CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION
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1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

The progress and all round development of a country depends upon harnessing the skills and abilities of all sections of society regardless of caste, creed, religion and sex. Women have been discriminated against for ages and they have not been given equal opportunities in many social, economic and cultural spheres. If we do not involve women in development activities, it not merely obstructs their own development but also affects the progress of the entire nation. The status of women could be the best indicator of a nation’s progress.

Asthana (1974) endorses this view when she says; “the position of women in society is the true index of its cultural and spiritual attainments”. According to Sengupta “women’s role in the various walks of life has contributed to the evolution of values which have counted for what may be described as all-round progress. Her status is the measuring rod in assessing the standard of culture of any age.” Hence for the economic and social growth and development of the nation and community the complementary roles of women and men is highly presses upon.

It is a well-accepted fact that women in general, particularly in India, are not treated well by the society. Whether it is the social status or violence or remuneration for the services rendered or sexual harassment, the women are at the receiving end. There have been a number of researches, discussions and debates to address this issue. These efforts might have contributed in some improvements, but a lot more is still desired to be done. In a society, which is horizontally male dominated; it is a daunting task to
make people understand the importance of due respect and status to women. A society
cannot claim to be civilized and progressive unless it provides a respectful, honorable
and safe to its women folk. There is, no doubt that a number of laws and organizations
are in place to work for the welfare of women. It is, however more important to change
the mindset of the men and also women wherever necessary.

According to UN report (1980), women constitute half of the world’s population,
perform nearly two third of its work hours, receive one tenth of the world’s income and
less than one hundredth of the world’s property. Statistics disclose that women
comprise 66% of the world’s illiterates and 70% of the world’s poor. Although various
ameliorative efforts are being made accordingly for the improvement of the status of
women, there condition has not improved much. UN presented one more report later in
1995-1996. The report clearly states that, the world’s 2.8 billion women remain as the
largest marginalized group. The statistics of atrocities against women of all nations is
indicating the truth, even in 2015, the status of women remains almost as it was in the
past. As such the women struggle all around the world. There is change in the scenario
to some extent in terms of education and economic empowerment, but the reality still
remains the same to say, there is a long way to go for better achievements in this
regard.

Woman has been the oppressed section of the society during the course of history. She
had been exploited in Iraq, Rome, Greece, Arabia, Egypt, India and China. History
gives us ample examples where we can say how women were purchased and sold like
animals in fairs and market places and they were treated worse than animals. There was
a debate for long time regarding whether woman had a soul or not. In Arabia, the very
existence of girl was regarded as a matter of disgrace and to state their cruelty and
insentiveness they use to bury their daughters alive soon after their birth. The widows
in India were delivered to the flames of the funeral pyre of her dead husband. The followers of religion considered women as a source of sin, the pathway which leads to transgression and any relation or contact with her was considered as an impediment in salvation and spiritual development. Most of the civilizations give no place to women in society. She was deprived of social and political rights. In any financial deal she cannot exercise her own free will. A woman is placed under the control of men in all stages of her life, firstly under the guardianship of her father, later under the oppressive rule of husband and lastly under the patron of son. Women wouldn’t dare to challenge their authority she had no court of justice where she could appeal in order to escape from the suppression and tyranny of the men.

“Despite National constitutions and international instruments that proclaim ‘Equal rights for women and men’, there are many instances in which, equal rights to personal status, security, land, inheritance and employment opportunities are denied to women by law or practice. Addressing the resulting constraints for women is important as an end in itself, but it is also essential for formulating effective national strategies for increasing economic productivity and growth, reducing poverty and achieving sustainable resource managements for women. 1

Indian women have been generally being subjected to stifling oppression and stultifying suppression, resulting in their subordination throughout the history irrespective of socio-economic, demographic and religious differences. The inferior status assigned to women is a result of social evaluation of her biological activities of child bearing and socialization patterns existing in our society. The stereotypes are formed on the bases which become part of cultural tradition. Which validate and justify their inferior status and account for their dependency discrimination and degradation. 2
No doubt in some parts of the world, women have been in the role of authoritative rulers. The record of world history shows how empires and governments have danced on her tune. But then also, women were deprived of her due rights as she suffered in silence throughout the course of history. Indian women are also at cross roads as like others in the world of their rights, empowerment and safety. Though the India created the image of ‘SITA’ for worship and role model for Indian womanhood, in the society. But the other side Indian woman has been treated as subordinate person, sexual commodity, unwanted child and a labour without pay. In the family the situation of Indian women is very bleak. Patriarchy is deeply rooted in Indian society. Women have been socially, economically, physically, psychologically and sexually exploited everywhere in India. They have always been given secondary status and ill treatment of discrimination in the context of misinterpretation of religious teachings, or in the name of customs and traditions. This kind of treatment through the ages, leads to their vulnerable and marginalized position in the society. All though different measures for social reform have been taken before independence, and later continued in various forms. The govt of secular India formulated many legislative provisions and also initiated significant policies and programmes for the secure- economic betterment and protection of women, but it does not address the whole women community of India nor succeed to protect them from atrocities. The interventions failed to ensure inclusion of all the women in mainstream development process by decreasing their marginalization in every sphere.

“Marginalization of women from mainstream socio-economic, political and cultural scenario is mainly due to gender biases in the entry of the educational institutions, options for education and training available to girl students and employment opportunities available to the educated and qualified women.”
The modern world has misused the concepts of liberty and equality. There is no doubt that progress of human depends to a great extent on the equality and freedom of both sexes. The societies which places unnatural hurdles in the way of human freedom and create inequalities that are artificial, dies out and degenerates slowly. And truth lays in the fact that freedom doesn’t lie in unrestricted license. Hence equality doesn’t mean a total destruction of diversity which arises out of inborn and natural differences existing between man and woman. The natural and real equality can only be achieved when each individual is entrusted with its tasks that are determined naturally and the qualities which are qualified inherently.

The western civilization has placed undue and exaggerated emphasis on self-assertion and self-expression for the historical reason that its fundamental concepts arose out of struggle against artificial repressions. The result is that the assertive and expressive tendencies of human beings have brought about internal conflicts which threaten to its foundation the very structure of civilization. A balance between self-expression and self-repression, freedom and order, uniformity and diversity should be achieved to put human society on a stable basis. If this is true in the large spheres of human relations, it is equally true in the sex relation of men and women. An expert on sex psychology like Havelock Ellis says: “we have always to remember that the whole art of living lies in a fine balance of expression and repression. For repression- understood in a wide sense and not merely in the special sense sometimes given to it by psychoanalysts is as central fact of life as expression.”

The upcoming research on feminism in the Middle East has set a new trend to the controversial question on status of women in Muslim societies, particularly since the 19th and 20th centuries. In these researches the Muslim women scholars and activists like Saba Mehmood, Fatima Merrnissi, Leila Ahmad and others have raised questions
regarding the meaning of modernity and western culture and its assumed impact on the Middle Eastern women. In these researches they are very careful enough not to talk or come to an generalized statement regarding the status of Muslim women or the patriarchal nature of Islam. These researches are focused on the central theme of importance of women’s rights and identity.

Another very essential target of these researches was to once again examine the theoretical framework which defines women’s domestic role in the Middle East to the realms of traditions and identified their existence in public life as a sign of modernity. They analyzed the modernity and gender politics of 20th century from different perspective in contemporary Muslim society.

Since, the very idea of human rights is believed to be the product of western social culture the Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular find themselves in chaos and confusion, when they question, contemplate on the issue of human rights be it west or other societies. Many Muslim women scholars, advocates and activists who advocate human rights strongly feel that Muslim women are discriminated from birth to grave by their societies. Because of which many Muslim women scholars deviate from the path of Islam. And this deviation further leads them to more darkness and agony. They don’t find any support from their societies instead they are seen and targeted as religious rebels. Hence they find themselves alone and targeted.

**1:2 KEY CONCEPTS:**

**ISLAM:**

Islam is an Arabic word which connotes submission, surrender, and obedience. As a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to God. Another literal meaning of the word Islam is ‘peace’ and this signifies that one can achieve real peace of body and of mind only through submission and obedience to God.
“Islam is summed up in *Shahada*: *Lailaha illallah*; ‘there is no deity, but God’ – affirming God to be one and only one. He is the Absolute Transcendent Creator, the Lord of the universe. The two authoritative sources of Islam are: The *Quran*, the word of God and *Sunnah*, the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

“Every religion designates some element in this world as mediating the other world. For the Greek, the link between the finite man the ultimate scheme of things is rationality. Man through his intellect participates in ultimate reality insofar as his ideas are true. For the Christians the link is the person of Christ. For the Muslims the mediator between man and God is belief, righteousness and virtue. It is in moral behavior what the humans and the divine meet.

“To the general question of who are the saved, the felicitous, the men of final success, the Quran repeatedly answers: “Those who believed and did the good”. The instances in which this expression occurs in the Quran are so many as to obviate any listing to them, so that doing the good things in the world is inseparable from the faith and is tantamount to it as well as to salvation. On the other hand, to the opposite question of who is the damned, the denier of religion, the rebellious, the unjust, the evil, and the Quran answers:

“It is he who violently repels the orphan, who does not urge the feeding of the deprived, who is oblivious of what he says in prayer: the pretender, who stands in the way of assistance to the needy.”(*107: 1-7*)

“Islam thus anchors its moral ideal not only in faith in the transcendent, not in a realm outside of space-time, but on doing the good here and now, on realizing the demands of social justice here and now.
“Islam, as propagated by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), although a religion centered in Mecca, is not an Arabian religion, nor even an Arabian adaptation of Judaic Christian monotheism. On the contrary, the whole function of Islam was to raise both Arabian and non-Arabian religious conceptions and ethical standards to the levels set by the preaching of the earlier prophets. 6

“This unitary conception of the religious message as presented by Islam entails also the whole history of humanity. In a sense Islam was there from the beginning. Adam was a Muslim by the fact that he was the first prophet and that he testified to the oneness of God. This oneness was gradually forgotten as it is in the nature of to forget. But always God send other messengers to renew the message of unity, to bring man to the awareness of the one. Hence there are series of prophets who, although they established religions by different names were in the profound sense Islam. That is why the Quran refers to Abraham as musliman hanifan, that is, Muslim and follower of the primordial religion, although he lived millennia before the Prophet of Islam (Muhammad) and the advent of the Quranic revelation. He is called Muslim by the Quran itself to affirm that the idea of religion based upon Unity of God is not new but is synonymous with the religious history of mankind. There has never been a time when the religion of God which calls man to the one, has not existed in some place or other. But we have a multiplicity of religions precisely because of the gradual loss of this message and the necessity for it being reconfirmed again and again by successive revelations. The supreme reality of Islam contained in the shahada: La ilaha illa Allah (there is no God but Allah), was not invented as a result of the Quranic revelation which descended upon the Prophet in Arabia in the first/seventh century: rather it is an assertion of the truth which has always been, is and will be. 7
“The Islam that was given by Go is not only the elaboration of doctrines and practices, but rather the vivid and personal summons to individuals and societies to live their lives always His presence and to treat their fellowmen always under His judgment.

“The discussion on the meaning of Islam may be concluded with an observation made by Thomas Carlye: “Allah Akbar, God is great’; - and then also ‘Islam’, that we must submit to God. That our whole strength lies in resigned submission to Him, whatsoever He do to us. 8

MODERN FEMINISM:

“Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural, and political movements, theories and moral philosophies, concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. The term “feminism”, coined by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier, and was first used in English in the 1890s, in association with the movement for equal political activists have been concerned with issues such as individual autonomy, political rights, social freedom, economic independence, abortion and reproductive rights, divorce, workplace rights and education and putting an end to domestic violence, gender stereotypes, discrimination, sexism, objectification etc.9

“Feminism is not a singular or unitary concept, but a polyvalent amalgam of diverse, multi-layered, complex, and often, contradictory ideas. There are various approaches to the issue of feminism, which makes it difficult to arrive upon any single definition.

Lisa S Price, in Feminist Frameworks: Building Theory on Violence against Women offers an interesting definition of the term: “Feminism is also a method of analysis, a standpoint, and a way of looking at the world from the perspective of women. It questions government policies, popular culture, ways of doing and being, and asks how women’s lives are affected by these ideological and institutional practices’. It must be acceded, from the onset, that feminism needs to be understood in the plural; exploring
and identifying ‘feminisms’ is therefore a more authentic approach. Feminism address the issue of women’s inferior position in society and seek ways and methods of alleviating the social, cultural, political and economic discrimination that women are subjected to. But the difference in the approach to this central problem contributes to the complexity, diversity, fragmentation and contradictions underlying ‘feminisms’.

The origin of the term ‘feminism’ is uncertain and debatable. The term can be traced back to 1871, when it was used as a medical term to define symptoms of ‘feminization’ of the bodies of male patients. In 1872, Alexander Dumas used it in a pamphlet titled *I’homme femme*, to identify women who believed in a masculine way. And the term had spread through Europe and America by 1910. Thus, ‘feminism’ as a term had conflicting implications in both medical and political discourse.

“The term is made up of two components ‘femme’, ‘woman’ in French, and ‘esme’, which refers to a social movement or a political ideology. It has been a controversial term and many activists struggling against sexist oppression have even rejected the label. In order to classify the shifting movements in the history of feminism, the paradigm of ‘waves’ came into use. Thus, ‘first wave feminism’ is used to signify the feminist movements of the late 19th century and the early 20th century that were aimed at acquiring equal rights for women. ‘Second wave feminism’ refers to the feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s that addressed issues such as women’s employment, role in the family and sexuality, along with their political rights.

It is the second wave of feminism which is refereed in this study as Modern Feminism. “In the 1960s, several factors worked together to bring about a major cultural revolution. Rebellion, the emergence of criticism that doubted the validity of truth and even the ability to assert truth, a shift towards relativism affected the minds of entire generation. These seeds of anti-traditional, anti-orthodox understanding were planted
and watered. It was in the context of this backdrop that the central ideas of ‘Modern Feminism’ were born. 12

The ideas and views of Modern Feminism are discussed in the next chapter.

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY:
The study is spread over five chapters. The organization set up of the study is as follows:

- **Chapter I** is titled *INTRODUCTION* which deals with introduction of the study, the explanation of the key concepts of the study and organization of the study.

- **Chapter II** is titled *REVIEW OF LITERATURE* which as many subchapters as follows:
  - Historical Background of feminism.
  - Waves of feminism.
  - Theories of feminism.
  - Concept of family and marriage in modern feminism.
  - Feminism in India.
  - Status of woman and concept of gender roles in Islam.
  - Socio-economic status of Muslim women in India.

- **Chapter III** is titled *RESEARCH METHODOLOGY* which deals with the statement of the problem, hypotheses, objectives of the study, methodology of study, significance of the study and limitations of the study.

- **Chapter IV** is titled *INTERPRETATIONS, OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS* which highlights the interpretations of renowned scholars and researchers from both the
fields i.e. feminist thinkers and Islamic thinkers and renowned personalities who work for the betterment of Muslim women. Then observations of the study are put forth and then the analysis is presented.

Chapter V is titled CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS where in the conclusion of the study is presented and some suggestions are made at the end of the study.
NOTES:


4. Usman, K.K.(2001). This is Islam. published by forum for faith and fraternity, pg no 1

5. Ibid pg no 5-6

6. Ibid pg no 5-6

7. Ibid pg no 6-7

8. Ibid pg no 7


11. Ibid pg no 2,3.