

## The problem of women in the thought of Malek Bennabi

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### Abstract

Malek Bennabi (may God have mercy on him) believed that the problem of women in Islamic societies is the problem of the individual in Muslim societies, regardless of their gender. He viewed women as one of the two poles of society, the other being men. When addressing women's problems, we must not solve them without considering society. It is a mistake to compare women and men to arrive at quantitative results that indicate their value in society. As for those who have appointed themselves defenders of women's rights, whether by defending their liberation or by keeping them away from society, their motivation is sexual. As for those who call on women to imitate Western women, women there are not in a good position for us to imitate them. The society that forced them into factories has stripped them of their femininity, making them a distorted image, neither a woman in all her femininity nor a man. Society is harmed by their disregard for motherhood and the loss of the sanctity of sexual relations within the family bond, which guarantees the continuation of the human race, which has become threatened in Europe. Malek Bennabi called on feminist movements to select women of good races so that they can consider the future of society before thinking about the future of women and their rights.

**Keywords:** Problem; Women; Think; Malek Bennabi.

### Introduction:

God Almighty created our master Adam (representing the male sex) before Lady Eve, preparing him for guardianship, which is a great responsibility towards the creation that God Almighty would create later. The precedence in creation was to feel a sense of responsibility towards those who come after him. Then God Almighty created Lady Eve (representing the female sex). He created her as a part of our master Adam, peace be upon him. "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women." (An-Nisa: 1). Lady Eve was not created independently, but rather a part of our master Adam, peace be upon him, from his rib, so that he would feel responsible for her. She is a part of him and came after him in creation. Is there competition between them? If the relationship were a competitive one, they would have been created simultaneously, and Eve would have been created independently. Humans feel responsible for those who are part of them, not competing with them. The first role a woman played in her life was that of wife, due to the sanctity of the relationship and the magnitude of the responsibility. If the relationship between a man and a woman were a competitive one, life would have required the continuation of one of them within a framework of competition. However, life requires both

of them, because the continuation of the human race and the mission of succession depend on the presence of both, and there can be no human race without the presence of only one of them.

Women have shouldered responsibility alongside men, as they are equal in the duties of worship. God Almighty has honored them and distinguished them from men with qualities that make them unique in terms of femininity and emotion, and characteristics that distinguish them from the male sex, such as their tenderness and gentleness. This tenderness, gentleness, and femininity have caused women to be wronged and subjected to various forms of injustice throughout human history, especially before Islam, to the point of being judged as inhuman and eliminated by burying them alive, and the confiscation of all their rights, starting with the right to life. They were inherited like property, goods, and estates, and were traded, displayed, and exchanged. They were viewed as a cause of calamity, misfortune, and punishment, and as a necessary evil... etc.

Islam came, and with it came honor and elevation. No law has honored women more than Islam. The Holy Quran named a Surah after them, Surah An-Nisa, and named another after the best women of Paradise, Surah Maryam, peace be upon her. The Holy Quran was revealed in events whose subject was women, such as Surah An-Nur and Argument.

The Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, linked the noble character of a Muslim to his respect for women: "Only a noble person honors them, and only a vile person humiliates them" (Narrated by Ibn Asakir). He recommended women in his Farewell Sermon: "Treat women well" (Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim). He linked the kindness of a Muslim to his relationship with his family when he said: "The best of you is the best to his family" (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi). He also emphasized the necessity of being kind to women: "Be gentle with delicate women" (Narrated by Muslim). Islam restored women's right to life, cared for them, and elevated their status. Men are the sisters of men. The Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, described them as precious companions (Narrated by al-Tabari). He likened them to delicate women, who should be treated with kindness. He made raising and caring for girls a gateway to Paradise and a means of drawing closer to God Almighty. His last words, may God bless him and grant him peace, were a recommendation to treat women well. He even went so far as to say, The necessity of prioritizing the mother in terms of affection, care, and honor, and granting her three rights compared to one right for the father. (The hadith, "Your mother, then your mother, then your mother," narrated by Muslim)

Malik Bennabi, a thinker who devoted his entire life to studying the problems that trouble the Islamic world, addressed the problem of women through his writings, based on his view that they are an active element in the progress of society. He studied their problem, and the problematic that the study raises: How did Malek Bennabi address the problem of women? And from what perspective was this addressed?

### **Chapter One: Introduction to Malek Bennabi - may God have mercy on him -**

#### **First: Birth and upbringing:**

The Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi - may God have mercy on him - was born in the city of Constantine in 1905 AD. He says about his family: "In a poor family, the children are bound to go hungry when the father loses his job, but my mother prevented that by practicing sewing, and thus she was the one who held the money bag that was always empty."<sup>1</sup>

He received his early education in a Quranic school, where he attended for four years. During that period, he also joined the French school and continued to attend his old school to learn the Quran, but he later dropped out because he didn't learn much there. However, he didn't lose touch with Islamic culture, as he began to frequent the mosque, especially on holidays, Fridays, and during the summer, when the Tebesians' audience was divided into two groups:

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<sup>1</sup>Malek Bennabi, *Witness of the Century*, Syria, Damascus, Dar Al Fikr, 2nd ed., 1984, p. 19.

1\_ A group of people stayed in the mosque after the evening prayer to listen to the imam's lessons.

2\_ Others went to local cafes where storytellers recounted tales from One Thousand and One Nights.<sup>2</sup>

He passed his primary school certificate and the scholarship exam, which had a profound impact and significance for a child from the colonies, whose family could not afford to send him to high school.

He moved to Constantine to continue his studies at the secondary level, majoring in Islamic law at Sidi El-Jili School, where his teacher, Martin, enriched his students with vocabulary and instilled in them a taste for writing.<sup>3</sup>

After completing his fourth year in 1924-1925, he traveled to France in search of work, going to Marseille, Lyon, and Paris, but finding no suitable job, he returned.

He returned to Tebessa, where he worked as an assistant in the court. He was then officially appointed as a clerk in the courts of the Aflou district of Oran. He says, "Aflou was, for me, a school where I learned to appreciate the virtues of the still-virgin Algerian people. These virtues were certainly present throughout Algeria, before colonialism corrupted it." Through Constantine, Tebessa, and France, Ibn Nabi (may God have mercy on him) gained scientific knowledge of the dangers of colonialism and its effects on the regions he visited. 4. Therefore, he had the physical experience that enabled him to anticipate the evils of colonialism and its danger to these people living in the golden age. 5. He returned to Tebessa and was transferred to the Chelghoum El-Eid court. 6. He eventually resigned from this position to work with his brother-in-law in a mill. However, an economic crisis struck in 1929, leading them to sell the mill. His father suggested that he travel to France to complete his studies, and so he traveled to France in 1930.

Second: The Parisian Era 1930-1956

Following the example of Algerian students who traveled from Algeria, Malek Bennabi, may God have mercy on him, traveled to France in 1930. He registered for the entrance exam at the Institute of Oriental Studies. In Paris, he joined the "Unité Chrétienne des Jeunes Parisiens." He says, "And now, forty years later, I see with all clarity that the wind that swept me in September 1930 was not pushing me toward a distant adventure, nor toward the social status that a diploma from the School of Oriental Studies would provide me. Rather, it was pushing me to this place where my spiritual formation was complete. It must be said that my conscience was opened to all the problems that occupied my life, even at this hour."<sup>7</sup>

In 1931 AD, he married a French woman who converted to Islam at his hands. He says: "And now, after forty years, when those memories come back to your mind, I imagine that the fates that made me the means by which Khadija learned about Islam, made her the means by which I learned about the authentic face of French civilization."<sup>8</sup>

In 1937 AD, a school was established to teach illiterate people, and he was asked to teach, but the administration prevented him from continuing. During this period, he published his books *Conditions of Renaissance*, *The Direction of the Islamic World*, *The Afro-Asian Idea*, and *Labayk*. After that, he left for Cairo in 1956.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Asaad Al-Sahmarani, Malek Bennabi, a Reformist Thinker, Beirut, Dar Al-Nafayes, 1st ed., 1984, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Witness to the Century, p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> The same source, p. 153.

<sup>5</sup> The same source, p. 174.

<sup>6</sup> The same source, p. 175.

<sup>7</sup> Malek Bennabi, Witness of the Century, p. 211.

<sup>8</sup> The same source, p. 269.

<sup>9</sup> Masoud Ahmed, The Problem of Peace in the Thought of Malek Bennabi, MA Thesis, Ain Shams University, Cairo, 1988, quoted from Anwar Al-Junaidi, A'lam Al-Qarn, Vol. 1, p. 158.

### Third: The Cairo Phase 1956-1963

After this period, Bennabi's relationship with France was severed, and he never visited the country again. In Cairo, he contacted President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and the Egyptian government allocated him a monthly stipend, enabling him to devote himself to his intellectual work.<sup>10</sup>

Bennabi (may God have mercy on him) traveled to Egypt carrying his book, "The Afro-Asian Idea," and published his message "The Algerian People Are Being Exterminated." He also participated in sessions of the Islamic Research Academy, where he published his works in Arabic immediately after writing "The Intellectual Struggle."<sup>11</sup>

Cairo was, for Malek Bennabi (may God have mercy on him), the launching pad for his exploration of the countries of the Arab East. He visited Lebanon and Syria in 1959, where he delivered several lectures at cultural clubs and universities. He also participated in numerous conferences held in Mecca, Kuwait, and Tripoli.<sup>12</sup>

### Fourth: Return to Algeria

Malik Bennabi (may God have mercy on him) did not have the opportunity to return to Algeria until after President Houari Boumediene returned, assuming several positions, including:

- Advisor to Higher Education
- Director of the University of Algiers
- Director General of Higher Education.

He then resigned to devote himself to intellectual work and reform. His interests during this period included theorizing about processes of change and reconstruction, and he published *Algerian Horizons*, *The Problem of Ideas in the Islamic World*, *The Muslim in the World of Economics*, and *Diaries of a Witness to the Century*, in addition to his various articles and lectures.<sup>13</sup>

Malek Bennabi - may God have mercy on him - used to hold a weekly seminar in the capital at his home, which was attended by students and young people from all over the Maghreb and Europe. Bennabi - may God have mercy on him - left a will to the lawyer Omar Kamel Maskaoui to preserve his heritage, publish his articles, and print his books. He also performed the Hajj pilgrimage, passing through Syria where he delivered his lecture that was printed in the book "The Role of the Muslim and His Message in the Last Third of the Twentieth Century" as if it were his last will and testament, before departing to be with his Lord on October 31, 1973 AD, after a journey full of giving and sacrifice.<sup>14</sup>

Section Two: The Axis of Malek Bennabi's Thought.

First: A Brief Reading of Malek Bennabi's Works.

A thoughtful reading of all of Bennabi's works—may God have mercy on him—will reveal that he was striving to revive Islamic civilization, <sup>15</sup>and that this goal occupied the bulk of his attention. He systematically studied it to understand the factors that led to its establishment and construction, the factors that led to its stagnation and stagnation, and finally

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<sup>10</sup> \_ Asaad Sahmarani, *Malek Bennabi, a reformist thinker*, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> \_ Masoud Ahmed, p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> The same reference, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> \_ Masoud Ahmed, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> The same reference, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> \_ Abdul Latif Abada: *Bright Pages from the Thought of Malek Bennabi*, Batna, Dar Al-Shihab Publishing House, 2nd ed., 1984 AD, p. 13.

the factors that led to the beginning of the decline that culminated in the collapse the nation is experiencing at this time.<sup>16</sup>

Ibn Nabih - may God have mercy on him - shouldered the concerns of civilization for a nation mired in decay. He devoted himself to diagnosing the state of the contemporary Arab-Islamic world—diagnosing the ills of Islamic societies—presenting the causes and examining their various aspects and meanings in light of modern social sciences. He analyzed the flaws he saw in the Islamic nation in three dimensions: ideas, people, and things, relying on a systematic and scientific approach to presentation and analysis. Among the ills he diagnosed in the modern Islamic world were: the disconnect between thought and behavior, susceptibility to colonization, atomism or atomistic mentality, inferiority complexes, ego inflatedness, psychosis, and the complex of indulgence and impossibility, importing economic solutions, hoarding, ineffectiveness, literalism, etc.<sup>17</sup>

Malek Bennabi (may God have mercy on him) did not merely diagnose diseases, but rather employed his intellectual education and production to seek solutions to the problems of his nation, whose genius and the value of its civilizational message he discovered in the Holy Quran.

He worked to present a cognitive methodology for resuming civilizational construction after systematically analyzing the conditions of backwardness and dependency and using scientific ideas.<sup>18</sup>

He then proposed a theory for advancement, which is "the theory of civilization." Malek Bennabi's (may God have mercy on him) books outline the means and mechanisms of transformation in which Islam plays a fundamental and pivotal role. "His ideas motivate us, in politics as well as in economics and society, to root the approach and build a culture based on employing developmental energies in the service of society."<sup>19</sup>

If the Muslim's goal is civilization, he cannot achieve it except through renaissance. Therefore, the books of Malek Bennabi, may God have mercy on him, were answers to these questions: What is civilization? What is renaissance? Where do we begin with them? What are their conditions? His approach to answering them was to describe the backward Islamic world and analyze the reasons for this backwardness to arrive at a statement of the conditions for civilizational takeoff and renaissance. Therefore, Bennabi's approach was always toward the necessity of reform.<sup>20</sup>

And through his contemplation of the backward Islamic world, he arrived at a fixed truth, which is: that the Islamic world is experiencing a comprehensive civilizational crisis. It is not an intellectual crisis, nor a political, ideological, or economic crisis... Rather, it is a different crisis. It is a crisis of man, "the post-Almohad man who succeeded the man of Islamic civilization, and who carried within his being all the germs that would produce, in different periods, all the problems that the Islamic world has been exposed to since that time."<sup>21</sup>

And Malik, while standing before all these crises of the Islamic world, sees the solution in a comprehensive change for the human being, which is that the Holy Quran returns to that

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<sup>16</sup>Taha Jaber Al-Alwani, Malek Bennabi and the Movement for Cultural Renewal, Al-Shorouk Al-Thaqafi Newspaper, a weekly supplement issued by Al-Shorouk Al-Arabi, Issue No. 15, week of November 4-11, 1993.

<sup>17</sup>See the book The Destination of the Islamic World, The Birth of a Society, Reflections, The Problem of Culture, by Malek Bennabi.

<sup>18</sup>Hamid Rawaba, Malek Bennabi, the Man of Civilization, Al-Shorouk Al-Thaqafi Newspaper, Weekly Supplement on Al-Shorouk Al-Arabi, Issue 15, Week of November 4-11, 1993.

<sup>19</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, Reflections, Damascus, Syria, Dar Al Fikr, 1985, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>See the conditions of the Renaissance and the direction of the Islamic world, the birth of a society.

<sup>21</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, The Face of the Islamic World, Malek Bennabi, translated by Abdul Sabour Shaheen, Syria, Damascus, Dar Al Fikr, 1st ed., no date, p. 36.

feature of moving life, and that we make the verses of the Quran a living matter that dictates to the individual a new behavior and attracts him to a life of work and activity.<sup>22</sup> "We need to reorganize the vital energy of the Muslim and direct it...and the first thing that we encounter on this path is that the teaching of the Quran must be organized in a way that inspires anew to the Muslim conscience the (truth) of the Quran as if it were new and descended immediately from heaven upon this conscience."<sup>23</sup>

This is a general overview of his books. However, when we examine each book individually, we find his thought issues distributed as follows:

1- Views on the Holy Quran and the Methodology of Interpretation:

We find this in the Quranic phenomenon, where he demonstrated the authenticity of Muhammad's prophecy - peace and blessings be upon him - with indisputable proof, relying on psychological, moral, logical, and rational criteria. He also proposes an effective method of interpretation.

2- Conditions for Civilizational Takeoff and Elements of Civilization:

We find this in his books *Conditions of Renaissance and Birth of a Society*, where he addresses the definition of society and the conditions for a society that engages in civilizational action. He also identifies the elements of civilization, the importance of each element, and its role.

3- Autobiography and Chronicle of the Events of His Time:

We find this in *Witness for the Century*, about which he says, "Perhaps those intellectuals who have lost their grasp of the language of the Muslim Algerian people will be surprised that I am not writing these memoirs for them, but for the Algerian people when they can read their history."<sup>24</sup>

4- The Future of Islam and the Role of Muslims in the World:

He wrote two books on this topic: "The Future of the Islamic World" and "The Role and Message of Muslims in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century." In the first book, he addressed the reality of the Islamic world and its future. In the second book, he explained the role of Muslims and their role in the world: that of representative and that of witness. Both books also outline the path to liberation from the grip of colonialism and subservience to the West.

5- Explaining the Methods of Intellectual Conflict in Colonized Countries and Preparing for Revolution:

He wrote "The Intellectual Conflict in Colonized Countries," "In the Heat of Battle," and "Algerian Horizons." Through these books, he attempted to expose colonial policy and shed light on the real problems that Algerian youth must actively seek to solve.<sup>25</sup>

6- Proposing a political project as a solution for Third World countries:

The Idea of an Islamic Commonwealth and the Afro-Asian Idea. This study demonstrates the possibilities and means that would enable the Islamic world to unite, achieve self-sufficiency, and thus independence in all its forms.<sup>26</sup>

In "The Afro-Asian Idea," he expanded the scope of his study to include the Third World.

7- Algeria after Independence:

He wrote on this topic "A Talk on the New Construction" and "Between Guidance and Perplexity," in which he discussed the post-political independence period.

8- An Analysis of the Problems of Ideas and Culture:

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<sup>22</sup>The Destination of the Islamic World, pp. 178, 179.

<sup>23</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, *The Birth of Society*, translated by Abdul Sabour Shaheen, Syria, Damascus, Dar Al Fikr, 3rd ed., 1986, p. 114.

<sup>24</sup>Witness to the Century, p. 288.

<sup>25</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, *In the Wind of Battle*, Syria, Damascus, Dar Al-Fikr, 1986 AD, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> \_ Abdul Latif Abada, *Bright Pages from the Thought of Malek Nabi*, p. 29.

The mission of culture is to be a method of civilization that motivates man and his four means (the moral principle, aesthetic taste, and practical logic), which is why he gave them great importance in all his books.

He also believes that every civilization has its own style, method, and choice. Islamic civilization, the belief in monotheism connected to the messengers before it, gravitated toward the supernatural and the mystical, toward ideas.

He also discussed the status of ideas and their value in society and civilization.<sup>27</sup>

9- The interconnectedness between moral and economic values:

We find this in the Muslim world of economics, where we see how the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) solved economic problems with moral guidance.

Thus, through an overview of the books of Malek Bennabi (may God have mercy on him), we find in his books either a diagnosis of the ills of the Islamic world (social, psychological, economic, etc.) or a search for solutions to free the Islamic world from the cycle of dependency and backwardness, attempting to chart the path for Muslims to return to the path of civilization after having left it.

Second: The axes of Malek Bennabi's thought (may God have mercy on him)

We can hardly count the topics that Professor Bennabi (may God have mercy on him) addressed through analysis and study, but the central problem around which most of his books revolve is "the problem of civilization."<sup>28</sup>

His interest was focused on diagnosing the ills of the Islamic world, which was floundering in morality and dependency, trying to find solutions to the problems and ills facing the Islamic nation. Therefore, he gave a single title to all his works: "Problems of Civilization."<sup>29</sup>

The focus of Malek Bennabi's thought - may God have mercy on him - is the problem of civilization. Any reflection on the problem of civilization is essentially reflection on the problem of culture. This is because it is the origin of every civilizational transformation in history. He also attributed to it most of the tragedies and catastrophes that befall society in the industrial, moral, political, or military spheres. Civilizational action is essentially a cultural action.<sup>30</sup>

Malek Bennabi - may God have mercy on him - also believed that the driving force of society is the idea that drives it toward civilizational action. He said: "There is a stage in which society is primitive and poor in means. If it is grasped by a fundamental idea that captures its spirit, it becomes integrated into the cycle of history, and its daily efforts are directed toward a higher ideal that gives its ideas a functional role."<sup>31</sup>

If a society is beset by dangers, it is not due to a scarcity of its resources, but rather to a poverty of its ideas. How could it be otherwise, when a society's wealth is not measured by its possessions, but by the extent of its ideas.<sup>32</sup>

Hence, the problem of the Islamic world is a problem of ideas. Since its decline after the Almohad era, it has faced a problem of ideas, not a problem of means. So, the main themes of Malek Bennabi's thought - may God have mercy on him - are:

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<sup>27</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, *The Problem of Ideas*, translated by Bassam Baraka and Ahmed Shabou, Damascus, Syria, Dar Al-Fikr, Algeria, Dar Al-Fikr, 1st ed., 1992, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Bright Pages from the Thought of Malek Bennabi*, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Tayeb Barghouth, *A Call for Communication and Establishment*, Al-Shorouk Al-Thaqafi Newspaper (a weekly supplement issued by Al-Shorouk Al-Arabi, Issue 15, week of November 4-11, 1993.)

<sup>30</sup> \_ Al-Tayeb Barghouth, *The Position of the Cultural Issue in Malek Bennabi's Strategy of Civilizational Renewal*, Algeria, Dar Al-Yanabi' for Publishing and Media, 1st ed., 1993, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, *The Problem of Ideas*, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> The same source, p. 12.

1. The Problem of Civilization.
2. The Problem of Culture.
3. The Problem of Ideas.

#### Third: The Characteristics of Malek Bennabi's Thought

By this, we mean the characteristics that characterized his thought, which we discern in all his books. These characteristics made his ideas, the way he presented various topics, and the way he discussed and analyzed them, distinct from the approaches of other thinkers, whether contemporaries or those who came after him.

The most important of these characteristics and features are:

1. The Analytical Tendency: A careful examination of Malek Bennabi's thought - may God have mercy on him - will reveal that he does not rely on his own ideas or adopt an opinion until it has been adequately analyzed and deconstructed. Malek Bennabi - may God have mercy on him - had a distinct approach to deduction. As Taha Jaber Al-Alwani said of him: "In these approaches, he combines the crafts of a precise engineer who knows how to carry out demolition and dismantling operations and how to transcend them to undertake the task of construction and assembly, taking into account all influences, various tools, and all conditions."<sup>33</sup>

Coordinating ideas helps me do that, and the mathematical style I've learned helps me do that. Sometimes, this style itself became the subject of heated debate between us, when my friend criticized the dryness of engineering thought.

Here, we find him mentioning that he was distinguished by coordinating ideas in his discussions with his friend Hamouda Ben Sa'i, who possessed a broad culture.

The power of analysis allows the thinker to view an idea from many angles. Thus, he doesn't settle for an idea until it is supported by logical, historical, religious, etc. arguments.

Malik Bennabi, the electrical engineer, did not disappear from all the discussions and lectures. Anyone who attended his lectures or read his books will recognize many of the physical, mathematical, and chemical terms that, thanks to him, entered the field of human problems.

Thus, the thinker's scientific and mathematical background prevented him from recounting the details of events and elaborate on them. Rather, his primary focus was on deep analysis and precise observation, combined with the rigor of logic. Therefore, we find him in all his books as a philosopher of history, a social, economic, political, and psychological analyst, and a scholar of religions and geography. He employs all His knowledge in these sciences allowed him to analyze events and not merely look from a narrow perspective. His systematic mathematical background, as we mentioned, aided him in this, as he investigated the depths of things, not their superficial appearances.<sup>34</sup>

2- Systematicity: By this, we mean the absence of contradiction and avoiding betrayal of principles. In all his books, whenever Malek Bennabi (may God have mercy on him) believed in an issue, he continued to emphasize its importance and never backed down. If he arrived at a particular idea, he used all his knowledge to support it and demonstrate its validity and importance. All his books highlight his belief in civilization, culture, and ideas... and we do not find a single book in which he abandons these ideas. Bennabi's ideas (may God have mercy on him) are harmonious, without contradiction, retreat, or betrayal of his principles.

3- Realism: When Malek Bennabi (may God have mercy on him) addressed issues of civilization and culture, the importance and value of ideas in society, and their dangers, and when he addressed the conflict with the West, etc., he was not floating in fantasy or delusion. He proceeded from the reality he lived and from personal experiences. Marira is a model of

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<sup>33</sup>Bright Pages from the Thought of Malek Bennabi, p. 18.

<sup>34</sup>Witness to the Century, p. 252.



what the Islamic world is experiencing. As Abdul Aziz Al-Khalidi says: "Ibn Nabi is not, in reality, a professional writer, or an office worker immersed in inert objects such as paper and words. Rather, he is a man who, in his private life, felt the meaning of humanity in its moral and social form. This is the tragedy that Ibn Nabi felt, with all its intensity and all the harshness he encountered in his personal experiences."

Reality called him to contemplate, analyze, and seek solutions for a nation engulfed in ignorance, poverty, or susceptibility to colonialism, the result of which was direct colonialism.<sup>35</sup>

Writing was not a hobby for Malek Bennabi - may God have mercy on him - but he was dealing with the issue of his homeland, Algeria, and the Islamic nation. Therefore, he used to say: "I am not a writer in the professional sense that involves researching a topic to present it to the people, but I feel a situation surrounding me that pushes me to study it and present it to the people."<sup>36</sup>

4- Multiple perspectives: If we wanted to judge Malek Bennabi, may God have mercy on him, through his writings, we would find him to be a philosopher of history, a sociologist, a psychological, economic and political analyst, and a scholar of the Islamic religion.

He - may God have mercy on him - was looking into all the issues of the Islamic nation and its psychological, economic, social, cultural, etc. Omar Misqawi says: Despite the long time that separates us from the ideas of these lectures, they still address us in our journey towards the future, and Malek Bennabi's reflections on the heart of the problem still motivate us in politics as well as in economics and society to root the approach and build a culture based on employing development energies in the service of society.<sup>37</sup>

5-Ensuring a sound diagnosis: Malik ibn Nabi (may God have mercy on him) was keen to diagnose the problems of the Islamic world, avoiding logical contradictions in understanding real problems. He believed in the necessity of accurately diagnosing problems, because the problems of civilization require careful thought based on the logic of things, rather than on intellectual habits that direct our thinking in a direction unsuitable for addressing the problems we face.

Just as he (may God have mercy on him) was keen to diagnose the various ills of the Islamic world, he was also keen to identify appropriate solutions, which he supported with various pieces of evidence and proof.

### **Section Three: The Problem of Women in the Thought of Malek Bennabi**

First: The Status of Women

Many call for the liberation of women, while others draw comparisons between them and men to arrive at quantitative results indicating the value of women in society, etc. However, Malek Bennabi – may God have mercy on him – was neither of these nor those. His position on the issue of women was based on a hadith in which the Prophet – may God bless him and grant him peace – said: "Women are the sisters of men"<sup>38</sup> .

He believes that "the problem of women is not something we should examine separately from the problem of men. They constitute, in reality, a single problem: the problem of the individual in society"<sup>39</sup> .

Women and men constitute the individual in society. Women are one half, and men are the other. Therefore, the problem of women must be resolved with a solution that prioritizes the

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<sup>35</sup> \_Malek Bennabi, Conditions of Renaissance, p. 6

<sup>36</sup> \_Malek Bennabi, Between Guidance and Perplexity, Damascus, Syria, Algeria, Dar Al-Fikr, 2nd ed., 1988, pp. 63-64.

<sup>37</sup> \_Malek Bennabi, Reflections, Damascus, Syria, Dar Al-Fikr, Algeria, Dar Al-Fikr, 1991, p. 4

<sup>38</sup>Hadith: "Women are like sisters..." Narrated by Ahmad.

<sup>39</sup>Conditions of Renaissance, p. 174.

interests of society. Men and women are the two poles of humanity, and neither has meaning without the other. If men have achieved miracles in the field of art and science, women have created geniuses of men. This is Sumayyah, the mother of Ammar ibn Yasir, being tortured for her conversion to Islam. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, passes by the square and is stopped by the painful sight, so he says to them: "Blessed are you, O family of Yasir, for your destination is Paradise<sup>40</sup>".

Thus, women have a role in history, how could it not? Every great cause leaves its mark on the destiny of humanity, and its echo in history draws noble faces to represent it on the ship of time. The face of women is no less prominent and clear. Indeed, one may find in their own femininity an exciting and influential color that is not found in any other.

If there are women's movements today, they must choose good plants so that their girls do not hinder them. There are fertilizers that help good plants grow, and there are places that only grow rot. The women's movement must choose, to plant its roots, that pure, virtuous soil that produced Lalla Fatima N'Soumer, Soumaya, FadhilaSaadane, etc. This reminds us of the advice of the Messenger of God - may God bless him and grant him peace -: "Beware of the green of the dunghill." They said, "What is the green of the dunghill?" He said: "A beautiful woman in a bad environment."

So, woman is a being who does not live alone, and who raises her problems on the margins of society. Rather, she is one of its poles, and man is the other pole. The two poles cannot be separated.<sup>41</sup>

For all this, the dignity bestowed upon women by Islam, when it saved them from the harsh customs of the Jahiliyyah, must be restored. However, her dignity must be restored so that women may be the masters of society, inspiring men with noble emotions, not the knight who dominates them. "Dominate" here means disputing the position of guardianship.<sup>42</sup>

Malik Bennabi – may God have mercy on him – does not follow the approach of those who despise women and diminish their importance. Rather, he believes that they have a role in society, just as men do. If women fail to fulfill their role, or are diverted from their true function, society will spiral into suicide. Second: Investigating women's problems also requires examining men's problems:

The problem of women in Malek Bennabi's thought should not be examined separately from the problem of men, as they both constitute, in essence, the problem of the individual within society. This is despite the emotional perspectives of those writers who have set themselves up as defenders of women's rights, both East and West.

Third: It is wrong to compare women to men:<sup>43</sup>

It is not serious to draw a comparison between women and men, only to arrive at quantitative results indicating the value of women in society, whether they are greater, lesser, or equal to men. These figures are nothing but a slander against the truth of the matter and pure fabrication.<sup>44</sup>

Fourth: Motives for Calling for Women's Liberation

Malek Bennabi believes that the claims calling for women's liberation by those who claim to be liberating them, or those who demand their exclusion from society, are nothing more than

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<sup>40</sup>The same source, pp. 176-177.

<sup>41</sup> \_Malek Bennabi, *Between Guidance and Perplexity*, Damascus, Syria, Algeria, Dar Al-Fikr, 2nd ed., 1988, pp. 63-64.

<sup>42</sup>Hadith: "Beware of greenery..." Narrated in *Kanz al-Ummal*.

<sup>43</sup>*Between guidance and confusion*, p. 66.

<sup>44</sup> \_Malek Bennabi, *Conditions of Renaissance*, Damascus, Syria, Dar Al-Fikr, 3rd ed., 1969, p. 184.

an expression of subconscious sexual tendencies. The deep psychological motives that drive both sides to express their opinions, and then it will not be difficult for us to understand these motives for what they truly are, are all derived from one thing: the sexual instinct, according to Freud's analysis. This point was the starting point for both groups, but they subsequently took different paths. This reasoning may be apparent to those who demand that women appear in seductive attire, as this awakens their instincts or satisfies their desires. However, those who insist on excluding women from society and who believe in the necessity of keeping them confined to their traditional confines may seem somewhat strange in justifying the psychological motivation for their position as sexual. However, this strangeness quickly disappears when we realize that their thinking has no logical justification other than the moral preservation they cite, behind which the significance of their adherence to women is hidden. Here, instinct speaks through a different lens.

While the discourse about instinct is clear among those who want women to appear in a manner that appeals to instinct, among those who believe that they should not appear in a manner acceptable to human nature, it is difficult to discern the role of instinct in such thinking. However, preventing women from appearing may be a hidden justification for the sexual drive that lingers in the man's soul, driven by the fear that his woman will be shared by another. Thus, he defends his woman, and here the sexual consideration clearly appears in his thinking. Thus, we see that both groups may derive their opinions from a single consideration: instinct, and we have no hope of finding a solution to the problem of women. Fifth: Women's Rights:<sup>45</sup>

In order to solve the problem of women, it must be purged of such tendencies and then resolved with a solution that prioritizes the interests of society. Women and men constitute the individual in society; women are one half of the individual, just as men are the other. The Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Women are the twin halves of men."

God Almighty created them from a single soul, as He says: "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed, Allah is ever, over you, an Observer." (An-Nisa' 1) Men and women are the two poles of humanity, and one has no meaning without the other. While men have accomplished miracles in the fields of art and science, women have created the geniuses of men.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, Malek Bennabi believes that he will address the issue beyond the poetic hymns calling for women's liberation. The problem is not limited to the gentle sex, or to urban girls, or to those from elite families. Rather, it is also related to the advancement of society and the definition of its future and civilization. Therefore, Malek Bennabi believes that we must stop playing on women's rights while addressing their problems. Indeed, we must not grant women rights that are not in the best interest of society.

Sixth: The Women's Veil:

If we ask, "Should we remove the veil?" "Is it permissible for a woman to smoke?" "Or vote in elections?" "Should she be educated?" Our answers to these questions should not be motivated solely by women's interests, but rather by society's needs and its cultural advancement. The goal of exploring women's participation in this society is to benefit from them in raising the status of women themselves. Therefore, it is not beneficial for us to view women's problems from any other perspective. Malek Bennabi responded to those with delicate tastes who believe that this vision causes women to melt into society. However, he responded by saying that granting women rights at the expense of society means the deterioration of society. Isn't she a member of it? The issue is not an individual issue, but rather a societal issue.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, *Conditions of Renaissance*, pp. 185-186

<sup>46</sup>Hadith: "Women are like sisters..." Narrated by Ahmad.

<sup>47</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, *Conditions of Renaissance*, p. 177

#### Seventh: Imitating Western Women:

Muslim women, who until recently wore the "mellaya" excessively, have begun to follow in their social path the path Europe has charted for its women, imagining that this is a solution to their social problems.<sup>48</sup>

Malek Bennabi regrets that Eastern women are so simple when they see their problem solved by such imitation of European women. The problem of women is a human problem, upon the solution of which depends the progress of civilization. Therefore, its solution cannot be merely a superficial imitation of the actions of European women, without considering the foundations upon which European women built their lives.<sup>49</sup>

Is it beneficial for the Muslim woman to be placed in a position similar to her European sister? Some Islamic countries have followed this path, and in their view it represents the movement for renewal in women's lives, which reformers still call for. However, with some consideration, we see that our transition of women from veiled women to unveiled women who read newspapers, vote, and work in factories has not solved the problem, as it still exists. All we have done is move women from one state to another, and we will soon see that this transition has complicated the problem after it was simple. The state of the European woman is not one to be envied. The appearance of the European woman in a form that speaks only to the individual's instinct has raised new dangers, from which we would have liked society to be safe. The problem of offspring in European countries has reached a state that sometimes calls for pity, as it has lost its social organization, such that European society, from which the meanings of sanctification of sexual relations have been erased, considers these relations to be entertainment for idle souls. Thus, it has lost its function as a means of preserving the family and the survival of society.<sup>50</sup>

Here we find a new warning for those who make Europe their paragon of innovation: the problem of European women remains serious, serious even in the minds of women themselves and in their perception of themselves. We can see the seriousness of this issue in one aspect of their lives in Europe: "affection." The dress a woman chooses for herself is a clear indication of the role she seeks to play in society and actually plays.<sup>51</sup> Until recently, European women wore delicate lace clothing, concealing, with their femininity, their secrets, hidden from their feet. They used their modesty as a barrier to prevent them from falling into vice. In this dress, they were the best example of delicacy and politeness in society, as they were the respected lady, the virtuous wife who, with her delicate hands, wiped away the troubles of work from their husbands' souls. Today, however, they wear seductive, provocative clothing that reveals not the meaning of femininity, but rather the nakedness of women. It emphasizes the physical meaning that a society dominated by love for immediate pleasure clings to. In contrast, we find our Muslim woman wearing the "mulla," excessively covering her body in an abnormal manner in some parts of our country, expressing the tendency toward stagnation and backwardness that characterizes our societies. On the other hand, it expresses the hypocrisy and duplicity that sometimes haunts our souls. In both cases, the situation lies somewhere between excess and excess. It is our duty to place women here and there where they fulfill their role as servants of civilization and inspire a sense of beauty and morality—the role for which God has sent them as mothers and wives to men.<sup>52</sup>

#### Eighth: Women's Conferences:

It would be desirable if our women held a general conference to define women's role for the benefit of society, so that they would not be victims of their own ignorance, and of men's

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<sup>48</sup> \_ The same source, p. 178

<sup>49</sup> \_ The same source, p. 179

<sup>50</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, *Conditions of Renaissance*, p. 180

<sup>51</sup> \_ The same source, p. 181

<sup>52</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, *Conditions of Renaissance*, p. 182

ignorance of the nature of their role. This would be more beneficial to us than hollow words that have no scientific meaning.

This is because Malek Bennabi does not view women's problems as something to be solved by the pen of a writer in an article or a book. Rather, he believes that this problem is multifaceted and has a share in every aspect of society. As human beings, women participate in all human production, or so they should be. Planning their lives in society will only be beneficial if we view this conference with care, provided it includes the means to address the problem from all its angles. For example, it must include psychologists, educationalists, doctors, sociologists, scholars of Islamic law, and others. Then we can say that we have established the soundest approach for women's lives, and this planning will inevitably benefit society, because the scholars and thinkers in it are the ones who developed it.<sup>53</sup>

#### Ninth: Women's Work

Our definition of women's work in society is worthy of consideration. It is well known that European women were victims of this consideration, because the society that liberated them threw them into the furnace of the factory and the office, telling them, "You must eat by the sweat of your brow," in an environment rife with moral dangers. They left them in a disastrous freedom, one that benefited neither them nor society. They lost their storehouse of human emotions and their sense of affection for the family, and, with the burdens of work imposed upon them, they became a distorted image of a man, without remaining a woman.

Thus, society was deprived of this important element in the construction of the family, its fundamental component, and Europe reaped the fruits of this disintegrating family: problems of a new kind.<sup>54</sup>

#### Tenth: Polygamy:

Another interesting issue is polygamy. Is polygamy better than monogamy? Or the opposite?

#### Eleventh: The Future of Women's Development:

A sociologist not only studies things as they are, but also attempts to understand their potential. Therefore, when we see Muslim women progressing in their dress and behavior, we wonder: Where are they headed?

Malik Bennabi believes that we do not know where women are headed, nor do we know their purpose, because our society is subject to time and events.

If a Muslim woman is not present in society and aware of its developments, she will leave room for another woman to succeed her, even in the home where she is confined. The trend of marrying foreign women has emerged in our society, a result of Arab women's alienation from society.<sup>55</sup>

#### Conclusion:

Through Malek Bennabi's (may God have mercy on him) research into the problem of women, we find that:

\_ He calls for not comparing women to men, to demonstrate the magnitude of the important roles they play, since both women and men were created to perform a mission suited to their nature.

\_ He believes that the problem of men and women is the same in the Islamic world: the problem of the individual who lags behind civilization.

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<sup>53</sup> \_ The same source, p. 183

<sup>54</sup> In the Wind of Battle, Malek Bennabi. p. 100.

<sup>55</sup> \_ Malek Bennabi, Conditions of Renaissance, p. 183

- \_ He encourages women's movements that crystallize into associations, and calls for the selection of women of good character who do not encourage women to deviate from the path they were created to fulfill.
- \_ He calls for the restoration of the dignity bestowed upon women by Islam, so that they may become the woman who inspires noble emotions in men, not the knight who dominates them.
- \_ If women deviate from the mission for which they were created, society will collapse.
- \_ He distinguishes between the sexual motives of advocates of women's liberation and those who advocate for their exclusion from society.
- \_ Women should not be granted rights at the expense of the interests of society.
- \_ In the hijab, we must consider taste and beauty.
- \_ Western women are not in a position to call on Muslim women to imitate them or follow their example.
- \_ It is necessary to plan for women's progress in society, and to set goals and objectives.
- \_ We view polygamy from the perspective of the community's interest.

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