

Women Empowerment through Quran: An Alternative Narrative to the Western Liberal Feminism

Dr. Rukhsana Shaheen Waraich,

Lecturer, Department of Law, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad

Dr. Muhammad Fayaz

Assistant Professor of Law, Bahria University, Islamabad

Ghazala Ghalib Khan

Lecturer, Faculty of Shariah & Law, International Islamic University Islamabad

Abstract

The current narrative of Western Liberal Feminism is strongly built upon the financial independence of women. Some even call it 'Financial Empowerment'. In fact, this is only one aspect of women empowerment. The history of Islamic world reveals that Islam initiated its own version of empowerment of women through the Holy Quran. From its inception, Islam marks it mandatory upon every member of Islamic society to seek knowledge. Since the advent of Islam till today, female Muslim scholars, from around the globe, have been consistently contributing to the realm of Islamic knowledge. Starting from Hazrat Aisha (May Allah be pleased with her) as the very first prominent female Muslim scholar till date, countless female scholars have emerged on the horizons of Islamic scholarship, making their valuable contributions to women empowerment. It is argued that throughout the Islamic history, women have shared their intellect, caliber, enthusiasm and wisdom, enriching the heritage of Islamic scholarship. Till date, one can find the examples of such empowered women in Islamic world who are contributing to shape their societies. They were not financially independent by the time when they embarked upon their respective journeys. This is to problematize here that female financial independence is only one angle of women empowerment. Islam bestows upon a novel dimension to women empowerment. This is empowerment through the Holy Qur'ān. The knowledge, wisdom

and intellectualism acquired through the Qur'ān truly empowered women in Islamic history and continues to this date. Female Muslim scholars are using that intellect and wisdom and very actively shaping the course of history alongside the opposite gender - men. Dr. Farhat Nasim Hashmi is amongst one of such scholars of the contemporary Islamic world. Her services for spreading the teachings of the Holy Quran not only transcended the borders of her native country; rather it became a global wave and a positive paradigm shift in the teachings of Islam when her brainchild 'Al-Huda International' was founded. We posit that she is an epitome of women empowerment, and this didn't stem from financial independency but is deeply rooted in the education of the Holy Qur'ān. Moreover, she has made countless woman empowered through intellectualization achieved through the Holy Book. The paper also examines the process of transfer of empowerment through analysis of her Islamic School System. Moreover, it includes results of an analysis of interviews conducted from women, all of which supports the view that their empowerment does not lie in being financially independent but in gaining wisdom through the Holy Quran.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Feminism, Intellectualism, The *Quran*, Islam, *Dawah*, AL-Huda, Islamic Revivalist Movements

Introduction

Western Liberal Feminism is a belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes.¹ It manifests in different movements, narratives, discourses, and ideologies. The current narrative is strongly built upon financial independence. Some even call it 'Financial Empowerment is the New Feminism'². In fact, this is only one angle of women empowerment. Arguably, a woman may or may not be empowered through financial independence. Moreover, there are many different dimensions of women empowerment and there may be many different alternate versions of women empowerment in different parts and cultures of the world.

The examination of history of Islamic world reveals that Islam initiated its own version of women empowerment through the Holy *Qur'ān*. Islam made it mandatory upon every member of its society to seek knowledge. It encouraged women to attend the Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace

Be Upon Him) and under his direct training and supervision. They used to seek knowledge, ask questions, and voice their opinions and objections, so much so that they demanded a female-only exclusive day of education.³ The *Qur'ān* gave them the confidence, purpose and meaning to their lives alongside the political, economic, and social rights. However, these rights did not dominate their lives, rather it was the intellectualism, wisdom and knowledge acquired through the Holy *Qur'ān* that did so. This legacy continued throughout Islamic history until it was marred by external factors like alien cultures, imperialism, and colonialism. There have been some attempts to revive this old tradition in the post-colonial era by some female Muslim scholars. They have proved that the true empowerment comes from the intellectualism acquired through the Holy *Qur'ān*. Financial independence can be one aspect of empowerment but it's not always the case. Rather, it has not been the case in early Islamic history. Women might not be rich but empowered enough to stand up in the meeting of the second caliph, Umar ibn-al-Khattab, and object over his opinion regarding a matter related to women and make him retrieve his opinion.⁴

Owing to the above, the services of Dr. Farhat Nasim Hashmi for disseminating the intellectualism, wisdom and knowledge of the Holy *Qur'ān* are unprecedented. Her brainchild 'Al-Huda International Welfare Foundation'⁵ that started from Islamabad (Pakistan)⁶, has emerged a global wave of teaching and learning of the Holy *Qur'ān*. This global tremor transformed the lives of thousands of women across the globe. She did not adopt the conventional *Madrassah* system to teach women the Holy *Qur'ān*. Rather, she established her own novel institution that is distinct from the systems of traditional *Madrassah*, as well as modern university education. Amidst these well-established systems of education, she opted for her own experiments, to maximize the impact of the Holy *Qur'ān*. She envisioned to transform the basic fabric of the Muslim society, where Islamic values are not culture-based, rather they are deep rooted in the correct knowledge and wisdom of *Qur'ān*. She established an institution all by herself without any male parallel to the traditional system. The wisdom of her curriculum and syllabus of the institution was conceived through the following Verse:

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ
وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

Certainly, did Allah confer [great] favor upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book [i.e., the Qur'ān] and wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error.⁷

She realized that humanity was saved by Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and he did so by imparting the knowledge of the Holy *Qur'ān* in them. Human beings can possibly be liberated by many coercive and abusive shackles of the modern-day world by giving the Holy *Qur'ān* its due space in our lives. For this reason, she founded an institution solely dedicated for women and young girls to teach them the Divine Book cover to cover, starting from the first chapter till last. Not only its correct recitation but its meaning and exegesis too. Out of the six hours that students spend in the said institution, *Qur'ān* is taught for almost five hours. A woman all alone stood up and took upon her, the task of teaching the Holy *Qur'ān* to females of this *Ummah*. How would this sound to a patriarchal society? That too in a field where there was a monopoly of men and exclusively controlled by them. A woman stood up, took up the task of establishing a novel institution that must be a fusion of traditional Islamic scholarship and modern methodologies of teaching and research, excessively relying upon computers and the internet. She led it all alone from making the curriculum to the length of courses for each age group and background. Starting from a small circle in Islamabad, this institution has spread its 12 main branches in Pakistan that supervise countless smaller circles. Globally, it has established campuses in Canada, USA, UK Saudi Arabia, and Middle East that supervise many smaller circles of the Holy *Qur'ān* worldwide. According to a rough estimate, one thousand women graduate in the Holy *Qur'ān* yearly from these main branches. There is no estimation of how many women would graduate through countless smaller circles. All of them are being run by graduates of Al-Huda. Women are preachers now at such a large scale without male supervision. The influence was so massive that it attracted a lot of attention. Resultantly, multiple theses,⁸ book chapters and articles were written on the

life of Dr. Farhat Nasim Hashmi. Moreover, her remarkable contribution for initiating this global wave to study the *Qur'ān* enlisted her in the "List of 500 Most Influential Muslims" for the years ranging from 2010 – 2022.⁹

According to the students and followers of Dr. Hashmi, her dynamic personality has given a new definition to women empowerment and leadership. She is a remarkable fusion of traditional Islamic knowledge and modern scholarship. On the contrary, her critics consider her a 'fitnah' and deviant.¹⁰ The main objection relates to the credibility of her academic qualification. Is she qualified to start an Islamic school? Which Madrassa did she attend? Who gave her the authority to do so? Where did she receive her Islamic education from? Another important issue is regarding the structure and methodology of this Islamic school. Why has she deviated from the established practices of traditional *Madrassah* mainly run by male Islamic scholars? What does Al-Huda International resemble to? Is she following the West? What is the agenda? There is an endless list of such questions. To remain firm and grounded to her cause, in the face of such staunch criticism, presented by a male dominated society, is the true women empowerment. To challenge the monopoly of centuries old systems and to bring a revolutionized idea of teaching religion which had become male dominated phenomena, is true empowerment of females around the globe. For this reason, authors argue that her empowerment came from the in-depth knowledge of the Holy *Qur'ān* and Muslim societies had first empowered women through dissemination of knowledge of the Holy *Qur'ān*. Authors posit to challenge the stereotypical liberal notion, that focuses mainly on financial empowerment, and it is argued that Muslim societies have their own tools, versions, and notions of women empowerment.

Dr. Hashmi's deep rooted, concrete empowerment was embedded in her by her father, who was a very qualified religious scholar. Before going into further details about Dr. Hashmi, it seems apt to know about her father, in greater depth, as she credits him as being the most important personality in shaping and influencing her life.

Abdur Rahman Hashmi

The birth name of Dr. Hashmi's father was 'Fateh Shah Kaimal Puri'¹¹, but he renamed himself as 'Abdur Rehman Hashmi' (Servant of most gracious

one), when he came to know about the *Hadīth* that Abdur Rehman was one of Allah's favorite names. He was a religious scholar as per the traditional standards of the Sub-continent. He did his *Dars-e-Nizami* course from traditional *Madrassah* and later graduated from *Jamiah Islamiyah Talimuddin Dabhel, Surat India* (Affiliated with Darul Uloom Deoband). He was a lifelong member and leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami too.

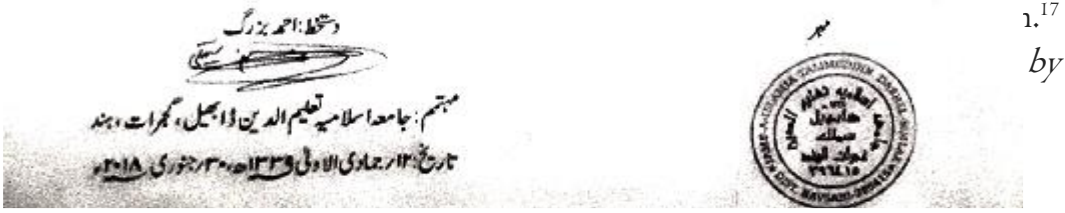
He was born around 1914-1915 in Misriyal, district Campbellpur (now Attock in the Punjab, Pakistan). He started his formal religious education at the age of 12 in Tamman (a town five miles away from his hometown Misriyal)¹² and studied two classes there and completed Nazra till 26th Juz. He then left for a village Galiyat to live with his brother and completed primary school¹³ and Nazra there and learnt Persian too. At the age of 15, he travelled to Saghar (a town six miles away from his hometown) and studied there for three years and learnt Arabic Grammar (*Ṣarf* and *Naḥw*). Later, Mr. Hashmi hit the road to reach Pindi Ghaib (district Tala Gang) and did the traditional course of *Madrassah* called *Dars-e-Nizami*¹⁴. He then studied *Rabṭ-e-Qur'ān*¹⁵ from Mawlana Hussain Ali.¹⁶ He studied logic for one year too. Later, he was appointed as a Khatīb at Eidghah in Gujrat. However, his passion for *Hadīth* compelled him to embark on a new journey, and this time it was to *Jamiah Islamiyah Talimuddin Dabhel, Surat India*. There he got the opportunity to learn *Hadīth* from Mawlana Shabir Ahmed Usmani, and other learned teachers there. Mr. Hashmi excelled in this subject and his teachers were so happy with his progress that in some subjects, they awarded him 51 marks out of 50. Following are the details of his teachers and the marks he obtained in their courses.

- He studied *Saḥīḥ Bukhārī* from Allama Shabbir Ahmed Usmani and got 50 out of 50 marks in it.
- Mawlana Abdu Rahman Amrohi taught him *Abū Daūd* 50/50, *Saḥīḥ Muslim* 50/50, *Baiḍawī* 48/50, *Nisāī* 49/50, *Muwattā Imām Muḥammad* 50/50 and *Muwattā Imām Mālik* 51/50 and Jalālain.
- Mawana Amrohi was so happy with his result in *Muwattā Imām Mālik* that he gave him 51 out of 50.

”تاریخ جامعہ“ میں ابن ماجہ شریف کا ذکر نہیں کہ کس سے پڑھی ہے؟ لیکن مولانا فتح شاہ صاحب رحمۃ اللہ علیہ کے ہم درس رفیق قاری تنویر احمد شریفی رحمۃ اللہ علیہ کی سوانح ”تذکرۃ الشریف“ میں ص: ۱۱۵ پر ہے کہ ابن ماجہ شریف انہوں نے حضرت مولانا عبدالرحمن صاحب امر وی رحمۃ اللہ علیہ سے پڑھی ہے۔

نوٹ: واضح رہے کہ یہاں ”جامعہ اسلامیہ تعلیم الدین ڈابھیل، گجرات، ہند“ میں امتحان میں سب سے اعلیٰ (اونچا) نمبر پچاس ۵۰ ہے، اس لحاظ سے مولانا فتح شاہ صاحب رحمۃ اللہ علیہ کی سند عالی ہے۔

یہ تحریر محمد رشاد و ڈاکٹر کی درخواست پر دی گئی ہے، نیز یہ تحریر ”تاریخ جامعہ“ ص: ۹۹ زوداد جامعہ: ۱۳۵ھ کی مدد سے تیار کی گئی ہے۔ نقطہ



Source:

After completion of his *Daura-e-Hadīth* He returned to his hometown and started teaching at *Madrassah* in Pindi Ghaib.¹⁸ An incident here changed his entire left. Two students fell ill and one of them died of pneumonia. No medical practitioner was available there to treat them. It affected him so much that he decided to learn the ‘*Hikmat*’. He went to different cities like Khaniwal, Multan and Khanghar to learn ‘*Hikmat*’ from expert *Hakīms*. After developing reasonable expertise in the field, he started his own practice in Luddaywala. In 1945, he joined *Jamaat-e-Islami* as a “*Rukn*”¹⁹ after doing research²⁰ for two years. He used to conduct study circles for teaching *Qur’ān* as a *Rukn*.

In 1947, He shifted from Luddaywala to Sarghodha city where he lived for the rest of his life and later got married.²¹ He then spent his rest of his life in practicing ‘*Hikmat*’ and ‘Homeopathy’²² and teaching the Holy *Qur’ān*. From morning till noon, he used to practice and from *Zuhr* till ‘*Asr*’, he used to teach Translation of Glorious *Qur’ān* to the people around him like shopkeepers and general public. He also played his role in a religious movement and was even arrested thrice during the movement of ‘*Khatm-e-Nabuwatt*’.

The home of Abdur Rehman Hashmi was a hub of religious studies, as it was a boarding, for the students who were keenly interested in religious studies from the learned father. Despite being a well-qualified scholar, he did not teach in any *Madrassah*, rather he preferred to disseminate the knowledge of the *Qur’ān* to the general public. From pre-dawn to dusk, he used to teach different segments, alongside his practice of homeopathy. At the said pattern,

he used to teach males boarders and the female members of his family at different slots. Females of his own home and others were taught after *Fajar*. Then it used to be the turn of children of his home. Afterwards, he used to go to his clinic. He had reserved the time of noon till afternoon for teaching of the Holy *Qur'ān* to the general public. Night was again the time to teach the *Qur'ān* to his own family if something left in the morning.

Dr. Hashmi was born to him on December 22nd, 1957, in Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan. She is the eldest of her 12 siblings.²³ It is quite evident that Dr. Hashmi grew up in such a learned environment, deeply impacting her personality. Her father was the most important teacher in her life. One can observe the resemblance between father and daughter lives. They both travelled extensively for seeking Islamic knowledge and did not limit themselves to one place for that matter. Moreover, the impacts of such journeys are reflected in their lives too.

He travelled for decades, from city to city, to seek knowledge with limited resources and meagre means of transportation. The same path was chosen by the daughter, later to be elucidated in the following paragraphs.

The above accounts clearly demonstrate that Dr. Hashmi belongs to a well-reputed Muslim Scholar's family, settled in the Indian subcontinent for years. No doubt, she was born, raised and educated in the house of a prominent Islamic scholar of his own time – Abdur Rahman Hashmi.

ACADEMEIC JOURNEY OF DR. FARHAT NASIM HASHMI

Aforementioned details elucidate that Dr. Farhat Hashmi was born to a traditional 'Alim Abdur Rahman Hashmi' who made sure to teach and transfer his knowledge to his children, especially his eldest daughter – Dr Farhat Hashmi. At the same time, he sent them to schools to be well-versed with modern education too.

The formal education of Dr. Hashmi began with a local *Madrassah* in Sarghoda where she was sent for *Nazrah* of *Qur'ān* and other basic knowledge of Islam. She completed *Nazrah* when she was about six and half years old. Her father was in jail for his participation from the platform of Jamaat –e-Islami in the movement of 'Khatm-e-Nabuwatt' at that time. He sent a letter to his wife on this occasion and asked her to buy her presents and celebrate her completion.

At the age of 7, she was sent to her grandmother in a village for admission in a school as her mother wanted her to be directly admitted in Grade II while schools at Sarghoda²⁴ city was not ready for that. She studied there for one year and later shifted to a school in Sarghoda city and completed schooling from there. She has been an exceptional student and won scholarships and prizes throughout her life. Young Farhat used to aspire to become a teacher. Alongside her formal education at school, her father made sure to transfer his treasure of knowledge to the heart of her intelligent daughter. He would wake up for *tahjjud* (pre-dawn prayer) and start teaching at that time.

He started teaching Farhat Hshmi, Persian when she was in Grade VI and gave her the books of *Sā'dī*²⁵ for reading. She studied Persian for next three years followed by *Ṣarf* and *Naḥw*²⁶ in Arabic. He started teaching her translation and short *Tafsīr* of *Qur'ān* when she was fourteen years old and studying in Grade IX at school. It took them four years to complete the translation and exegesis of *Qur'ān*. She was eighteen years old by then. Later he taught her *Rabṭ al-Qur'ān*. The books of *Aḥādīth*²⁷ and *Fiqh*²⁸ that are taught during *Dars-e-Nizami*, were also learnt by Dr. Hashmi from her father. In this way, she studied everything that is taught in traditional *Madāris* of the sub-continent. But she neither joined any *Madrassah* for formal religious education, nor undertook any examination, hence does not hold such formal certification either. In our opinions, the issuance of certificates is not more important than the actual transfer of knowledge. We do not think that actual certification should be a criterion to test the credibility of someone's know-how.

During her teenage years, Abdur Rehman Hashmi assigned her the duty to manage his library containing authentic books written by prominent scholars at that time. Two writers impressed her most when she was growing up. Saddrudin Islahi's Book '*farīza-e-Iqāmat-e-dīn*' (Obligation to Establish the Creed (of Islam)) had a deep impact on her for the propagation of Islamic teachings. She gives credit to Abu Al-A'lā Madūdi's books '*Deeniyat and Khutbāt*' for the development of deep love for Islam.²⁹

Following the footsteps of her father, she joined *Jamī'at*³⁰ too for a brief period but left it during her college. According to her, she appreciates the spirit, knowledge, and struggle of many scholars of *Jamā'at*, yet she became

dissatisfied with their focus on politics. She had realized, after contemplation, that Pakistani society lacks proper religious education and enlightenment and all efforts to change the society will be futile unless the prime focus is on the education and awareness of masses, especially women. She realized that true empowerment would come through the *Qur'ān* and not through gaining power through politics. She was of the view that unless women have wisdom, intellectualism, knowledge and wisdom through the *Qur'ān*, Pakistani society is not going to change. Therefore, in order to bring about a change in the society and make women more empowered, efforts should be made to disseminate the knowledge of the *Qur'ān* to the most grass root level. Thus, started working towards her vision of making women empowered through the *Qur'ān* instead of political movements. Moreover, she felt that she is more suitable for learning and teaching than any other field. After realizing this, she threw herself into her studies more rigorously.

After completing her bachelor's degree from Sargodha Degree College, she got admission in Punjab University, Lahore, for her Masters in Arabic. The strong foundation of Arabic Language inculcated by her father bore fruit. Dr. Hashmi topped the entire Faculty of Arts. The hard work of her father paid off and she graduated with distinction.

She started her career as a lecturer at Sargodha Degree College. Meanwhile she got married to Idrees Zubair who belongs to a family of scholars and had a rich history of Islamic traditional scholarship in Multan.³¹ Dr. Zubair's father Mawlana Abu Tayyab Shams ul Haq Masud was the next strong influence on Dr Hashmi's religious scholarship.

Later, she joined International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI) as a lecturer in Arabic department. After some time, she was informed that she had been granted the merit scholarship by the government of Pakistan. It was for her excellent result in Masters in Arabic from the University of Punjab, to pursue her doctoral studies from abroad. She had few weeks left to complete the procedure of admission in order to avail the scholarship. She had two daughters by then. She applied to different universities in Arab countries but did not get any response from there. She requested the Egyptian president of International Islamic University, Islamabad to help her in admission in Egypt. However, for certain reason, he could not do it. Meanwhile, the deadline for

the expiry of the scholarship was approaching. On the advice of Dr. Mehmood Ahmed Ghazi, the then Director General of Dawah Academy, IIUI, she applied in European universities. She was accepted by the University of Glasgow, Scotland first and joined it for doing a PhD. She was accompanied by her Husband Idrees Zubair who too completed the doctoral degree from the same university.

Dr. Hashmi decided to opt for *ḥadīth* as her main subject in PhD (Arabic and Islamic Studies). Professor John Mattock was appointed as her supervisor at University of Glasgow.³² Before proceeding, it is pertinent to discuss some detail about the late John Mattock.

John N Mattock

Professor John Nicholas Mattock was born on January 6th, 1938, to Gilbert Arthur James Mattock and his wife Margaret Kathleen Mattock, an Anglican communion³³ family³⁴. He was initially educated at Collyers School, Horsham, West Sussex, and then he was admitted to Christ's Hospital on September 25th, 1950. It is a charitable boarding foundation, accepting specially children of families in social, financial or other need, with minimal means³⁵. At Christ's school he was in one of 14 senior boarding houses, Peele B, a boarding housing about 50 boys aged 11 to 18. When John left school on July 30th, 1957 he had been the house captain, and the deputy senior Grecians of 1967 (equivalent to sixth form boys, planning to enter Oxford or Cambridge Universities). He later joined Pembroke College, Cambridge, to read classics and oriental studies in 1957 and graduated in 1961. At that time, he was awarded one of the E.G. Browne Prizes for Oriental languages. He researched the Arabic translation of Aristotle's "*De Partibus Animalium*" and in 1963 he was elected to a Drapers' Research Fellowship. He remained so till 1965 before joining University of Glasgow as lecturer. He stayed at Cambridge too to do a PhD and completed in 1968. He ultimately became a professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies in University of Glasgow and he remained there throughout his entire career, as Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies until his retirement because of his ill health.

At that period university vacancies in the field of Arabic Studies were rare and in 1965 John was thought fortunate to be appointed, ahead of a strong field, in sole charge of Arabic in the University of Glasgow.

He had not expected to remain in his first job for long but, in the event, he stayed in the Glasgow for the rest of his career, eventually becoming Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies. He complained that it was impossible for him to cover a full Arabic course single handed; to preserve the subject in the face of university cuts he had to take in large numbers of research students from the Middle East and the disproportionate amount of time that they demanded interfere with his own work which, after a promising start, diminished in quantity and was later hindered by the onset of diabetes.

His school friend Peter Attenborough recalls:

Although good friends at school and during our first two years at Cambridge while he was reading classics, we went our separate ways as he took up Oriental Studies and remained at Cambridge. I much admired his intellect, his apparently effortless mastery of everything to do with Latin and Greek and then the way he took so easily to oriental languages: he was naturally at home in discussions about aesthetics, culture and philosophy and I always appreciated his gentleness, his kindness and his deep courtesy³⁶.

His friend and colleague James E Montgomery³⁷ says about him:

He was a very gifted and sympathetic teacher, who was very open to the educational needs of his students. This was because he was an excellent Arabist who was confident in many branches of the study of classical Islamic societies. He was a great supporter of female students from Middle East and Pakistan because he believed that everyone should have the opportunity to study, in such cases when students came from the Middle East and beyond, he believed passionately that they return home having been given the benefit of a thorough grounding in western approaches to Islam, to add these educational experiences to those they had acquired from studying in their home countries. But he would never impose his views on his students –instead he created a space where both student and pupil could grow.

He died suddenly, after several years of ill-health on May 6th, 2001 aged 63.

Expertise in Hadīth

As Dr. Hashmi had switched her field from Arabic Language and Literature to *Hadīth* Sciences at PhD level. To achieve mastery in this subject, the couple requested Syrian scholar Shaykh Muhammad Saeed al-Badinjiki³⁸ to teach both and received '*Ijāzah*' from him. She went on to receive two more *Ijāzahs* in *ḥadīth*, one from Mohaddith Mawlana Abu Tayyab Shams ul Haq Masud Multani and another *Ijāzah* from Abdul Ghaffar Hassan (father of Dr. Sohail Hassan). During her PhD, Dr. Hashmi and Dr Idris travelled to many Arab countries to collect the material for their doctoral theses, for instance they visited Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and met different scholars like Sheikh Al-Bani and sought guidance for their theses. Dr. Hashmi wrote the thesis on the topic "*A Critical Edition of Kitab al-Wajiz fi Dhikr al-Mujaz wa al-Mujiz by Abu Tahir Ahmad B. Muhammad B. Ahmad B. Muhammad al-Silafi, al-Isbahani.*"³⁹ abovementioned investigations reveal that she was taught by some amazing scholars both in University of Glasgow and otherwise. Its because of this diversity that is manifested in novelty of her institution 'Al-Huda International Welfare Foundaton'.

After completion of her doctorate, she resumed her teaching position at IIUI, but this time as an Assistant Professor in Usuluddin Department. She was later appointed as an in-charge of the women 's campus of the said university. Dr. Hashmi continued to accept more responsibilities for contributing Islamic teachings to the general public, especially women, where she founded 'AlHuda International'.

INCEPTION OF ALHUDA INTERNATIONAL

While teaching at the IIUI, Dr. Hashmi was simultaneously offering circles (*dars*) for girls in the women hostel of IIUI – home tutoring a reflection she had from her father. Gradually people started calling her for lectures at larger venues such as community halls and hotels. During this period, she felt a dire need to connect people with the book of Allah at large scale, as she saw the 'thirst' amongst a myriad of women.

She was not satisfied with the quantum of the syllabus selected for the teaching of Glorious *Qur'ān* at IIUI either. She tried to convince the higher authorities to add the complete *Qur'ān* in the syllabus and that too for all

faculties, but her efforts were not fruitful. This eventually led her to leave the university and compelled her to do something independently for the cause. At this juncture, she started 'Al-Huda International Welfare Foundation' where the entire Holy *Qur'ān* was to be taught in a manner that can cater the needs of women at large.

Her '*dars*'⁴⁰ had already created a social circle of ladies and girls who were eager to study *Qur'ān*. Her first formal course was '*Daura Qur'ān*' in a home in her neighborhood in F-6, Islamabad, Pakistan. After conducting it successfully, a one-year course was started in 1994. According to Dr Hashmi, following Verse of *Ṣūrah al-Baqarah* inspired her in formulation of syllabus, the said verse is repeated in this paper.

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ
وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِن كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

Certainly did Allah confer [great] favor upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book [i.e., the *Qur'ān*] and wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error.⁴¹

The first batch started with 48 students. All of them graduated with no drop out. Students started making recordings through their own recording devices during this course, in case of classmates who missed the class due to unavoidable reasons or for their own revision. Next year, more people started recording. This led to the proper recording system. Initially cassettes were made, later CDs and then websites and applications. Dr. Farhat Hashmi designed the courses that merged her traditional scholarship with modern modes. She included the subjects that she had learnt from her father in her own way. She merged translation, exegesis, and *Rabt-e-Qur'ān* in one core subject. Arabic grammar was also made a compulsory subject. *Sīrah*, *Fiqh*, *Azkār*, *Tazkiyyah* were also included in the course. A thorough investigation of the curriculum reveals its stark resemblance with syllabus of Dars-e-Nizami and BS Usulludun curriculum at International Islamic University, Islamabad. But she had to shorten the duration and squeezed the syllabi.

According to the students of Al-Huda⁴², Dr. Hashmi teaches *Qur'ān* in easy-to-understand language and enabled women to understand the *Qur'ān* in a

way that each verse seemed to address the person reading it, thus, making her integrate Islamic teaching in everyday life. They are of the view that⁴³ Dr. Hashmi's unique feature that attracts most women is her focus on the text of *Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth*. She teaches in a mellow, deep, and affectionate manner. Firstly, she teaches the literal meaning of the word. She takes the listeners to the roots of the word and gives a comprehensive concept of where a word stands in Arabic linguistics. This is followed by the technical meaning. Context of the *Qur'ānic* verses is explained where needed and then the exegesis (*Tafsīr*) is elaborated with sufficient detail. It is neither too short as to make it incomprehensible nor is it too extensive as to make it convoluted. Language is very simple, very relatable, and understandable for students. No specific *Tafsīr* book is selected as a textbook. Rather, Dr. Hashmi prepares her lecture of *Tafsīr* from various Arabic and Urdu *Tafāsīr* books and students are supposed to note down that in their *ajzā* (Workbooks containing 30 equal sections of *Qur'ān* Text). She consulted *Tafsīr al-Qurṭābī* by *Al-Qurṭābī*, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* by *Muhammad ibn Jarīr Ṭabarī*, *Zād al-Masīr fī 'Ilm Tafsīr* by *Ibn al-Jawzī*, *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī* by *Abū al-Khayr Nāṣir al-Dīn 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar Al-Bayḍāwī*, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* by *Ibn Kathīr*, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* by *Jalāluddīn Al-Suyūṭī*, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl fī Tafsīr wa Ta'wīl* by *Al-Baghūwī*, *Tafsīr Sa'adī* by *Abdur Raḥmān Sa'adī* and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* by *Muhammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymeen* alongside many others.

Some of the Urdu *Tafāsīr* that are consulted by her time and again during preparation of lecture of *Qur'ān* include *Tafhīm-ul-Qur'ān* by *Syed Abul Ala Maududi*, *Tafsīr-ul-Qur'ān* by *Abdur Rahman Kilani*, *Tafsīr-Ahsan-ul-Bayan* by *Hafiz Salah-ud-Din Yusuf*, *Tazkīr-ul-Qur'ān* by *Mawlana Wahiduddin*, *Tadabbur-i-Qur'ān* by *Amin Ahsan Islahi*, *Tafsīr-e-Majidi* by *Mawlana Abdul Majid Daryabadi*, *Tafsīr Zia-ul-Qur'ān* by *Muhamamd Karam Shah Al-Azhari*, *Bayān-ul-Qur'ān* by *Mawlana Muhammad Ashraf Ali Thanvi*, *Ma'ārif-ul-Qur'ān* by *Mufti Muhammad Shafi Uthmani*, and *Tafsīr Fi Zilāl al-Qur'ān* by *Sayyid Qutb*.

She frequently quotes *Ahādīth* of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) for *Tafsīr*. Likewise, sayings of *Sahābah* and Jurists are mentioned where needed. Studying *Qur'ān* from cover to cover enables the students to understand it

thoroughly and build a strong bond and connection with this holy book. This text-based teaching is fundamental in changing the hearts as it develops a deep connection with the book of Allah. Students embark on an inspiring journey through the text of *Qur'ān*, feeling completely different persons once reaching the shore after diving deep in the ocean and collecting pearls of wisdom.

Al-Huda's students are its assets who after completing their studies from the said Institute get themselves engaged in the teaching of *Qur'ān*, *Ḥadīth* and other Islamic sciences. "*Qur'ān for all. In every hand. In every heart.*" This famous quote of Dr. Hashmi motivates her students to do utmost efforts to share the treasure of *Qur'ān* which they have acquired from Al-Huda. Consequently, hundreds and thousands of students take up the task of sharing this treasure after completing their course from Al-Huda. Some start teaching *Tajwīd* to children, while some other students decide to teach this art of recitation of *Qur'ān* to young girls and elderly ladies. *Tafsīr* is required to be taught via audio lectures of Dr. Hashmi in the class conducted by graduates of Al-Huda but students from far flung villages, after completing their course from Al-Huda, very often teach in their own mother language, due to the language barrier. Some graduates start a branch if they have sufficient staff, and the vicinity is in need of that. Others join the already existing branch of Al-Huda as a staff member.

According to them, the learning of the *Qur'ān* empowers them in a true sense. It gives them a clear vision, mission and true meaning of life which gives them confidence. It connects them directly to Allah. Moreover, Dr Hashmi encourages the students to go to universities as well and gain the knowledge from those institutions as much as possible.

Dr. Hashmi's vision is to create a healthy learning atmosphere, 'accessible' and 'easy to understand' for people from all walks of life. To envision this goal, Al-Huda offers different courses of varying durations, on campus and off campus, through its network of institutes, The Branches and Qur'an classes, therefore, caters the needs of women belonging to all strata of the society.⁴⁴ Following is the brief overview of the different courses alongside their syllabus, offered at Islamabad Institute for the propagation of Islam.

Long Courses

- ***Ta'lim al-Qur'ān***

The aim of this course is to provide comprehensive knowledge to the students about different aspects of *Qur'ān*. This course, therefore, deals with cover-to-cover Proper Recitation, Translation and *Tafsīr*. Auxiliary subjects include: *Qur'ānic Sciences*, *Hadīth Sciences*, *Sīrah*, *Sunan*, *Fiqh al-Ibādāt* and Arabic grammar. Besides providing authentic knowledge, a lot of focus is placed on the *Tarbīyyah* and *Tazkīyyah* of students. Customized forms of the same course are offered at different branches under the name of *Ta'lim al-Dīn* and *Tafhīm al-Dīn*.

- ***Tehfiz al-Qur'ān Course***

The *Qur'ān* is not only written in *Maṣāḥif* but also preserved in the hearts of Muslims. Millions of *Ḥuffāz* takes part in keeping this tradition alive. Al-Huda too initiated a course to contribute in continuing this blessed practice.

Medium Length Courses

- ***Ta'lim Al-Tajwīd Course***

The objective of this course is to teach *Tajwīd* to the students so that they are able to recite the *Qur'ān* properly, smoothly and confidently. Syllabus of this course includes the rules of *Tajwīd*, memorization of selected Surahs of *Qur'ān* and *Tarīl* (Recitation) of *Qur'ān*.

- ***Ta'lim al-Ḥadīth Course***

This course is a door to gain understanding about the blessed treasure of *Ḥadīth* and its relevant sciences. In this course, the most authentic book of *Hadīth* “*Sahīh al-Bukharī*” is taught as a main text. Besides this, auxiliary subjects related to the sciences of *Ḥadīth* are taught to better equip and train the students with the said subject.

Short Courses

There are many people who are heavily engaged in various mundane affairs and therefore, find less time to devote to educational and other related activities. Keeping this problem in view and targeting such sections of the society, Al-Huda offers different short-term courses. For instance, weekly courses like ‘*Fahm al-Qur'ān*’ and ‘Reality Touch’ are offered and ‘Summer

Courses' are arranged for students during summer vacations. Moreover, different lectures are arranged on important occasions touching vital issues of Muslims. Most of these courses are taught online too.

She is not only an epitome of women empowerment in Muslim society, rather she is also a perfect example of a communitarianism.⁴⁵ It should be noted that Dr Hashmi's remarkable journey is accompanied by her kids and husband. She is a complete home maker too and an example of work-life balance. She is a mother of four children and twelve grandkids. Nurturing a family is a dominant feature in Muslim societies. Women Empowerment in Islam does not allow to sacrifice family life for careers. Therefore, right example of women empowerment from Muslim societies focuses on keeping the basic unit of family institution intact.

Details and accounts reaffirm that Dr. Farhat Hashmi is well-versed with Dars-e-Nizami and have studied almost the entire course from her father, but she did not take any examination and does not hold any such certification. As mentioned earlier, does this make any difference? What is more important – certification or actual retention of Islamic knowledge? To any person of ordinary prudence, a mere certification does not make a person to be a scholar. It is the actual knowledge, skills and attitudes that have been developed throughout the pupilage. What else would fascinate more when one's mentor is his/her father. Connecting to the accounts again, she has three *Ijāzahs* in *Ḥadīth* from esteemed scholars. She topped in her Masters in Arabic in her entire faculty and received the Government of Pakistan's scholarship for higher education and completed her PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from University of Glasgow. It should be noted that she was an assistant professor and in charge of the entire women campus of IIUI when she resigned and started Al-Huda from scratch and lived her life on minimum on multiple occasions of her life. She can be indeed considered as most empowered women in Pakistan, yet she left her financial stability and independence to start Al-Huda with literally almost nothing monetarily in hand, although she was well-aware of the fact that preachers in Pakistan are generally poor for their entire life. Yet, she left her financial stability and revived the true method of women empowerment.

Moreover, the examination of the methodology and structure of Al-Huda International reveals that it is not affiliated with any institution nor is it with any religious board. It is neither following any university's pattern nor following the *Dars-e-Nizami* course of *Madrassah*. However, it is an amalgamation of both systems in a novel way. The teaching and researching methods are rigorous. Traditional Madaris are very right in criticizing Al-Huda International in the sense that they didn't join the traditional system, instead, they started a parallel system of Islamic education. But proponents of Al-Huda counter argue that the system of Madaris should be upgraded, rather than dragging everyone in the same stream. However, there should be no monopoly in education. They are of the view that Al-Huda's massive success is proof that Madaris need to change its 200 years old system. In their view, latest development of two new boards and new programs are proofs of it.⁴⁶

Conclusion

In Western Liberal Feminism, the financial independence of women is deemed a pre-condition for their empowerment. However, this is only one angle of women empowerment. The main argument of this paper was reaffirmed that there are many different dimensions of women empowerment and there may be many different alternate versions of women empowerment in different parts of the worlds, such as – Women Empowerment in Islam. A close examination of Islamic history reveals that Islam initiated its own version of female empowerment through the Holy *Qur'ān*. Such luminaries can still be found in Muslim societies who are actively contributing to shaping the very fabric of their societies. Dr Farhat Hashmi is one such example, who has gained unprecedented success in bringing masses towards learning the Holy *Qur'ān*, particularly amongst women and young girls. She is a highly educated Muslim female, who has gained both traditional and modern scholarship. Few contemporaries have criticized her educational background, that she never appeared in any *Madrassah* exam hence does not possess any certification from *Madāris*. However, this study explores the fact that she got rigorous religious knowledge from his father who was a scholar under *Dars-e-Nizami* system. He had formal authentication and certification from a renowned and a historic Islamic *Madrassah* in India. Very few would

have certifications from such *Madāris*. Dr Hashmi received all this education informally but in a more effective way. It is our common understanding that mere certification does not make any difference. Even if it does, it is noteworthy here that she holds Masters in Arabic from University of the Punjab with distinction and received scholarship from Government of Pakistan and did her PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from University of Glasgow. She earned three *Ijāzah* in *Hadīth* too. Regarding the structure and courses of Al-Huda, although the roots are embedded in *Dars-e-Nizāmi* and BS Usulludin program, still the structure, duration, methodology are novel and innovative, perfectly addressing the needs of masses particularly that of women around the globe. This was rightly criticized by traditional *Madāris* but the research findings here reveal that the strategy has been successful in instilling the love of the Holy *Qur'ān* in masses, particularly helpful in educating and empowering females in the realm of Islam.

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⁴ Hafiz Ibn-Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir Abridged*, 2nd., vol. 2 (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 2003), 411, <https://www.noor-book.com/en/ebook-Tafsir-Ibn-Kathir-Volumes-pdf>.

⁵ "Al Huda International," accessed November 18, 2021, <https://www.alhudapk.com/component/content/article/2-uncategorised/174-about-al-huda-international.html#legal-status>.

⁶ She is a Pakistani Scholar and unlike popular belief she is not a Canadian national.

⁷ *Āl-e-Imrān* 3: 164.

⁸ For Instance, Khanum Sheikh. "*New Expressions of Religiosity: A Transnational Study of Al-Huda International*", (Doctoral dissertation, University of California: 2009) Available at ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis database. (UMI Number: 3401629); Faiza Mushtaq, "*New Claimants to Religious Authority: A Movement for Women's Islamic Education, Moral Reform and Innovative Traditionalism*" (Doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University: 2010) Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis database. (UMI Number: 3428446); Sadaf Ahmed, "*Transforming Faith: The Story of*

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⁹ Published by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, affiliated with the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, in Amman, Jordan.

¹⁰ Faiza Mushtaq, A Controversial Role Model for Pakistani Women. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, 4(2010): 1-18.

¹¹ See the list of Alumni of *Jamiah Islamiah Talimuddin Dabhel* in Mawlana Fazlurrahman, *Tareekh Jamiah Islamiah Talimuddin Dabhel*, (Multan: Idarah Taleefat Ashrafiyah, n.d), 420.

¹² Although he had started learning recitation (Nazra) of Quran a lot earlier from Hafiz Muhkam Deen but he left because his parents needed him for work. At the age of 12, he resumed his religious education.

¹³ He got first position in the Primary exam.

¹⁴ He studied the standard curriculum of Dars-e-Nizami here which includes translation of Glorious Quran, and Books of Ahādith like Bukhari and Mishkat.

¹⁵ The science of link between verses of Quran.

¹⁶ Teacher of Mawlana Ghulam Ali who was a famous preacher (khatib) in the mosque of Raja Bazar (Rawalpindi)

¹⁷ The facts are based upon the investigation of the researcher. The authors personally contacted the said *Madrassah* and they were kind enough to not only provide the details but also issued a certificate in the name of Dr Rukhsana Waraich – one of the authors in this article.

¹⁸ His salary was 9 rupees here.

¹⁹ An official Member of Jamaat

²⁰ He used to write letters to different scholars to ask their opinion about Mawlana Maudūdī and his doctrines.

²¹ He married twice. He had a daughter with his first wife but couldn't have any other children. At the age of 40, he got married for the second time and had all his other children with her including Dr. Hashmi.

²² He later learnt Homeopathy too and preferred it over other modes of treatment.

²³ Her half-sister from another mother is the only older sibling. Her widow Aunt (sister of his father) also used to live with them alongside their children. Her father took care of them as well.

²⁴ Except for one year in the village, she lived an urban life and was raised in a modestly well-off and respectable family.

²⁵ The story books are named as Gulistan Saadi and Bostan etc.

²⁶ Charthawli 's book of *Şarf* and *Naḥw*

²⁷ *Mishkāt al-MaŞabiḥ*

²⁸ *Hidāyah* and *MukhtaŞar al-Qudūrī*

²⁹ Author is extremely grateful for giving interviews conducted between 2017-2021.

³⁰ Student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami.

³¹ <http://www.idreeszubair.com/>

³² Unlike the popular belief, he was an atheist and not a Jew.

³³ **Anglicanism**, one of the major branches of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation and a form of Christianity that includes features of both Protestantism and Roman

Catholicism. Anglicanism is loosely organized in the Anglican Communion, a worldwide family of religious bodies that represents the offspring of the Church of England and recognizes the archbishop of Canterbury as its nominal head.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anglicanism> (Accessed 10th August 2021).

³⁴ In his later life, he didn't profess any credal system beyond a faith in humanity.

³⁵ www.christs-hospital.org.uk

³⁶ Obituary, *The Blue* (Summer 2001), 60.

³⁷ <https://www.ames.cam.ac.uk/people/professor-james-montgomery>

³⁸ He was not a formal teacher appointed by the University. Rather he was kind enough to privately tutor them.

³⁹ Her doctoral thesis can be accessed here:

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/3446/1/1989hashimiphd.pdf>

⁴⁰ Popular name of the public lectures by religious scholars.

⁴¹ *Āl-e-Imrān* 3:164.

⁴² Researchers conducted the interviews from the graduates of Al-Huda International Islamabad.

⁴³ Interviews were conducted by researchers over the period of four years between 2017 to 2021.

⁴⁴ Detailed information about these courses can be accessed at www.alhudapk.com and www.farhashmi.com

⁴⁵ "Communitarianism is the idea that human identities are largely shaped by different kinds of constitutive communities (or social relations) and that this conception of human nature should inform our moral and political judgments as well as policies and institutions." Please see: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/communitarianism/> (Accessed July 7th, 2021)

⁴⁶ The Government of Pakistan has formed a new board "Majma al-Uloom al-Islamiyah Pakistan" for Madaris in Pakistan. Under this new board, new subjects will be taught to match with challenges of contemporary times.

<https://dunya.com.pk/index.php/city/gujranwala/2021-05-11/1821805> (Accessed May 11, 2021)