



My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam

Annemarie Schimmel , Susan H. Ray (Translator)

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An internationally acclaimed scholar, who has dedicated more than fifty years of her life to understanding the Islamic world. Annemarie Schimmel examines a much-misunderstood feature of Islam: the role of women. Schimmel is critical of those—especially Western feminists—who take Islam to task without taking the time to comprehend the cultures, language, and traditions of the many societies in which Islam is the majority religion. Shattering stereotypes, Schimmel reconstructs an important but little-known chapter of Islamic spirituality. With copious examples, she shows the clear equality of women and men in the conception of the Prophet Muhammad, the Quran, the feminine language of the mystical tradition, and the role of holy mothers and unmarried women as manifestations of God. This work is studded with luminous texts from Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and particularly Indo-Muslim cultures, which reveal how physical love can give expression to the highest forms of mysticism.

My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam Details

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From Reader Review My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam for online ebook

Tamara Agha-Jaffar says

My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam by Annemarie Schimmel explores the role of women and the feminine in the mystical tradition of Islam (Sufism).

Schimmel was an internationally renowned scholar who wrote extensively on Islam and mysticism. Fluent in several languages, including German, English, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish, she was a professor of theology at Ankara University for several years before moving to Harvard where she inaugurated the Indo-Muslim Studies program. She was a prolific writer, publishing numerous books and articles on Islamic literature and mysticism.

In My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam, Schimmel dedicates a chapter on the role women played in each of the following topics: women and the Prophet of Islam; in Sufism; in the Qur'an and Islamic traditions; and in the education of the soul since "soul" (nafs) is a feminine word in Arabic. She also explores the respect paid to elderly women and mothers in the Islamic tradition.

Schimmel provides copious examples of the significant contributions made by a number of female mystics to Islamic mysticism. She carefully distinguishes between the role and expectations placed on women in the Quran and the rigid restrictions and prohibitions placed on them in society, attributing the latter to misogynistic cultural influences which became increasingly intransigent throughout time and which deviate in significant ways from the Qur'an.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the book is Schimmel's exploration of a variety of Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Indo Muslim Sufi love poems. Schimmel reads these poems as metaphors for the beloved's yearning for union with God. The beloved can be male or female. He/she goes on a quest to seek the beloved with an unwavering dedication that serves as a role model for other seekers. This interpretive lens opens the poems up to new readings in which every action, every step, can be read as a metaphor along the mystical path to God.

The book is recommended for those seeking an understanding of the role of women and the feminine in the mystical tradition of Islam.

Umut Reviews says

I was hoping to get some external view about this subject, but totally disappointed with the translation of the book in Turkish. It's impossible to understand and follow in modern language. I don't know what the translator was thinking, do you want people to read the book or not!!! It needs to be today's Turkish, not Ottoman Turkish from 19th century. It's a big shame.

Amira Bousdjira says

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Madeeha says

In this book Annemarie Schimmel attempts to fill in the gaps of the feminine aspects that have been left behind in Islamic interpretation, leaving an unbalance.

She identifies the male dominated and sometimes misogynistic tendencies of the culture and how it's affected the interpretation of Islam. Schimmel points out how women were viewed by poets, used as negative metaphors as in the lower self, temptation or the doniya (Worldly life), possibly due to a feminine noun for the word for 'ego' the "Soul inciting to evil". in the Qur'an. Which has lead to the demonisation of women.

Schimmel also pushes forward the omitted aspect, that the 'Accusing soul' and finally the 'Soul at peace' are also feminine nouns in the Qur'an. She also quoted how women were used as negative metaphors by poets. But Also positive quotes by some of these same poets, even by the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). Who stated that women being one of the dear things God has made to him.

Thus suggesting that the problem is not with Islam but it's interpretation due to misogynistic attitudes in the culture.

Schimmel writes a little about Ibn Al-Arabi, and how highly he considered the woman, he wrote that women could attain the highest mystical rank, and how he placed a strong emphasis on the role of the feminine which earned him the accusation of tending toward "Parasexual symbolism" by modern Muslim critics.

The only issues I had with this book are that firstly it's written in an academic style so at some parts it feels informative without drawing one in and connecting. Or maybe it's just that i'm reading a lot of poetry lately :o)

But some parts do feel skimmed over. However what might be contributing to this sense is that it's only a small book considering the vast subject Schimmel is trying to portray. I expected it to be a bigger book before it arrived. However It's very informative and gives you points to research further and a lot of insight. I would recommend as it's an invaluable piece of work.

Putri Larasati says

"Aku ingin menuangkan air ke dalam neraka dan mengobarkan api di surga, sehingga kedua selubung ini lenyap dan tak seorang pun akan menyembah Tuhan karena takut akan neraka atau mengharapkan surga, melainkan semata-mata demi keindahan-Nya yang abadi." (Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyyah)

Begitulah Prof. Dr. Annemarie Schimmel mengutip salah satu kisah asketis tentang peran perempuan dalam Islam, khususnya dalam tradisi sufistik, sebagai upaya mengkritik pemikir feminis Barat yang kerap menganggap Islam tidak memprioritaskan hak-hak perempuan.

Saya bisa bilang bahwa buku ini cukup cantik. Selain karena memang buku ini mengangkat topik yang saya sukai, namun ada alasan lain: perasaan saya yang hanyut tidak seperti perasaan yang saya rasakan ketika membaca buku nonfiksi. Mungkin karena di dalamnya Schimmel banyak menyematkan puisi, prosa, atau karya sastra lain yang menangkap perhatian saya.

Hal yang membuat saya takjub sekaligus malu saat membaca buku ini adalah ketika saya mengetahui bahwa Schimmel adalah seorang nonmuslim yang **sangat** mengagumi Islam. Bahkan kapasitas keilmuan beliau tentang Islam jauh di atas saya yang menganut Islam sejak lahir.

Berawal dari ketidaksengajaan menemukan buku *My Soul Is a Woman* ini, berujung pada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang hakikat perempuan dalam Islam dan keinginan untuk mengenali keyakinan sendiri secara lebih intens lagi. Betapa sebuah bacaan yang lembut untuk para pencinta-Nya yang (ingin) taat! ♥

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Sadia says

I read this book while sitting in the Muslim prayer room at Princeton University yesterday. I read it in the evening, after I had finished praying Magrib. My heart felt depleted and so I picked up the shortest book in the library there. Once I started reading it, I didn't stop and didn't leave until I had finished reading it.

I learned that in the mystical realm, Muslim women have achieved excellence, have been held to the highest positions. Muslim women mystics are part of the tradition of Islamic spirituality. Women have played significant roles in the lives of other mystics, other men, and also, had led and written about their own mystical experiences. Some mystics were also mothers and wives, but many were not. I have a list of some of their names.

Although I knew the story of Majnun, the man who falls so desperately in love with Leila, that he loses his wealth, beauty, and sanity in search of his beloved--I did not know that there exists a parallel story of SASSI from the Indo-Muslim subcontinent, in which a woman quests for her beloved and endures similar stages of grief and disaster.

Sassi is born as a Hindu princess, but once her parents learn that she is destined to marry a Muslim man, she is sent away in a basket on a river (sounds like another biblical story you know?). She is raised by a poor Muslim family. Her beauty is so remarkable that others come just to watch her work. A Muslim king falls in love with her, and they run away together. He gives up his status, for fear of derision and censure from his family probably. When Sassi wakes up after spending a night with him, she finds him gone and her quest ensues to find her beloved.

Quest narratives about love fascinate me. I think it's extraordinary how we as human beings imagine and experience love, and link that love with God. The Sufi quest for God is imagined as a woman's quest for her lover, who she never sees again until death unites her with her Creator. But I was alarmed to learn that such a narrative exists! That it is told from the female voice.

I would like to read the translation of the entire story in the future.

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Ghadeer Jallad says

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Nu says

Mir persönlich war das Buch etwas zu literarisch/mystisch orientiert und dadurch nicht so ganz repräsentativ für alles "Weibliche im Islam".

sara says

i can see why critics say she's an islamic apologist...nonetheless, i loved it....as this is the last book Schimmel wrote, one can say that she cracks the door open for us as life's door closes on her...i think a more acute perception would be that Schimmel leaves the door open for us as she slips right through it onto the next world...this short book is an inspiration to enter a world of critical and theoretical thought...especially for anyone interested in islam, sufi poetry/philosophy, muslim cultures, esp south asian cultures, women/gender studies, etc.

Tu?ba says

"Mütercim, bu kitab?n tercümesinde kulland??? dil hususunda, ceberrut "öz Türkçecilik" umdesine boyun e?mek istememi?, daha ziyade ve tabii ki becerebildi?i kadar?yla "do?ruluk bütünlük" umdesini esas al?m?hr. Zira yetersizli?i ve fukaral??? fazilet mertebesine yükseltip, yanl?? ve nefessiz bir tercümenin "özbeöz"(?) olmas?n?n vicdanlar? tatmin etmeyece?i izahtan varestedir. Muhakkak ki Türkçemiz sade olacakt?r, ama ondan da evvel, bilhassa tercüme gibi bir iddian?n beraberinde getirdi?i taahhüt mucibince, "do?ru ve isabetli" olacak ve bu taahhüt, fer'i (ve do?rulu?u su götürür) mülahazalara kurban edil?neyecektir." Mütercim takdimi önsözde belliydi zaten de, ben yine bir deneyeyim belki anlar?m dedim ama yok, bitiremedim.
