

# Ethics of Motherhood in Islām and Feminism

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**ABSTRACT:** The physical and psychological developmental differences between men and women's nature are with good reason. Women's integrity lies in moving towards what her nature and disposition dictate. Islām considers motherhood, and its particular ethical criteria, to be one of the greatest manifestations of female integrity, and nurturing the new generation to a woman's most significant task. Parallel to the Human Rights Movement in the West and the Industrial Revolution, another movement – "Feminism" – began to achieve women's rights and establish equality between men and women. This movement, through its discrepancies, has become an all-inclusive ideology with orientations. Based on their fundamental ideas and philosophies such as individualism and sexual freedom, feminist extremists consider motherhood to be the most important factor in the suppression of women. According to them, patriarchy has dominated history, science and society while women's status and unique characteristics have been ignored. Through criticising traditional ethics, they have strived to find new approaches so that at the same time as flattering and attesting the superiority of feminine characteristics, they could spread them throughout general ethical solutions for society. One of their targets in the field of ethics is the ethics of motherhood; they attempt to establish the benevolent and nurturing nature of motherhood as a social blueprint for all human interactions. Islām deems faith, purity,

patience, sacrifice, etc. to be virtues essential to motherhood and considers mothers' bosoms to be the primary and most important factor in conveying values to the new generations.

**KEYWORDS:** motherhood, family, biological differences, feminist extremists, ethics of motherhood, ethics of caring, faith, purity, sacrifice and forgiveness.

### ***Introduction***

God Almighty, in all His Wisdom in the creation of all beings has granted them the necessary developmental and innate abilities to guide them along their path to perfection. As such, "motherhood" is the greatest manifestation of divinity in women, which, if nurtured within its truthful principles, becomes the pinnacle of a woman's perfection and integrity. Unfortunately, in the last centuries, following the spread of modern materialistic views, distance from spirituality, emphasis on personal freedoms, and relevancy of ethical criteria, the enemies of mankind have now targeted the sacred institution of motherhood.

In this article, besides revealing the ominous project of feminism in its radical form, from denying the differences between men and women to rejecting the tradition of marriage, demeaning the male gender, destroying the institution of families and metamorphosing the identity of women, to attempt to create humans through new reproduction technologies, and the dimensions of raising children in governmental organizations, and replacing families with government, we also compare the views of Islām and Feminism about these issues.

### ***Developmental Differences between Men and Women***

Reflection on the Qur'ān and religious scriptures reveals that men and women, in their human identities and that which is a necessity to humanity, are equals. All-Knowing God, in order to preserve the continuation of mankind, divided humans into male and female, and the differences in several

characteristics are the requisite of such division<sup>1</sup> and this difference produces different effects in social life.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The Psychological and Spiritual Differences between Men and Women***

The system of creation has placed each being in an orbit specific to itself and its welfare, to reside within that same natural orbit.<sup>3</sup> In nature, everything has its own special place and a relevant purpose.<sup>4</sup> The munificent Qur'ān also said:

و قد خلقكم اطوارا

We have created you variant. (Sūrah 71:14)

God made women's nature soft and granted them sensitivity and delicacy of feelings, assigning them appropriate duties.

Women are as a plantation for you. (Sūrah 2:223)

### ***Feminism and Biological Differences***

Early feminists respected the differences between women and men. According to them, because of their natural differences, women have certain duties and the government is required to support the "task of motherhood".<sup>5</sup> However, feminist extremists, in order to equalise the roles of males and females, have attacked the matter of gender, considering gender related behaviour to be the result of social-acceptance and not biology.<sup>6</sup> Among the purposes of creating families are satisfying the sexual needs of men and women, psychological serenity for both spouses, passion and compassion between their bilateral interactions, and finally the most important goal: procreation and the need to continue one's seed, which enters families into a new phase.<sup>7</sup>

Islām has several recommendations when choosing a wife and the mother of one's children and suggests qualities and virtues such as faith, wisdom, decorum, purity, dignity of birth and lineage, fertility, ability to satisfy the sexual needs of the spouse, and beauty of visage.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Feminism and Marriage***

Feminist extremists blatantly reject marriage and believe that starting a family is a conspiracy to oppress women further and a tool in the hands of male traditional ethics. They instead promote homosexuality and sexual independence for women.<sup>9</sup>

Feminist extremists, by acknowledging the fact that, women are more active and dominant in sexual matters are attempting to establish a new order to subdue men. They will use any political, educational, commercial, legal, and other means to reach their goals and insist upon them.<sup>10</sup> Approaches to homosexual ethics with the emphasis on "choice" instead of "duty" suggests that instead of the traditional question of "whether this act is good" one must ask "whether this act will aid me in my progress towards self-awareness and freedom". This approach is the most radical in feminist ethics to eradicate completely the dominance of men and push them aside from life's scene, purely to serve personal desire, enjoyment, and self-satisfaction.<sup>11</sup> Groups of homosexuals have frankly announced that a true feminist must be homosexual since there is no need for men.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, an inclination for adultery has increasingly reduced the tendency to marry because when someone could satisfy her sexual needs outside wedlock, she has no intention or motivation to marry. The burden of carrying a child and nurturing children will not encumber women which is a deviation from nature.<sup>13</sup> The successes of this feminist movement include single mothers, a dangerous increase in sexually transmitted diseases, sexual stimulants, abortions, and runaway fathers whose roles in the families are being ignored. They have no decisive rights, waste their lives away in the streets or have aggressive relations with women.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, these results are vindictively anti-child. The fact that children hold a position secondary to men is bad enough but what makes it worse is when children also hold a position secondary to women; an idea that follows the feminists of the third century and ancient Rome – which had a motto: "Live for your-self."<sup>15</sup>

## ***Family***

Family is a "natural-conventional" society which lies somewhere between an instinctive society (such as that of the bees and termites) and social-conventional (such as the civil society of humans).<sup>16</sup> Family is life's first educational institution and the primary centre of important pedagogy.<sup>17</sup> Family is a strongly influential institution that conveys values from one generation to another. Family is the only social structure that deals with its members with love, patience, and care. This force of correlation leads individuals to excellence.<sup>18</sup>

According to Islām, family and its health have many effects on the advancement of society. It is the source of welfare in managing State and humanity.<sup>19</sup> The developing character of a child requires knowledge that someone is there that cares for him more than others, someone that would not only rational but also irrational things for him.<sup>20</sup> The traditional family is indeed a safe house in this cruel world. In return for this support of our children, apart from the natural satisfaction it brings, it enables us to face mortality with notions of being immortal.<sup>21</sup>

Unconditional love and acceptance of a child's uniqueness by the parents, sets the basis for the progeny to discover his wishes and ideals and recognise the path to achieve them more quickly.<sup>22</sup> In the religion of Islām parents must share the responsibility equally of raising the children and adorning them with moral ethics and social decorum.<sup>23</sup> Changing the family system and its related clichés has always been one of the demands of feminists because in their opinion, family is the utmost original institution in which women are placed under the dominance of the patriarchal system.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, emphasis on women's sexual liberty and easy birth control has annihilated the importance and value of the female's body and destroyed the relationship between husband and wife. In the light of feminist education, men expect an equal contribution towards living expenses by women. If a woman simply wishes to be a mother, the public opinion would be that she is neglecting her responsibilities.<sup>25</sup>

## ***Motherhood***

Many of the roles of mothers in the past, such as nursing, counselling, guidance, etc. now require years of specific training and education but in two aspects a mother's role is irreplaceable: one is pregnancy and child-birth and the other is the unconditional love of a mother for her child. On that basis, it can be said, "Mother is the giver of life."<sup>26</sup> Motherhood is a state of human existence with respect to biological necessities. In this view, motherhood is the natural destiny of women and an instinctive function.<sup>27</sup> "Motherhood" usually means caring for the children, satisfying their material, spiritual and emotional needs, and feeling responsible for them.<sup>28</sup> In modern approaches to gender, motherhood is the manifestation of relations which are subject to change through historical, social, economic, and even racial aspects.<sup>29</sup> Even the cultural changes of the second half of the twentieth century to the meaning and structure of paternity have affected the understanding and analysis the issue of motherhood.<sup>30</sup>

The legend of motherly love has several specific aspects which distinguish it from other forms of love; although, socio-cultural norms and values have certain effects on it.<sup>31</sup> Some believe that even the feelings and affection a woman has for her spouse are rooted within her maternal love and are a secondary state of a woman's maternity arising from her instinct of adaptability to situations.<sup>32</sup> In childhood, nothing can replace "mother", and later in life, nothing can be "mother". Any mother and child will understand this perfectly.<sup>33</sup>

Esteemed scholar and sociologist, John Bowlby (1969) believes that a child's dependence on the mother is a sheetrock of the child's personality. Where it is missing, the child will be incapable of having meaningful relationships with others. He stresses that: "A child needs the presence of a mother as much as food and the absence of a mother would subconsciously evoke the feeling of anger and loss in him."<sup>34</sup>

### ***Honour and Dignity of the Position of Motherhood***

There are two categories of verses in the Qur'ān on gratitude for parents; one on the joint rights of mother and father and the other specifically on gratitude for mothers which, in itself, honours the position of mothers.<sup>35</sup>

وقضى ربك ألا تعبدوا إلا إياه وبالوالدين إحسانا

Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him and do kindness to your father and mother. (Sūrah 17: 23)

ووصينا الانسان بوالديه حملته امه و هنا على وهن و فضاله فى عامين ان اشكر لى ولوالديك السى  
الصير

And We have enjoined man in respect of his parents-- his mother bears him with faintings upon faintings and his weaning takes two years-- saying: Be grateful to Me and to both your parents; to Me is the eventual coming. (Sūrah 31: 14)

Then, as a description of a mother's services, the Qur'ān cites her thirty months' endeavour which includes the duration of pregnancy, child-birth, and breastfeeding which is difficult for the mother (from the exegesis of Sūrah 46: 15). A man named Jahmah came into Prophet Muḥammad's (Peace Be upon Him) presence and said, "I wish to go with, to be of service to you in the war and have come to you for guidance." The Prophet asked, "Do you have a mother?" He said, "Yes." The prophet said, "Well, then go be of service to her, for Jannat (paradise) is beneath her feet."<sup>36</sup> It is due to a mother's important position and her great sacrifice that when someone asked the Prophet of Islām, "O Prophet of God, to whom must I do kindness?" He replied, "To your mother." When that man asked again, "And after that to whom must I be kind?" he replied again, "To your mother." When the man asked the third time, "And after that to whom must I do kindness?" the Prophet replied, "To your father".<sup>37</sup>

God, in His Excellence, has combined mothers' hearts and souls of mother with His light of divine mercy to such an extent that none but mothers may understand. His Eternal Benevolence granted mothers tolerance as unyielding

as the Earth to persevere in the face of hardship and difficulty from the moment of conception, pregnancy and birth, to nursing and nurturing the child to the end; such hardships and troubles which fathers could not withstand for even a single night.<sup>38</sup> The Lord, in His Excellence, honoured women with the task of motherhood and granted them the merits of this important task so that all Prophets, Imams, and divine ambassadors soared to the divine presence from the bosom of a woman.<sup>39</sup> This proves that a woman's most important function is motherhood and that all other activities must be done while maintaining the maternal aspect.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Pregnancy***

From the moment the foetus forms inside the mother's womb, the period of motherhood begins.<sup>41</sup> In the holy Qur'an a woman's pregnancy is referred to as follows:

Indeed He created all of you from a single body and from that one body He also a female made so that he might find serenity with her. Whence she joined with him; a slight onus she bore and fared a while as such. When the bearing became heavy, they called upon their God praying that if You should grant us a righteous child, we shall be thankful. (Sūrah 7: 189)

In remuneration of a pregnant mother, it suffices that the prophet of Islām said:

A woman from the beginning of pregnancy to the end of the nursing period is as a soldier of God and if she should lose her life in that time, she will be rewarded as a martyr.<sup>42</sup>

The diet of a mother during pregnancy is of paramount importance. Imām Riḍā (as) said about this matter, "Quince increases wisdom and intellect."<sup>43</sup> There is much emphasis in Islām on a pregnant woman's avoiding both Ḥarām and doubt inducing food. Further, it is ethically recommended for a pregnant woman to avoid wishing malice upon anyone, being envious and looking at al-Marrat (passers by), and, to pray and say psalms, read the

Qur'ān, keep calm, refrain from grief, maintain her Wuḍū' (ablution from minor impurity), and refrain from fighting and arguing.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Nursing***

The mother can nurse the child after birth from the milk in her bosom and nurture the child due to her special maternal psychological characteristics.<sup>45</sup> Imām 'Alī (as) said, "For a baby, nothing holds more benefits than the mother's breast milk."<sup>46</sup> The mother has the right to choose the duration of the nursing period. The Qur'ān leaves the decision of nursing period to the parents:

Mothers shall breastfeed their children for two years, that is, for those who wish to complete the nursing period. ( Sūrah 2: 233)

### ***Feminism and Motherhood***

There is a long history of belittling the revered position of motherhood through the ignorance of mankind; it has taken a new shape in every era according to its conditions and situations. On one side of the spectrum, traditionalist extremists have limited the role of women to childbearing and housekeeping. The anchor to support this idea is the biological differences between men and women. Motherhood is a completely instinctive function, deep-rooted in nature while the men's biology makes them competent for the instrumental roles of satisfying financial needs and interacting with the outside world. In modern approaches to gender, motherhood is a social construct affected by the limited reality of women. Anthropologists have explained how a change in a social situation causes a change in the women's status.<sup>47</sup> Rich distinguishing motherhood as an experience enclosed in women's body, uninfluenced by culture, from the institution of maternity which yields all control to a patriarchic culture. Of these two descriptions, one is forced upon the other. From this point, some feminist extremists have linked the suppression of women to motherhood and consider the biological ability to procreate to be the greatest obstacle for women.<sup>48</sup> The "Goals of the

National Organisation for Women" released a notification defining home-makers as "completely retired from society", deeming raising the new generation to be unimportant.<sup>49</sup>

Firestone suggests that "motherhood" should be eliminated from human culture. In her opinion, new nursing technologies and child-care institutions have ended the need for natural mothers.<sup>50</sup> In order to belittle the position of home-makers, socialist governments such as Canada and Sweden have tried to punish single income families through revenue and taxation laws.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Family Feminism***

Unlike feminist extremists who believe motherhood to be the source of suppression of women, this group focal point is women's ability to bear children. This group, with reference to the fact that the mother-child relationship has a biological aspect, and, that women, in comparison to men, have a closer and more natural bond with children, concludes that the restoration of family and the roles of mothers must exceed all other activities.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Extreme Feminism and Procreation***

This group, based on the principle of "individualism", aiming for personal liberty and independence of women, and, supporting the principle of "equality" for men and women, undermine the natural gender differences, disparage the institution of the family and regard motherhood to be marginal. In their opinion, any legislature in favour of mothers is conforms to the traditional gender stereotypes and causes the suppression of women.<sup>53</sup> Firestone who believes the biological ability to procreate to be the main reason for women's oppression and gender-based role division, writes, "The first objective of a feminine social system is to save women from their reproductive biology by any means possible". Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*" (Vol.2, 2001) says that perhaps one day the participation of men in the process of procreation would become unnecessary ... and to reach this objective is women's desire. This group strongly supports

the rights to contraception and abortion and considers new reproduction techniques such as IVF to be the preferred ways to become pregnant. However, nowadays, many of the victims of these projects are the middle-aged clients of fertility clinics who spend millions of dollars in order to achieve their unattainable dreams of having children.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Abortion***

Feminists believe abortion rights to be vital in women's sexual freedom. Women and politicians have considered this issue from a purely political and not moral perspective, ignoring the ethical issue of the lives of unborn children. Supporters of abortion rights believe that a foetus is a mass of accumulated cells without feelings and not a complete human. The unborn child within the mother's womb is only an irregular matter resulting from the mother's sexual activities. The Supreme Court also approved the right to abortion on the basis of the argument that the foetus in the womb does not yet have the qualities of humanity, and therefore, human rights do not apply to them. Today, in abortion clinics, they cruelly take unborn children's lives and shred their lifeless bodies in disposal machines. Many doctors earn a living through this business, and, by selling the dismembered parts of foetal bodies to cosmetic companies, make a great deal of money.<sup>55</sup>

### ***Day-Care Centres***

Day-care centres are yet another weapon of radical feminists in their battle with "the family". In order to give priority to women's social obligations and free them from the responsibilities of motherhood, they devised free day-care plans to eliminate the need for conventional family. Women would compete with men, patriarchy would cease and everyone would be of an equal standing.<sup>56</sup> Of course, a good kindergarten for a few hours a day, not only does not harm the children, but is also preferable for some mothers.<sup>57</sup> However, the long hours of day-care alter the relationship between mother and child and its pervasive effects may dangerously alter the construct of society.<sup>58</sup>

These major changes in child-rearing, in modern day America, have caused a diminished sense of community and augmented the spirit of individualism.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Feminist Ethics***

Until the end of the eighteenth century, belief in the great chain of existence was based on a strong faith in God, as the source of all things holy and good, from Whom all things begin and to Whom all things return. This chain of existence included the lowest forms of life such as the amoeba to the greatest form such as the Holy Omni-Presence. In this chain, laden with ethical and moral hierarchies, humans are right in the middle and have the ability to fall to the level of beasts by committing acts of ignorance or rise to a higher level, perhaps even to the holy and revered position of receiving Divine messages, through performing wise acts.<sup>60</sup> Before the Copernican, Darwinian, and Freudian dictums struck their blows to the "self-love of humanity", the public opinion of the Man's position in the world was that God created the earth, the heavens, and humans and mankind's main obligation is to be great trustees to the creations of The Lord and live a sacred life according to Judeo-Christian teachings. However, the aforementioned dictums propelled western civilization towards a state in which nothing is absolute.

Therefore, no truth or ethical principle, except self-interest, is worthy of consideration.<sup>61</sup> One of the most definitive signs of the decline of our social, cultural, and – by extension – family ethics; today, is our blatant disregard for moral hierarchies. That constitutes loss of the belief that in all human matters, there is good, better, and best, and that all ethically healthy human communities must adapt themselves and their legislation to this natural belief.<sup>62</sup> Out of all failed interpretations of human and natural realities, relative ethics has reigned out of control and has given us the worst disregard for moral hierarchies; that is, no surprise, because in the era of seeking equality, we have announced that all things, including ethical values, are equal.<sup>63</sup>

Now, in our era the psychoanalytic human has emerged. This particular brand of human beings is characterised as one which "severely rejects the notion of

hierarchy in which all manners of predecessors believed."<sup>64</sup> This act became the major pivotal point in the principal changes from the system of hierarchy to equality. This change could only occur based on the notion that there is no ethical hierarchy, no right or wrong, no good or bad. As soon as these relative ethics emerged as a systematic unit, moral principles were replaced by psychoanalysis. In fact, we live in an anti-cultural society in which we seek freedom from all boundaries and obligations. The religious human sought salvation, but the psychoanalytic human is born to enjoy. Beliefs have surrendered their place to passions and now all nations raise havoc in order to achieve those rights that satisfy these passions.<sup>65</sup>

Nowadays in the west, the individual freedom or moral of "be happy", which is devoid of value, has replaced the meaningful values of obligations towards spouse, family, children, and society. Sexual freedom lost women, men's financial supports in the household. That support enabled women to bear children, provide for them, and should they choose to support them, and raise them on their own.<sup>66</sup>

The essence of the ethical system, that the early feminist strived to preserve, was significantly different from that of modern feminists. At that time ethical principles were based on the family values of men and women. Nowadays, however, ethics are based on independence and autonomy. This matter appears charming at first, but is essentially quite dangerous. Unfortunately, extreme feminism has become propulsion towards this autonomous individualism, and, as a result, served anti-family policies in the government's interest.<sup>67</sup> Thomas Judge, theoretician of disambiguation, fanatically announced that the individual and freedom surpass culture, society, tradition, norms, greater values, obligation, and many other facets of ultra-individualistic realities. The disambiguation philosophy of free will, which is in fact a weapon to protect the individual against the government, has now become a philosophical weapon for radicals to use against the institutions of family and society. Judge strongly believes that all interpretations of reality are of equal validity.

The therapy approach also considers all social pathologies to be the result of sociological arbitration and beyond the help of the individual. In this perspective, family is a failed institution and children are its victims. They replace families with governmental facilities and parents with social workers. Criminologists, also, based on these principles, believe crime to be the outcome of a disturbed family or a plagued society and the criminal merely to be a victim of such circumstances, not someone to be cured or punished.<sup>68</sup> Therefore we see that based on these ideas, the ethical values of the west have changed drastically. They consider carnal virtues such as chastity, generosity, modesty, kindness, sincerity, and so on to be myths, a remnant of the archaic and barbaric eras. They believe chastity to be a pointless denial of carnal desires and natural pleasures, compassion to be the result of a weakness of the heart, and modesty and prudence to be an obstacle to achieving human rights whereas it is only in the light of these virtues that human beings can attain salvation and true happiness.<sup>69</sup>

Nowadays, as a reflection on feminist movements' emphasis on sexual freedom, single mothers have become a cultural anomaly. A great percentage of homicides, suicides, school expulsions, and runaway minors are due to the lack of a parental figure in the person's life, specifically a father figure. In households in which women seek equal treatment, there is often conflict; if women in our society had a correct understanding of the differences in the men and women's roles, they would understand the vital necessity of a family. God has created women with specific traits that make her just as valuable as her male counterpart. In the eyes of God, we are not second-rate or inferior citizens. God's purpose, when speaking of the union of man and woman, was not meant for misuse. He means the men's protection to be nurturing to women, not oppressing or demeaning to her gender.<sup>70</sup>

### ***Maternal Ethics***

This so-called maternal approach to ethics is closely related to women's opinions on ethics. Theoreticians of this approach place emphasis on females'

psychological characteristics and ethical virtues. According to them, a truly gender equal system of ethics, would not be a replica of conditional-obligatory models that are generally based on male experiences. Most of our human interactions are between people who are not equal in power or knowledge. Ethics systems must be based on a model suitable to the routine, daily lives of the general public and not on understandings that are bound to conditional actions. The dynamics of ethical existence are best explained through the models of maternal instincts.<sup>71</sup> Where a parent attempts a relationship with a child, a doctor with a patient, or a confident youth with a distressed and depressed friend, it is not a relationship of two equal economical poles in a business negotiation, but rather the relationship of two individuals with specific weaknesses and strengths.

In Ruddick's opinion, maternal instinct, like any other human instinct, has its own specific method of thinking with its own vocabulary, reasoning, goals, and purposes. The goals of maternal thinking are as follows: caring for, raising, and accepting the child, and protecting the child's life which are "instinctive maternal actions". Infants are delicate and fragile and without proper care, nurture, and clothing, they would not survive. In order for mothers to be able to care for their young, even in the hardest of circumstances, they must possess some ethical virtues such as humility and good-nature.

The second aspect of motherly instinct is rearing and nurturing the child, which does not have a pre-existing model and is coupled with compassion and love. The third and final aspect of maternal instinct is education. Mothers often try to raise their children to be compassionate, model citizens; in Ruddick's opinion, enforcing discipline, protection, education, and good manners in upbringing, is an ultra-virtuous example of "loving care", which is both reasonable and emotional. This love is what causes mothers not to loathe and reproach maternal instincts.<sup>72</sup>

Feminist theoreticians of maternal ethics strive to generalise and make maternal instinct applicable to both men and women. Based on that, anyone can think as

a mother does, whether in family or social matters. According to the supporters of this theory, the reality of war is merely death and the loss of the products of motherly instincts, namely people on whose growth, nurturing, and protection, many years of troubles, hardship, and care has been spent. In contrast, the popular male understanding of war is to achieve victory and power.<sup>73</sup>

E. F. Kitei based his approach of equality in ethics on the concept of "dependence" rather than motherhood. Protecting, worrying and connection with the dependant are the main points in this approach. According to Kitei, the origin of a mother's ethical obligations towards her infant is the relationship of the dependency one in dire need on her who has the position to satisfy those needs. The main distinguishing point of this relationship of dependency, which has a great social foundation and structure, is that it is usually not by choice, but rather assumed to be bound by family ties, the dynamics of friendship, or terms of servitude.

Kitei proposes that the model of the relationship of dependence could and must guide the general policies of human equality. In his opinion, all human beings are equal because they are the products of one or several mothers and at some point were dependent on her or them. He claims that since every person is a mother's child, one must care for and protect the source of this dependence, rather than attempt to weaken the ties that hold society together. He insists that the primary purpose of general policies must be to strengthen the sources of dependence and on the other hand reduce dependence itself.<sup>74</sup>

According to Held, maternal ethics are based on cooperation, compassion, agreement, sharing, and satisfying the needs of others. She believes the relationship between the motherly figure and child to be the model of all favourable human interactions. Her claim is that, there is a significant gap between women and men's ethical experiences. She criticises traditional western ethics in which not only are women's ethics of women ignored but men's ethics are also considered to be non-gendered. Unlike some philosophers of maternal ethics, Held believes that both women and men can

assume motherhood. The fact that men cannot bear children does not mean that they cannot raise children either. Both men and women can and must acquire the views of maternal ethics. Making the ethics of motherhood exclusive to women causes men to become unemotional, dispassionate, and quarrelsome individuals who show these characteristics when placed in positions of power. Held, despite believing that both men and women can assume motherhood, also reminds us that there are qualitative differences between the motherhood of women and men. Women's ability to reproduce is perhaps a sign that they are more responsible for the creation of new individuals than men. However, since men have a part in the conception and creation of a new life, they must also share in its protection and the responsibilities of its growth.<sup>75</sup>

White Beck, in an analysis of motherhood, places more emphasis than Ruddick or Held on the mothers' biology. In his opinion, women's "maternal instinct" causes them to see everything as if revolving around their babies whereas men are different. A father, in spite of his efforts, will not be able to experience motherhood or the fragility and feebleness of infants. The best he can do is to provide support through these experiences and offer his compassion. The different biological experiences of men and women affect their particular emotions towards the child. The physical experiences specific to women deepen their emotions and the strength of their affection and care for the child.<sup>76</sup>

### ***Criticising Feminist Maternal Ethics***

There are two groups of critics of the maternal approach to ethics: feminists and non-feminists. Non-feminist critics oppose the idea of using a special application of a relationship as an ethical model for every interaction. Non-feminist critics are dubious about whether any human relationship can be a model for all human interactions because every human relationship including parents to child, husband to wife, friend to friend, and employer to employee has its own specific criteria. The relationship between those of

unequal status cannot be as a model for a relationship between those of equal status and vice versa.<sup>77</sup>

Feminist critics interfere with the adequacy of the mother and child relationship. According to them, mothers, in a patriarchic society, are surrounded by misconceptions, expectations, and requirements. Is it necessary that, other than for a few exceptions, all women must follow the example of those who have sacrificed everything for the sake of their children? Alternatively, must all people follow the example of good friendship as a relationship?<sup>78</sup>

Others make the criticism that proponents of maternal ethics consider biological mothers to be too ideal needlessly brush non-biological mothers and fathers aside. Another point is that, there are many behavioural differences between mothers. Some of them perform their maternal duties under the most oppressive circumstances; others are negligent or violent towards their children whereas some men or non-biological mothers have better maternal behavior than biological mothers. This group of critics believes that even better role models can be found. Friendly relationships, especially those based upon mutual goals and wishes, can have all that a mother-child relationship offers and more.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Ethics of Care and Its Criticism***

Care has a short recorded history – since the latter half of the twentieth century. Care includes emotional ethics and outlook in relation to another person. Even though this care may apply to animals, institutions, or even ideas and thoughts, it applies primarily to people.<sup>80</sup> Caring for another person requires affection and concern for his or her happiness in a way that one feels at peace and happy when he or she is happy and unhappy and distressed; this state cannot exist unless one person is emotionally involved in caring for another. The care-giver must want the well-being of the charge – hence this protection is done willingly and enthusiastically. Therefore, caring is not due to obligatory servitude or the need to aid another; even though, there may also be these elements to care, but in a more logical and purer way based on one's charitable nature since care also requires

understanding, or at least understanding the needs, well-being, and welfare requirements of another person. At the same time, in caring for another, one tends to consider the charge of troubles and problems as one's own neglecting one's own personal problems and troubles. Therefore, care as opposed to mere concern, enthusiastic care-giving and constantly thinking of the welfare of another, are of ethical importance.

Nell Noddings, who proposes the most complete explanation of care, argues that care is much more than merely being concerned for another. Care requires a strong understanding, or open-mindedness, and sensitivity towards another. When caring for another, one must consider the other as an individual. Caring is not a regular standard of ethics. The importance of care is in the conceptual view that it represents.<sup>81</sup>

Care, as understood in late twentieth century, is not the same as compassion or charity. It is a much more complicated and deeper emotion. It requires a more collective involvement with another person and his or her situation whereas compassion and charity are achieved through humanity.

Carl Gilligan and others reason that women attempt to categorise ethics based on care more than men. In opposition to this view, many feminists argue that reference to any gender differences relevant to important ethical characteristics can once again be associated to the suppression and belittlement of women.<sup>82</sup> Non-feminist critics also argue that even if care is an ethical virtue, and not just a pleasant psychological characteristic that some random people possess, it is essentially a virtue less ethical than justice. This group suggests that replacing a special sense of care with the common ethical principle "helping those in need" is better since principles are more trustworthy than senses.<sup>83</sup>

Theoreticians, such as Robinson, attempt to offer general standards of care to manage society and political fields.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Motherhood in Islām***

According to Islām, mothers are the foundations in shaping family identity. The

status of husbands and children, their happiness or sadness, are solely dependent upon her. Hence it is said that man's ultimate happiness lies in finding a respectable and praiseworthy wife.<sup>85</sup> A child is a gift from God in the parents' safe-keeping. Mothers in particular are responsible for safeguarding this gift.<sup>86</sup> Raising a righteous child is so important that the Prophet of Islām, Muḥammad (S) said: a righteous child is one of the flowers of paradise.<sup>87</sup>

A mother is an ethical and behavioural role model for the child and the child initially learns the philosophy of life from the mother.<sup>88</sup> Mothers have the great responsibility of raising their babies; a good upbringing can ensure a nation's happiness and a poor upbringing can corrupt a society.<sup>89</sup> The woman's lap is that of immaculacy, prominence, purity, and virtue. Women can raise strong youths for the future of the nation.<sup>90</sup> Imām Sajjād(as) said about the rights of children:

Your child's right over you is that you know he is of your being, his good or bad lies with you in this world and you know that you are responsible for his upbringing. Raise him such that you find yourself rewarded when he does well and find yourself punished and discomfited when he does evil.<sup>91</sup>

From an ethical perspective, mothers should know the basics of ethics and virtues, understand them, and apply them to their lives to still positive ethics in their children. Religiously, faith and belief are vital components to a mother's knowledge. Based on them, she can guide her child towards great goals. The mother is responsible for the physical and emotional well-being of the child and must teach the child the ways of respectable conduct towards others.<sup>92</sup>

### ***Lady Zahrā (as), a Multidimensional Role Model for All Mothers***

Contemplating different aspects of the holy Prophet's daughter, as a wonderful wife and most valuable mother, we realize that from a meagre shanty, she raises such children whose luminosity surpasses time and place.<sup>93</sup> Every Thursday night, Lady Zahrā's children would find their mother at

prayer, kneeling and prostrating before God, and praying for each and every Muslim. When they asked her why she did not pray for herself, she said, "First neighbours, then household."<sup>94</sup> In terms of knowledge and combatting ignorance, her moving speech in the mosque of Medina is thoroughly infused with different aspects: history, sociology, philosophy of the extinction of great nations, religious principles (*Uṣūl*) and subsidiaries (*Furūʿ*), leadership, the role of praying and sincerity, and so on, that the world has not yet seen since.<sup>95</sup> From this, we understand that a mother must be an educated and knowledgeable person. A mother's ignorance can have devastating and irreversible effects on a child. Observing the life of the great lady Zahrā, we understand that a woman, with respect to her position as mother and wife, must participate in resolving scientific, political, economic, and social issues.<sup>96</sup>

### ***What Mothers Pass on Hereditarily and through Upbringing according to the Qurʾān***

We can only say about Canʿān son of Noah, who refused to take his father's sympathetic advice in the sight of the signs of Divine Wrath, that he did not have a good mother; the mother's traits passed to the son. In contrast, Ishmael son of Abraham, obeyed the will of his father without complaint because he had a wonderful mother like Hājar, who had, in the years of his father's absence, taught him sincere virtues, religion, and sacrifice.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, Moses' mother was so kind and pure that her name and story have told in the holy Qurʾān (Sūrah 28: 7) and after throwing him in the Nile for his protection, Divine Providence willed that he should reject all wet-nurses and be breastfed and raised by his own mother, thus receiving her guidance and care. (Sūrah 28: 12). Later, even in the Pharaoh's palace, another faithful woman, the Pharaoh's wife, played a role in his upbringing. The Pharaoh's wife, in the palace of corruption, behaved so well and righteously that she became a role model for all believers. (Sūrah 66: 11)

### ***The Paramount Importance of Mothers' Faith and Purity***

A mother, in order to raise her children successfully, must develop faith in order to resist temptation. A mother's faith aids her in the face of problems and her children benefit from peace and mental strength. Faithful mothers control their tempers and hold their tongues when dealing with their children, refrain from associations that might stain their character, and the effects of purity, humility, and grace show upon their faces.<sup>98</sup>

Purity is a virtue that comes from chastising the instinct of lust.<sup>99</sup> With the appearance of this virtue, wisdom and reason overcome lust and desire, and the person can then be free from their bond.<sup>100</sup> Virtues such as humility, grace, and so on are all controlled by chastity.<sup>101</sup> A mother's value is in her purity and servitude to the Divine Will. A mother who is compassionate and wise with her children will never be tainted. The existence of saints in the world is due to the virtue of their mothers and this means that women's purity can have an eternal effect on the world. The Holy Qur'an praises Virgin Mary's purity and chastity to the point that she was deemed worthy of being impregnated by the Holy Spirit. (Sūrah 66: 11)

### ***Motherly Forgiveness***

Essentially motherhood means accepting limitations and obligations, not as a chore, but with pleasure and joy. A mother's work is incompatible with selfishness, egotism, and self-interest. A mother is required to make many sacrifices in order to keep the new generation.<sup>102</sup> This means ethical sacrifice, which is a personal virtue through which one forfeits personal interests in favor of another's.<sup>103</sup> The Holy Qur'an says that those who possess this particular virtue are among those who shall reach salvation. (Sūrah 59: 9)

Furthermore, empathising and sympathising with a child require patience and tolerance which nurses and governesses do not have. Rearing a child and instilling certain ethical virtues in him requires patience and tolerance that only a mother possesses.<sup>104</sup> The mother must look past her desires and this is

exactly the ethical patience that includes resistance against indecent desires.<sup>105</sup> And the reward of those who are patient is immeasurable. (Sūrah 39:10) Another virtue that a mother must possess is meekness. Meekness is a personal virtue through which the self reaches a state of serenity and peace such that rage and anger can no longer easily upset her.<sup>106</sup>

### ***Motherly Love and Kindness***

The joy of motherhood and a mother's serenity and peace in the time she spends loving and caring for her child and performing her maternal obligations is a duty imposed upon mothers by nature and instinct.<sup>107</sup> Some psychologists believe that all aspects of a woman's life which consist of love and kindness and preserving the emotional health of a woman, are closely related to these spiritual niceties.<sup>108</sup> This love that engulfs all of a woman's other wishes, are the reason for her pleasure and joy.<sup>109</sup> Motherly love incredibly lightens the burden of motherhood.<sup>110</sup> Love is excessive kindness which only occurs between two individuals<sup>111</sup> and motherly love is attraction towards a being to whom, the mother gives her whole self.<sup>112</sup>

Motherly love is essential to a child's survival. The mother is the source of kindness, compassion, and safety for the child. A child's self-confidence and peace of mind is dependent upon this feeling of safety.<sup>113</sup> Parents love their child because they consider him to be a version of themselves and their hope of survival... Mother and father strive to discipline and perfect their child to provide all welfare, benefit and happiness for him.<sup>114</sup>

In Islām kindness and love for children has such importance that when one of the Ansār (Helpers) came to the Prophet and asked to whom he must do kindness, the prophet replied, "To your parents." The man said, "They have passed away." The Prophet then replied, "Then be kind to your children."<sup>115</sup> Imām Sādiq (as) also said that God has mercy upon his servants because of a parent's extreme love for children.<sup>116</sup> Motherly love must be unconditional and fulfilling.<sup>117</sup> However, moderation must be maintained in affection; excessive love and kindness spoils the child whereas excessive strictness and discipline harms the healthy character of the child.<sup>118</sup>

### ***Some Ethical Suggestions Made by Islām for Dealing with Your Children***

**Refrain from Insults and Scorn:** Persistently scorning and insulting the child demeans the child's character and provokes his or her stubbornness. Imām 'Alī (as) said, "Excessive scorn and punishment fuels the fires of obstinacy."<sup>119</sup>

**Keeping Promises:** The great Prophet of Islām said, "When you make a promise to a child, you must keep it because children look to you as providers."<sup>120</sup>

**Speaking kindly to a Child:** An Islamic ethical suggestion is to refrain from speaking harsh and impolite words because it may taint the heart.<sup>121</sup> Being angry with a child causes God's anger.<sup>122</sup>

**Emphasis on Kissing Your Children:** The Prophet advises parents to kiss their children and says that for every kiss a parent gives a child, a good deed is written for that mother or father.<sup>123</sup>

**Motherly Discipline:** Mothers must discipline their children kindly and gently, not harshly. Their teachings must be appropriate to the child's level of understanding. When discipline includes dos and don'ts, they must not demean or break the child's spirit. Never compare your child to another or brag about another's achievements in the face of your child's weaknesses. The child must not be shamed when disciplined and his/her dignity must be maintained. Unnecessary discipline weakens a child's self-confidence. When mistakes are repeated, the parents must stop discipline and start seeking reasons. Discipline must guide rather than force, and if ineffective, it must be done through other methods such as story telling or punishment as necessary.<sup>124</sup>

**Playing with the Child:** Adults playing with children is educationally import. The Holy Prophet (S) said:

He who has a child in his care, must behave like a child in bringing him up.<sup>125</sup>

The mother can stimulate the child's imagination and creativeness when playing, teach him the importance of rules and respect for regulations, and help him learn new and unknown things, and peaceful co-existence.

**Telling Children Stories:** The Qur'an considers storytelling to be a teaching method (Sūrah 12: 111). Mothers can teach important ethical and theological lessons through stories. However, stories must be appropriate to the child's age, understanding, and psychological state, and have an educational purpose, be free of lies and departures from reality, and answer any reasonable questions the child may have.<sup>126</sup>

**The Child's Education:** Imām 'Alī (as) said, "A child's heart is as an empty land. Whatever you sow there will be accepted."<sup>127</sup> The Lord Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an, "God brought you forth from your mothers' wombs while you knew naught." (Sūrah 16: 78). Human beings, in any stage of growth, require a teacher and guide. The child's very first teacher is his or her mother.<sup>128</sup> Teaching religious essentials is also one of parent's most important duties. Imām Sādiq (as) said, "Teach your children ḥadith as early as possible before enemies get in ahead of you and corrupt your children's hearts with their false words."<sup>129</sup>

**Do Not Discriminate Between Your Children:** The Holy Prophet suggests that you keep God in mind and treat your children equally. God praises equal treatment of one's children even in relation to kissing them; He also emphasizes not discriminating when giving gifts to one's children.<sup>130</sup>

**Consulting Your Child:** During adolescence, when the child's mind is developing, it is commendable for parents to consult their children; it helps keep them free of tyranny and peremptory actions and strengthen their ability to make decisions. The Holy Prophet (S) strongly recommends parents' consulting their children between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one (the third septennial of their lives).<sup>131</sup>

**Keeping Children in Separate Beds:** In order to follow proper child-rearing protocols and prevent sexual perversion from a tender age and the

severity of satanic temptation, two boys, two girls, or a boy and a girl cannot, according to Islām, sleep in the same bed. There must be a barrier between them to separate them.<sup>132</sup> Mothers are not even allowed to sleep without reserve in the same bed as their daughters over the age of six.<sup>133</sup>

**Social Etiquette:** The Holy Prophet recommends us teaching our children proper etiquette.<sup>134</sup> We must teach our children to sit properly in public, not to complain and whine, be silent unless spoken to, not to lie and not to swear oaths whether true or false. Where elderly people are present, he must listen rather than speak and not say profane or improper things. He should not curse or utter vulgarity and blasphemy. He should be trained to speak eloquently and kindly, respect teachers and parents, and treat them with kindness and civility. He should have humility towards everyone, praise and admire those in conduct and interaction with him, and do not participate in corrupt matters.<sup>135</sup>

Finally, to end on a sweet note, we recite Imām Sajjād's prayer for raising children:

O Lord! Bestow thy grace upon me and have mercy on my children; do not deprive them of the gifts of righteousness and reason, and grant me righteous wisdom to raise them virtuously. O God! Adorn my children with the ornaments of insight and faith so that they might hear pleasant words, and speak pleasantly and be obedient to your will.<sup>136</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

God Almighty has created men and women with certain physiological and psychological differences in order to ensure the survival of the species. Biological and psychological researches reveal differences between men and women, and the stroke of creation has given women a delicate nature to assume the revered task of motherhood. However, motherhood is incompatible with feminist ideologies because feminist theories, especially radical ones, though demanding total equality between men and women in all respects, reject or deny there being any differences.<sup>137</sup>

Extreme feminists attack the principle of gender, and consider gender-based behaviour to be the result of social acceptance and not physiology. If the nature of men and women were identical, the effects of it would have appeared throughout the centuries and the women's physiology would have changed to resemble that of men. It is for precisely this reason that western societies have not yet been able to establish equality between men and women.<sup>138</sup>

To achieve their goals, extreme feminists have even gone so far as to claim that reproduction is the main reason for the oppression of women and gender roles in society. Therefore, they propagated homosexuality of women and same-sex marriages whereas natural motherhood requires a dependence on the opposite sex.<sup>139</sup>

They advertise contraception and abortion and believe that the new advancements in reproduction to be the most efficient way to procreate. However,

If humanity reaches a state of scientific advancement where procreation can be done without satisfying sexual needs and without the loving and spiritual relationship between mother and father, it will not last very long because what preserves the laws of nature is human instinct. When nature is ignored, it threatens humanity and causes the loss of social order.<sup>140</sup>

Another problem feminism has with the concept of motherhood is based on the notion that in order to establish true social and political equality between men and women, there must be an emphasis on individuality whereas motherhood requires selfless attention to and care for the children which originates from emotional and psychological capacities for love and compassion, awareness of the needs of others, and self-sacrifice.<sup>141</sup>

Based on acknowledging motherhood as a natural and instinctive matter for a woman, the women's primary goal is motherhood, and their sexual activity and

satisfaction are to achieve this aim. However, through relying on the concepts of individuality and self-gratification, feminism seeks ever greater sexual freedom for women, and to make having children out of wedlock something which does not cause infamy. This in turn, causes men not to assume parental responsibility for children and has caused women many problems in raising their children on their own, without any support from men.<sup>142</sup>

So we see that "the feminist movement" has only brought more problems for women. Their problems used to be the result of her humanity being neglected, but their new problems are the result of neglecting and ignoring their natural and instinctive desires, their particular potentials, and their particular function which is in turn, more oppressive to women.<sup>143</sup> According to Islām, not only does motherhood not limit or retard a woman's social activities, but it is also her making and an important priority of womanhood.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, raising a child is a woman's most important and most sensitive obligation.<sup>145</sup> In Islamic scriptures, mothers have a valuable position that men lack. Mothers can raise righteous and civil children to nurture society.

من احيائها فكانما احيى الناس جميعا

Whoever nurtures, it is as if he has nurtured the entire population.

(Sūrah 5: 32)

Ethical virtues deemed necessary for mothers in Islām include: faith, purity, sacrifice, patience, and so on, which develop women's spirituality and bring them closer to the Beloved. Sexual liberalism, self-gratification, and individualism are considered to be terrible ethical traits, linked to mankind's doom.

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