Throughout history it is seen that social stereotypes have been reinforced by archetypes. Another way of putting it would be to say that in every age, woman has been seen as primary as mother, wife, mistress, sex object, their roles in relationship to men. Roles outside this, woman as an achiever, as a leader or as a strong individual are, by and large, either non-existent or rare.¹

It is true that woman is known by the relationship she bears to man as mother, wife, daughter, sister and so on. Her independent recognition, as an individual with a distinct identity, does not exist in any society. All the major civilisations in the world have patriarchal societies, wherein woman is known by her relationship with man and not vise-versa. That is why the adjectives like 'parasite', 'shadow of man', 'soulless creature', 'property of man', are used for women. Simone-De-Beauvoir enlists some more words from different civilisations such as

'power of disaster', 'sphinx of dissolution', 'maya or illusion' and 'internal enemy who corrupts without any sign of combat'.²

Such lies are told about women and other members of the society are made to believe them. Thus, the patriarchal society reduced woman to the position of an unpaid servant in the household and child bearing biological automation. She is always portrayed as acted upon in relation to man.

Sociologists have seen India as a traditionally male dominant society, where individual's rights are subordinate to social roles. Indian womanhood has accepted it and lived with it for ages. There is duality in the projection of the image of woman in literature also.

There are deified archetypal images and there are debased and degraded images of women as well. At a later stage, one finds an insurgent minority who protests against these ills.

The significance of the study of the status of woman in society never diminishes, because all the civilisations in the world, have given such an abundant bulk of contradictory statements, made about the status and privileges of women in every society that sociologists need a life time to solve the tangle. Calling woman good and bad alternatively, confirms one point that such contradictions about women are inherent in every civilisation.

The hypocrisy of calling woman goddess and a witch, in one breath, is not wanting in the history of human civilisations. The civilisations, which are supposed to be the cradles for nurturing the highest human values and human dignity, are also not lagging in ill-treating the woman. When the mother figure dominates the psyche of the 'think-tank' of a community or a religion, woman appears like a goddess and in the contrary circumstances, the same woman appears like a witch. Thus, the contradictions that are embedded in the psyche of a community are inherited and practised by its members. The religions, which boast of being world's oldest and greatest, also suffer the ignominy of respecting mothers and humiliating wives, loving daughters and disliking daughters-in-law. That is why it becomes necessary to study how woman is being treated in every civilisation. One has to find reasons for the tag of 'essential otherness' attached to woman in every civilisation.

According to Greek Mythology, a woman called, Pandora, was responsible for all the sufferings of the humanity. Therefore, the male dominant Greek society cursed woman as a soulless creature.

One of the early Greek philosophers, Pythagoras, wrote ten good things in the world like right, light, straight, male and so on and in the other column, where he mentioned ten bad things in the world, he wrote, left, crooked, female and so on. The great poet Homer also had his share in considering woman a slave. Homer makes Hector gently remind Andromache.
'Wives have no place even at the dining table, only in the household, at the loom and in the marriage bed.'

In this way, the world's wisest human society has made woman a convenient peg to hang its strange logic and inconsistencies on. The Greeks regarded woman as a sub-human creature, whose status in society was, in every way, inferior to that of man. Woman of Greek nobility observed purdah and their apartments were also segregated from their main houses.

Gradually, the Greeks became over-whelmed by egotism and sexual perversion. With this change in man's attitude, the corrupt female element gained prominence that has no parallel in history. Prostitution became rampant and this institution attracted poets, philosophers, men of letters, historians and savants of arts alike. It may sound strange that counsel of such women was sought on matters like morality, aesthetics and state politics. They used to lock their legally wedded wives to visit the houses of prostitutes, which were regarded as temples of learning and Eden of pleasure. Lechery and pleasure hunting was so rampant among the Greeks, that this intelligent race did not get a second chance to reach those dizzy heights they had occupied once.

The martial race of the Romans could not do better to improve the lot of women. When the Roman democracy was at its zenith, woman was deified and her chastity was considered the mainstay of national pride. Once a husband kissed his wife, in the presence of his daughter, it was considered derogatory to the moral fabric of the society and a vote of censure was passed against that man in the senate.

Along with the march of time, the position of woman also underwent vast changes. Marriage was reduced to a civil contract. Divorce was so easy that it could be obtained on any flimsy ground. Seneca (04 BC to 65 AD), the famous Roman philosopher, criticised his countrymen severely for this. Roman women used to take many husbands in those days. Maulana Sayyid Abu Ala Mawdudi gives a typical example of one woman.

"whose last husband was twenty-third and she herself was the twenty-first wife of that man." 4

In the beginning, the Christianity strived to give a respectable life to woman. It put an end to immoral practices and retrieved dancing girls.

After the initial stage of feminine glory, many Christian saints are on record abusing woman as ‘snake’ or ‘scorpion’ and also,

"The origin of devil, the scorpion, ever ready to sting." 5

The role of church, in further belittling the woman, was large. Once it declared that conjugal relationship was a ‘dirty’ affair. Woman was weakened because her ‘right to earn’ was denied. In different Christian communities, different rituals continued which speak of woman’s untold misery. Among the Russian Christians, at the time of his daughter’s marriage, the father gently strikes his daughter, saying that he strikes her for the last time and then passes on the whip to his son-in-law. This speaks volume about the treatment given to woman in that community.

After the initial goody-goody euphoria, the Judaism started preaching that woman is a wicked creature. Even today, the Jew in his daily prayers says,

"Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God! King of the Universe! Who hath not made me a woman." 6

Plurality of wives was not disallowed in Judaism. Divorce was so easy in the Jewish society that,

"A husband divorced his wife because she put little more salt in the food." 7

4. (Abu Ala Mawadudi, S. Pardah and Status of Woman in Islam) P. 22
5. (Kidwai, S. M. H. Woman Under Different Social and Religious Laws) P. 10
6. (Ibid) P. 13
7. (Ibid) P. 13
It is unthinkable that of all the preachers in the World, the enlightened Buddha advised his disciple Anand regarding women.

"Don’t see them, Anand. Keep wide awake."  

In the Buddha’s opinion, the accident of being born a woman must have been what to be born a shudra to a Brahmin. It is a sorry state of affairs that the person like The Buddha, who fought relentlessly against the dead rituals, could not do much for the living creatures.

In Hinduism, woman was respected to the extent that she was called the goddess on earth. A popular Sanskrit verse, in praise of woman, goes, ‘where women are worshipped, gods take pleasure in (treading) that land’.

Hinduism honoured woman and her intelligence to such an extent that women like Lopamudra, Gargi, Maitreyi contributed to the Vedas.

A.S. Altekar, in his exhaustive study on Hindu woman, says that the woman’s role, in different capacities, was very much appreciated by the Hindu society then.

Verily, wife is a friend

or

I believe, there is no physician like the wife’

However, this ‘doctor’ turned into a slave and her medicine into potion, when Manu, the law giver, came on the scene.

Manu relegated woman not only to a subordinate position, but her right to study the Vedas was also taken away. Man’s arrogance against woman can be seen in a line of the Hindi poet, Surdas, "Dog, drum, cattle and woman, should be beaten to keep them in good tune."

8. (Ibid) P.11
Not so much of beating woman, but what really rends our heart is the fact that woman is made to stand in the same row as that of dog.

In the initial stage, as happened in other religions, woman was much respected in Islam also. The Quran, in more than seventeen places, has declared equality between man and woman.

'Wives have the same right as the husbands have on them.'

Not only The Quran but the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) also confirms this equality view.

Then came the lawgivers, Sajjad-bin-Yusuf and Wahid-Ill of the Abbasid and Ummayad clans. They made sweeping changes in the moral and material laws, which governed the Islamic society. They were very much harsh, especially on women, as they were considered the custodians of the prestige of the family. The biased opinions of these lawgivers almost turned the egalitarian Islamic society into a medieval, tribal society. As a result, woman was shelved in every department of life like marriage, divorce, right to property, right to education, purdah, polygamy and so on.

'Un-nikaho Min Sunnati', 'The contract of Marriage is my tradition' says the Hadith, (the Book of the Prophet's sayings and doings). So, among the Muslims, marriage is a social contract and since it is a contract, both the parties have equal rights in its maintenance or otherwise. The bride is free to put any condition to the groom but those conditions must be within the range of 'Hududullah' (limits set by god). She is even free to refuse the groom fixed by her parents and well-wishers. Widow marriage and second marriage do not carry stigma in the Muslim society.

Polygamy, as has been wrongly believed, is in no sense an essential institution of Islam. On the contrary, The Quran declares, "Fa Wahidatan' (then marry only one). That is, if you cannot treat your wives equitably, then marry only one.

10. (The Quran), 2:228
The fourth chapter of The Quran, 'Al-Nisa', 'Woman', permits polygamy under extraordinary circumstances, but does not enjoin it. In ordinary course, it is not a matter of right for a Muslim male to marry four wives. However, when there are war widows, destitutes and abandoned women, who have no other source of survival and if they are not remarried, they would be thrown in the street and they would adopt immoral ways for survival, in such condition four wives are allowed in Islam. A rich man cannot marry four maidens. The practice has been found to be an effective check on concubinage and street immorality. According to the 1981 census, polygamy is six percent among the Muslims and a little less than seven percent among the Hindus.

Mehr of 'bride money' is another salient feature of the Muslim marriage. While entering into a marriage contract, the bride is free to stipulate any amount of Mehr. It entirely belongs to her. The Quran warns,

'And (if) you have given a heap of gold, take nothing from it.'

'Talaq' or divorce is another area of Muslim social life, which has created much controversy. Honestly speaking, if the contending parties strictly follow the guidelines laid down by The Quran, there will be no heartburns on both the sides. If the people concerned try to depend on their own whims and on the biased opinions of the Ulemas of different schools of Islamic jurisprudence, then they are likely to be involved in deeper troubles. A lot has been said and written about the 'Talaq-e-aah', repeating the word 'Talaq' three times in one breath and every thing gets over. Such unilateral divorces are not only unjustifiable but un-Islamic also. Elsewhere, the matter is discussed in detail.

Islam stands more resolutely behind the weak in the matters of justice. Nowhere in The Quran or 'Sharia' the book of traditions, this type of divorce is either recommended or deliberated. If marriage is a social contract, then how can The Quran deny the natural justice of hearing the other party, that is woman? Therefore, the unilateral Talaq is anti-Islamic and against the spirit of The Quran.

11. (The Quran) 4:20
Another provision of far reaching consequences, that The Quran makes for the welfare of Muslim woman is, her right to property. Islam recognizes every one's right to property, man, woman and child. A Muslim woman can earn money through her skills or inherit her ancestral property. Others, including her husband and children, have no claims over her property. She can trade individually or in partnership with other men and deal with her money in the manner she likes.

"Purdah" is one more area, which has been grossly misunderstood by the people of other religion. Frankly speaking, some Muslims themselves have not properly understood it. "Purdah" is a Persian word which connotes, guarding oneself against other's evil eyes or it is a sign of respect shown to the elderly persons. However, Purdah cannot be used as in instrument of segregation. Other Islamic countries have started using Purdah as a dress item. In a landmark judgment on 15th July, 1999, the Supreme Court of Egypt ruled that the women, going to colleges and universities should not be compelled to wear Burqah, because any type of segregation of women from the rest of the society is un-Islamic.

So far it is seen, how the major religions of the world have treated woman. If one observes carefully, one finds a pattern emerging regarding the position of woman in different religions. The founders of the religions like Islam, Christianity and Hinduism were very considerate towards women. They could not think of keeping women away from the mainstream of society. That is why women were held in high esteem. They were considered equal to men.

When a religious community develops into a society, some lawgivers emerge under social compulsions. Since the law-giver is a representative of the patriarchal society, the laws or rules he shapes for the health of the society, naturally favour man and put woman in more and more strong shackles. Manu, Sajjad-bin-Yusuf are such law-givers.

Sometimes, efforts are made, by some people in the society, to support the stand taken by Manu and Sajjad-bin-Yusuf regarding women, saying that what they did was right in those particular circumstances. It is difficult to accept the half-truth. Even if we accepted the argument that particular circumstances compel them to relegate women to
Subordinate position, for the sake of argument, what are the reasons for these social evils perpetuated by these law-givers?

1. they are responsible for the vertical split in the society. Manu created four divisions of the Indian society like Brahman, Kshtriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Wahid and Sajjad split the Muslim society into two groups – Ashrafis (high caste Arabs) and Afaqis (the converts).

2. they allowed a handful of people to pursue knowledge like Brahmins in the Hindu society and Mullas and Maulvis in the Muslim society.

3. untouchability, in both the communities was the creation of these law givers. Among Muslims, untouchability is impossible, but under the influence of the Hinduism, the Muslim nobility and aristocracy made some converts to stay outside towns and cities. Therefore, it can not be argued that some social circumstances compel the law-givers to push woman to the back ground.

What The Quran said about woman, the Prophet of Islam practiced in his personal life. How did the Prophet of Islam treat his wives, daughters and other women during his life time, is an important question. The Prophet often reminded his wives and daughters that they were the role-models for other Muslim women. The first wife of the Prophet, Hazarat Khudeja, was the friend of the weaker sections and pleaded on their behalf to the Supreme authority of the Islamic world. Therefore, Bibi Khudeja was called the mother of the believers.

Hazarat Bibi Ayesha was the youngest and the most outspoken among the wives of the Prophet. She was very intelligent woman and a leading Islamic jurisprudent of her times. Qazis (judges) used to consult her on difficult issues. She was writing poetry and commanded a section of Muslim army in the Battle of Jamal (camels).

Umme-Salma was another wife of the Prophet. She had byhearted the entire Quran and contributed about 378 sayings of the Prophet to the book of Hadith. Like Bibi Ayesha, Umme-Salma was also an expert on Islamic jurisprudence. She was an adviser to the Governor of Medina, Marwan-bin-Hakim, on religious matters.
Among the Muslims all over the World, 'Bibi Fatima' is the name taken with great respect. Daughter of the Prophet of Islam, Bibi Fatima was an ideal woman for other married women to emulate. The cordial relation between the father and daughter was of such an exemplary order that even to-day, every Muslim wants to treat his daughters and grand children as was done by the Prophet.

Apart from the women belonging to the Prophet’s family, there are others whose life stories would help us in understanding the high status, the Muslim woman held in the early Islamic society. Among them, Hazarat Umme Ammar, Bibi Khansa, Bibi Asma-bin-Yezid and others are prominent. A lion-hearted lady, Umme Ammar, like lightening fell upon the enemy and rescued the Prophet in the battle of Uhad. In the battle of Yemen, she ‘single handedly’ pulled victory to the side of the Islamic army, because she lost one arm.

Arabs are proud of their pets and poets. Bibi Khansa was a woman-poet of high repute. She was called ‘Arsal Arab’, ‘Arabic Poetess of Excellence’. In the poetry competition at Ukaz near Mecca, Bibi Khansa won poet-laureateship, defeating the famous poets of the time Zarier and Bashar.

Hazarat Asma-bintee-Yezid was not only a military genius but an intelligent woman, who won praise from the Prophet, for her argument that the domestic chore that women perform, was as important as the trade carried out or a battle fought by men. The Prophet assured Bibi Asma and through Bibi Asma to the Muslim womanhood that the domestic work is also important and woman gets half the merit for her work in the house, from what man earns out side.

In Islam sainthood is not granted to woman, but the excellent services rendered by the following women earned them the title.

Saint Rabiya, Saint Zubeda, the wife of the famous Khalifa of Baghdad, Haroon-Al-Rashid, Saint Fakrunnisa Shohada to name a few, are great names in Islamic world. Little efforts are made to introduce these great daughters of Islam to the outside world by the historians but not the men of letters.
Spain had a brilliant record of woman participation in intellectual activities. Ayesha and Lubena, the two illustrious daughters of the King of Spain were not only good at Islamic theology but also at Mathematics and Alchemy. They have written books also on these subjects. It is an unfortunate loss to the Muslim community all over the world that no efforts are being made to write about these women and their intellectual pursuits.

In this way, woman in Islam is better placed than her sisters in other religions. Unfortunately, it has not been brought to the knowledge of others. For instance, the Italian saying ‘As a horse, good or bad, requires spurs, so a woman whether good or bad, requires thrashing’ reflects what does the community think about woman. On the other hand, The Quran says,

‘Respect the womb (woman)’

Similarly, there is a Chinese proverb, ‘Listen to the counsel of your wife but act against it’. On the contrary, Islam bad made wife’s counsel mandatory while taking decisions of their children’s marriages. That is why, it is said that woman in Islam is better placed, but for the intervention of the so called law-givers.

In the events like Purdah, Polygamy and Talaq, The Quran certainly protects the interests of woman. For every event, there are pre-conditions. Without fulfilling them, man cannot obtain the final results. However, the clergy and arrogant leaders of the society, removed all those riders and pre-conditions and retained what was beneficial to them.

There are some intellectual acrobats to establish woman’s position lower to that of man. In order to prove that woman is inferior to man, many scholars are found indulged in childish arguments.

A group of thinkers say that woman is physically weaker than man, hence man enjoys higher status. If physical strength is the criterion to decide one’s superiority, then why can’t tiger and elephant be superior to man.

12. (The Quran) 4:131
Social anthropologists like Murdock and Parson say that woman is a 'programmed to produce' child, hence she is inferior. There are other species also which 'produce'. If they stop producing, could they be equal to their male counterparts?

There is Rousseau's 'consents theory', which says that Woman is a willing slave of man. It is a hundred pity that a man like Rousseau said this. Willing slaves are rare phenomena.

There is a theory in psychology, which is known as anatomical theory of man's phallus. It is so ludicrous that it does not deserve serious attention.

Finally comes the Marxian theory of economic class struggle. In Marxism, everything boils down to economic disparity and class struggle. It is a fact that economically weaker position of woman makes her to accept man's overlord ship.

If we go on searching, we may find many more theories propounded by Man to prove his superiority over woman. Man has wasted much of his intellectual power to prove his superiority over woman. There, I think, lies the strength of womanhood.

The second chapter has been divided into two parts: the first part describes the Cultural Confluence and exchange of thought between the two communities of Hindus and Muslims and in the second part, how this cultural exchange has been depicted in the fiction has been shown.

Muslims came to India as sailors, as preachers and finally as rulers. On every occasion, there was some cultural exchange between these two communities and both of them were benefited by each other's experiences in different fields. The cultural exchange has been depicted by some of the fiction writers in their novels and short stories.

Due to some compelling political reasons, some Arab sailors reached India and settled down in the coastal areas like Malabar, Bhatkal in Karnataka and Surat in Gujarat and so on. They married Indian women and their offsprings in Kerala were called 'Mopalas', 'the great child' and in the areas around Bhatkal, they were called 'Navayaths' of 'the
new generation'. According to Jamila Brijabhusan, the word Malbar, which is given to some part of Kerala, is derived from the Arabic word 'Maabar' or the threshold.

The famous historian Ibn Batuta, graphically described how quickly Arab Women adapted themselves to the dress, ornaments, festivities of India. Segregation of women with separate dwellings, which were typical of the Muslim community were adopted by the Indians.

Islam came to India and became popular with the masses, not because of the exclusive practices of its scholars, but because of the assimilative preachings and practices of the Sufi saints. Sufism is the Bhakti Movement of Islam. It is a pantheistic, mystic cult and its philosophy is closer to the 'Advait' or non-dualistic philosophy of Shankaracharya. A Sufi saint Ibne-Arabi emphasized his philosophy of 'Whadatal-Wajud', which is an Arabic version of vedantic 'Aham Brahmasmi', I am the Brahman or the Supreme soul. Due to assimilation of the Hindu and Muslim philosophic teachings, many Hindus also became the followers of the Sufi saints. Moveover, the Sufis used the local language and Hindu mythology to preach the Universal fundamentals of Islam. Therefore, they became friends of India.

Two things which distinctly emerge from the Sufi movement in India are; due to their Pan-Islamic theology, they considered all Muslims as one family. They did not make distinction between the people of Arab pedigree and those of the Indian origin. They considered the Hindus also their brothers. This broad based Islamic brotherhood, created a sense of identity crisis in the minds of Arab Muslims and other aristocratic Muslims in India, because they wanted to maintain their Islamic identity. Some of these disgruntled Muslims, poisoned the minds of the Mughal rulers and some of the rulers turned against the Sufi saints.

Secondly, the Sufis did not do anything to salvage the prestige of Muslim women. It was expected of the liberal Sufis to lead the Muslim woman out of her prison and encourage her to participate in spreading god's message to humanity. The Bhakti movement produced many woman-saints, but the Sufi movement could not do so.
In the third place, Muslims came to India as rulers. The advent of Islam was an epoch making event in the history of mankind, as it exercised profound socio-cultural influence on other religions also. In the beginning, the important constituents of the Indo-Islamic society were the stubborn Turks and Afghans, represented through the elite classes like Shaikh, Syed, Pathan and Mughal. These classes strictly adhered to the Islamic traditions. Their women were kept in strict isolation. Chastity of woman and 'purity' of blood were guarded so zealously, as if they were the frontiers of their kingdom.

During the zenith period of the Mughal empire, the Muslim woman was liberal to some extent. She came in closer contacts with the Rajput women and this proximity helped the Muslim woman to gain freedom to some extent.

What was the impact of Hinduism on Islam is an important question. Muslims lived surrounded by a vast majority of Hindus and a state of perennial hostility towards them was impossible. After the shock of the Muslim conquest was over, both the communities were trying to find out a 'modus vivendi' to live as neighbors. Their search resulted in a composite culture, which was neither exclusively Hindu nor purely Muslim but was called Hindustani.

Hinduism influenced Muslim rulers, noblemen, soldiers and philosophers in several ways. Akbar and Jehangir celebrated the Hindu festivities like Holi, Diwali, Basant and so on with their Hindu subjects. The Muslim nobility and landed gentry imitated their kings. The Urdu and Persian poets took their themes from the Hindu mythology and the Muslim writers of Hindi poetry like Malik Mohammad Jaisi, Rahim Khan were on par with the Hindu poets of Hindi.

Lastly, the Muslim masses, who were converted from different Hindu communities also continued with their old customs and traditions, along with their new practices.

Hinduism influenced Muslim social life to a considerable extent. Muslims were much impressed by the monogamy practised by the Hindus. Divorce, which was so common among the Muslims, became rare due to Hindu influence. Along with good practices, some bad practices also came from the Hindu society. Untouchability is one among them. The Muslim elites of Arab pedigree, treated the local converts as untouchables.
Some class of Muslims were forced to live outside towns and cities because they came from low 'castes'. These are some of the socio-cultural influences of Hinduism on Islam.

As Hinduism influenced Islam, it also received some influence from Islam. It helped to shatter the concept of Brahmanical supremacy because Islam does not subscribe to the idea of one-up-manship in society. Simplicity in religious practices among the Muslims, dealt a severe blow to the complicated rituals in Hinduism. Monotheism of Islam had a telling impact on Hindu idolatry. The talented people who came from Iran, Iraq, Turkistan, Arabia and so on, brought some novel ideas regarding arts, architecture and science. This new cultural serum was injected into the Hindu society. That is why J.L.Mehta writes that Muslim dress, food habits, indoor games, hobbies, taboos were absorbed by the Hindus, except that they could not touch beef nor eat with Muslims in common utensils.

When there was cultural exchange between Hindus and Muslims, what position did Muslim woman acquire, in the social hierarchy, is another important question. The Muslim society, which kept half of its population within the four walls, under cruel and un-Islamic pretences, hurried through its decadence. However, the real cause of the downfall of the Muslim society was its non-achieving instincts. These non-achieving instincts could have been neutralised, if they had welcomed new thoughts, but that was not to be. Woman, who should have been an able partner in man's progressive journey, as she did in the early years of Islam, was pushed into oblivion. In this way, man's gross neglect of woman was one of the causes of the decadence of the Muslim society.

The Muslim society, which developed itself into a kinship-micro-society, embedded as it is in the micro-socializing agencies such as purdah and polygamy, also stubbornly spurred the changes taking place from time to time. This refusal of new ideas by the Muslims led to their further disintegration. With the inception of harem and concubinage, the degeneration of Muslim woman reached its nadir. Gradually, the noble picture of the free, courageous, independent, self-respecting, hence respected by all, sort of Muslim matron was replaced by a subdued, helpless and eyes down-cast sort of woman.
When the Mughals came to India, Muslim women got little freedom. It was because the first
generation of the Mughal rulers were among the achieving groups and secondly,
Mughals had already crossed the tribal stage.

Then came the period of social reforms. The Muslim woman was, once again, unlucky
because among the Hindus many social workers like D.D. Karve, Ramabai Ranade,
Jyotibha Phule came, but among the Muslims there was no man or woman social
worker of recognition, except Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. After initial opposition to the
Aligarh Muslim University, some Muslim families started sending their daughters for
higher studies. Education earned good jobs and good husbands for educated Muslim
women, while the fathers had an occasion to feel proud for their daughters going to
schools and colleges.

Freedom movement of our country provided yet another chance for some of the Muslim
educated women to come out. Princess Hamidullah of the United Provinces, the King
mother of Bhavpur were some of the women who came from the royal families. Begum
Shahid Hussein Kidwai, Kulsum Sayani, Anisa Kidwai, Bibi Amtul Islam, Begum Hamid
Ali and scores of middle class women also came out to participate in the freedom
struggle. Begum Rokeya and Begum Shah Nawaz also played a big role. This is the
historical background of Muslim women. After this, how the Muslim woman has been
depicted in Indian English fiction is to be seen.

Muslim women characters have been divided into two groups: Liberal and Conservative.
Some of the non-Muslim fiction writers have depicted Muslim women so briefly that
nothing could be said about their progression or sometimes such characters are so
insignificant that there is nothing special about the characters that should be recorded.
Nevertheless, there are some good characters created by non-Muslim novelists. First,
their liberal characters are to be reviewed briefly.

Fakr-un-nissa, the wife of Hyder Ali in Bhagwan Gidwani's novel *The Sword of Tipu
Sultan*, is a liberal character for the following reasons.
The first thing, that attracts readers, is Fakr-un-nissa’s upright bearing. She shines in her roles, first as the wife of Hyder Ali and then as the mother of Tipu Sultan. She has the capacity to control Hyder Ali, a flamboyant soldier. Unless she has enchanting charm and beauty, it would not have been possible.

Secondly, she is also a woman with an eye for natural beauty. She loves flowers. That is why Hyder Ali calls, ‘My lady of flowers’.

Thirdly, she was an artist, a painter. Rarely one comes across so many dimensions in a Muslim woman character.

Rehana, in Chaman Nahal’s Azadi, is another liberal character for different reasons. She is bold, courageous and falls in love with Sunil, who is also married. She was forced to marry Muzaffer, by her parents. Marriage performed against the will of girl, has no sanction in Islam. She wants to avenge her parents.

Muslims do not subscribe to the idea of platonic love or love of the soul. All love is physical. What one calls the love of soul or one’s impassioned love towards others, is only one’s compassion. Her revolt against the forced marriage makes for a different woman.

Hasina Begum in Train to Pakistan is a different woman because she has the courage to warn the district magistrate to mind his language while speaking to women. She says, she is an artist and people of all castes come to listen to her music. They pay for their entertainment. She continues to lash out at the district magistrate that people like him, who cannot understand art, look for ‘other things’.

Karima, in Mulk Raj Anand’s Barber’s Trade Union, a collection of short stories, is another daring woman, who rushes with scythe at the British soldier who winks at her. This act leads her to starvation but she is possessed with only one idea,

‘The father of Ismat will find me exactly as he left me.’13

13. (Anand Mulk Raj, Barber’s Trade Union) P-120
Her exemplary courage in plunging herself into fire to save her son from her burning cottage, is another instance of Karima being a very bold lady. She is very proud of her husband Shamus, who is imprisoned by the British soldiers because, he attends the public meeting of Khan Gaffar Khan.

Similarly, Yasmin in Confession of a Lover, written by Mulk Raj Anand is a straightforward woman, who encourages her sister Naseem to marry Krishen, her husband’s class fellow. Naseem is scheduled to marry an old railway guard, who has no eye for her artistic talents. Yasmin braves rough weather from all sides to make the marriage of Naseem and Krishen a reality, but the conservatism has the last laugh. These are the liberal Muslim women characters studied.

There is a definite pattern emerging from among the liberal Muslim women characters. Except Fakr-un-nissa, Rehana and Yasmin, revolt against the institution of marriage. Islam says, marriage cannot be forced against the will of the girl. In the cases of Rehana and Yasmin, not only the marriages are forced but there is a wide psychological chasm between the husband and wife.

The second set of woman characters, Karima and Haseen Begum are outstanding due to their moral stature. Both of them refuse to succumb to the material temptations in order to preserve morality. All these women characters have been given enough scope to blossom to the maximum extent. One may not agree with what they speak. For instance, Rehana’s interpretation of The Quran may be erroneous but her steadfastness in her belief makes her a different character.

Conservatism, is a tendency to remain unchanged and the tendency to observe laws, customs and traditions, as they have come to be associated with being the member of a religious group.

There are some such Muslim characters in the fiction of non-Muslim writers. Nur in Chaman Nahals Azadi, is a conservative character. She loves Arun but when the problem of marriage is being discussed, she asks Arun to embrace Islam. If a woman loves a man, his or her religion should not be detrimental to the cause of their Union.
this way, Nur, Nadira, Saira, who have been listed as conservative characters here, suffer from myopic vision of life. They are so flat characters that they can be described in only one sentence. Nadira’s narrow mindedness and her strange logic that if they had migrated to Pakistan, all those troubles would not have been there, makes her a flat character. On the other hand, Saira’s problem is her greed for money and enjoyment. Thus, these women characters rotate around only one idea.

Ruqayya Begum is a different character. Her knowledge of history, her insatiable desire to be always with Tipu Sultan and her childlike tenderness of heart are appreciable qualities in her personality. However, she doesn’t have the dynamism of her mother-in-law. Her role is limited in history itself. Accordingly, the author has treated her.

Begum Sahiba in Jhabvala’s Heat and Dust, is not a serious attempt at characterisation. The entire novel looks like a book written by a novice. In order to create an aura of modernism around Begum Sahiba, ‘chain smoking’, ‘Swiss education’, her birth in ‘Kabab Pore’ and marriage with Nawab of ‘Khatm’ (the end), such devices have been used.

One can have an interesting comparison between the two women characters of Keki Daruwallah’s Zubeda’ and Bapsy Sidhawa’s Zaitoon. Both the women characters emerge from turbulences in life. But Zubeda’s tame vanishing from the scene vis-à-vis Zaitoon’s struggle for existence, makes the latter a heroic woman. Sidhawa’s picturisation is so authentic that unless one lives with these tribes for months, such an authenticity is hard to come. The point to be noted here is, if the artist has a mind and he or she can become one with his or her characters, then their presentation becomes not a vague justification but a near reality.

The liberal and conservative characters created by non-Muslim fiction writers have better range, than those created by the Muslim writers. Except in the case of Attia Hosain and Humayun Kabit, other fiction writers have created stereotypes.

Laila, in Attia Hosain’s Sunlight On a Broken Column, is an intelligent girl, who occupies the central stage in the novel. She is fifteen and is well within the range of ‘seeing’ and
‘showing’ for matrimonial alliances. Aunt Abida, who brought her up, firmly refuses to accept the family tradition to marry girls at their teen-age.

Laila joins college and cannot keep herself away from the anti-British demonstrations. Laila is probably the first Muslim woman character, created by Muslim writers, shown as the one actively participating in the freedom movement of India.

Besides being a rebel, Laila is also a girl of an independent mind. She decides to marry Ameer, a junior lecturer in Aligarh Muslim University. It is against the family tradition because Ameer belongs to the family of lower social status.

She respects The Quran but at the same time she believes that knowledge can also be found outside the Holy Book. Laila is intelligent, independent and multifaceted character, because she is a grand mixture of intelligence, logic, courage and shyness that is natural to a civilised girl.

An aged woman, Ayesha, the mother of Nazu Mian, the Panchayat of Rahimpur in Men and Rivers, by Humayun Kabir, is also a liberal character. She has the rare capacity of facing life bravely and squarely. The only weak point in Ayesha’s character is her insistence on Malek’s marriage, who is hardly ten.

Nazu Mian is a short tempered man. He often clashes with his one time good friend and now turned a bitter enemy, Asgar Mian. Nazu Mian warns his servant Ramzan not to tell anything to Ayesha about the quarrel. The lady somehow, gathers information and asks about the details. The servant denies any clash between Asgar and Nazu. The old woman flares up,

"You dare disobey me? Your Panchayat remembers the flogging I gave him." 14

Being the village chief, Nazu Mian controls Rahimpur but Ayesha controls the village Chief.

14. (Kabir, Humayn, Men and River) P.36
Ayesha is a religious lady and also a good cook. Her greatness lies in her compassion that she bears to each and every person of the village. In fact, in the novel, the fury of river Padma is effectively counter balanced by the love and kindness of Ayesha. That is why life becomes tolerable to some of the families of Rahimpur, who fail to protect themselves from the devastating floods of Padma.

Ingilab, written by K.A.Abbas, has almost all characters conservative. Miss Salmah, an educated daughter of Professor Saleem, is also a conservative character. She is papa’s child. Therefore, she cannot think and act independently. Her only ambition in life is to get a good husband.

Salmah is brought up in a home, which is full of hostility, bitterness and dissensions between Saleem and his wife. This atmosphere must have adversely affected Salmah. She is inflicted with an idea of insecurity. That is the reason why she behaves like a child with Anwar in picture hall. Her possessiveness and indecisiveness make her appear childish.

No other woman, among all the Muslim women chosen to discuss as conservative characters, is more conservative than Begum Mir Nihal, in Twilight in Delhi, written by Ahmed Ali. In one way, her conservatism is her strength because she believes that what all happens, happens according to the Will of God. For such people, difficulties in life do not disturb beyond certain limits.

She never thinks beyond today. She never ponders over the fact that our tomorrow depends on what we do today. Her day begins with prayer and also ends with it. In the meantime, she does not forget it to refresh her memory of belonging to an ancient family of Delhi and also that their blood is purer than that of the nawabs. She knows that her husband is not faithful to her but her belief in destiny makes her tolerate everything.

If Laila in Sunlight On a Broken Column, is an intelligent, innovative and courageous girl, Zohra, her cousin is, uneducated, dull witted and conservative girl. She says prayers, sews and knits and writes daily accounts. One hour, between the afternoon prayer and the evening prayer, is reserved for her dressing and make-up. This is exactly the picture
of a middle class Muslim girl. This is the minimum and this the maximum an average Muslim maiden is expected to do. Salmah, Zohra and Bitqueeze are also the girls, whose days are spent in the manner said above. There is no trace of learning new things and no attempts at achieving something distinct.

Before undertaking a comparative study of the Muslim women characters created by the Muslim and Hindu fiction writers, it is proper to assess the overall achievement of each group of writers separately.

As far as the historical novels are concerned, the non-Muslim writers had no problem because they had to create nothing new. Characters were already known to the people in a lesser or greater degree. What the writers were expected to do was to present them, recasting in attractive colours. Fakr-un-nissa and Ruqayya are such characters.

In the novels and short stories with social themes, the non-Muslim writers appear to be faltering. They lack proper perspective on Muslim womanhood. That is why some of their Muslim women are stereotypes. Some women like Rehana in Azadi are unconvincing. Except on fewer occasions, the Muslim woman appears like a character in a shadow play, dimly silhouetted against the background of life.

Though the non-Muslim writers have succeeded in providing enough range while depicting Muslim women, no writer has penetrated the mind of these characters. For instance, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Raja Rao describe not only actions, but also the mind behind the actions. Such efforts are not made in the cases of other Muslim women characters, created by non-Muslim fiction writers.

As regards the variety of Muslim women characters, it can be said that the non-Muslim writers have amazing range of heroines, from queens to dancing girls and from the wives of the Indian administrative officers and vice chancellors to the wives of stone cutters. Women from the palatial buildings in the posh localities of Delhi, down to the mud huts in the Rann of Kutch, all find place in different novels. Contrary to this, the Muslim women characters, created by Muslim fiction writers, belong only to the middle class families.
In this way, the non-Muslim writers met only with partial success, because as far as range and scope of the characters are concerned, there is little to say, but as far as the psychological study is concerned, more can be said.

Why did not, then, the non-Muslim fiction writers in Indian English project the Muslim woman authentically? Meena Shirwadkar mentions following reasons.

1. The rigid Purdah system.
2. The biased racial superiority among the Hindu writers made them to ignore Muslims.
3. Their ignorance about some of the basic principles of Islam.
4. They might not have read about the galaxy of brave and intelligent women of Islam.
5. They have not studied the rich Islamic mythology, which glorifies the feminine principle as the generator and sustainer of the universe.

As far as the first reason is concerned, the non-Muslim writers' problem is understandable. When a woman hides herself, not only from the eyes of others but also from the Sun, how can any one describe her? If a woman is constantly threatened with the idea that the world outside is full of wicked people and they will make her impure with their looks, then how can she come out in the open? Muslim woman takes to Purdah so that other men should not see her, but can she not see other men through her Purdah? Not the rigidity, but proper education would solve such problems.

Except the first reason, all other reasons like biased racial superiority, ignorance of certain basic principles of Islam, having ignorance about the model Muslim women and finally lack of the knowledge of rich Islamic mythology, multiply lapses on the part of the non-Muslim writers.

In comparison with the Muslim women characters created by the non-Muslim fiction writers, where do the Muslim women characters created by the Muslim writers stand? One is likely to find that the Muslim women characters drawn by the Muslim writers suffer both qualitatively and quantitatively, vis-à-vis, the Muslim women characters created by the non-Muslim writers.
1. Some say that, the Muslim female characters created by Muslim writers are less in number, because Muslim writers are less. It cannot be a sound argument, because Brahmins are very less in number but they surpass other writers in every field. Many of the Muslim writers may be the first or second generation of educated people in their families.

2. Even the range of characters is limited among the Muslim writers. The non-Muslim writers have covered women from palaces to cottages, but the Muslim writers have depicted only middle and lower-middle class women.

3. Another significant point to be noted between the two groups is, out of the twelve Muslim women drawn by the non-Muslim writers, eight are concerned with country’s politics. Either politics is influenced by them like Fakr-un-nissa or politics influences them like Rehana, Rahati, Nur, Nadira and Karima. On the other hand, out of six Muslim women characters under study, only Laila to some extent and her cousin Zohra to a very little extent, are concerned with country’s politics. Others are busy in getting married.

It is rather surprising that great national events like freedom movement and partition of India did not evoke enough response from the Muslim writers except some stray efforts like Inqilab.

Another interesting question that needs to be asked is, why are there only few liberal Muslim women characters? One obvious explanation could be, liberalism, per se, is against the spirit of Islam. The Western writers like George Bernard Shaw and others have praised Islam for its dynamism but all was lost in the sands of time due to the obscurantist clergy.

The second question is, why the Muslim society has been depicted conservative by the Muslim writers themselves? It is because the Muslim society, in most part of the world, except in Rome, Russia and Turkey has rejected renaissance. Hence, they remained conservative. Recently, the Supreme Court of Egypt delivered a historic judgment saying that the Islamic Clergy cannot force Purdah against the will of college and university going lady-students. It further added that such imposition is against the Islamic spirit.

There is an ill-founded fear that if a Muslim woman learns anything other than The Quran, it is an act of sacrilege. This strange and selfish ideology has kept the Muslim
woman in darkness. This is un-Islamic that Muslim parents can give any kind of
education to their sons, but only daughters should not get other type of education,
except learning The Quran.

The myopic Muslim clergy tells that giving Western education to Muslim women is a
devilish trap of some of the Westernised Muslims. These people called Aligarh Muslim
University a devil’s instrument to mislead the Indian Muslims.

This is the reason why the Muslim women created by Muslim fiction writers are
backward, scared of their future and frightfully committed to the institution of marriage.

In the final analysis of the entire gamut of views, opinions and arguments, one voice
emerges clear and loud, that The Quran grants liberty and equality to the woman, but
the clergy curtails them. Clergy exists in every religion. Then, how could the Hindu
woman be liberal? It is not only the clergy but the entire Hindu society is responsible in
making woman, what she is today. Therefore, Simen De Beauvoir appears to be
perfectly right in saying that ‘Woman’ is not the creation of one man, one force or one
ideology.

“It is civilization, as a whole, that produces this creature.” 14

Having said all this, a mute question still remains to be answered. How long the Muslim
woman should wait for her liberation? The question is rather absurd. Why should
Muslim woman wait for a Messiah to come from somewhere to liberate her? Ahalya
waited for Rama’s touch* to regain her human form or the legenldry flower ‘Nargis’**
waits for a man with ‘eye’ to appreciate its beauty. However, no miracle of this kind can
happen in the case of Muslim woman. She must have to start the movement of her
liberation from herself. That is what the Bhagavadgita says, ‘one must uplift oneself.’
She should have to venture herself to get liberated from the ‘essential other’ tag that she
has borne so far.

What are the means to achieve this end? Education and education alone is the key to the
liberation of Muslim woman. Traditional education will help her to read and understand

14. (Simen De Beauvoir, The Second Sex), P.40
to what extent The Quran grants liberty to woman and how capriciously it is curtailed by the fundamentalists.

Similarly, she should obtain the worldly knowledge as well. There doesn’t appear to be any kind of contradiction between the two ways of learning and if at all any, woman has the commonsense to resolve it. Western education does not ask a Muslim to abandon his or her traditions, but provides a touchstone to wean out the spurious from the real.

Gainful employment of woman also goes a long way to improve the conditions of Muslim woman. When The Qur'an permits woman to trade individually or in the partnership of a ‘known’ man, it cannot prohibit her to seek employment in other fields also. The only condition is that she should not neglect her family. Taking care of the family comes under ‘Hududallah’, the ordains of god. Without the co-operation of man, it would not be possible.

After education and economic independence, it is the political power that is going to make woman still stronger. Muslim women will certainly be benefited politically if the reservations for women, announced by different governments (but never implemented so far), are given effect.

Another point that will help the Muslim woman to gain more liberty is the fact that, she must whole-heartedly welcome renaissance in all the walks of life. She should bear in mind that renaissance or new knowledge or fresh ideas are not against the Islamic spirit, as has been wrongly believed. The renaissance will definitely liberate her from the burden of the past.

The modern Indian history has maintained a studied silence about the contribution of Muslim women to India’s Freedom Struggle. They should organise themselves in to various social and cultural organisations to highlight their contributions to Indian culture and Indian politics.
Muslim woman should not move away from the main-stream culture of the Indian society, under the provocation that Islam is different religion and she has a separate identity. Nationalism should be considered supreme and all religions must tend to strengthen it. Moving away from it breeds distrust and distrust leads to incompatibility, which is so dangerous for the peaceful co-existence among the people, as a nation.

This should be, in brief, the blue print of the fiction to be written on Muslim woman in future. Her coming out from the age-old isolation, plunging into the mainstream of national life, her constructive interaction with other people to build human relations and certain amount of rigorous efforts to overcome her past, all this should be her priority.

Muslim writers, in vernaculars, like Sara Abubakkar and Vaikkam Muhammad Basheer have already started writing on these aspects of the life of Muslim women. Besides these writers in Kannada and Malayalam respectively, there are other Indian writers like Pratibha Ray in Oriya, K. Saraswathiamma in Tamil, Akavoor Narayanan in Malayalam, Veereshlingam in Telagu, Ismat Chugatul and Qurratulain Hyder in Urdu, who have also created liberal women. In Indian English too, there are very good efforts by the writers like Attia Hossain, Hymayun Kabir and others.

Indian English literature spans a rich variety of themes, from the conventional to the new woman. What is now needed is the projection of more and more new role models. The changes going on in the human relationship and in domestic setup need to be portrayed. Man-woman relationship has rarely been described as a fulfilling experience. If such positive human experiences will be used while depicting the Muslim woman in future fiction writing, then probably an acceptable Muslim woman would emerge.

Ahilya is a mythical character from the Ramayana. She was turned into stone due to the curse of a sage. She got her human form when Rama touched her.

Nargis is a legendary flower supposed to be blooming in desert. It laments as none appreciates its beauty. However, it hopes that a man with ‘eye’ would come and pluck it.