

# The Problem of Feminism in Works of Islamic Reformers (Late XIX – beginning of the XX Centuries)

Aivaz Minnegosmanovich Fazliev<sup>a</sup>, Adelya Ilhamovna Sattarova<sup>b</sup>, Anvar Airatovich Gafarov<sup>c</sup>  
and Mariam Arslanovna Galeeva<sup>d</sup>

*Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia*

*aivazik@mail.ru, anvargafarov@mail.ru, satadel@inbox.ru, galeeva\_mariyam@mail.ru*

**Key words:** Islamic feminism, Muslim reformation, Muslim literature, Russian Empire.

**Abstract:** The end of 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries marked with rapid modernization era of the Muslim community's way of life. Along with other issues of renewal the object of Muslim women's emancipation was brought up. This subject has found wide discussion among Islamic (Russian) literature. The article is devoted to the analyses of the problem of Feminism in Islamic scholars' and publicists' works of that period. The scientific and publicistic works of Tatar, Bashkir, Azerbaijan, Kazakh and other enlighteners and religious reformers (such as A. Bayazitov, M.F. Akhundov, A. Agaev, R. Fakhretdin, Z. Kamali, S.-G. Sultanov and others) were used as the research source. The carried out research showed that the posing of feminism problem (as the most important part of Muslim community's total modernization) took place during the heated discussion with proponents of Traditionalism and also with representatives of academic sciences, orientalist of the Christian missionary direction which closely related with imperial policy of spiritual-cultural assimilation of the Russian "foreigners". At the same time, Muslim reformers largely using traditional theological argumentation managed to articulate and substantiate issues of women's emancipation: empowerment of family-related legal status of Muslim women, ensuring access to their education, expansion of their social and political rights in general.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The wide involvement of the Muslim world into global processes which begun in at the turn of the 18th – 19th centuries led to its active integration to the multilateral structure of international relations. As Muhammad Iqbal had mentioned: "the most remarkable phenomena of modern history, however, is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West" (Muhammad, 2013). During the last 100 years, such remarkable changes had taken place that are almost comparable with the previous thousand-year period of historical development. The Muslim community's modernization has become legitimate reaction to the deepest crisis of Traditionalism, intensified by growing colonial expansion of European countries (Nabiyev, Gafarov, 2015).

Along with the leading Muslim countries (Turkey, Egypt, Iran, India) the process of renewal in 19th century got in environment of Russian Muslims where the modernization along with general trends has its own specific features. With the spread of scientific achievements and development of secular education, implementation of progressive Western technologies into Muslims' life, as well as elements of European culture the issue of female emancipation has become pretty relevant (Fazliev, Sattarova, Gafarov, Galeeva, 2019). Heated discussion on this topic unfolded in scientific orientalist literature and promotional publicism (Kecia, 2014; Khader, 2016; Gafarov, Nabiyev, Fazliev, Nafikov, 2017; Muñoz, 2012; Seker, 2012).

The main object of the research is to analyze new approaches and assessments that appeared in the end of 19th – beginning 20th centuries in works of Islamic

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<sup>a</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6269-347X>

<sup>b</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7708-5300>

<sup>c</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1060-3393>

<sup>d</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6246-0577>

reformers and educators (Gafarov, 2015) in a relation with feminism issues. Along with works of Muslim writers (Akhundov M.F., Agaev A., Kamali Z., Fakhretdin R., Sultanov S.-G. and others) the opinions of their opponents – the representative of academic and missionary oriental studies (Katanov N.F., Ostroumov N.P., Koblova Y.D and others) are going to be considered.

## 2 METHODS

The theoretical and methodological basis of the research relies on the civilization approach, which main provisions were developed in philosophical and historical works by N.Ya. Danilevsky, O. Spengler, A. Toynbee etc. They identified conceptual complex of ideas about the developments of Russian`s Ummah. The civilization approach let the authors to consider Muslim community in the Russian Empire as an essential part of the whole Islamic civilization and the changes of its lifestyle – in line of common processes of renewal of Muslim world. At the same time, the methodology of the research that is connected with the main aim of the article required an appeal (along with the above mentioned) to the systematically integrated approach, its main components: structure-functional, dialectical, typological, hermeneutical, phenomenological, comparatively-historical and other methods. Meanwhile, general scientific methods were used as well as special ones – diachronic method (periodization method) a problem method, chronologically-problematic one and method of a synchronous analyses. The method of content-analyses had a special place in used sources (Islamic reformers` works). The multidisciplinary nature of research determined the approach to the methods of religious studies, cultural studies, source studies and other Human sciences.

These theoretical-methodological approaches let us to determine the nature and specific of Muslim reformatory literature, its level of adequacy in connection with the processes of female emancipation that occurred in the late 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries, in the breakdown era of traditionalism and modernization of Muslim community.

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<sup>e</sup> Besides, we have to admit that that on the outskirts of the empire many issues of daily life, not going beyond the Muslim community, had been still solving by using Sharia and Adat. (regular law).

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Despite the obvious entering of European elements in Russian Muslims` life, representatives of academic oriental studies believed that the beginning of female emancipation in the Muslim environment was exceptional. In particular, in series of articles «The view of Muslim society on women» (1900) by N.F Katanov denies any changes in the state of Muslim women (Katanov, 1900). In the article by Ya.D. Koblov «The state of Muslim women» says: “She will be born as a slave and she will remain a slave for the rest of her life” (Koblov, 1906). O.A. Shkapskiy writes about slave state “in which the Kyrgyz (Kazakh) woman is” (Shkapskiy, 1986) etc. The given critical assessments are closely connected with the Christianizing, Russifying policy of the Government which was intensified in the second half of the 19th century. In their denunciation state-owned culture bearer (from German: kulturtrager) did not find even single positive feature: “everything evil what is done in Muslim society ..., belong to Islam“(Berezin, 1855).

At the same time, it cannot be denied that the family sphere remained conservative, the least exposed to renewal area until recent times. Despite the growing influence of Russian lawe application of Sharia law was allowed. There was no coincidence that The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education studied them in order to take them into account in administrative work. Appropriate requests were sent to districts with Muslim population. So, in 1824 A.N. Golitsyn asked for a certificate of rules “about Mohammedan matrimonial affairs” (State Archive of Astrakhan Oblast. F. F-488. OP. 1. D. 483. L. 1-2, 6, 19). As a result, the assembly of representative of the highest Muslim clergy was opened, as well as “honorary old men from each society” to receive a feedback “on the basis of this subjects”<sup>f</sup>.

Matrimonial relations of Muslim community which largely determine women`s social status, really lagged behind the general trends of renewal. Even Islamic modernizers had to admit that the Muslim woman was doomed to «to the most tough hopeless slavery» (Agaev, 1901) (A.Agaev «A woman by and in Islam», 1901). Z.Kamali (“The philosophy of Islam”, 1909-1911) wrote: “in the Muslim Ummah

<sup>f</sup> Subsequently, Muslim law was fully described in the works of statesman and Islamic scholar Baron N.E. Tornau.

the woman is in a poor and miserable position, practically at the same level as the domestic cattle” (Kamali, 2010). However, their assessment of Muslim women’s social rights and the problems of arising feminism were significantly different from the position of official Westernizers.

Rejecting unfounded accusations against Muslim culture S.-G. Sultanov notes original desire of Islam for social harmony (Sultanov, 2014.). Condemning the Muslim women’s social isolation he emphasizes that ‘polygamy now seems to be an exception rather than a general rule in the most civilized Muslim countries like European Turkey, Egypt, Algeria and among intelligent Muslim in Russia’ (Sultanov, 1901). The reclusiveness of women is absolutely wrongly attributed to the prophet, according to A. Agaev. ‘Mohammed had given them (Muslim women) such broad rights’, he writes, “that even some modern legislation, such as that of France, does not even dream of” (The Life and Teaching of Muhammad or the Spirit of Islam, 1902). Amir Ali, the Indian reformer, expressed the confidence (for this is “opinion that shared by the majority of Muslims”) that polygamy should soon cease in Muslim society because it is not in the spirit of Islam (The Life and Teaching of Muhammad or the Spirit of Islam, 1902).

At the same time, Muslim authors overall emphasize the advantages of Muslim marriage, which is civil act, that provides Muslim women greater social guarantees than women of other confessions. “The future of the nation”, wrote R. Fakhretidin, “is connected with the strength of the family, which, in turn, depends on respectful relationships between husband and wife. However, “if there is no unity and love, the creation of a family is impossible and divorce is necessary”. It is doubtless that the right to divorce (which originally existed in Islam) protects, first of all, the women’s position. “Although God does not like divorces, he condemns even more when a man lives and torment his wife who he does not love and does not consider as a life partner” (Fahretidinov, R., 1994). According to F. Karimi “Islam gives women more rights than are given to their Christian sisters”; “the common point of view that Muslim women are totally isolated is also mistaken”. At the same time, he admits that so far the actual treatment of Muslims to their wives is “in contradiction with the spirit of Islam” (Vamberi, 1996). “The reason of these problem”, explains Z. Kamali, “is the ignorance of our people, their inability to use the laws that exist in Sharia” (Kamali, 2010).

The principal supporter of the resolution of women’s issue on the basis of equality was M.F.

Akhundov. Focusing on the European order, the Azerbaijan educator advocated for the equality of women “in all rights of mankind with men”. “It even says”, he wrote, “in other European countries they are admitted to the government positions, not to mention that in some countries they also occupy the throne, if they are entitled to it by birth”. In any case, the Sharia “in litigation ... must apply the main basis of constitution, which consists the equality of rights” men and women. It is obvious that “Islamism needs a reformation ... establishing freedom and equality of both sexes in humanity, moderating eastern despotism with wise political institutions and mandating compulsory literacy for both Muslim men and women (Akhundov, 1982). In a letter to G. Zirdabi (1877) Akhundov emphasizes that “the benefit of science is real if only ... science is studied by both sexes – both men and women” (Akhundov, 1982).. Abai, the Kazakh educator, also wrote about it: “it needs to build schools, it needs the population to give money for these schools, it needs everyone to study, even girls” (Abay, 1995). Abd al-Rkhman, the Emir of Afghanistan, also agreed with this slogan - to introduce education among women (Autobiography of Abdurakhman Khan Emir of Afghanistan. Published by Sultan Mohammad Khan, 1901).

#### 4 SUMMARY

The conclusions of Islamic reformers on the women emancipation that began in Muslim environment caused a negative reaction of representatives of academic and mission-oriented oriental studies (Berezin V.D., Shkapski O.A., Katanov N.F., Ostroumov N.P., Koblov Y.D. etc.), who strongly rejected the existence of any improvements in Muslim women’s life. Koblov Y.D. criticized modernists who defended the legal merit of Muslim marriage. However, he had to admit that “among local (kazan) Muslims there is comparatively less propensity to polygamy than in the East, and recently, it can be said, polygamy is being phased out and marriage life take on normal forms” (Koblov, 1906). Ostroumov N.P. also was not convinced by Muslim literature. In 1903 he published the book “Koran and progress. On the mental awakening of modern Russian Muslims”, that was aimed to expose Muslim reform. The common goal of these publications was to show the destructive nature of Islam, inability of positive development on the basis of its civilizational foundation. The positive changes that were happening were entirely linked to beneficial influence of

European colonial policy, with tendencies of spiritually - cultural assimilation.

However, the Islamic approach has never been comprehensive. Many Russian, democratically inclined scientists and publicists actively supported the renewal of the Muslim world. Thus, famous philosopher V.S. Soloviev who was a close friend of ahun Bayazitov A. spoke out against religious intolerance and xenophobia. To a large extent, it was with the help and influence of Bayazitov A. that Soloviev wrote an essay "Mohammed, his life and religious teaching" (1896). After the essay was published Bayazitov published the review in "Nedelya (Week)" called "What is Islam preaching" (1896). Tatar publicist noted that unlike other "blasphemers of Islam", who didn't "grasp the true meaning of the whole teaching, and limited themselves only to the separately taken single phrases", Soloviev shows the actions of prophet and the process of the formation of his teachings in historical context. It also applies to common accusations of Islam in cultivation of polygamy, etc. (Bayazitov, 1885).

In turn, the publication of A. Bayazitov's book "The attitude of Islam to science and infidels" (1887) found a positive review in "Moskovskiye Vedomosti" (N. A New Study on Islam, 1887). The author of review, qualified Islamic scholar denounced preconceived notions about Islam: including the note about the high position of a woman in Islamic world. Other famous orientalist Nalivkin V.P. also condemned sweeping denial of Muslim way of life. The study of feminine question in Central Asia ("An essay of everyday life of settled native population of Fergana", 1886) lead him to the conclusion that "in some at least respects, the position of a Muslim woman is better and the circle of her personal rights is immeasurably wider than that of women of the European peoples" (Nalivkin, Nalivkina, 1886). Undoubtedly, democratically minded Russian authors that were respectful of cultural identity of "infidels" admitted and welcomed solving the problems of Islamic feminism in line with the preservation of ethno-confessional identity Muslim peoples (Sattarova, Gafarov, Nabiyeu, 2019).

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Thus, despite the heated discussion, Muslim reformers succeeded in raising the issue of female emancipation. They saw a solution to the problem of Islamic feminism primarily in the ways of liberating Muslim women in family-law sphere, giving them an

access to full education and raising their social and political status in general. According to Muslim reformers, women's emancipation must be based on the cultural and spiritual values of Islamic civilization.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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