

## Feminism Vs. Islam

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In this short essay, I shall elaborate on the issue of feminism vs Islam.

The word feminism was coined by a French philosopher, Charles Fourier in 1837. Feminism is a political movement that principally began in the West and industrial nations after the industrial revolution (1760) due to injustices against women. The main objective was and still is equality between sexes with demand for equal opportunity, equal pay and equal treatment of women alongside men. This movement has been relatively slow. The American revolution took place in (1775-1783) and the oldest democratic constitution in America was ratified in 1788, but women were not part of the democracy until 1921 in the United States and until 1971 in Switzerland. In England, married women did not have property inheritance rights until 1882 (please see Married Women's Property Act of 1882). Even today, sociological reports indicates that women are paid less than men and are less involved in social and political affairs compared to men in general. In the field of sociology, this results in the emergence of a new theory called "Feminist theory," that tries to explain the roots of inequality and injustices against women worldwide. Ironically, after the Renaissance in which the role of the Church was radically curbed and later, even with the emergence of democratic institutions, the rights women remain unequal to those accorded to men. Then, on the basis of feminist theory, the main question is why the West has failed to treat women as equal to men? The answer can be found in the Bible. The West being predominantly Christians, follows the Bible that makes women a second class citizen. From the dawn of Christianity, this trend has continued until today because it is rooted in people's culture. It was in 2005 that the president of Harvard university, Lawrence H. Summers, argued in a conference that "men outperform women in math and sciences because of biological differences". (The Guardian 18 January 2005). So feminism is an answer to injustices caused by the Church as well as political institutions that are linked with the Church even today. A good wife is the one who is submissive to her husband. However, the political movement in western societies as slow as it is, made huge progress for the status of women in employment, family issues such as the right of divorce, abortion, condemnation of rape and sexual harassment by men. Industrial societies have witnessed women coming to political power and becoming CEOs of major companies. Thanks to the separation of Church and State, freedom of expression and assembly have prevailed.

Islam is the third monotheistic religion in the world and is a world civilization. It is not a political movement although in principle, religion and politics in Islam are not separate.. On the contrary, they are interwoven. Islam came 622 years after Jesus not only as a belief system but a complete culture and way of life. It has changed the culture of the bedouin as well the urban people. In this culture, men and women are declared equal. (please see the movie, The Message). Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam has been recorded as being the most influential figure in the history of mankind. In the "A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History" by Michael H. Hart(1992), Muhammad (570-632), listed as the number one most influential man in history,, " he[Muhammad], was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.". The Qur'an, the Book of Islam, declares both men and women equal in creation, society and family. (please see Gender Equality in Islam (2002) in English language, and Civic Equality Rights in Islam (2015) in Farsi language by this

author). On the creation of men and women, the Qur'an says, " O mankind! Reverence your Guardian Lord Who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; reverence God, through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and reverence the wombs (that bore you): for God ever watches you." (Qur'an,4:1). In employment and society, the Qur'an says, "Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female: You are members, one of another." (Qur'an, 3:195). On family, concerning women, the Qur'an says, " They are your garments and you are their garments." (Qu'an, 2: 187). This means that within the family men and women compliment each other. History tells us that in Islam, women were part of building Islamic civilization along side men. Critics of Islam allude to witnesses of one man and two women, forgetting the fact that when women do witness in the court of law, it means they have a role in society and judicial system for the last 1400 years. The reason for requiring two women is that in case one woman, due to feminine complications and pain forgets then the other woman can back her up for the sake of justice. Islam granted women the right of inheritance, divorce, and education 1400 years ago. Ayesha, the Prophet's wife as well as Fatima the Prophet's daughter are considered two scholars in the history of Islam. Ayesha also played a role in political affairs when she stood against the fourth Caliph and demanded that the assassins of the third Caliph should be brought to justice. The fourth Caliph did not agree and Ayesha lobbied for her cause which led to a major war between the Prophet's wife and Ali, the son in law of the Prophet and the fourth Caliph.

One major difference between feminism and Islam is that feminism does not address the issue of moral values between men and women neither in society nor in family while Islam does. Another issue is that feminism does not address the feminine issue of women such as pregnancy, labor during pregnancy, and the role of a mother. This is left for personal decision and choices while Islam as a culture addresses these issues.

It is important to note that after the era of the Fourth Righteous Caliph in Islam, Muslims went back mostly to tribalism and misogyny and they interpreted the Qur'an in favor of men. This trend become stronger when Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab(died 1792) the founder of Wahhabi sect in Saudi Arabia of today gave Islam a very negative and biased interpretation of Islam. This sect managed to spread its message later with petro-dollars around the world and resulted in the creation of ISIS, the Taliban, Al Qaida and Boko Haram and so on. Unfortunately, the Unites States for its own strategic interest, fully supports Saudi Arabia and never questions its human rights agenda, women rights issues or the bombardment of Yemen.

As a researcher of social sciences and humanities, I do confess that democratic systems are ahead of Islam in women's rights in all aspects of life while Muslims needs to go back to their roots in order to bring justice to women. Muhammad Ibn Salman, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia promised to bring moderate Islam into play and he confessed that the true Islam has been "hijacked", but he did not confess that it was hijacked by Muhammad Ibn Abul-Wahab more than two hundred years ago, and later by his followers who established the kingdom of Saudi Arabia more than eighty years ago of which he is now the Crown Prince. Time and history will tell us if he succeeds.

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