



How Feminism Fractured the Family

PART 3

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

Economic Dependence on the Husband & Viewing Domestic Roles and Motherhood as a Waste of Women's Talents

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

(i) Economic Dependence on the Husband was Seen as Not Compatible with Women's Liberation:

Western feminism promoted the view that economic dependence on the husband was not compatible with respect for women or women's liberation. They believed that for women to elevate their status and achieve genuine equality to men within the society and to break away from their cycle of 'servitude' to men within marriage, they needed to earn their own living. Therefore, success and empowerment for the woman became linked to entering the workforce, pursuing a career and becoming financially independent.

These beliefs were again born from the injustice women faced within their marriage and society within Western secular states. For example, women were forced to stay in unhappy and abusive marriages because they could not often fend for themselves upon divorce. In addition, they would often be left in financial hardship if widowed. All this was because neither the state nor the community nor relatives had an obligation to provide for them after their marriage ended. Hence, feminists argued that due to the financial dependence on the husband, women were economically vulnerable and '*condemned to a life inescapably dependent on a man's income*', as one writer described it. They, therefore, tried to convince women that the only way for them to 'escape' the 'oppressive institution and imprisonment of marriage' was to ensure they had their own form of income.

Unfortunately, many Muslims also became besotted with the idea that women's empowerment, respect and financial security were based upon financial independence. This was not only due to Western feminist thoughts infiltrating the Muslim lands as a result of political and cultural colonialism and secular Muslim regimes intensively promoting them within their societies but also due to the failure of the secular systems that ruled the Muslim World to provide effectively for women who were divorced or widowed. They abandoned them to fend for themselves and their children, even if that meant begging on streets or scavenging for food from rubbish bins.

However, in contrast to the Western secular system, Islam never considered the man's role as the breadwinner as a privilege or a means for men to have control over women. Rather, it regards it as an important responsibility placed upon the shoulders of men, while also viewing the woman's economic dependence upon the man as a privilege for her. This is because financial maintenance by the man lifts from women the burden of having to provide for themselves, empowering them to fulfil their roles as mothers - looking after, nurturing and educating their children without the time-constraints, pressures and strain associated with having to manage a job at the same time.

Furthermore, within Islam, male relatives are obliged to provide for their female relatives to the best of their ability. However, if the woman has no provider, then the state is obliged to financially maintain her, protecting her from any financial hardship and ensuring for her a good standard of living. The Prophet (saw) said, «مَنْ تَرَكَ مَالًا فَلِأَهْلِهِ وَمَنْ تَرَكَ دَيْنًا أَوْ ضَيَاعًا فَلِئِيَّ وَعَلَيَّ» "If

somebody dies (among the Muslims) leaving some property, the property will go to his heirs; and if he leaves a debt or dependents, we will take care of them."

Therefore, under the Islamic system of the Khilafah, women who are divorced, widowed or unmarried should always enjoy financial security, and have no fear of leaving an unrepairable or abusive marriage due to monetary concerns. In addition, the man is forbidden from using his duty to financially maintain his wife and family as a tool to control or manipulate his spouse – providing it or withholding it according to his wishes - for his wife has a right over his wealth and to take from it according to her needs, as demonstrated by the following hadith of the Prophet (saw): عَنْ عَائِشَةَ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا - أَنَّ هِنْدَ (بِنْتَ عَتَبَةَ)، قَالَتْ لِلنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنَّ أَبَا سُفْيَانَ رَجُلٌ شَحِيحٌ، فَأَخْتَأُ أَنْ أَخَذَ: «خُذِي مَا يَكْفِيكَ وَوَلَدُكَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ» Hind (bint `Utba) said to the Prophet (ﷺ) "Abu Sufyan is a miserly man and I need to take some money of his wealth." The Prophet (ﷺ) said, **"Take reasonably what is sufficient for you and your children "** The judicial records of the Uthmani Khilafah state are also full of cases where women used the court system to secure their marital financial rights.

(ii) Domestic Roles and Motherhood Were Seen as a Waste of Women's Talents:

Many Western feminists promoted the idea that women's domestic duties and childrearing were a waste of their talents and that they were holding women back from achieving their real potential within society and public life as well as limiting their horizons. They believed that the role of the wife and mother was stifling and an obstacle to women fulfilling their true aspirations and ambitions in life. They claimed that women could not take their full role in society and secure equal rights as citizens of the state on par with men while they were 'held like a prisoner at home'. Mary Wollstonecraft for example, the 18th century pioneer of the Western feminist movement, wrote in her book, 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', *"Females...denied all political privileges, and not allowed as married women, excepting in criminal cases, a civil existence, have their attention naturally drawn from that of the whole community to that of the minute parts."* And feminists argued that full respect and self fulfilment were not compatible with full-time domestic responsibilities and childrearing, which they described as essentially reducing them to 'baby-making machines'. Christabel Pankhurst for example, the re-known early 20th century feminist and member of the suffragette movement, said of home-life responsibilities that they were an intolerable burden on married women, a waste of time and economic energies, and were unpaid and unrecognised.

Consequently, over time, many feminists began to shun motherhood and stay at home wives and mothers, encouraging women to be anything they wanted to be....that is except housewives and full-time mothers. The 20th century American feminist Betty Friedan, for example, one of the founders of modern-day Feminism, stated that, *"women who 'adjust' as housewives, who grow up wanting to be 'just a housewife', are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own death in the concentration camps...they are suffering a slow death of mind and spirit."* Even, the UN's 1995 Beijing Platform Declaration condemned school curriculums for showing men and women in "traditional female and male roles." It stated that *"traditional female and male roles...deny women opportunities for full and equal partnership in society."*

This feminist contempt towards the woman's role as home-maker and mother arose due to various reasons. *Firstly*, under the Western secular system, domestic work was not valued compared to paid work and the role of providing for one's family, which was seen as an honourable duty. Hence, the position of breadwinner was placed over the status of being a wife and mother. *Secondly*, within Western states, women were historically confined to home duties with no role outside of the house. This was used as an excuse by some to deny women their educational, economic and political rights, for they claimed that women were in no need of such privileges if their only duty was as home-makers and child-rearers.

Hence, the successful woman became defined as the one who had a successful career or at least earned her own living rather than a woman who fulfilled her primary duty as a wife and mother well. Employment became viewed as that which gave the woman value rather than successfully raising a child which is one of the most valuable duties in a society. Consequently, feminists called for elimination of gender differentiation in roles, and for equal sharing of paid work, home duties, and child-rearing between men and women in family life. Susan Okin, for example, a well-known 20th century feminist, wrote in her book, 'Justice, Gender, and the Family',

that female child-rearing “is immensely time-consuming and prevents those who do it single-handedly from the pursuit of many other social goods, such as education, earnings, or political office,” and that “any just and fair solution to the urgent problem of women’s and children’s vulnerability must encourage and facilitate the equal sharing by men and women of paid and unpaid work, of productive and reproductive labour. We must work toward a future in which all will be likely to choose this mode of life.” The irony was though that most women were pushed into low end, poorly paid, and exploitative jobs. Hence, as a result of this erroneous feminist view of success, women were not only burdened with the responsibilities of men with jobs that failed to raise their status in society, they also sacrificed their important duties as wives and mothers, all in the name of feeding the economy.

Islam, however, did not share the Western secular view towards motherhood, nor did it hold the view that women should only be confined to their home duties, but rather, that they should be active in the public life as they are active in their private life. *Firstly*, Islam gave immense value and importance to the role of being a wife and mother, raising its status in society and assigning great rewards in the Hereafter to fulfilling these duties well. The Prophet (saw) said, «مَهْنَةٌ إِحْدَاكُنَّ فِيَّ «The woman that does her domestic chores [cheerfully] attains the rank of those upholding Jihaad.» بَيْتُهَا تُدْرِكُ عَمَلُ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ» جَاءَ رَجُلٌ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، فَقَالَ: مَنْ أَحَقُّ النَّاسِ بِخُسْنِ صَحَابَتِي؟ قَالَ: «أُمُّكَ»، قَالَ: ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ: «ثُمَّ أُمُّكَ»، قَالَ: ثُمَّ مَنْ؟ قَالَ: «ثُمَّ أَبُوكَ» A man once came to the Prophet (saw) and said, ‘O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship?’ The Prophet (PBUH) said: “**Your mother.**” The man said, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: “**Then your mother.**” The man further asked, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: “**Then your mother.**” The man asked again, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: “**Then your father.**”

Abdullah Ibn Abbas (ra), a companion of the Prophet(saw) and great Islamic scholar, once said, *“I know of no other deed that brings people closer to Allah than kind treatment and respect towards one’s mother.”* And Julia Pardoe, a 19th century British Poet, Historian, and Traveller, wrote regarding the status of the mother under the Islamic system of the Uthmani Khilafah in her book ‘The City of the Sultan and Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1836’, *“An equally beautiful feature in the character of the Turks is their reverence and respect for the mother of their being...the mother is an oracle; she is consulted, confided in, listened to with respect and deference, honoured to her latest hour and remembered with affection and regret beyond the grave.”*

Secondly, although Islam defined the woman's primary role as a wife and mother, it never held women back from having an active public life nor did it differentiate between men and women in their educational, economic, judicial, and political rights. In fact, Islam obliged women to be involved in the politics of society by standing against injustice and corruption and by accounting their rulers. Allah (swt) says: **﴿وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ﴾** **"The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong)"...** [TMO At-Taubah: 71]

«كَلَّا وَاللَّهِ لَتَأْمُرَنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَلَتَأْخُذْنَ عَلَى يَدِي الظَّالِمِ وَلَتَأْطُرُنَّهُ عَلَى الْحَقِّ أَطْرًا وَلَتَقْصُرُنَّهُ عَلَى الْحَقِّ قَصْرًا» “Nay, by Allah, you have to enjoin the Ma’ruf and forbid the Munkar, and to hold against the hand of the tyrant, and to force him on the truth truly and to limit him to the truth really...”

Hence, there are many examples of Muslim women who were extremely active in the politics of the Islamic society of the Prophet (saw) and the Khilafah state that followed his rule. One example was Al-Shifa bint Abdullah, a woman who the second Khalifah of Islam, Umar bin Al Khattab(ra) would consult on various political matters due to her intelligence and insight, often giving preference to her opinions over others. Furthermore, Islam obliged women to gain knowledge in the Deen while also encouraging them to excel in seeking education about worldly affairs. This is why the history of Islamic civilization under Islamic rule is filled with thousands of examples of female scholars and experts in Islam and many other fields of study. Alongside this, women enjoyed a very prosperous economic life under Islam, engaging in economic contracts and working if they so wished but with no social or economic pressure to enter employment, knowing that their husband, male relatives and the state were obliged to ensure their financial

security. The Prophet (saw) said, «قَدْ أُذِنَ لَكُنَّ أَنْ تَخْرُجْنَ لِحَوَائِجِكُنَّ» “O women! You have been allowed by Allah (swt) to go out for your needs.”

Judicial records from the Uthmani Khilafah reveal that women had a very active economic life. They show that women owned land, orchards, houses and other forms of property and that all revenues from these was exclusively theirs to manage. For example, records from 17th century Shariah courts of Kayseri, a city in Anatolia, Turkey, reveal that its women accumulated a large amount of the land and property in the city. 40% of the purchase or sale of property in Kayseri between 1605 to 1625 involved at least 1 woman. In another study on 18th century Aleppo court records, 63% of property sales involved women. The judicial registers of the Uthmani Khilafah also reveal that women engaged in trading, formed contracts, invested their wealth in various projects, ran their own businesses, and held managerial positions in businesses owned by others. Hence, marriage, home duties and motherhood were not an obstacle to women in the history of Islam to having an active public life and excelling in many fields of life.

Feminism is a Flawed and Irrational Concept:

Hence, feminism developed its flawed view towards marriage, motherhood and the family unit as oppressive patriarchal structures due to the injustice that women were subjected to under the man-made Western secular system. Instead of focusing their attention on the root cause of women's oppression, the secular system and its values and beliefs made men and the traditional family structure the target of their anger and hatred. Consequently, many women developed an aversion towards marriage, not only because they saw it as an oppressive, misogynistic institution but also due to viewing men with suspicion and as their enemy, waiting to take their rights away. Unfortunately, this mode of thinking affected many Muslim women too, causing them to delay or avoid marriage and motherhood altogether. Many viewed the Islamic family laws with suspicion or even contempt, while others viewed their spouse as foes rather than as brothers in Islam and companions in life, resulting in conflict within marriage rather than the tranquility that should accompany marital life.

Furthermore, feminism is based upon a fundamentally flawed and irrational premise that denies reality for it denies gender differences. It ignored the biological nature of women as the child bearers of the human race, trying to push this aside as irrelevant, while it should be a central factor in defining the roles and rights within marriage and family life for the genders. It also rejected the central position that a mother has in a child's life. This is probably why the well-known French writer and feminist, Simone de Beauvoir, once stated, “No woman should be authorized to stay at home to raise her children... Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice too many women will make that one.”

Alongside this, feminism and gender equality's failure to appreciate the real differences between men and women led them to judge the Islamic family laws as oppressive and discriminatory towards women due to the gender differences in rights and responsibilities. However, they failed to understand that those very differences *accommodated* for the distinction between the two sexes and complemented one another to create an effective, well-organised and harmonious family structure. This is alongside ensuring financial maintenance, protection and support for the woman and her children. Hence, when the Islamic family laws were abandoned by states and family units due to this 'Equalizing of Genders', it was women and children that suffered the most.

Part 4 of this article will address the destructive impact that feminism and gender equality has had on marriage, motherhood and family life as well as on the lives of women, men and children, and on society overall.

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