



Book Review: *Women's Presence in Sports Stadiums*

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Introduction

In recent years, women's attendance at men's sports stadiums to watch selected sporting events has become one of the major social demands raised by women in Iran. Following years of controversy and public debate, the government eventually permitted women to attend football matches in stadiums. This issue has since attracted considerable scholarly attention from legal, sociological, political, and religious perspectives.

Given that the Iranian legal system is founded upon Islamic law and seeks to harmonize legislation with Sharī'a principles, the jurisprudential dimension of this issue is of particular importance. One of the most significant works devoted to this subject is *Women's Presence in Sports Stadiums*, written by Javad Fakhar Toosi at the request of the Center for Strategic Studies of the Presidency.

The book consists of two major sections. The first examines the primary Islamic ruling (*al-hukm al-awwalī*) regarding women's attendance at men's sports stadiums and discusses the arguments advanced by both proponents and opponents. Since this issue is relatively new and classical juristic sources contain no independent discussion of it, contemporary jurists have generally addressed it only in responses to legal inquiries (*istiftā'āt*). Accordingly, the author attempts to reconstruct the

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relevant jurisprudential arguments based on general legal principles.

The second section investigates the issue from the perspective of secondary rulings (*al-ahkām al-thānawīyya*). The author discusses both arguments that could render women's attendance obligatory and those that might justify its prohibition. After examining these arguments, he concludes that none of the proposed secondary considerations is sufficient to override the principle of permissibility. Consequently, he argues that women may attend all men's sporting events without restriction and that the Islamic government should remove legal and administrative barriers preventing such attendance.

Despite the author's commendable effort to clarify this contemporary jurisprudential issue, the book contains several substantial methodological and jurisprudential shortcomings. Since no comprehensive scholarly review of this work has yet been published, a critical evaluation appears necessary. Considering the overall quality of the book and the relatively minor editorial issues, this review focuses primarily on its substantive arguments rather than stylistic matters.

Literature Review

No previous academic review specifically evaluating *Women's Presence in Sports Stadiums* was identified.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach. Through critical analysis of the author's arguments and the relevant jurisprudential sources, it evaluates both the methodological framework and the legal reasoning presented in the book.

Findings and Discussion

The book argues that the traditional jurisprudential claims requiring women to remain at home or prohibiting any form of



gender mixing fail to establish the impermissibility of women's attendance at sports stadiums. Consequently, the author relies on the principle of original permissibility (*aṣālat al-ibāḥa*) to justify unrestricted attendance at all men's sporting events.

A careful examination of the relevant jurisprudential evidence indeed suggests that absolute prohibition of gender interaction cannot be substantiated. However, this does not justify the opposite conclusion—namely, that unrestricted interaction between unrelated men and women is universally permissible. Islamic jurisprudence recognizes specific conditions governing interactions with non-maḥram individuals, including observance of religious boundaries, limitation to legitimate necessity, and the absence of a reasonable probability of moral corruption (*mafsadah*).

Indeed, many contemporary jurists who prohibit women's attendance at certain sporting events do so not because they consider all gender interaction unlawful, but because they believe that particular circumstances may reasonably give rise to moral or religious harm. Therefore, instead of concentrating primarily on refuting the doctrines of domestic confinement or absolute prohibition of gender mixing—which few contemporary jurists actually advocate—the author should first have defined the jurisprudential concept of *mafsadah* and then examined whether such concerns genuinely arise in all sporting events, only in particular competitions, or in none at all.

Furthermore, the book attempts to reinterpret numerous traditions (*aḥādīth*) so that Islamic regulations governing relations between unrelated men and women are reduced almost exclusively to the issue of sexual desire. By restricting the scope of many legal texts to a limited category of women, the author seeks to demonstrate that unrestricted attendance at all men's



sporting events is fully compatible with Islamic law. A closer reading of the scriptural evidence, however, indicates that such interpretations are difficult to reconcile with the apparent meaning of the relevant texts and established jurisprudential principles.

Contemporary social demands increasingly favor broader participation of women in public spaces, and policymakers cannot simply ignore these developments. Nevertheless, evolving social expectations cannot by themselves justify reinterpreting religious texts in ways that exceed accepted principles of legal reasoning. A more balanced jurisprudential approach would seek practical legal solutions that both accommodate legitimate social needs and preserve the integrity of Islamic legal methodology. Even where full implementation of a particular legal ruling proves difficult in practice, acknowledging those practical limitations remains methodologically preferable to adopting strained interpretations of scriptural evidence that lack sufficient jurisprudential support.

Conclusion

Although *Women's Presence in Sports Stadiums* addresses an important contemporary issue and offers an innovative jurisprudential perspective, its principal conclusion rests on several contestable assumptions. The book correctly challenges the claim that Islamic law absolutely prohibits all forms of gender interaction. However, it fails to demonstrate that the absence of evidence for absolute prohibition necessarily establishes unrestricted permissibility.

The central weakness of the work lies in its insufficient engagement with the jurisprudential concept of *mafsadah*, its expansive interpretation of the principle of original



permissibility, and its extensive reinterpretation of scriptural evidence. A more persuasive legal analysis would distinguish between different types of sporting events and evaluate each according to the probability of moral harm, prevailing social circumstances, and established jurisprudential criteria, rather than adopting an unconditional ruling applicable to all situations.

Keywords: women's attendance at stadiums, gender interaction, Islamic jurisprudence, original permissibility, *mafsadah*, book review