Chapter 1
Revisiting Feminism and Exploring Islamic Feminism as a Discourse

Of course – I prayed –
And did God care?
He cared as much as on the air
A Bird – had stamped her foot –
And cried “Give Me” –
My Reason – Life –
I had not had – but for Yourself –
‘Twere better Charity
To leave me in the Atom’s Tomb –
Merry, and Nought, and gay, and numb –
Than this smart Misery.
- Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
Introdcution to ‘Sex and Gender’

Women everywhere across the world crave for equal treatment and equal rights as that of their male counterparts. Misogyny is prevalent among human beings from centuries and hence, feminism as a discourse seeking a conscious individual identity for women, has flourished to give voice to the unheard, unnoticed, and exploited part of the human race - women. As a movement, feminism has served incalculable women in the history of humankind in numerous ways. Women through different expressions explain the complex scenario of suppression by patriarchal authorization.

Do you fancy me?
Do I suit and do I meet with your approval and requirements?
Will you endorse my thoughts?
Will you turn these simple breasts to beauty beneath your gaze?
Am I winner? Do I win that stirring in your groin?
Could I become your life’s pin-up and find myself a face?
So do you fancy me? Well I am sick of it.

(qtd. in Linthwaite 55-56).

This short poem by Dina Butler fiercely questions men’s certification of women’s beauty, integrity and individuality in sarcastic as well as furious tone. Women have been conditioned and trained psychologically to look at themselves with a male viewpoint. The poem is simple in words but reveals volumes of psychoanalysis of socio-culturally conditioned women and men; as well as poses questions of deranged women on patriarchy. Sex and gender are very often debated issues of the orb with thousands and millions of opinions versus facts. Simone De Beauvoir’s critical understanding demystifies the term ‘woman’ harshly in Second Sex (1956):

WOMAN? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female – this word is sufficient to define her. In the mouth of a man the epithet female has the sound of an insult, yet he is not ashamed of his animal nature; on the contrary, he is proud if
someone says of him: ‘He is a male!’ The term ‘female’ is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman’s animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex; and if this sex seems to man to be contemptible and inimical even in harmless dumb animals, it is evidently because of the uneasy hostility stirred up in him by woman. (33)

Women are imprisoned in their sex which itself does impose on her certain limitations. Male patriarchy is a socio-cultural phenomenon; from the very birth of a kid, irrespective of sex, the socio-cultural hammering begins and deforms the psyche of an individual forever. Women were viewed as objects in the 14th century with the increasing popularity of “nude” paintings. The thesis on Women’s Poetic Responses to the Male Gaze: Cutting Them Down by Nadine Yonka justifies that those paintings “in 14th century” were usually painted by men with their objects being beautiful, “naked, passively positioned women”. (14) In Ways of Seeing, Berger says that “men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at”, and describes male painters’ psychology while painting a woman, the “person who is the object of their [male painters’] activities – woman – [is] treated as a thing or an abstraction”. And more than this, “the ‘ideal’ spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him” (62).

To understand the artificial and conditioned behavior patterns, Joy Schaverien, on the basis of collected social and anthropological research data, asserts that gender identities suggest that gender has no biological origin, that the connections between sex and gender are not really “natural” at all in Desire and the Female Therapist: Engendered Gazes in Psychotherapy and Art Theory in 1995. (5) The way a woman (or a man) behaves, views, expresses, acts, and reacts – is not natural at all. The male gaze has taught women how to look, act and feel in a way what women should. De Beauvoir’s Second Sex as a manifesto of feminism remarkably stands out which asserts that “one is not born a woman but becomes one” (273). In pursuit of enquiry into women’s subjugation worldwide, she has excavated nuances from history, biology, psychology, anthropology, sociology, culture, philosophy, literature, mythology, etc. which determine and cause an imbalance and thus affirm injustice between sexes. Many feminist scholars throughout the world have used her ideas as a
base for further contemplations. Among the late twentieth century theorists, Judith Butler in her theory uses De Beauvoir’s work to state:

Gender is not only a cultural construction imposed upon identity but in some sense gender is a process of constructing ourselves. To become a woman is a purposive and appropriative set of acts, the acquisition of a skill, a ‘project’, to use Sartrian term to assume a certain corporeal style and significance. (Butler 36)

Hence, determinants of gender are unnatural and transient too. Sex confirms one is ‘female’ or ‘male’ biologically. But gender defines one is ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ and thus create a dichotomy of ‘woman’ or ‘man’ in the society according to their culture. And thus, the seemingly normative gender roles are actually constructed phenomenon.

**Revisiting Feminism**

The word ‘feminism’ cannot be explained by a single phrase or definition. It has very subjective interpretations according to its appropriateness and relevance. It’s been said that today there are as many definitions of feminism as there are feminists. Each definition of feminism is governed by many factors including one’s own beliefs, history and culture. Significantly, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan in “Feminist Paradigms” write and justify the nature of today’s approach towards ‘feminism’ as a discourse which is striking:

If the student of literature in the early 1970s was moved to ask why is there not a feminist criticism, the student of literary theory in the late 1990s might well be moved to shift the emphasis and ask but why is there not a feminist criticism? The frustrations of proliferation can also be construed as the pains of progress, and if the tone of feminist criticism has lost the celebratory solidarity of its early days, it has gained a much needed complexity of analysis. (527) [Emphasis is underlined]

It is crucial to mention that many female activists avoid tagging themselves as feminists while taking for granted all the political and cultural achievements of the
movements initiated by feminism. Culler questions “is this the death of feminism or the triumph of feminism, when principles it fought for go without saying?” (Culler 17) Most certainly, this should be seen as a triumph of this theoretical discourse. The pains and troubles and accusations and controversies have been resulted into a little liberated world for women to live in.

In the literary and theoretical world, the contribution of women was neglected and discouraged while men’s experiences were considered as universal truth. The different feminisms and their emergence can be seen as the necessity of the time and place they belong to. The female writing existed but it was not appraised or critiqued with zestful interest. In Feminist Writings from Ancient Times to the Modern World: A Global Sourcebook and History, Wayne surprisingly, with the evidences of historical records, literary documents and archeological disks, says that “Enheduanna”, “estimated 2350 BCE”, is the first identifiable female poet in history. (1) She was not only a poet but also a priest in the temples of Ur and Uruk, two Mesopotamian cities located near the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in what is known today as Iraq. The poem Inanna 2000 years before the Bible represents the fate of a goddess who questions sexual discourse. These evidences are secured in the University of Pennsylvania Museum which says the first ever written script in Summerian language was done by a woman, Enheduanna. This indicates that female writing existed but critical analysis of such literature or at least recognition of the same became inappropriate. Such investigations done by feminist critics justify their pain, suffering and anxiety through their words.

By studying the status of women in literature and the works of women authors, feminist critics have generated some of the facts in traditional approaches to literature with many significant theories. One may find women’s alienation from the literary canon and the reason may be the fact that the literary works of male authors reflect chiefly a male view of life which is not necessarily women’s experience but considered as universal facts. Feminist critics view literature as a representational art whose function is to picture life, and what is ignored or pushed aside is the part played by language and patriarchy. Consequently, critical approaches influenced by structuralism and deconstruction have challenged the view that language is a stable, predictable medium, and have put into question the notion that writing merely
represents speech, thought or experience. Based on these, feminist critics analyze women’s writings from various perspectives. Different feminisms/ feminist theories have different agendas to counter and to justify literature and life of women writers in broader perspectives. Different feminisms / feminist theories with different ideologies play different roles at different times and place in the world. Their ideological viewpoints cross connect or simply oppose the basic tenets. It is interesting to note these differences with objectivity as every set of belief gets established with its contextual necessities. Feminism in English literature cannot be narrowed down to British writing anymore but to begin the inquiry, British feminist writing can be used to argue that British colonial mind-sets also had to recognize their women’s worth in all the fields via feminist movements and literature.

Unearthing literary history in British literature, many movements and many feminist writers enriched the British literary canon. From “Margaret Tyler’s mild protest about restrictions on women in a 1578 preface to Mary Anne Radcliff’s 1799 attack on male usurpation of female occupations and the prevalence of prostitution” (Ferguson xi), Britain had gone through tremendous patriarchal stances but at the same time, feminist consciousness took over the male monopoly in many fields. Sisterhood and After Research Team writes:

Aphra Behn (1640-89) was one of the first women writers to earn her living by her pen, opening the door to other professional women writers in the 18th century. Most famously, Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters and George Eliot shaped 18th and 19th century literature, and the opinions of the readers who read their work. It is a sign of the patriarchal society of the time that Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot both used male pseudonyms under which to publish their work… Female authors such as Virginia Woolf led the way to modernism and the reinvention of the novel in the early 20th century. (“Sisterhood and After Research”)

From early days to 20th century estimation in a nutshell provides a picture of British feminist discourse. British concepts of liberation and resistance lead these women towards their acceptance as social reformers, subjects or signifiers and more importantly as individuals of importance. Contemporary writers including Doris Lessing have achieved a strong voice to be heard. British Feminism and/or white
feminism is often questioned for not considering differences based on race, caste and class internationally. Their claim to be universally absolute itself turned out to be patriarchal and authoritarian. Thus apart from any nation and time sequence, the growth and development of feminism as a discourse should be viewed by the lenses of different strands of feminist discourses world-wide. Feminism is a theorizing of an ‘ism’ wherein literary theories and practices are importantly in focus. Mainly, one theory of feminism seems opposing another set of feminist thoughts. And as a result, it is ironic to say that a particular feminist theory versus another whereas all the strands propagate equality and gender justice under different domains like economy, class, caste, race, culture, religion etc.

One of the major and important strands of feminism, Radical Feminism propagates that society must be changed at its core in order to erase patriarchy. Radical feminists try to erase the male female gender roles that society has imposed upon them. And eventually, they reject sex-gender ideology, patriarchy and men themselves. They believe in “reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts.” (Willis 117) Radical feminism falls into many categories wherein broadly there are two major schools of thought: Radical-Libertarian Feminism and Radical-Cultural Feminism. Mary Daly, the American radical lesbian feminist, is the epitome of Radical Feminism with her harsh views about men and their dominance. Radical-Libertarian feminists believe that femininity and reproduction limit women’s capacity to contribute to society and so they should be androgynous. They violate sexual norms and thus control every aspect of their sexuality. Radical-Cultural Feminism views are vividly different from Radical-Libertarian feminism views. It advocates that women should encompass their femininity because it is better than masculinity. They contradict their views by establishing a link between sex, female subordination, porn, rape and abuse while believing that reproduction is the source of power for women and men feel jealous of women. (Gardner 187) While Liberal Feminism’s main thrust was on the emphasis of the same educational opportunities and civil rights for women during 1950’s and 1960’s where many Civil Rights movements were taking place. Betty Friedan, the writer of *Feminine Mystique*, the first president of NOW (National Organization of Women) in America, started the sparkling of Second Wave feminism in the 20th century in USA. (Rappaport 234) Liberal feminists create and support acts of
legislation that remove the barriers for women. Equal access to jobs and equal pay can remove the barriers and liberate women.

Socialist Feminism is believed to be an extension of Radical Feminism flourished during 1970s which believes that there is a direct link between class structure and the oppression of women. Western society rewards working men because they produce tangible, tradable goods while women’s work in the domestic sphere is not valued because they do not produce substantial, tradable goods. Marxist Feminism claimed that women’s oppression originated in the introduction of private property and suggested that capitalism itself is the cause of women’s oppression. Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin are famous socialist feminists. Theoretically, for socialist feminists, radical feminism could not justify that the oppression of women is not just the product of male dominance, while Marxist feminism fails to recognize the significance of women’s labor in the private sphere. Many more feminists across the globe have been practising socialist feminism with practical approaches. Eugenie Potonie Pierre in France, Isabella Ford in UK, Kollontai Alexander in Soviet Union, Kuzwayo Ellen in South Africa are just a few names to emphasis the fact that socialist feminism has a wide acceptance as a revolutionary ideology. Eleanor Marx, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx is tagged as a mother of Socialist Feminism who declared that she was “of course, as socialist, not a representative of ‘Woman’s Rights’...The so called ‘Woman’s Rights’ question is a bourgeois idea.” (Holmes “The Making”) She proposed to deal with the sex question from the point of view of the working class and the class struggle. It is soothing to know that “more recent Socialist theorizing has moved toward the understanding that sexism and capitalism cannot be separated from racism, imperialism and heterosexism, and that to dismantle one system requires dismantling them all” (Gardner 216). But, Socialist feminism was also criticized by Black feminists in the 1980s for the failure to recognize race as another system of domination. Thrice marginalized, highly oppressed and crushed into crumbs, African American women had to write and raise their voice against white racist Americans. Their basic arguments on oppression are based on their race, skin color and gender. They are in opposition with Western feminism because of the fact that white women had never considered them as women but they were treated only as ‘blacks’ and had been excluded them from their fundamental rights as human beings.
The literary criticisms based on women perspectives become important to construct an individualistic identity through women’s expressions.

Moreover, Elaine Showalter was also criticized for her generalization. Her critical essay “Toward a Feminist Poetics” refers to gynocentric criticism that creates “a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories” (Showalter 131) later in 1979. She traces the history of women’s literature and divides them into three phases: (1) Feminine (1840-1880), (2) Feminist (1980-1920) and (3) Female (1920- ) wherein the first phase ‘feminine’ women wrote in accordance with or in seeking equal intellectualism with men while the second phase ‘feminist’ approach in women strived to protest against men standards and established a voice demanding women’s rights and values. Moreover, the third phase ‘female’ writers rejected both “imitation” and “protest” and turned to female experience as autonomy in literature and arts (137-139). But the ‘gynocentrism’ soon was opposed by other feminists showing the flaws that it doesn’t include women of colour and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) issues and thus it cannot be universally absolute estimation. Being essentialist in its approach, ‘gynocriticism’ was opposed by many feminists. Ideological differences also play a role to construct various feminisms. Black feminists hailed strong voice over the exclusion done by Western white feminists. They critiqued the mainstream feminists for their failure to recognize “that their proposals for gender equality may rest on the exploitation of others.” (Gardener xxviii) Earlier black feminist and philosopher Anna Julia Cooper in nineteenth century had a systematic enquiry on gender issues as well as class issues. Patricia Hill, Collins, Angela Davis, Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde are few names in the creation of black feminist theories. Tony Morrison, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and many others have added flavors in the literary canon of African American tradition.

Post-colonial studies invited another issues from once colonized nation states wherein Gayatri Spivak’s theoretical work “Can the Subaltern Speak” united South Asian countries as well as other developing countries which was based on Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s works. “Subaltern” thus projects the voices of dissent in different contexts. As Western feminism could not establish the universality among all nations
against all forms of patriarchy, each group of equality seekers revolted against it in a set pattern. Three basic failures which are described by Shahzad Mojab are significant to quote here:

(a) It is challenged by the continuation of patriarchal domination in the West in the wake of legal equality between genders, (b) suspicious of the universality of patriarchy, it overlooks oppressive gender relations in non-western societies and (c) rejecting Euro centrism and racism, it endorse the fragmentation of women of the world into religious, national, ethnic, racial and cultural entities with particularist agendas. (Mojab 124)

These failures may have ignited a subtle curiosity to seek equal rights among other groups from different parts of the globe. Many terms exist like that of “Nazi feminism”, “Jewish feminism”, “Catholic feminism”, “Socialist feminism”, “Utopian feminism” etc. (Saliba 34) Another important term got focused recently was ‘Nationalist Feminism’ where Ranjoo Seodu Herr argues that

‘Polycentric’ nationalism has potentials for advocating feminist causes in the Third World. ‘Polycentric’ nationalism, whose proper goal is the attainment and maintenance of national self-determination, is still relevant in this neocolonial age of capitalist globalization and may serve feminist purposes of promoting the well-being of the majority of 3rd world women who suffer disproportionately under this system. (Herr 132)

Conceptually, the term ‘polycentric’ nationalism has various possible factors in context with ‘third world feminists’ agendas. Nationalists forget or overlook the feminists agendas and deny the existence of patriarchy over women problems while dealing with patriarchal systems like capitalism, globalization – expansion of telecommunication, commercialism, technology, economic imbalance etc. Ranjoo Herr’s optimistic and hopeful research may help build a strong nation with feminists’ self-esteemed intervention. But it seems an ideal, situational and rare possibility for any nation to set up a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (148).
Moghadam raises a question that can’t an all-inclusive “global feminism” exist for all? (Saliba 34) The answer to this question most probably negates the possibilities of the existence of a single ‘global feminism’ as per the two basic different ideologies/perspectives prevailing in feminist philosophy. On one hand, there is “constructionist” ideology and on the other, “essentialist”, both of them clash with basic fundamental approach. “Constructionists” believe and accept that “gender is made by culture in history” i.e. the very construction of man/woman dichotomy, gender roles and inequality between sexes are the result of power politics from the beginning of the human civilization. Deliberately, women were put aside from the landscape of the political, economic, social, educational and policymaking decisions. However, “essentialists” believe that the fundamental differences between two sexes are inevitably made by nature. Biologically as well as psychologically, both are different and one should accept facts while seeking the equal rights with specificity for females. Their core argument goes up seeking special rights and considerations for female gender. (Rivkin and Ryan 529) Hence, the coherence among different ideologies is distorted with the core mental makeup. Being ‘essentialist’ or ‘constructionist’ again signifies the social, economic, cultural and religious background of that feminist. So, every feminist philosophy caters to the needs of time and space it belongs to. Everything else revolves around any of these basic fundamental approaches. Social, political, regional, economic, cultural, psychological, racial, anthropological and religious factors work in a multifaceted approach towards forming a strand of feminism. The thesis focuses on religion as the main stimulus standing for and against women’s liberation. The same hammer which breaks the glass shapes the iron.

Religions as Anti-Feminist Propagation

Among all the influences, here, religious influence as a major subjugation on women is focused upon. Besides other factors, it is affirmed that religion plays a significant role in formation of a ‘woman’ as strong determinant of gender. Every religion is basically and/or over the time has become patriarchal in nature. The mere fragility of physique which is naturally in such a form to promote, protect and preserve the progeny or regeneration became the tool to dominate and oppress women and make them the ‘second sex’. While meditating on the Golden Age of Women as the Myth,
De Beauvoir makes up a point that pre-religion eras were having women’s status superior to men, they were able to rule and govern their clans as being more close to mother earth and/or being mystic physically – generating lives. She says:

From the feminine point of view, the Brahmanic epoch shows regression from that of the Rig-Veda, and the latter from that of the preceding primitive stage. Bedouin women of the Pre-Islamic period enjoyed a status quite superior to that assigned them by the Koran. (De Beauvoir 95)

Few instances from Islam, Christianity and Hinduism have been examined here. An example of semantic derogation in Arabic language is cited to check in the definition of the word ‘woman’ itself in the light of Islamic terminology. Gabriele Vom Bruck in her study on elusive bodies of Yemeni elite women reveals how the words hurmah (often used as a synonym of wife) and haram (forbidden, sacred, and prohibited) in Arabic are contextually similar. Hurmah word is used for a woman in a relational way like to whom a woman belongs - a father, brother or husband who is obliged to provide her protection. Bruck further investigates and writes “in this sense, the term hurmah is reminiscent of the Polynesian term tapu from which the English tern taboo derives. Tapu means “reserved” or “prohibited”, as when persons are not to be interfered with. Polynesian women who are married are generally in a state of tapu.” (Saliba 171) After obtaining physical maturity, a woman is called ‘aurah’ (literally, that which is indecent to reveal). In Islam, it is a default rule to conceal one facet of identity – the surface of the body – from non-mahram (any man except father, brother, husband and son). This linguistic instance is suited to the fact that the language itself is Phallocentric “since Lacan takes the phallocentric constitution of the Symbolic as natural, the outsided-ness of woman appear as natural. Whereas the critical psychology perspective justifies that outsided-ness of woman is grounded by the phallocentric constitution of the Symbolic” (Dhar 176).

In Christianity, none is unaware of Eve’s status - the cause of the fall of mankind, the temptress, man-eater, vamp and the utter humiliated creature ever.

There is no question that the dominant, pervasive and penetrating social standard throughout the biblical tradition is one of the male-
dominated patriarchies when women primarily serve and eternally cursed, since a woman allegedly was the one who first brought sin and death into the world. (Kirk-Duggan “Women and Christianity” 192)

Thus, essentially, woman is seen as a cause of “sin and death” in the world. In Love, Honor and Violence: Socio-conceptual Matrix, in Genesis 34, Mignon Jacobs argues that women from the core of religious ideology in Christianity are the subjects to honor for the society for which violence has been (and can be) induced to achieve that honor even at the cost of women’s lives. The mere subjugation of women has been rooted in the pages of scriptures of the world religions. (Kirk-Duggan “Pregnant Passion” 11-35) With the biblical reference of Queen Vashti, Nicole Duran justifies that the very question of her ‘being’ on her own has no answers and “…[Christianity] is an example of the reality of women’s lives being written over and rendered invisible, so that our own tradition – pieces even of our own – psyche – do not in this sense belong to us.” (Kirk-Duggan “Pregnant Passion” 84)

Bagavagdita proclaims that “Vaisyas, Women and Sudras” are born of “evil womb” (Patton 91). The Hindu scriptures are written in masculine gender. According to Hinduism, Vaisyas are the merchants who were not given few ‘adhikaras’ (rights) and Sudras, the fourth and lowest class are the untouchables, devoid of any ‘adhikaras’. Women and Sudras were not allowed to get education or read the Holy Scriptures. The surprising part is that women were not even given a status of a ‘class’. They were rather treated as lower than the lowest class. Vishnu Purana declares that “even though woman’s nature is evil, she will attain heaven if she serves her husband.” (91) The mere temptation had been created to make women serve their husbands with a sense of obligation and service to god as well as for their own salvation after death.

By and large, women have been seen as an instrumental, secondary and derogatory tool for men. The instances from Islamic semantic significance, Christian religious history and Hinduism and its treatment to women – all intend to justify that as mass temperament is basically drawn and cultivated by the imposed religions, the very psycho-social ideology to look at a woman as marginal and insignificant. Religions do propagate and spread equality, peace and justice and thus secure women’s status among societies as equal as men. So, religions are being used for both
the purposes: for salvation of women as well as for subjugation of women. One of the recent and vigorously debated branches of feminism is – Islamic Feminism.

**Islamic Feminism**

The Quranic Verses have been interpreted by various Islamic feminists and theorists to suit their purpose unleash the age-old authoritarian patriarchal viewpoints. The manipulations done to the sacred words are examined by these scholars in depth. Many male feminists too have contributed to analysis in an unbiased way. The Muslim world is divided into two major parts: Sunnis (orthodox) and the Shi’ites (literally, schismatic) Furthermore, the Sunnis are divided into four schools (madhahib) 1. The Malikis – following Malik Ibn Anas, 2. The Hanafis – following the school of Abu Hanifa, 3. The Shafi’is – following al-Shafi’i and 4. The Hanbalis – who follow Ibn Hanbal. They all have differences among them on the details of juridical procedures. Each group has a specific texts of fiqh (religious knowledge) based on the sources of Shari’ah and Hadith (documentations of legislations and laws based on Prophet’s words during his life span).

Islam is a tradition with an intellectual legacy that has developed sometimes coherently and systematically over the past fourteen hundred years, and sometimes in contradictory directions not only from previous generations, but also within a single generation. (Wadud “Inside the Gender” 55)

Over the years, the drastic changes in perceptions and understanding of the sacred words have been the issue of conflicts. It is ironic to see the various differences among the different sects of a single religion, their different interpretations and ideological differences in laws and legislations. Everything which is documented systematically and formally after the death of the Prophet has had various power politics inculcated into it. Al-Jabiri with various and extensive references and cross check, calls the era of putting the religious texts into writing (‘asr al-tadwin’) as the “beginning of an institutionalization of censorship”. (Mernissi 16)
Four basic documents can be considered as the key source to dismantle the falsehood of the existing fundamentalism as well as the so-called ‘Islamofobia’. First and foremost the ultimate revelation of authoritative, common-for-all shared knowledge of life to discipline it and manage it, the universal verses – The Quran – is the base of Islam. Second is Hadith which is the ‘recorded deeds and sayings of the Prophet’; third remains fiqh i.e. the religious knowledge – the theory or philosophy of Islamic law, based on the teachings of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet. The fourth is called *tafsir*. This Arabic word stands for the exegesis of the Quran. It refers to assigning a specific meaning, often resulting from inspiration or dreams to some of the symbolic Ayaat (the verse). In all honesty, the ultimate figure remains the same – The Prophet – Mohammed; his representation of a new religion, his propagation of the same, his connections with the Allah almighty, his spreading words on revelation in the Quran, his teachings with morals, his knowledge and struggle, his acknowledgements, his deeds and his life as a message to humankind. It is convincingly said that,

The story of Islam is the saga of a happy man who in his youth dreamed of a different world and realized all his dreams in his maturity and vigorous old age, when, filled with success with women and military triumphs, he bent the most recalcitrant of his enemies to his will. (Mernissi 25)

When it is justifying that Islam is the story of the Prophet (in a broad sense), the term Islamic Feminism can be focused on his very preaching, revelations, morals and ethics on women. This is again a thought-provoking issue that a Prophet – Man in gender – is deciding the status of women; giving meanings to their existence. No woman seems to be a decisive factor in the formation of a new religion. In another way round, before Islam, before the Prophet’s intervene in the social spheres of the lives of people, the condition of women was way more pathetic than one can ever think of. Ample historical evidences affirm that women in the age of ‘boot parasti’ (worshiping of stones) were treated miserably as servants by their counterparts. Slavery and violence were the tools used to subjugate women. The ultimate motif of this new religion was equality, brotherhood and peace to all irrespective of gender. After Prophet’s exodus to Medina (around the year 622 in Christian calendar), the
women sought refuge in Medina from Mecca to be protected and liberated from ill-treatments to them. They were able to attain full citizenship and freedom of speech. (Mernissi vii) All her research shows that the women were treated equally during this period and Islam never blocked any way for women.

Islam, of course, propagates equality, brotherhood, peace and liberation in every walk of life. Albeit, the general impression of this religion has been tormented, distorted and tagged as barbaric, callous and aggressive in each way possible in contemporary scenario. It is surely ironic that while the literal meaning of the word Islam is ‘Peace’, today it is represented as violent and malicious. Especially in the case of female freedom, it’s been seen that the Muslims who adhered to their religion are conservative and fanatics; behaving as if their women are their property and a subject for subjugation. Saliba begins her article “Gender, Politics and Islam” with a very appropriate example of how Islam is being represented after demolish of Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre i.e. “the image of a veiled woman captioned “The Face of Islam””. Furthermore in the interpretative mode, Saliba adds that “Harkening back to colonialism, the prevailing discourse implies that “the face of the Islam” is to be uncovered by United States military men, whose victory over the Taliban forces is represented by celebratory images of Afghani women removing their burqas.” (Saliba 1)

The term ‘Islamic Feminism’ itself has a variety of variants in its meaning and practices in general. As a term or theoretical discourse, it has a wider disagreement and dilemma shared in the world of thinkers, philosophers, feminists and researchers. The frequently asked questions are well versed here by Valentine M. Moghadam:

Can there be such a thing as a feminism that is framed in Islamic terms? Is Islam compatible with feminism? Is it correct to describe as feminist or even as Islamic feminist those activists and scholars, including veiled women who carry out their work toward women’s advancement and gender equality within an Islamic discursive framework? Can the activities of reformist men and women … seek the improvement of the status of women – be described as constituting
an Islamic feminism? Or are they reinforcing and legitimizing the state’s gender policy?” (Moghadam 1135)

So the term, its definition, treatment in different Islamic nations, its implications to universal viewpoint and its various phenomenological attributes are the matters to peep into. Defining Islamic Feminism, Crooke tries to explain both words separately as:

The epithet "Islamic" situates a person somewhere on the continuum between a cultural identity that is Muslim and coexists easily with secularism and occasional expressions of religious observance on the one hand, and Islamist, which describes a way of life committed to fighting for the establishment of an Islamic state. "Feminist" refers to a consciousness that women are unjustly treated simply because they are women. This consciousness may, but need not, be galvanized into action to do something to change this unjust system. (Encyclopedia)

Khan goes on to say that Islamists talk about contemporary women’s needs and present Islamically inspired solutions through persuasion and at times coercion which raises an inquiry of justifying the concept of equality whereas Orientalists “offer descriptive and devalued essentialist imagery of Islam as articles of faith.” (Saliba 311) “Islamic”, truly, depicts a convenienist attitude where they seek an amalgamation of all which make them secular and liberal in their life styles/thinking patterns with religious identity too which ultimately results into contradictory realities of existence. “Islamic” word suggests an inclination to religious history, preaching and ideological adherence to Islam with contemporary, modernized, traditional cultural values as “interconnected” framework. (Saliba 332) The contrasting values of Islamist fundamentalism and Orientalism put the identity of Muslim women in a confused state in the entire world for themselves as well as for non-Muslims. While the workable solution lies in between these two discourses which simply can be achieved with ‘Islamic’ where

Deconstructing racist discourses, particularly those that emphasize the need to modernize traditional cultures and religions, will generate a view of cultures as interconnected. Such a framework helps diffuse the
rigid boundaries between Islam and West and gives women individual freedom of choice at the intersection of the two, without being labeled anti-Islamic by their families and communities or as “fanatics” by those outside. (Saliba 332)

The word ‘Feminism’ simply stands for an acute struggle to gain equality in every sphere of life for women. According to Margot Badran, the term ‘feminism’ was coined “in France in the 1880s by Hubertine Auclert”, who introduced it in her journal, “La Citoyenne”, to criticize male predomination and to make claims for women’s rights and emancipation promised by the French Revolution. (Badran “Islamic Feminism”) The co-joined phrase ‘Islamic Feminism’ precisely works on the notion of achieving equality within the framework of Islam as a religious doctrine. There has been a conflict among Westerners regarding the existence of the term. Many Westerners simply reject the concept with their belief “feminism and Islam is an oxymoron” as Islam does not allow Muslims to produce feminism. On the other hand, Westerners who supported it was merely “displaying a feigned concern for ‘her’ plight in order to justify colonial and neo-colonial incursions into Muslim societies, or simply to make a show of arrogant superiority” (Badran “Feminism in Islam” 1)

Historically, the term ‘feminism’ was in use “in Egypt by the early 1920s in Arabic as nisa‘iyya” (‘Nissa’ means female in Arabic language) while the term ‘Islamic Feminism’ began to be visible in “the 1990s in various global locations”. Iranian scholars Afsaneh Najmabadeh and Ziba Mir-Hosseini explained the rise and use of the term Islamic Feminism in Iran by women writing in the Teheran women’s journal Zanan that Shahla Sherkat founded in 1992. (Badran “Islamic Feminism”) The emergence of the discourse in Iran with so firm grounds can be seen as a socio-political unrest and many leading chains of events with uncertainties during 1979 to 1990. Iran’s monarchy was replaced by an Islamic republic in 1979 where the populist revolution in which leftists were prominent and ended the monarchy and brought about a republic while Islamic revolution marginalized or eradicated leftists and liberals and instituted a draconian cultural-political system characterized by the rule of a clerical caste, the application of Islamic law to the areas of personal status and crime, compulsory veiling for women. The suppression continued until it acquired a
loud voice in the form of writing about the coercion and inequality. (Moghadam 1137-1139)

Saudi Arabian scholar Mai Yamani used the term in her 1996 book *Feminism and Islam*. Turkish scholars Yesim Arat and Feride Acar in their articles, and Nilufer Gole in her book *The Forbidden Modern*, published in Turkish in 1991 and in English in 1996, used the term in their writings to describe a new feminist paradigm they detected emerging in Turkey. South African activist Shamima Shaikh employed the term Islamic Feminism in her speeches and articles in the 1990s as did her sister and brother co-activists. Already by the mid-1990s, there was growing evidence of Islamic Feminism as a term created and circulated by Muslims. (Badran “Islamic Feminism”) Islamic Feminism as a discourse for discussion in academia and in intellectual masses has gained a remarkable, overwhelming response in different parts of the world. Besides the theoretical canonization, three phases which are prevalent in Arabic feminist discourse distinguish it with various socio-political, economic and religious factors from that of the existing western feminism and/or other prevailing discourses. 1990s were the years when Islamic Feminism as a critical theory began surely the revolt in the writings of female fiction writers is the evidence of its existence since long. The first phase consists of the literary fiction writing by various female authors in Islamic countries. The second phase remarks the existence of Islamic Feminism in the form of social activism while the third phase deals with the theorizing and debating the discourse and its agendas. (Badran “Feminists, Islam and Nation” 3) But this estimation is contextual with Egyptian feminist discourse. The first phase wherein the Muslim authoresses have been yelling about the dominant patriarchal attitude towards women in the name of Allah, in the name of gender is an issue to be conferred.

In the essay, ‘Theorizing the Politics of ‘Islamic Feminism’’, Mojab gives a distinction between feminine and feminist writing by saying that the articulation against patriarchy in Muslim women predates from the time of contact with Westerners. But unauthorized writing or protest is all ‘feminine’ consciousness while theorized and systematic resistance against patriarchy establishes ‘feminist consciousness.’ (125) Three examples from Iran consists of a poet and the only historiographer Mah Sharaf Khanum Kurdistani (1805-47), revolutionary poet and
political activist Qurrat Al- Ayn (1817-1852) and Bibi Khanum Astarbadi (1894-)
(Mojab 125-126) Mah Sharaf was forced to write the documentary on Quranic verses
where she never attempted to do it with gender perspective while Bibi Khanum wrote
with very bold language satirically on men-women conjugal relationships where men
were suggested to learn from Western men how to treat their wives. This indicates
they were not so feminists in their views and were bound to their social, religious
obligations. While Qurrat al’Ayn was a daughter of a cleric, an ulema, who opposed
Shi’i religion in Iran and the monarchical superintendents arrested and killed her in
1852. “A notable beauty as well as a brilliant, independent thinker, Qurratul-Ayn was
‘arguably the most interesting woman in Iran’s history.’ Her rejection of the veil was
a facet of her rejection of Shar’iah, traditional Islamic law that restricted the lives of
women.” (Rappaport 560) The second phase and third phase in Iran seems more
articulating with the activists like Tuba Azmudeh (1878-1936), Mariam Behruzi
(1945), Sadiqa Daulatabadi (1881-1961) and Mehrangiz Kar (1944-) who
participated in public lives also and raised their voice against women suffrage. Many
others followed their attempts, agreed to stand and support the causes for women
emancipation. Their social activism was based on their seeking equal rights not only
in domestic spheres but also in public lives. The wife of Iran’s fifth Prime Minister
Mir Hussein Musavi was active since 1979 to “reinterpret the emancipation of Iranian
women within the scriptures of true Islam” (Rappaport 563). She promoted education
for women and supported veiling as a code of modesty not only for women but also
for men to respect the conceptual resurgence.

Besides Iran, Egypt with strong Islamic ideology also shows phases similar to
Iran with distinct women contributors to the cause of Muslim women’s liberation
under Islamic umbrella. Malak Hisni Nasif (1886-1918) with the pen name Bahithat
(searcher of the desert) wrote many articles to promote education was one of the
promoters of early feminism, who influenced Huda Sharawi and many later feminists.
Nasif with Nabawiyya Musa was one of the first women teachers in Egypt. In a very
short span of life, Nasif influenced many social movements in Egypt. (Rappaport 476-
478) Barakat Hidiya Hanim (1898-1969) did many noble social initiatives gathering
other Muslim women to support different agendas i.e. medical services, philanthropy,
social services to needy women to support their education etc. Hers was a remarkable
contribution to Egyptian society as well and hence before her death she was awarded
Egypt’s highest honor too. Nabawiyya Musa (1886-1951), a controversial, courageous, outspoken and strong woman emerged as a staunch feminist who strongly promoted education among women, rejected veil, criticized British Ministry of Education as well as Egyptian Education system. A spinster with many political and social stunts cofounded EFU (Egypt Feminist Movement) with Huda Sharawi in 1923. She wrote extensively on women, Islam and fiction too. (467-469) Under the influence of Huda Sharawi, Saiza Nabarawi (1897-?) was also leading a staunch feminist life and became a Vice President of the EFU after Sharawi’s death in 1947 till 1949. She was extremely a left-winger and a communist to her contemporaries. (473-474) On the other hand Zeinab al-Ghazali (1918 - 2005) was “a radical Islamist fundamentalist reformer” who “sought to improve women’s social position in Egypt through a return to Islam as the true path and through the reaffirmation of women’s primary role as wives and mothers.” (253) Radicalism, fundamentalism and Islamism seem to be the foundation of many Egyptian women who believed in emancipation of women in certain spheres of lives. In al-Ghazali’s case, she herself preaches women to be at home rearing the sons of Islam while doing all socio-political activism on the other hand. She rejected EFU, Huda Sharawi’s initiative, claiming it enforces a “westernized form of feminism as being too secular and out of touch with the roots of Islam.” (253) Nawal el-Saadawi (1931-), “the controversial Egyptian doctor, sociologist, and feminist, looked upon by many as the Simone de Beauvoir of the Arab world, led a new wave of reformist activity among Arab feminists in the early 1950s in Egypt.” (605) Her bold writing on taboo subject - female sexuality in Women and Sex (1971) shook the entire Islamic world. Nawal el-Shaadaawi wrote about physical exploitation of Arab women, forceful prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases. Being the EFU’s active member, she has led many international conferences to spread awareness. She wrote novels and travelogues too. While Aminah al Said (1914-1995) was a journalist, translator and campaigner. Her voice could not be suppressed by President Gamal Abdel Nasser. (610) She promoted Government’s education policies for both men and women which made her more acceptable and worthy EFU member which she joined at the age of fourteen. Durriyah Shafiq (1908-1975), a poet and prose writer in French language was a bold, courageous woman who established a union named ‘Daughter of the Nile’ after leaving EFU. She established her own political voice, found several journals, including the women’s magazine The New Woman in 1945. She fought for the right of voting for women and
went on hunger strike against existing government on various issues. Out of depression, mental break down and many controversies led her to commit suicide at the age of 67. (636-638)

The founder of EFU Huda Sha’rawi, an important social activist (1879-1947) was born in a privileged family and she had contributed in philanthropy significantly. She had a difficult married life but she had started leading her life into the direction of female issues and philanthropy. With her husband’s political position, she indulged into political struggles against British government and worked for independence too. “Sha’rawi believed that women should not abandon the veil until such time as men began to be more responsible in their own sexual behavior. Meanwhile, women should make use of its symbolic significance as a weapon rather than as a social inhibitor” (639) But after coming back from Alexandria, at Cairo railway station, she had started fierce revolt against veil by abandoning it in public with her friend Saiza Nabarawi to protest against patriarchy.

This single, well-publicized act became something of an apocryphal landmark in the history of women in Egypt, with some sources talking of Sha’rawi romantically casting her veil into the sea. Later commentators have pointed out that, as such, it held little significance for Egyptian women, except those of the middle and upper classes. The vast majority of ordinary women in rural areas did not wear the veil anyway because it impeded their work in the fields. (640)

This act presented an example to understand the claims by critics that EFU was bourgeoisie in nature, followed westernized feminism and was consisted of elitist women of Egypt only. However, many Arab women were influenced by her contribution to encourage other talented Egyptian women to fulfill their intellectual potential. Her organization increasingly became regional in its operation, extending into rural areas with many dispensaries, schools, orphanages, workshops and clubs offering help and support to unemployed and poor women. The EFU also guided women toward self-help by establishing a model farm in a province and assisting women workers in the textile and handicraft industries. For these many social works and political intervene, she was awarded with country’s highest honor the “Nishan al Kamal” in 1945.
All these Egyptian social reformists were involved in many philanthropic, educational, medical and welfare organizations to improve the lives of women in Egypt. The strong social activism in Egypt is seen but in two basic diverted mental make-up. One is inclined to fundamentalist Islamic views for women keeping them under surveillance of male patriarchy, claiming it to be more protecting and secure for them, accepting their physical feebleness as a benchmark of God’s will to make them so with a purpose of re-generation. They can be put into the category of ‘essentialist’ what Rivkin and Ryan tags a group of feminists (Rivkin and Ryan 529) or what Mojab puts “femininely” feminists who stand against the domestic violence, polygamy and raise their voice for equal rights for education and decision making without authorized or systematic protest. (Mojab 125) These can better be called ‘Islamist feminists’ who claim to be bound themselves with Islamic textual discourses at the same time asking for liberation within the boundary of Islamic paradigm.

While in Turkey, the first Muslim girl to study at the American College for Girls in Scutari, an influential writer, reformer and nationalist, Halide Edip became the first female Professor in University of Istanbul, Turkey. She promoted education among women of Syria and Turkey during Ottoman rule. Her love for Mathematics and English language was exceptional. At the age of 16, she came up with her first book on Turkish life lived by women in the harem. She was highly involved in the nationalist causes of independence of Turkey to establishing schools and writing fiction. She wrote several important and popular novels about Turkish way of life in which she discussed nationalism, women’s position in society and the need for social reform. Her most well-known novel was *The Daughter of Smyrna* (1922), about a female freedom fighter. Her novel *The Clown and His Daughter* (1935) blends Turkish nationalism with Westernized ideals; *Family* (1912) which analyzes the problems facing Turkish women who desired to obtain education; and several other books on Turkish politics, notably *Turkey Faces West: A Turkish View of Recent Changes and Their Origins* (1930). (Rappaport 217-218) Moreover, Nuket Sirman in “Dossier 5-6: Turkish Feminism, a Short History” in Dossier Articles Europe Turkey Empowerment published online on Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) website, writes that two significant movements – in March 1986 with the demand of UN Declaration of Women’s Rights and in 1987 with thousands of women marching to “protest against the physical abuse of women” proved to be strong stimulators for
feminist consciousness among Turkish women. (1) Furthermore, during the Ottoman period, ideological clashes between “progressivists” and “Islamists” were visibly loud in social setup. The Early Republican Period witnessed women outside their homes along with their roles “primarily as wives and mothers” questioning “the democracy”, “civilization” and “Islamic way of life”. (3-4) But 1980s were influenced by “student movement and the various brands of the Marxist Left” ideology. Many feminist groups indulged in various activities with western influence. (6-8) In the years 1993 and 1996, first female Prime Minister Tansu Ciller reigned the nation and inspired women to be seen everywhere in all the spheres of social, political, religious and cultural lives.

Be it Iran, Egypt or Turkey, fundamentally all the three phases are visibly dominant with specific socio-cultural and political intervention with Islam. The clashes of ideologies are between progressive, secular and democratic Muslims with fundamentalists, essentialists and conventional Muslims. However, the third phase theorizing the feminist discourse in Islamic framework is that of a systematic, structural, argumentative and referential with the Islamic textbooks. Theorizing is essential part of any literary canon to be established after a certain exploration of the problem. The systematic efforts have been put in various countries with the existing resources and counter questioning the age-old believes. Islamic Feminism as a discourse in social sciences and academics is gaining support from the liberal Muslims all over the world as it liberates women without being out-thrown from their belief system. It is interesting to cite Richard Rorty’s speculation explained by Jonathan Culler (2011) that a theory as a genre is a mixture or blend of 1) the evaluation of the relative merits of literary productions 2) Intellectual history 3) Moral philosophy and 4) Social prophecy. (3) The fusion of these phenomena leads us towards a systematic formulation of a theory. Islamic Feminism as a discourse theorizes it with the help of focusing on all these four dimensions. The female writers in different countries have created a base with firsthand experiences. Islamic Feminism as a discourse in literature is to evaluate their literary works generating the intellectual history with moral, philosophical and social implications. Theory as a genre emerges as a fine blend of all these discourses of any subject/discipline which after all becomes multidisciplinary and phenomenon.
On the same note, one must cite Margot Badran’s essay that classifies two different feminisms in Middle East; Secular Feminism and Islamic Feminism.

Secular feminism draws on and is constituted by multiple discourses including secular nationalist, Islamic modernist, humanitarian/human rights, and democratic. Islamic feminism is expressed in a single or paramount religiously grounded discourse taking the Quran as its central text. (“Between Secular” 6)

She argues that the region of Middle East was experiencing uneven socioeconomic and technological transformation confronting western imperialism and colonialism with the emergence of the concept of feminism from the west in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Time and again, while detecting the theory of Islamic Feminism as a fusion of these discourses, there must be a contemplation on difference between the terms ‘Islamist’ and ‘Islamic’ because, these two terms ‘Islamist’ and ‘Islamic’ contradict like that of ‘feminine’ and ‘feminist’ ideologies in feminism. Terms like ‘essentialist’ and ‘constructivist’ exclaimed by Rivkin and Ryan (529) also resemble with the same terms respectively. ‘Islamist feminists’ ask for certain ‘freedom’ within an existing power structure while ‘Islamic feminists’ ask for ‘being free’ from that structural bondage of the system. However, ‘Islamic feminists’ also do not deny the religious inclination but as a matter of fact; they hypothesize it with secular ideology and re-interpret the existing interpretations of religious texts. Islamic feminist describes the speech, action, writing, or a way of life committed to gender justice and also an engagement with Islamic epistemology as a development of a faith rather than a rejection of it. Hence, they address this discourse and derive its rhetorical strategies to construct individual identity for Muslim women to relish full participation in public as well as private world in a just community with their counterparts.

Equality of sexes in Islam

Islamic Feminism as a discourse with the light of Quranic instances, its interpretations and reinterpretations from feminist point of view as well as Hadith, its context and its implications establish a fact that this belief system is based on equality for all irrespective of gender, class, race, nationality, wealth and position among
humans. As Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” is true with Islamic ideology as well. Fatima Mernissi in her book Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women’s Rights in Islam in 1991, points out that there is no difference among human beings on the basis of their sexes. Prophet Mohammed, as an answer to Umm Salama’s query (118-120), one of the adorable wives of the Prophet says that

Lo! Men who surrender unto Allah, and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey and women who obey, and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth, and men who persevere (in righteousness) and women who persevere, and men who are humble and women who persevere, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and – women who fast, and men who guard their modesty and women who guard (their modesty), and men who remember Allah much and women who remember – Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward.’ (qtd in Mernissi 119)

Clearly, it intends to make believers understand the nature of the religion; as far as the believers are adhered to the basic tenets of Islam, they are equal. No degradation is cited as far as belief system is concerned. Whenever the Prophet was questioned by any of the member of his clan including his wives, through revelations, He answered with specific verses with certain context. Thus, the Quran proposes conditions of righteousness in conduct, belief and modesty for both men and women alike to grant equality and reward. Amina Wadud, a renowned Islamic feminist scholar, confesses after suppressing and demoralizing readings and practices throughout her years of contemplations:

Mercifully, the more research I did into the Qur’an, unfettered by centuries of historical androcentric reading and Arabo-Islamic cultural predilections, the more affirmed I was that in Islam a female person was intended to be primordially, cosmologically, eschatologically, spiritually, and morally a full human being, equal to all who accepted
Allah as Lord, Muhammad as Prophet, and Islam as Din.” (Wadud “Quran and Woman” ix-x)

She has dealt with the exegesis of existing interpretations with special focus on androcentric language. The very startling concern for these *tafasir* is that they were exclusively written by males. To paraphrase her understanding with references quoted from different Hadiths and their contexts, one may not deny that men’s experiences and perceptions were included and women and women’s experiences were either excluded or interpreted through the male vision, perspective, desire, or needs. By analyzing the voiceless-ness of women in these interpretations, Wadud carries on debates on the subject with utmost investigation. She proposes that “the Quran does not support a specific and stereotyped role for its characters, male or female” (Wadud “Quran and Woman” 29). By far, it is convincing as well as thought-provoking with certain contextual parameters. A female falls into one of the three categories according to her investigation mentioned in the Quran. Her social, cultural and historical contexts assign her a distinct role which is neither derogatory nor complimentary. The second role assigned to her is that of bodily functions i.e., nurturing and caretaking of progeny. Thirdly, she fulfills “a non-gender specific function” representing her endeavors as a human being on the earth. (Wadud “Quran and Woman” 29) Wadud in her another book, *Inside Gender Jihad: Women’s Reform in Islam* in 2006, asserts more specifically that:

It is primarily male thinkers that have produced what passes as fundamental paradigms in our religious heritage. Many ordinary Muslims have come to consider these narrowly produced paradigms as universal – even divine. Yet the vision of past scholars was limited in two particular ways: (1) by their social-cultural and intellectual-spiritual circumstances; and (2) by the noticeable absence of women’s ideas and reflections in considering what Islam means or what it means to be human in Islam. (Wadud “Inside the Gender” 115)

Women are not considered as equals even though fulfilling all the preconditions prescribed in the Quran. According to Wadud, narrow interpretations with politically corrupt motives without considering women’s voice have distorted the very essence of the holy words. Why the contradictions came into existence carry the vital bearing
on the research constituents here. Besides the Quranic verses, Hadith also has undergone tremendous manipulations. Mernissi claims that each group, seeking “legitimacy in and through the sacred text” had their own interest in interpreting the holy words. Furthermore she writes:

We can now appreciate in their true measure the two contradictory tendencies that were at odds with each other in the elaboration of the Hadith: on one hand, the desire of the male politicians to manipulate the sacred; and on the other hand the fierce determination of the scholars to oppose them through the elaboration of the fiqh (a veritable science of religion) with its concepts and its methods of verification and counter verification. (Mernissi 43)

She simply rejects the false justification behind arrogant and narrow interpretations or misinterpretations of the Quranic text which deals with justice, equality and humanity. Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud argue on the subject of inequality as an oxymoron to Quranic verses; promoting and declaring that all are equal according to Islam. Quran, a moral guidance, relates the gender roles with morality and have specifications regarding their distinct roles. In the fourth chapter, 34th verse represents the inequality with specific reasons. Wadud with Azizah Al-Hizri’s investigations on the words reveal and clarify the misconceptions prevailing from ages with the interpretations given by Pickthall, Zamakhshari and Maududi too. The controversial verse says:

Men are \textit{qawwamuna 'ala} \{superior/in charge of/…} women, \{on the basis\} of what Allah has \{preferred\} \textit{(faddala)} some of them over others, and \{on the basis\} of what they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are \textit{qanitat}, guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those from whom you fear \textit{nushuz}, admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. (4:34)

The Arabic words in italics show the words which need profound exegesis. Wadud leads the readers into semantics and in its contextual relevance by saying that in two conditions only the man is ‘qawwam’ (superior or in charge of) woman: “preference
and “socioeconomic norm/ideal”. (“Quran and Women” 70) It suggests that the preference is done by Allah for some men over some women, not necessarily all men over all women. In the case of property, woman needs financial support and Quran promotes it. The idea behind this dependence is well justified by Azizah Al-Hizri who investigates and makes the subject topsy-turvy. The biologically specific ability to generate the progeny was actually treated as a major role of a woman and thus men, on the other hand, very inferior beings, were supposed to earn bread and butter to continue with the generations of mankind. Women had not to think of producing money by doing any physical or mental labour. While men, in service to women, had to search for other means to survive and let their women and children survive too. But the fact is that the Quran was revealed in seventh century Arabia when the Arabs held certain perceptions and misconceptions about women and were involved in certain ill-treatment to them like that of infanticide, sexual abuse of slave girls, denial of inheritance to women, polygamy, unconstrained divorce, domestic violence, concubinage etc. And the verses revealed at that time were very much relating to Arab culture existing at that time. In these increasingly global and capitalist societies, almost all the conditions have been changed from its core. And the rigid framework cannot be implied stringently.

The same verse is translated differently which is more authoritatively articulated in its meaning in open sources of internet and other translations which are commonly used and propagate men’s superiority and their right to beat women:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah and to their husbands), and guard in the husband’s absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g., their chastity, their husband’s property, etc.). As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful), but if they return to obedience, seek no against them means (of annoyance). (http://www.noblequran.com/translation/surah4.html)
The sacred texts and their verses are not only manipulated to a great extent but are also made them structural characteristics in Muslim societies. Such fundamentalist manipulations of authoritative Quran have carved a niche in Muslims’ minds. The mass mentality is very much driven by such understanding of the Quranic verses in general. Sayyid Qutb goes on saying that “The man and the woman are both from Allah’s creation and Allah ... never intends to oppress anyone from His creation.” (Wadud, “Quran and Woman” 35) Wadud in 2006 confesses that two decades of trying different theories did not permit her to condone any man to “scourge” or any physical harm to a woman. She affirms that verses have been “applied through some historical examples and conditions” and the literal meanings cannot be implemented as the *hudud* (penal code) ordinances in Islamic justice and usage. (Wadud “Inside the Gender” 200) Whenever any special duty is indicated, it carries some context, some incidents, and some referential time and thus it seems difficult to maintain the status quo in application of these verses.

**Education for women**

The socio-cultural gender roles on the basis of their physical attributes had confined and restricted women from attaining knowledge and education in ancient times. They had been taught life skills like looking after crops, gathering firewood, fetching water, making food, washing, cooking, bearing children, taking care of them and seeking the strength to do all this with enthusiasm like the laborers without remuneration. It was and in some parts still is a common understanding among men and women alike that women are mentally weak, physically fragile and impious, emotionally fool and financially dependent on men, his intelligence and on his income. The psychological conditioning resulted into a sense of inferiority complex wherein education itself can be seen as manipulated discourse among human beings.

Mary Wollstonecraft, the English author and often considered as an early feminist, in her 1792 book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, simply argues and questions “a false system of education” for “the conduct and manners of women which prove that their minds are not in a healthy state” (6). The system of education consisted of any subject knowledge is perceived mainly by men which ultimately has become universal and thus there is no female perception. The education system itself
has been manipulated in favor of male gender from time immemorial. Virginia Woolf quotes an untitled poetry by Lady Winchilsea (1661):

How we are fallen! Fallen by mistaken rules,
And Education’s more than Nature’s fools;
Debarred from all improvements of mind,
And to be dull, expected and designated;
And if someone would soar above the rest,
With warmer fancy, and ambition pressed.
So strong the opposing faction still appears,
The hopes to thrive can ne’er outweigh the fears.
(qtd. in Woolf 64-65)

To restrict females from gaining knowledge and understanding of any virtue had become a part of every society, religion and culture by and over the time. Like untouchables, women were excluded from learning the ‘Vedas’ and the sacred texts in Hinduism. Women were denied access to centers of knowledge and education. Muslim women are still not allowed to enter in Mosques where Namaz is performed with one of the views that they are not physically pure to enter in a house of Allah and can distract men from their worshiping. Muslim women are still limitedly accessible to attain knowledge. Many think that education to women is a threat to the patriarchal society. The case with Malala in Pakistan proved how fundamentalists feel threatened from the air of change in terms of education and understanding among Muslim females. According to Islamic classical education in Historical Dictionary of Islam (2009), two levels were existed in initial juncture: elementary and secondary; precisely – kuttab or maktab and madrasah. Education was informally given in homes or in mosques or in any building attached to a mosque. In the elementary level of learning, the reading and writing skills were taught through the Quran. Teaching included the prayers and rituals and simple arithmetic. Secondary education included the study of the Islamic sciences, the Quran, Hadith, fiqh and ancillary fields like Arabic grammar, philology etc. Importance of education and gaining knowledge is immense in living a meaningful life on this planet. The Quranic verses are not taught with their contextual meanings and relevance in typical Islamic education systems. With this regard, Wadud suggests that
Seventh-century Arabian particulars in the Quran should be restricted to that context unless a broader basis of understanding and application can be developed from them. In the social, political and moral arena, a reciprocal relationship must be made between particular historical or cultural practices during the time of the Quran revelation as reflections of the underlying principles and the diverse reflections of those principles in other historical and cultural contexts. (Wadud “Inside the Gender” xii)

As a matter of fact, the sequence of revelation of Quranic verses has been altered in their chronology in the Quran. It is believed that the changes in chronology are to propagate social and cultural preaching with different contexts and to set a standard of moral lives of Muslims. The first ever revealed verse ‘Iqra’ (read) is placed in the Sura – 96 which orders humankind to read, to inform oneself and to gain knowledge. Quran says: "Read. Read in the name of thy Lord who created; [He] created the human being from blood clot. Read in the name of thy Lord who taught by the pen: [He] taught the human being what he did not know." (96: 1-5). The Prophet of Islam has also emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge in different ways: (1) Time: “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.” (2) Place: “Seek knowledge even if it is far as China.” (3) Gender: “Seeking of knowledge is a duty of every Muslim.” (4) Source: “Wisdom is the lost property of the believer, he should take it even if finds it in the mouth of a mushrik.” (Rizvi “Education in Islam”)

Islam preaches education for all while “too many of the world’s Muslims cannot perceive a distinction between … [the] interpretation and the divine will, leading to the truncated notion of divine intent as well as of the divine nature and essence limited to the maelstrom perspective, hence violating the actual transcendent nature of Allah.” (Wadud “Inside the Gender” 81) As equality of genders has been declared in Islam, the provision of education is also for all. But as a matter of fact, the scenario seems totally topsy-turvy in many Muslim countries as women are not allowed to attain education, they cannot think of travelling for the same, they have no source of knowledge except becoming the slaves of their patriarch masters in the form of their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Many far remote villages in many parts
of the world, irrespective of religion, have no provision for education especially for women.

**Islam and Women in Politics:**

Many historians mention that women rulers in pre-modern era could sustain themselves due to their tremendous knowledge and skills in many fields. Khayzuran governed the Muslim Empire under three Abbasid caliphs in the eighth century; Malika Asma bint Shihab al-Sulayhiyya and Malika Arwa bint Ahmad al-Sulayhiyya both held power in Yemen in the eleventh century; Sittal-Mulk, a Fatimid queen of Egypt in the eleventh century; the Berber queen Zaynab al-Nafzawiyah (r. 1061 - 1107); two thirteenth-century Mamluk queens, Shajar al-Durr in Cairo and Radiyyah in Delhi; six Mongol queens, including Kutlugh Khatun (thirteenth century) and her daughter Padishah Khatun of the Kutlugh-Khanid dynasty; the fifteenth-century Andalusian queen Aishah al-Hurra, known by the Spaniards as Sultan Madre de Boabdil; Sayyida al-Hurra, governor of Tetouan in Morocco (r. 1510 - 1542); and four seventeenth-century Indonesian queens. In the contemporary world too, Muslim women have successfully reigned with enormous leadership skills in the Muslim worlds. Benazir Bhutto was Prime Minister of Pakistan (1988-90, 1993-96), Tansu Ciller was Prime Minister of Turkey (1993-96), and Shaykh Hasina is the current Prime Minister of Bangladesh (1996-2001, 2009 - ). (Esposito "Women and Islam")

The question of women’s leadership in Islam has aroused arguably many controversies as tensions remain between traditionalists who advocate continued patriarchy and reformists who advocate continued liberation of women. This Hadith supporting exclusion of women from politics is the most famous weapon with the fundamentalists and traditionalists wherein they claim: “Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity!” This seems shocking to those who believe in Prophet’s inclination with equal treatment and respect to women. But as a matter of fact it appears in al-‘Asqalani’s thirteenth volume where he quotes al-Bukhari’s Sahih, that is, those traditions that al-Bukhari classified as authentic after a rigorous process of selection, verifications and counter-verifications. (Mernissi, 9)

How and why any Hadith was quoted and who did so is very much investigated research field in many Muslim countries.
One should know the contributions of the Prophet’s wives in politics with special reference to A’isha, his youngest wife. Her political life after the Prophet’s death is a sheer example of bravery and leadership which in return was condemned by many scholars of Hadith and Sacred texts who were chauvinists and misogynists. “The Battle of Camel” was led by A’isha at the age of 42 on December 4, AD. 656 and she played a key role in many political decisions. Mernissi justifies why the name of a battle was not cited by the person who fought it by saying that: “The historians called this confrontation “The Battle of the Camel,” referring to the camel ridden by ‘A’isha, thereby avoiding linking in the memory of little Muslim girls the name of a woman with the name of a battle.” (5) The Oxford Dictionary of Islam shows that historical records illustrate that the Prophet Muhammed consulted women for their opinions. Umm Waraqah was appointed Imam over her household by him. Women could correct authoritative ruling of the Caliph Umar on dowry. The dictionary furthermore sings the golden time of women who pledged an oath of allegiance to Muhammad independently with their male kins. Some courageous women converted to Islam prior to their husbands - demonstrates the Islam’s recognition of their capacity for independent action. Caliph Umar appointed women to serve as officials in Medina. The early Islam shows a relatively more liberated and autonomous status for women whereas no woman held religious titles in Islam.

Islam and Hijab

The burqa clad woman has become a symbol of Islam which is seen as a patriarchal, misogynist and anti-feminist religion. The very image of woman in ‘purdah’ or ‘burqa’ creates a gory impression of conventional, orthodox, suppressed and confined Islamic ideology. The time a man gazes a woman in a ‘burqa’, automatically or say conditionally, the perspective changes. A man gazes at a female, in most of the cases as an object of pleasure. But here in this case, the lady in ‘veil’ as indicating being ‘Muslim’ becomes somewhat lesser than the image of an ‘object’. The ultimate function of a veil, according to so-called leaders of Islam, is to protect a lady from ill-intentional male gaze but contrarily it serves the opposite purpose wherein the ‘veil’ symbolizes her doubly muted objectification. The compulsion of ‘purdah’ hides these women’s real beings, crushes their individuality and freedom, and makes them real slaves to misogynist system. Tulika Bahuguna in Panorama of

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World Literature, in her article “Purdah and Zanana: Re-visioning conventions”, has quoted many of scholars’ views on ‘Purdah’. (127) She has quoted Eunice de Souza’s words defining ‘purdah’ as “not just the burqa… but the elaborate codes of seclusion and feminine modesty used to protect and control the lives of women.” Jasbir Jain and Amina Amin calls it “dividing line between tradition and modernity” while Zenana (a separate place for women to dwell in a house) is, in Separate Worlds: Studies of Purdah in South Asia, “the physical segregation of living space” when Burton calls Zanana as “shorthand for Indian women’s imprisonment”. (127)

The ‘purdah’ and ‘zanana’ seem to be a codification of male dominance over female freedom. It’s a keen example of the objectification of female body. The hegemonic verses from the Quran on ‘veil’/ ‘hijab’ are used to inflict power over the women in Muslim societies. As its been seen that Quran refers to Arab societies at particular time and the ‘veil’ for women in that set up where women were highly insecure among cruel Arab men seems persuasive. But the questions to those verses and their authentication with referential interpretations are highly recommended. Again referring to Mernissi’s groundbreaking research on the revelation of the verse on hijab implies many aspects related to power political interpretations and their propagation with extreme inclination as final worlds. She argues that “the hijab – literally “curtain” – “descended” not to put a barrier between a man and a woman, but between two men.” (85) With this very statement, she starts a whole chapter to justify how and why the verse on ‘hijab’ was revealed on the Prophet. Prophet’s affection for his wife Zaynab Bint Jahsh after his marriage with her led to a level of frustration when few guests were not leaving from the place and the Allah had revealed a verse on him.

The "descent of the hijab" had a double perspective from the beginning. There was a concrete aspect: the Prophet drew a tangible curtain between himself and Anas Ibn Malik. There was also an abstract aspect: the descent of the verse, from Heaven to earth, from God to the Prophet, who recited it. The Prophet drew a real curtain between himself and the only man in his house who was still there after the departure of the other guests, and at the same time he recited the verse which was inspired in him on the spot by God. (100)
Mernissi refers to many descriptions and thus says that the Prophet was a man of great patience and serenity then how could this incident made him so very irritated that the God had to divide the universe into two spaces; private and public and/or man and woman (the latter is in the practice in more strict sense). The clarifications are based on different holy wars prior to this incident in Prophet’s life wherein the messenger of the God, the Prophet had disastrous experiences. Another aspect of security in Arab world also worked hard for the same. The threats of marriage with the wives of the Prophet after his death had to be nullified at that time too. And ‘hijab’ became very essential to let the wives of the Prophet hide from the enemies.

The meaning of ‘hijab’ in Sufism connotes to an inability of a person for exaltation in spiritual sense. The word linguistically as well as in Sufism stands for a derogatory sense of ‘separation’ of one thing from another. From Al-Darqawi’s book *Lettres d'un maitre Sufi* translated by Titus Burckhardt (Milan: Arche, 1978) Mernissi quotes:

... the Kur'an, though it [hijab] is found there only seven times, provides valuable information on the basic and metaphorical meaning of the term, as it does to a certain extent on its evolution. In general hidjab in the Kur'an means a separation: it is the veil or the curtain behind which Mary isolated herself from her people (XIX, 17); it is also the separate establishment (later, the gynaeceum) which was imposed at first only on the wives of the Prophet (XXXIII, 53; cf. XXXIII, 32), apparently on the advice of Umar. On the Day of Judgement, the saved will be separated from the damned by a hidjab (VII, 46), which is glossed as wall (sitr) by the commentators, who deduce this interpretation from Kur'an LVI, 13. "It belongs not to any mortal that Allah should speak to him, except by revelation, or from behind a veil" (XLII, 51), a veil apparently meant to protect the elect from the brilliance of the divine countenance. (95)

All such meanings with different references make a sense of necessity in the Arab world of that time to divide the universe in two separate sections but certainly it stands for “a seclusion”, “a separation” and in a certain sense “a derogation” on the basis of many criteria. Another reason to wear long ‘Abaya’ (robe) of white color and
a ‘Chador’ was to protect one’s self from the scorching heat of Arab world irrespective of gender which is still true to its geographical location. The Oxford dictionary of Islam says that women prayed in mosques un-segregated from men, were involved in Hadith transmission, gave sanctuary to men, engaged in commercial transactions, were encouraged to seek knowledge and were both instructors and pupils in the early Islamic period. The compulsion of ‘hijab’ in South Asian countries in contemporary times shows the distorted, misogynist and chauvinist - psyche of male elite in societies.

Conclusion

Since misogyny is as old as civilization and as common as flu or chicken pox everywhere in the East and West – among rich and poor, rural and urban areas – there is no reason to portray it as a pre-modern, pre-capitalist syndrome.” (Hashmi 1) Hence, misogyny in religious context is also not religious but mainly contextual to its interpretations and misconceptions. The objective study and examination of the history of Feminism and feminist theories existing from a long period of time with a focus on Islamic Feminism tries to recognize the naked realities prevailing in the society in the name of Allah. The aim of historical survey is to make up the scene of necessity of feminism globally as well as nation wise. The practical approach towards theories and practices are reciprocal. It is seen that the theories are used to write fictions and fictions are used to establish theories. The relationship between theory and fictional work is complementary. And thus, Islamic Feminism as a discourse, as analysed, should be used as a lens to evaluate fiction which strives to establish the similar fact that Islam as a religion does not block ways for women’s liberation; but the misconceptions due to patriarchal interpretations play a vital role in subjugating women from every possible progress.

Applying the discourse on novels and analyzing the results are two major objectives of this research. Thus, the two neighboring countries – Pakistan and Bangladesh which were actually the parts of ‘The Akhand Bharat’ before independence in 1947 are taken into account. ‘The fragmented India’ has broken up the psyche of Muslims and non-Muslims alike in general. The trio - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh actually have a lot in common after these much of decades after their own individual identities while having tremendous contrasting overviews. Tehmina
Durrani (1953), Fatima Altaf (1929-), Zahida Hina (1946-), Kishwar Naheed (1949), Fahmida Riaz (1945-) from Pakistan have severe radical thoughts in their brains and pens. Among them, Tehmina Durrani with specific political background is chosen to studied with her novel *Blasphemy* (1999). While Taslima Nasreen (1962) from Bangladesh is all time controversial figure to threaten the cores of fundamentalism prevailing in Islamic counties is much discussed among the literary circles. Thus, contemporary writers Tehmina Anam (1975-) and Monica Ali (1967-), the shining stars of Bangladesh were studied and the Tehmina Anam, the winner of ‘Best first book award of the Commonwealth writer’s Prize’ is decided to be worked upon with her novels *The Golden Age* (2008) and *The Good Muslim* (2011) as Monica Ali is basically a Diaspora writer.

India still remains like a mother figure in literary scenario to these two counties. The female writers of pre-independence era have already created a base for the emerging consciousness among liberal Muslim writers as well as many non-Muslim writers alike. *Sulatana’s Dream* (1905) by Roquia Sakhawat Hussain (1880-1932) can be called as a benchmark in feminist writing. Her ‘Feminist Utopia’ played a significant role for imbibing inspiration in many of the feminist Muslim writers and many non-Muslims too where the dream has lead the readers into an ideal world of Science, peace, progress and women. Other significant feminist Muslim writers in Urdu are Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991) and Qurratulain Hyder (1928-2007) who stand out in the Urdu literature with the fierce feminist ideology which discarded the very essential patriarchal voice in Islam when the term ‘feminist’ was not in a fashion. It can be appropriately said that the Urdu literature in India had received tremendous twirls after their intervention. The path breaking novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain (1913-1998) in English language is “considered [as] a forerunner for later Indian feminist novels” (Miller 146) which portrays a young woman’s struggle to free herself from her traditional Muslim upbringing during a period of national struggle within India at large. Her stories generally talk about vivid colors of pre-independence, pre-partition in Muslim Northern society in India. In Indian feminist writing, one can see the revolt against the existing patriarchy while in Muslim writing, the revolt roars with a much higher voice against the Islamic fanatical approach towards female liberation. Shama Futehally (1920-2013) can be cited as a prolific Muslim writer of contemporary India but all her works deal with mere acceptance of
patriarchy. Stylistically, Futehally’s *Tara Lane* (1993) and *Reaching Bombay Central* (2002) are so rich in vivid imagery and extraordinary semantic presentation of Muslim world but they lack a fierce revolt against existing patriarchy while the emerging voice of recent Indian Literature, Noor Zaheer (1958) goes forthright in questioning the set rules of Islamic fundamentalist mentality. Her *My God is a Woman* (2008) is a threshold to understand the Islamic laws for Muslim women in an Independent democratic India. Based on Shah Bano case in India, the novel questions the Islamic laws, Sharia’h and patriarchal judgments in general. Thus the writers Noor Zaheer from India, Tehmina Durrani from Pakistan and Tahmima Anam from Bangladesh are to be critically analysed with the lens of Islamic Feminism as a discourse in their fiction.
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