

Rediscovering Balanced Masculinity: Prophetic Role Model of Manhood in Maintaining Compassion, Strength, And Self-Control in Marital Relations
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Abstract

Modernity has a tendency to bifurcate realities and place them into opposites. The same has happened with the modern discourse of women's rights and traditional gender roles. Consequently, it has been torn into "Male vs Female" or better put "Male chauvinism vs Feminism" and has been one of the most debated topics in the talk shows, Aurat marches, and other national or international forums. This stark polarization is essentially getting its inspirational drive from the Western paradigms: the "red-pilled" perspective, which valorizes traditional masculinity but risks distorting it into an unprincipled form of dominance, while the radical adherents of secular feminism, who advocate, to some extent, the subjugation of male identity to feminist ideals. This article aims to argue that both perspectives are flawed due to parochial and myopic ideologies cantered on the valorization of one gender over the other. In contrast, Islam offers a balanced approach rooted in the ideas of love and self-discipline for the sake of Allah. Using the prophetic example and Quranic principles, we argue for a compassionate and balanced model of manhood that is grounded in self-control and mutual love while abstaining from egotistic, anger-driven behavior in the marriage. Through the lens of marital relationships, we criticize the influence of the above-mentioned trends that are shaping the modern discourse on this sensitive issue. By using the interpretive approach, we try to draw examples from the life of the Prophet (peace be upon him) as a role model and standard of masculinity, which harmonizes compassion, wisdom, and strength. This will give us another perspective to approach the issue beyond the false dichotomy of male chauvinism and Islamic feminism.

Keywords: *Balanced masculinity; polarization; Compassion; Seerat; Feminism; Male Chauvinism; Patriarchy*

Section One: Introduction

With the advent of modernization and the project of homogenizing the world to convert it into a global village, Muslim societies have been increasingly affected by Western views and ideologies. Gender roles and family structures are one of the issues under attack in the oriental civilizations. Consequently, in recent years Pakistan has witnessed an ongoing debate about "women issues" in the form of "Aurat March." The onslaught of these modernist ideas often presents a challenge to the traditional Islamic framework, which is rooted in values of balance, harmony, and divine guidance.

While a number of people are embracing so-called feminism though, some people are inspired by red-pilled ideologies as anti-feminist thought. This movement, often characterized

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by anti-feminist rhetoric, promotes a distorted version of traditional masculinity rooted in dominance, aggression, and emotional detachment. Many of its adherents take inspiration from Western male icons and social media influencers who promote a secularized, hyper-individualistic view of masculinity. Thus, youth is increasingly getting trapped into male chauvinism which is another extreme and secular ideology. Amidst all this, Pakistani society is losing the balance that Muslim societies maintained based on the prophetic model, without pitting the two genders against each other as enemies, with each being the usurper of the other's rights.

Youth inspired by them is The Islamic marriage model is outlined for us by Allah, who is the Creator of both men and women, the just and all-knowing. It emphasizes the importance of mutual respect, love, and companionship between spouses and guides them to establish a strong, supportive partnership. The overall nature of the relationship is characterized by *مودة*

مودة (love and mercy), *سكينة* (serenity, peace, tranquillity), and *معروف* (that which is recognized as good, reasonable, and kind). It is meant to be a gentle, loving bond between husband and wife, where both find comfort and peace with each other, existing together in harmony.

Muslims who have embraced feminist ideologies often assert that individuals who express disagreement with feminism may do so due to a lack of understanding of its principles. Additionally, dissenting women are sometimes portrayed as victims of abusive relationships, individuals living in isolated or sheltered circumstances, or as internalizing patriarchal norms--a phenomenon often referred to as "false consciousness." These narratives imply that such individuals have been conditioned or "brainwashed" by the prevailing patriarchal framework, preventing them from critically engaging with feminist perspectives.¹

By examining various examples of the Prophetic character found in both primary and secondary Islamic literature, we aim to delve deeper into the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Through this exploration, we seek to identify a balanced approach to masculinity that transcends the often-polarized views present in secular discussions. The Prophet's life serves as a model that encapsulates strength and compassion, demonstrating how one can embody virtues such as leadership and empathy without falling into extremes. By drawing on comprehensive narratives and teachings, we can uncover a holistic understanding of masculinity that resonates with timeless values and offers guidance for navigating contemporary challenges.

Section Two: Pre-Arabic Conditions of Arab

Before the advent of Islam, the Arabian Peninsula was characterized by a tribal society that was deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms. Women, having no rights and voice in the community, were treated as second-class citizens. They were often seen as mere possessions and were treated like animals. Female infanticide was a common norm as daughters were often considered burdens due to economic strain and the perception that they brought dishonor to the family. The Quran specifically mentions and condemns this practice: And when the girl [who was] buried alive is asked, for what sin she was killed".²

Marriage in society was often transactional. There was little or even no emphasis on emotional bonds, mercy or mutual respect. Rather they had no choice in choosing their spouses and could be inherited as property after the death of their husbands. In this context, women were denied basic rights to property, inheritance, and self-determination. Social injustices were institutionalized, and male dominance was absolute. This grim reality laid the foundation for Islam's revolutionary reforms, which sought to restore dignity and balance to human relationships, particularly within the family.³

Section Three: Prophetic Reforms in Marriage and Family Life

With the advent of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ transformed the societal norms of family life and marriage. These reforms not only elevated the status of women but also redefined the concept of masculinity. He transformed the nature of man from cruel to compassionate and merciful. His reforms shifted the paradigm from transactional marriages to partnerships based on emotional and spiritual bonds. The Quran describes the marital relationship as one of love and mercy: "And one of His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may find comfort in them. And He has placed between you compassion and mercy. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect."⁴

Another key reform was the establishment of women's rights to inheritance and property. The Quran explicitly granted women the right to inherit: "For men, there is a share in what their parents and close relatives leave, and for women there is a share in what their parents and close relatives leave---whether it is little or much. These are obligatory shares."⁵ These reforms empowered women economically and provided them a sense of security and autonomy, which was unheard of in pre-Islamic Arabia.

Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ modeled compassion and patience within his family life. He was known to assist with household chores, mend his clothes, and listen attentively to his wives. His conduct demonstrated that leadership in the family was not about domination but about service and care. For instance, when his wife Aisha lost her necklace during a journey, the caravan was halted at his command, prioritizing her emotional distress over logistical inconvenience.

Section Four: Modern Challenges

In contemporary society, gender dynamics have become a battlefield for ideological debates. Particularly, modernity has created binaries between two genders. The "red pill" movement and radical feminism are two notable trends in this context. Both ideologies tend to address gender inequalities, yet their approaches often exacerbate the division.

The red pill movement has gained significant traction among young Muslims. Most of young people are drawn to its promise of reclaiming "masculine strength" in the face of overarching feminism. Social media influencers often portray themselves as protectors of traditional masculinity and criticize feminism as a threat to men's rights and identities. However, the red pill ideology is fraught with toxic elements. It often distorts traditional masculinity into a caricature rooted in emotional detachment, aggressive dominance, and apathy toward women. This perspective fosters an unhealthy dynamic that is not only antithetical to Islamic teachings but also counterproductive to fostering mutual respect.⁶

In Islam, masculinity is not defined by dominance or insensitivity but by a balance of strength, compassion, and self-discipline. The prophetic model of manhood exemplifies this balance, as it emphasizes mercy, kindness, and responsibility alongside assertiveness and leadership. The red-pill movement's failure to integrate these virtues into its vision of masculinity highlights its fundamental shortcomings.

On the other side of the spectrum, radical feminism often seeks to dismantle traditional gender roles and behavioural structures. It argues that traditional gender roles inherently perpetuate patriarchy and oppression. For instance, radical feminism often promotes complete autonomy and independence for women, framing traditional roles of motherhood and marriage as forms of subjugation. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge the issues that feminism highlights, such as domestic violence, and systematic discrimination, which are real concerns that must be addressed within Islamic society. Amidst these extremes, Islam offers a balanced approach to gender relations. It views men and women as complementary

partners with distinct yet equally valuable roles. The prophetic model illustrates how masculinity and femininity can coexist with love, mercy, and mutual respect,

Section Five: Prophetic model of Patriarchy: A Man is the Shepherd of his Family

"Sexist" has a negative connotation, but in fact, sexism is something innate to all human beings. Sexism means that men and women are different and, as such, ought to be treated differently and according to different expectations. Everyone understands this on an instinctual level and revelation reaffirms these instincts: "And the male is not like the female."⁷

The Prophet ﷺ led a family life which was the embodiment of Quranic principles. Modern feminism which tends to reject hierarchical structures in the family, the authority of the husband, and the marital obligation of the wife is at par with the Prophetic model of patriarchy. Prophet ﷺ constantly maintained a benevolent structure of authority and remained the sole arbitrator between his wives.⁸ This is exemplified by a well-known incident involving a misunderstanding between Hazrat Aisha and Hazrat Zainab bint Jahsh. Instead of taking sides, he acted as an arbitrator---not due to his prophethood, but because he was the husband and decision-maker in the family. He listened to the matter impartially and encouraged reconciliation.⁹

In addition to running the state of Medina as a head and involving in political affairs, Prophet ﷺ maintained an assertive and responsible character in his family life. He was the sole provider of his multiple wives. But his assertive and patriarchal character was always imbued with patience and understanding. Hazrat Aisha, his beloved wife has narrated that he never struck a servant or a woman and never raised his hand except in self-defense.¹⁰

Section Six: Prophetic model of patriarchy

1. Humanity's Perfect Expression

Humanity attains its perfect expression in the Prophet ﷺ. The highest possibilities of our condition are realized and revealed In him, and his life style. According to Murad, this is beauty itself: the word Jamil, beautiful, which is one of his names, refers also to virtue. Ihsan, the Prophetic state of harmony with God, means the engendering of Husn, or beauty.¹¹ Murad, A. H. (1999, April). The Sunna as primordality.

2. Imam Ghazali's Testimony

Imam Ghazali, the great theologian says: 'The Messenger of God ﷺ was the mildest of men, but also the bravest and most just of men. He was the most restrained of people; never touching the hand of a woman over whom he did not have rights, or who was not his mahram.'

3. Balance of Strength and Compassion

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had left a model for his followers that goes beyond the present conception of masculinity. He embodied a balance between masculine strength and compassion and love while interacting with his wife. Contrary to present views of masculinity, He never hesitated to show compassion towards the feelings of his wives and listen to their concerns. In an incident when the Prophet's ﷺ wife Aisha' lost her necklace during a journey, the caravan halted on his command despite the inconvenience it caused to a large crowd of Muslims.¹² This aspect of the incident is often neglected at the cost of another important aspect of it. Prophet ﷺ showed

great sensitivity to his wife's distress and prioritized her emotional well-being over the logistical challenges lurking behind at that time.

4. Rooted in Mercy and Compassion

As Murad¹³ has highlighted even during the most difficult situations with his wives Prophet's masculinity was deeply rooted in the principle of mercy and compassion. He was the shyest of men so his gaze would never remain long in the face of anyone else. At his home if there was roast meat, he would eat; if there was rough barley bread, he would eat it; if there was honey or something sweet, he would eat it; if there was only yogurt without even bread, he would be quite satisfied with that.

5. The Shepherd Model

Prophet ﷺ gave us the model of patriarchy in which an authoritative man has the relation to his family as a shepherd to his sheep, rooted in compassion, empathy, care, and responsibility. Ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, "All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock. A man is the shepherd of the people of his house, and he is responsible. A woman is the shepherd of the house of her husband, and she is responsible. Each of you is a shepherd and each is responsible for his flock."¹⁴

6. Consultation with Wives

The Prophet ﷺ not only consulted with his wives in many worldly and political affairs but rather accepted their opinions on many important occasions. We can see the example of this during the watershed moment of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah when He accepted the critical advice of Umm Salama in implemented it readily.¹⁵

7. Rejecting Modern Toxicity

The most notable toxicity of modern masculinity that has been inspired by the red pill movement is their triumph in hatred or at least showing complete apathy toward women. Muslim youth are being inspired by these icons of social media who justify their masculinity by mocking and laughing at the fragility of women. But the Prophetic character shows us another way, He ﷺ not only publicly acknowledged his love of his most beloved wife Aisha but treasured this affection too.¹⁶ This example from his life tells us that one's love for a woman is not an indicator of weakness and specifically declaring it to the companions and friends is not an act of shame but rather a beautiful trait.

Section Seven: Conclusion

In this study, we have explored that the contemporary debates in the Muslim world about gender issues are torn between two extremes of male chauvinism and feminist ideology. This has led to extremist behaviour towards gender roles and has dismantled the traditional approaches toward familial roles and responsibilities within Muslim societies.

We explored a moderate and balanced model of masculinity exemplified by the life of Prophet ﷺ. Looking through various primary and secondary Islamic texts, we find that Prophet ﷺ gave us a model of manhood that achieves and maintains a balance between manly attributes of strength, vigour, and responsibility towards one's family without losing a deep touch of compassion, care and love towards women. The prophetic model is a beacon of light offering a middle way for the modern Muslim youth which is teetering on the precipice of two extremes of secular ideologies.



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