

Q4. Describe the rights of women in Islam in the context of current wave of the feminist movement?

Introduction

It is evidently argued that, 1400 years ago, Islam broke the shackles of ignorance and introduced the plight of women rights. In a society where women were viewed as property and buried alive, Islam provided them with the right to inheritance, body autonomy and various other rights to ensure the human integrity of women. Nevertheless, despite the efforts of Islam, feminists movement have sprung across the globe with aspirations of women rights and equality. Hence, in this answer I will aim to investigate how Islam and feminism are on the same page with respect to fundamental human rights, yet differences are projected under the notion of gender equity versus equality. In this manner, the global condemnation of feminism despite evident similarities with Islam will also be investigated.

What is the current wave of Feminism?

The feminist movement originated in 1848, under the plight of female right to vote. In the years that followed, demands on the right to live, education, inheritance and autonomy were presented. Nevertheless, the new trends and waves of feminism have shifted their focus towards demeaning men and their status,

along with promoting agendas of homosexuality and transgenderism. Accordingly, the current waves of feminism were met by rejection from the Muslim community.

Can Islam and Feminism go Hand in Hand

Islam and feminism both advocate for fundamental human rights for women. Based on the lack of autonomy provided to women of America and Europe, in the 1800s, ~~the~~ women took it upon themselves to ensure their rights to suffrage, autonomy, marriage rights and other similar rights. Under the same logic, Islam also provided women their rights in a society filled with ignorance. In fact, the fundamental rights defined under both ideologies are similar, but, differences arise in terms of modern waves of feminism as well as their advocacy for gender equality. Islam has defined women rights under the realm of gender equity. Meaning, although women are equal spiritually, their societal role is different to that of men. On the contrary, feminism advocates for lack of biological differences plus equality. Adding on, their advocacy for the unIslamic principles of homosexuality and transgender rights results in further resentment from the Muslim community.

Rights of Women in Islam

Islam has granted women their rights in the spiritual, social, economic, and political aspect. In terms of spirituality, Islam has provided clear evidence that men and women are equal in the sight of Allah. For instance, it is mentioned in the Quran that:

'Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds' (74:38)

This indicates that, both women and men will be held accountable for their deeds, and are expected to follow the guidance of Allah and his prophet. Thus, Muslims regardless of their gender are expected to carry out actions penetrating towards prayer, fasting, zakat and Hajj, along with other Islamic practices.

The Social Aspect

Socially, women are granted rights through all stages of life, including as a child, wife and mother. Islam forbade the custom of female infanticide in Arabia, and equated it to murder. In the Quran Allah states that:

'And when the female (infant) buried alive - is questioned, for what crime she was killed.' (81:6-9)

Moreover, Islam advocates for kind and just treatment of daughters. According to a hadith by Ibn Hanbal, it is narrated that, 'Whosoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favour his son over her, God will enter him into paradise'. The female right to education is

also no different than her male counterpart, as Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ~~sa~~ said:

'Seeking knowledge is mandatory for every Muslim' (Al-Bayhaqi)

Here, the term Muslim refers to both men and women, indicating the social rights Islam has provided for women.

As a wife

Moving forward, women are also provided 'rights' in terms of being a wife. The Quran indicates that marriage is a sharing between a man and women in emotional and harmony based regards. Furthermore, Islamic law indicates that a woman cannot be married without her consent, along with the full right to Mahr - her marriage gift. Most of all, the Quran advocates for the kind treatment of wives. As it is mentioned that,

'But consort with them in kindness, for if you hate them it may happen that God has placed much good' (Al-Quran, 4:19)

Other than that, in case of an unsuccessful marriage and impossible continuation, it is taught to seek a gracious end for it.

As a mother

In Islam, kindness towards parents is next to the worship of God, and there is special recommendation for the good treatment of mothers. The Quran states that,

'And We have enjoined upon man (to be good) to his parents: his mother bears him in weakness upon weakness' (al-Quran 31:14)
Thus, Islam provides a woman with several rights in her role of a mother.

The Economic Aspect

Islam introduced women to the right of independent ownership. In Islam, a woman's right to her money, real estate, and other properties is fully acknowledged. Adding on, women are not forbidden from seeking employment if there is a necessity, and if her contribution fits her nature. Examples of which include, nursing, teaching and medicine. With that said, Islam recognises that her roles as a mother and wife are the most sacred, and she shapes the future of nations by virtue of her role. Moreover, a woman is entitled to her due share in property, as it is mentioned in the Quran that, 'To men (of the family) belongs a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, and to women a share of that which parents and near kindred leave, whether it be a little or much - a determinate share.' (al-Quran, 4:7).

Thus it can be deduced that, Islam provides women with their economic rights.

~~The Political Aspect~~

And:

Gender Equality vs Equity

In the previous sections, it was highlighted that Islam and feminism go hand in hand in terms of fundamental rights, and how Islam has effectively provided women with most rights under the feminist agenda. Yet, a clash between both ideologies is depicted, along with a lack of acceptance. This clash can be related to the 'gender equality vs equity' debate.

The feminist school of thought claims that women and men are equal, and can embark upon the same societal roles. Meaning, a woman should contribute financially in the house as much as a ~~woma~~ man, and also take on military roles and head of state roles. On the contrary, Islam acknowledges the basic biological differences between the two genders, and how men have been tasked upon as providers and protectors of women. Meaning, a woman should take on the responsibility of motherhood, while men find sources of income. In this manner, both genders contribute to the marriage in the best of their abilities. Moreover, Islam also acknowledges that women cannot take on responsibilities of a military commander or head of state. Although exceptions are present, women generally are emotional, and do not have the psychological and physiological strengths to take on these tasks alone. Hence

why, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated that, 'A people will not prosper if they let a woman be their leader.'

Hence, Islam does not advocate for gender equality, and this is where the clash with feminism is evident. Instead, Islam gives women equity and provides rights in line with their physiological and psychological limitations, and these rights were highlighted in the previous ~~sub~~ section.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Islam is a religion that provided women their due rights in an era of ignorance and blatant discrimination. Islam gave women their social, economic and political rights under the realm of gender equity. Meaning, the ~~ph~~ physiological and psychological limitations of women were brought under consideration. On the other hand, feminism, although advocating for the same fundamental rights - education, consent and inheritance etc - they differ in the regard of gender equality. As a result, feminism is not generally accepted in the Muslim community, despite advocating for the same fundamental rights.