

Islam's Refutation of Feminism

When we discuss the topic of feminism and how it is viewed by Islam, we realise that there are two underlying issues that must be addressed. They are:

1. The lack of an understanding regarding the status of women in Islam and the roles that are ordained for them by the *Shariah*.
2. A confusion regarding the rights of women and the absence of a system that upholds them.

Therefore, if any attempt were to be made to explain Islam's stance toward feminism, these two issues must first be addressed. We first must see what Islam says about women, what rights it bestows upon them, and what duties are delegated to them by the *Shariah*. Only once this clarification has been made can we compare Islam to feminism and make any conclusions on whether or not feminism is compatible with Islam. So, let us begin, insha'Allah.

The status of women in Islam and their duties as per the *Shariah*

The notion that men are equal to women, in every sense, does not exist in Islam. Yes, they are equal in that they are both human, they are both servants of their Creator, Allah (swt) and they both are obligated to worship Him (swt).

What is clear, though, to even a child is that men and women are two distinct entities. They are distinct in how Allah (swt) has fashioned them and He confirms this distinction. Allah (swt) says, ﴿وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْأُنثَى﴾ **“And the male is not like the female.”** [TMQ Surah Aali Imran 3:36].

The existence of intersex individuals, also known as hermaphrodites, does not negate the fact that men and women are opposite sexes. This is because an exception to a rule does not render the rule obsolete. In fact, the exception exists *because* of the rule.

Humans are born with five fingers, though there exist abnormal cases of children being born with more, or less, than that number. Similarly, there are two human sexes, though the sex of some individuals is ambiguous.

Of course, we accommodate for exceptions and the *Shariah* does indeed accommodate for the intersex. However, that is not the topic that is being discussed currently.

What is being discussed is the status of women in Islam. The Qur'an clearly distinguishes them from men on the basis of them being of a separate sex. The following question, then, is what other distinctions are made between men and women?

When we examine the *Shariah* and the obligations that Allah (swt) has bestowed upon the believers, we see that in some cases, men and women are given exactly the same duties, in their capacity as humans, and that in other cases, they have separate duties, in their capacity as separate genders. In the cases where they have similar duties, we have the examples of them both being required to perform the five daily prayers and both having to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. Then there are the cases across all the categories of the *Shariah* in which men and women are given separate duties. In *ibadat*, we have the example of a man being obligated to perform the Friday congregational prayer whereas the woman is not. In *munakahat*, we have the example of the man being assigned as the guardian of his wife and the wife being instructed to obey him.

So, what we say is that in some cases the roles of the believing men and women are the same and in other cases they are different. Allah (swt) is the One Who assigned these roles and as His servants, we are obligated to perform them to the best of our abilities. He (swt) is *Al-Hakeem*, the Most-Wise and the Most Judicious and to His legislation alone do we submit.

﴿إِنَّمَا كَانَ قَوْلَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذَا دُعُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَهُمْ أَنْ يَقُولُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ﴾ Allah (swt) says, “The only statement of the (true) believers when they are called to Allah and His Messenger to judge between them is that they say, “We hear and we obey.” And those are the successful.” [TMQ Surah An-Nur 24:51].

The rights of women in Islam and a system that secures them

Just as we acknowledge that it is the *Shariah* that dictates the roles and duties of the believers, so too do we understand that the rights of the believers are derived from the legislation of Allah (swt). This is because a servant's rights are granted to them by their master and Allah (swt) is *As-Sayyid*, the Master, and we are His humble servants.

Therefore, to see what rights a woman has in Islam, we turn to what Allah (swt) has revealed through His noble scripture and through His final messenger, Muhammad (saw). Allah says, ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِن تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِن كُنتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا﴾ “O believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Should you disagree on anything, then refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you (truly) believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is the best and fairest resolution.” [TMQ Surah An-Nisaa 4:59].

The problem, however, is not that the *Shariah* does not grant women rights. Instead, the problem that we find present in the *Ummah* today is that the rights of women are not secured.

And here we turn to a much larger issue.

The absence of the *Khilafah* (Caliphate) and the implementation of the *Shariah*

It was in 1924 CE that the Western agent, Mustafa Kemal, succeeded in abolishing the Ottoman *Khilafah* and, under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Western powers divided up the Muslim lands amongst themselves.

What followed was a complete uprooting of the *Shariah* from the societies in which the Muslims lived. The laws that governed their lands were changed from the *Shariah* to that of the West. The jurisdiction of the *Shariah* courts was first limited before they were entirely abolished. Reforms were made in the educational institutions so that the people were no longer taught their *Deen* but rather the curriculum of the West. Everywhere, in all aspects of society, the *Shariah* was hunted down by the colonialists and forcefully plucked out.

The consequence of this was that the *Ummah* was subjected to a myriad of problems. With no *Khilafah* state to enjoin good upon the people and implement the *Shariah*, the Muslim world became overrun with all manners of corruption and injustice.

In the case of women, the injustice was, and still is, both abundant and severe.

Forced marriages, the denial of a woman's right to divorce, and the unlawful consumption of a wife's wealth, at the hands of her husband or male relatives, are just a few well-known and prevalent examples.

The injustice faced by women is made even more manifest when the *deen* is purposefully distorted and used to excuse it. So, the *hukm* that a woman must obey her husband is used to excuse the behavior of a husband when he abuses her or fails to uphold her rights over him and the *hukm* that it is sinful for a woman to deny intimacy with her husband, unless she has a valid excuse, is used by the husband to justify all manners of obscenity committed against the wife. We even know of cases where a man will rape a woman, who is not his wife, and then will force the woman into marriage, in order to evade punishment!

Such cases demonstrate the sorry state that the *Ummah* finds itself in today. In the absence of the *Khilafah*, there is no system that comprehensively educates the people in their *Deen*, encourages good behavior and piety in the people, and holds the criminals

amongst them accountable. It is not just the rights of women that are not secured, but the rights of everyone everywhere.

Feminism is not the solution

Understanding that the absence of the *Khilafah* and the implementation of the *Shariah* are the true reasons for the lack of justice received by the women in this *Ummah* is important in our discussion of feminism.

This is because there is now a growing belief amongst segments of this *Ummah* that the correct method for acquiring the rights of women is the advocacy of feminism.

However, what must be understood by the believers of this *Ummah* is that feminism is not a methodology. Instead, it is an ideology, one based upon *kufir* beliefs developed in the West. To fully understand what is meant by this, we will now explore the history behind feminism in the West.

The development of feminism in the West and its inherent *kufir*

The idea that women are inherently inferior to men was a notion that dates back to the times of ancient Greek philosophers. Aristotle famously said that, "Women are to the man as the slave is to the master, the manual to the mental worker, the barbarian to the Greek. A woman is an unfinished man, left standing on a lower step in the scale of development."

Later, when the Christians took a hold of Europe, their perceptions of women were no more favorable. The Biblical tale of Eve being deceived by the serpent into eating the apple and then giving some of it to Adam, thus leading to both of them being banished from Heaven, developed a perception in Western culture that women are intellectually inferior to men, troublemakers, and an inconvenience for men.

It was this perception that for centuries led to the mistreatment and oppression of women in Western societies. They were denied the right to divorce and, due to the belief that women were irresponsible and irrational, they were not allowed to manage their own property. Instead, a wife's property became her husband's property and he could spend it however he wanted whereas she was denied the same right. Both of these rights, the right to divorce and the right to own and keep one's property, were granted by our noble Prophet (saw) to women almost seven centuries before the Europeans experienced their Renaissance.

The Christian belief that Eve convinced Adam, to take a bite of the apple, also led to the belief that when women were allowed to talk, only evil ensued and thus it was better to keep women silent. In many European countries during the medieval ages, a scold's bridle, a muzzle-type contraption, was placed on the heads of women, who had spoken out of turn or had angered their husbands.

It was after centuries of such abuse and mistreatment that the women of the West organized themselves and began to openly demand better rights. Thus, in the nineteenth century, arrived the first wave of feminism, which was defined by the Western women's efforts to secure basic rights such as the right to vote and the right to own property.

However, even after these rights were granted, the West was still saturated with ideas that were used to oppress their women. Take, for example, the Western concept of "biological determinism".

The idea held by Western thinkers was that a man and a woman's roles in society were determined by their biology. Their biology, it was understood, made them fundamentally different from one another. This idea, that a man and a woman are distinct biological entities, is also understood in our *Deen*, as was explained at the very beginning of this discussion.

However, where the Western *kuffar* erred is that they made human reasoning the basis of assigning gender roles instead of the *Shariah*. Human reasoning, as we understand it, is not infallible and is subject to error. This led to the development of all sorts of perverse notions about women.

For example, in the nineteenth century, Western doctors conceived of the idea that a woman's body is "anabolic" i.e. it conserves energy instead of expending energy. They reasoned that this made women sluggish and passive and as such, unfit for the realm of politics. Such ideas were therefore used to justify the disenfranchisement of women and their exclusion from politics.

This misconceived idea of "biological determinism" is what led to the second wave of feminism. Feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan began to resist the idea that biology determined a woman's role in society and began to promote the idea that a woman could be equal to a man in terms of her conduct in society.

This effort by the feminists to free women of the constraints of biological determinism had an unintended consequence. As feminist thought continued to develop and the third and fourth waves of feminism began, thinkers such as Judith Butler took the ideas of second-wave feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir to a new extreme.

What began to be said is that not only should a woman's role in society not be determined by her biology but also *her gender* should not be determined by her biology. This idea that gender was simply a "social construct" and that a woman was not defined by her biology is what led to the development of the transgender movement.

Now, the prevailing notion in the West is that a man and a woman can choose their genders for themselves. A man can put on a wig and a skirt and begin to call himself a woman. This is another grave sin, for it was narrated by ibn Abbas (ra) that, «لَعَنَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الْمُتَشَبِّهَاتِ بِالرِّجَالِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْمُتَشَبِّهِينَ بِالنِّسَاءِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ» **"The Messenger of Allah (saw) cursed the women who imitate men and the men who imitate women."** (at-Tirmidhi).

So, what can be seen here is that the adoption of one *kufir* led to the development of another. In the West's "enlightened" struggle to secure rights for their women, they ended up dismantling the very thing that defined being a woman.

This is a warning for the believers. The righteous predecessors used to warn the *Ummah* that just as the reward of performing a good deed is that Allah (swt) guides one towards another good deed, the punishment of performing a bad deed is that a person succumbs to more bad deeds. Similarly, when the believer strays from the legislation of the Qur'an and Sunnah and begins to adopt ideologies that are *kufir*, he will find no end to it. He will sink into the quagmire of sin from which the only escape is returning to what the *Shariah* has imposed.

This is further exemplified by the penetration of socialism into the feminist movement.

When the first strands of feminist thought began to emerge at the end of the 19th century, it was very quickly infiltrated by socialist philosophy. It was socialist thinkers such as Friedrich Engels that defined marriage as a class struggle between men and women, similar to the class struggle that existed between the bourgeoisie and proletariats. This undermined the value society placed on marriage. Later, in the 20th century, Simone de Beauvoir built upon socialist ideas of class struggle and concluded that ultimately, women and men were involved in a societal conflict. Contrast this with the Islamic understanding that men and women are the *'awliyah* of one another. Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ﴾ **"The believing men and the believing women are allies ('awliyah) of one another..."** [TMQ Surah At-Tawba 9:71].

Pitting men and women against one another led to nothing but harm. Consider now how with the dominance of feminism in the West, divorce rates are rising and more and more children are being raised by single mothers who are being forced to also work. This cannot solely be attributed to feminism but also to the rise of hedonism and individualism. People no longer value marriage or the family structure and instead seek out temporary pleasure and experiences that affirm their sense of individualism. As such, fewer people in the West are getting married, rates of adultery are escalating, childbirths are decreasing, the number of

abortion is on the rise, and, thanks to the population engaging in more frequent acts of *zina*, the rates of sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise.

This is why the ideologies of the *kuffar* must be studied carefully. What seems harmless on the surface can actually be the cause of the *Ummah's* destruction. Feminism is presented to the believers as a method to ensure women's rights but its foundations are nothing but rotten and *kufir*.

Women's rights and the colonialist agenda

There is another point that must be understood regarding feminism. That is, feminism was not presented to the Muslim world by the West out of a sincere intention to "emancipate" women. Instead, it was presented in order to undermine the *Shariah* and further the colonialist's campaign to dominate the Muslims.

When colonialists arrived in the Muslim world, they worked through various means to uproot the *Shariah* and replace it with their own legal systems. One of their methods of doing so was by sponsoring the Orientalist project; European institutions began producing an entourage of academics who studied the *Shariah* in-depth and began to distort its teachings and spread lies about it. One of the most destructive narratives produced by the Orientalists was that *Shariah* was a rigid system of law that led to nothing but societal stagnation. The Europeans viewed themselves as the agents of change and progress and they claimed that their legal schools were superior to the *Shariah*.

They claimed that *Shariah* was outdated and did not belong in the modern world. One of the arguments they used for this was the claim that *Shariah* oppressed women and did not give them their rights. To build this argument, the Orientalists purposefully misinterpreted the *Shariah* and spread lies about the Muslims.

So, for example, when the Europeans arrived in Turkey, they learned about the Ottoman sultan's harem. The harem primarily served as the living quarters for the women of the Ottoman palace and was also where the women were given classes and educated. No man was allowed to enter the harem. The European men, frustrated by this, began to spread malicious lies about the harem. They claimed that the harem was a prison for the concubines of the sultan and that they were given nothing to do as they waited all day for the sultan to call for them. To turn this fiction into truth, the Orientalists constructed film sets back home in Europe that were designed to imitate the Ottoman harem and then hired actresses whose complexion matched that of the Eastern women. The actresses were instructed to look bored and despairing. Their pictures were then taken and these pictures were spread across Europe to help build public opinion against the Muslims and the *Shariah*.

They went further and produced paintings of what the insides of the harem supposedly looked like. In these paintings, they depicted the women of the harem as naked, thus leading to an entire culture in which Muslim women were sexualized by the Europeans. Pornographic images, that depicted actresses posing as Muslim women, were widely circulated in the West.

The European's obsession with the Muslim women showcased their intense depravity. In Algeria, the French launched a campaign to encourage Muslim women to remove their veils. The French would dress their own women in the veil and then have them stand in public squares, posing as Muslims, and then have them remove their veil. They hoped that this would inspire Muslim women to abandon the veil. These efforts failed and in the Algerian revolution against the French, the *hijab* became a symbol of Muslim liberation.

The colonialists' campaign to get Muslim women to remove their *hijab* was all part of their plan to dominate the Muslims. Frantz Fanon described their doctrine in *Algeria Unveiled* as such: "...if we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must, first of all, conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight."

He further elaborated by writing: “The Algerian, it was assured, would not stir, would resist the task of cultural destruction undertaken by the occupier, would oppose assimilation, so long as his woman had not reversed the stream. In the colonialist programme, it was the woman who was given the historic mission of shaking up the Algerian man. Converting the woman, winning her over to the foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructing the Algerian culture.”

In Egypt, the controller-general assigned by the British, Evelyn Baring, initiated numerous unveiling campaigns similar to what the French had launched in Algeria. However, at the same time that he was criticizing the veil for being oppressive, he was also serving as the first president of his country’s Men’s League for Opposing Woman Suffrage. The blatant hypocrisy demonstrated by Baring reveals to us what the colonialists’ true motives were. They had no interest in “liberating” Muslim women. Their goal was to abolish the *Shariah* as a way of life by first disparaging it.

Conclusion

By now it should be clear to the reader where Islam stands in relation to feminism. Whereas Islam is the perfect *Deen* of Allah (swt), feminism is nothing more than a man-made ideology that is based on *kufr*.

It is a great misfortune that in the absence of the *Khilafah*, the *Ummah* is unable to attain the full virtues of their *Deen* and subsequently feel the need to turn to ideologies of *kufr* to organize their affairs.

It, therefore, becomes clear to us all the importance of working towards the re-establishment of the *Khilafah*. Only with the restoration of the *Khilafah* on the method of the Prophet (saw) can the *Shariah* be implemented and the rights of the women be restored.

So let us strive hard, insha’Allah, towards this objective. Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُم مِّن مَّنَآءٍ بَعْدَ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا ۗ يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا ۗ وَمَن كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ﴾ **“Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them and that He will surely establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them and that He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security, [for] they worship Me, not associating anything with Me. But whoever disbelieves after that - then those are the defiantly disobedient.”** [TMQ Surah An-Nur 24:55].

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Khalil Musab – Wilayah Pakistan**