

Feminism and Islam: Their contribution for the holistic growth of women

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العميدة المؤسسة،

كلية نياز الجامعية الوطنية، ممباي، الهند.

Introduction

The last two centuries observed bellowing feminists demanded women's rights through revolutionary movements, scholarly writings and forming organizations promoting equal rights for women. This paper illustrates an unbiased comparative study of women's rights stipulated by the feminist movement and the women's rights given by Islam. The misconceptions that the Muslim women are subjugated, exploited and treated as chattels by Muslim men is countered. Muslim woman is considered to have been deprived from participation in social, economic, and political positions. Further, the physiology and psychology of the two genders is discussed to discern their optimum potential for the advancement of the society.

Feminism

The word 'Feminism' was first used in the year 1895. The dictionary defines feminism as 'the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes'¹. The feminist struggle advocated equal rights to women. The nineteenth and twentieth century have diverse views and concepts about 'Feminism'. Originally, 'Feminism' aimed to award women the fundamental right to education, to own property, to choose a marriage partner and the right to vote. Eventually this movement grew to unfetter women to free sex: legalized prostitution, legalized pornography and lesbianism.

Feminist divided into independent groups each carrying their personal outlook and acumen. Some of the groups are as follow: -

Marxist or Socialist Feminist: They reason that the role of men and women in domestic and workplace is unequal. The domestic work, childcare and the system of marriage is a patriarchal system.

Radical Feminist: They believe that women can achieve freedom by uprooting and reconstructing the oppressive and dominating patriarchal system.

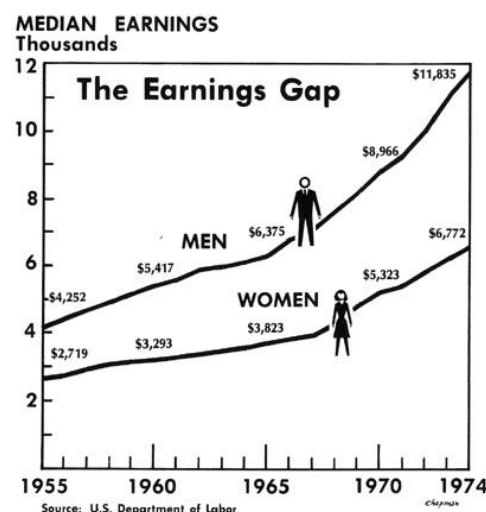
1. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>

Liberal Feminist: They assert the freedom of women can be achieved by women's own actions and choices to bring reform.

Multiracial Feminist: They strive to grant equal right to women of all colour, culture and race.

The eighteenth-century Feminism asserted equal job opportunity to women. The social structure of the era was designed to confine women to the house and their major undertaking was to cater to the need of the children and husband. Feminist of this era held the household chores as a burden which obstructed the freedom of woman to begin a full-time job.

The age of Industrialization required labourers to keep their factories running. Most young men who were the prospective labourers of these industries were killed in the World War II. The requirement of Industrial Revolution to meet the surging need of labourers in the factories was fulfilled by the women. Though women were paid lesser than their male counterpart, she was made to believe that this job offered them opportunity to earn contrasting their household chores which give the impression of unpaid slavery. Hence women left home under the false pretense of progress and modernization. Women were in the armed forces as well as drivers of trams. The entrepreneurs could make huge profit by paying the women lesser wages.¹



Women employment increased from 26% to 36 % in a span of four years from 1939 to 1943. The children of employed mothers were appeased by state funded wartime nurseries. Though apparently women shouldered equal workload as that of men but were paid less salary, medical compensation, and other incentives. Later, however the British Parliament was compelled to pass a law to give women wages equivalent to men. Women under the disguise of liberation was serving the economical need of the country and deprived her own children of their basic need of motherly love, care, and protection.

The scholarly poetry and prose writings by Radical Feminist Adrianna Riche, Audre Laude, Robin Morgan, Suzan Griffin and Judy Grahn was women centered and depicted the oppression of women in the patriarchal society. Ti-Grace Atkinson wrote in 1974 that "male/female system" is the first and foremost instance of human oppression'. Family life was perceived as an unwanted added responsibility on women offering the men liberty and

1. https://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/file.php?path=/images/CQ_Researcher/cqresre19770218_im127.1.jpg

freedom to enjoy their life. consequently, this ideology led increase in divorce and delay in marriages. Many children had single parent. The lack of parental guidance triggered psychological disturbance in children causing an adverse effect on the overall development of the children.

In 1980's a completely deviant feminist wave began which views women as an entity. Claims were made that women are superior to men and were free of any need from men. Katha Pollitt, a contemporary feminist, exclaims 'women are people'; hence the two sexes need not be united.¹ Contemporary feminists believe in exercising complete control over her body and sexuality. Hence many countries legalized lesbian marriages. Pornography, prostitution, and abortion is realized to be complete liberation of women from the obscure ethics and norms of the society.

Islam

In the seventh century, Islam conferred women the right to education, inheritance, marriage, and divorce. The wife of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was one of the most successful businesswomen of Makkah. A lady would come to teach the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to read and write. Islam holds men and women have equal rights and accountability. Allah says 'If any do deeds of righteousness, - be they male or female- and have faith, they will enter Paradise and not the least injustice will be done to them' (Al Quran - 4:124).

Islam recognizes the family structure as the foundation of the society. Healthy family will lead to a sound active society. Appropriate upbringing of children requires financial and well-structured training. Men and women are equal but not identical in Islam. The two sexes are given rights and duties based on their physical and psychological makeup. Man is physically stronger than woman hence he is considered as the breadwinner. He is expected to toil and earn a decent living for his family. The wife in turn is not burdened with the responsibility to earn so that she can spare enough time and efforts for the appropriate training and nurturing of the future generation.

Islam acknowledges that the role of the man and woman; breadwinner and care-taker, are equally important. Both the roles are equally rewarded in the sight of Allah. The husband and wife both have rights over each other's property. A woman can inherit property from her son, husband, father and even brother. Muslim woman's portion of inheritance is not the same as the man as she is excluded from the financial responsibility of the family. A marriage cannot

1. http://www.gender.cawater-info.net/knowledge_base/rubricator/feminism_e.htm

culminate without the consent of both the bride and the bridegroom. If the marriage does not turn out to be amicable, the right to separation through Talaq¹ and Khula² has been granted.

Islam regards preservation of life, property and honour at a high esteem. Any harm to the physical or psychological well-being of another human being is prohibited. To preserve the human species a constitution of marriage is constructed, and an extra marital affair is a punishable crime. In between the married couple any act of harm like domestic violence, sodomy or abandonment is forbidden. To sustain the sacred marriage wedlock obscenity, vulgarity, prostitution and pornography is forbidden medical science proves that men are provoked by visual stimuli. The Muslim woman is expected to adorn the hijab³ whenever she is in presence of men who are not her close blood relatives. This closes all the avenues to urge the opposite gender, thus avoiding crime such as rape and molestation.

The chastity of a woman cannot be slandered unless four eye-witnesses are produced. If one fails to produce witnesses, then he/she will be punished by administering 80 lashes. A wife is viewed as one of the greatest blessings for a man. A mother is given a higher degree of respect and good treatment over the father. A father who upbrings two girls with good moral training is promised Paradise. Whereas this is not the case with the infinite number of sons he takes care of. A woman's social security entirely lies in the hands of the man which is an added responsibility for the man.

Conclusion

The west judges and grades a woman based on her appearance. A Muslim woman does not focus her objective to look attractive to the male counterparts around her at workplace or street. It is more obvious if one compares the average time spend by a Western woman in the in front of a mirror before she leaves her house to a Muslim woman who merely adorns the Hijab. A Muslim woman is expected to groom and beautify herself for her husband who has more right to see her beauty. On the contrary, a feminist struggle to keep herself prim when she is outside the house and shabbily dressed inside the house. She is completely drowned and obsessed with her looks to gain the approval of every man.

1. Talaq is the Arabic word for divorce given by the husband to his wife

2. Khula is the Arabic word for nullification of marriage. This is done by the wife after due consent from a judge

3. Hijab means veil. It is covering of the entire body of the women except the face and hands till the wrist for women and the area from navel to the knee for men.

The feminist movement began to free women from the shackles and bondage of men. But it has brought the woman; a mother or a wife or a daughter, outside her home to work and gain independency.

The irony of the situation is that woman is made to feel degraded to serve the men of the family but puffed with pride when she does the same job as waitresses and airhostess.¹ The sorry state of affair is that the woman who is trying to free herself from the male of her family has in turn fallen prey to the lust of promiscuous men in the name of art and fashion. Unfortunately, she is still remaining as slave of man in disguise. Her job provides a company an employee at a lesser wage; her pretty appearance satiates the lustful looks of opportunistic men.

Islam has liberated women from the bondage of men. It delivers women free from self-obsession and brings her to God. She enjoys all the rights to education, property, inheritance, consent of marriage, politics and finances and safety where women's life and honour is a mandatory responsibility of man.

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