

**Islam and Gender Complementarity: A Critique of Radical Feminism and its Impact on the Islamic Family Institution**

**Saeed Akhtar<sup>1</sup>, Adnan Khan<sup>2</sup>, Farman Ali<sup>3</sup>, Ibrahim<sup>4</sup>, \*Mohammad Hussain<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> International Postdoctoral Fellow, IRI, Islamabad, and Lecturer, Department of Islamic Studies and Religious Affairs, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. [saeed111akhtar@gmail.com](mailto:saeed111akhtar@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. [akhan@uom.edu.pk](mailto:akhan@uom.edu.pk)

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. [aleefarman@gmail.com](mailto:aleefarman@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. [ibrahimsocio@gmail.com](mailto:ibrahimsocio@gmail.com)

<sup>5</sup>\*Lecturer, Department of Sociology, University of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (**Corresponding Author**) [mohammadhussain.soc@uom.edu.pk](mailto:mohammadhussain.soc@uom.edu.pk)

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**Abstract**

Islam supports gender complementarity and believes in assigning different roles to different genders based on biological differences and social considerations. Radical feminists, on the other hand, overlook biological and psychological discrepancies and criticize the gender-based division of roles. This study employs the Islamic framework of gender complementarity, supporting its stance with evidence from the Holy Quran, Hadiths, views of classical Muslim jurists, and scientific research. Additionally, the study critically evaluates the gender-equal ideas of radical feminists and seeks to demonstrate that such views are detrimental to the existence of the family, a cherished institution in Islam. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the Islamic paradigm of gender complementarity, as opposed to the radical feminist gender equality paradigm, fosters greater social justice and stability.

**Key Words:** Holy Quran, Hadith, Gender Complementarity, Radical Feminism, Biological Differences, Social Justice, Neuroscience, Patriarchy, Jurisprudence.

**Introduction**

The notion of gender roles has been an integral part of sociopolitical discourse for decades. Islam offers its own unique paradigm of gender complementarity, where men and women do not have equal rights but hold equally important roles as members of the family and society. However, radical feminists do not seem happy with these roles and therefore enthusiastically advocate the abolition of gender-based responsibilities. This study aims to present the Islamic view of gender complementarity and critique radical feminist perspectives that seek to change the traditional Islamic family system.

**Methodology**

To provide a detailed Islamic perspective on gender complementarity, this study employs a qualitative approach and makes a textual analysis, namely the Holy Quran, Hadiths, and the

legal opinions of classical jurists. Furthermore, this study takes the work of prominent feminist texts into account to facilitate a comparative assessment. In this connection, the ideas of Shulamith and MacKinnon have been particularly focused on to demonstrate the ideological discrepancy between the views of radical feminists and Islamic teachings on gender roles. To further improve the Islamic argument, this study takes resort to neuroscience and evolutionary psychological perspectives, which affirm the fact of biological and psychological differences between men and women. These perspectives endorse the Islamic stance on gender complementarity. The study also draws upon the legal corpus of eminent polymaths such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Qayyim. They, and many other such highbrow scholars, have advocated the gender complementarity approach.

Through this comprehensive approach, this study deconstructs the notions of equality propounded by radical feminist theorists. Scriptural Foundation of Gender Complementarity: Islamic teachings with respect to gender roles emphasize justice and mutual responsibilities rather than identical rights and functions. The Holy Quran takes into account the biological and psychological differences between men and women while assigning them specific roles in the family. The Holy Quran highlights their complementary roles in Surah Al-Baqarah

"And women shall have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, but men have a degree over them"<sup>i</sup>

This verse acknowledges the social value and status of both men and women but at the same time recognizes differences in their responsibilities. Similarly, another verse in the Holy Quran distinguishes between the roles of a husband and a wife. The former has been assigned the duty to cater to the financial needs of the family and provide protection and security.

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means"<sup>ii</sup>

The Prophet (peace be upon him), as a role model for humanity, practiced gender complementarity in his interactions with his companions and his wives. His first wife, Khadijah (may Allah be pleased with her), was a successful businesswoman who supported the Prophet (peace be upon him) both financially and emotionally. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) was a profound religious scholar, yet she gladly carried out her domestic chores. The Prophet (peace be upon him) always instructed his companions to take care of their families and emphatically remarked:

"The best among you is he who is best to his wife"<sup>iii</sup>

He told his followers that they had rights over their wives but that they should not forget that their wives also had rights over them.<sup>iv</sup> Some other sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) also highlight the reciprocal responsibilities of both sexes.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) affirmed the duty of a husband to provide for his family by stating that it is a sin for a husband to neglect his wife, whose financial responsibility falls on his shoulders. On the other hand, he highlighted the role of the wife in managing the household and

educating her children. He addressed wives, saying that they would be questioned as guardians about their husband's house and his children.

Drawing on the scriptural teachings and practices of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions (may Allah be pleased with them all), Muslim jurists have argued that gender roles are based on complementarity rather than equality.

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), for instance, maintained that due to their different natural dispositions, Islam assigns distinct responsibilities to men and women. Similarly, Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) emphasized the importance of family structures and the specific roles that men and women must fulfil to maintain social harmony.<sup>vi</sup>

Ibn Qayyim's also advocates the views on the complementary roles of men and women in the family, as he argues that to be fair to the fair sex does not mean bestowing equal rights on them. Rather, justice means meting out fair and just treatment to them in accordance with divinely guaranteed rights which takes in to account their natural disposition.<sup>vii</sup>

Imam Shafi'i also thinks that Islam, in its distribution of roles and responsibilities, considers the biological difference and of both sexes and accordingly gives them rights and impose responsibilities to them.<sup>viii</sup>

Imam Abu Hanifa takes a similar stance, maintaining that while women are allowed to conduct business and play their legal and political roles, their primary domain, actions, and authority lie within the family.<sup>ix</sup>

Ibn katir has similar views on the question of complementarity. He maintains that the cannot have identical roles in the society. While explaining the term *Qiwamah* (leadership of men) he argues that it does not aim to bestow some kind of superior position on men, it rather tasks them with financial responsibilities of the family.<sup>x</sup>

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Imam Malik likewise recognizes the natural differences between the sexes, which necessitate complementarity rather than equality of roles. Ibn Jawzi also argued that men and women are naturally tailored for different roles.<sup>xi</sup> Al-tabari, the prominent exegete, explains the idea of gender complementarity and maintains that men are legally bound to provide sustenance to the family and women are obligated to take care of their children and household responsibilities.<sup>xii</sup>

Radical feminism, unlike Islamic concept of gender complementarity, looks upon gender inequality as a downright socially construct and as such must be abolished. Shulamith Firestone and Catharine MacKinnon are two of the most eminent feminists who argue that biological

differences are the main reason for gender oppression. In other words, gender inequality is not only caused by an unfairly constructed social reality but is also embedded in biological disparity. To eliminate such role inequalities, they propose ending women's reproductive role and switching to artificial reproduction. This, they argue, would liberate mothers from the hardships of maternity and enhance their agency in different spheres of existence. Her advocacy for the abolition of natural reproduction will ultimately lead to the end of the family, a cherished Islamic institution. She saw the conventional family system as an oppressive institution that reinforces male authority over women. She strongly criticized the idea of assigning specific roles to women due to biological differences. According to her, the gendered division of labor is unfair.<sup>xiii</sup>

Catharine MacKinnon (b. 1947), another key feminist writer and legal expert, conducted research on the relationship between gender and power. She argues that due to biological differences, men and women receive entirely different social and legal treatment. Additionally, social and legal structures perpetuate power and rights disparity. She condemns the patriarchal roles of women as caregivers and argues that this is a tool of male dominance, not gender complementarity. She specifically criticized legal and social systems that emphasize adherence to norms regarding sexuality and family life, as they help men maintain their dominant socio-legal position. She differs from liberal feminists, who believe that men and women should have equal legal status, and argues that the very legal systems that serve as tools of women's oppression need to be utterly abolished.<sup>xiv</sup>

Radical feminists want to promote identical roles and disregard natural discrepancies between the sexes. They regard motherhood as a form of female oppression. In addition, they see Islamic family and inheritance laws as tools for perpetuating male dominance. Similarly, they prefer gender-neutral parenting to the Islamic model of child-rearing based on gender roles.

However, Islam puts great stock in the family as a key factor in creating social stability. The Holy Quran accentuates the role of the family in providing partners and children with emotional fulfillment, affection, and support.

"And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy" <sup>xv</sup>

The Islamic perspective of gender complementarity is supported by scientific research. Neuroscience informs us that men have different emotional and cognitive proclivities. It is now scientifically established that hormonal and neurological differences impact behavior, communication styles, and emotional reactions. This supports the argument that men and women should have complementary roles.

Evolutionary psychology also seems to be on board with the Islamic paradigm, claiming that both genders develop diverse skills and tendencies. With such distinctive adaptations, men and women need to have different roles, as advocated by the Islamic paradigm of gender complementarity. Islam admits gender differences and legislates laws that accommodate both sexes. Islam treats women with deep respect and protects their economic rights, such as Mahr, inheritance, and business ownership. Women are not ignored in the realm of education, as already alluded to—

Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) was a great scholar of Islam. Islam elevates women to the position of a judge and does not prohibit them from working in administrative positions.

### Conclusion

Seen from an Islamic perspective, their views completely contradict the Quranic model of complementarity. Islam, unlike these radical feminists, acknowledges biological and psychological discrepancies and, at the same time, uses such differences as a means to create a balanced and harmonious family. Such differences are not used as a tool of oppression. Islam considers the family a source of societal stability and moral guidance and fervently advocates its preservation. It does not see eye to eye with radical feminists who advocate gender equality.

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