

## Gender Equality according to Islam and Feminism

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**Abstract—** Gender differences between men and women lead to legal differences between them, including Such issues as violence against women and many other questions. There are two contrasting approaches to these differences:

The first approach maintains that legal differences indicate discrimination against women, because justice means full equality between men and women: Any difference means injustice, The second approach holds that having the same look at the rights of men and women paves the way for injustice against women, because such a look does not pay attention to the natural differences between men and women: It can turn into a vicious circle. In this essay, these two approaches have been discussed so that we can have a better understanding of the subject semantically, Epistemologically, and existentially.

In addition, there is a discussion of the roots of gender difference according to Islam and Feminism in terms of equalization and differentiation between men and women. Moreover, there is a discussion about the feminist ethics and the non-feminist ethics and about the criticism in this regard.

**Keywords-** women, men, feminism, Gender Equality, Difference.

### I. INTRODUCTION

If we look at the subject under discussion in an ancient perspective, that is, during the ancient Rome, we will see that women did not enjoy any social rights; They did not inherit any property; After their husbands died, women would be transferred to the inheritors, as they were considered as commodities, Yes, the greatest assault on the women's dignity, their materialistic, and spiritual rights occurred in the post- Renaissance era in the west, referred to as the civil death of woman'.

Some people believe that feminism is the result of a natural protest against plato's as well as Aristotle's opinions, that humiliated women, and led to the cultural conventional, ethical, legal, and sexual belittling sexual belittling of women. These opinions met no challenge for various generations: Feminism was, therefore, a radical reaction to such opinions. Plato's as well as Aristotle's thoughts continued up to the post Renaissance era, and even today, unfortunately, they continue to resist, as statistics show that women are the one- third of the workforce, but seventy percent of the poor, and two – thirds of the illiterate and the less educated in the world; They have got only one percent of the possessions and ten percent of the managerial positions; women are, unfortunately, the greatest victims of violence: This shows that feminist movements along with the international campaigns on the parts of feminists, have failed.

It is necessary to remind ourselves that only at advent of Christianity, and at the time when Islam penetrated in to Europe, women's dignity increased, and they managed to enter in to political arena .

The word feminism' was first used by Charles Fevrier, the 19th century socialist, to defend the women rights movement. The word 'femme' referring to feminism found its way in to French in 1837.

Femme is a female human, with 'femmena' as its ancestor. '-ism' indicates a school of thought. Feminism, therefore, does not signify the same concept when it is used. Among the Various definitions, however, it has some common characteristics.

It tries to pave the way for a social, economic, political, and cultural system in which there is no discrimination or merits [ 1 ].

Feminism, or the women rights movement, to the belief in women, is a part of other- orientation movement or phenomenon; A movement with a domain of ethnicity and gender, which has got pro and con controversies.

In 1789, in the women's rights and civil rights statement, Olympe De Gouzh, the French writer, announced; women should have the right to stand on a rostrum, as they have the right to be hanged from a gallows. In 1792, three years after the French Revolution, the first formal feminist essay (which was a 300- page statement) was written by Mary Stonecraft in England, published in 1797; It is considered as a petition for the rights of women. What motivated Stonecraft to write the book was Rousseau's famous book. Emile' : It was a critique of the injustice in the society, and it considered one thing to be real justice : the question of women and their success in communities. Stonecraft disliked Rousseau's natural distinction, and she insisted on the general abilities of both genders, males and females, to do intellectual activities. This date can be considered as the beginning of the first wave of feminism. [2]

Feminism is a widespread collection of social theories on political movements and ethical invoked mainly by women, or inspired by them. It is also a collection of concepts about social, political, and economic contexts within a social movement with multiple concepts focusing mainly on a campaign to do away with gender inequalities and to promote the women's rights including .

Their interests and to address their problems. Feminism tries to understand the cause of existing inequalities; It also focuses on the gender policies of power equations. The general questions which receive the attention of feminism, however, are the discrimination of stock behaviours in the forms of unjust manifestations, and the patriarchy, feminist activists, moreover, try to address such issues as the genital

rights, the domestic violence, the equality for both males and females, and the gender discriminations. The essence of feminism states that rights, privileges, duties, and statuses should not be based on gender. Although many feminist leaders were women, some men were distinguished feminist leaders. All modes of feminism believe in the principle of efforts to promote the rights of women. In respect of causes of injustice, and with respect to the manner of fighting injustice, however, they are different from each other, and that is why there are different modes of feminism with different adjectives [1].

#### Origins

Throughout history, we can find the advocates of women's rights and those of gender equality: For example, Queen Theodora of Eastern Rome was in favor of laws which supported women, and regulations which paved the way for the freedom of women. Gristan Depizan, the first female professional writer, presented many feminist tenets much earlier than 1300 A.D. by challenging the inheritance limitations, and through her membership in different unions. As a philosophy, or as a movement, the modern feminism goes back to such intellectuals as Mary Wortley Montague and Marquis Condorcet, who championed for women's higher education. The first women's scientific association was founded in 1785 in Middleburg, a city in Southern Netherlands; It published a newspaper for women, in which Condorcet presented her feminist ideas – Feminism became an institutional movement. In 1837, Charles Vase, the socialist idealist, coined the word 'feminism'. In 1848, the first conference on women's rights was registered as an organized movement. In 1869, John Stuart Mill published his book 'Following the women' in order to prove that 'legal following for only one gender is a mistake, and one of the obstacles of human development'. At the end of nineteenth century, and in the early twentieth century, many countries began to give suffrage to women. New Zealand was the first country in this regard (1893).

## II. VARIOUS KINDS OF FEMINISM

Feminist theories are based on different ideas and assumptions, for example:

1. Most socially feminist movements promote women's rights interests, and concerns.

2. Some theories of feminism discuss maleness/femaleness as a dichotomy, rejecting the idea of multiple genders.

3. Some theories consider the concept of woman as the norm, and present their analyses and critical writings on the basis of gender inequality.

4. There are three waves of feminists: Early feminist movements call themselves 'the first wave'; the feminists of 1960s are the second wave, and some younger feminists introduce themselves as the third wave.

5. Egalitarian feminists support protectionism. Wendy Camiz introduces other forms of feminism in her book 'A horrible Liberty: women running away from equality'. In this book, she considers the egalitarian feminism as the promoter of equality between men and women by giving equal rights to them. Protectionist feminist prefer to

concentrate on legal supports for women, e.g. employment and divorce regulation, and sometimes on limitations imposed by men, for instance, free speech which has been denied to women (or especially, the production and consumption of pornographic drawings, paintings, and photo).

6. There are other groups, theories, and versions which are based on commitment and difference, for example, Mary Dolly' and Marilyn' feminism which calls for entire segregation of men and women in the society and in the culture. Some feminists focus on the abnormal theory emphasizing on male and female meanings –[5].

As it was stated briefly about the variety of feminism there are many feminist sub-groups with various theories, understandings, and tenets, which can not be fully discussed in this scope, for example:

Radical Feminism – Marxist Feminism- Liberal Feminism- socialist Feminism- Islamic Feminism- Modern Feminism- Anti- Racist/Anti – Anarchist Feminism – African Feminism Amazon Feminism- Black Feminism cultural Feminism – Opposite Feminism –Economic Feminism- French Feminism- Japanese Feminism- European Feminism- Materialist Feminism- spiritual Feminism- Third world Feminism, Etc., and others.

There are tens, or rather, hundreds of other theories and versions of Feminism, which nonetheless are based on the early thought and or idea of equality between men and women. Depending on their place and time of emergence, however, they find themselves in different obligations and orientations.

Gender Differences According to the Islamic point of View.

There are two completely contrasting viewpoints on the gender difference:

1. Legal difference indicates tyranny, and gender discrimination against women, because justice means complete equality between men and women. Any belief in differentiation is to trample justice underfoot.

2. The other approach maintains that having the same look, that is, the absolute self- same or one- to – one correspondence, paves the way for in justice against women.

Before discussing these two approaches, let us discuss the semantic definitions of 'similarity', 'justice', and 'equality':

In Arabic, Tashaboh, meaning similarity, derives from sheb'h meaning sameness, and Ashbah is the plural [2].

Justice' has been defined as moderation, straight forwardness, tendency to truth, 'Adl' meaning justice is something between the extremes: Other definitions: The equal division of profit and shares, There are two types of justice: justice which has a reasonable basis, and consequently, it will not be abrogated with time. For example, do good to someone who has been good to you, 2. Religious justice which may fall into abeyance after a while; AS an example, we can mention the justice toching the retaliation. [4].

In this essay, the terms 'equality', and 'similarity', and others are in relation to women.

Here, these terms have been discussed epistemologically. Gender is the main agent affecting such words as equality

and justice . The question is that if it is possible to imagine the equality between men and women when there is a gender distinction .

To answer the above question , different viewpoints have been presented , among which two approaches are pronounced , as follows:

A) The divine ideology: Gender plays no role in the essence of humanity. In other words, it does not cause any defect, nor does it contribute to humanity. Yet gender plays a significant role in effecting laws and regulations, causing legal differences.

B) Non – divine ideology: Gender plays no role in the essence of humanity, nor does it play a role in effecting laws and regulations.

These words, of course, have different meaning in the divine and the non- divine ideologies.

Gender differences to Islam and the Islamic Thinkers:

The main difference between Islam and Feminism is the way they look at the gender difference in the women's rights. The spirit of difference come to the fore when we look at the existential epistemological bases of the two schools . Who determines the expediency is the main question for both school . Islam believes that . God, the Almighty, knows better how to administer justice . consequently , absolute identification of genders paves the way for injustice against women. Disregard of natural difference between men and women is considered to be a gender tyranny. [5].

Ayatollah Mottahari's comments:

According to Islam, both men and women are humans. They are equal in terms of humanity, and they enjoy equal human rights. However, men and women are not similar in many . Nature does not see them as identical . They have not been created like each other , There are, therefore, necessarily different rights, duties, and punishments for them .[6].

Gender tells us that men and women are two genera of the same species. Therefore, it is necessary for a genus to be different and difference from another genes. Accordingly, legal difference is essential for women. In other words, as the gender requires, the difference is permanent, and consequently, the natural rights are different . Natural rights are requirements of the goal- oriented nature, and given this goal, every creature is gifted with unique aptitudes and rights , The best way to find the natural rights is to refer to creation . [11] .

According to the Islamic philosophy, being a man or a woman does not on the essence of humanity, without creating an essential difference ,

In his book called ' sheffa' , Aviceinna maintains : ' Gender is an accident and a state, like color, and as such , it is outside the essence, causing men and women to fall into two distinct genera. [7].

### III. Meaning of Justice

Justice means the merit in accordance with one' s capacity. Every entity, at state of existence deserves the specific capacity it acquires. Since God is the absolute

perfection, He gives a creature what it is possible for it in terms of existence or perfection . [8].

According to Islam, men are not superior to women; Nor are women superior to men. Gender, race, color, nationality, and any other attribute, do not show the superiority of a person over another one . The holy Koran says: ' mankind, we have creates you male and female , and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the most godfearing of you.' [Hojorat, 13]. Yet , equality of values does not mean equality of rights. Some Islamic thinkers suggest that equality between men and women is correct in the sense of justice grated by God to any creature as it is due : It does not mean that men and women enjoy the Divine Gifts equally.

By 'equality between men and women' , Ayatollah seyayed Mohammed Hossain Tehrani says, we mean ' The requirement of Nature in terms of equality is that social rights and duties for individuals are in accordance with the rights given to anyone as they are due, : e . , as the capacities allow; Therefore, equality does not mean that the rights and the duties should be exactly the same: Equality is not siltmilarity. [9] .

Since there are natural differences between men and women, equality does not mean that they should enjoy the same Divine bounty: Men are superior in terms of some rights, and women ate superior in some respects: For example, women can become mothers whom are praised by the faith of Islam.

Differences are transitory according to some Viewpoints

Some Islamic theorists believe that differences of decrees touching men and women are due to the social and cultural condition which may change from place to place and from time to time. Therefore, legal rules are not fixed throughout centuries. These rules are valid as long as sociocultural conditions are fixed: As the conditions change with time , so do the rules . Some thinkers hold that the decrees about women in the Koran and in the quotations [ie . Ahadith'] are based on usage, that is, in accordance with the wonts and traditions of the time when the Messenger was ordained . The decrees, therefore, are not valid for ever. [10]

According to this viewpoint , we can not present a fixed interpretation of 'justice' , because justice is relative and variable. Justice about women , therefore, is dependent on , and subject to temporal as well as spatial changes. [11] .

Anyway, it is necessary to mention some koranic verses about the status of women in the Islamic school of thought, showing that they are treated honorably: And the believers , the men and the women, are friends one of the other,' [ Repentance, 71]. 'And say to the believers, that they cast down their eyes and guard their prier private parts; ... And say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, ...' And say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, ...' [Light, 30, 31] ' If it had not been for certain men believers and certain women believers whom you knew not, ...' [victory 15]. ' And for men, there will be a portion of what they Garn, and for women, there will be a portion of what they Garn' . ' And God has struck a similitude for the

believers- the wife of pharaoh, ...' [ the forbidding, 11] ' ... Mary, God has chosen thee, and purified thee; and He has chosen thee above women.' [The house of Imran, 42].

According to Islam, women are like men in terms of decision – Making about their destiny, and their personal choices; Economically, socially, culturally, etc. women are quite independent and autonomous, as men are. In addition, there is not only difference between men and women on religious beliefs and principles:

As for the practical duties, such as the worships, prayers, the religious service, fasting, and the social issues, such as the pilgrimage to Mecca, Hajj, bidding to honor, and forbidding dishonor, there is not any difference between men and women.

#### IV. GENDER EQUALITY AND FEMINISM

Seagull(1999) quotes Robert wright, the famous scientist, as saying: ' Feminists used to be mocked through 90s, when they were looking for equality between men and women, because they ignorantly denied the Darwinian bare truth touching the nature of mankind' . In his best seller called 'The Moral Animal: why we Are the way we Are' , Wright intends to assure the numerous readers that feminists have managed to create laws and regulations against sexism, and for women at large; Nonetheless, they can not share power with men, because women lack the necessary genome of men to embark on competition and adventure. [12].

Simone De Boire says: ' one is not born a woman : she becomes a woman' . This argument means that the low status of women is neither 'natural' nor biological, it is, rather, something created by the society. [13].

Oakley believes that 'sex' is a word that refers to the biological differences between men and women : the observable differences in the sexual organs, and the difference in the process of reproduction; 'Gender' , however, is a cultural phenomenon referring to the social classification of males and females. [14].

Given the above theories, and other theories not Mentioned above, and given the two distinct legal models, that is, the parity model and the transformative model, we can conclude that any gender difference cases tyranny and/or discrimination against women.

##### A. Feminist Ethics

Feminist approaches to ethics emphasise the ethics of care in the human relationships. Feminists claim that their ethics is not based on prejudice. They believe that preachers of traditional ethics claimed they were speaking for the entire humanity while they were representing men, particular men, for centuries. In 1982, Gilligan published a book called ' In a Different voice' to present some experimental studies. The main argument of the book was that in the developmental process, boys and girls receive different ethical influences. In fact, there are two discourses of ethics : one of them is based on the language of justice, and the other is based on the language of responsibility, or the language of care.

According to Rita Manning, the ethics of care has five main components: 1. Moral attention 2.sympathetic understanding 3.Relationship awareness 4.Accommodation

5. Response. She, then, explains these components in details. [5].

##### B. Islam and the Feminist Ethics

Some feminists believe that the koranic language , which is Arabic, is a manly language. However, the Koran does not consider the factor of 'gender' as a factor affecting the essence of humanity: The Koran addresses the essence of humanity, in which maleness or femaleness is not important. The following verses from the Koran show the honesty of the negation of gender superiority: 1. 'I waste not the labor of any that labors among you, be you male or female.' [The House Imran, 195]. 2. 'whosoever does a righteous deed, be it male or female, believing, we shall assuredly give him or her to live a goodly life' [The Bee, 97].

Although four words of 'Ammal' ][labor or deed], 'saleh' [righteous], 'Hovva' [he], and 'Mo' men' [believer] in the above are considered to be male, God makes it clear that gender is not important. We should remind ourselves that in Arabic, and in every language, as far as I know, many words refer to males, but they mean mankind: For example, man, mankind, he, etc in English.

#### V. CONCLUSION

1. Concerning the women' s rights, feminists do not have a single theory. Each group has got its own version of feminism, and consequently, its – own way to get to justice for women .

2. Relativity undermines the trust and the confidence at the borders of feminism, because one can not find a fixed definition for different concepts. For example, the concept of justice has been defined differently by different groups: some feminists define it as the complete legal equality between men and women. And others define it as the implementation of specific laws and regulations for women.

3. Some thinkers believe that feminism causes the women to destroy themselves with their own hands.

4. Islam says that 'rights' , 'justice' , etc . are absolute terms, which should be discovered, but Feminism says that these terms are relative .

5. According to the Islamic approach, the legal difference is something obvious, According to Feminism, the legal difference is conventional, and that id is created by humans.

6. In Islam, the standard for distinguishing the rights is the Divine Revelation; In Feminism, the criterion is the consensus of human wisdom.

7. According to Islam, the existential value of men and women is the same, and that the criterion for superiority stems from godfearing or 'taghva' , while according to Feminism, ' equality' , 'similarity' , and 'sameness' are one thing: Islam says they are different .

Therefore, both Islam and Feminism try to administer justice to the rights of women, but their origins and methods are quite different. The first school of thought believes in God' s words, and the second school of thought believes that women' s rights can be materialized through the human words.

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