CHAPTER- V

Conclusion
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As the main purpose of this study is to assess the contribution of Muslim Novelists of the period 1925 to 1975, it is felt necessary in the first chapter to trace the tradition of Indian English Novelists and, more particularly, the Muslim Novelists. It has been noticed that the Muslim Novelists of the period follow the same tradition of Indian English Novelists. The ideological perspectives of these writers reveal that they have been influenced by progressive, Marxist and Gandhian ideologies. The first chapter also refers to the existing criticism on these novelists and it is followed by the methodology of research to be adopted.

Ahmed Ali, one of the pioneer novelists of the Progressive Writers Movement of the 1930s. His life and literary career, influences and themes, the progressive movement, which moulded his creative sensibility, the theme of conflict between Tradition and Modernity, East West encounter etc. are discussed. Ahmed Ali was a trendsetter paving a way for the next generation Muslim novelists like K.A. Abbas, Attia Husain and others his novels Twilight in Delhi and Ocean of Night have definite socio-political background. The source of his literary inspiration was the freedom movement. Twilight in Delhi reflects the atrocity imposed on the Muslim Community by the British during the great uprising of 1857. Further, the novel also depicts the patriotic feelings of the Muslims towards India. The novel strongly holds forth that the two-nation theory, which led to the tragic partition was the result of the divide
and rule policy of the British. The novel depicts, at length, that the 1857 movement was an Indian Movement consisting of people of all religions and castes. It can be stated, categorically, that Ahmed Ali’s Twilight in Delhi, Ocean of Nigh and Rats and Diplomatst are the products of undivided India. Thus the India of Ahmed Ali in his novels highlights the fact that Muslims considered India their motherland. The conflict, in the novel is not between the Hindus and the Muslims but it is between the Muslims and the British. Both these novels express the grievance of the Muslims against the British for causing the decline and death of the glorious Muslim traditional culture.

Besides taking into account the life and works of Aamir Ali this chapter refers to the ideological perspective and thematic concern of Aamir Ali. His three novels Conflict, Via Geneva and Assignment in Kashmir refer to political events at national and international levels. His first novel, Conflict, reads like Raja Rao’s Kanthapura and K.A. Abbas’s Inquilab, which are the two important novels on the political picture of the pre-Independence India. Aamir Ali has depicted family life against the political situation in India during the Indian Freedom struggle and the theme of Indian Nationalism is more prominent in the novel Conflict.

Moreover, Aamir Ali does not discuss Muslim Culture, nor does he show any special concern for the Muslim Community. He refers to composite culture of India in his novels and has drawn characters both from Hindu and Muslim Communities. However his novels speak of a ‘United’ India and highlight the common cause of the Hindus and Muslims in driving the British out of India so as to achieve independence.
The contribution of Humayun Kabir, Zeenuth Futehally, Iqbalunnisa Husain and Attia Hosain. Humayun Kabir’s Men and Rivers is a rural novel and deals with the tillers of the soil. Here, it is worthwhile to note that among the seven Indian Muslim novelists that are discussed, only Humayun Kabir has focused his attention on the customs, modes and manners of the rural Muslim Community in India. His novel not only narrates a simple tale but also discusses the affinity between man and nature. The river Padma plays a significant role in the lives of simple peasants and fisher folks and proves the fact that the lives and fortunes of these innocent people depend on the changing mood of the mighty river.

Among the other three women novelists discussed in the fifth chapter Iqbalunnisa Husain’s Purdah and Polygamy deserves special mention as it is the first novel among women centered novels in English by an Indian Muslim woman writer. The novel depicts the plight of the women in the traditional Muslim household due to the age-old customs - the purdah system and the customs of polygamy in Muslim society in India. The novelist attacks the custom of polygamy in Muslim society and takes strong objection to the callous attitude of the Muslim men towards their womenfolk. Iqbalunnisa critically lays bare the loopholes of the purdah system and custom of polygamy. Thus her novel can be viewed as a novel of social criticism. Zeenuth Futehelly’s novel Zohra refers to the Satyagraha Movement and the involvement of the people in the freedom struggle. As for Atia Hosain who wrote at later stage in the history of women’s emancipation, she is more assertive in her choice of priorities.
and more vocal in stating them. She protests against her society that disregards the sentiments and the sensibilities of women.

From this comprehensive study it is now clear that Muslim novelists of the period 1925 to 1975 have ascertained their affiliation to Indian Writing in English by writing novels deeply rooted in the Indian tradition. They have also affirmed the basic cultural values of India to authenticate their personal experiences. Admitting the large diversity of country’s religions, castes and creeds, they have visualized the thought of oneness and have enunciated the feeling of oneness and of an identity which is beyond ego, beyond race, beyond cultural configurations. All of them strongly believe in the timeless splendour of India. The common and outstanding feature among them is “Indianess”, their society is essentially an Indian which gives vivid and explicit expression to the complexity of Indian mind and Indian experience. They are Indian first and foremost. They identified themselves with everything Indian and considered “India” their motherland. The novels convey the patriotic feelings of the Muslims in India. India as depicted in their novels is, of course, a united India and the novelists express their concern for the deterioration of the rich Muslim culture caused by colonialism in India.

The novels of Muslim writers are full of social awareness, spirit of protest, patriotic feelings, and empathy for the underprivileged. These are major concerns enunciated by them. No doubt they have merged into the main stream with a determined sense of adaptability yet retained their identity by enriching the Indian Writing in English through their innovative contribution.
Apart from enriching and ennobling Indian English novel through their contributions these Muslim novelists have successfully presented the distinctive character of Indianness while revealing their commitment to the humanistic values of universal significance.

These Muslim novelists like their other contemporaries like Mulk Raj Anand give message of humanism. They believe in equality of all men. So uphold dignity of man and denounce the system of caste which undermines human dignity. For instance, Abbas’s humanism believes in the happiness of man in the context of his earthly existence. So it decries such social evils as poverty and cruelty pain and misery and pleads for tenderness and compassion in human relations. Their humanism believes that liberty - social, economical and political - is the birthright of all men. So, it denounces capitalism and imperialism as evils which make for the misery of a certain section of society. They do not approve of superstition and absolute tradition, orthodoxy and religiosity since they believe that these are the impediments in man’s progress. They believe in international harmony and world peace. Their humanism pleads that woman in India needs to be trusted on an equal footing with man.

It is observed that all these writers wrote their novels during the period which is strongly marked by certain political and ideological issues. It was the period of transition from colonialism to Independence. In such a phase of nation a writer plays a dominant role and he has to take a certain position. Within this point of reference it can be stated that all these writers believed in the anti- British movement led by Mahatma Gandhi. All these writers were progressive in the sense that they were nationalistic
and non sectarian in outlook. Naturally therefore they upheld the newly emerging democratic and socialistic values.

The beginning of the 20th century saw the consolidation of Marxism which also influenced some of the Muslim writers like Ahmed Ali and Sajjad Zahir. Their ideological concerns are clearly reflected through their novels. One more important feature of literature on the global level was social realism. It is seen that all these writers under study have written their novels in a realistic vein which bring them on par with the great writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. The significant issues dealt with by these writers are decadence of Muslim aristocracy, their crisis due to the partition of India and more importantly their quest for identity in future. All this ethos has been very realistically depicted by these writers, which forms a major contribution to the Indian English fiction. One of the major issues that these writers dealt with is the image of woman presented by them. It was the age when women’s liberation movement got momentum in Western countries and it had its impact on the Indian English writers. All these writers while portraying the new woman have given expression to the distinct identity of women. It appears that they have accepted the newly emerging feministic values vis-a-vis the orthodox values nurtured in Indian family system. All these writers have spoken on behalf of freedom of women from the clutches of tradition. This also makes them essentially progressive.

The occasional references to Gandhi and his principles is a matter of great concern for most of these writers. As is worldwide known, Gandhi stood for “non-violence”, the principle which was inevitable at that moment for
the solution of socio-political problems of India. Most of these writers under study have directly referred to Gandhi and his principles, and like other novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao have projected the image of Gandhi as the father of Nation.

The language, style, expression, diction and imagery of all these Muslim novelists show harmony between conception and execution. The hallmark of their creative genius is the clarity of conception and corresponding perspicuity of expression. Their novels present a multi-coloured panorama of thought and feeling which is an index of their versatile personalities. All these novelists have show extreme fascination for lucidity of expression, economy of verbal medium, metaphorical use of language, rhetoric questions, symbols, images etc. are abundantly used.

To sum up, these Indian Muslim novelists firmly believe in secular values and have tried to revamp Indian tradition for peace, harmony and universal brotherhood. In expressing the cosmic harmony, Indian philosophy and composite unified Indian culture their performance has undoubtedly remained progressive. These writers were progressive thinkers and humanists who tried to uplift Muslim as well as Indian society in general on the basis of their progressivism.

National political consciousness grew in Bengal in the nineteenth century as a result of the conditions created by the British rule and the action of the forces accompanying this rule. Since the penetration of new forces did not take place evenly, the conditions which led to the rise of modern political and national consciousness matured unevenly among different
sections of the people. Consequently, the early nationalist activities in Bengal were devoid of a Muslim element. The intelligentsia and the middle class growing up in Bengal, small in them, were as yet composed mainly of Hindu elements. The Muslims, already backward in trade, money-lending, and control over land as Jamindars during the Mughal and Nawabi periods, lagged behind in modern education which limited their entrance into the independent professions, while their engagement in trade and commerce was already rare. These two aspects had delayed the appearance of a real middle class and a bourgeoisie among the Muslims in Bengal. As a result, till the beginning of this century, a fairly powerful modern middle class, conscious of the peril to its interests involved in the status of subjection, was not advanced enough among the Muslims to adopt nationalist public and political position.

The early nationalist movement in Bengal also had suffered from some obvious limitations, conditioned by the contemporary socio-economic life, and could not attract the Muslims in the earlier process of nation-making”.

The pioneers of nationalism in all countries were always the modern intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie. It was predominantly from among the Hindus that the first sections of the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie sprang up. But the intelligentsia among the Muslims in the nineteenth century were composed of the Ulama or the traditionally educated intellectuals. They failed to grasp the reality of the British rule. Being traditionally educated, conservative and backward looking, they were opposed to modern developments and ideas. They thus retarded the
filteration of those ideas down to the people. Most of them held the conviction that India under the British was dar-ul-harb (abode of war or injurious to the socio-religious life of the Muslims). A few of them organized isolated movements against the authorities and even engaged in armed clashes, but their reactions operated mainly through religion. They did mobilize rural masses in some isolated pockets, but their ideologies and methods being medieval, they could hardly direct the consciousness of their followers on modern lines. Following the suppression of their rebellions, particularly after the 1870s, they avoided open conflict with their foreign rulers. But the followers of the Faraizi and Wahhabi movements in Bengal retained the conviction that British rule was d-r-ul-harb. The British authorities realised that it would be difficult to persuade this section to accept their rule as a normal feature. Rather, it would be better to isolate then and encourage other previously dominant segments, i.e., the upper class among the Muslims, to accept British favours and collaborate with the rulers for their mutual interests. The upper class Muslims in Bengal, who formed an insignificant part of the total Muslim population, were mostly imigrants and their descendents. The position and influence which these Muslim elites continued to exercise in the urban areas was a relic of the past which was linked to their association with the pre-British state apparatus. This tended to generate a false sense of pride among them. In the nineteenth century, when new forces set in under the impact of the British rule, majority of them failed to appreciate them. While their own failure to meet the new forces was more to be blamed, the increasing preponderance of the Hindu
elite in education, government employment and professions was bitterly resented by them. These in fact served as important factors in formulating the attitude of the Muslim elite in Bengal politics especially in relation to the British.

The British policy of keeping different sections of the people divided also served as a guiding force in the negative attitude of the Muslim elites towards the nascent national movement. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century when unmistakable signs of growth of national patriotic consciousness were discernible among the Hindu intelligent in Bengal, the British authorities decided to pamper the decaying Muslim upper class under the guise of favouring the 'Muslim community, and anxiety was shown to devise measures to refurbish their position and image. The British rulers proposed that 'Muslims' should become the passive recipients of British 'favours'.

However, not all Muslims were to be such recipients, but only those who would accept a 'British-conceived future'. The premise of this policy was that it would be possible to alienate the Muslims from the growing national movement, once the 1. of P. Hardy, op. cit., p. 116. John Strachey remarked in 1888: "It is not possible to say what proportion of the so Mohamedans may be held to represent the classes once dominant in India. Whatever be the actual number, it is comparatively small. It doubtless includes many who feel for us and our Government a deep and fanatical dislike; but it also includes a large number of men who, perhaps above all others in India, deserve our confidence and respect.... It is remarkable that English education which not unfrequently seems to
develop and bring into prominence the least administrative qualities of the feebl
races of Hindus, seldom leads to such results among Mohamedans. Educa-
tion does not dispose the more vigorous Mohamedan to indulge in the foolish political agitation, the thinly veiled sedition, and the scurrility which chaxms for the effeminate Bengali; it makes him manlier, indep-
endent, and self-reliant, and a more loyal citizen". John stradhey, India, p. 224. Elitist elements of the Muslims had been convinced that they had more to gain by collaboration with their rulers than by opposition to them. Fortunately for the British, some Muslims of the upper class were only too willing, for their own interest to accept that 'British-conceived future'. In the ascendancy of the middle and upper class Hindus with modern education and greater economic power they saw - and colonial authorities actively encouraged this belief - the 'dominanca 2 by the Hindus' • They were further motivated politically and socially when some sections of the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia, then groping towards political consciousness, tried to exclude the Muslims from the mainstream of Bengali or Indian life. In this situation, the British rule seemed to them 'benevolent and just', and collaboration with it mutually advantageous. The Government, for its own interests, recognized their 'importance' and formulated measures to satisfy their ambi tiona. The considera.t ion and favour shown to them added to their weight in society and they claimed to be representing the Muslim public opinion. Encouraged by the colonial bureaucracy, they strove to steer clear of political involvement by the Muslims and formulated a policy of
loyalism and dependence on the British Government. They projected the theory that the British rule was not discriminating against

2. W.W. Hunter, op. cit., Passim. the 'Muslims', that under it they could freely perform their social and religious obligations, and that they needed Government favour and patronage to remove their disadvantages in matters of education and employment. In other words, their interests could be better served by supporting the Government than by joining members of the other communities who were spreading national political consciousness in Bengal. These Muslims of the upper class were, however, members of a socially exclusive group more oriented towards their class than towards their community at large. Living in the urban areas of Bengal, they themselves had no political or social coherence or consciousness of common interests with other Muslims.

Most of all, they had little measure of contact with the majority of their Bengali co-religionists who also had little interests in common with the upper class Muslims, being separated by barriers of language and social divisions. The vast majority of the Muslims of Bengal were of indigenous origin. Unlike the upper class Muslims, they were mostly rural and deeply attached to their traditional environment. In social standing, appearance, language and customs, they closely resembled their fellow countrymen belonging to other faith.

Their political and economic interests were identical with those of the masses belonging to other religious beliefs and they shared with them a common life in the villages and constituted essential and interdependent parts of the village economy. The Muslim masses, the vast
majority of whom lived in the rural areas, had been in the past barely conscious of the locus of political authority in the country, let alone taking pride in being part of the 'Muslim' ruling power. In fact they had developed a sense of disinterestedness in anything which did not affect their day-to-day lives. They were involved in some isolated movements in the nineteenth century but these could hardly contribute to the growth of modern political consciousness among them. The rural masses, both Muslim and Hindu, living in the villages, isolated by medieval communication system, had no opportunity whatever to get in touch with the new ideas and forces that were making themselves felt in urban areas, particularly in and around Calcutta. As a result of the slow growth of a modern middle class among the Bengali Muslims, restless and ambitious, which could stimulate political consciousness, the upper class Muslims, with the active patronage of the British authorities, maintained their influence well into the twentieth century.

They tried to canalize the rivalries between the growing number of educated Muslims and members of the Hindu middle class for jobs and economic opportunities into the communal channel. During the first decade of this century, and coinciding with the reactionary partition of Bengal, when Bengal politics took a militant Shape, political separatism was given a good start with the encouragement of the British officials by a few titled Nawabs and Muslim Zamindars of Bengal led by Nawab Salimullah of Dacca. They evolved an unscientific and irrational strategy of communal politics which assumed that the 'Muslims', as an educationally and economically
depressed 'community', could not hold their own with the Hindu elite in
the rough and tumble of electoral or agitational politics, and needed
British protection and patronage. The British authorities worried by the
growing strength and increasingly aggressive tone of the militant
nationalists, encouraged the Muslim aristocratic leadership to promote
communal politics and serve as a counterpoise to the Congress politics in
Bengal. In return they might expect a favoured treatment in any
constitutional or political settlement in the name of the 'Muslim
community' consistent with this strategy, they supported curzon's partition
of Bengal, and joined their counterparts in other parts of India to demand
the reactionary principle of separate electorates and in setting up a
communal political organisation to promote their interests in the name of
the 'Muslim community'. The identity of interests between the aristocratic
leadership and the British bureaucracy and their anti-national tie held no
apparent promise for the Muslim masses and there could be no reason for
them to take any special interest in the British-sponsored communal
separatist politics initiated by the aristocratic leadership Nevertheless
this leadership was able to pursue their reactionary politics. They found
sustenance not only from the British bureaucracy and its divisive
measures, but also from wrong actions of multinationalists who, instead
of adopting a broad secular approach, introduced Hindu religious
symbolism in the nationalist political movement. The actions of the
nationalist and the reactions of the anti-national forces during the period
only retarded the growth of united national political consciousness of the
people The patron-client relationship that was established between the
British authorities and the upper class Muslims, which aimed at isolating the Muslims from the national mainstream, was met with opposition from sections of Bengali Muslims even in the late nineteenth century, though this opposition was very feeble. A few educated Bengali Muslims wrote. The upper class Muslims through separate electorates and representation only tried to serve their own sel- fish interests in the name of Muslim community. This was clear when instead of demanding universal adult franchise, they argued for and attained franchise rights only for the members of their own class. See our chapter II.

5. R.P. Dutt, op. cit., p. 292, Nehru, op. cit., pp. 23-24. against it and worked for closer contacts with the National Congress. Illr ing the first decade of the twentieth century some others, imbued with the ideals of nationalism, came forward in opposition to the reactionary separatist politics of the upper class Muslims 6 Some of them came to public life through establishing newspapers and journals and through association with the nationalist Bengali Hindus. They had much in common with the latter, for their educational advancement had possibly engendered in them political aspirations similar to those of their Hindu counterparts. They did not accept the communal strategy evolved by the upper class leadership with the connivance of the British bureaucracy, they also saw through the fundamental falsity of the claim of separate interests of Muslims. They therefore sounded a note of warning to the Muslims regarding the reactionary character of the upper class separatist politics. They were critical of Bengal partition as giving power to upper class Muslim groups
who had no identity of interests with the Muslims of Bengal in general. They took part in anti-partition agitation and were in favor of Bengali Muslim involvement in the emerging national movement. The appeal of these nationalist Muslims was. Most prominent among them were Abdul Kalam, Rasul and Mujibur Rahman. Naturally at first addressed to the nascent educated Muslims rather than to the masses who were still politically inarticulate and apathetic. Though at this time, they were admittedly, few in number their open opposition to the anti-national alliance between the British bureaucracy and the upper class Muslims influenced the rising educated Muslims. This was soon evident •

During the first years of the present century, there 470 was emerging in Bengal a new generation of young educated Muslims. Increasing unemployment among them, due to the inability of the social and state apparatus to incorporate them, and their perception of economic misery among the people under colonial subjection created among them a mood of criticism.

They found themselves isolated in the political system of the country through the machinations of conservative leadership and the British. The policy of loyaliem had brought them nothing but humiliation and contempt from other sections of the Bengal population. The exhortation of the Bengali nationalist Muslims fell on their receptive ears. The feeling gained ground among them that the Muslims should discard the ways and means of the upper class leadership and must pay increasing attention to the political agitation that as making headway in Bengal. A similar trend was also visible elsewhere, parti-7. cf. Comments of Lady Minto who
recorded the feelings of young Muslims in her journal: "The younger generation continually in northern India. The British authorities and their upper class Muslim clients thought that with the creation of the new province of Eastern Bengal they had succeeded in isolating the educated Muslim elements both from the Congress politicians and from those traditional opponents of the British, i.e., the Ulama. But they misjudged the situation, and the trend among the younger Muslims soon became a matter of serious concerns to them. The demanding and subsequent British recognition of separate electorate for the 'Muslims' and founding the Muslim League was partly the outcome of this concern. In addition to the broader strategy of counterpoise against the congress and the national movement, the British policy seems to have been also one of divide and rule within the Muslim Community. Policy of trying to keep Muslims away not only from Congress politics but also from the militancy displayed by the 'younger Muslims' but the British bureaucracy and the loyalist Muslims could not foresee the possibility of the cont were wavering, inclined to throw in their lot with the advanced agitators of the Congress, then came fuller's resignation. A howl went up that the loyal Mohammedans were not to be supported and that the agitators were to obtain their demands through agitation".

In the last two centuries, the representation of Islam and of Muslims in dominant western discourses—in the form of electronic and print media and scholarly and literary works—have often been less than appreciative; this religion and its adherents, both in popular culture and scholarly texts,
have often been represented as backward and uncivilized, a point most emphatically argued by the late Edward Said in Orientalism (1978). However, it can certainly be claimed that Islam and Muslims have never been as heavily demonized or marginalized in Western discourses as in the post 9/11 era, when they are being also represented as the sources of fear and threat. A significant focus of western discourse on Muslims has been on Muslim women. Muslim women, especially veiled Muslim women, have always captured the imagination of people in the West, and these women’s relationship with Islam has been the subject of much speculation in western mainstream and academic circles. As many scholars agree, Muslim women in contemporary western discourses have often been depicted as either victims or escapees of Islam or, more recently, as the pawns of militant Islam. The popular genre of Muslim life narratives, which have proliferated in the years after the events of 9/11 too, 4 have also reiterated the account of Islam as a backward and misogynist religion and Muslim women as powerless victims of Islam. These memoirs, with their claim to authenticity, have also helped to reify many Western stereotypes about Muslims and Islam in recent years.

In the last decade, within such a context of representation of Islam and Muslim women in the West, a number of novels, written in English by women authors and published in western countries, 6 tell a different story about Islam and about Muslim women. These novels foreground the spiritual dimension of Islam and insist on a deeply devotional relationship between the main female characters and the religion of Islam. This paper focuses on a selection of such novels, and argues that, due to their intense
involvement with the Islamic sacred and spiritual, they create (regardless of a long tradition of Judeo-Christian representation) metaphoric sacred spaces almost unprecedented in English literature. I argue in this paper that the selected novels can be described as metaphoric Muslim sacred spaces in the larger space of English literature because they represent Muslim spaces, moments and symbols in a range of different ways, and they validate the sacred, drawing attention to its significance in some people’s lives rather than ironising it or regarding it sceptically. Throughout the paper, I demonstrate how particular novelistic techniques are employed by individual narratives for this validation of the sacred. Importantly, these novels, through exploring the personal religious experiences of ordinary people and the portrayal of a number of unconventional sacred spaces and moments, problematize the view that the sacred is exclusively the province of the religious elite or that hallowed times and places are only those which are conventionally associated with the sacred. Moreover, I argue that although these novels specifically deal with the engagement of Muslim characters with the sacred through Islamic rituals and practices, and emphasise the importance to them of the form of the religious rituals and symbols, they also suggest that personal spiritual experiences of Muslims are not dissimilar to those of people of other creeds. Significantly, this depiction of the spiritual world of the Muslim characters is offered through the genre of the realist novel, a genre very familiar to western readers. Thus, these texts use a familiar vehicle to convey points about Islam that are different to those conveyed by more mainstream representations.
Literature interested in religious themes has, for several centuries, been part of the canon of literary traditions around the world, and English literature is no exception in this regard. A significant proportion of English literature, especially in past centuries, has been engaged with themes, subjects and symbols from Hellenistic religions, and from Judaism and Christianity. However, the religious tradition of English literature has been principally engaged with Christianity.

The religion of Islam, a minority religion in English-speaking countries, has not historically enjoyed a similar position to Judaism and Christianity, the two other Abrahamic religions, in English literature, though it has been represented in European literary texts since medieval times. As Mohja Kahf (1999, p.4-5) argues, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Western literature generally reflected the European perspective on Islam, which was characterized by viewing Islam as a blasphemous creed or as a source of resentment because of the might of the ‘Muslim world’ at that time. However, orientalist discourse can explain most of the more recent representations of Islam and appearances of Islam in English literature, especially after the middle of the eighteenth century (Said1978; Kahf 1999).

In postcolonial times, with English becoming the official language in some of the colonized countries, some Muslim writers from these countries began to give their own accounts of the Muslim world and produced literary works about Muslim issues and characters. Amin Malak, in his book Muslim Narratives and the discourse of English (2005), reports that Ahmed Ali’s Twilight in Delhi, published in 1940,
was a major novel of this kind (2005, p.19), though, he says that Sultana’s
dream (1905) by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, should be given the credit
for being the first fictional contribution by a Muslim to English literature
about Muslim characters and themes (2005, p.30). Many other Muslim
writers of fiction have created works in English about Muslim
communities, including Adib Khan, Mena Abdullah, M.G Vassanji,
Farhana Sheikh, Ahdaf Sueif, Nurroddin Farah, and Abdulrazak Gurnah.

In this research work, in order to explore the notion of the Muslim sacred
and its representation in contemporary English literature, I will look
briefly at four novels, Sweetness in the belly (2005) by Camilla Gibb, The
girl in the tangerine scarf (2006) by Mohja Kahf, and The Translator
(1999), and Minaret (2005) by Leila Aboulela.10 I contend that these
texts can be distinguished from many other fictional texts by and/or about
Muslims because their main characters’ spiritual lives within Islam and
their engagement with the sacred are specifically emphasised.11 All these
texts are by women writers and explore the lives of women Muslim
characters. The novels were selected partly because they are among the
most critically acclaimed works published in the last decade in the West,
exploring the theme of spirituality in the lives of Muslim characters.
Moreover, although, in this paper, I am not concerned with the gendered
aspects of experience with the sacred and make no distinction between
women and men’s religious and spiritual experiences, I believe that, in
our time, representations of Muslim women’s spiritual lives, for reasons
already discussed, is even more crucial than representations of Muslim
men involved with the sacred; hence my choice of women writers who write about Muslim women characters.

The notion of the sacred has been variously defined. Emile Durkheim, the prominent sociologist, and Mircea Eliade, the well-known historian of religion, consider the sacred as that which is distinct from the profane, common and ordinary. Eliade, in particular, believes that the divine presence erupts in the sacred thing, though he also maintains that anything can be set apart as disclosing the qualities of the sacred (Livingston 2005, p. 46). Durkheim, likewise, notes that sacredness is a value placed on objects, communally agreed on by specific groups (Paden 2003, p.31). Rudolf Otto, the eminent theologian, discussing the sacred in religions, observes that the sacred or the holy is the root of religious experience (Livingston 2005, p.42). Similarly, Durkheim considers sacredness as a universal feature of all religious phenomena (Paden 2003, p.31). For the purposes of this paper, since the selected fictions are realist novels with Muslim characters modelled on ordinary people, I am especially concerned with the manifestation of the Muslim sacred in what David Hall (1997) calls ‘the lived religion’, which is, the everyday beliefs and practices of the laity. In other words, I am interested in the appearances of the sacred in specifically domestic settings.

Before moving to a discussion of the novels, I would like to point out that any involvement with the sacred is important because the sacred in our modern, predominantly secular, times is either underrepresented or, as Gareth Griffiths observes, represented, ‘as a relic of disappeared past and of outdated modes of knowing’ (2001, p.425). Therefore, any engagement
with the sacred in literature (or elsewhere) should be taken seriously, especially since a sense of the sacred still matters to many people and since, in Mark R. Woodward’s words, ‘concern for the sacred is a fundamental quality of humanity’ (2001, p.113).

The four main characters in these novels are Najwa, Lily, Khadra and Sammar, respectively. Najwa, the main character of Minaret, is a Sudanese woman who has lost her family and financial support as a result of political turmoils in Sudan, and now lives and works in London as a maid. She only finds peace of mind and a sense of belonging after turning to her Muslim religion at this turbulent time in her life. Lily, the main character of Sweetness in the belly, is an English girl who is brought up by a Sufi master in Africa. The Sufi master introduces Islam to Lily. Lily lives some of her teenage years in Harar, Ethiopia, though later on, with the outbreak of war in Ethiopia, she goes to London as a refugee and stays there. Khadra, the main character of The girl in the tangerine scarf, is a Syrian-American girl, who is brought up in a highly devout Muslim family and community in Indiana, and who, at a certain moment in her life, starts to doubt her religious community and subsequently her religious faith. However, this moment of doubt becomes a starting point for her to embark on a spiritual journey which culminates in a much deeper faith than she had before. Sammar, the main character of The Translator, is a Sudanese Muslim woman, who says goodbye to life in Scotland and her professional life there, after finding out that Rae, the man she desperately loves and wishes to marry, does not want to convert to Islam, a requirement for the marriage of Muslim women. The
resolution comes with Rae’s conversion to Islam, and marriage between the couple follows.

The main characters are represented in ways that engage the sympathy of the reader. The creation of sympathetic characters who are involved with the sacred can be seen as an important novelistic device for validating many ideas about the sacred presented in the novels. One of the techniques harnessed to create sympathetic characters is focalization. Najwa in Minaret and Lily in Sweetness in the belly are the focalizes as well as the narrators of the stories; in other words, the stories are presented from their perspectives. In The Translator and The girl in the tangerine scarf, there are external narrator-focalizes, who have access to the inner lives of the main characters, Sammar and Khadra, respectively. Both types of focalization provide the opportunity for the reader to gain insight into the thoughts and feelings of the characters, making it easier to connect with the characters. Another reason why the characters can be called sympathetic is that, although none of the characters is represented as flawless, none of them is depicted as mean, dishonest or insensitive either. The mature Khadra, for example, always treats her parents with respect and humility, even though she does not agree with many of their ideas. Similarly, Lily always works selflessly and beyond the call of duty for the refugees, both in her job as a nurse and in her volunteer work for the reunification of refugee families.

The representation of the Islamic sacred is offered in various ways in the texts. One way is the frequent reference to the rituals and symbols of the religion of Islam, such as the daily prayers, the verses of the Quran, the
fasting of Ramadan and azan (the call to prayers of Muslims). These rituals and symbols are important in relation to the sacred since, as James C. Livingston maintains, we cannot point to, address or communicate with the sacred unless through ‘the language and gestures of our own social and historical experience’ (2005, p. 48). Also spiritual moments for religious people are most often created at times when they are involved in religious rituals or are mindful of religious symbols. In this context, it should be noted that, in our times, the very presentation of the sacred in contemporary literary works can be regarded as a way of drawing attention to the idea that the sense of the sacred is still an integral part of the lives of many people. However, in these novels other techniques of rendering the sacred as significant have also been used. In many cases, the representation and upholding of the sacred happen at the same time. In other words, often, when something related to the sacred is portrayed, it is suggested by the narrative as anything but mundane. This happens for example, in the case of the rituals and symbols of Islam. There is almost never merely a passing reference to them in the texts. Rather, those rituals and symbols are represented and reflected on through a tone of awe and admiration, or they are situated in particular meaning-inspiring contexts. As an example, we can refer to a scene in the girl in the tangerine scarf, in which Khadra starts to pray again after not praying for a period of time. Her return to prayer is introduced by a rush of the verses of the Quran passing through her mind, building up a spiritual energy that culminates in her starting to pray again. This is how this moment is described:
She called out for a caller to call to her and listened; she was the caller and the call. Your Lord delights in a shepherd who, on the peak of a mountain crag, gives the call to prayer and prays. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running... Let not any of you belittle herself... And no soul knows what joy for them has been hidden. ... I was a hidden treasure... and I wished to be known. O soul made peaceful, return to your Lord, accepted and accepting. Come in among my worshipers, and in my garden, enter. Come to prayer, come to prayer. Khadra came to prayer. She felt as though she were praying for the first time, as if all that long-ago praying, rakat after rakat, had been only the illusion of prayer, and this—what she began to do now—was the real thing (Kahf 2006, p.307). This situating of Khadra’s prayer amid verses of the Quran or religious sayings with the common theme of God’s love for human beings and the possibility of an intimate relationship between God and people suggests Khadra’s prayer in this instance is significant and meaningful, rather than ordinary or habitual. Another important way through which the sacred is represented in these novels is through the depiction of physical Muslim sacred spaces. In Minaret, for example, Najwa spends a lot of time in a mosque, attending different ceremonies and classes held there. In Sweetness in the belly, the Sufi shrines are referred to frequently and the ceremonies which are held there are described. The narratives also present these spaces as valid and important, mainly through having the main characters comment on their and other people’s sense of wellbeing in these places. These spaces, as described by the narrators, are not neutral zones. Rather, they have
specific impacts on the people who attend them. Graham Howes observes that religious buildings can ‘serve as a psychological resource, and they can lead us to a deep wellspring of residual religiosity upon which we can therapeutically draw’ (2007, p.76). The narrators of these novels also talk about the psychological effects of attending mosques and shrines on the characters and other people. Lily, for example, reports how in the shrine, people who are singing the religious chants can reach ‘a point of near ecstasy’ (Gibb 2005, p.43). Najwa, in Minaret, thinks about the effects of attending the sacred space of the mosque. On one occasion she says, ‘Few people are themselves in mosques. They are subdued, taken over by a fragile neglected part of themselves’ (Aboulela 2005, p.2). Given the characterization of Najwa as a religious person, that ‘fragile neglected part’ might be interpreted as that aspect of a person’s psyche that is drawn to spirituality. Najwa also has no doubt that in the mosque she never feels gloomy, and when she leaves the mosque, she is ‘refreshed, wide awake and calm, almost happy’ (Aboulela 2005, p.243). Moreover, on one occasion, when she is in the mosque she says that, ‘I am happy that I belong here, that I am no longer outside, no longer defiant’ (Aboulela 2005, p.184). Louis p. Nelson (2006, p.6) drawing on Edward Linenthal (2001) comments that that sacred spaces are especially linked to the socio-political identity of the adherents, rousing in them ‘a sense of belonging’. The mosque, as a place to belong, is, throughout the narrative, an important place for Najwa, an immigrant in the West with no supportive family member around. Najwa also believes that the space of the mosque has a unifying effect on the mosque goers, making them all
feel calm and serene. For example, she relishes the memory of the last ten days of Ramadan in the mosque, when, she remembers, all of them were ‘listening to the same verses’, all of them ‘enjoying the same mood’ (Aboulela 2005, p.187).

Lily, the narrator in Sweetness in the belly, also talks about a similar effect, the unifying effect, of attending the religious space of the shrine, emphasizing that the inequalities of race, class and gender disappear there. She explains that all people feel equal there, as they are participating in similar spiritual experiences.

…. Here, worship was far more colourful: urban Hararis, the men in their starched white galabayas and white neat skullcaps, their wives, daughters and sisters glittering in bright headscarves and beaded shawls; the people of the countryside, Oromo peasants who work in the Harari lands, darker skinned and wearing duller hues than the Hararis, and the herder, sinewy Somalis and their butter-scented wives draped in long diaphanous veils. Landlords, serfs and nomads. Conspicuous wealth, backbreaking servitude and drifting poverty- secular distinctions all erased in the presence of God’ (Gibb 2005, p.42).

In Sweetness in the belly, there is also a reference to the relationship between architecture and the notion of the sacred. Lily shows an awareness of how the special architecture of the city of Harar, with its mosques and shrines and five gates and five clay platforms in each house, reminding the people of five daily prayers and five pillars of faith, has given this city the quality of the sacred. John Renard, a specialist in Islamic art and architecture, suggests that religious architecture can
communicate … at least five aspects of a religious community’s fundamentals: ritual practice, cosmology, sense of liturgical time, view of community’s history, and the notion of correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm’ (Howes 2001, p.77).

The way that Lily describes Harar, with its symbolic architecture, corresponds clearly to this view about religious architecture. Of Harar she says:

There was comfort in the order and predictability of our world. Ours was a city of ninety-nine mosques and more than three hundred saints, their shrines organized along seven cocentric circles. There were five gates punctuating the city wall and five raised clay platforms in Harari houses, just as our days revolved around five daily prayers and our lives were governed by the five pillars of faith. (Gibb 2005, p.271)

In short, these physical Muslim spaces, either mosques or shrines or cities with religious designs, are presented in the novels as significant especially because of their potentially positive psychological impacts on people.

In addition to the conventional physical sacred spaces, such as the mosque and Sufi shrines, these novels also present us with some unconventional sacred spaces. By unconventional, I mean spaces which are sacred for reasons other than specific historical associations or significant architecture. What makes these spaces sacred is, instead, the human agent. The appearance of such spaces in the texts can imply two things in particular. First, it suggests that sacred spaces can be so important to some people that sometimes they need to create them with
the help of their imagination. Second, it can also remind the readers that although the experience with the sacred in some cases happens for people when they are in groups, ultimately this experience is a personal one. In The girl in the tangerine scarf, for example, we read that, in spite of the presence of a mosque, a conventional sacred space, one of Khadra’s friends prefers to create her own sacred space rather than going there. The narrator comments, ‘She was deeply religious but not a regular mosque-goer. She dropped in on one occasionally. Didn’t think it was necessary to attach to a mosque scene at all, didn’t find it troubling not to “have” a mosque. She had a zawiya at home, a clean, well-lit corner where her prayer rug was spread’ (Kahf 2006, p.367). Another example of the creation of a personal sacred space is a scene in Sweetness in the belly when Lily feels the need to pray, she goes to the bathroom of the hospital, spreads her gown as a prayer mat and prays there, turning the bathroom into a sacred space (Gibb 2005, p.203). According to Belden Lane, a sacred place is ‘very often an ordinary place, ritually set apart to become extraordinary’ (1988, p.21). These examples from the novels represent how extraordinary sacred space can be created out of ordinary space through human agency. Similarly, when Sammar, in The Translator, in her trip to Sudan, hears azan, she remembers how in Aberdeen she sometimes tranced herself into thinking that the rumble of the central-heating pipe was the sound of a distant azan, something that could turn her lonely room in Aberdeen into a sacred space:

She had missed it in Aberdeen, felt its absence, sometimes she fancied she heard it in the rumble of central-heating pipes, in a sound coming
from a neighbouring flat. It now came as a relief, the reminder that there was something bigger than all this, above everything. Allah akbar, Allah akbar… (Aboulela 1999, p.145).

In all the examples about the imaginatively created sacred spaces, the characters involved are Muslims living in the West. The fact that the characters take refuge in their imaginations to create sacred spaces in these novels, as hinted earlier, indicates how important such spaces can be for them to feel contented, and how they can feel about the (physical) unavailability of these spaces in the western context.

People of different cultures can have different ideas about spaces associated with spiritual practices. This point is directly raised in The Translator. Sammar, in one instance, complains that in Aberdeen she cannot pray anywhere she wants, the way she did when she was in Khartoum:

On days when Diane was not in, Sammar prayed in the room, locking the door from inside. … It had seemed strange for her when she first came to live here, all that privacy that surrounded praying. She was used to seeing people pray on pavements and on grass. She was used to praying in the middle of parties, in places where others chatted, slept or read. But she was aware now, after having lived in this city for many years she could understand, how surprised people would be were they to turn the corner of a building and find someone with their forehead, nose and palms touching the ground (Aboulela 1999, p.76).

This point about whether to pray publicly or privately, which has confused Sammar, suggests how ideas about sacred spaces are also
culture-bound and how they are part of the adjustments that people have to make when they immigrate to other countries.

Another instance in the presentation, as well as the validation of the sacred, is the way the character’s so-called ‘premodern’ perspectives are treated in these novels. As religious people, all the characters share attitudes and beliefs that cannot be necessarily explained by modern reason. Here I use Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge’s sense of the premodern, ‘those life worlds of spirits, myths, religions, indeed of poetry, that cannot be explained in totally modern terms’ (2005, p.391), or whatever that to the ideal rational human being of modernity might seem irrational though not necessarily antirational. An example of a ‘pre-modern’ perspective is the way the system of cause and effect is perceived by many religious people. Many religious people believe that the ultimate cause of actions and events is God, and nothing happens unless God wills it. This religious system of cause and effect is the way the narratives, especially in Aboulela’s novels, make the main characters explain certain events. In Minaret, for example, if a necklace, the loss of which Najwa is accused, is suddenly and unexpectedly found, it is not simply because she and her employers looked for it. In Najwa’s view it is a miracle and the result of God’s mercy for her. She says, ‘This is the kind of miracle that makes me queasy. … My stomach heaves. I can lose this job easily. Rely on Allah, I tell myself. He is looking after you in this job or in another job’ (Aboulela 2005, p.114). Also, in The Translator Sammar does not understand a sentence in a postcard which says, ‘get well soon’ as she deeply believes that one’s health is in God’s hands and
so thinks that ‘I pray’ is missing from the beginning of the sentence (Aboulela 1999, p.104).

Many scholars have argued that modernity is mistaken to ignore ‘premodern’, since ‘premodern’ is part of the lived experience of many people around the world. Mark R. Woodward, for example, contends that ‘an enchanted modernity … may in the long run prove to be more stable than the secular modernities of the Christian West’ (2001, p.113). By extension, Mishra and Hodge state that we need a modernity that ‘seems not to accept the incommensurability of the rational and the mystical’ (2005, p.395). They especially insist that modernity should not ‘break off completely with a premodern past’. Rather modernity should make ‘the premodern inhere in it as a significant and empowering trace’ (Mishra & Hodge, p.396). The ‘premodern’ ideas represented in these texts are not treated ironically; rather they are explicitly endorsed. The main strategy in this regard is that, in cases in which the characters use religious or ‘premodern’ logic in explaining events, those events in the narratives are ordered in such a way that they appear to reinforce the characters’ ideas. In Minaret, for example, the lost necklace is found just after Najwa has prayed hard for it to be recovered. Thus the text positions the readers to share, or at least sympathise with, Najwa’s view that this finding of the necklace at this time might be explained as a miracle.

It can be argued that these novels also challenge some assumptions about the sacred. First of all, these novels question the belief that only mystic elites, Sufi masters or spiritual gurus can commune with the sacred. They do so because the realist narratives represent ordinary people who, in
most respects, are comparable to their non-religious contemporaries in the modern world. However, they are, simultaneously, engaged with the religious world. For example, in Sweetness in the belly, Lily is a responsible and reliable nurse in a London hospital. She is also the one who burns incense in her backyard to honour Bilal, the saint of Harar, as she believes that saints offer people a ladder to reach God more easily, and she is the one who believes that when she prays she feels as if she is ‘not of this time and place’ (Gibb 2007, p. 346). The fictional character Lily, like Najwa, Sammar and Khadra, is represented as an ordinary modern person, who, at the same time, can have deep spiritual moments. Lily’s case demonstrates how the sacred space is represented as a domestic space, and how the spirituality found in this space is produced not as remote or untouchable, but as immediate and accessible.

Moreover, these novels provide a challenge to the idea that the experience of the spiritual belongs only to religiously compliant Muslims. One striking point about each of the texts is that none of the characters is a strictly observant Muslim, practising absolute religious obedience. Even in Aboulela’s novels, in which the characters show the greatest degree of awareness of religious rules and try their best to observe them, Najwa and Sammar kiss or embrace the men they love, to whom they are not married at the time. In Sweetness in the belly, Lily has a loving relationship with Aziz, the Harari doctor, who does not live long enough to become her husband, and yet it is only after having such experiences and after opting for less rigidity in the practice and understanding of Islam that she feels that she has matured in her understanding of her religion and in her
devotion to it. She emphatically says that she does not want to be orthodox the way some people explain orthodoxy. She says: “… to become as orthodox as this Imam demands, I would have to abandon the religion I know. He’s asking for nothing less than conversion. Why would I do such a thing? My religion is full of colour, possibility and choice; it’s a moderate interpretation, one that Aziz showed me was possible, one that allows you to use whatever means allow you to feel closer to God, be it saints, prayer beads or qat, one that allows you to have the occasional drink, work alongside men, go without a veil when you choose, sit alone with an unrelated man in a room, even hold his hand, or even dare I say it, to feel love for a Hindu’ (Gibb 2005, p.404).

As we see in this example, it is the personal relationship with God that matters to Lily more than anything else. Some of the behaviours that she refers to and believes are harmless to engage in as a Muslim (having ‘occasional drinks’, holding the hand of ‘an unrelated man’) are indeed digressions from the rules of Islam. However, Lily’s understanding of Islam seems to be less rule-bound and more spirituality-oriented. In The girl in the tangerine scarf, likewise, there is a scene in which Khadra, for the first time, allows herself to unveil outside the house. Doing so, she does not feel disobedient to God or thereby deprived of His love. Instead, this moment turns to one of intense spirituality for her: The scarf was slipping off. She shrugged. The chiffon fell across her shoulders. …She closed her eyes and let the sun shine through the thin skin of her eyelids, warm her body to the very core of her. She opened her eyes,
and she knew deep in the place of yaqin [certainty] that this was all right, a blessing on her shoulders. Alhamdu, alhamdulillah. Gratitude filled her. Sami allahu liman hamadah. The sunshine on her head was a gift from God.

Unveiling are part of the same process, the same cycle, how both are … Teta got it. How veiling and necessary ;…(Kahf 2006, p.309) This scene suggests how sacred time and space can be created independently of whether the human agent follows particular religious proesccriptions or not. Needless to say, I do not intend to make any theological evaluation of the views of the fictional characters here, as this paper focuses on a literary analysis of these novels. However, it can certainly be claimed that these novels challenge the idea of any exact correspondence between religious orthodoxy and the experience of the spiritual and the sacred, and suggest, rather, a kind of flexibility for the sacred.

The novels selected for this study, by offering glimpses into the characters’ experiences with the sacred, can also provide an opportunity for exploring the notion of the universality as well as the particularity of the sacred experience. The experiences with the spiritual and the sacred that the main characters in these novels have might sound familiar to some readers, belonging to diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds. Martin Lings, in his book What is Sufism? (1975), discusses the relationship between the mysticism of Islam and other religions, and contends that if we think of mysticisms of different religions and creeds as radii, we can say that Islamic mysticism is ‘both particular and universal—particular in that it is distinct from each of the other radii
which represent other mysticisms and universal because like them, it leads to One Centre’ (Lings 1975, p.21). Non-Muslim readers, in their spiritual moments, might have experienced the same feeling of awe, the same feeling of being protected by the divine hand, the same physical reactions such as shivering and crying, and the same feeling of ecstasy, experienced by the fictional characters in their spiritual moments, as depicted in the novels. However, in these novels the verses of the Quran, the space of the mosque, the sound of azan, or other uniquely Muslim symbols and rituals, are what create such feelings in the Muslim characters, thus making their experiences specifically Muslim. For western readers, this suggestion of the similarity between experiences of the sacred is represented through the familiar framework of the realist novel. As a result, these texts may well have the additional effect of persuading readers to accept that Muslims, after all, are not those strange ‘Others’.

Emphasis on the idea of the sacred makes the selected novels worthy of attention for another reason too. As hinted in the introduction, fictional works of the type of those explored here, which highlight the Islamic sacred and spiritual, although few in comparison with mainstream representations, still can bring some balance to the representations of Islam in the West. Also, the depiction of some Muslim women’s deep spiritual bonds with Islam through these novels provides an alternative to the dominant paradigms of representations of Muslim women in the West as mostly either the victims of Islam and awaiting rescue by the West or escapees of Islam who can only feel liberated in the West. Indeed, these
novels, by representing Muslim women who have agency in choosing a religious way of life, have deep relationships with their religion and take solace and empowerment from it, suggest that the sacred space that Islam can create might well be a place to take refuge in rather than escape from., for example, Byng, M D 2007, Abrahamian, E 2003 and Mishra, S 2008. 2 Meyda Yegenoglu (1998), for instance, argues that the desire to penetrate the veil – which places the body of the Muslim woman outside the reach of the Western gaze – has given rise to many western fantasies about Muslim women, and it is one of the reasons why there are so many representations of Muslim veiled women in Western discourses. See also Kahf, M 1999. 3 See, for example, Kahf, M 1999, Kahf, M 2000, pp.149-151 and Mohanty, C T 1984. 4 Some critics believe that it is no coincidence that Muslim memoirs which tell the victim story of Muslim women have proliferated in the so-called ‘age of terror’ because they argue that the plight of Muslim, as depicted in these memoirs, can be harnessed to get public consent for military action in Muslim countries. See, for example, Dabashi, H 2006 and Whitlock, G 2007. 5 Fatemeh Keshavarz (2007, pp.2-3) dubs this ‘eyewitness literature’ the New Orientalist narrative, and as examples of this kind of narrative, among others, she refers to Reading Lolita in Tehran:a memoir in books2003 by Azar Nafisi, and Kite Runner 2003by Khaled Husseini. The Infidel: my life 2007 by Ayaan Hirsi Ali is one of the most high-profile memoirs of this type, which attributes most of the problems in Muslim countries to Islam. For criticisms of this book see, for example, Ali, L 2007, Anthony, A 2007, The Economist 2007. 6 The selected novels have been published
in the UK, the USA and Australia. 7 See, for example, Detweiler, R & Jasper, D (eds.) 2000. 8 Of course, there has always been so much diversity among Muslims, and the idea of the existence of a ‘Muslim world’ is only an ideological construct, strategically used as a binary opposition to the ‘Christian world’. 9 Adib khan is a Pakistani- born, Australian-based writer and the author of Seasonal Adjustments 1994, which won 1995 Commonwealth Writer's prize for Best Book. Mena Abdullah, Indian-Australian, is the author of Time of Peacock1965, a collection of stories about the joys and pains of growing up Muslim in Australia.  M.G Vassanji is a Kenyan-Canadian writer and the author of award-winning novels, The Gunny Sack 1989, The Book of Secrets1994 and The In-Between World of Vikram Lall 2003. Farhana Sheikh is the Pakistani-born, UK-based author of The Red box 1991, which is about the lives of some Pakistani Muslim girls in England. Ahdaf Soueif, originally from Egypt, is the author of the bestselling novel, The Map of Love 1999, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction. Nurroddin Farah is a Somali novelist, mostly famous for his novel The Maps 1986, which explores the theme of cultural identity. Abdulrazak Gurnah is originally from Zanzibar but lives and works in the UK. He is the author of a number of fictional works, including Paradise 1994, which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction. 10 Camilla Gibb, the author of Sweetness in the Belly 2005, was born in London and grew up in Toronto. She is not a Muslim. She was chosen by the jury of the Orange Prize as one of the talents to watch for in 21 century. She is also the author of two other novels, Mouthing the Words 2001, and The Petty
Details of So-and-so’s life 2002. Her latest novel, Sweetness in the Belly, was short-listed for the Giller Prize, was chosen as a Best Book of the Year by the Globe and Mail and amazon.ca, won Ontario’s Trillium Book Award and was long-listed for the 2007 IMPAC Award. Mohja Kahf, the author of The girl in the tangerine scarf 2006, is a Syrian-American Muslim writer. She is the author of Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: from Termagant to Odalisque 1999 and E-mails from Scheherazad 2003, a finalist in the 2004 Paterson Poetry Prize. She has won an Arkansas Arts Council award for achievements in poetry. Leila Aboulela, the author of The Translator 1999 and Minaret 2005, is a Sudanese Muslim writer. She lived for many years in Aberdeen and wrote most of her works there. She is the winner of Caine Prize for African Writing in 2000 for her short story The Museum 2001. Her two novels, The Translator and Minaret, have been nominated for Orange Prize and IMPAC Dublin Literary Awards.

As examples of some other contemporary novels with themes similar to the selected novels see, for example, Abdel-Fattah, R 2005 and Zakiyyah, U 2001. For examples of works which deal specifically with the subject of women and religious and spiritual experiences, see, for example, Osch, C 1983, Holden, P (ed.) 1983, Ochshorn, J & Cole, E (eds.) 1995 and Falk, N A & Gross, R M (eds.) 1980. Following Gerard Genette (1980) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983), I am calling the perspective from which the story is presented ‘focalization’, rather than ‘point of view’. Genette and Rimmon-Kenan argue that in theoretical discussions of this perspective, the term ‘focalization’ is more precise than the term ‘point of view’. The
main reason they indicate for this preference is that in most studies of point of view, no distinction is made between perspective or narration or between ‘who sees’ or ‘who speaks’ while the agent who sees (focalizer) might or might not be the same as the agent who narrates (narrator). Using the term ‘focalization’ helps us avoid this confusion (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, pp. 71-74) 14 Quoted in Howes 2001. 15 Mostafa Malekian, the Iranian scholar, argues than religious beliefs can be put into three categories:1. Those which are rational, 2. Those which are antirational and 3. Those which are irrational. He maintains that what distinguishes an antirational belief from an irrational one is that reason can definitely prove that an antirational belief is wrong while, in the case of an irrational belief, reason can neither definitely prove that it is wrong nor definitely prove that it is right. In other words, reason alone can not disprove an irrational belief (Malekian 1997, pp. 50-56). 16Alhamdulillah is part of a Quranic verse, the translation of which is ‘Praise be to Allah’. 17 Sami allahu liman hamadah is part of a Quranic verse, the translation of which is ‘Allah has heard those who have praised Him’. 18 Many Muslim scholars do not agree that hijab is a religious requirement and insist, instead, that what is required in the Quran is modesty for both men and women (see for example Ahmed 1992, Barlas 2002, Mernissi1991, and Wadud1999). However, scholars still argue that hijab should be respected on the grounds that it is an identity-marker for Muslim women and that it represents the freedom of choice that Muslim women should be given in representing their bodies (see for example Zine2004, Woodlock2000). In Kahf’s novel, also, though Khadra resolves that she
does not need to wear a headscarf to feel close to God, she does not stop wearing it occasionally so as to remind to herself and to the world, among others, what an important part of her identity Islam is, and to remember ‘how precious is the heritage! A treasure fire cannot eat’ (Kahf 2006, p.313).

Having studied all the novels selected for the research work ‘we can sum up saying that we can find the real picture of India and the life of common man. The characters in the novels are so real and natural that, when we read and analyze them we start comparing them with ourselves, our relatives, friends and neighbors. Though the novels have simple, settled story, they have covered the story of many generations and many decades. The writers have exhibited their intelligence in presenting picturesque description of life. There is optimism like Browning, there is pessimism like Arnold, there is reality like Dickens, there are emotions, feelings and picturesque description like Tennyson thus we can say the selected novelists have all notes of life in there novels. The characters in the novels are bold, courageous and confident like Robert Browning’s characters that are ready to face the life as and how it comes. Similarly we also find that Nature, destiny and fate are ruling the lives of people. Humayun Kabir has described very beautifully the power of nature which can survive or completely destroy the lives of human beings. In the novel we see Man is just a puppet in the hands of destiny. Thus here we remember Mathew Arnold. The novels also give the message of the importance of humanity.
Being Muslim writers, selected novelists have subjectively as well as objectively presented the Islamic philosophy, its customs, traditions, beliefs, culture etc in a beautiful manner. Though they have used the polished English language, still it is easy and simple to understand for a common reader. The writers have also used the colloquial language here & there in the novel to give a native touch.

As the novels are written during the Gandhi whirlwind, the writers and their novels are greatly influenced by the Gandhian philosophy. Hence we find the picture of simple village life, poverty, hunger of the poor Indian Society. Though the novels have written in 19th century, even today in the 21st century the novel have relevance because it exhibits the conditions and life of common people which is same even today. We can see how partition has not only affected the nations but also the families and every individual were affected with it.

We can see different approaches, observation, and point of view towards life in the study. The selected writers have used their writings as a weapon or we can say as a medium to reform the society and to bring awareness among the readers.

As the novel is a popular form of literature it has provided everything that the reader needs. It appeals to the readers. It is true and authentic mirror to man and society of it’s times.

The writers have successfully created the impression of Indians artistically, by choosing Indian problems and sufferings as subject matter. The writers have minutely observed the life around them, and have consciously tried to bring a close grip with life, with its joys and sorrows, hatred and love and
this has resulted in the rise of realism and humanism. Various manifestations of inhumanity and exploitation have been exposed in the novels with a view to reform society and discard the old order. The sympathy of the novelists is with the poor, exploited, suppressed and discarded.