



How Feminism Fractured the Family

PART 2

How Feminism Developed its Disdain for Marriage, Motherhood and the Traditional Family Unit

Absence of Rights in Marriage & Viewing Traditional Marital Roles from a Hierarchical Perspective

Part 1 of this article discussed how the destructive ideas of feminism, in particular the concept of gender equality, was a sugar-coated toxic pill that was promoted to women and societies under the labels of 'women's empowerment', 'women's rights' and 'gender justice'. However, in truth they served as one of the most destructive forces upon marriage, motherhood and the family unit. It also discussed how many within the Muslim Ummah embraced the ideals of feminism, failing to realise that feminism was born from the historical experiences of injustice, oppression and absence of basic rights that women within Western states experienced due to living under the flawed man-made secular system – a history and experience that Islam does not share.

Part 2 and 3 of this article will explain how the feminist attack on marriage and the traditional family unit arose and contrasted with Islam's distinct views, values and laws related to women, marriage and family life.

(i) Absence of Rights for Women in Marriage:

In the Victorian era, when a woman married, in the eyes of the law, she essentially ceased to exist. She became the property of her husband upon marriage, and her rights were legally given over to her spouse, who could essentially treat her however he wished. Hence, once married, many were treated almost like slaves. The woman's ownership of her wealth and any wages she had would be handed over to her husband who would have control over her property and money. Furthermore, it was also extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a woman to divorce her husband even if he was abusive or unfaithful to her; in fact, a husband could be violent towards his wife without fear of prosecution. She also had no rights to custody over her children.

As a consequence of women's deprivation of rights within marital life, the early supporters of feminism viewed marriage and the family unit as a form of enslavement and servitude of the woman to the man. Friedrich Engels for example, the famous 19th century German philosopher and social scientist, wrote in his book, 'The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State' that, *"The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife"*, and that upon marriage, *"The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children."*

Feminists also opposed the concept of restricting the sexual relationship between men and women to the confines of marriage. They described this as stifling the freedom, happiness and pleasure of women, and called for 'sexual liberation' of the woman. They also supported the woman's right to have an abortion, arguing that full reproductive control for women was a prerequisite to anything resembling equality.

The Muslims who adopted the feminist wariness towards marriage, viewing it as a form of female servitude and enslavement of the woman to the man that needed rectification

through the call for gender equality within marital life, failed to understand that Islam never regarded the wife as the property or slave of the husband but rather maintained that she was the companion of her spouse and a legal entity on her own right. Hence, within Islam the woman continued to have full ownership and control over her wealth, earnings and property, while her husband had no right to any part of her income, assets or money. For example, the judicial registers of the Uthmani Khilafah confirm that under its Islamic rule, no-one, including husbands, could sell, rent or use a woman's property, or spend her wealth without her consent, and if they did, she could and did initiate suits against them in court. The woman was also able to conduct her own contracts and seek judicial redress in the courts, independent of her husband. In addition, Islam gave the woman the right to seek Khula (divorce) and to take her husband to court for any act of abuse or even negligence in his responsibility to provide for her or to give her the mahr (dowry) decided upon marriage. The judicial records of the Khilafah state provide many cases that provide plentiful proof of all this. In Islam, the woman is also given custody of her children upon divorce if they are below the age of distinction, and if they are above this age, then the child is given the choice as to which parent they wish to live with.

Furthermore, those Muslims who supported the woman's right to abortion on par with the West, not only failed to realise how heinous a crime aborting a life with a soul is in the eyes of Allah(swt), but also that 'abortion' is one of the gruesome consequences of liberalism's sexual freedoms and its flawed view of seeking pleasure over all things. It is a viewpoint that has ripped apart the family structure, devastated the lives of children, and sown havoc within societies. Hence the legalization of abortion is not the solution to a problem, nor a symbol of progress for the woman or states but is rather an action filled with emotional turmoil and guilt, and the outcome of a failed way of life.

(ii) Traditional Marital Roles were viewed from a Hierarchical Perspective:

Western feminists viewed the traditional family structure of the man as the head of the family who the woman is duty bound to obey as a symbol of patriarchy and male power and dominance over the woman, as well as demeaning for women. In large part, this was to do with two reasons. *Firstly*, as already discussed above, it was because women within Western secular states were powerless and deprived of many basic rights upon marriage as well as subject to any of the whims of their husband with very little right of redress if they faced injustice. As a result, many husbands used their position as head of the family to exploit and mistreat their wives, knowing that there would be no legal repercussions. *Secondly*, it was because these feminists viewed the traditional organization of roles within the family unit from the perspective of a hierarchy, with the man seen as superior to the woman due to his status as head of the family unit. As a result, the woman's traditional role as home-maker and care taker of the children was seen as demeaning and lower than the man's traditional role of breadwinner of the family. This view was the natural consequence of the fact that men were considered as superior to women within secular societies historically. In addition, men and women were categorized into different roles based on a flawed view towards the nature of the genders. Men for example were viewed as having the capability of reasoning, action, intellectual strength and being independent in their thinking; hence, they were equipped to be the head of the family and to operate in public life. Meanwhile, women were viewed as being emotional, irrational, passive, and have the qualities of submission and dependence; hence, they were restricted to the private sphere. Even the so-called 'enlightened thinkers' of Western secularism, such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, and Montesquieu, found it impossible to grasp that women had the same worth and intellect as men. They described women as incapable by their nature to develop the full faculty of reasoning and depicted them as creatures of emotion and therefore unsuitable for the public sphere. Hence, feminists attacked the traditional family structure, arguing that it promoted the idea that

women were inferior, submissive and weak, and that they should not accept a relationship where there is an unequal hierarchy of power.

Within the Muslim Ummah, those affected by the thoughts of feminism also began to believe that Islam's organization and differentiation of gender roles and rights within marriage and family life were unjust and demeaning to the woman. So, they attacked the concept of male guardianship in Islam and the wife's duty of obedience to the husband. They also called for the duties and rights in Muslim marriages to be shaped upon gender equality – for example that men and women should share the responsibilities of earning for the family as well as child rearing, and that inheritance and divorce laws should be the same for the genders.

However, they failed to appreciate that unlike Western secular states, Islam always viewed men and women the same in their worth, status and intellect as well as deserving of the same political, economic, educational and judicial rights. Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا﴾ **“And Allah has made for you mates of your own nature...”** [Al-Imran: 195].

And the Prophet (saw) said, «إنما النساء شقائق الرجال ما أكرمهن إلا كريم وما أهانهن إلا لنيم» **“Women are the twin halves of men. None but a noble man treats women in an honorable manner, and none but an ignorant treats women disgracefully.”**

Hence, Islam's prescribing of the man as the head of the family is not based upon the concept of male superiority and domination but rather upon the concept of guardianship and heavy responsibility in taking care of, protecting and providing for his wife and family. Furthermore, Islam's differentiation of different roles, duties and rights for men and women in marriage and family life is not based upon any sense of gender hierarchy but rather what is required to effectively organize the family unit so that the needs of all family members are fulfilled effectively, and harmony is achieved in family life. Nor does Islam define one role above another but rather views all prescribed duties as complementing one another and essential for the successful functioning of the family unit. Additionally, the specific responsibilities of men are not linked to greater success and status than those prescribed upon women; rather, success and status in this world and the next are measured according to the effort placed in fulfilling those duties commanded by Allah (swt). He (swt) says,

﴿وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ لِّلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبْنَ وَسَأَلُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّا اللَّهُ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا﴾

“And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned. And ask Allah of his bounty. Indeed Allah is ever, of all things, Knowing.” [Al-Nisa: 32]

Part 3 of this article will continue the discussion on how Feminism developed its disdain for marriage, motherhood and the traditional Family Unit. It will address how feminism's view that economic dependence on the husband was not compatible with women's liberation, as well as its belief that domestic roles and motherhood were a waste of women's talents, led it to trying to dismantle the traditional family structure.

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