



## ISLAMIC FEMINISM: A MISSION TO RECTIFY THE DISTORTED VISION OF PATRIARCHY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE MALAYALAM MOVIE “ALIF”

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### ABSTRACT

*Islamic feminism is a form of feminism concerned with the role of women in islam. Islamic feminists challenge the patriarchal interpretation of what they call “medieval male consensus” and cite female supportive verses of the Quran and sayings from the hadith to promote the egalitarian ethics of Islam. According to them ,the muslim ideal of the “silent, passive, obedient women” has nothing to do with the authentic message of islam. Rather it is a construction of Ulama, the male Jurist theologians who manipulated and distorted the religious texts in order to preserve the patriarchal system. Thus, this paper strives to present Islamic feminism as an endeavour to challenge the orthodox interpretations of islam with special reference to the Malayalam movie Alif directed by Muhammed koya which tries to reclaim the ideological discourse on women and sexuality from the stranglehold of patriarchy.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Islamic feminist theologians, prophet Muhammed ,patriarchal dominance, Alif-malayalam movie.*

### DISCUSSION

Islamic feminism is a form of feminism concerned with the role of women in islam. It aims for the full equality of all muslims, regardless of sex or gender, in public and private life. Islamic feminists advocate for women’s rights, gender equality and social justice grounded in an Islamic framework. Advocates of the movement seek to highlight the deeply rooted teachings of equality in the Quran and tries to dismantle the distorted vision of Islamic teaching by the patriarchal society. They challenge the patriarchal interpretation of what they call “medieval male consensus” and cite female supportive verses of the Qur’an and sayings from the hadith (sayings and preachings of prophet Muhammed and his followers) to promote the egalitarian ethics of islam. According to Islamic feminists the muslim ideal of the “silent, passive, obedient women has nothing to do with the authentic message of islam, exhorted by Mohammed, the founder of islam. Rather it is a construction of the Ulama, the male jurist theologians who manipulated and distorted the religious texts in order to preserve the patriarchal system. This theme is caricatured in the Malayalam movie ALIF, Directed by veteran film maker Muhammed koya. Really, islam is a natural way of life that teaches that it is through the doings of good deeds that souls find true happiness and peace following the ideology of egalitarianism.

William Montgomery watt (1909-2006), one of the foremost non-muslim interpreters of islam in the west, portrayed prophet mohammed as a figure who rectified on behalf of womens rights and instituted rights of property ownership, education and divorce, giving women certain basic

safeguards which had previously been unavailable to them. Truly, muhammed granted women rights and privileges in the sphere of family life, marriage, education and economic endeavors, rights that helped to improve womens status in society. Under Islamic law, marriage was no longer viewed as a “status” but rather as a “contract” in which the womens consent was imperative. Studies reveal that female education in the Islamic world was inspired by Muhammed’s wives; the founder of islam praised the women of madina because of their desire to grasp the world of knowledge.

The famous second century Islamic philosopher and quadi (judge) Ibn Rushd, known to the west as Averroes, established that women were equal to men in all respects and possessed equal capacities to excel in peace and in war citing examples of female warriors among the Arabs, Greeks, and Africans. But these truths were misinterpreted by the jurist theologians and there by, the marginalisation of the women community was the outcome of it. Surely necessity is the mother of invention; and indeed a problem encourages creative efforts to meet the needs to solve the problem. That means inventiveness and ingenuity are stimulated by difficulty. When muslim women could not cope with the distorted form of islam (exhorted by its founder), they were bound to reclaim the historical context of muslim law and tradition put forwarded by the founder of islam. Thus, the movement of Islamic feminism originated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Egyptian jurist Quasim Amin, the author of the 1899 pioneering book womens Liberation (Tahrir al mara) is often described as the father of Egyptian feminist movement. Through his writing he criticised some of the

practices prevalent in his society at that time, such as polygamy, the veil and purdah (sex segregation in Islam). He condemned them as un-Islamic and contrary to the true spirit of Islam.

Asisha Abd al-Rahman, writing under her pen name Bint al-Shafi ("Daughter of the river bank") was the first modern woman to undertake Islamic feminism. She uses Quranic exegesis to show the rights and privileges of women in the society. Although she did not consider herself to be a feminist, her works reflect feminist themes.

Fatema Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist who was one of the founders of Islamic feminism, whose book *Doing Daily* (1989) is a noted work under this concern, presents a lucid account of the painful sufferings of women community's lives as they struggle against poverty, illiteracy and sexual oppression.

Through her writing, she seeks to reclaim the ideological discourse on women and sexuality from the stranglehold of patriarchy. She critically examines the classical corpus of religious juristic texts, including the hadith and reinterprets them from a feminist perspective. Really, the Muslim ideal of the "silent, passive, obedient women" has nothing to do with the authentic message of Islam. Rather, the activist of this movement recognized that it is a construction of the male jurist theologians who manipulated and distorted the religious texts in order to preserve the patriarchal system. This truth is very much explicated in the Malayalam movie, *Alif* where the jurist theologian Sulaiman Musliar delivers a sermon on men and sexuality in which he advocates for masculine polygamy when a man has an extra penchant of sexual desire; that is diagonally opposite to the teachings of Holy Quran and prophet's instructions. When Fathima, the protagonist of the movie, asks the Ulama, if a woman has same sexual desire as man, how she be satisfied, then theologians call her a "slut". At the same time, appearance of Grandpa, an embodiment of all virtues, is incarnated to establish and expose the true spirit of Islam.

Though Islam tolerates polygamy, it extends certain pre-conditions. Really, polygamy is a great impediment in the development of conjugal intimacy. If a man follows polygamy in a particular condition, he is bound to follow justice and equality among his wives as done by prophet Muhammad. But, whether the weak mentality of the first wife is consoled or not, is an enigmatic question. Nowhere we see any answer to this kind of "unwanted queries". Truly, polygamy humiliates womanhood and render women inferiority and subordinate to men.

Islamic feminists are critical of the subordinate legal and social status afforded to women by law and custom in Islamic nations and communities, but deny that Islam itself is responsible for this state of affairs. They argue that Islam has historically been interpreted in patriarchal and often misogynistic ways, that Sharia law has been misunderstood and misapplied. Islamic feminists strive to cite female supportive verses of the Quran and sayings from the hadith to promote the egalitarian ethics of Islam. They make an attempt to undermine the ideological and political system that silence and oppress Muslim women. They do this in two ways first, by challenging the dominant Muslim male discourse concerning women and their sexuality and second, by providing the "silent women with a voice" to tell her own story.

The film "*Alif*" begins with the expositions of a judgement made by prophet Muhammad, in which he exhorts

that mother figure has prominence than that of father in a family. And the most out of all the sanctioned affairs on the globe, what God hates is, Talaq, divorce. In the film, Abu divorces Fathima and remarries for amazing wealth. He is supported by an Ulama who is a divorce agent in the same locality.

When we go through the film, we would enjoy the invisible presence of Grandpa Jnab Kunhammad Sahib, whose "oracles" on truth of Islam, enables Fathima to face all the atrocities in her life. As a scholar he makes harsh criticism against the mal practices of modern jurist theologians. He says those who try to bury women in invisibility and silence should bear in mind that in any religion the vital victim of religious fundamentalism is the women of that community; he remarks that the fundamentalist deny education to the women, contrary to the true spirit of Islam.

In the film, Sulaiman Musliar stresses that if a lady is not contented with her man, she is absolutely a slut and such women will be fuelling the internal fire. But once prophet declared that a sex worker who quenched the thirst of a dog would be inheriting the heaven. When Fathima reminds this incident to the Musliar, he denies it and scoffs at her. And then he frightens her saying that when a woman raises her voice in a gathering, that heralds the doomsday. Fathima reiterates that all these factors that Ulama attribute to the prophet's sermons now are actually, something that willfully cooked up by the Ulama themselves. Anyway, she succeeds in her attempt to get rid of all worries and impediments in her life. Whenever she feels difficulty to solve any problem, she invokes the presence of Grandpa, and he gives the proper directions in time.

Often, she asks – "did I go wrong"? He tells her that the reverent prophet has rendered women respectability in their personal as well as social life. Grandpa reminds her that though Muslim community has splitted in to many groups they join hands to interrogate the issues of women community, if any issues arise.

By distorting the ideology of Islam, the modern jurist theologians consider women as a commodity, something which anybody can purchase at any time. Prophet Muhammad has sanctioned women too many privileges and rights. She can go to church and has right upon her father's properties, even to participate in a battle.

Fathima gets government job; her ex husband Abu knows about it. Then he approaches Fathima and promises his readiness to protect her; then she closes the door against him and strive to live happily with her family. Now the people of her community begins to admire her brave step to life and Fathima too adores herself.

The director is bold enough to caricature the atrocities prevailed in Muslim community. Here, the appearance of Grandpa and his holy remarks are appreciable. Really, he is the other self of the Fathima herself. Since all virtues are embodied in her. Truly, Fathima has the true spirit of an Islamic feminist.

Thus, Islamic feminism critiques Islamic patriarchy by historicising and reinterpreting sources of scriptural authority.

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