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An Introduction to Muslim Women's Rights

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The topic of Muslim women's rights is vast; Muslim jurists have been writing about it for centuries. Because jurists are partly the product of their societies and these societies were and continue to be highly patriarchal, Islamic literature has been saturated with a patriarchal perspective on women's rights. This perspective has become so entrenched that it has been rendered invisible. For most Muslims it no longer represents the *ijtihad* of individuals. Instead, it has come to be viewed by them as an "objective" reading of Qur'anic text.

Because of the complexity of the topic of Muslim women's rights, I limit this introduction to a select number of issues usually raised in connection with Islamic family law. Some of these issues have been raised in local and regional women's conferences, but the answers have not always been satisfactory. Furthermore, there has been no systematic reexamination of traditional Islamic jurisprudence on these and other issues from a woman's perspective. This chapter provides a step in that direction.

Tawhid and the Concept of Equality

Family law, like other branches of Islamic law, derives from the concept of *tawhid*, or the belief in a single God. *Tawhid* is the core principle of Islamic jurisprudence.[1] From it flow many secondary principles, including the one that asserts that God is the supreme being and that all human

1. See Faruqi 1981.