

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SEPARATIST FEMINISM FROM THE QURANIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *Separatist feminism is a controversial issue even in feminism stream. Its objective and radical approach for women liberation brings lot of criticism from scholars all around the globe. Nevertheless, this ideology is gaining influence day by day. This study will focus on the ideology of separatist feminism and analyse it from the Qur'anic perspective. This study aims to broaden the scope of understanding of this particular feminism branch; its characteristics and issues, and how the Quran views it especially on the aspect of women rights and liberation. It is a qualitative study that utilizes the deductive and inductive method. Separatist feminism works and critics will be examined in the light of in the Qur'anic understanding and the result indicates that there are several characteristic and issues of separatist feminism that can propagates better understanding on feminism as a whole.*

Keywords: *Feminism, Separatism, Separatist Feminism, Qur'anic analysis, Qur'anic perspective.*

Introduction

Feminists champion women's issues. They pursue equality in women's rights, including voting rights, educational rights, the right to gain position in public office, to work, to procure equal wages or pay par men, to own property, to enter contracts, to have equal rights as men within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Women's 'liberation' has been the principal objective of the feminist and their long history has transformed feminism into numerous

ideologies. The differences in the degree and method to realise their objective developed various feminist theories. One such feminist theory is separatist feminism.

Separatist feminism is a branch of radical feminism advocating that patriarchy is best oppose through focusing exclusively on women and girls (Christine Skelton & Becky Francis, 2009). They believe that inequalities between men and women, particularly in political and sexual aspect are unresolvable. They argue that men in any ways will always represent the dynamics of patriarchy thus cannot contribute positively to the feminist movement (Sarah Lucia Hoagland, 1988). These women focus their energies, work and allegiances for the benefits of all-women community. They put importance on activities that emphasize working out with other women especially towards political and social objectives, and choose to live in family exclusive of only females, opposing total interaction with men in work and personal life. To avoid a patriarchal society, these women chose to live in continence or lesbian relationships (Dunbar, 1969).

Some separatists believe in a permanent isolation from the male species, while others consider it a “first step” personal growth period. They believe that disengagement from men allows women to understand themselves in a different comprehension. Although not all separatist feminists believe in a complete disengagement from men, they at the very least still reject being a part of male-dominated institutions. Marilyn Frye, a philosophy professor and feminist theorist, defined separatist feminism as a “separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles, and activities that are male-defined, male-dominated, and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance for male privilege -- this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, by women” (Marilyn Frye, 1997, p. 406-414)

An infamous separatist feminist publication is the Society for Cutting Up Men Manifesto (SCUM Manifesto) by Valerie Salanas. The SCUM Manifesto claims that men brought disaster to this world, and it is up to women to fix it. For this objective, it recommends the creation of SCUM, an organisation focusing to overthrowing society and eradicating the male sex. The *Manifesto* is mostly regarded as sadonic but forms legitimate philosophical and social questions (Castro, 1990; Ronell, 2004). The *Manifesto* become epidemic when the author attempt to murder Andy Warhol for unknown motive (Weiss, Bernstein, 1978). Solanas perceived men as “incomplete females,” due to their genetically deficiency of the Y chromosome. She listed societal problem which she attributes to the male sex, including disease, war, conformity, and prejudice of all kinds. She also promoted the elimination of male sex through selective breeding, reproducing only female children as she believe with men in this world, the problems of ageing and death could never be solved (Solanas, 1967).

The separatist feminist understanding of women’s liberation eventually gives rise to a question of the position of this ideology in Islam. This is because the Islamic view of men and women is directly guided by Islam’s sources (the Quran and Sunnah) that look at the relationship of both genders from a more comprehensive perspective. Islam defines men and women in need of each other, in which the Quran shows:

O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer (al-Nisa 4:1).

This verse clearly indicates that men and women were created by Allah (SWT) from one and the same soul, to be partners. Men and women are created to complement each other as “Awliyah”, an Arabic term which can be generally translated as “protectors of one another” or “friends of one another” or “allies of one another” as the Quran says:

The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Almighty and Wise (al-Taubah 9:71).

Syed Qutb believes that this verse presupposes the need of true cooperation and close ties within the community in fulfilling the roles of what Allah (SWT) have obliged. It indirectly illustrates how men and women share the same responsibilities and accountability as co-vicegerency and are encouraged to use political and social measures for the objective of doing good and forbidding evil (Qutb, 2015).

This article examines the characteristic and the issues of separatist feminism from the Quranic perspective and analyses the agenda through a rational approach guided by a critical understanding of the Quran. This study also attempts to look for the Quranic perspective on the position of men and women.

Analysis

i) Characteristics of Separatist Feminism

Secular

Like other ideologies, separatist feminism can trace its history to the Enlightenment period (Walters, 2005). Sharing the same origins, separatist feminism regards man and woman relations from a purely secular worldview leading to preposterous differences between the dualism of religious and non-religious facets of life. This implies that religion in any ways should be avoided or should be kept in exclusive of a personal sphere and has nothing to do with the public life, which includes all dimensions of educational, social, familial, political, economic and others. Their separation of men and women was based solely on rational mental faculty without considering any religious commandment and belief. This signifies that separatist feminism focuses on all issues of women from a secular perspective, a perspective that partitioned life into two compartments, religious or non-religious. Having isolated the public life as non-religious, it makes its theories on various issues of women without consulting religion, as though religion has nothing to do with the affairs of women.

Materialism

Separatist feminism, being a secular ideology, regards the advancement of women from a materialistic perspective. It is only interested in the social standing of women and the economic or material progress of women for worldly importance and does not bother to see whether the foundation of the material development of women is based on spiritual and ethical principles (Chodorow, 1989). Due to this, the improvement plans and programs which the feminists laid for the objective of women’s development are always biased; never turn out

to be holistically rewarding for women, children, men and for the family and society as a whole.

Over Skepticism

Separatist feminism considers all systems and knowledge to be patriarchally influenced. They question the economic system, the higher learning institution programmes and the literature to favour to men than women. For example, literature argues that the norms of assigning masculine gender to generic precursor arise from language reflecting “the prejudices of the society in which it evolved, and English evolved through most of its history in a male-centered, patriarchal society.” (Carolyn Jacobson, 2014)

Some linguistic treaty has put importance on men and the male viewpoint and proposed that maleness is the societal norm (Wildman, 1996). In English, nouns like “man” or “mankind” and forms of address example “you guys” are normally also used for female while it is unlikely to refer to male as female (Anderson, 2010; Kleinman, 2002). It is considered insulting if men are being associated with something feminine and unmanly such as by calling him a girl or a sissy. (Rosenberg, 2001). Terms such as “freshmen” or job-related titles like “chairman” are purportedly to be use for both men and women, and many highly reputable jobs are tacitly linked with men thus people started to use modifiers such as “woman doctor” or “lady doctor” to signal an departure from the typical that doctors are normally men (Briscoe, F.; Arriaza, G.; Henze, 2009; Powell, 2010). In Western culture, the male resemblance and the use of male addressing for divinity for instance the portrayal of God as “he” or “father” have been contended to promote male privilege (O’Brien, 2008). Men’s greater similitude and likeness to God has been used to give grounds for their religious and cultural position on women (Lorenzen, 1999).

No Concept of Accountability

When separatist feminism discusses women issues, it does not hold any interest on the question of accountability to God due to their secular approach. Most secular feminists hold the notion that religions restrict women’s freedom and distrupts the development for women liberalisation. Religion, at the very core are considered patriarchal and the source of women’s oppression (Ali, 2004). It is one of the reasons that separatist feminism, like their feminism mother and other modern ideologies, takes pride in its separation from God and religion and develops like a rapid intellectual industry giving birth to a succession of theories for the empowerment of women. They have a tendency to look at themselves as saviours of womankind and are do not consider themselves accountable to God nor any institution.

Sexism

Separatist feminists are known to be gender biased when it comes to men’s right. They promote justice for all crimes on women but remain silent on the issue of crime over men. The most recent issues were the appointment of Donna Hylton as a featured speaker at the Women’s March on Washington which caused much controversy (“Donna Hylton on women’s march,” 2017, “Speakers,” 2017, “Women’s March Featured Speaker Who Kidnapped And Tortured A Man,” 2017, “Women’s March on Washington,” 2017). She is well known as a very radical feminist who was convicted of the kidnapping, torture, and

murder of Thomas Vigliarolo. Her involvement in the high-profile case was the subject of a 1995 article in the Psychology Today magazine (Neimark, 1995).

Extremist separatist feminists also yearn for the total eradication of the male species through killing and abortion. Valerie Solanas evoked the SCUM Manifesto (Society for Cutting Up Men) to create a all female utopia. She was also charged with killing attempt of three men and was reinstated in a mental hospital. Extreme separatist approach and their loathing towards men have been compared by Men's rights activists as the same Nazis attitude towards the Jews (Solanas, 1967).

Identical separatist movements exist today. One extremely disreputable organisation is the Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs), or as they considers themselves, "gender-critical feminists." Their trademark of women-exclusive feminism denies the participation of transwomen, on the footing that transwomen are men. TERFs believe that gender definition is a social product, to approve of the non-physical psychological disparity between male and female is to support patriarchy. This leads to the preclude of trans people from their organisation and cause, allege things like "a mutilated male body is not a female body" and transgenders support rape culture. The Southern Poverty Law Center considers TERFs as a hate group (Kelsie Brynn Jones, 2016).

ii) Issues of Separatist Feminism

The Collapse of the Family Institution

Separatist feminists contend that wifehood and motherhood hinders women from progress. They consider the family and society structure as patriarchal and the biggest obstacle for women development. By patriarchy, they do not mean male headship but male domination over the female in the family and society. According to them, the family is a primary political establishment with a patriarchal agenda propagating the relationship between male and female inside and outside the family with an emphasises on male domination and female subordination (Marilyn Frye, 1997). They also believe that heterosexuality and motherhood are parts of the political or patriarchal system of the family. They believe that sexuality and reproduction can be separated from the institution of marriage. For most of them, marriage is enslavement and childbirth is burdensome and an awful job. Radical feminist, Dworkin, wrote Intercourse, in which she claims that the kind of sexual subordination portrayed in pornography was predominant to men's and women's experience of heterosexual relationship in a male supremacist society. In the book, she claims that all heterosexual sex in our patriarchal community is humiliating and are forced on women (Dworkin, 1987).

Promotion of Deviant Sexuality

Many separatist feminists firmly consider that all type of sexuality including homosexuality, lesbianism, trans-sexuality and others should not only be legalize but also be popularize (Echols, 1990). They believe that advertising all sorts of sexuality would help women to liberalize themselves from heterosexuality which is the mainstream form of sexuality. They claim that there is an urgent need to redefine marriage, family and reproduction to encourage women liberation from the marital heterosexual union (Kershaw, 2009).

Ignorance of the Biological Nature of Men and Women

Separatist feminists ignore the biological differences between men and women. According to them, biological disparity between men and women does not matter much as gender is socially constructed (Butler, 1999). They assert that biology is not destiny and advocate the idea that gender identity is not a fixed, secure destiny and may change over time for an individual (Diamond, L. M., & Butterworth, n.d.). Thus, feminists are badly confused about “equality” and “identity”. They have mixed up the questions of equality and identity. They ignore the fact that men and women are not identical and, therefore, equality is different from identity.

Promotes Killing and Abortion

Extremist separatist feminists desire the annihilation of men through killing and systematic abortion. For example, Valerie Solanas the writer SCUM Manifesto (Society for Cutting Up Men) hopes to build up a complete all-female utopia (Hoberman, 2003; Siegel, 2007; Winkiel, 1999). To attain this objective, the *Manifesto* urges an insurgent vanguard of women to be formed. This vanguard is named SCUM. The *Manifesto* contends that SCUM should employ obstruction and straightforward action scheme to bring about revolutionary changes to society. To uproot patriarchy in the society order, extreme action is necessary: “If SCUM ever marches, it will be over the President’s stupid, sickening face; if SCUM ever strikes, it will be in the dark with a six-inch blade.” (Solanas, 1967)

Discussion

i) Islamic View on the Characteristic of Separatist Feminism

Islam is *Deen*¹ and encompasses all dimensions of life. It does not accept secularisation or compartmentalization of life into religious and non-religious (Md. Jahirul Haq, 2015). Islam has given fundamental and holistic instruction for men and women to live up their life, encompassed private and public dimension that aimed for the betterment of Muslims, materially and spiritually (Dale F. Eickelman, James Piscatori, 1996). Material development based on Islamic teachings lies in spiritual and ethical principles thus delivering a unique combination of matter and spirit in Islam. Hence, when Islam addresses women’s issues, it does not look into the issues from a purely material or secular perspective, rather it looks from an all-embracing and holistic Islamic perspective which conjoins matter and spirit in a unique blend (Zeenath Kausar, 2014). This Islamic approach for development is integrated and does justice to all. The Quran says:

Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. And those who were given the Scripture did not differ except after knowledge had come to them - out of jealous animosity between themselves. And whoever disbelieves in the verses of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in [taking] account (Ali Imran 3:19)

This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. (al-Maidah 5:3)

¹ The term was normally associated with religion, but in the Qur'an, it has a more encompassing meaning. *Deen* is the way of life in which righteous Muslims must practice to comply with divine law (Quran and Sunnah), or Shari'a, and to the divine judgment or recompense to which all humanity must inevitably face without intercessors before God (Md. Jahirul Haq, 2015).

Therefore, in Islam, all issues and questions concerning man and woman, whether in familial or public, politic or economic, should be referred to the Quran and the Sunnah so that they can get the best solutions for all their problems and issues of life (Kayadibi, 2017). Islam has also forbidden people to be skeptical on everything, as this characteristic will in the end burden oneself, as the Quran says:

O you who have believed, do not ask about things which, if they are shown to you, will distress you. But if you ask about them while the Qur'an is being revealed, they will be shown to you. Allah has pardoned that which is past; and Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing. (al-Maidah 5:101)

Islam recognizes men and women as in need of each other. The idea of sexism clash with the spirit of universal religion and mercy to all in which Islam promotes. The Quran says:

The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Almighty and Wise. (at-Taubah 9:71)

Contradicting the separatist feminism concept of no accountability to anything, Islam teaches both men and women that at the end of the day, they are accountable to Allah (SWT) for all their works and deeds, and even for the stance, they take on a given issue related to man or woman (Abdul Kader al-Safi Osman, 1992). The Quran says:

And [mention] the Day when We will resurrect among every nation a witness over them from themselves. And We will bring you, [O Muhammad], as a witness over your nation. And We have sent down to you the Book as clarification for all things and as guidance and mercy and good tidings for the Muslims. (An Nahl 16:89)

Thus, it is important for those men and women scholars who write on women issues to bear in mind that they are directly accountable to Allah (SWT) for all their writings, to properly understand issues objectively, so their writings are unprejudiced.

ii) Islamic View on the Issues of Separatist Feminism

The Islamic stance on the familial issues is very clear. Islam put motherhood at a very highly respectable place. It considers motherhood as a great blessing from Allah (SWT) for the mankind, as the compassion, love and all the hardship which a mother experienced for her children are counted as great deeds in front of Allah (SWT) (Fatima Umar Naseef, 1999). The Quran says:

And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination. (Luqman 31:14)

As far as marriage is involved, Islam sees it as one of the signs of Allah (SWT), providing tranquillity and love to both men and women (Fatima Umar Naseef, 1999, pp. 73–78). The

Quran says:

And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought. (al-Rum 30:21)

Marriage in Islam is not a type of enslavement for women because Islam is against male or female domination in the family. The family in Islam is, therefore, neither patriarchal nor matriarchal but mutually consultative between men and women. Even though men are overall in charge of women and children in the family because they tend to shoulder the financial responsibility of the family and are physically stronger than women, it does not, however, mean that they can dictate to women and become despotic (Muhammad Salaam Madkur, 1968). They are expected to exercise consultation with women in managing the family. Some Muslim scholars who consider Islamic family as patriarchal argue that Islam believes in the headship of men in the families. They overlook the fact that patriarchy by definition is not a mere headship of family but male domination and absolute despotism over females in the family and society. This kind of male domination and despotism has no place in Islam because Islam by nature is anti-despotic (Zeenath Kausar, 2014).

On the issue of deviant sexuality, Islam considers it as the vulgar practices of ignorant people. The major schools of Islamic jurisdiction on their understanding on Qur'anic verses and hadith, which was expanded by the prominent opinion of Islamic scholars such as Imam Malik and Imam Shafi'i, regard homosexuality as a punishable crime and a sin (Richard C. Martin, 2004). The Qur'an brings up the story of the "people of Lot" which was destroyed by God because of their involvement in lustful carnal acts between men and homosexuality. The Quran says:

And [mention] Lot, when he said to his people, "Do you commit immorality while you are seeing? (al-Naml 27:54)

Do you indeed approach men with desire instead of women? Rather, you are a people behaving ignorantly." (al-Naml 27:55)

Islam prohibits premarital or extramarital intercourse and is indeed very strict on these issues. It advocates abstinence and prevent all the routes which can lead to sexual laxity and deviance. The Quran mentions:

And do not approach unlawful sexual intercourse. Indeed, it is ever an immorality and is evil as a way. (al-Isra 17:32)

Killing innocent people due to their skin colour, language and gender has no place in Islam. Moreover, the act of killing innocent people in Islam is just like killing all humanity. All lives have their own right on justice in Islamic law including those of the non-Muslims. The Quran forbids tyranny and killing innocent people as it says:

Because of that, We decreed upon the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for corruption [done] in the land - it is as if he had slain mankind entirely. And whoever saves one - it is as if he had saved mankind entirely. And our messengers had certainly come to them with clear

proofs. Then indeed many of them, [even] after that, throughout the land, were transgressors. (al-Maidah 5:32)

Islam is very absolving in the understanding between “equality” and “identity”. It considers that men and women are equal but not exactly alike (Zeenath Kausar, 2014). Men and women are considered equal in the essence that they were created from the single soul and are given the same mission of becoming vicegerency of Allah (SWT) in this world. Both are also urged to acquire knowledge without disparity of access between men and women. Nevertheless, the equality acknowledged above does not mean that Islam fails to notice the biological dissimilarity between male and female. Hence, in Islam, men and women are fundamentally equal in essence, but uniquely different in natural disposition. Accordingly, there are some responsibilities, which legally bind men, due to their dominant natural disposition and biological characteristic, but not on women, for example, the responsibility to support family financially. Correspondingly, motherhood duty such as childbearing and childbirth are delegated to women because they are biologically up to this task than men (Muhammad Salaam Madkur, 1968, pp. 47–70). This is how Islam perceives equality and identity and complements both aspects to complete men and women as the righteous vicegerent of Allah (SWT).

From the Islamic point of view, as discussed above, a woman can contribute to the socio-economic, political, and other institutions of society, on the condition she follows the Islamic injunctions of dress and social interactions and performs her responsibilities in the family. However, it would be the best for women in Islam that could contribute their services to the society while participating in its various fields based on their qualifications, skills and interest while not overlooking their responsibilities towards their family. This would help women appreciate their inner potentials and motivate them to make use of them in developing the society to establish justice and peace for all.

Conclusion

Separatist feminism is indeed controversial as it goes beyond the normal parameters of mainstream feminism. Its fundamental objective of separating men and women are illogical and unpractical considering they resort to violence and radical approaches for their aims with the concept of disunity rather than harmoniously working to improve women’s rights alongside men. The Quran criticises the characteristic, issues and idealism of separatist feminism. As a religion that brings mercy to all men and women, the conduct of separatist feminism is against Islamic teachings.

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