

PROPHET AND PHILOSOPHER MOHAMMED: A PRECURSOR OF FEMINISM

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is nothing but the name of a belief that women should have the same rights as men needs no telling. The history of modern western feminism is divided into three waves and each is described as dealing with different aspects of the same feminist issues. The first wave refers to the movement of the 19th through early 20th centuries, which dealt mainly with suffrage, working conditions and educational rights for women. The second wave (1960s-1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws and the role of women in society. The third wave (late 1980s-early 2000s) is seen as both a continuation of the second wave and a response to the perceived failures. Mary Wollstonecraft struggled for the emancipation and freedom of the women of Europe, Begum Rokeya brought about revolution for the women of the East and West Bengal, Jeremy Bentham wrote for the independence of women in England. But if feminism refers to the movement of giving women what they deserve, then it won't be an overstatement to state that Mohammad (PBUH) is the precursor of what we call feminism. This paper investigates the background of the official starting of feminism, and also the backdrop of the women of Muhammad's time. The article also, besides showing that this great prophet and philosopher firstly brought about a movement for the education and rights of women and took them out of the grave where they were buried alive, delineates Mohammedan endeavours he attempted to give the women what they ought to have.

KEYWORDS: Education, Equality, Feminism, Precursor, Rights, Suffrage

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

Feminists Movement before its Official Starting:

Feminism actually began with the publication of Margaret Fuller's 'Women in the Nineteenth Century' (1845), John Stuart Mill's 'The Subjection of Women' (1869), Oliver Schreiner's 'Women and Labour' (1911), Virginia Wolf's 'A Room of One's Own' (1929), Mary Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792). (Barry, 2010, p. 121)

But many writers of different countries are seen to write about the rights of women before this certified starting. The condition of women in the society of the then Europe was so deplorable that only priests were allowed to preach religious doctrines and theories. This unambiguous history is written by Margaret Walters as he says: "Hildegard of Bingen, who was born at the end of the 11th century and became a nun, and later the abbess, of a small Rhineland convent, has long been as a remarkable and impressive writer; recently, her great musical talent has been rediscovered and

celebrated. But she was sometimes plagued with doubts about her ‘unfeminine’ activities, and wrote to one of the leading churchmen of the time, Bernard of Clairvaux, asking if she—an uneducated woman—should continue with her writing and with composing. He encouraged her, and within a few years she was known and honoured all over Europe. When she was 60 years old, she embarked upon preaching tours all through the German empire, even though at that time only priests were allowed to preach.” (Walters, 2005, p. 6 & 7)

Mary Astell, one of the true earliest feminists who was born in 1666, had to leave her house at the age of 12 as her father died then and nobody came to patronize her since she was a girl. Going to London with only a little money and the addresses of a few family contacts, she sought shelter to some of her distant relatives who didn’t pay any heed to her. Desperate and depressed, she was not able to get any livelihood; she wrote to William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, asking for help:

“For since God has given Women as well as Men, the intelligent souls and how should they be forbidden to improve them? Since he has not denied us the faculty of thinking, why should we not (at least in gratitude to him) employ our thoughts on himself, their noblest object, and not unworthily bestow them on Trifles and Gaities and secular Affairs?” (Walters, 2005, p. 27)

By 1694, she wrote her first book “A Serious Proposal to the Ladies” urging other women to take themselves seriously: they must learn to think for themselves, work to develop their own mind and skills, rather than always deferring to masculine judgment. One of her books was entitled “Thoughts on Education”. Girls, she argued, must be taught to think for themselves, to judge clearly and sensibly, rather than waste all their time in acquiring graceful social skills and accomplishments.” Walters, 2005, p. 27 & 28)

She also writes, “We value them (men) too much and ourselves too little.” (Walters, 2005, p. 28)

For centuries, and all over Europe, there were families who disposed of ‘unnecessary’ or unmarriageable daughters by shutting them away in convents.

(Walters, 2005, p. 6)

‘The most widely read books for girls on the subject of moral instruction, Dr James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) and Dr. John Gregory’s *Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), echoed what the luminaries (VIPs) of London’s literary world implied or directly advised – that the proper duty of the female was to make herself pleasing to men. Such skill was women by nature. She didn’t need to be dedicated to academic study to play the role of a charming wife or loving mother satisfactorily.’ (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii)

Catherine Macaulay argued in 1790 that the apparent weakness of women was caused by their Miseducation. She also argued by saying, “Women were limited mentally and physically by their environment. She urged physical exercise and academic studies for women, equal to those of men, dismissing the concept of innate inferiority and claiming in a principle which Wollstonecraft would urge tirelessly, ‘there is but one rule of right for the conduct of all rational beings. But the issue of female emancipation was not a central concern for Macaulay. Macaulay is concerned equally with the management of infants and the education of princes. It was for Marry Wollstonecraft to take the argument of natural rights and make their application to women the subject of a sustained argument. It was for Wollstonecraft to isolate and emphasize the issue of education for women, taking Lady Mary’s ‘unmined gold’ and urging it to be used to enrich all of human society.” (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. xl-xli)

Official Waves of Feminism

“The history of modern western feminist movements is divided into three waves. Each is described as dealing with different aspects of the same feminist issues. The first wave refers to the movement of the 19th through early 20th centuries, which dealt mainly with suffrage, working conditions and educational rights for women and girls. The second wave (1960s-1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities and the role of women in society. The third wave of feminism (late 1980s-early 2000s), is seen as both a continuation of the second wave and a response to the perceived failures.”

First Wave:(1830s—Early 1900s)

The first official wave of feminist movement started in the middle of the 19th century and continued till the early period of the 20th century. The exponents and writers of feminism of this period actually dealt with suffrage, working conditions, and educational rights for women. Often taken for granted, women in the late 19th to early 20thcenturies realized that they must first gain political power (including the right to vote) to bring about change was how to fuel the fire. Their political agenda expanded to issues concerning sexual, reproductive and economic matters. The seed was planted that women have the potential to contribute just as much if not more than men.

Second Wave of Feminism: (1960s—1980s)

What is sometimes termed ‘second-wave’ feminism emerged, after the Second World War, in several countries. In 1947, a Commission on the Status of Women was established by the United Nations, and two years later it issued a Declaration of Human Rights, which both acknowledged that men and women had ‘equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution’, as well as women’s entitlement to ‘special care and assistance’ in their role as mothers. Between 1975 and 1985, the UN called three International Conference on women’s issues, in Mexico City, Copenhagen, and Nairobi, where it was acknowledged that feminism: “constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds... There is and must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves. (Walters, 2005, p. 97)

In 1949, French writer Simone de Beauvoir wrote her world-famous book *The Second Sex* where she argues, “All through history, a woman has been denied full humanity, denied the human right to create, to invent, to go beyond mere living to find a meaning for life in projects of ever-widening scope. Man remodels the face of earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future; woman, on the other hand, is always and archetypally other. She is seen by and for men, always the object and never the subject. (Walters, 2005, p. 98)

Third Wave: (1990s – Present)

Today and unlike the former movements, the term ‘feminist’ is received less critical by the female population due to the varying feminist outlooks. There are the ego-cultural feminists, the radicals, the liberal/reforms, the electoral, academic, eco-feminists etc.

The main issues we face today were prefaced by the work done by the previous waves of women. We are still working to vanquish the disparities in male and female pay and the reproductive rights of women. We are working to end violence against women in our nation as well as others.

We are still fighting for acceptance and a true understanding of the term ‘feminism’, it should be noted that we have made tremendous progress since the first wave. It is a term that has been unfairly associated first, with ladies in hoop skirts and the ringlet curls, then followed by butch, man-hating women. Due to the range of feminist issues today, it is much harder to put a label on what a feminist looks like.

Background / Condition of Women before these Waves

The women were treated as commodities whose, as it was thought, only duty was to please and obey man. The great philosophers who have immensely contributed to the existing values of life have paradoxically treated woman as an object to be used by man: *she is God’s second mistake*, said Nietzsche. To Aristotle, *she is an inferior man*. He again says that *the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities*. Machiavelli chooses to identify women with fortune: *fortune is a woman, and if you wish to master her, you must strike and beat her*. Schopenhauer says *a woman is by nature meant to obey*. The saying *tota mulier in utero* (woman is nothing but womb) was in vogue. Shakespeare too refers it as, *Frailty thy name is woman* and the same idea is mentioned in *The Taming of the Shrew* e.g., *Thy husband is thy lord, thy keeper, thy head, thy sovereign*. (Gupta, 2002, p. 6)

In Indian Vedic age Manu, the law giver of the Hindu Dharma Shastra, clearly assigns woman a subordinate position to man:

During childhood, a female must depend upon her father, during youth, upon her husband, her husband being dead, upon her sons; if she has no sons, upon the near kinsmen of her husband; in default, upon those of her father, if she has no parental kinsmen, upon the sovereign; a woman must never govern herself as she likes. (Bader, 1964, p. 55)

Before starting the revolution for the women’s autonomy, their condition was so dreadful that they suffered from an identity crisis as well as claustrophobic problem. As Anita Desai, one of those novelists in English who have tried to understand closely the predicament of their female characters, writes:

“There are those who can handle situations and those who can’t. And my stories are generally about those who cannot. They find themselves trapped in situations on which they have no control”. (Bheda, 2005, p. 14)

Plato, the Greek philosopher, has thanked God for not creating him as a woman. (Beauvoir, 1988, p. 22)

Vishnu, lying on his death-bed, told Jhudhithir: ‘Women shouldn’t be believed as snakes shouldn’t be; to tell a lie to a woman is not a matter of sin; six elements are spoiled and destroyed if they are not kept in the eye all the while, one of them is a woman’. (Chattapadhaya, 1998, p. 19)

Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh, says: ‘

They (women) are goddess, covetous, they desire everybody’s favour

Women don’t want to be for only one male

They are goddess, covetous, the more adoration they get the more adoration they demand

They are very greedy

They aren’t content with one (male), they aren’t happy with one (male)

They always hope for many. (Abedin, 2006, p. 23)

The descriptions stated above tell us how the condition of the women was till the first half of the 20th century.

In 1871, the political philosopher Thomas Carlyle remarked, “The true destiny of a woman ... is to wed a man she can love and esteem and to lead noiselessly, under his protection, with all the wisdom, grace and heroism that is in her, the life presented in consequence.” (Walters, 2005, p. 70)

Margaret Walters writes a sentence which is very objectionable: “And a great many women, as well, accepted the notion that by nature and God’s decree, women were different to men. God meant them to be wives and mothers; if they deserted their proper sphere, it would lead to ‘a puny, enfeebled and sickly race’.” (Walters, 2005, p. 70)

Education was totally away from the girls; they were not allowed to go to school for studies. It seemed that the women don’t have any right to enter into the territory of the literati. That they were refused to get education becomes obvious when we study the background behind Mary Wollstonecraft’s writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* where Miriam Brody writes:

‘As for her (Mary Wollstonecraft) education, it was predictably meager. There were day-schools around Beverly in Yorkshire, but like most of the educated women of her time, she was self-taught. Intellectual curiosity developed in a girlhood correspondence with a friend, Fanny Blood, but was fed with great effort. Not only was the Wollstonecraft’s family unsympathetic to her request for privacy; they were unlikely to have provided her with the well-equipped library which had been the traditional informal schoolroom for such learned woman as Lady Mary Wortley Montague and Catherine Macaulay’. (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. xii)

‘As she (Mary Wollstonecraft) began to earn money herself, she became virtually his (her father’s) sole support, and eventually she financed the education of her younger brothers and sisters as well—found them employment when she could, and kept spare beds in her own limited rooms in case they needed a temporary home. She even stage-managed the flight of one sister from an unhappy marriage’. (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. xii)

‘Wollstonecraft established a school at Newington Green which, in London, at the end of the eighteenth century, provided an informal education for these novice teachers as well’.

That the condition of women during Mary Wollstonecraft’s time was really horrendous is also understood when we read her first novel *Mary, A Fiction* (1788). Miriam Brody writes: ‘Mary’ is a high-spirited, rebellious heroine, one rather like the authoress herself. Running away from an unhappy marriage, which had been arranged for her by her father, she announces that she will not be ‘thrown away’, or ‘given in with an estate’. (Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, 2004, pp. 76)

Before the actual commencement of the feminist movement, women were treated like a fruit. It was accused that the men peeled the ‘fruit’ out and threw it away. Mary Wollstonecraft, mother of modern feminism and the writer of the first sustained argument for female emancipation, was directly deceived by her husband, Gilbert Imlay, who continued his illegal relationship with another woman while Mary was struggling frantically to keep afloat in the sea of plight with her child. This becomes clearer when we read Miriam Brody’s introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* where she writes:

‘In London once again in 1795, Wollstonecraft could no longer delude herself about him (Imlay), for Imlay was living openly with another woman. Wollstonecraft had met the various crises in her struggle for economic independence with characteristic resilience and determination, but Imlay’s infidelity and all it implied of her misplaced trust left her

desperate. Finally, too, travel weary, with no appetite to begin again, she was as far as she had ever been from her fantasies of a harmonious and stable home. Her response to all of this was suicide. She left instructions for the care of her child and walked out at night to look for a secluded spot along the Thames where, making sure her clothes were heavy with water, and assuming she was unobserved, she at last leapt from a bridge. But in spite of her precautions she had been noticed and was pulled unconscious from the water by a passer-by. Later she told William Godwin that the pain associated with the attempt on her own life was so great she was resolved never to try again. Perhaps the suicide attempt exhausted the worst of her despair for after a few embarrassing meetings with him she was able at long last to resolve to forget Gilbert Imlay, and began to make plans for her own and her daughter's future, moving about within her London circle of reassuring friends.' (Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, 2004, pp. xxiii-xxiv)

An obvious picture of the condition of women during eighteenth century England appears before us when we peruse the feminist background of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*:

'The eighteenth century inherited an unfavourable amalgam of attitudes of women. The puritan reformers, good religious fundamentalists, encouraged submissiveness in women, passivity, dependence on men, limited education, a general containment and restriction of the 'weaker vessel'. The cavalier court of Charles II replaced puritanical disdain and restriction with ribald licentiousness a thorough-going contempt and sexual exploitations of females, having no place for Renaissance idealism. But if the seventeenth-century woman was kept from books, or insulted at court, the workaday life of the rural or urban woman in the economy of the community had remained relatively unchanged since medieval times, and was a far more independent one than her sister's would be one hundred years later. The aristocratic woman, to be sure, led a non-productive life, divorced from the working routine of the community, but the wife of the farmer, small shopkeeper or tradesman, actively participated in the productive work which maintained the economy of the household. No man would consider, when marrying a woman, that he was obliged to undertake the burden of her support until she died. If she was the wife of a farmer, she generally kept a dairy business, bringing eggs, butter and cheese regularly to market. She participated in seasonal harvests, and kept the accounts, if it were a large farm, superintending the servants and managing the care of the small children. While domestic industries thrived, the entire household, including children, participated in spinning and weaving cloth within the home. The wife of the shopkeeper in town worked alongside her husband behind the counter, with the entire household, servants and children living above the shop. One need not imply by this that women enjoyed an equal status with men in the working world. The trade guilds had restricted the training of women and had, for centuries, maintained them as a cheap pool of surplus labour. But women traditionally shared through their husbands the social and religious life of the guild, and if a woman, wife or a daughter, survived the death of her male relation, she often carried on in his craft, a practice she continued well into the eighteenth century.

But apart from sharing her husband's work, there were a number of specific trades which were entirely dominated by women until the eighteenth century, in which a woman owned her own property, maintained her own apprentices and was responsible for her own debts as an independent trader. Most of these trades were based on the manufacture of food or functioning of the household, such as brewing, dyeing cloth and preparing meals. Paradoxically, then, while the eighteenth century would be notable in calling for reform of female manners, the seventeenth-century woman, in spite of vilification by seventeenth-century puritanism and cavalier poets, was an active, productive member of the economic life of the community. The range of her activities was limited, but she had far more of the economic independence, which Mary Wollstonecraft tried to reclaim for her sex a century later'. (Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, 2004, pp. xxxi-xxxii)

“Adam says in Genesis, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man’. Corinthians elaborate a little. ‘For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man’. And St Paul had said plainly, ‘wives submit to your husband’. (Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, 2004, pp. xxxii)

That the education for the women before the starting the feminist movement was denied is also understood when Miriam Brody says:

‘Wollstonecraft would have agreed with Astell that virtue is dependent on knowledge and that an educated mother is a better one, but Wollstonecraft will give these notions the twist of Enlightenment and liberalism: the educated woman will go into society to facilitate its progress and development; the educated woman may even make contributions to human wisdom; if she is talented, and wants to enough, she may be a vital constructive participant in recognizing society’. (Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, 2004, pp. xxxiii)

If the women were given equal chance to be educated, Wollstonecraft wouldn’t need to write these lines.

William Blackstone, a distinguished and learned professor of law at Oxford, cleared the state of women in his book *Commentaries on the Laws of England*:

‘The husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything’. (Blackstone, 1847, p. 441)

‘A married woman, then, could legally hold no property in her own right, nor either into any legal contract, nor for that matter claim any rights over her own children. To be sure, families had got round these laws for many years and would continue to do so; still, the woman’s dependence which was becoming more and more manifest in the course of the eighteenth century, achieved a legal sanctity in Blackstone which formed the spirit, as well as the letter, of all traditional injunctions to women which writers on the subject would make’. (Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, 2004, pp. xxxv-xxxvi)

Daniel Defoe wrote in his *Complete English Tradesman*: ‘They (women) act as if they were ashamed of being tradesmen’s wives, and scorn to be seen in the counting house’. (Defoe, 1738, pp. 279-280)

To delineate the then condition of women, Miriam Brody also stated that the most widely read books for girls on the subject of moral instruction, Dr. James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) and Dr. John Gregory’s *Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1774), echoed what the luminaries of London’s literary world implied or directly advised—that the proper duty of the female was to make herself pleasing to men. He added that such skill was woman’s by nature. She didn’t need to be dedicated to academic study to play the role of charming wife or a loving mother satisfactorily. Understandably, in the face of these traditional injunctions to be good, to get married, and to be quiet, very few women triumphed intellectually.

Bluestocking Hannah More, one of the more outspoken of Wollstonecraft’s detractors, ‘condemns a girl’s enervating indoor routine, her nonsensical curriculum with its emphasis on fashion and manners, and she emphasizes, like Wollstonecraft, that women must be educated to be better mothers’. In *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), Hannah More writes: ‘The more a woman’s understanding is improved, the more accurate views will she take of the station she was born to fill’. (More, 1799, pp. 345-346)

'While travelling in Scandinavia and preparing the *Letters* Johnson published, Wollstonecraft was moved to write with a mixture of sorrow and anger when watching peasant women scrub (to clean soot by rubbing) linen (a kind of cloth) in cold water, their husband already cracked and bleeding. These were women to whom the most menial and even laborious offices' are left with 'men stand up for the dignity of men.' (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. xlii)

'Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in.' (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. 30)

The then condition of women during the eighteenth century is also discerned when we see Wollstonecraft point her finger with a complaint saying that boys frolic in the open air, while girls are kept indoors and advised not to soil their frocks. She asks, "But should it be proved that woman is naturally weaker than man, whence does it follow that it is natural for her to labour to become still weaker than nature intended her to be? Arguments of this cast are an insult to common sense, and favour of passion. The *divine right* of husbands, like the divine rights of kings, may, it is to be hoped, in this enlightened age, be contested without danger, and, though conviction may not silence many boisterous disputants, yet, when any prevailing prejudice is attacked, the wife will consider, and leave the narrow-minded to rail with thoughtless vehemence at innovation.' (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. 55)

That most women are destined to be mothers is Wollstonecraft's best argument for educating them.

Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is really a unique creation to know the then condition of women. She writes that 'the power of generalizing ideas 'has not only been denied to women; but writers have insisted that it is inconsistent, with a few exceptions, with their sexual character. Let men prove this, and I shall grant that woman only exists for man. I must, however, previously remark, that the power of generalizing ideas, to any great extent, is not very common amongst men or women. But this exercise is the true cultivation of the understanding; and everything conspires to render the cultivation of the understanding more difficult in the female than the male world.

It is sufficient to allow that she has always been either a slave, or a despot, and to remark, that each of these situations equally regards the progress of reason.' (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. 71)

'Confined then in cages like the feathered race, they have nothing to do but to plume themselves, and stalk with mock majesty from perch to perch. It is true they are provided with food and raiment, for which they neither toil nor spin;' (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. 71)

Early 20th Century Feminism

During the early 20th century, English women achieved legal and civil equality, in theory if not always in practice. Some women, those over the age of 30, were allowed to vote from 1918, and there were arguments about whether their priority was to press hard for enfranchisement on the same terms as men, or to concentrate on women's other needs and problems.

The effects of the First World War had been so complex that it is impossible to generalize about them. It had allowed some women the opportunity to work outside the home; in the war years, the number of women employed outside the home rose by well over a million. Some worked in munitions factories and engineering works, others were employed in hospitals; many demanded pay rises, sometimes insisting their wages should be equal to men's. Their contribution during the war, both domestically and as workers outside the home, almost certainly contributed to their partial enfranchisement in 1918. But many women were left widowed or unmarried, and the war-time press had talked darkly about 'flaunting

flappers’.” (Walters, 2005, p. 86)

The Labour Party member Ellen Wilkinson—an unmarried woman with a trade union background—wrote: “The men come in the middle of the night and the women are driven from their beds without any clothing other than a coat. They are running out in the middle of the night and the home is burned.” (Walters, 2005, p. 87)

‘It was not until 1923 that court in England allowed a woman to divorce her husband on the grounds of adultery, although such grounds had long been within his province.’ (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. lxiii)

The economic system prevalent in Europe during the nineteenth century denied desperately poor women adequate job-training and a reasonable choice of employment. One of the most courageous Victorian feminist reformers, Josephine Butler, suggested that the inter-relationship of economic exploitation of women and their moral degradation in her fight for repeal of the Contagious Disease Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869, which were prompted by growing alarm at the rise of venereal disease among the military, and which forced prostitute in certain towns to undergo routine medical examinations. Butler noted before a Commission investigating these Acts that: ‘So long as men are vicious, and women have no employment, this will go on.’ Butler is at least suggesting that the fundamental causes of degradation in women were not aberrations in their character, but an economic system which denied desperately poor women adequate job-training and reasonable choice of employment. (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. lxiii)

Attempts of the Feminist Writers Taken for Women:

Attempts Taken by Mary Wollstonecraft

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman speaks as much as to the problems of women in the twenty-first century. Her experience in childhood and as a young woman, in a class-bound and male-dominated society, influenced and shaped the ideas she would later develop into a feminist argument. The argument and the passion Wollstonecraft bring to her defence of feminism is, therefore, not only more poignant but more comprehensible with awareness of the trial and anguish of her struggle for a full of life—for personal liberation, economic independence and for a release from the emotional insecurity imposed on her by her refusing the traditional safeguard of early marriage. (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. x-xi)

Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her world-famous book “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” because she was brought up by an abusive father who ‘frequently broke into a violent rage, and Mary often tried to defend her mother by throwing herself between them. Unfortunately, if she remembers her father as tyrannical, her mother, she recalls, was too willingly his victim.’ (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. xi)

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is a treatise on overcoming the ways in which women in her time are oppressed and denied their potential in society, with concomitant problems for their households and society as a whole. The introduction sets out her view that neglect of girls’ education is largely to blame for the condition of adult women. They are treated as subordinate beings that care only about being attractive, elegant, and meek, they buy into this oppression, and they do not have the tools to vindicate their fundamental rights or the awareness that they are in such a condition. Women are taught to indulge their emotions and thus have unhappy marriages because passion cannot be sustained. Virtue should not be relative to gender; as both men and women were created by God and have souls, they have the same kind of propensity to exercise reason and develop virtue. Female dependence as seen in her day is not *natural*. Women's confinement in the home and inability to participate in the public sphere results in their insipidness and pettiness. Wollstonecraft wants to inspire a "revolution in female manners."

In chapter nine Wollstonecraft calls for more financial independence for women, expresses the need for duty and activity in the public sphere, argues for the need to be a good citizen as well as a good mother, and describes the various pursuits women might take on in society. Chapters ten and eleven concern parenting duties, repeating that there must be reforms in education for women to be good mothers who neither tyrannize over their children nor spoil them. Chapter twelve concerns Wollstonecraft's ideas for education reform. These include a conflation of public and private education, co-education, and a more democratic, participatory educational structure.

Women and men must have things in common to have successful marriages.

In the introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Miriam Brody writes about Jean Jacques Rousseau's attitudes to women: "Not only is she by nature inferior, but she exists only to provide entertainment for men. Wollstonecraft challenges Rousseau's major assumptions about women: that a state of dependence is natural to them, therefore they should be dependent on men; that they are naturally un-inclined to learn, therefore they should be given little opportunity; that they should have less liberty, but become accustomed to 'habitual restraints' since dissipated, levity and inconstancy are also natural to them. Wollstonecraft argues with all these assumptions. That women were created for the entertainment of men is offensive to Wollstonecraft's notion of reason. She will argue that women's faults are not a proof of their natural inferiority but proof instead of the intrinsic inferiority of the environment. What Wollstonecraft finds most pernicious in Rousseau are the ethics he teaches women. If a virtue is one which is applied differently to men and women, Wollstonecraft calls it a 'sexual virtue'. (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. li-iii)

Mary Wollstonecraft's own view regarding these is written here: "If the honour of a woman, as it is absurdly called, be safe, she may neglect every social duty; nay, ruin her family by gaming and extravagance; yet still present a shameless front—for truly she is an honourable woman." (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. 170-171)

Miriam Brody also writes that Rousseau further described, "After all, if a woman thrives for many years wholly on flattery and admiration, and is schooled in deception, where will she turn when her husband no longer finds her amusing or attractive? Surely the appetite for flattery and the practice of deception can only lead her to infidelity and further neglect of her children.

A woman should bear the insult of her husband without complaining." Replies Wollstonecraft, "Of what materials can that heart be composed, which can melt when insulted, and instead of revolting an injustice, kiss the rod?" (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. 106)

Attempts Taken by John Stuart Mill

The most important written argument for feminism in the nineteenth century was John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, published in 1869, which gave to a wider audience, many of the concerns the *Vindication* had raised seventy-nine years earlier. Mill, who became an active feminist reformer, argued, as did Wollstonecraft, for improved education for women, disparaging the environmental forces which appeared to consign them to coquettish imbecility. He spoke also of the deleterious effects of Victorian prudishness on a woman's as well as a man's worldly ambition, saying 'whoever has a wife and children has given hostages to Mrs Grundy.' Like Wollstonecraft, he believed that 'the power of earning is essential to the dignity of women. The character of a married woman's life, however, must still be primarily domestic, her education a source of spiritual enrichment rather than the means by which she gains economic independence.' (Mill, 1869, p. 76)

By the end of the nineteenth century, women gained the right of entry to medical schools, the right to be educated at Cambridge University, entry to various professions and establishment of job-training programmes for working-class women. The great crusade of feminist reformers, however, was for the vote. From John Stuart Mill's presentation of the first petition to parliament in 1866 until suffrage was achieved in England in 1927 (in the USA in 1919), the constitutional movement for women's suffrage, under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett, persevered against the hostile male legislators in whom they rested all their hopes. The suffrage movement and the acquisition of a few places in higher education changed the lives of only a small group of women. The married woman's life was still circumscribed by her domesticity. The working-class worked hard at two jobs, the one she went in the morning, and the other which she returned at home.

Attempts Taken by Anita Desai

Anita Desai's novels are regarded as austere disparagement of the society's discriminating attitude towards women out of her struggle for female autonomy. She brawls (struggles) against the backdrop of the patriarchal cultural pattern prevailing in India. In her novel *Cry, The Peacock*, she discusses the failure of marriage between Maya and Gautam. Maya marries Gautam who is much older than her but their temperament and emotional responses never match. The novel is about Maya's cries of love and understanding in her loveless marriage with Gautam. The tragic end of Maya and Gautam's married life is seen in her act of killing her husband and afterwards killing her own self by committing suicide.

Her novels give a faithful expression to the long smothered wail of a 'lacerated psyche and tell the harrowing tale of blunted human relationships.' (Pathak, 2009, p. 98)

Desai's other popular works like *In Custody*, *Fasting, Feasting* focus on fragmented souls shutting between the harsh realities and rosy imagination. Uma, the main character of the novel *Fasting, Feasting*, is observed to be at the beck and call of the parents. When Arun, the only son and 'glory' of the family is born, Uma is forbidden to go to school any more. When Uma informed her mother by saying: 'I have to go and do my homework,' her mother snapped at her, "Leave all that. We are not sending you back to school, Uma. You are staying at home to help with Arun. Stay at home and look after your baby brother." (Desai, 2008, pp. 18-21)

Everyone's favourite cousin, the gracious, beautiful and intelligent Anamika, wins a scholarship to Oxford, but her parents, Lila Aunty and Bakul Uncle, do not consider allowing her to go and study in America. Lila Aunty and Bakul Uncle are none but the representatives of the society Anamika lived in where the girls, even being an outstanding student and winning a scholarship in a world-famous University, are not allowed to get access in the galaxy of higher education.

"To Oxford, where only the most favoured and privileged 'sons' could ever hope to go" (Desai, 2008, pp. 69)

It is here mentionable that since the writer is a female writer, she has ironically used the word 'sons' not daughters to mean that the society she lived in allowed only the sons to go abroad for higher studies.

"Naturally, her parents would not countenance her actually going abroad to study—just when she was of an age to marry—everyone understood that, and agreed, and so the letter of acceptance from Oxford was locked in a steel cupboard in their flat on Marie Drive in Bombay, and whenever visitors came, it would be taken out and shown around with pride". (Desai, 2008, pp. 69-70)

Anamika could win the scholarship of Oxford but she was not allowed to go there to study, but with this win the family took pride and regarded the scholarship as a quality which will equalize her with the status of her would be

husband. The family took it as a good chance to find a good husband showing this ‘family prize’. “The scholarship was one of the qualifications they were able to offer when they started searching for a husband for her, and it was what won her a husband who was considered an equal to this prize of the family.” (Desai, 2008, pp. 70)

How selfish the society was! They used the scholarship to search for a better and qualified husband but they were not allowing Anamika to go to America for higher studies. Anamika thus suffers from the dilemma of identity and claustrophobic problem. Rather, to her private sadness, they stash her award off into a cabinet and bring it out only to show visitors. Anamika has many suitors, but her parents marry her off to a much older man because he “matches” her in degrees and prestige. How unscrupulous and unprincipled the society is! They chose a husband for Anamika but his age was quite more than her. They choose this old man “because he had qualifications equal to hers; he too had degrees, had won medals and certificates, and it seemed clear he would be a match for her.

Uma, Aruna and all the other girl cousins crowded around to see the match when he came, a bridegroom, to the wedding, and they fell back when they saw him, in dismay. He was so much older than Anamika, so grim-faced and conscious of his own superiority to everyone else present: those very degrees and medals had made him insufferably proud and kept everyone at a distance. The children saw that straight away: there would be no bridegroom jokes played at this wedding, no little gifts and bribes from him to them; he barely seemed to notice Anamika. The children saw that too—that she was marrying the one person who was totally impervious to Anamika’s beauty and grace and distinction” (Desai, 2008, pp. 70)

Thus a girl’s virginity is less important to the parents than the medals and certificates of a man who is searching wife. Thus, the women really suffered from what we call the dilemma of identity. Even the children could understand that the bridegroom was simply an old man who will not make any jokes with them. But they could say nothing as the society doesn’t allow them to. How sorrowfully these girls suffer from claustrophobia! The man pays no attention to Anamika, but rather appears to worship his own mother. Soon after their wedding, news floats to Uma’s family that Anamika’s husband and mother-in-law regularly beat her and that she is treated like a household servant. What a society it is! A wife is beaten by her husband and mother-in-law. How come! What a shame! Women were not treated as human beings. It seems that the wives or women didn’t have any right to enter into the galaxy of those human beings who are happy in this world. The women who lived in this society suffered from the dilemma of identity. She had to spend all the time in the kitchen, and had to eat at the last.

“Anamika had been beaten, Anamika was beaten regularly by her mother-in-law while her husband stood by and approved—or, at least, did not object. Anamika spent her entire time in the kitchen, cooking for his family, which was larger so that meals were eaten in shifts—first the men, then the children, finally the women. She herself ate the remains in the pots before scouring them. If the pots were not scoured, so they heard, her mother-in-law threw them on the ground and made her do them all over again.”(Desai, 2008, pp. 71)

Can it be thought that Anamika has any right to this family? Is she treated as a human being let alone being treated as a member of the family? How miserably she suffers from an identity crisis in her own family! Her mother-in-law is also a woman but she thinks herself as the boss of the family and gives no importance to Anamika as his son’s wife. This is because, I think, this bossy mother-in-law couldn’t also enjoy herself in the family when she was the wife of her mother –in- law’s son.)

“When Anamika was not scrubbing or cooking, she was in her mother-in-law’s room, either massaging that lady’s feet or folding and tidying her clothes. She never went out of the house except to the temple with other women. Anamika had never once been out alone with her husband. (Desai, 2008, pp. 72)

Look, Anamika was always at the beck and call of her mother-in-law. Soon, Anamika miscarries due to a beating, becoming infertile. Uma hopes that her husband will send her back home to her parents, but Anamika doesn’t return. “Then the news came that Anamika had had to go to the hospital. She had had a miscarriage at home, it was said, after a beating. It was said she couldn’t bear more children. (Desai, 2008, pp. 72)

How cruel and brutal the society is! The wives are beaten so ferociously and brutally that they miscarry.

“What will people say? What will they think?” (Desai, 2008, pp. 72)

It is asked to Uma by her Mama. But I ask her, “You also think about what people will say if Anamika is sent back from her husband’s house to Lila Aunty and Bakul Uncle? How bastard you are! How actor and actress you are! Do people believe that people like you also think about the happiness of the girls of a family? If she is sent back because of her miscarriage, people will think about your prestige, but what about your social status if the people like Anamika’s husband and her mother-in-law indescribably persecute the wife of their house?

“Who cares what they say? Who cares what they think?”(Desai, 2008, pp. 72)

It is boldly said by Aruna. This kind of brave statement from Aruna indicates that the deprivation for the girls of what they deserve has made them brave and revolutionary. Revolutionary zeal is observed when a society deprives somebody of what he / she deserves as crime is there where people are not given what they need.

“Don’t talk like that, ‘Mama scolded them. “I don’t want to hear all these modern ideas. Is it what you learned from the nuns at the convent?’ She glared at Uma: Mother Agnes had made one of her periodic visits to persuade Mama to send Uma back to school and this always roused Mama’s ire. Uma thought it better to withdraw. So then Mama glared at Aruna. ‘All this convent education—what good does it do?’(Desai, 2008, pp. 72)

How shamelessly a mother scolds her children because of nothing! She asks, ‘What have you learned by going to the convent?’ It means she makes the school responsible for the girls’ ‘misbehaviour’. Actually she couldn’t tolerate her two children as they were girl. Thus, the two sisters suffer from the dilemma of identity in the family).

Background / Condition of Women before Mohammedan Wave

At the time of Muhammad's birth, women in 7th century Arabia had few if any rights. That the condition of women was more serious, dangerous, and objectionable at the time of Mohammed can be clear from the point that at that time even the right of life for women could be in question, since it was not uncommon for small girls to be buried alive during times of scarcity. In the Qur'an, it is said that on Judgment Day "buried girls" will rise out of their graves and ask for what crime they were killed. Part of Muhammad's legacy was to end infanticide and establish explicit rights for women.

Steps Attempted by Mohammed (PBUH)for Women

Muhammad himself frequently counseled Muslim men to treat their wives and daughters as well. "You have rights over your women," he is reported to have said, "and your women have rights over you." Muhammad was orphaned at an early age. He once remarked that, "Heaven lies at the feet of mothers." As the father of four daughters in a society that

prized sons, he told other fathers that, if their daughters spoke well of them on the Day of Judgment, they would enter paradise. (Al Hadith)

Beginning from the time of Muhammad's marriage to his first wife Khadijah, women played an important role in his religious career. According to Muslim sources, Khadijah was the first person Muhammad spoke to about his initial, terrifying experience of revelation. She consoled him and became the first convert to Islam. She remained a confidant and a source of support throughout their entire marriage. Though men commonly took more than one wife in 7th Century Arabia, Muhammad remained in a monogamous marriage with Khadijah until her death, when Muhammad was in his fifties.

Following the Battle of Uhud (625), in which scores of male combatants died, leaving unprotected widows and children, Muhammad and the Qur'an decreed that, in order to protect the orphans of such families, men might take up to four wives. The permission itself is surrounded by language that discourages the very thing it permits, saying that unless a man can treat several wives equally, he should never enter into multiple marriages. The usual supposition in the modern monogamous West—that Islam institutionally encourages lustful arrangements—is rejected by Muslims themselves as an ill-informed stereotype. At the same time, Muslim feminists point out that in various cultures at different economic strata the laws of polygamy have frequently operated to the clear detriment of women. Polygamy is an uncommon occurrence in the modern Muslim world.

According to a hadith: (saying or actions of the Holy Prophet)

"When the servant of Allah marries, he has fulfilled half the (responsibilities laid on him by the) faith" (Mishkat)

Allah, the Most Exalted, has revealed that:

Women have the same [rights in relation to their husbands] as are expected in all decency from them; while men have a degree over them. Allah is Powerful, Wise." [Al Quran 2:228]

In this verse, Allah, Most Merciful, has alluded to the rights of women before referring to the rights of men. A point of expediency in this sequence is that men invariably secure their rights by sheer strength, but women are usually unable to secure their rights by force, therefore the need for safeguarding their rights is more serious. [Tafseer Maarif al Quran].

Another textual indication in this sequence is that men should take the initiative in fulfilling the rights of women. The seniority of men referred to in the Quranic verse neither implies greater rights of men nor suggests any excellence in terms of the life hereafter.

The following Quranic revelation conveys this reassurance:

Verily, men who submit [to Allah] and women who submit,
and men who believe and women who believe,
and men who are obedient and women who are obedient,
and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth,
and men who are patient and women who are patient
and men who are humble and women who are humble,

and men who give alms and women who give alms,
and men who fast and women who fast,
and men who guard their modesty and women who guard (their modesty),
and men who remember Allah much and women who remember,
Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward.
(Al Quran 33:35).

In fact, there are many subtleties in this Divine statement. As explained by Abdullah bin Abbas (RA), a companion of the Prophet (PBUH), explains that

"It simply suggests that men should have greater forbearance towards women. The implication is that should women be remiss in discharging the rights of men, it is expected that they would tolerate such lapses, but not fall short themselves in fulfilling the rights of women."

We have observed the spiritual elders exercising such magnanimity. Other beneficial purposes and points of wisdom on this issue can be found in the various interpretations of the Quran. The gist of those explanations is that this degree of seniority is also for the benefit of women. The Holy Prophet (PBUH), a blessing for all the worlds, was especially compassionate and lenient towards women and exalted their status. He had a deep concern about protecting them from all kinds of loss and discomfort, and he equated the reward of their routine activities with the rewards which men earn only after making tremendous sacrifice and effort. While Allah, Most High, in His wisdom has made women physically delicate, at the same time He has thrust the load of the hard struggles and burdens of their lives upon men. Thus men have been charged with the responsibility of maintaining women and being lenient, compassionate and forgiving. They have also been strictly forbidden from dealing harshly with women. Following are the sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) concerning these concessions, virtues and the status of women.

The Virtues of Muslim Women as narrated by Mohammed (PBUH):

A Warning for Men

Jabir (RA) narrates that the Prophet (PBUH) also gave these instructions in his sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage. "Fear Allah regarding women; for you have taken them (in marriage) with the trust of Allah. (Mishkat)

This warning establishes the sanctity and inviolability of women's rights. In this teaching men have been cautioned that although they are guardians of women, they should not exercise this responsibility without concern and fear of accountability to Allah. They should be mindful that Allah is a witness between them and their wives and it is through His commandment and permission that women have been made lawful for them through marriage. Women are therefore in Allah's protection. If the husbands are cruel they are guilty of breaching their trust with Allah. How big an honour this is for women and how stern is the warning for their guardian husbands that they should remember that women are in Allah's protection. (Ma 'Arif al-Hadith)

The wife is therefore entrusted to the man on a sacred pledge to which Allah is a party. Islam teaches that in this union the function of the woman is not only for the gratification of physical drives. On the contrary, she is viewed as the most qualified partner of man in shaping the character of family and society for the realization of the ultimate aims of

human existence.

Farewell Advice for Men

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said: O people, your wives have a certain right over you and you have certain rights over them. Treat them well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. (Tirmidhi)

Fair dealings and good behaviour are necessary towards everyone, but the Prophet (PBUH), the mercy for all mankind, emphasized it especially towards women.

Kindness to the Wife, an Aspect of Faith

A'isha, (RA) reported Allah's messenger as saying, "Among the believers who show most perfect faith are those who have the best disposition, and are kindest to their families." (Tirmidhi)

Note: A'isha (RA), the Holy Prophet's wife, is one of the most famous women in Islamic history. She was gifted with an outstanding intelligence and memory and is considered to be one of the most reliable narrators of al-hadith.

The Best Men

Abu Huraira (RA) reported Allah's messenger as saying, "The believers who show the most perfect faith are those who have the best disposition and the best of you are those who are best to their wives " (Tirmidhi)

Behaving with Women Emphasized

For the benefit of the believers who love and follow him, the Prophet (PBUH) cited his own example to make these instructions more effective, he remarked:

The best of you is he who is best to his family, and I am the best among you to my family. ((Tirmidhi)

Easy Entry in Paradise

Umm Salma (RA) reported Allah's messenger as saying, "Any woman who dies when her husband is pleased with her will enter Paradise."(Tirmidhi)

Should the husband be displeased with his wife without any fault of hers, she will of course be innocent in Allah's sight and the responsibility for annoyance shall rest with the husband.

Spending for Wife's Comfort

It is narrated by Abu-Darda (RA) that the Prophet (PBUH) instructed me: "Spend as much as possible upon your family. " (Kanz)

This is indeed a source of encouragement to spend for the comfort of women. The husband is also under an obligation to maintain his wife irrespective of whether she is rich or poor.

Those who are not generous with their wives should take heed of this advice.

Reward of Everyday Chores

The Prophet (PBUH) has said; "Homemaking (Allah-willing) raises the station of a woman to the level of those who make Jihad." (Kanz)

Jihad means striving the utmost in Allah's Path. Such a striving has many forms. Outwardly, this refers to the defense of the oppressed. Allah, Most Merciful, has revealed in the Holy Quran:

"Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors" (Al Quran 2:190).

"If it were not because Allah repels some men by means of others, cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques where Allah's name is mentioned frequently would have been demolished" (Al Quran 22:40).

"Why should you not fight for Allah's sake and of the oppressed men and of the women and the children who are crying: Our Lord! Lead us out of this town whose people are oppressors! Grant us a patron from Your Presence and grant us a defender from Your Presence" (Al Quran 4:75).

Efforts to restrain the nafs (the vain desires of the lower soul) has been called the greatest Jihad. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) explained this mode of striving when returning from an expedition: "We are returning from the lesser Jihad (against our outward enemies), to the greater Jihad (against the nafs -the vain desires of the lower soul)"

Although this exceedingly great reward is a tremendous favour, the wife is at liberty to forego it and is fully entitled to ask the husband to arrange for domestic help. The wife's maintenance is not in lieu of any household services. Thus, according to Shariah, housework or attending on the husband and children cannot be imposed on the wife as her religious obligation. On the other hand, remedial disciplinary recourse exists within the legal framework of Islam against husbands who deliberately abandon their primary responsibilities to the detriment of their wives.

Sharing Domestic Work with the Wife

The Prophet (PBUH) has said; "Helping wives (in their domestic work) earn (men) the reward of charity." (Kanz)

Narrated Al-Aswad (RA): I asked A'isha (RA), "What did the Prophet (PBUH) do at home?" She said, "He used to work for his family and when he heard the call for the prayer, he would go out." (Sahih al-Bukhari)

This demonstrates the great inducement to care for women by sharing their domestic chores.

Paradise Welcomes the Wife

Anas (RA) reported Allah's messenger as saying, "When a woman observes the five times of prayer, fasts during Ramadan, preserves her chastity and obeys her husband, she may enter by any of the gates of paradise she wishes (in other words nothing will prevent her from entering paradise)." (Mishkat)

Thus, if women are mindful of the compulsory injunctions of religion, there is no need for them to toil hard in performing strenuous acts of worship. Just by doing the above, they merit the same lofty ranks as awarded to men who perform demanding forms of worship. This is indeed one of the innumerable favours of Allah.

Allah's Creation Prays for the Wife

The Prophet (PBUH) has said: "The birds in flight, the fish in the rivers, the angels in heaven and the animals in the jungles seek repentance for the woman who is obedient and submits to her husband."

It is worth considering that merely upon doing the above women earn this great reward. It is to be noted that if there are any sins in one's account, those are forgiven by repentance and subsequent repentance causes elevation of one's

grade in paradise.

Obedience towards the husband is not unqualified. The scope of obedience extends to those matters which are classified as the rights of the husband. Another rule is that the husband or someone else cannot be obeyed if the act required amounts to disobedience of Allah.

Wives to Enter Paradise before Men

The Prophet (PBUH) has said: "O women, the pious among you will enter Paradise before pious men. When the husbands will enter Paradise these women will be presented to their husbands after being bathed and perfumed. These women will be on red and yellow coloured conveyances accompanied by children (as beautiful) as scattered pearls."

A great saint has remarked: "O Ladies! What other superiority do you want? You will enter Paradise prior to men. Of course, being pious is a necessary condition, and this is not difficult.

Allah's Special Mercy on the Wife

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said: "May Allah show mercy to a woman who gets up during the night and prays, who wakens her husband and he prays, but if he refuses, sprinkles water on his face."

Reward for Martyrdom

The Prophet (PBUH) also said in the above detailed hadith: "The woman who dies during pregnancy gets the status of a martyr".

Rewards beyond Imagination

Addressing Salamah (RA), the nurse of his son Ibrahim (RA), the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Does it not please any one of you that if she conceives by her husband and he is satisfied with her that she receives the reward of fasting and vigil for Allah's sake. And none of the dwellers of Heaven or Earth know about the coolness of her eyes (a unique repose) she will get for the labour pains she suffered. When she delivers, not mouthful of milk flows from her and not an instance of the child's suck, but that she receives for every suck and mouthful, the reward of a good deed. If she is kept awake by her child during the night she receives the reward of freeing seventy slaves for the sake of Allah."

The Prophet (PBUH) then said: "O Sallahah! do you know which women are being referred to? Those who, despite piety and enjoying a respectable position obey their husbands and do not belittle them." (Al-Tabarani)

Reward through Husband's Earnings

The Prophet (PBUH) said: "When a woman spends (in the Path of Allah) from her husband's wealth, not wasting it (but spends reasonably and within permissible limits) she will have her reward for what she gave and her husband will have him for what he earned. The same applies to the storekeeper. The reward of any of these persons does not diminish the rewards of the others." (Bukhari)

In the life of this world, the title or ownership of wealth is outwardly assigned to human beings through apparent means such as earnings or inheritance, due to the necessity of organizing the affairs of an orderly society. However, all human beings are on an equal footing in terms of real ownership of possessions, in view of the fact that it is not man but Allah Who is the Absolute Owner. The husband, the wife, and even an employee who arranges for the charity payment to be made, are all rewarded due to their respective roles in facilitating the giving of charity and not on account of their

temporary ownership of what was donated. This saying of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is a source of profound reassurance for ladies not to fear that giving charity without having personally earned the money carries no reward.

Reward for Pilgrimage

Narrated A'isha (RA), the mother of the faithful believers: I requested the Prophet (PBUH) to permit me to participate in Jihad, but he said, "Your Jihad is the performance of Hajj." (Bukhari)

According to another narration, the Prophet (PBUH) remarked, "The (best) Jihad (for women) is (the performance) of Hajj." (Bukhari)

Reward Earned in the Safety of the Home

The Prophet (PBUH) has said: "Waging Jihad is not obligatory for women (as long as it remains Fard-e-Kifaya), nor is attending (congregational) prayers on Fridays and accompanying funerals." (Kanz)

Imagine the great reward that women earn within their homes!

Reward for the Loving Wife

The Prophet (PBUH) has said: "Allah likes the woman who obeys and loves her husband and protects herself from other men." (Kanz)

Men Counterparts of Women

The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Women are the twin halves of men." (Kanz)

The creation of Hawwa (Eve) from Adam (AS) is well known. Both men and women are of the same essence, their rights and obligations are also similar. Therefore, even if the virtues of women had not been detailed separately, it would not have been a cause of concern, as they are automatically covered by the same rewards. Thus the virtues of good deeds earned by men are the same as those which women earn.

Leniency towards Women Enjoined

The Prophet (PBUH) instructed in the longer hadith: "Act kindly toward women, for a woman is created from a rib" (Bukhari)

This teaches men not to demand infallibility (dependability) from women. If some incompatibility of temperaments persists in the relationship, the husband should give up his obsession to change the wife's nature. Just ponder how much leniency and forbearance is enjoined by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) towards the lapses of women.

The Best Women

Abu Huraira (RA) told that when Allah's messenger was asked which woman was best, he replied, "The one who fills (her husband) with joy when he sees her, obeys him when he directs and does not oppose him by displeasing him regarding her person or property." (Mishkat)

Prayer for Modest Women

The Prophet (PBUH) said: "May Allah have mercy on women who wear the sirwal (loose fitting lower garment)." (Kanz)

Our natural instinct of bashfulness prompts us to cover the body adequately, nonetheless the Holy Prophet (PBUH), in his boundless compassion for women, prayed for those who dress modestly.

The Great Value of Women's Actions

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said: "The vice of an immoral woman is equal to the vice of a thousand immoral men while the virtue of a pious woman is equal to the reward of worship of seventy saints." (Kanz)

What a great reward for a virtuous deed of a woman it is! It is indeed a great favour and a source of felicity for women.

Honourable Mention of the Wife

The Prophet (PBUH) has said: "The best among your wives is the one who is chaste and loves her husband." (Kanz)

Purity and loving the husband is only natural, yet women are rewarded for it.

Verbal Honour Earns Reward

A companion said, "O Prophet (PBUH) I have a wife, when I meet her, she says, 'Welcome my chief and the chief of my household.'" When she finds me in a sad mood, she says, 'Why worry about this world when the provision for your afterlife is being earned (anyway)?" 'Upon hearing this, the Prophet (PBUH) said; "Inform that lady that she is among the workers of Allah, and she earns the rewards of half Jihad." (Kanz)

Quality of Reward with Men

Asma (RA) reported that she approached the Prophet (PBUH) on behalf of women and mentioned that men have excelled women due to their participation in the Friday and congregational prayers, visiting the sick, attending funeral prayers, performing the Hajj and Umra and due to participation in Jihad. The Prophet (PBUH) replied: "Go and inform the women that their beautification for their husbands, discharging their rights, seeking their pleasure and obeying them is equal in reward (to the above mentioned acts) of men." (Kanz)

The Great Reward for Nurturing

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said: "From the instant of conceiving up to the delivery and nursing of the baby, the woman gets the same reward as the one who has been appointed to guard the boundaries of Islam and remains steadfast for Jihad. If she dies during this period, she gets the reward of a martyr." (Kanz)

Besides the mother's exclusive opportunity to be rewarded in the hereafter, she enjoys the vast authority and status in addition to her spousal rights. In her role of motherhood, she has an unquestionably privileged position in relation to her husband. The following is a very brief but exact picture of these Islamic teachings.

"We have enjoined man to respect his parents; his mother bears him in weakness upon weakness, while his weaning takes two years. Thank Me as well as your parents; unto Me is the journeying." (Al Quran 31:14)

Your Lord has decreed that you should worship none except Him, and (that you show) kindness to your parents. If one or both of them attain old age (while they are) with you, never say to them 'Shame!' nor scold either of them. Speak to them in a respectable fashion and lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: My Lord! Have mercy

on them both as they did care for me when I was little. (Al Quran 17:23,24)

Worship none save Allah (only) and be good to parents and also near relatives, orphans and the needy. (Al Quran 2:83)

A few sayings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) are also cited which enjoin kindness towards the mother:

Jahmah (RA) said to the Holy Prophet (PBUH), "O Messenger of Allah, I desire to go on a (military) expedition and I have come to consult you." He asked him if he had a mother, and when he replied that he had, he said: "Stay with her because Paradise lies beneath her feet." (An-Nasai)

A man asked the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to whom he should show kindness and he replied: "Your mother, " He asked who comes next and he replied, "Your mother." He asked who comes next and he replied, "Your mother." He asked who comes next and he replied, "Your father, then your relatives in order of relationship." (Tirmizi, Abu Da'ud)

According to the learned scholars of Islam the reason for giving preference to the mother is on account of her exceptional efforts such as the difficulties of pregnancy, delivery and nurturing. Therefore, she alone is blessed to deserve recompense for this in the hereafter as well as greater honour in this life.

Narrated Anas (RA): A man came to the messenger of Allah (PBUH) and said: I longed to go on Jihad but I was not able to. He said: Is either one of your parents still alive? The man said: My mother. He said: Allah has instructed us in devotion to her, so if you do thus, you are as one who has made the Hajj, the umrah and participated in jihad." (At-Tabarani)

"Narrated Ibn 'Abbas (RA): Do not leave your mother unless she gives permission or death takes her, because that is the greatest (deed) for your rewards." (Al-Kabir):

"Narrated Abdullah Ibn Amr Ibn Al-As (RA) about the Prophet (PBUH) that he said: The major sins are associating anything with Allah, and rudeness to parents, and killing anyone and swearing a false oath purposefully." (Bukhari)

Narrated Abu Isa Al-Mughirah (RA) that the Prophet (PBUH) said: Verily, Allah forbade for you, rudeness to mothers." (Muslim)

It is to be noted that the Muslim women enjoy special privileges not only as mothers and wives but also as daughters

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said: "Whoever brings up two girls until they attain adulthood, he will be with me on the Day of Judgment, and so close to me as these two (adjacent) fingers of mine (and he pointed to his two fingers joined together). (Muslim)

Narrated Ibn Abbas (RA): There is no Muslim, whose two daughters reach the age (of adulthood), and he is good to them as a companion, and they do not cause him to enter Paradise." (Bukhari)

Angels Applaud Women

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said: "Each time the baby sucks milk the nursing woman gets the reward as of giving life to a mortal and when she completes the feeding the angels pat her on the shoulders and declare that all her past sins have been forgiven." (Kanz)

Pleasant After-Life Assured

A'isha (RA) narrates the hadith that the woman whose husband is absent and she guards herself in such a manner that she does not adorn herself, and stays home and observes the prayers regularly, will be raised as a virgin on the Day of Judgment. If her husband was a believer she will be his wife in Paradise. If he was not a believer." (Kanz)

The Price of Leadership

A'isha (RA) said that a man does not become the head of the household until he gives up the concern (out of consideration for the other members of his family) about what he wore and what food he ate to satisfy his hunger. (Kanz)

This is an admonition for those who are heedless of their family members due to their preoccupation with food and cloth.

Some Essential Duties of Husbands

Once the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was asked about the obligations of the husbands in relation to their wives, and he said, "You should feed her when you eat; clothe her (in a fitting manner) when you clothe yourself; neither strike her on the face, nor use impolite language (when addressing her), nor separate from her except in the house (should it become necessary)." (Mishkat)

Should there be any argument in the family, the husband is urged not to leave the home, as such a separation would cause distress and worry to the wife.

Husband Forbidden to Hate Wife

Abu Huraira (RA) reported Allah's Messenger (PBUH) as saying; "A believing man must not hate a believing woman. If he dislikes one of her characteristics he will be pleased with another (of her good qualities)." (Mishkat)

Men should forbear any shortcomings of women in view of this teaching and the following Quranic injunction:

"Live with them in kindness; even if you dislike them, perhaps you dislike something in which Allah has placed much good. (Quran 4:19)

Wife Best Treasure of Man

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said: "The best treasure is an obedient wife having a good disposition so that her husband is pleased to see her and she obeys him and when the husband is not home she protects her chastity.

Should an attitude of defiance be adopted (as opposed to that of mutual consultation) it will naturally lead to discord the family which will be ruinous for all. This hadith therefore enjoins loyalty and faithfulness with a promise of a vast reward. (Ma 'Arif al Hadith)

Pleasant Attitude with the Wife

A'isha (RA) has related that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) would enter the house with a pleasing disposition and a smile on his lips. (Uswa-i-Hasna)

Ibn Mastud (RA) said, "Mix with the people on the condition that your religion is not injured, and joke with your family." (Bukhari)

Affinity with the Wife

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said: "O men. There is a reward in your affinity with the wife." (Ibn Hiban)

Tender Dealings with Women

During the farewell Pilgrimage the Prophet (PBUH) said to the camel driver: "Anjasha, drive slowly; for you are carrying (on the camels, women, delicate like fine) glassware." (Muslim)

Narrated Abu Qatadah (RA): The Prophet (PBUH) said: When I stand for prayer, I intend to prolong it, but on hearing the cries of a child, I cut it short, as I dislike to trouble the child's mother." (Bukhari)

To be Educated is an Equal Right with Men

Islam teaches that men and women are equal before God. It grants women divinely sanctioned inheritance, property, social and marriage rights, including the right to reject the terms of a proposal and to initiate divorce. The American middle-class trend to include a prenuptial (**premarital**) agreement in the marriage contract is completely acceptable in Islamic law. During Islam's early period, women were professionals and property owners, as many are today. Although in some countries today the right of women to initiate divorce is more difficult than intended, this is a function of patriarchal legislation and not an expression of Islamic values.

"Allah, Most High, has said in the Holy Qur'an

Among His signs is (the fact) that He has created spouses for you among yourselves so that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has planted love and mercy between you. In that are signs for people who reflect (Quran 30.21

In this verse, Allah has described the creation of women as a token of His Wisdom and Power. As a favour to men, He has revealed that women were created for their benefit, namely peace and comfort. The fruitful end result of all the needs of men associated with women is tranquility, peace and comfort. Therefore the outcome of all conjugal affairs should be peace and comfort. The families which have achieved this treasure are in harmony with the purpose of their creation, whereas homes which lack inner peace, despite possessing the material means of outward comfort, are absolute failures in realizing the real aims of marriage. The object of marriage outlined above can only be achieved if the husband and wife recognize and fulfil their mutual rights. Otherwise quarrels evolve and destroy domestic peace. The nature of husband-wife transactions is such that no man-made law can enforce the complete fulfilment of rights, nor can courts of law do full justice in these matters.

The very first verse revealed to the Messenger of Allah implies, "Read! In the name of your Lord Who has created (all that exists)". (Khan, 2006, p. 182)

This verse doesn't partially encourage the males only to seek knowledge rather very obviously persuades everybody (male and female) looks for knowledge. And Muhammad says that seeking knowledge is inevitable for both males and females; he has also urged us (including men and women) to go even to China, if needed, with a view to seeking knowledge. There is no doubt that the most cited writers of the time are Mary Wollstonecraft, and her famous book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* can unambiguously be called feminist, and in this book Mary Wollstonecraft actually identified the education and upbringing of women as creating their limited expectations based on a self-image dictated by the male gaze. She also writes:

“To conceive, she writes, of a just God who would create a woman and then deny her the rational capacity to seek the knowledge that would make her virtuous—is impossible.” (Wollstonecraft, 2004, pp. xlv)

Wife's Freedom

May thousands of blessings be upon the Holy Prophet (PBUH), a mercy for the worlds, and blessings also upon the true religion of Allah revealed to him. Islam has brought the world out of darkness by establishing the criterion of right and wrong and has taught respect for others. It has established justice and enjoined the rights of women and men as being duties to be performed by each. Islam has bestowed freedom and independence upon women and has also conferred upon them full ownership and authority over their lives and property, like it has upon men. No one, be he a father, a grandfather can oblige a woman to marry someone against her wishes. Should she be married without her consent, the validity of such a contract becomes solely dependent upon her whole hearted acceptance, failing which it is annulled.

It is the wife's right to be provided with a suitable residence which allows her comfort and privacy. To ensure the wife's independence, the Islamic Law (Shariah) has given her the exclusive right over her home, in that none of the husband's dependents or relatives may live in the same dwelling without her willingness and consent.

Providing a separate dwelling may become mandatory even if the in-laws insist on living together. However, if the parents are crippled, they may be included in the family (Durr-I Mukhtar).

Another consideration of the requirements for suitable residence is that the neighbourhood should be of virtuous people amidst whom the wife does not experience fear or loneliness

House women wherever you reside, according to your circumstances, and do not harass them in order to make life difficult for them. (Al Quran 65:6)

Kind and friendly treatment towards the wife's relatives is expected of the husband, so much so that her senior blood relations should also be regarded as his elders. If the wife's parents are ill or incapacitated with no one to serve them, the wife has the right to look after them as often as required even if they are disbelievers. The husband has no right to prevent her from doing so.

Asma (RA) said, "My mother who was a pagan, came with her father during the period of the peace pact between the Muslims and the Quraish infidels. I went to seek the advice of the Prophet (PBUH) saying, my mother has arrived and she is hoping (for my favour)." The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Yes, be good to your mother." (Good treatment implies good behaviour; helping her financially; visiting her etc.) (Bukhari)

Islam has granted both married and single women the incontestable right to retain any wealth or properties in their own names, and they have the unequivocal authority to independently carry out any transactions of acquisitions and sales concerning such holdings.

Thus no male has the authority to spend from the wealth and property of a female without her permission. Women remain fully independent and cannot be coerced in any way. Even in the event of divorce or their husband's death, women get their share of inheritance as stipulated by Islamic Law in the same way as men get their share. However, unlike men, women are not responsible for maintaining any relative, irrespective of their sound financial standing. The husband is not at liberty to help his relatives at the detriment of his own family.

Narrated Abu Huraira (RA): Allah's Apostle (PBUH) said, "The best alms is that which you give when you are rich, and you should support your dependents first." (Bukhari)

Abu Huraira (RA) reported Allah's Messenger (PBUH) as saying: Of the dinar (money) that you spend as a contribution in Allah's path, or to set free a slave, or as charity given to a needy, or to support your family, the one yielding the greatest reward is that which you spent on your family. (Muslim)

If the husband does not provide for his family, the wife can take of his wealth what is sufficient for her needs and the needs of her children, in a reasonable way.

The Islamic Law revealed to the Prophet, upon whom be thousands of blessings, teaches that pleasing women and spending for their welfare is a form of worship. Should the husband fail to grant her essential rights, she has the recourse of Islamic Law to secure the same or else compel him to divorce her.

To prevent injustice and distress, it is insufficient to fulfil rights that merely satisfy the letter of the Law. The underlying spirit of the Law is equally important. Therefore, according to Islam the social norms are an additional criterion to determine if the parties are suffering injustice. Hence Islam forbids those attitudes and dealings which inflict injury or annoyance, according to the established norms of society. For example, ignoring someone in a given society might be more painful than in another society. These matters cannot be dealt with in courts of Law. Therefore, they are encompassed by this provision of "social norms."

Removing ladies from the guardianship of men leads to chaos and is in itself a form of encroaching upon women's rights. Just as Islam has checked the cruelty and injustice of violating the rights of women, likewise it upholds that burdening them to fend for themselves and their withdrawal from the leadership of men is an infringement of their rights. Neither can the woman's delicate constitution endure this hardship nor can her management of domestic affairs and her honourable natural function of nurturing her children bear this distraction. Therefore, along with mentioning women's rights, the Quran declares that men are a degree above women, which simply alludes to their obligation of being responsible for women, as explained earlier. There is dire warning for any negligence on the part of men in fulfilling this ordained duty. Allah has warned:

You who believe, shield yourselves and your families from a fire whose fuel will be men and stones. . . " (Al Quran 66:6)

In the preceding verses, the Prophet (PBUH) was enjoined to urge his wives to do good. The above verse emphasizes this as a duty for all Muslims. Men have been exhorted not to be heedless about shaping the character of their family.

When this ordinance was revealed, Umar (RA) mentioned, "O Messenger of Allah! It is understandable to worry about saving oneself from Hell-fire (by avoiding sins and adhering firmly to the Divine Commandments), but how can we save our families from Hell?" Allah's Prophet responded: "This can be achieved by dissuading your family from whatever Allah has forbidden you and by enjoining the deeds which Allah has enjoined on you. Your family can thus be saved from Hell."

The Muslim jurists have explained that it is obligatory to arrange for the religious education and training of the wife and children. Men whose families are ignorant of religion will suffer the most severe punishment in the Hereafter. The following forewarning is included for those who believe in Allah as their Lord on whom we are totally dependent, and who

also believe in the compassion of His Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Beware, each of you is a guardian and each of you will be questioned about your wards. The man is the guardian of his family and will be answerable about every member of it. . . (Mishkat)

CONCLUSIONS

Isn't a careful and attentive perusal on the discussion above enough to opine that if there is feminism in the world, the philosopher and prophet Mohammed (PBUH) is unquestionably the forerunner of this movement? One step attempted by him for the fact that women were graved alive just after their death and the prophet Mohammed (PBUH) managed to take them out of the grave is quite enough to regard him as the precursor of feminism. But other than this, this prophet has said about a number of good news and rewards that they will receive from the Almighty on the Doom's Day. And if it is justified, then it will not be an overstatement to say that if feminism refers to the movement of ensuring the women what they deserve, then the real feminism started with the advent of this prophet; and what started during the end of the 18th century may be or should be termed as what we call Neo-Feminism. (n.d.).

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