



## **"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an**

*Asma Barlas*

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Does Islam call for the oppression of women? Non-Muslims point to the subjugation of women that occurs in many Muslim countries, especially those that claim to be "Islamic," while many Muslims read the Qur'an in ways that seem to justify sexual oppression, inequality, and patriarchy. Taking a wholly different view, Asma Barlas develops a believer's reading of the Qur'an that demonstrates the radically egalitarian and antipatriarchal nature of its teachings.

Beginning with a historical analysis of religious authority and knowledge, Barlas shows how Muslims came to read inequality and patriarchy into the Qur'an to justify existing religious and social structures and demonstrates that the patriarchal meanings ascribed to the Qur'an are a function of who has read it, how, and in what contexts. She goes on to reread the Qur'an's position on a variety of issues in order to argue that its teachings do not support patriarchy. To the contrary, Barlas convincingly asserts that the Qur'an affirms the complete equality of the sexes, thereby offering an opportunity to theorize radical sexual equality from within the framework of its teachings. This new view takes readers into the heart of Islamic teachings on women, gender, and patriarchy, allowing them to understand Islam through its most sacred scripture, rather than through Muslim cultural practices or Western media stereotypes.

## **"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an** **Details**

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# From Reader Review "Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an for online ebook

'Izzat Radzi says

Saya masuk kedalam perbahasan buku ini setelah melalui sedikit sebanyak buku lain yang mencorak dan membentuk pemikiran saya; kritik al-Hady mengenai konservatisme agama (khususnya dalam buku Asma ini, kaitan kitab tafsir dan zaman pemerintahan siapa dan bagaimana ia ditulis), kritik reductionisme agama-Quran kepada ritual oleh Syazreen; perbincangan idea Iqbal mengenai Divine Ontology dan terbaru Identiti Wanita dengan Quran oleh Ni' mat.

Maka tidak dapat tidak hal ini memberi satu kaca mata yang berbeza dalam mencemati dan menilai buku ini. Pertamanya, beliau membuka lembaran perbahasan dengan teori kritik; hermeunatika dan teologi pembebasan (*liberation theology*). Hal ini sangat wajar bagi mempermasalahkan dan pengutaraan metode pembacaan Qur'an yang beliau laungkan.

Sebelum dikritik buku ini, wajar sekali dipuji akan perbincangan mengenai, misalnya (i) *Divine Ontology*, di-mana dalam tradisi Judeo-Krisitian misalnya, ideologi *Father-Male* yang mendasari pegangan/kepercayaan dibantah beliau dengan hujah-hujah yang kuat, daripada menggantikan Father-rule dalam kisah Nabi Ibrahim kepada *God-Rule*, ke doktrin Tauhid yang neutral, akar kepada Islam yang menolak sebarang bentuk patriaki. Hal ini penting kerana dalam tradisi agama Samawi lain diatas, Hawa misalnya dikaitkan sebagai punca pengeluaran Adam (dan secara tidak langsung seluruh Umat manusia) dari Syurga (lalu secara tidak langsung menyalahkan kaum Hawa secara pukal).

Dan sini kritik pertama berlaku. Beliau di-awal-awalnya adalah dalam nada 'menolak sebarang bentuk rujukan' kepada hadith, kitab tafsir dan sewaktu dengannya, kerana ulasnya, selain dari sifat renyah (memerlukan disiplin tertentu, lantas menjadikan ia eksklusif dan elitis), isi kandungannya sendiri mengutarakan kisah dan sifat misoginis terhadap wanita. Sebenarnya, apa yang perlu seperti selalu asatizah utarakan, lihat apa yang disebut (dalam tafsir), siapa yang menyebut (penulis kitab dan sahabat/tabi'in dalam matan) dan tidak lupa zaman ia ditulis, seperti Asma terangkan mengenai kaitan sebuah kitab tafsir dan zaman. Nah, bukankah dengan cara ini kita lebih bersikap adil dan bukan menolak buta begitu sahaja? Apabila kita lihat kembali, misalnya mengenai masalah Hawa ini, rujukan beliau (malah dalam masalah lain juga) masih bersifat sekondari; selain hanya bertumpu kepada Tabari dan Baydawi. Disini, saya cuba mengutarakan tafsir yang disampaikan oleh Maulana 'Asri (yang menurut Farid Esack, aliran beliau Shah Wali Allah adalah aliran reformis-tajdid) ketika membahaskan mengenai [7:20]...????? ???? ?????? beliau dengan jelas bersikap egalitarian dengan menafsir Qur'an ini dengan kaedah Arab, yang dengan jelas menunjukkan Syaitan membisikkan kepada kedua-mereka, dan mereka berdua dengan kebolehan aqal fikiran (and will) memilih untuk makan buah dari pohon larangan tersebut. Dan ini datang dari seorang ulama' ahl-hadith! Maka, sangatlah saya kira tidak padan akan beberapa pandangan kecil yang beliau tolak untuk menolak usaha ulama' sebelum ini seluruhnya. Tidak ada ilmu yang lahir dari vakum!

Hal kedua yang menarik minat adalah perbicangan mengenai (ii) seks/ualiti, yang didalam termasuk ulasan mengenai kesetaraan (*equity*), kesucian (*purity*) dan rasa tanggungjawab dengan hubungan (*chastity*) dalam Bab 5. Hal ini kerana sekadar pembacaan dan penelitian sedikit sebanyak sebelum ini, perbincangan mengenai hal ini sangatlah mengecewakan (depressing) khususnya dalam falsafah Eropah, dari metode psikoanalisis Freudian-Lacanian, sekurang-kurangnya dari mazhab Žižek (Saya belum meneliti Foucault). Argumen yang Asma bentangkan adalah terdiri dari tradisi masyarakat, khususnya Yahudi (hal sama saya jumpa dalam buku

The Jewish Woman's Movement In England And The United States, 1881-1933) dimana setiap hari, di

gereja mereka, golongan lelaki berdoa syukur tidak dilahirkan sebagai wanita. Dan pemikiran misoginistik yang menundukkan (*submissive*) dan melemahkan jiwa (*internalizing the weakness*) wanita ini yang 'diperangi' oleh Qur'an. Dan hal kesucian (purity) juga menarik untuk diteliti kerana dalam dunia pasca-modernisme ini, lebih-lebih dengan tradisi Barat/Eropah yang menggalakkan hubungan terbuka antara jantina, usulan menjaga darah dari bercampur (selain soal tanggungjawab) melalui hermeutika Qur'an adalah terpakai kepada kedua-dua jantina, dan bukan hanya kepada wanita (dalam budaya *slut-shaming* misalnya, dan di penjurusan satu lagi pembulian/memalukan orang yang suci (*virgin*) dari zina dsb). Asma dengan merujuk Badawi [Gender Equity in Islam 1995] mengatakan bahawa dalam Quran "*menstrual taboo extends only to intercourse; it does not extend to sexual intimacy, nor does it call for social ostracization or confinement.*" **h.162** Saya bersetuju dengan tanggapan ini -meskipun beliau kerap kali mengkritik bahawa pandangan sebegini muncul dalam tradisi Hadith- kerana misalnya, Maulana 'Asri misalnya membawa pandangan Imam Bukhari berkenaan Fiqh ini dan berpandangan bahawa bukan sahaja dibolehkan perempuan Haidh masuk ke masjid, malah turut membaca Qur'an (contoh nyata adalah bagi Hafizah yang mahu menjaga hafazan-nya). Dan bila Asma mengutarakan polemik umur A'isyah berkenaan isu kahwin dengan kanak-kanak, saya tidak bersetuju apabila beliau merangkumkan perbincangan mengenai umur itu dengan "*in studying 'Ayesha, one therefore is studying "male intellectual history, nor a woman's history, but reflections about the place of a woman, and by extension, all women, in exclusively male assertions about Muslim society".*" **h.126** Entah apa yang ingin dicapai jika itu konklusi beliau akan polemik ini. Bagi pemula pada sesiapa yang berminat akan isu khusus ini, boleh dapatkan dua karya Dzulkhairi Mohd Noor.

Berkenaan bab 6 *The Family and Marriage*, saya kira adalah lanjutan dari bab 5 dari skop perbincangannya. Ia berdepan dengan masalah dalam perkahwinan; daripada poligami, nikah-cerai, 'rogol isteri' sehingga ke nusyuz (saya terjemahkan sebagai tidak berterima kasih kepada suami, rentetan sebab dibawah) dan memukul isteri (wife-beating). Pertamanya, saya bersetuju banyak perkara dalam bab ini, daripada kebahagiaan dan kasih sayang (sukun/sakinah) adalah peri-utama dalam sesebuah perkahwinan sehingga ke idea "*the Qur'an does not present polygyny as a solution for economic problems, a wife's infertility, or the need to fulfill male sexual needs*" **h.191** yang memualkan seperti yang pernah saya dengar dari seorang asatizah yang tidak perlu saya namakan sebut di masjid. Dan kedua, saya bersetuju akan perlunya persetujuan isteri dalam perhubungan kerana, mereka juga mempunyai keinginan (*will*) dan angin (*mood*) emosi. Dalam hanya menundukkan wanita dalam hal ini, adalah tidak patut kerana boleh sahaja kita menterbalikkan hal yang sama kepada sesuatu perkara yang misalnya tidak mahu dilakukan oleh pihak suami pada satu-satu masa (ambil contoh menonton bola/membeli belah). Oleh itu, apabila beliau menulis "*If many men read these Ayat as a license to rape their wives or to abuse them, it may be because they are already abusing their wives and are seeking religious justification for their transgressions.*" **h.162** saya juga sama teringat apabila Olivier Roy mengatakan mengenai ISIS dan pengabsahan tindakan mereka, "*It's the Islamification of radicalism that we need to investigate, not the radicalization of Islam.*" Selain itu juga, perbincangan nikah bersyarat (*prenuptial agreement/contract*) wajar ditambah-baca dan difikir ulang.

Namun berkenaan nusyuz dan pukul-isteri, saya kira perlu ada kritikan. Saya senada apabila beliau berbicara dalam masyarakat Islam zaman turun Wahyu, wanita boleh dipukul sesuka hati dan 'dijual-beli lagi diwarisi' dan konsep nusyuz itu adalah sebagai batasan dalam masyarakat yang tiada batas memukul isteri. Malah, kes-kes mahkamah isteri dipukul yang menyayat hati -seolah hilang perikemanusiaan dalam perhubungan perkahwinan- wajar kita ambil enteng lontaran beliau ini. Namun, dalam membicarakan hal ini, kita masih tidak dapat lari daripada saranan sebenar ayat Quran tersebut. Jangankan kerana nyamuk, kelambu dibakar! Bukankah, misal Dr. Rozaimie membahaskan (1 & 2) bahawa hal ini adalah berkenaan fiqh yang terpaut dengan hadith bagi setiap tahapan? Bukankah 'pukul' tersebut adalah langkah terakhir, itupun jika ia memberi kesan (isteri berubah dan bukan kesan dari maksud menyakitkan/mencederakan)? Bukankah langkah-langkah sebelum itu masih penting, dari tidak bercakap, boikot tempat tidur sehingga menghantar

wakil? Ya, saya tahu beliau mengkritik mengenai sama ada (i) insiden pukul isteri tanpa batas dan perikemanusiaan dalam masyarakat patriaki, mungkin di Saudi/Mesir atau negara majoriti/jutaan Muslim seperti Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan/India; atau (ii) cubaan untuk mengambil simpati Barat mengenai budaya yang berbeza ini; meskipun beliau tidak memperincikan hal ini (tahap-tahap dan jenis pukulan) dan membiarkan ia seperti angin berlalu.

**Update: as in 2018, I took back above. No one should be hit -especially free-will adult as a couple- for any reason whatsoever. I know the theory above (since 2009) sort of stating 'hit' with a ruler/small object on the toe etc (places where 'no traces' of hit or humiliating like face), but it seems unsuitable for today's time, as well as who's in charge of putting checks on the hitter?**

Kalaupun Asma menghujahkan Tuhan tidak menundukkan wanita kepada suami dengan kerap kali menghujahkan insiden 'Aisyah selepas insiden fitnah (saya tak tahu kemana arah beliau mahu pergi dengan itu), bagaimana dengan dua hadith nabi mengenai (i) setiap dari kamu adalah pemimpin (sehingga ke akhirnya, yang memperincikan tanggungjawab isteri) dan (ii) hadith nabi melihat banyak wanita dalam neraka, yang apabila ditanya, mengatakan mereka tidak berterima kasih kepada suami; dalam erti kata apabila ada satu kesilapan/kesalahan suami, seolah-olah tidak pernah ada suatu pun kebaikan yang pernah dilakukan oleh suaminya sebelum itu.

Bahkan, saya menekankan beliau sewajarnya membawa nusyuz dalam Qur'an itu tidak lebih kepada suatu konsep didikan dalam Islam/Qur'an. Suami bertanggungjawab untuk menegur isteri apabila salah (kerana dia menanggung dosa tidak menegur, dan bukan dosa isteri tersebut) dan isteri ada tanggungjawab untuk mendengar teguran itu, kerana apa guna bicara panjang lebar sehingga bab akhir, tetapi teguran untuk penambahbaikan dengan berwewenang ditolak tepi kemudian mengutamakan ego sendiri. Perikritik ini adalah kerana Asma seolah menidakkan kewujudan konsep nusyuz itu, betapa independen sekali seorang wanita bernama isteri.

Meskipun kritikan diatas, saya kira buku ini masih lagi bagus itu (dan akan diulang baca nanti selepas beberapa ketika sesudah menambah-baca mengenai wacana ini).

Malah, boleh kita tambah persoalan (yang beliau tidak utarakan) mengenai konsep wahyu kepada Maryam (dan konsep wahyu-kenabian), juga konsep-sosial masyarakat judeo-kristian dalam mendepani berita Maryam mengandung tanpa seorang suami, selain konsep menunduk/menahan diri dalam hubungan awam berlainan jantina-kaitan dengan naratif Yusuf a.s.

Secara keseluruhannya, 7/10

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## **Fadoua says**

Interpreting religious texts, in particular the Qur'an, has been the work of men for centuries. Women are excluded from contributing to the Tafsir. Although, women participated actively in the creation of religious knowledge in the early decades of Islam (the prophet's wife Aisha as example), their opinions have been excluded for a long time.

What are the consequences of the absence of women's voices? Isn't it one important reason of the patriarchal reading of the Qur'an? Isn't it a reason of the understandings of Qur'an that teach sexual inequality and segregation? What if women participate in Tafsir communities? Won't this suggest a balanced reading and

understanding of the Qur'an and avoidance of misreadings the verses related to women?

In her book "Believing women in Islam", Prof. Asma Barlas explains how Qur'an is read in ways that seem to justify sexual oppression, inequality, and patriarchy. She, first, discusses and criticizes the different traditional methods of generating the meanings from Qur'an. She introduces the concept of hermeneutics to observe Qur'an's interpretation. Hermeneutics is a theory that deals with interpretation of religious scriptures and advocates that "it is not enough to ask what we know about religion, but equal attention must be paid to how we come to know what we know". Besides, she re-reads for us the Qur'an position on a wide variety of issues that concern Muslim women, for instance, the relationships father/daughter and husband/wife. She shows that Qur'an can be read in different way that makes it a book of liberation for women.

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### **Presley Abdul says**

Asma Barlas definitely knows what she is talking about. "Believing Women" in Islam is an immensely valuable book, which has thoroughly researched and analyzed Qur'anic exegeses in a multi-faceted method that she carefully details. The book itself offers readers with past experience regarding hermeneutics and the Qur'an to read the book in a non-linear fashion. However, I did not follow that advice, having had a very minuscule background knowledge of traditional exegeses and hermeneutics. Barlas offers readers the chance at an anti-patriarchal reading by reading in front of the Qur'an and behind it; in addition, she discusses the intertextual, intratextual, and extratextual aspects of the scripture. She also contests traditional canonized readings of the Qur'an by inciting all different types of modern discourse, while still exploring the limits and boundaries of her own theoretical understanding. Definitely a must for anyone interested in the "supposed" role of women in Islam.

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### **Hadia says**

I really loved this book. Its tone is highly academic, but I thought it did a wonderful job of demonstrating how the Quran is consistent with egalitarian values of gender equity and how misogynist interpretations of the text reflect people's own pre-text and understanding of the text, rather than the Quran itself. She criticizes readings of the Quran that are decontextualized and selective, thereby emphasizing that it should be read holistically and intratextually. She argues that the Quran itself lays out a method for exegesis based on textual holism.

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### **Damian says**

Pretty damn good book. Very detailed account of how oppressive readings of the Qur'an became confused with the Qur'anic discourse itself. Posits alternative interpretive approach that delineates a very convincing anti patriarchal theme within the text. Nevertheless, it does not give a satisfactory account of how the institution of a highly patriarchal family structure sits with this anti patriarchal theme. Furthermore, to argue that orthodox readings of the Qur'an are unholistic and ignore liberatory themes and are thus arbitrary is a bit disingenous considering there are clear power relations instituted between men and women within the Qur'an. Because of this it verges slightly into the apologist territory for me. Despite this shortcoming the

themes identified such as displacing the sovereignty of the father with God's was absolutely fascinating.

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### **Naeem says**

I read this in the manuscript form and felt that it would make the author an international success. It has.

Rather than a review, I would like merely to describe it. It battles on two fronts: against feminists who might like to think that Islam is anti-women; and Muslims who might like to think that Islam gives them license to subordinate women.

The core of the analysis is the idea that God created woman not, as in Christianity, from the rib of man. Rather, that God creates men and women simultaneously and as ontologically different. And, that this is God's way of showing humans how to understand, respect, and celebrate difference.

My own small difference with the author's world view is that, given that God's words must be interpreted by humans, why do we need to concern ourselves with original text? I still worry about this question. And I pose it for all sacred texts, including those that pass as "secular" -- like various constitutions.

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### **Hamza says**

I'll just come right out and say it: I had very mixed feelings about this book. It is certainly an important work, but I felt like I just could not get into some of the language used, first of all. The author used many terms with a slash right in the middle of them, like "sexual/textual" that confused me a bit. I suppose I cannot blame the author for my not having a background in her specialty, but I felt that the average Muslim would be left scratching their head as much as I was. Maybe I'm wrong.

I was also a bit taken aback by the way the author would almost cast aside ahadith, tafasir, and other extra-Qur'anic texts while then evoking "the Tradition" in the next breath when mentioning something such as 'A'isha's (RA) age at marriage. I do not believe the author was necessarily saying that ALL of these extra-Qur'anic materials are worthless, but it still seemed contradictory to me.

The author did bring up some valuable points about how tafasir and the opinions of early scholars, which were undoubtedly set in the context of patriarchal societies (since most societies are patriarchal), should not necessarily be taken as the end-all, be-all backdrop under which we should understand the Qur'an. Her assertion that many of the early commentaries examined the Qur'an aya (verse) by aya also rang true, and it is well known that many of them focused more on things like linguistics than deriving law. I fully agree with her idea that hermeneutics is an important way to read any text.

And yet there was just too much eschewing of traditional scholarship under the four established madhahib (schools of thought) for my taste. While Imam ash-Shafi'i was only human and therefore liable to make mistakes, his school was developed over centuries, with the opinions of his students and his students' students (and so on) being factored into the mix. As such, none of these schools are monolithic, and thus have been open to interpretation by scholars even into the present day.

While I do sympathize with the author's concerns and do not deny that many Muslims of today are

misogynistic and ignorant of their own faith, I do not blame the classical study of Islam for this failure but rather the *lack* of study undertaken nowadays. The author would mention how *ijtihad* should not necessarily be closed while going on in the postscript to state that she did not claim to be a *mujtahid*. That statement confused me, since the entire work is essentially *ijtihad*.

Still, despite my misgivings about some of the author's statements, I really enjoyed this book and did not find her opinions on the *ayat* in question radically different from how I had already understood them. I owe that not to my own discernment but in fact to "traditional" Islamic scholars such as the late Mohamed Sa'id Ramadan al-Bouti (???? ???? ????? ?????). For more information on that, check out his book *Women Between the Tyranny of the Western System and the Mercy of the Islamic Law*. It's not perfect, but I think it covers a lot of the issues mentioned by the author of this book.

For further reading, I also recommend the recent book *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* by Prof. Jonathan A.C. Brown. This tackles the problem of early scholarship while staying true to the Islamic tradition. It acknowledges the fact that early scholarship was not infallible, but also denies the idea that we should eschew it or its extra-Qur'anic components (*ahadith*, *ijma'*, *qiyas*) entirely. Again, I am not saying that Ms. Barlas was making such a claim in this work, but she seemed to come close a few times.

So, why four stars despite all of my issues with this book? Well, they are really minor nitpicks considering how much I enjoyed reading it, and I do think such a work by a female author is important in understanding how so many have just gotten it wrong and toed the patriarchal line. She is certainly an excellent writer, and perhaps I would have enjoyed this book even more if I was more of an intellectual. My opinion doesn't matter anyway. Read the book, but do not expect it to keep too closely to Traditional Islam. Also don't expect Ms. Barlas to bash Islam like so many other female authors from Islamic backgrounds have done lately. I don't know, just read it.

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### Aasem Bakhshi says

I initially wanted to give this book 4 stars but then I ended up giving an extra because I must have given 5 if I was women. This is an excellent all-encompassing text and not just another feminist reading of the Quran. Barlas makes an extremely strong case for unreading patriarchal readings of scripture by principally moving the onus of (mis)reading from the Quran to the reader who is interacting with the text through his own subjectivities. In my view, the work achieves a two dimensional success; one, against the misogynist and predominantly male oriented interpretations and two, against those modernist theories which blames the text itself for its misreading.

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### Sajal says

\*I read this for a class\*

I know this isn't for everyone. But holy crap, this was for *me*. Throughout **Believing Women in Islam**, Barlas essentially challenges "the widespread tendency to blame Islam for oppressing Muslims rather than blaming Muslims for misreading Islam". She calls out those who have "monopolized the meaning of God's word", which invariably reinforces systematic patriarchy. (Something that plagues more than just Islam, I



bet).

She explores certain Islamic cultural traditions, Shari'a Law, questionable Ahadith, and uses the Quran to prove them un-Islamic. *I'm in awe!* And her arguments in favour of reading the Quran as a holistic text, thereby refraining from taking ambiguous Ayah's out of context, has me in complete agreement.

This would have received 5/5 if it wasn't for the fact that I found the writing to be dry at times. So, 4/5 it is. Would highly recommend!

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### **Ify says**

Dr. Asma Barlas has written a wonderful scholarly work (which may not be the easiest read but readers should stick with it) on her view of the Quran and Islam as egalitarian and antipatriarchal. Barlas challenges the methodology by which conservative mostly male interpretative communities empowered by state actors have read in patriarchal themes in the Quran. She also challenges some Western/feminist critiques of Islam trying to find a middle way between the two that remains faithful to the central principle of the oneness of God and the dignity of women and men as equals before God.

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### **Indigo says**

I'm finished with "Believing Women"...: An incredible scholarly & critical analysis that offers an insightful & inclusive approach textually, historically, culturally; lifting the veil off of patriarchal paradigms (once and for all) and revealing the true beauty, the essence of the Qur'an. Highly Recommended.

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### **G Barahona says**

Barlas' book is part of the modern scholarship in Islamic studies. She puts forth a strong argument (with excellent citations) that Islam has been derailed by shutting down ijti'had and ijma as well as the elevation of the ahadith over the Qur'an itself - which God specifically warned against. The book is broken into 3 parts and the first two delve deeply into these issues. The third part focused on the impact of these failures onto women. Excellent book for its argument and her craft.

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### **Exavidreader says**

Some interesting and valid points based on the Quran showing how Islam strives for gender equality. Difference does not mean inequality. On the other hand, there are many other contentious issues that were not addressed such as the law of inheritance. There are also some issues that I disagree with. Although not comprehensive enough, it is still a good read.

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## **Juliette says**

For those who think Islam doesn't make room for human rights (esp, womens rights) this book is a great insight into Islam, the Qur'an and its true meanings.

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## **Sofia says**

Asma Barlas finishes this book with a Post Script stating, "my objective in writing this book was to recover the scriptural basis of sexual equality in Islam and thereby to defend Islam against the claim, made by both Muslim conservatives and feminists, that it is a religious patriarchy that professes models of hierarchical relationships and sexual inequality". Without doubt she has truly met this objective academically, it's up to the people to realise this objective practically.

I myself am a Muslim woman who has been trained in traditional Islam and as such, her analysis of what she terms "Muslim conservative" positions and her deconstruction of these really struck me. These are not superficial arguments, but deeply constructed and rigorously authenticated by the Quran itself. To say it is a valiant piece of work is an understatement. I enjoyed how she dealt with the other end of the critical spectrum too, by challenging the accusations of (Western) feminists. She's not in this for making friends!

Just recently I had an exchange with a young Imam (Muslim leader) on the issue of domestic violence in the Muslim community. He had written a paper on the matter and I had been quite critical as I felt he missed the point. She covers marital issues in her book and analysis the Quranic verse that some have highlighted as a facilitator for DV against women. Her analysis was so much more superior and well thought through. Not only that but her approach is one that is holistic, taking the Quran in its entirety, not just piecemeal, isolated verse by isolated verse. This is crucial in the need to shift whole attitudes and understandings.

I think if anyone gives this less than five (maybe 4) stars, it's probably because they haven't been able to push through the highly academic vocabulary and the immensely scholastic approach she takes (This is no light read), or because the patriarchal readings and commentaries of the Quran have become so internalised that the reader is not yet ready to entertain her writings. If your aversion is due to the former I would urge you to soldier through it, what you get out of the book will be much more than what you put in. If it's because of the latter, I'd recommend you continue to read around and to allow observations of the world around you to let you make good sense of what she has written.

I had so many "mind blown" moments with this book and would highly recommend it. If you have ever wondered about women in Islam as an insider or outsider, this book is for you.

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