعفر ﷺ قال: «غيرة النساء الحسد والحسد هو أصل الكفر إن النساء إذا غرن غضبن واذا غضبن كفرن الا المسلمات منهن».

Frequency	Source	Basic/Core Themes	Organizing Themes	Overarching Themes
	Wasā'il al-Shī'a, ibid, H: 25292[1]/ *Al-Kāfī*, ibid, p.338[2]/ *Al-Kāfī*, vol.5, H: 1[3]/ *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol.100, p.241[4]/			
9	Quran 4: 34/ Quran 2: 233/ Quran 17: 23-24/ Quran 29: 8/ Quran 31: 14/ Quran 46: 15/	wifehood and motherhood		

From Abu Jaʿfar (a), who said: "The jealousy of women is envy (*al-ḥasad*), and envy is the root of disbelief. Verily, when women feel jealousy, they become angry, and when they become angry, they disbelieve—except the Muslim women among them."

[1]. عن أبي عبدالله ﷺ قال: «ان الله عزّ وجلّ لم يجعل الغيرة للنساء وانما تغار المنكرات، فاما المؤمنات فلا انما جعل الله الغيرة للرجال...».

From Abu Abdullah (a), who said: "Allah, the Almighty, has not created jealousy (*al-ghayrah*) for women. Only the corrupt women feel jealousy—as for the believing women, they do not. Indeed, Allah has ordained jealousy solely for men..."

[2]. «الحَياءُ عَشَرَةُ أَجزاءٍ، تِسعَةٌ فِي النِّساءِ وواحِدَةٌ فِي الرِّجالِ».

"Modesty (*al-ḥayā'*) consists of ten parts: nine are in women, and one is in men."

[3]. «خلق الله الشهوة أجزاء، فجعل تسعة أجزاء في النساء، وجزءاً واحداً في الرجال، ولولا ما جعل الله فيهنّ من الحياء على قدر أجزاء الشهوة لكان لكلّ رجل تسع نسوة متعلّقات به».

"Verily, Allah the Blessed and Exalted has divided marital desire into ten shares: nine shares are in women, and one share is in men. And were it not for the modesty that Allah—the Mighty and Glorious—has instilled in women proportionate to their desire, every man would have nine women clinging to him."

[4]. «ان اللَّهَ جَعَلَ لِلْمَرأَةِ أَنْ تَصْبِرَ صَبْرَ عَشَرَةِ رِجَالٍ فَإِذَا حَصَلَتْ زَادَهَا قُوَّةَ عَشَرَةِ رِجَالٍ اخرى».

Imam Sadiq (a): "Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, has endowed a woman with the patience of ten men. Then, when she becomes pregnant, He grants her the strength of ten additional men."

Frequency	Source	Basic/Core Themes	Organizing Themes	Overarching Themes
	Wasā'il al-Shīʿa, vol.15, p.175[1]/			
2	Quran 43: 18/ Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 153[2]/	Feminine disposition to ornamentation		
3	Quran 2: 282/ *Wasā'il al-Shīʿa*, vol.27, p.365[3]/ ibid, vol.20, p.362[4]/	Women's greater emotional dominance		

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[1]. «إذا حملت المرأة كانت بمنزلة الصائم القائم المجاهد بنفسه وماله فى سبيل اللّه ، فإذا وضعت كان لها من الأجر ما لايدرى أحد ما هو لعظمه، فإذا أرضعت كان لها بكل مصة كعدل عتق محرر من ولد اسماعيل، فإذا فرغت من رضاعه ضرب ملك كريم على جنبها وقال: استأنفى العمل فقد غفر لك».

"When a woman becomes pregnant, it is as if she is a fasting person standing in devotion to Allah, striving in His path with her life and wealth. And when she delivers the child, she is granted a reward so immense that no one can quantify it. And when she breastfeeds the child, for every suckle, she receives the reward of freeing one of the descendants of Ismail (a), when she finishes nursing, a noble angel strikes her on her side and says, "Resume your deeds, for you have been forgiven.'"

[2]. «إِنَّ النِّسَاءَ هَمُّهُنَّ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَ الْفَسَادُ فِيهَا...».

"And indeed, women are preoccupied with the adornment of worldly life and corruption within it."

[3]. «وعلّة ترك شهادة النساء في الطلاق والهلال، لضعفهنَّ عن الرؤية ومحاباتهنَّ النساء في الطلاق ، فلذلك لا تجوز شهادتهنَّ إلّا في موضع ضرورة ، مثل شهادة القابلة...».

From Imam al-Riḍā (a), in response to what was written to him regarding the reasons [behind certain rulings]: "The reason women's testimony is not accepted in matters of divorce and moon-sighting is due to their weakness in accurate observation and their tendency to favor other women in divorce cases. Therefore, their testimony is only permissible in cases of necessity, such as the testimony of a midwife …"

[4]. پيامبر ﷺ: «أَلْبَنَاتُ هُنَّ الْمُشْفِقَاتُ الْمُجَهِّزَاتُ الْمُبَارَكَاتُ، مَنْ كَانَتْ لَهُ ابْنَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ جَعَلَهَا اللهُءلَهُ سِتْراً مِنَ النَّارِ، و مَنْ كَانَتْ عِنْدَهُ ابْنَتَانِ أُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ بِهِما، وَ مَنْ كَانَتْ عِنْدَهُ ثَلَاثُ بَنَاتٍ أَوْ مِثْلُهُنَّ مِنَ الْاخَوَاتِ وُضِعَ عَنْهُ الْجِهَادُ وَ الصَّدَقَةُ».

The Prophet (s): "Daughters are compassionate, helpful, and a source of blessing. Whoever has one daughter, Allah will grant him a shield from Hellfire. Whoever has two daughters, because of them he will enter Paradise. And whoever has three

Frequency	Source	Basic/Core Themes	Organizing Themes	Overarching Themes
3	Quran 4: 124/ Quran 33:35/ Quran 49: 13	Equal capacity to attain nearness to Allah	Equal value in terms of humanity	Axiological Foundations
3	Quran 33: 72/ Quran 24: 30-31/	Equal accountability in divine commandments		
6	Quran 17: 19/ Quran 4: 13 /Quran 3: 195/ Quran 16: 97/ Quran 9: 72/ Quran 33: 35	Same thawāb for jihād regardless of gender		
1	Quran 30: 30	Identical God-given innate disposition	Common origin of values	
1	*Wasā'il al-Shīʿa*, vol.5, p.175[1]/	God's rewards for maternal hardships as worship	The intrinsic value of motherhood	
5	Nahj al-Balāghah,	The spiritual value of women's domestic labor	Valuable woman's domestic role	

daughters—or sisters equivalent to them—the obligation of jihad and charity will be lifted from him."

[1]. «إذا حملت المرأة كانت بمنزلة الصائم القائم المجاهد بنفسه وماله فى سبيل اللّه ، فإذا وضعت كان لها من الأجر ما لايدرى أحد ما هو لعظمه، فإذا أرضعت كان لها بكل مصة كعدل عتق محرر من ولد اسماعيل، فإذا فرغت من رضاعه ضرب ملك كريم على جنبها وقال: استأنفى العمل فقد غفر لك».

"When a woman becomes pregnant, it is as if she is a fasting person standing in devotion to Allah, striving in His path with her life and wealth. And when she delivers the child, she is granted a reward so immense that no one can quantify it. And when she breastfeeds the child, for every suckle, she receives the reward of freeing one of the descendants of Ismail (a), when she finishes nursing, a noble angel strikes her on her side and says, "Resume your deeds, for you have been forgiven.'"

Frequency	Source	Basic/Core Themes	Organizing Themes	Overarching Themes
	Ḥikmah 234[1]/ *Wasā'il al-Shīʿa*, vol.20, H: 25341 and vol.14, p.123[2]/ *Al-Mustadrak*, vol.15, p.156[3]/ Nahj al-Faṣāhah, H: 2892[4]/			
101	**Total**			

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[1]. «خِيَارُ خِصَالِ النِّسَاءِ، شِرَارُ خِصَالِ الرِّجَالِ؛ الزَّهْوُ وَ الْجُبْنُ وَ الْبُخْلُ؛ فَإِذَا كَانَتِ الْمَرْأَةُ مَزْهُوَّةً لَمْ تُمَكِّنْ مِنْ نَفْسِهَا، وَ إِذَا كَانَتْ بَخِيلَةً حَفِظَتْ مَالَهَا وَ مَالَ بَعْلِهَا، وَ إِذَا كَانَتْ جَبَانَةً فَرِقَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ يَعْرِضُ لَهَا».

"The best qualities in women are the worst qualities in men: vanity, cowardice, and stinginess. For when a woman is vain, she guards herself (from impropriety); when she is stingy, she safeguards her own wealth and her husband's wealth; and when she is cowardly, she fears everything that befalls her."

[2]. «تَقَاضَى عَلِيٌّ وَ فَاطِمَةُ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ فِى الْخِدْمَةِ فَقَضَى عَلَى فَاطِمَةَ عليها السلام بِخِدْمَتِهَا مَا دُونَ الْبَابِ وَ قَضَى عَلَى عَلِيٍّ عليه السلام بِمَا خَلْفَهُ... فَقَالَتْ فَاطِمَةُ فَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَا دَخَلَنِى مِنَ السُّرُورِ إِلَّا اللَّهُ بِإِكْفَائِى رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ تَحَمُّلَ أَرْقَابِ الرِّجَالِ».

Ali (a) and Fatimah (a) asked the Prophet (s) to arbitrate in dividing household responsibilities between them. The Messenger of Allah (s) assigned the domestic duties to Fatimah (a) and the outdoor tasks to Ali (a). Thereupon, Lady Zahra (a) said: "None knows the joy that has entered me except Allah, for the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) has spared me from bearing the burden of [interacting with 'non-maharem'] men."

[3]. قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «يَا حَوْلَاءُ مَا مِن امْرَأَةٍ تَكْسُو زَوْجَهَا إِلَّا كَسَاهَا اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ سَبْعِينَ خِلْعَةً مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ كُلُّ خِلْعَةٍ مِنْهَا مِثْلُ شَقَائِقِ النُّعْمَانِ وَ الرَّيْحَانِ وَ تُعْطَى يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَرْبَعُونَ جَارِيَةً تَخْدُمُهَا مِنَ الْحُورِ الْعِينِ...».

The Prophet (s) said: "There is no woman who clothes [i.e., provides for] her husband except that Allah will clothe her on the Day of Resurrection with seventy garments of Paradise—each garment as delicate as a poppy petal and as fragrant as basil. And forty servants from the attendants of Paradise will be granted to her, to serve her."

[4]. «مهنه احداكن فى بيتها تدرك جهاد المجاهدين انشاءالله».

"Any one of you women, by being occupied with your household duties, will attain the reward of the Mujahideen (those who strive in the path of Allah)."

The research findings resulted in 101 raw codes which were then organized into three overarching themes: ontological foundations, humanistic foundations, and axiological foundations; along with seven organizing themes: the essence of male/female creation, the purposeful creation of woman, will and freedom of choice, ultimate purpose of human creation, and sex differences, equal value in terms of humanity, Common origin of values, the intrinsic value of motherhood, and valuable.

According to the findings, women's empowerment shares certain fundamental commonalities with global empowerment literature at its conceptual foundations. Specifically, some general ontological, humanistic, and axiological principles—such as equality in human essence and the existence of absolute universal values like the inherent worth of each individual—are addressed in both the global definitions of empowerment and in the Quran and hadiths. These findings align with and corroborate the results of several domestic studies, including those by Rezazadeh et al. (2021), Hashemian et al. (2022), and Heidari Rad and Tohidi Monesh (2023).

However, fundamental distinctions emerge between the Quranic foundations of women's empowerment and competing approaches. From an ontological perspective, the findings emphasize the unity of creation between men and women, as articulated in the (Quran 4:1[1]), which refers to humanity as a "single soul." This concept aligns with certain feminist theories, such as ecofeminism, which highlight women's intrinsic connection to creation. However, it stands in contrast to the underlying philosophy of mainstream feminist approaches that may not emphasize this unity.

The historical context of women's empowerment is also marked by the dominance of distorted interpretations of Judeo-Christian scriptures, which have significantly contributed to negative Western perceptions of women. Texts from the Torah and Bible contain evidence of women's subordination, and these doctrines, combined with patristic exegesis, philosophical epistemologies, and popular consciousness, have established a historical framework that views women as inherently inferior.

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[1]. ﴿يا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذي خَلَقَكُم مِنْ نَفْسٍ واحِدَةٍ وَ خَلَقَ مِنْها زَوْجَها وَ بَثَّ مِنْهُما رِجالاً كَثيراً وَ نِساءً...﴾ (النساء/۱)
"O mankind! Be wary of your Lord who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and, from the two of them, scattered numerous men and women…" (Quran 49:13)

In contrast, the Quran's emphasis on human creation from a "single soul" (*nafs wāḥidah*) signifies a unified existential reality that underscores the shared human essence, presenting a metaphysical foundation that cannot justify gender superiority (ʿAlāsavand 2012, 46). Consequently, this perspective asserts that women possess equal intrinsic worth as human beings and should achieve empowerment across various spheres in accordance with their natural rights and characteristics. This understanding challenges prevailing narratives of women's subordination and reaffirms the importance of recognizing women's empowerment as a fundamental right grounded in their equal status within the framework of Islamic teachings.

In contrast, competing approaches broadly define empowerment domains, framing a woman's inability to access leadership roles in Islamic societies as opportunity deprivation and disempowerment. Moreover, the Commission on Women and Development's instrumentalist approach reduces women to mere agents of economic development, overlooking their intrinsic value as beings endowed with multidimensional capabilities. These capabilities necessitate opportunities for realization that align with their inherent needs and dispositions.

From a humanistic perspective, significant divergences arise between Quranic and non-Quranic approaches to gender. Certain radical feminist schools, adopting an adversarial approach to achieving gender equality, argue that—beyond minimal physiological differences—gender distinctions are culturally constructed and should not be used to evaluate women's worth or assert their inferiority. Some feminists, such as Butler (1990, 9), further contend that both gender and sex, as binary categories, are cultural constructs with prescriptive and restrictive implications, rendering the distinction between sex and gender obsolete.

In contrast, Quranic verses affirm the existence of inherent natural differences between men and women, as highlighted in verses such as verses (Quran 49:13[1]; 4:34[2]; 2:228[3]). These verses recognize distinctions that are not merely social constructs but are grounded in biological realities. For example, differences in reproductive capacity, sexual characteristics, and higher sexual arousal in men are biologically based and cannot be solely attributed to cultural factors. Some of these distinctions, such as differentiated familial and social roles, stem from cultural decisions that are rooted in these biological traits (Bustān 2015, 30).

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, in his Quranic exegesis, *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān*, emphasizes the significance of sex differences in relation to verse 34 of *Sūrat al-Nisāʾ*. He explains that the phrase, *"because of the advantage Allah has granted some of them over others" (Quran 4:34)*, refers to the additional capacities that Allah has bestowed upon men, enabling them to undertake certain challenging tasks. He notes that the essence of women's lives is characterized by emotional and sentimental qualities, rooted in tenderness and delicacy (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1981, 4:543). Consequently, these inherent differences provide a basis for certain distinctions in rulings and responsibilities within Islamic law. For instance, the rulings regarding *hijab* and the concept of sexual submission (*tamkīn*) can be understood as justifiable in light of these natural differences.

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[1]. ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا...﴾ (الحجرات/١٣)

"O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another…" (Quran 49:13)

[2]. ﴿الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ...﴾ (النساء/٣٤)

"Men are the managers of women, because of the advantage Allah has granted some of them over others, and by virtue of their spending out of their wealth…" (Quran 4:34)

[3]. ﴿وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ...﴾ (البقرة/٢٢٨)

"and men have a degree above them…" (Quran 2:228)

A more critical point is that the inherent differences between men and women are viewed as divinely ordained aspects of God's perfect creation plan, as indicated in the Quran (51:56[1]), which states that humans were created to serve God (*ʿibādah*). These differences derive their meaning from the ultimate divine purpose of servitude and are inherently just. Within this framework, feminine and masculine capabilities differ, each designed for specific functions that contribute to the overall harmony of creation. For instance, one distinctive feminine capability is providing psychological security within the family. Wives and mothers utilize this capability to create warm and tranquil havens for family members, as illustrated in verse 21 of *Sūrat al-Rūm*: *"And of His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them ..."*[2] *(Quran 30:21)*. This verse emphasizes the importance of companionship and emotional support in familial relationships, highlighting the role of women in fostering a nurturing environment.

These natural differences signify not inequality but rather a wise diversity in creation that equips each gender for distinct roles. This distribution of capabilities reflects divine justice, as both genders receive responsibilities and opportunities that are commensurate with their inherent nature. As stated in Quran (4: 32[3]), each male and female possesses unique virtues and excellences, which further underscores the idea that both genders play complementary roles in society. This comprehensive approach to women's empowerment emphasizes equality of rights—acknowledging that women and men have equal rights in terms of dignity and worth—without advocating for identical roles or responsibilities. It recognizes and values women's distinctive traits and contributions while guiding them toward divine perfection.

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[1]. ﴿وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ﴾ (الذاريات/۵۶)

"I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me" *(Quran 51:56)*

[2]. ﴿وَ مِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْواجاً لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْها ...﴾ (الروم/۲۱)

"And of His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them ..." *(Quran 30:21)*

[3]. ﴿وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ لِلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِمَّا اكْتَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِمَّا اكْتَسَبْنَ...﴾ (النساء ۳۲/)

"Do not covet the advantage which Allah has given some of you over others. To men belongs a share of what they have earned, and to women a share of what they have earned..." *(Quran 4:32)*

Within this framework, genuine women's empowerment is realized not through blind imitation of men, but through the cultivation of their innate potentials in alignment with divine purposes. From an Islamic scholarly perspective, natural gender differences are recognized as an essential component of the causal order, as noted by Muṭahharī (see Muṭahharī 1998, pp. 125-126). This understanding implies that there is no inherent superiority between genders; rather, each possesses distinct responsibilities and rights that are complementary to one another.

The differentiation of gender roles in the Islamic approach serves multiple functions, including the enhancement of spiritual well-being and moral purity within family structures. This notion is substantiated by verse 53 of *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb*, where Allah emphasizes the importance of separating private and public spheres for the purification of hearts: *"... And when you ask anything of [his] womenfolk, ask it from them from behind a curtain. That is more chaste for your hearts and their hearts ..."*[1] *(Quran 33:53).* This divinely prescribed separation is designed to minimize the socially disruptive aspects of natural sexual attraction (Bustān 2015, 65), thereby facilitating positive social participation for both genders.

In this context, the Islamic framework views the roles of men and women as integral to maintaining social harmony and spiritual health, promoting an environment where both can thrive according to their distinct capabilities. This approach fundamentally contrasts with the underlying assumptions of the 1995 UN Human Development Report, which equates gender equality with absolute legal sameness and non-discrimination before the law. Such an interpretation becomes untenable when considering the natural differences between genders, as it overlooks the deeper philosophical and ontological dimensions that inform Islamic thought.

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[1]. ﴿... وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ...﴾ (الاحزاب/۵۳)

From a humanistic perspective, the Quranic theme of women's free will and agency (e.g., Quran 76:3[1], 91:9-10[2], 7:19-23[3], 33:72-73[4]) partially aligns with Amartya Sen's (1985) theory of agency. The 1995 UN Human Development Report, Kabeer's (1999) framework, and Women in Development approaches similarly define women's empowerment as enhanced choice and control over resources, reinforcing this convergence. However, the Islamic perspective

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[1]. ﴿إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا﴾ (الإنسان/٣)

"Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful" (Quran 76:3)

[2]. ﴿قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا؛ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا﴾ (الشمس/٩-١٠)

"one who purifies it is felicitous, and one who betrays it fails" (Quran 91:9-10)

[3]. ﴿وَيَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ * فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوْآتِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ * وَقَاسَمَهُمَا إِنِّي لَكُمَا لَمِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ * فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكُمَا الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلْ لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ * قَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنْفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ﴾ (الأعراف/١٩-٢٣)

"[Then He said to Adam,] 'O Adam, dwell with your mate in paradise, and eat thereof whence you wish; but do not approach this tree, lest you should be among the wrongdoers.' Then Satan tempted them, to expose to them what was hidden from them of their nakedness, and he said, Your Lord has only forbidden you from this tree lest you should become angels, or lest you become immortal.' And he swore to them, 'I am indeed your well-wisher.' Thus he brought about their fall by deception. So when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness became exposed to them, and they began to stitch over themselves with the leaves of paradise. Their Lord called out to them, 'Did I not forbid you from that tree, and tell you, "Satan is indeed your manifest enemy?"' They said, 'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves! If You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers'" (Quran 7:19-23)

[4]. ﴿إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا * لِيُعَذِّبَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ وَيَتُوبَ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا﴾ (الأحزاب/٧٢-٧٣)

"Indeed We presented the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it, and were apprehensive of it; but man undertook it. Indeed he is most unfair and senseless. Allah will surely punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the polytheists, men and women and Allah will turn clemently to the faithful, men and women, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful" (Quran 33:72-73)

distinctively links agency to moral accountability (Quran 17:84[1]), emphasizing human responsibility for actions—a connection often overlooked in Western literature.

The Quranic theme of "potential for deviation and misguidance" (Quran 2:36[2]), highlighting human susceptibility to temptation) underscores that Islam does not view empowerment as a solely linear or progressive process. Instead, it frames empowerment as contingent upon vigilance against internal threats (Satanic influences) and external challenges. Consequently, human agency—manifested through choice and control—can lead to positive or negative outcomes, necessitating ethical constraints to guide empowerment effectively.

Liberal feminist theories, which emphasize external barriers to women's empowerment (e.g., legal, economic, and social structures), argue that reforming these conditions—through equal access to employment, education, and opportunities—achieves full empowerment. They narrowly define empowerment as attaining external power, such as career advancement or financial independence. However, this perspective overlooks internal threats, such as arrogance from success or the misuse of power for unethical purposes, which can undermine empowerment even when external barriers are removed. Without an ethical framework, empowerment risks becoming self-defeating—a limitation liberal feminism fails to address.

The Quran introduces the concept of ibtilā' (divine test), illustrating that empowerment itself can become a means of trial. Verses highlighting how wealth and power may lead to rebellion against God

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[1]. ﴿قُلْ كُلٌّ يَعْمَلُ عَلَى شَاكِلَتِهِ فَرَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ هُوَ أَهْدَى سَبِيلًا﴾ (الإسراء/٨٤)

"Say, Everyone acts according to his character. Your Lord knows best who is better guided with regard to the way" (Quran 17:84)

[2]. ﴿فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَى حِينٍ﴾ (البقرة/٣٦)

"Then Satan caused them to stumble from it, and he dislodged them from what they were in; and We said, 'Get down, being enemies of one another! On the earth shall be your abode and sustenance for a time" (Quran 2:36)

(Quran 28:76[1]) reveal that empowerment, in the Quranic view, is not an end goal but a tool for achieving a higher purpose. This higher purpose, articulated in Islamic scholars' view as "*qurb-i ilāhī*" (nearness to Allah), represents the ultimate objective of human creation: "The ultimate goal is a station near to God—meaning that all possible perfection and delight for creation are gathered there. Indeed, not all those close to the Divine Presence are of the same rank, but among them are those who attain every possible joy, leaving no void within their being. This is none other than the '*Khalifatullāh*' (Vicegerent of God) and the manifestation of Allah, the Blessed and Exalted. However, worship is an intermediate goal, while the preliminary purpose is to prepare the ground for choice and divine testing" (Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2011).[2]

The research findings regarding the intrinsic worth of women and men, as stated in the (Quran 17:70[3]), align with Principle 2 of the UN Charter on women's empowerment, which emphasizes respect for human rights. This principle underscores the recognition of every individual's inherent dignity and value, regardless of gender. However, a key distinction arises within the Islamic framework: Islamic criteria do not confine women's value solely to the achievement of social or economic power, which often dominates global indicators like the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). Instead, the Islamic perspective also incorporates dimensions of empowerment related to spiritual growth and the attainment of higher spiritual stations.

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[1]. ﴿إِنَّ قَارُونَ كَانَ مِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَى فَبَغَى عَلَيْهِمْ وَآتَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْكُنُوزِ مَا إِنَّ مَفَاتِحَهُ لَتَنُوءُ بِالْعُصْبَةِ أُولِي الْقُوَّةِ إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ قَوْمُهُ لَا تَفْرَحْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفَرِحِينَ﴾ (القصص/٨٦)

"Korah indeed belonged to the people of Moses, but he bullied them. We had given him so much treasures that their keys indeed proved heavy for a band of stalwarts. When his people said to him, 'Do not exult! Indeed Allah does not like the exultant." (Quran 28:86)

[2]. The remarks of Ayatullah Miṣbāḥ Yazdī at the office of the Supreme Leader on 26/10/2011.

[3]. ﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا﴾ (الإسراء/٧٠)

"Certainly We have honoured the Children of Adam, and carried them over land and sea, and provided them with all the good things, and given them an advantage over many of those We have created with a complete preference" (Quran 17:70)

This broader definition of empowerment can be articulated through Quranic value criteria,[1] particularly the standard of "*taqwā*" (God wariness). God wariness serves as a guiding principle, encouraging individuals to develop a heightened awareness of their responsibilities to God and to one another. This spiritual dimension enriches the understanding of empowerment, suggesting that true empowerment encompasses not just material success but also the pursuit of moral and spiritual excellence. Moreover, this foundation opens the door to another aspect of women's empowerment—"educative empowerment." This concept emphasizes the importance of education and personal development, including spiritual and moral education, as crucial components of empowerment. Unfortunately, this dimension has often been neglected or misinterpreted in many empowerment theories, particularly within certain feminist frameworks. For instance, radical feminism frequently critiques the gender division of labor, viewing it as a patriarchal construct that confines women to domestic roles, with motherhood being seen as a prominent symbol of this confinement (Bustān 2015, 15). From this perspective, women are encouraged to liberate themselves from what are perceived as inherent biological characteristics, such as fertility and reproduction, in order to achieve a broader range of choices and opportunities (Abbott & Wallace 2004, 296).

In contrast, the Islamic understanding of women's empowerment does not view motherhood and domestic roles as limitations but rather as integral aspects of women's identities that can contribute to their spiritual and personal development. The nurturing and educative roles women fulfill within the family can be seen as avenues for empowerment that align with both their natural dispositions and spiritual objectives. Islam values motherhood and domestic responsibilities, recognizing women's innate capacities while providing guiding mechanisms and laws to channel these capacities. This approach ultimately benefits family stability and social sustainability.

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[1]. ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُــعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾ (الحجرات/١٣)

"O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify yourselves with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God wary among you. Indeed Allah is all-knowing, all-aware" (Quran 49:13)

Conclusion

The present study elucidated Islam's intellectual framework for women's empowerment through Quranic teachings and hadiths by identifying three overarching themes: ontological, humanistic, and axiological foundations and seven organizing themes: (1) equality in the essential creation of men and women, (2) purposeful creation of women, (3) equal free will and choice, (4) equality in humanity's ultimate purpose while acknowledging natural gender differences, (5) equal valuation of both genders, (6) common origin of values, and (7) the inherent value of motherhood and feminine roles. This framework requires further reinforcement and completion in future research.

This foundational framework not only avoids the reductionism inherent in theories such as Kabeer (1999) or Longwe (1993), but also maintains a balance between gender justice and natural differences. The findings demonstrate that emphasizing natural gender differences as the primary humanistic basis for women's empowerment does not indicate inequality, but rather reflects the wise diversity in creation and divine justice that equips each gender for specific roles. This comprehensive perspective on women's empowerment simultaneously emphasizes equality of rights (not identity of rights), recognizes women's unique characteristics, and guides them toward divine perfection. Within this framework, genuine women's empowerment is achieved not through blind imitation of men, but through cultivating their innate potentials in alignment with higher divine purposes -a stance that contrasts with certain feminist approaches (such as essentialism).

The ontological foundation of the unified origin of male and female creation (*nafs wāḥidah*) not only demonstrates a fundamental theological distinction from feminist approaches—particularly liberal feminism—but also establishes the framework for eliminating inferiorizing perspectives toward women in Islamic society. This foundation facilitates the creation of empowerment opportunities aligned with women's inherent dignity and status as human beings. When a woman's capacity for autonomous choice is defined in absolute, unconstrained terms, it may become self-defeating and generate detrimental consequences for both family and society. Islamic teachings

therefore incorporate specific ethical boundaries and considerations that limit absolute freedom—a position fundamentally incompatible with liberal theories like liberal feminism.

Islam, while recognizing the natural differences between men and women in talents, physical and spiritual dimensions, roles in society, and innate needs, has removed gender from psychological prominence and implemented its social policies logically within the gradual and progressive revelation of the Qur'anic verses (Ahmadi Parto & Behjatpur 2023, 153).

Ultimately, developing operational models based on such research findings would enable policymakers and cultural planners to design women's empowerment programs at micro, meso, and macro levels that align with Islamic values while addressing real societal needs. This approach not only prevents blind imitation of Western models but also—by leveraging Islam's intellectual heritage—can yield a culturally-grounded, implementable framework tailored to Iran's socio-cultural context.

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