COSMO-FEMINISM OR FEMINISM-LITE?: POSTCOLONIAL VISIBILITY POLITICS BEHIND THE PORTRAYAL OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY GRAPHIC NOVELS

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Cosmo-feminism or Feminism-Lite?: Postcolonial Visibility Politics Behind the Portrayal of Muslim Women in Contemporary Graphic Novels** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Cosmo-feminism or Feminism-Lite?: Postcolonial Visibility Politics Behind the Portrayal of Muslim Women in Contemporary Graphic Novels

This study is a postcolonial critique of three graphic novels; *Persepolis: The Story of Childhood (2003)* by Marjane Satrapi, *Habibi (2011)* by Craig Thompson, and *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution (*2017*)* by Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye. As all the selected works are published in the West and, in one way or another, advocate Muslim women's rights, the researcher has analysed the postcolonial gender concerns presented by the authors. Lila Abu Lughod's postcolonial gender debates are used as a primary lens to scaffold the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Furthermore, to analyse the authenticity of these gender concerns, the theory of cosmo-feminism is adapted by contrasting it with the feminism-lite concept. This cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate is used as a touchstone to decode writers' portrayal of postcolonial visibility politics. The research methods of Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), Comparative Analysis, and Biographical techniques are used to analyse the selected hybrid texts. The researcher also adopted the codes from Raina (2009), which helped form the criteria for the analysis. As the writers of the selected works belong to different milieus, it is found that each novel implicitly presents a different image of female Muslim characters. The cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate shows that the portrayal of a Muslim woman in *Habibi* (2011) is inclined to feminism-lite agendas and indirectly promotes the idea of 'sexualization of the Orient'. Whereas the depiction of female Muslim characters in the other two novels adheres to the true spirit of cosmo-feminism. The distinctive histories and sociopolitical situations create the lived experiences of Muslim women. Hence, it important to understand the complexity of Muslim womens' problems while advocating their rights. The adaptation of the cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite concept can be refined and exploited in future research.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

QCA   Qualitative Content Analysis

AD   Authenticity within Detail

GP   Gender Perspectives

DC   Diversity in Characters

RP&R   Resistance to Patriarchal Society and Religion

PS   Patriarchal society

SS   Struggle for Survival

PC   Personal Connections

SJI   Social Justice Issues

HA   Historical aspects

I/O   Insider/Outsider Perspectives

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my lovely mother Aqdas. Like her name, she is an epitome of pureness, kindness, resilience, and humility. She is my role model and favorite human; I am nothing without her.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Study

      Recognizing the importance of graphic novels in English literature and the necessity of researching them is the need of time. The world has significantly changed with technology and development, and is stepping towards more advancements. Likewise, the forms of literary expressions are also changing, and contemporary literary genres, such as graphic narratives, are replacing texts solely dependent on words. This diverse genre has also paved the way for academics and research since the 1970s (Abdelsalam 101). Graphic narratives are a new form of literature that expresses stories in fewer words using a combination of visual arts. This combination of words and visuals provides a broader perspective to the literature; hence, the discernment process also becomes comprehensive. Graphic literature is "as versatile as a film or traditional literature" (Llorence 39) and holds a unique place in the world of literature.

      Besides the uniqueness of this genre, graphic narratives are usually stigmatized and mostly treated with less seriousness than other forms of literature. These narratives have also faced much "genre-based" criticism (Lopes 401). However, graphic narratives have sustained a crucial position in the literature after many developments in this field. The post-World War II period experienced a boom in publications of graphic narratives. During this time, many comic books were written, having an expansion in the genres by introducing themes like ". . . romance, crime, horror, and science fiction" (Lopes 400). Edward Said has also endorsed the uniqueness and diversity of graphic literature. He explains his experience of reading comic books by saying that he felt "liberated and subversive" after reading comic books. Said also admires the engagement of graphic narratives by saying that this genre contains ". . . the unrestrained passage between what the characters thought and said" (Sacco intro, (i)). These qualities of graphic texts are enchanting, but

simultaneously make this genre complex and challenging to decipher. Hence, greater eagerness is required to understand the complexity of hybrid-texts.

The depiction of women, specifically Muslim women, in graphic literature is a topic of debate in contemperory research. Furthermore, the portrayal of Muslim women in Western graphic novels is a less-discovered yet vital topic to explore in the post-9/11 world. Hence, this area of the literature research is explored in this study. For this particular study, the graphic novels selected are *Persepolis: The Story of Childhood (2003)* by Marjane Satrapi, *Habibi (2011)* by Craig Thompson, and *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution (*2017*)* by Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye. The purpose of selecting these three graphic novels was to examine the portrayal of Muslim women in Western texts written by writers of different backgrounds. It is tripartite research and theoretical underpinnings of postcolonial gender concerns are pivotal point of this research. Besides having different contexts, the commonality between these selected graphic novels is that, these hybrid texts are published in the West, portray Muslim women as the central characters, and advocate Muslim women's rights in front of a global audience. The rationale of selecting these three graphic novels is to unveil the contradictions in representation of Muslim women in graphic literature by writers of varied backgrounds. Although the novel *Habibi (2011)* by Craig Thompson is an explicit orientalist text but in past researches it has not been analysed under the lens of cosmo-feminism vs feminism-lite. Instead of merely criticizing the writer, the researcher has placed his work in a specific position, which makes it easy to understand and contrast different ways of representing Muslim women in graphic literature.

The graphic novels selected for this research, in one way or another, deal with the politics of visibility. These novels are entertaining and engaging because of the graphics they display, but ironically, none of these works are apolitical. Graphic novels, due to their incorporation of both visual and textual elements, have the capacity to offer alternative narratives and challenge dominant perspectives. The utilisation of these platforms facilitates the amplification of voices and experiences that have been marginalised, while also providing a visual depiction of historical events and social issues that are frequently overlooked or misrepresented by mainstream media. The utilisation of graphic novels as a medium enables postcolonial representations to critically engage with prevailing narratives and present multifaceted

viewpoints on the intricate dynamics of colonialism and its consequences. These entities have the capacity to challenge and undermine prevailing stereotypes, assert control over their own actions and decisions, and present alternative narratives that challenge established systems of authority.

In the present scenario, the interconnection between the politics of visibility and postcolonial representations in graphic novels lies in their shared focus on power dynamics, the questioning of dominant narratives, and the amplification of marginalised voices and experiences. Graphic novels have the capacity to reshape the comprehension of the postcolonial world and enhance the representation of identities and histories through their utilisation of visual and textual elements. This medium offers alternative narratives that contribute to a more inclusive and diverse perspective. In general, the intersection of visibility politics and postcolonial representations in textual discourse demonstrates a shared objective of acknowledging and rectifying power differentials, while also amplifying the voices of marginalised communities. Both concepts present a challenge to prevailing discourses and present novel opportunities for representation and acknowledgment within a postcolonial framework. The interconnection between the politics of visibility and postcolonial representations in graphic novels is evident. Both concepts pertain to power dynamics and the manners in which marginalised groups are depicted or marginalised within a specific society or historical framework.

In this study the research has tried to understand the politics of visibility in each text by reading between the lines. As graphic novels are a highly complex literary genre, visibility politics are inevitable in these narratives. "[Sic] visibility politics aim to display collective identity and change conceptualizations of the group and its issues." (McCammon, Holly J., et al., eds 378). By addressing postcolonial visibility politics, the researcher highlights the aims of writers (dealing with postcolonial gender issues) "at changing the beliefs and feelings of outside audiences." (McCammon, Holly J., et al., eds 377). The phenomenon of postcolonial visibility politics helps us understand the backdrop of prevalent feminism, racism, and gender issues addressed in the selected graphic novels. As there is always a reason behind the presence or absence of some aspects in the literature, the researcher has tried to decipher visibility politics to understand the reasoning behind highlighting social and gender issues in the selected works. The present study aims to accentuate

implicit postcolonial gender concerns in selected works. As Edward Said says, "the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident" (12), hence, Western literature dealing with the characters of Muslim women is likely to contain postcolonial schemas.

The postcolonial gender debates provided by Lila Abu-Lughod are the primary lens of this study. Abu-Lughod is a Palestinian-American anthropologist, and she has primarily researched on Middle-Eastern Muslim women. Her concepts of gender in the backdrop of postcolonialism, race, and imperialism best suits the requirements of this study. While describing the complexity of the lives of Egyptian village women, she writes that it is essential to be sensitive towards [sic] "the complexity and even the richness of the 'objects' of their concerns, and the global inequalities that make them vulnerable to intervention, imagined or actual" (257). From Abu-Lughod's gender perspective, it is interesting to study the varied representations of Muslim female characters in selected graphic novels.

Furthermore, as the writers of the selected graphic novels belong to a distinct milieu; but all the works are published in the West, it is interesting to note how the varied backgrounds of the writers affect the postcolonial gender display in the novels. The researcher tried to investigate the postcolonial gender issues presented in the selected works by profoundly analysing the background and biographies of the writers of the selected works. The milieu of the selected graphic novels enabled the researcher to understand the possible agendas of the writers behind their portrayals.

It is essential to note that all of the selected works explicitly advocate Muslim women's rights from a global perspective, as cosmo-feminism is a philosophical and social movement that seeks to promote gender equality and women's empowerment within the broader framework of global social, political, and economic systems. It combines feminist principles with a global perspective, recognizing that gender inequality interconnects with other forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, ableism, and colonialism. Hence, it is implicit that the selected works deal with cosmo-feministic ideas in one way or another. Here, it becomes critical to understand the authenticity of these cosmo-feministic ideas. The criteria of measuring this authenticity is based on Lila Abu Lughod's postcolonial gender concepts and on the cosmo-feminism vs feminism-lite debate. Furthermore, Rania's code of AD

(authenticity within details) has also been measured in the same way. Hence, the researcher developed a lens by contrasting cosmo-feminism with feminism-lite concepts. As feminism-lite concepts can undermine the core principles of feminism by diluting its message and failing to challenge patriarchal systems and structures. Hence, this divergence between cosmo-feminism and feminism-lite provides a lens to understand the faulty feministic ideas. Further, this lens helps to understand Muslim women's representation in Western graphic novels. The secondary theorists of this work are Niamh Reilly, who has elaborated the concept of cosmo-feminism and Monica Dux and Zora Simic who presented feminism-lite concepts. Furthermore, if the portrayals of Muslim women in the selected literature are inclined to feminism-lite ideas, it is found that what could be the representational problems in such texts?

By representing the struggles of Muslim women, all three novels ostensibly advocate the concept of cosmo-feminism. The idea of cosmo-feminism supports women's rights beyond borders and "the struggle to achieve recognition of women's wider economic and social rights" (Reilly 193). This research is an effort to understand the application of the cosmo-feministic ideas present in the selected literature. Furthermore, the researcher discovers that either these narratives contribute to present a positive image of Muslims globally or are merely illustrations of postcolonial visibility politics consequential to faux-feminism, that is, feminism-lite. In contemporary times, feminism has taken a new form resulting in the loss of the essence of the true feminist spirit. The present study also explores the bifurcation between cosmo-feminism and feminism-lite. While rejecting the feminism-lite phenomenon, Bhakti Shringarpure writes:

> Feminism is fundamentally communal and fundamentally bellicose in how it resists white heterosexist patriarchy. A T-shirt does not solve the problem. Nor does it help to submit to consumer obsessed celebrity versions of feminism, which are primarily interested in selling you stuff and are not really invested in issues of the economic, social or political justice.

This explains that cosmo-feminism is a genuine struggle toward global women's empowerment. Simultaniously, feminism-lite denotes all fallacies committed in the name of feminism to fulfill one's political purposes. These misconceptions are

analysed and elaborated to connect the dots of feminism-lite to the political agendas behind the works.

As qualitative content analysis (QAC) provides a layout to analyse both text and images in graphic novels, it best suits to fulfill the desired outcomes of the present study. Furthermore, the method of biographical and comparative analysis also helps in understanding the background of the texts and in comparing and contrasting all three novels. By applying qualitative content analysis method, the researcher finds out that how graphic novels depend on the social, cultural, and political settings in which they are fashioned and read. For this purpose, the researcher adopted the codes from Raina (2009), which are helpful in forming the criteria for analysing the selected graphic novels. Furthermore, this method helps to examine hybrid texts, considering the importance of content from a specific viewpoint of visibility politics. This method scaffolds the present study to support the investigation of visual narratives from postcolonial gender perspectives; and to observe the representation of Muslim women in graphic novels produced in the West.

1.2 Thesis Statement

Cosmo-feminism combines feminist principles with a global perspective, while feminism-lite focuses on the individualistic aspects of gender equality. The portrayal of Muslim women in Western graphic novels also tends to display a global view of postcolonial gender concerns, but writers of different milieu deal with this representation in various ways. This raises concerns regarding the authenticity of displaying images of Muslim women globally in these graphic novels. Hence, this study unpacks the postcolonial visibility politics in the selected works under the lens of cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite to find the application of these ideas in the selected novels while dealing with Muslim women characters.

1.3 Research Questions

I.   What are the postcolonial gender concerns in the selected graphic novels that bring forth the politics of visibility?

II. How do Western graphic novelists deal with cosmo-feminism while globally advocating Muslim women's rights, and is their representation unbiased?

III.   How do Muslim diasporic writers deal with Cosmo-feminism while representing Muslim women in their works, and is their self-representation unproblematic?

1.4 Significance of the Study

Graphic novels are a minimally explored area in the literature. This study explores the unique genre of graphic narratives and relates it to broader political worldviews. Furthermore, political and religious representations prevalent in graphic literature is a less discovered topic of past researches. Hence, this research is an unprecedented effort to highlight the global representation of Muslim women in three Western graphic novels written by writers from varied backgrounds. The researcher has examined the postcolonial gender issues displayed in each work under the lens of cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite which is a distinctive effort to analyse modern literature from a global perspective.

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

This study aims to unveil political and religious propaganda in graphic narratives. The representation of Muslim women in these narratives is the focal point of this research. The researcher has selected three graphic narratives for this purpose. The present study is limited to exploring these works under the lens of the postcolonial gender concerns provided by Lila Abu-Lughod. Furthermore, the lens of 'Cosmo-feminism vs. Feminism-Lite' is a touchstone to substantiate the argument of real versus fake feminism made in this research. The three graphic narratives selected for this study are as follows.

i.   *Persepolis: The Story of Childhood* (2003) by Marjane Satrapi

ii.   *Habibi* (2011) by Craig Thompson

iii.   *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* (2017), by Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye

1.6 Chapters Division of the Study

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction of this study. This chapter provides a glimpse into this research. Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review, which includes all previous literature related to the work. This section helps to understand the gaps in the research filled by the researcher. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework and methodology of this study. Chapter 4

analyses the graphic novel *Persepolis: The Story of Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi. In Chapter 5, the researcher analyses Thompson's novel *Habibi* and explains the political themes found in this work. In Chapter 6, the researcher analysed the graphic novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution*, by Sherine Hamdy and Coleman Nye and then compared the three selected novels under the lens of the cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-Lite debate. Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter, in which the researcher has resolved the research questions, explains the thesis statement, and provides future recommendations for the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current chapter presents an overview of the existing research on the portrayal of Muslim women in the graphic literature. The following literature review explores studies pertinent to the selected topic to contextualize the current research and identify gaps in the available literature. In addition, to obtain a comprehensive and clear grasp of the cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate in graphic literature, each section of this chapter examines the topic from its primary roots to its modern perspective. The literature review begins with background knowledge of all study aspects, and then places the current study within the framework of previous research. This brief review analyses many critical and theoretical approaches to this study's core topics and provides a solid basis for research. In addition, it elaborates on the limitations of earlier studies and concludes with a discussion of the distinctions between the present and previous works. The researcher has divided the literature review chapter into three sections. The first section foregrounds dispersed theoretical concepts, creating relevance to the present research concerns. The second section of the literature review broadly deals with visibility politics in the graphic literature, which helps to comprehend the prior understanding of this concern. The third and last section of the literature review discusses the representation of Muslim characters in the graphic literature. This helps identify the patterns of past research on the selected topic. This chapter discusses the points of departure or intervention that the researcher traced through this literature review.

2.1 Cosmo-feminism, Feminism-lite, and Postcolonial Gender Concerns

The selected literary criticism involves four significant concepts: postcolonial gender concerns, cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite, and sexualizing the Orient. All these concepts helps to fulfill the desired outcomes of the present research. Here, the researcher discusses some previous works related to selected literary criticisms. This discussion assists in demonstrating the inimitability of the present research. In the present study, the philosophy of postcolonialism is a backdrop for analysing other theories. As Postcolonialism is a vast and still developing theory, it is not easy to jot down all relevant related literature. Here, the researcher attempted to create a

discussion to understand the previously executed role of this theory in the relevant research domain. In this regard, Clare Bradford's research on graphic narratives is pertinent, as she utilized the postcolonial lens in her work. While explaining the phenomenon of postcolonialism, Bradford gives a sweeping narrative of the regions colonized by the colonizers, who later became the "settler society" of that area. She furthermore defines such "settler societies" as the places where colonization took the form of an invasion by a European force, where settlers exercised racial dominance over the native inhabitants of the areas they occupied, and where aboriginal peoples linger to fight for acknowledgment, compensation, and "self-determination" (4). Bradford has focused on analysing graphic literature in settler societies where colonial discourses still persevere in the "signifying systems of language and pictures" (13). Through this analysis, she observes a sturdy and fixed sense of "trauma and disruption" in the lives of colonized people. Her analysis is based on extensive data of fictional works selected from across the globe, written in English (as the English language is also a tool for silencing colonized people), and written by indigenous and non-indigenous writers. As she deals with graphic texts, her research specifically focuses on "two broad areas of postcolonial textuality" (13) (dealing with both text and milieu text). This study is constructive in deciphering the postcolonial rudiment in graphic narratives.

The most relevant primary text for understanding postcolonial theory is *Orientalism,* by Edward Said (1978). Western literature has produced a particular way of viewing the natives of the colonized regions. Said claims that besides the hands-on exploitation of the colonies, these textual representations also influenced the colonists' perception of themselves. He argues that a dominant class of English-speaking European nations determines the standard of knowledge formation. Because of this dominance, both colonizers and colonized colonizers have developed new senses of self-recognition. Even after the end of the physical subjugation of orients, the problem of stereotypical representations of orients still lies in the Western literature. These representations subsequently build a dogmatic discourse that needs analyses and clarification. Robert Young argues that the exertion of postcolonial criticism should be the emplacement of the concealed colonialism historical roots, which identify the 'invisible, unseen, silent, or unspoken' veracities (21). The idea of postcolonial theory existed even before allocation of this specific name for this concept. According to

Ashcraft et al., postcolonial theory emerged after colonized peoples aimed to conjecture and articulate the stiffness occasioned by this challenging and deliberated, yet ultimately dynamic and prevailing blend of "imperial language and local experience" (1). Postcolonial theory is best suited for the present study as '... it captures both the history of spatial control and a re-visioning of current spatial politics' (Brister 109), which provides great potential to evaluate graphic narratives. Hence, in the present study, the researcher primarily observed the selected graphic novels under postcolonialism lens, which paved the way for a detailed analysis.

Another scholar, Franny Howes, has also shed light on the diversity of the graphic narrative genre while analysing the critical lens of postcolonialism. She explains that when combining graphic literature with multicultural studies (such as postcolonialism), the primary focus of researchers is to highlight rampant "stereotypes" (11). She adds that in such research works, scholars generally underline the disturbing images of indigenous people and critically appraise the "quality of their portrayal" (11). She explains that this approach to analysing postcolonial schemas in graphic literature is integral to deploring demonizing, essentialist, and racist agendas concealed in the name of art. On the other hand, she has also put forward a genuine concern: the canonization of Western graphic narratives, which defines this entire genre in return. She argues that the timely response of postcolonial comics has urged us to "decolonize our thinking about comics studies" (3). The analysis of Howes is crucial for paving the way for new research, including the present research.

As the researcher selected Lila Abu-Lughod's postcolonial gender discussion to address the present research, it can be said that the researcher has departed from the previously produced literature on postcolonial gender concerns and graphic literature, as the present study has to link the concept of cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite with postcolonial gender concerns. Lila Abu-Lughod's concepts are best suited to foreground this link between gender issues and postcolonial debates. The previously mentioned scholarly discussions on postcolonialism and graphic literature paved the way for understanding and identifying the gap in this specific area of research. Furthermore, through this background understanding, the researcher has achieved more clarity in linking different philosophical ideas to create a diverse theoretical lens.

The cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate is not any specific literary theory, but the researcher has adapted this criticism from previous studies to fulfill the requirements of this research. Undoubtedly, this argument is quite contemporary and still emerging, but some previous studies in some ways (if not completely) aid in understanding this concept. Many scholars have researched the fine line of demarcation between real feminism and fake feminism. Bowen, in this regard, argues that the portrayal of women in graphic literature is a sensitive topic. She says that if we want to promote the real cause of feminism–that is, females understanding and supporting each other–we must identify the problematic "cultural assumptions" embodied in the literature. Contrary to this, the literature must contain "healthy portrayals of women" (Bowen 77) through which women around the globe can accept and celebrate diversity among each other. This concern put forward by Bowen is logical as she aims to promote cosmo-feminism through literary representations of women.

In her research on the representation of Muslim women in graphic literature, Raina put forward the concern of authenticity in such a representation. According to her, the depiction of Muslim women in graphic literature explicitly promotes the idea of a very inclusive kind of feminism (cosmo-feminism). However, essentially such representations are deliberate efforts to endorse particular political agendas. She finds these illustrations alarming because the fresh minds of children who study such literature are more likely to prone to cultural biases. She stressed her concern by stating that such problematic texts should not be included in academic discourse. As he specifically talks about the U.S., she believes that these books will have a "stereotypical influence" on the tender minds of readers (Raina 236). Her study does not directly address the discrepancy between real and fake feminism, but she has laid the foundation future analysis.

In the 21st century, like all other social or psychological concepts, many flaws in the concept of feminism also appeared in literature. The real essence of feminism has been fading, and it would not be wrong to say that it has been a convenient "handmaiden of capitalism" (Eisenstein 511). Many researchers have pointed out the misinterpretations made in the name of feminism. In this regard, Gemzöe points out the misapprehensions in the books of Mia Liinason, who has repetitively commingled theoretical considerations of "gender with political strategies for feminist action"

(Gemzöe 127). This false utility of feminism is what the researcher has addressed as feminism-lite (also called faux-feminism).

In a quantitative research by Bullock and Fernald, the interviews of young college students in America helped in understanding feminist identification among young college women. The results of this study are quite surprising as most of the students supported the agenda of "feminism lite." The researchers then follow some serious questions regarding the meaning of "self-identify as a feminist." This flawed conceptualization of women can lead to circumstances that will reassure sustenance for egalitarian opinions and ultimately give rise to stereotypical ideas (Bullock and Fernald 297). In the future, the researches should conduct more researches to understand the presence of feminist-lite agendas in literary texts.

In summary, cosmo-feminism recognizes the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental issues and advocates for sustainable and equitable development that addresses the needs and rights of women and marginalized communities. It calls for gender-inclusive policies and practices at all local and global levels and seeks to challenge and transform existing power structures and systems that perpetuate gender inequality. On the other hand, feminism-lite refers to a diluted or watered-down version of feminism that may not fully embrace or prioritize the core principles and goals of feminism. It can refer to approaches to feminism that may be more palatable or acceptable to mainstream or conservative audiences but may not challenge the root causes of gender inequality or advocate for significant social and structural changes. The aforementioned discussion on these topics shows that cosmo-feminism and feminism-lite have different orientations. Hence, the researcher has tried to create a link between these distinctive concepts, which has become the lens to study the selected graphic novels. Here, the point of intervention is that both topics fulfill the requirements of the present study. At the same time, the point of departure created by the researcher is how these concepts bring different outcomes with in the research. From this, I mean that the opposition made between these topics and using this opposition as a lens to study graphic literature is an outstanding effort by the researcher.

Western representation of Muslim women is often associated with sexualizing the Orient. The phenomenon of sexualizing the Orient is ubiquitous in Western

literature and art. To explain this process, Schaper et al. have used a very innovative term called 'sexotic'. Using this term, researchers have compared exoticization and sexualization. It is important to note that these concepts overlap and foreground each other. The sexual drives and sexual behavior of occidental for the oriental originates because of the 'exotic' nature of the 'other.' Hence, the spectacle of 'sexoticization' encompasses the interchange of these independent terms (exoticization and sexualization), bringing an innovative notion (sexotic) that necessitates the obligatory combination of these concepts. Thus, the term 'sexotic' highlights the exotic quality connected with sex and the sexual quality frequently linked with the exotic (Schaper et al. 115). This concept paves the way for this study's understanding of Western graphic novels.

In another discussion regarding 'Sexualization of the Orient' by Farazeh Syed, the researcher pointed out that the phenomenon of sexualization connotes disempowering the Orient. She argues that the "Orientalist fantasy" deliberately targets the sexual existence of the Orient and associates it with "femininity." Furthermore, she also reflected on another issue: the creation of a "visual trope" against the Orient. Exhibition of the Orient's "female nude" images has become a trend in the West. Syed also presented a relevant example in this regard symbolizing the image of a tiger as India. She claims that this image of the tiger is also a "visual trope" against the Orient as it is demonstrated as being 'tamed' by white people (Syed 19). The Promotion of obscenity in the name of freedom of expression is not ethical.

While discussing the process of sexualization, it is integral to debate the writings on Ottoman culture, specifically on life at harems. In this regard, the study of Herath on '19th Century Harem Representations' sheds light on the presentation of distorted images of the orients. This research is fascinating, as it has pointed out the difference between the experiences of male and female European travelers at harems. This shows that the phenomenon of sexualization is dependent on the gender of the Occident. According to this study, European male travelers concealed certain aspects of Ottoman culture, who merely focused on the sensuality of harems. It indicates the appearance of "gendered renditions" in the descriptions of harems and the Orient. On the other hand, descriptions of European female travelers are also prone to bias. Regardless of more profound insight into Ottoman culture, these descriptions could not obviate their "lingering Orientalist fantasies" (Herath 39). As a result, to retrieve

the most authentic depictions of harems, only the visual depictions of Ottoman women became a source.

According to the above discussion, the sexualization of the Orient has negative consequences, including perpetuating racism, reinforcing power imbalances, promoting cultural appropriation, and contributing to the dehumanization and marginalization of individuals from these regions. It is essential to recognize and challenge the sexualization of the Orient and to promote respectful and inclusive representations of individuals and cultures from these regions. It includes promoting diverse and authentic representations in literature, challenging harmful stereotypes, and fostering cultural understanding and respect. Respecting individuals from the Orient as fully human beings and valuing their diverse cultures, histories, and identities are crucial in promoting a more inclusive and equitable society. The aforementioned debate on the sexualization of the Orient creates a foreground to understand the point of departure and gap in this discussion. This is a well-researched topic, but the researcher has related this representation method, that is, sexualization, with the cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate. Writers who knowingly or unknowingly present these faulty images may have some agendas behind these portrayals. The researcher has tried to understand these agendas by presuming that such representations explicitly promote global feminism, i.e., cosmo-feminism. Implicitly, they could be disposed to feminism-lite, which is a flawed feminist advocacy. Hence, the writer has created a gap in this area of research by interconnecting the concept of the sexualization of the Orient with the idea of feminism-lite.

2.2 Visibility Politics in Graphic Literature

The graphic narratives are not simply fun literature for children but camouflaged narratives about dubious issues. The graphic narratives inspired by or representative of any political agenda tend to integrate particular ideological apparatuses into their content. These narratives (ab)use images of certain groups and people to justify their parochial demeanors. In the past, various graphic narratives were deliberately written as a conscious effort ". . . to introduce them into the broader public by putting the story on display" (Petersen 10). This shows that the genre of graphic literature, in many ways, indulges in the politics of visibility. Likewise, these visual stories also incorporate certain religious themes and celebrate freedom of

expression. Hence, graphic narrative is a highly complex genre of literature that needs to be elaborated and explored to uncover the implicit meanings behind these hybrid texts.

The history of graphic narratives is as old as that of human civilization. In the past, when humans could not read and write properly, they conveyed messages through certain symbols and illustrations. By examining the history of graphic narratives, it can be seen that as a mode of communication, graphic narratives frequently have a didactic quality in the manner in which they seem to moralize the actions they depict, either to eulogize some virtue or, through a negative example, to display some appalling behavior. According to David Kunzle's definitive history of early comic strips, the moral integrity of a comic strip is directly proportional to "the strength of the narrative element" (2). David Kunzle coined a relatively new term called Graphic narrative, which several scholars have adopted over the time. It is essential to comprehend the history of comic books as a medium and industry to comprehend how the culturally created category of the comic book reader, with its negative connotations, stereotypes, and stigmatized identity, arose and has persisted,

After many years, through the technological advancement of humans, the long narrative texts eventually started to lose their charm. In this scenario, the importance of illustration revived, and a new way of storytelling, called comics, started. "The term *comics* derives from the so-called funny pages found in late 19th-and early 20th-century newspapers" (Murray 2). At that time comics was a humorous genre in literature. Over time, these graphic novels took some serious place in academics, as their purpose shifted to addressing serious issues in society.

While discussing the history of graphic narratives, Petersen describes, "Over the centuries, artists have found many creative ways to tell stories with pictures, but often the pictures remain coded, relying on conventions and symbols that could be understood only by the original audience long since gone" (xiii). Gradually, with the beginning of writing, the art of illustration faded with time. In his book *Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels: A History of Graphic Narratives: History of Graphic Narratives*, Peterson explained that *Painting and Performance* by Victor Mair eventually prompted him to write his book. Mair traced the outlines of an old history of image recitation from India through Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and the Middle

East. He established that the ancient world's narrative art traditions had a more extensive and interwoven past that continued to the present day. Peterson furthermore esteems the contributions of Vidya Dehejia, David Kunzle, and John Lent, who particularized graphic narratives history by researching Buddhist tales in India, analysing early popular comic prints in Europe, and exploring Asian comics, respectively. He additionally elucidates that graphic storytelling, despite its long history and unique ways of communication, is an ambiguous category between art and literature that has struggled to build its specific language and ideas on how it works.

Owing to the growth of visual stimuli in almost all media, multimedia information sources have a greater appeal than single-focus information sources, such as text-only books. Over time, graphic narratives took the shape of graphic novels; however, this transition was plodding. The best way to describe graphic novels is as bound compilations of previously published comic book serials or original long-form works released in book format for the first time. Graphic novels are a fantastic technique to ease reluctant readers into more advanced reading. Typically, graphic novels chronologically fall into three categories. Common categories include the Golden Age, Silver Age, Bronze Age, and Modern Age; however, the Atomic Age (1952–1965) and Modern Age (sometimes known as the Iron Age) comes in specific references (Weiner 10). Besides the history of this genre, presently the genre of graphic novels is renowned in both academia and publication houses.

Throughout history, comics were synonymous to notorious pieces of art. The subversive combination of pictures and words in comic books challenged both the ostensibly "unique qualities" of visual culture and the "superior quality" of print culture (Varnum and Gibbons 216). In the contemporary world, comic books are famous around the globe, especially in Japan and France. In France, comic books are the "ninth art," while in Japan; comics (commonly called manga) are widespread source of "entertainment as television and video games" for all genders and age groups (Gagliardo 30). This shows that the genre of graphic literature has somehow achieved due importance in the field of literature and art.

The history of graphic novels lies in that of comics. The genre of graphic novels has emerged through the transformation of comics throughout history. The definition of a graphic novel is similar to that of a comic book, in terms of its

graphical and linguistic story style. However, it differs somewhat because the comics are gathered and arranged in a book format or compilation. It provides graphic novels a sense of completion; the entire tale is there from beginning to end and can stand on its own, "unlike the newspaper comic serial shorts or monthly issues of comic books" (Meuer 8). Fisher and Frey also elaborate on this sense of completion in graphic novels. They describe a graphic novel as a vast, full-length piece of comic-style art containing a "narrative with a beginning, middle, and end" (Fisher and Frey 40). The graphic novel is a significant literary form with complicated history and practice (Pagliaro 31). During the early half of the 20th century, comic books evolved from ten-cent repackaged collections of Sunday comic strips and "pulp magazines" into significant businesses (Pagliaro 32). All these attributes of graphic novels show that this genre is not inferior to any other genre of literature but is indeed more versatile.

While exploring graphic novels, Hillary Chute expounds that primarily the discovery of graphic novels was for commercial purposes; but now this genre is considerably more popular and identifiable than graphic narratives. In the second half of the twentieth century, 'graphic narratives' got a new name i.e. 'graphic novels'. This appealing title significantly helped in flourishing sale of hybrid-texts. In 1964, Richard Kyle was the first to introduce the phrase "graphic novel" in the newsletter distributed to members of the Amateur Press Association. Bill Spicer later adopted the term for his fanzine Graphic Story World (Chute 453). Furthermore, by explaining the history and importance of graphic novels in literature, Chute raises inevitable questions about the standing of this genre in the history of literature. As graphic novels are a relatively new form of literature, they greatly affect contemporary literature trends. The "texture of narrative forms" should be analysed to know that these narratives are principled according to the actual historical representation; another concern comes regarding the risks involved in showing or telling history in its original form. The complex nature of this hybrid art form also comes to play when it challenges the memory intelligence" of people through the "narrative design" of graphic novels. In other words, understanding people's lives through this form of literature involves more intricacy. Chute edifies that from modernist social and aesthetic attitudes and practices to the postmodern shift toward democracy of popular forms, and the graphic narrative has developed on the primary creations of fiction. In the graphic novel, we observe an acceptance of mass production and distribution and

an engrossed, innovative focus on form as political engagement (462). This emerging form needs to receive more sustained attention from critical approaches to literature (which they are beginning to do) by introducing a format that necessitates re-examining narrative and genre

Since graphic novels have evolved from comic books, this new form of faces stigmatized, like comics. Initially this genre had a less serious impact on readers. However, with the increase in the demand for comic books and graphic novels, graphic narratives have become a popular culture in the world, including America. While explaining the importance of graphic narratives in the literature, Weiner claims that "The old stereotypes and resistance to graphic literature" were unstiffened. Children and adults started buying graphic novels, and libraries started displaying this literature (8). Furthermore, he adds by highlighting the unique qualities of graphic literature. Discussing comic books with several volumes, he argues that it takes brilliant creators and writers to keep a character alive and fascinating for a long time (6). It is difficult to write and draw coherent tales. One may thus claim that graphic literature is among the finest genres of literature (7). Numerous significant organizations, "including the Southwestern Popular Culture Association, American Culture Association, American Library Association, and Texas Library Association," plan conference sessions for scholarly debates on graphic novels and comics (9). A complete culture has developed around comic books and graphic novels. The fastest-growing division of many bookstores is dedicated to graphic novels. Japan's most famous manga comics are the fastest-growing marketing category in the literature and publishing sector.

Progressively graphic narratives have gained more standing in the pedagogy of literature. Dong, in his book, *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives: Essays on Theory, Strategy, and Practice,* elaborates that graphic narratives are not only taught as ordinary literature, but the educational institutes have now discovered the potential of this genre in "teaching composition, rhetoric, and communication" (9). He also expounds the importance of graphic narratives in the American cultural realm. The rising acceptance of comics as literature has left an imprint on college courses, representing America's intellectual milieu. Furthermore, Dong discussed the importance of graphic narratives in the literature and explained contemporary teaching methods. In this regard, he focuses on the analogies of comics presented by

the famous cartoonist, Chris Ware. He offered an analytic framework that examined multiple aesthetic communication levels embedded in graphic narratives. Dong also points out a specific pattern in the syllabus of American Graphic literature courses. According to him, the specialists should follow certain consistent course design patterns, especially in the departments of literature, popular culture, and media studies. A reading list of five to ten redundant graphic narratives by renowned artists is present in the courses of Introduction to American Comics (40). Dong has also emphasized the importance of graphic narratives as literature by highlighting their role in classroom settings. He points out that graphic narrative can potentially improve classroom dialogue, particularly in amateur literature and writing classes for undergraduate students. Furthermore contributed to the field by creating lesson plans for graphic narratives that assisted students in learning the principles of visual analysis and rhetoric (222). In graphic narrative class, while most students are aware of the power of the image, many can also recognize the impact of the word when considering the image. It shows that graphic literature is valuable for all learners as it offers two modes of understanding, i.e., words and images.

While unfolding the classification of graphic narratives as "World Literature," Schmitz-Emans elaborates that the definition of literature eventually has been expanded to include graphic narratives. She jots down several causes behind this contemporary evolution. The art of comics has been described in several ways in recent decades, including in terms of media aesthetics, cultural applications, functions, etc. According to the most prominent theory, comics are storytelling grounded in a basic and transcultural human need to give experiences and imaginations a narrative form. This tendency has shown throughout human history through evolving media formats and languages. By obliquely or overtly comparing them with verbal storytelling, especially with the structure and poetics of the "graphic book," narrative methods see comics as a medium of "visual narratives" (Schmitz-Emans 385). The formal and functional comparisons, as well as differences regarding the use of visual sequences as a narrative technique, are still a point of debate for various theorists

The position of graphic novels in the realm of literature has advanced increasingly. Many prominent authors and graphic literature writers have recently greatly appreciated comics and graphic novels. In 2001 when "Jimmy Corrigan by

Chris Ware" won the Guardian's First Novel Award, some literary communities were stunned by this contentious choice that supposedly split the jury (Gravett 184). Including the graphic narrative genre in such prestigious awards displays the change in dealing with this category of literature. The trend of adaptations of eminent literary texts into graphic novels is quite famous now. It shows that texts can be presented better with the aid of images. The *Classics Illustrated* by Albert Kanter, written around 1941, is a famous example of a graphic narrative that has assisted certain students in passing their English Literature courses (185). This discussion summarises that graphic novel is now considered a well-versed genre.

The graphic narrative has always had shifting themes over time. This transition is marked as unexpected, from amusing themes to dark-superhero-entertainment comics. However, the seriousness of the subject matter of comic books is not an unforeseen or sudden phenomenon. Instead, this is evident from history that superhero comics used to deal with adult subject matter since "the 1970s". Art Spiegelman is a famous graphic novel pioneer, but several other writers wrote independent comics in the "1980s" (Versaci 10). In literature, constraining any genre to specific themes or essentials is an injustice to the diverse nature of literature. Graphic narratives have faced this genre-based discrimination as many attempts have been made to legitimize the graphic novel by differentiating it from the comic book. Here it is necessary to understand that graphic novels originated from comics, a diverse and vast genre. Such prejudices have contributed to the belief that comics as a genre cannot convey elaborated stories, deep topics, or compelling characters to an educated, "well-adjusted" adult audience (Versaci 2). Literary critics and scholars must address and counter this sort of genre based prejudice.

The importance of graphic narratives in the field of literature has already been elaborated; furthermore, the challenging opportunity of graphic texts to broaden the understanding of literary theories is also noteworthy. Graphic literature has distinct features, which do not synchronize with the standards of reading and interpreting regular literary texts. In this scenario, dealing with this discrete genre inimitably and exclusively is essential. As a result, this practice will enable literary minds to deeply read and understand graphic novels, which may affect and alter the longstanding academic perspectives and change the traditional "ways of thinking literature" (Baetens 83). This genre is undoubtedly a change-maker in the field of literature.

As graphic literature is highly predisposed to the politics of visibility, this gives rise to another feature of the graphic narrative: it can potentially be not very objective. Visual literature shares the same difficulty of unraveling politics from art as other literature. Hence, graphic narratives are not exempt from politics, like all literary genres. This genre implicitly deals with the politics of visibility, which needs to be explored and deliberated for in-depth understanding. David Greenfield has shed light on the politics of representation in graphic narratives. He argues that contemporary graphic novels offer a more nuanced view of the world. These hybrid-texts address complex issues implicitly. These innovative graphic novels have little in common with their superhero-infused archetype comics other than following a conventional aesthetic style. The graphic literature author adopts a narrative method conveyed with words and images (Greenfield 38). Similar to the algorithm of photojournalism, these authors focus on tales about the experience via involving the image/text storytelling technique. In most graphic novels, the authors position themselves as the protagonists.

Through the unique combination of graphics and words, graphic novels embody parts of reality that neither traditional fiction nor nonfiction might present. While explaining this phenomenon, Greenfield gives an example of Sacco's graphic novel Palestine written in 2002. In this novel, Sacco utilizes his backdrop paintings to show a scene in which he communicates information in a way that he could not achieve with words alone. In several ways, graphic novels supplement theoretical readings by giving concrete illustrations of abstract ideas. Modern graphic novels cover more complex themes in shades of grey by presenting a more "nuanced view" of the world (39). Greenfield discusses the versatility of representation and the diversity of interpretation in graphic literature. As the genre of graphic narrative has progressed, the demographic dispersion of authors, artists, and readers has dramatically expanded to include a broader range of cultures, communities, gender, and racial identity. As a result, the stories' subject matter has also widened, with newer pieces addressing historical and contemporary concerns more frequently (49). Graphic narratives have also been used as deviant art to shatter the traditional stereotypes prevalent in societies. In this regard, Greenfield elucidates how African American graphic tales utilize the conflict between image and text to challenge

conventional depictions of gender and race (52). Hence, the hybridity of graphic narratives is fruitful in challenging traditions.

While discussing the issue of the involvement of politics in graphic literature, Lewandowski explains that promoting certain communal ideals in graphic narratives may generate blemished representations of "political or social" communications (79). In such a circumstance, a comic book will explain and demonstrate some presumptions in a sophisticated and straightforward manner. It need not be meant to promote actual political participants; instead, it may express the private beliefs of an artist or a concept rather than a political objective. In this instance, one will likely receive a realistic, functional, and motivating representation of a specific idea. Propaganda in comics is a highly distinctive feature. It is when the primary objective of a graphic book is to show one political alternative as superior to all others. Similar to other forms of propaganda in virtually every medium, it purposely distorts the world's view and is frequently created as a direct response to the request of political players. In certain instances, like war comics, propaganda seeks to influence readers and provoke real and immediate actions from the piece of art. Promoting certain shared principles may also represent "political or social" communication. Those who wish to effectively communicate political messages deliberately choose graphic narratives as a medium. People who typically do not even read anything other than an instruction manual and are not interested in significant political issues can easily educate themselves by reading graphic narratives. Furthermore, comics can engage both the verbal and nonverbal pathways of human perception, making them unrivaled in capturing attention and going right to the heart of readers. Consequently, most graphic novels disguise political themes as amusement.

The effectiveness and ineffectiveness of political representation in graphic literature is a much-needed debate. Representation is a transitive act: it assumes an equivalency or substitution between two things, one real but absent and the other symbolic but present (McKinney 10). Representation is also an aggressive act: it approves and legitimizes its symbolic transformation. In this case, it is the transition of actual physical force into the symbolic expression of the capacity to create force when necessary (11). Force is actual, whereas power is symbolic: the latter is consequently a weak construct, as it conceals a reluctance or unwillingness to use force repeatedly and relies on public approval or consensus. If "representation is

nothing other than the fantastic vision in which power considers itself as absolute" (12), then it is also "the grieving of the absoluteness of force," the paradoxical expression of the impossibility of absolutism (121). Therefore, it makes sense that political leaders would consider attacks on their reputation as dangerous as those on themselves would.

In her research, Panjwani has drawn concern regarding the political representation of Muslim culture in children's graphic literature. She argues that there is the possibility that texts representing Muslim children will lend themselves to multicultural and critical pedagogy discourse, even if this has never been tried. Multicultural literature may not always include non-white perspectives. In addition, instructors may address the Islamic education component of Muslim children's books educationally without introducing religious overtones into the classroom. Even more importantly, the (so-called) Eastern viewpoints on children's literature diverge from Western perspectives. Children's literature can generally include a subgenre of minority literature, namely Muslim literature (212). Indeed, the terminology and concepts signified by pluralism and cosmopolitanism are modern manifestations of any civilization's goals, especially Western culture. These values also represent the innate humanism that has always been a component of human achievements and civilizations. Religious myths and archetypes of Muslims influence these; hence, their manifestations may not appear impartial (213). In teaching-learning situations, it can be questioned whether two or more sets of values and their applications will imply and operate concurrently and be appropriated or not. The answer to this question demonstrates the complexity of Muslim images examined in graphic literature written for children.

After the incident of 9/11, many Western comics and graphic novels portray questionable images of Muslims. The most famous of these works is *Holly Terror (2011)* by Frank Miller. Miller is often criticised for his Islamophobic representations. He deliberately creates stereotypical Muslim characters in his works, showing his hatred toward the Muslim world. Dar argues that Miller, in his comic *300* presented Muslims as "violent, oppressive, and garbed in typical Oriental fashion" (104). This representation shows the exact anti-Islamic sentiments of the writer. Croci also identifies the Islamophobic underpinnings in the works of Miller, and while pointing out *Holy Terror,* he names such graphic narratives as "WWII-era propaganda comics"

(182). In an interview, Miller expressed his anti-Islamic sentiments blatantly. While answering a question, he says that the terrible event of 911 happened because Muslims and the West needed "to retaliate" and work for "retribution" against this global issue of terrorism (George and Miller 114). It is evident through the author's remarks that his purpose of creating graphics is to promote Islamophobia.

On the other hand, some Western Muslim writers are countering the Islamophobic renderings by creating a counter-discourse of the works like *Holly Terror*. For instance, the web-comic *Qahera* by Deena Mohamed portrays a burqa-clad superheroine who fights misogyny and faux feminism. The unique depiction of the Muslim superheroine in Mohamed's work has aroused various researchers' interest. Dubbati debates that *Qahera* is a perfect counter-discourse of Islamophobic and neo-Orientalist works. The researcher argues that *Qahera* is a freak character with no rigid traits; she is as fluid in her personality as an average person is. The physical representation of the hero is also interesting to notice; Dubbati writes that Mohamed has prorated "Muslim woman's body as a spectacle that defies rather than amuses or satisfies" (447). It is a counter-reaction against the problematic Western representation of Muslim women.

Another researcher Abdelsalam has analysed this work under the lens of 'Third Space' by Bhabha. The depiction of Muslim women in *Qahera* shows the world of Muslim women and their choices and styles. Mohamed gives regular Egyptian women the title of superheroes for their ability to overcome the difficulties of daily life in this way. The portrayal of the female figures in the final panel exemplifies inclusivity and diversity. The fact that women wearing the hijab and niqab and being exposed are prominent panel members suggests that Mohamed claims to speak for all Egyptian women (116). They are "independence from misogyny and the co-optation of women's movements" (118). The Eastern representation of Muslim women in graphic narratives is continuously redefining their identities to shatter the stigmatization associated with them by Western representations.

This discussion on visibility politics involved in graphic literature starts from the background and history of this genre. It shows that graphic literature has always been written, read, and researched from political perspectives. Hence, this foreground

has been taken as a point of intervention for the present research. Furthermore, the portrayal of Muslim characters in graphic literature has also been discussed in this section, which builds a background of the study. It has been examined that Muslim characters are often stigmatized in graphic literature.

On the other hand, some research is discussed that advocates the rights of the Muslim community in their works. This juxtaposition builds the argument of the present research, as this study has also shown varied portrayals of Muslim characters in different graphic novels. Furthermore, the point of departure is that the researcher has dealt explicitly with the description of Eastern Muslim women in this study. This discussion has also pointed out some clear reasons for stigmatizing Muslim characters in graphic art. Islamophobia is one of such reasons discussed here, which paves the way for the buildup of biased opinions regarding Muslims. The researcher has highlighted how the world has changed after the 9/11 incident; consequently, the literature produced after this incident also has a typical approach. This discussion has effectively understood the Western perspective of dealing with Muslim characters in graphic literature. Furthermore, the point of departure from this before-mentioned literature is that the researcher has not linked Islamophobia directly to the analysis. Instead has dealt with other varied theoretical concepts more specific than the general Islamophobic concepts.

2.3 Representation of Muslim Women in Graphic Novels

The representation of Muslim women in graphic narratives is a controversial topic. The Western (sometimes Eastern) authors purposefully portray Muslim women wearing veils and hijabs to demonstrate the impression of oppression levied on Muslim women. This predisposed representation of Muslim women in graphic narratives is becoming a common trend globally. Karunakaran suggests that superhero comics frequently reflect Americans' prejudices concerning non-Western civilizations, religious minorities, and racial and ethnic minorities (2). He furthermore claims that a Muslim superhero team can be created if a comic book and graphic novel depictions keep up their current pace. The fact that Muslim women can now be depicted as superheroes after "thirty years" (19) of prejudice and stereotyping encourages Muslim women's representation going onwards and upwards.

Like other forms of literature, graphic literature is also not neutral regarding representations. In this situation, the critical analysis of graphic narratives is integral. According to the study of Cohen and Peery, the students of literature must realize the fact that whatever they are shown as mere "perceptions" could be "stereotypes" (20). This difference between freedom of expression and stereotyping must be considered to understand visual literature's partialities. Various studies and surveys have shown that naive literature students (specifically those from the West) recognized that their beliefs regarding Islam and Muslim women were distorted (25). Their discoveries disproved their preconceived ideas and clarified that their comprehension was only stereotyped.

According to Stromberg, in Western (mainly American) graphic novels, Muslims are portrayed in various ways, from archetypal terrorists and Islamic radicals to benevolent but stereotyped individuals. In academic circles, the representations of Arabs and Muslims in American superhero comic books have received little attention. The numerous new Arab and Muslim superheroes have made their debuts in well-known comic book series (like "The X-Men") in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the ensuing political and military conflicts (574). He said that Arabs and Muslims are not portrayed in these writings as simple clichés, loaded symbols, or token characters but rather as complex, inconsistently good, and inconsistently flawed real beings. These superhero comics are typically commercial works produced by a hired team. In contrast, graphic novels are frequently categorized as projects written by independent authors, allowing for more ambitious storytelling and more nuanced representations of characters (597). The difference between these graphic novels and the comic books Stromberg consulted for his study is partly due to their respective target audiences, which are younger for comic books than for graphic novels.

The specific representation of Muslim women in graphic narratives results from Islamophobia and hatred toward Muslims, which originated after the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, Muslim women's (mis)representation in such graphic narratives is a diligent inquiry. In his research, Jehanzeb Dar contends that some visual narratives portray Muslim women as oppressed, "secluded and fully veiled" victims of the brutality of Muslim men and the Islamic faith (100). In stereotyped graphic narratives, Muslim women are portrayed as beautiful creatures who are

always in need of rescue because they are victims at the hands of their people. The works depict Islam's religion as restrictive and encouraging violence; subsequently, Muslims, Arabs, and Iranians are depicted as violent and aggressive, ardently "anti-American and anti-Israel, uncivilized, and misogynistic" (109). By using the example of the graphic narrative character Dust, by Grant Morrison and Ethan Van Sciver, Dar makes the case that in the male-dominated world of comic books, where female characters are depicted with enormous breasts and skin-tight attire, it is intriguing to consider whether Dust and other Muslim super-heroines avoid sexual objection. Dust's explanation for embracing the burqa is somewhat stereotypical and inaccurate. The authors' lack of knowledge about Muslim women and Islam, in general, maybe the cause of this. In addition to painting men as lusty and wicked, frequent allusions by Dust to "protecting herself from men" sexualize Dust and turn her into an object of desire. The problem occurs when the beautiful Islamic teachings on modesty for both sexes are confused with the Western idea of "protecting women from men" (10). Such misrepresentations must be countered and re-defined in graphic narrative research.

Several graphic narratives directly or tacitly demonstrate political bias; therefore, they are not always necessarily apolitical. Likewise, in the South Asian comics, the portrayal of two worldviews is prominently noted, i.e., these narratives negotiate "multiple public spheres in the colonial and postcolonial period" (Murthy 40). The tug-of-war between the colonizer and the colonized will always prevail because history is never forgotten, and such political graphic narratives will always be written and studied. The incorporation of postcolonial theory is significant when it comes to the depiction of Muslims in American popular culture. ". . . Considering the diversity in the Islamic world, and its gendered racialization in the West" (Hosein 2), the analysis of Muslims in the Western narrative must be viewed critically under the lens of postcolonialism. It is the best approach to understanding the stereotypical representations of Muslims in Western works. While drawing a contrast between the representation of the Muslim world by media vs. academic scholars, Said claims that media and even tourists have entirely rewritten and whitewashed the history of events that occurred within the Muslim world. While on the other hand, in the name of artistic license, academic scholars frequently disregard their societal responsibilities of authentic representations (344). Stereotypes are commonly reinforced rather than challenged when a culture is demonized in literature, hindering cross-cultural

communication in the longer run. Said also lists several recurring themes in texts about colonized regions of the world, themes that, in his opinion, cannot simply be attributed to the beliefs of one particular author but rather to more expansive belief systems governed by discursive frameworks that are given legitimacy and power by imperial powers relations (266).

Additionally, he points out that the orients are rendered as inferior humans in the generalized texts created by Western writers. These broad generalizations regarding specific cultures convey the impression that the speaker cannot distinguish between unique groups of people and the overall population. In this scenario, visibility in such literature can be seen as a deception that silences marginalized societies worldwide (94). According to Said, the ideas of an imperialistic worldview are reflected when the majority of texts— about the Muslim world—by authors with Eurocentric lineage are examined.

Another interesting phenomenon Said explains is about "native informants" (324). Said, following Eurocentric writers, native speakers who write writings that distort the perception of their own native cultures are "native informants." This phenomenon has taken new forms as the concept of re-orientalism by Lisa Lau somehow originated from this very idea. According to Said, the misrepresentation in the portrayal of the Orient is still happening today, especially concerning the "enigmatic" and "mysterious" Muslim world (184). In his seminal book *Orientalism*, Said elaborates on the politics of power in structuring several Middle Eastern countries. Politics, as a type of imperialism, influences the creation of literature, scholarship, social theory, and historical writing, claims Said (14). The concepts of Said are essential to understand before this study as the vast concept of postcolonialism presented by Said paves the way to connect the cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate with postcolonial gender concerns raised by Abu-Lughod. Hence, the researcher has filled a research gap by linking these ideas of different orientations to create a new and engaging debate on feminism.

The notion of ecological and socio-political critique is where the contemporary South Asian graphic narrative themes are rooted. It presents unique viewpoints on gendered experience, global displacement, environmental brutality, and inter-ethnic conflict. Together with their international scope and diverse

methodologies, these concepts urge us to re-examine and re-imagine how South Asian and South Asian-American histories are represented in graphic narratives. They shed light on how the imaginative, trans-medial encounter in the graphic novel offers us fresh perspectives on the past while laying out new strategies for dealing with the violence that permeates "our postcolonial (but not post-imperial) present in South Asia and its diasporas" (Daiya 8). These new perspectives should be encouraged and analysed on a larger scale.

The discussion of the portrayal of postcolonial themes in graphic narratives would be incomplete without mentioning the graphic novel *Palestine* by Joe Sacco, written in 1993. Gallien argues that in this novel when Sacco uses discriminatory and offensive language and highlights the death of an American Jew, Klinghoffer, at the hands of Palestinian terrorists, in essence, he is seeking to highlight the oversimplifications, Western media makes because of the "Orientalizing" process. On the other hand, another mechanism comes to play when Sacco becomes part of the narration. It makes the graphic narrative a "meta-narrative" in which the author has become a "witness" of the events around him. Here, an exciting exploration can be made, which signifies the author himself is also complicating the story by intruding in the process of narration. As a result, like prejudiced Western media, Sacco gets involved in this postcolonial politics because of his "idiosyncrasies and biases" (Gallien 105). It shows that any graphic novel dealing with postcolonial themes is biased from either side (colonizer or colonized).

While drawing a contrast between the representation of the Muslim world by media vs. academic scholars, Said claims that media and even tourists have entirely rewritten and whitewashed the history of events that occurred within the Muslim world. While on the other hand, in the name of artistic license, academic scholars frequently disregard their societal responsibilities of authentic representations (344). Stereotypes are commonly reinforced rather than challenged when a culture is demonized in literature, hindering cross-cultural communication in the longer run. Said also lists several recurring themes in texts about colonized regions of the world, themes that, in his opinion, cannot simply be attributed to the beliefs of one particular author but rather to more expansive belief systems governed by discursive frameworks that are given legitimacy and power by imperial powers relations (266). Additionally, he points out that the orients are rendered as inferior humans in the

generalized texts created by Western writers. These sweeping generalizations regarding specific cultures convey the impression that the speaker cannot distinguish between unique groups of people and the overall population. In this scenario, visibility in such literature can be seen as a deception that silences marginalized societies worldwide (94). According to Said, the ideas of an imperialistic worldview are reflected when the majority of texts— about the Muslim world—by authors with Eurocentric lineage are examined.

Another interesting phenomenon Said explains is about "native informants" (324). Said, following Eurocentric writers, native speakers who write writings that distort the perception of their own native cultures are "native informants." This phenomenon has taken new forms as the concept of re-orientalism by Lisa Lau (discussed in the later section) somehow originated from this very idea. According to Said, the misrepresentation in the portrayal of the Orient is still happening today, especially concerning the "enigmatic" and "mysterious" Muslim world (184). The majority of "social conscience" and "melting pot" literature (as the books under discussion) raise questions about an author's social responsibilities. This study points out the loopholes in representations of Muslim women in the selected graphic novels to understand this responsibility. In his seminal book *Orientalism*, Said elaborates on the politics of power in structuring several Middle Eastern countries. Politics, as a type of imperialism, influences the creation of literature, scholarship, social theory, and historical writing, claims Said (14). This politics in the form of visibility politics is prevalent in the selected works analysed.

In his book, *The Postcolonial Graphic Novel and Trauma: From Maus to Malta*, Knowles considers the association between postcolonial literary representation and interconnected graphic novels. According to him, the graphic novel is not only an important medium for presenting postcolonial experiences, but it would not be wrong to say that it is the only best possible way of such depictions. While talking about trauma narratives, he adds that the tenderness and proximity of expression, delivered through graphic novels, cannot be expressed through other narrative forms. Graphic novels are a particularly timely contemporary genre to evaluate in "postcolonialism and race" discussions because they connect directly to a particular emotional incisiveness (Knowles 84). While understanding the involvement of postcolonial rudiments in certain graphic narratives, it is essential to frame the reading of such

works critically. Postcolonial graphic narratives and histories can be studied for their idiomatic, political, and contextual elements as emerging public culture expressions that show how modernity can be diversely appropriated in many "post-national imaginaries" (Mehta and Pia 4). Hence, it can be said that postcolonial identities are created and explored in graphic art more frequently.

Malo-Juvera has also researched postcolonial themes in graphic literature; his research is centered on exploring the harms of endorsement of prejudiced postcolonial ideas while teaching graphic literature to children. The ratification of these concepts aid in the normalization of social oppression and prejudice that minorities face in their daily life. The proper understanding and critical teaching of these narratives are mandatory to point out the social evils like "Comprador class privilege," "Othering of immigrants," and "Superiority of White-culture." As a result, students will avoid engaging in such discriminatory acts and will identify that these actions are nothing but "acting White" (Malo-Juvera 47). The critical approach to graphic literature must be diverse to shatter such misrepresentations.

It is also essential to discuss the works already done on the selected graphic novels to understand the existing knowledge gap in the study. The autobiographical graphic novel *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2003)* by Marjane Satrapi is a world-famous graphic novel with over 'two million copies' (Esra 2) sold worldwide. Various researchers have critically investigated this novel. Satrapi's work has received mixed views worldwide, making it difficult to label it with any political agenda. Gilmore and Marshall discuss this novel as a feminist work. The researchers believe that the painful experiences of the protagonist in the novel specifically highlight the issues of Eastern women, and this novel cannot be read as a work of universal agony. The protagonist is represented as a damsel in distress who needs to be salvaged and protected all the time. Gilmore and Marshall write that *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* narrates a 'politics of rescue' (689). Another researcher Leservot has analysed this work under the lens of Occidentalism, and she argues that this novel has ironically targeted the West. She writes, "Satrapi's characters use Western paraphernalia to resist the dominant paradigm of Islamic rule" (127).

Furthermore, another researcher has linked the concept of cosmo-feminism with *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood.* Friedman argues that it was Satrapi's right

as a world citizen to choose a better living situation for her. He writes, "Her cosmo-feminism from the side is based in the retrospective eye of the exiled memoirist, who has fled Iran in 1994 to live in Paris, where she has the artistic freedom she and her fellow artists lacked under the watchful eye of the Islamic regime" (Friedman 36). Hence, researchers' opinions and analyses on Satrapi's position as a diasporic are mixed. Some researchers put allegations about her works, while others understand her position as a diasporic writer and advocate her ideas.

Craig Thompson's *Habibi (2011)* is an American graphic novel based on a romantic fable set in an imaginary and contemporary Middle Eastern country. The Western geopolitical interests in the Middle East have caused political turmoil in the past century. Through the (mis)use of power, The West has succeeded in controlling the East. Thompson's graphic novel presents neoliberal geopolitics or a neo-orientalist approach in the post-9/11 context. Besides the explicit Islamophobic renderings in *Habibi (2011),* some researchers have acknowledged the efforts of Thompson by praising his efforts to present the modern viewpoint of religion. In her study, Kristine Gritter argues that Thompson has represented a close association between Islam and Christianity, promoting solidarity among religions. While condemning criticism of *Habibi (2011),* she writes, "Religious beliefs that buttress many adolescent discursive practices are mired in misunderstanding" (Kristine 97). Another researcher who has esteemed the work of Thompson writes,

> However, in line with his rejection of religious fundamentalism, his usage of Biblical/Qur'anic stories is less about a debate of their true historicity and more about having something that might accurately reflect life's struggles, something that might teach relevant lessons and provide applicable meaning (Lau 44).

Lau has universalized the ideas portrayed in *Habibi.* Instead of admitting the bias in his work, she has admired the universality of the graphic novel, which is meant for all humans. Besides these critics, some critics have highlighted the stereotyping and prejudices in the work of Thompson. Shammary, in this regard, writes, "Thompson played a worn-out parody of Muslim men which reproduced racial prejudices" (Shammary 9). It can be said that Thompson's work faced a lot of criticism and backlash.

Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution (2017) by Coleman Nye and Sherine Hamdy is a relatively new and less-researched work. This novel can be termed ethno-fiction as it is based on ethnographic studies. The writers of this novel are from different ethnicities as well. Nye is a white American, while Hamdy is an Egyptian woman living in States. This collaborative work is a deliberate effort to create a sense of cosmo-feminism among women of different regions and ethnicities. In this regard, Ferens writes, "... The collaborative research and formal experimentation (in *Lissa*) may be related to the authors' sense of accountability to their informants, and that by giving fictional names, faces, and complex lives to distant others, the authors hoped to foster interest in, and empathy towards, them" (Ferens 84). It can be said that this novel is an outcome of well-researched historical and cultural aspects.

The discussion in this section is more narrowed down as it directly deals with the topic of representation of Muslim women in graphic narratives. Furthermore, this section also introduces some previous research on the selected graphic novels. The representation of Muslim women in graphic literature sometimes shows positive feminist advocacy, while there are also some examples where the characters of Muslim women are stigmatized in graphic literature. These two ways of portrayal are direct and explicit. Through the above discussion, the researcher has created a point of intervention while dealing with this topic. It has been pointed out that there is a possibility that a writer seemingly advocates the rights of Muslim women characters, but knowingly or unknowingly, in doing so, they stigmatize these characters. This possibility has been discovered in the entire thesis. The previous works on the selected novels show that the present study has added significant knowledge to the existing literature.

The literature review overtly demonstrates that the genre of graphic literature is well acclaimed through the works within legitimate critical groups. The exposition of the evolution of graphic novels from comic scripts has explained the deep connection between the two literary forms. The influence of political themes in graphic narratives elucidates that this genre also needs equal importance and critical evaluation. Research is abundant on the selected literary criticism – there is a shortage of connections within all these literary criticisms. The researcher has filled this gap by creating a unique intermingling of these critical concepts, providing a new direction to these critical concepts. The selected three graphic novels have also been researched

previously, but the lens used in this study is diverse, underlining new understanding and conceptualization ventures.

Furthermore, the comparison between these three novels has not been made in earlier research, and the categorization that the present study provides of these novels is unique. In conclusion, the literature review enables the research to be carried out and pursued rigorously by theoretically integrating the investigation into the existing pertinent literature. It also regulates and directs the researcher to be correctly focused and suitably equipped with unique ideas.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the critical viewpoints espoused and adapted for the theoretical underpinnings of the research. Moreover, the research methodologies operated for this multidimensional study have also been elucidated in this section. This chapter provides a theoretical foundation for discussing the selected graphic novels and dominant postcolonial gender concerns working behind the contemporary debate of cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite, which serves as a backdrop for the critical analysis of selected literature. As this thesis explores the identities and experiences of Muslim women characterized in dominant Western representations, the researcher attempts to present theories that support irradiate notions of identity, illustration, and experience. As this study explores hybrid texts, selecting hybrid approaches for analysis is necessary (DeSuza 2). The researcher has drawn on different theories in formulating arguments about identity, illustration, and experience. However, postcolonial gender concerns presented by the renowned anthropologist Lila Abu Lughod is at the backdrop of the entire debate. As Abu Lughod's argument foregrounds the link between gender, race, nation, and imperialism, all the other theories and methods selected for the study align with this significant argument.

3.1 The Basics of Lila Abu Lughod's Postcolonial Gender Concerns and its Relevance to the Other Theories in the Present Research

Lila Abu-Lughod is a renowned anthropologist and feminist scholar who has significantly contributed to postcolonial gender studies. Her work explores the intersection of gender, culture, and imperialism, particularly concerning Muslim societies in the Middle East and North Africa. Abu-Lughod challenges the Orientalist framework, which depicts Muslim women as passive victims in need of Western rescue. She argues that this approach perpetuates colonial stereotypes and ignores the

agency and diversity of Muslim women's experiences. Abu-Lughod advocates for a nuanced understanding of Muslim women's lives that consider their agency and cultural complexities, subjectivity. She also advocates women's resistance towards social authorities "Gender segregation creates an even more important sphere for action in daily life than what is permitted to women in societies with less segregation between the genders" (Abu-Lughod 72). For this purpose, she believes that Eastern women who practice resistance towards their own culture do not need any "external interferences" (Abu-Lughod 42) to help them; instead, they are capable enough to rebel against societal oppression.

She emphasizes the importance of understanding gender within its cultural, social, and historical contexts. She rejects the flawed and uncritical understanding of feminism detached from historical perspectives. In this regard, she writes, that such criticism "overlook differences within each category constructed by the dividing practices, differences like those of class, race, and sexuality (to repeat the feminist litany of problematically abstract categories), but also ethnic origin, personal experience, age, mode of livelihood, health, living situation (rural or urban), and historical experience." She furthermore adds, "Experiences have been constructed historically and have changed over time. Both cultural feminism and revivalist movements rely on notions of authenticity and the return to positive values not represented by the dominant other" (Abu-Lughod 145). She rejects simplistic generalizations about gender in Muslim societies and highlights the diversity of gender roles and practices within these communities. Abu-Lughod calls for an intersectional approach that considers how gender intersects with other categories such as class, race, and religion. Abu-Lughod also challenges the hegemony of Western feminist perspectives in analysing gender issues in Muslim societies. She argues that Western feminism can sometimes be ethnocentric and paternalistic, imposing Western norms and values on non-Western contexts. She claims, "We do not stand outside the world, looking out over this sea of poor benighted people, living under the shadow—or veil—of oppressive cultures; we are part of that world. Islamic movements have arisen in a world shaped by the intense engagements of Western powers in Middle Eastern lives" (Abu-Lughod 33). She advocates for listening to and centering the voices of local women in Muslim societies to understand their experiences and perspectives on gender issues.

Abu-Lughod emphasizes how colonialism has shaped gender relations in Muslim societies. She argues that colonialism has not only disrupted local gender dynamics but has also influenced the construction of gender norms and identities. She highlights the need of critically examining the colonial legacy in understanding contemporary gender issues in postcolonial societies. She writes, "In the postcolonial world, women have become potent symbols of identity and visions of society and the nation" (Abu-Lughod 9). She advocates for feminist solidarity that transcend cultural and national boundaries. She calls for an approach that acknowledges the differences and complexities of gender experiences in different contexts while recognizing everyday struggles against gender oppression. She emphasizes building alliances among feminists from diverse backgrounds to work toward gender justice.

Overall, Lila Abu-Lughod's views on postcolonial gender issues highlight the need for a nuanced, context-specific, and intersectional approach that challenges Western-centric perspectives and recognizes the agency and diversity of women's experiences in Muslim societies. She advocates for feminist solidarity that transcends cultural boundaries and acknowledges colonialism's historical and contemporary impacts on gender relations.

As this study involves the critical analysis of the visual representation of Muslim women, thus the vantage point of the research is manifested with the centripetal aspect of gender illustration. For the exposition of the representation of Muslim women in Western graphic novels, the contrast between cosmo-feminism and feminism-lite has been drawn. This contrast has a logical connection with postcolonial gender concerns. The notion of cosmo-feminism originated from the concept of 'Cosmopolitanism.' Immanuel Kant coined this term and defined it as a European standard; with universal principles and values aiming for world peace. He presumed that this European idea of universal peace and harmony (cosmopolitanism) enables the construction of global citizens by obliterating one's ties to one's origins and roots. Presently, this term has been redefined to encompass a variety of Eastern experiences, moving away from its Eurocentric beginnings of "exile, immigration, migrant, diaspora, border crossing, pilgrimage, tourism" (Clifford 363). As this concept is pivoted on identity, it also profoundly connects with the postcolonial theory. According to Mignolo, there are new connections between cosmopolitanism, modernity, and colonialism. A worldwide kind of universal citizenship cannot exist without favoring the West; hence, he asks for a reimagined, critical cosmopolitanism

through interaction with a colonial difference (179). Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, and Chakrabarty also criticize the idea of cosmopolitanism. They name it as a Eurocentric, Western creation that should be reorganized without assuming the universality of the West. For this, reinscribing colonialism's center/margin division is obligatory (579). This discussion anticipates that the idea of cosmo-feminism pertains to the same concerns.

The idea of cosmo-feminism, originated from the concept of cosmopolitanism. Moreover, the postcolonial renderings are inevitable in both these concepts. According to Jones, in the making of "transnational feminisms" or "postcolonial feminist cosmopolitanism," there has been an effort to undermine the "binary of tradition and modernity" as the key metaphor for conceptualizing progress and development (59). The definition of Cosmo-feminism provided by Black is, "Women might develop usable alliances across national, racial, and sexual divides to combat the spread of global problems. I call this aspiration - a particular form of transnational perception - cosmo-feminism" (Black 228). It shows that cosmo-feminism emphasizes intersectional feminism, which recognizes that gender discrimination intersects with other forms of oppression and discrimination and that the struggle for gender equality cannot be separated from the fight against other forms of inequality and injustice.

The concept of cosmo-feminism is a prolific effort to celebrate the diversity of all women worldwide. However, the complexity lies in the practicability of this concept. This concept can be workable and productive or give rise to concepts like feminism-lite. Here feminism-lite refers to the fake or faux idea of feminism that tacitly follows other obscured agendas. For instance, Grewal discusses how colonial notions of tradition and modernity were used to represent Asian women in American popular media during the twentieth century. The narratives of women who moved from the East to the West were depicted as a journey from oppression to liberation and patriarchy to independence (63). Such distorted Eurocentric notions damage the credibility of the idea of cosmo-feminism. Black defines cosmo-feminism as finding ways for women to develop operational associations across racial, national, and sexual restrictions to prevent the expansion of global issues. Such distorted Eurocentric notions damage the credibility of the idea of cosmo-feminism. This sense of global concern or aspiration gives birth to a specific form of "transnational perception" linked with women, called cosmo-feminism (Black 228). There is a

narrow line between original cosmo-feministicic ideas and feminism-lite; exploring this line of demarcation is the aim of the present study. Critics of feminism-lite argue that it can undermine the core principles of feminism by diluting its message and failing to challenge patriarchal systems and structures. They argue that true feminism should be intersectional, inclusive, and transformative, seeking to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems rather than catering to the comfort or preferences of those who may be resistant to feminist ideology.

The progressive cosmo-feministicic ideas presented by writers might have some political concerns behind them. The maligned version of cosmo-feminism, earlier referred to as feminism-lite, most likely presents these political concerns in a discussion. In the present study, the researcher has identified some of these concerns, which are explained in the backdrop of Lila Abu Lughod's ideas of gender. The present research aims at finding out that either the writers of the selected texts advocate Muslim women's rights with proper historical, social, and geographical concerns, which I term as Cosmo-feminism. Alternatively, present an incomplete picture of Muslim women to the Western world, which I call a feminism-lite portrayal. The selected novels fall into either the cosmo-feminism portrayal or the feminism-lite category. In any category the novels fall, the visibility politics behind these portrayals is explained to determine the postcolonial gender concerns in each work.

3.2 Relevance of the Selected Theories to the Present Literary Analysis

The present literary analysis aims at identifying how Muslim women are represented in Western graphic novels. As the common theme in all three selected works is feminism and the protagonists are Eastern Muslim women, the researcher draws a connection between these two constants. Firstly, while dealing with women of the East, postcolonial gender concerns must be taken into the backdrop of this research. For this purpose, Lila Abu-Lughod's concepts are foregrounded in the theoretical debate. Furthermore, to address the application of the global concept of feminism in the selected works, the researcher has developed a contrast between cosmo-feminism and feminism-lite ideas. The purpose of introducing this cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate is the novelty and modernity of these concepts. These concepts are contemporary and still developing. The researcher has tried to add

more information to these bourgeoning critical concepts by contrasting them and linking this contrast to Abu-Lughod's postcolonial gender debates. The selected theories help determine the politics of visibility in each work.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

In this research, the postcolonial gender concerns presented by Lila Abu Lughod have been used for the broader understanding of concepts incorporated in the study. Furthermore, the analysis developed by the postcolonial gender postulates is reinforced by drawing its connection with the theory of cosmo-feminism. This connection between postcolonial gender concerns and cosmo-feminism has inimitably adhered to the research requirements. The notion of cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite has also been introduced and invoked to comprehend the ingenuity of the study. This idea is also used to draw comparisons and conclusions in the research. Using the concept of cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite to corroborate the interpretation while primarily establishing the argument's foundation in postcolonial gender debate makes the framework multifaceted. Consequently, the theoretical basis of the research is manifested in an assortment of viewpoints rationalized through the influence of visibility politics, which indicates that all the theories under discussion are concerned with elucidating the sociopolitical and ideological schemas in the selected graphic novels. In this effort, the selected theories debunk the disguise of visually artistic yet highly political graphic novels. The approaches applied in this research are elaborated in later sections.

3.3.1 Postcolonial Gender Concerns by Lila Abu Lughod

This study is grounded in the assumption that Muslim women are presented in a certain manner in Western graphic novels. Thus, the postcolonial gender concerns are relevant to unpack issues of visibility politics in the selected works. It draws suppositions to unpack how knowledge is constructed and dispersed in dealing with worldwide power relations. The most valued writer in the domain of postcolonialism is Edward Said; he introduced the concept of Orientalism back in 1978 hence. While remarking on the Western generalizations' paradigm change from the East to the entire Muslim world, Said proclaims that the West is constantly publishing their biased writings on the Arabs as well as on Islamic traditions, which epitomize undeniably "no change over the virulent anti-Islamic polemics of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" (287). It is important to note that 'self-reflexivity' is the key that

links the graphic narratives with predominant postcolonial literature and criticism concerns (Davies 8). Self-reflexivity is the process through which writers critically and intimately analyse their own experiences to draw connections between them and their subjects on a profound level (Goodall 137). In this regard, Saidian ideas encompass self-reflexivity and are relevant to explain the visibility politics prevalent in these graphic narratives.

As the presented study specifically foregrounds Lila Abu-Lughod's postcolonial gender concerns, it is essential to note that the fundamental root of her ideas lies in the Saidian concepts. As a prominent anthropologist and scholar, Lila Abu-Lughod has significantly contributed to postcolonial gender studies. Her work challenges traditional Western narratives about gender and culture, particularly about the Middle East and Muslim societies. Lila Abu-Lughod (2009) praised the aim and thoroughness of the Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World ("AHDR"). She regretted that, despite many authors being intellectuals and activists from Arab nations, their global outlooks and UNDP support inevitably resulted in an "international dialect" of rights that is problematic and not always relevant to nonelites in the MENA region (84). She claimed that the entire study implied that gender equality had been attained in other countries while portraying all Arab women as being uniform in their suffering and unique from a global standpoint. According to her ethnographic research from rural Egypt, concepts of rights and legal representation are frequently foreign ideas that have little impact on women's realities there. She also claimed that even situations as seemingly straightforward as domestic violence need to be considered in the context of personal agreements and decisions.

Abu-Lughod emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in understanding gender issues in postcolonial contexts. She argues that gender cannot be isolated from other social categories, such as race, class, religion, and nationality, as they intersect and mutually influence each other. She comments on the simplistic portrayal of women in the Middle East as passive victims. She calls for a nuanced analysis that considers the complexities of gender concerning other intersecting forms of oppression and identity. She challenges the notion of cultural relativism, which suggests that practices related to gender in non-Western societies are inherently inferior or oppressive. She argues against using a Western feminist lens to judge or critique practices in other cultures, as it can perpetuate a colonial mindset. Abu-

Lughod advocates for understanding gender practices in their local cultural and historical contexts and engaging in respectful dialogue with local actors to bring about positive change. Her book, *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?* Examines the Western cultural belief that Muslim women are oppressed and need to be saved by Western intervention. In this book, she writes about Afghan women in general. She argues that "women of the Orient were either portrayed as downtrodden victims who were imprisoned, secluded, shrouded, and treated as beasts of burden or they appeared in a sensual world of excessive sexuality— as slaves in harems and the subjects of the gaze of lascivious and violent men, not to mention those looking in" (Abu-Lughod 88). She furthermore suggests that Western feminists and activists should work to build solidarity with Muslim women and support their struggles for empowerment and agency within their communities. In an interview Abu-Lughod talks about her book and states one of the key arguments of her book, "we need to be vigilant against cultural explanations because of the way they are distributed unequally in the world. If I had to think of one "culture" to blame for the violence affecting women in the parts of the world that we think of as Muslim, it would be that of armed conflict and militarism" (Deb 10). This claim by Abu-Lughod is fascinating, as she has pointed out that Muslim culture cannot be criticized for advocating Muslim women's rights. In other words, culture and even religion are just used to exploit human rights through power.

She highlights women's agency and resistance in postcolonial societies, challenging the stereotype of passive victims. She highlights how women in the Middle East and other postcolonial contexts negotiate, resist, and challenge gender norms and oppressive structures creatively. She emphasizes the importance of amplifying the voices of local women and recognizing their agency in shaping their own lives and communities. She acknowledges the centrality of power and politics in shaping gender relations in postcolonial societies. She comments on simplistic notions of gender oppression solely based on cultural or religious factors and calls for a deeper analysis of the political, economic, and historical contexts that influence gender dynamics. She also examines how global power dynamics, including colonial legacies and contemporary geopolitics, shape gender relations in postcolonial societies.

Abu-Lughod advocates for using ethnographic methodology in studying gender issues in postcolonial contexts. She emphasizes the importance of on-the-ground research, engaging with local actors, and using qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of local realities. She also challenges Western biases and assumptions that may influence research on gender in postcolonial societies and calls for reflexivity and sensitivity in conducting research. It can be said that Abu-Lughod's views on postcolonial gender issues emphasize the importance of intersectionality, cultural relativism, agency and resistance of local women, the role of power and politics, and the use of ethnographic methodology in understanding gender dynamics in postcolonial contexts. Her work challenges simplistic Western narratives and calls for a nuanced and contextually sensitive approach to studying gender in postcolonial societies. In her article "Dialects of Women's Empowerment, Abu Lughod highlights the need for a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to women's empowerment, one that considers the specific cultural, social, and political contexts in which women live. As per Abu-Lughod's (2009) assertion, it is important to note that, "employment is not by its nature liberating" (p. 89). A widely held notion in the development sector is that achieving economic empowerment is necessary for attaining gender parity. While equal opportunity is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of achieving equality, likely many individuals worldwide can recall a time when they experienced dissatisfaction in a particular career and did not feel a sense of empowerment.

In another work, "Anthropology in the Territory of Rights, Islamic, Human, and Otherwise …" Abu-Lughod explores anthropology's role in studying human rights and its intersection with Islam. While highlighting the importance of anthropology, she writes,

> Anthropology can uncover, especially when it juxtaposes the discourses and social practices organized around rights with the everyday lives of some of the intended objects of rights efforts, the inadequacy of rights as a gloss for the lives of 'others' and the inevitability of its intellectual tools being inextricable from the socially located political projects of the people and groups who deploy them (Abu Lughod 256).

Hence, it can be deciphered from her claim that women's historical and social conditions shape their experiences. Furthermore, the movements for women's rights are also anthropologically unique and varied.

Besides the postcolonial gender analysis, this study examines how writers promote cosmo-feminism by portraying female protagonists. The portrayal of Muslim women in Western literature cannot be an apolitical depiction; considering this, a debate of bifurcation between cosmo-feminism and feminism-Lite is initiated under the backdrop of Abu-Lughod's concepts. The writers, presenting Muslim women in front of the global world, might have some political agendas behind their works. It would be naive to consider that all these writers are merely advocating the rights of Muslim women and, in doing so, are promoting the concept of cosmo-feminism. This study attempts to unravel this ambiguity by analysing graphic novels in the light of the cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate.

3.3.2 Cosmo-feminism vs. Feminism-Lite

The idea of cosmo-feminism promotes the diversity of women across borders. In this regard, Charlotte Bunch explains it as a "transformational feminist politics that is global in perspective [where] ... the particular issues and forms of struggle for women in different locations will vary [and activists] ... strive to understand and expand the commonality and solidarity of that struggle" (303). As this concept comes from the idea of cosmopolitanism, providing human rights to women around the globe has been the most crucial factor in cosmo-feminism. In this regard, it can be said that the very first tenet of this concept is the promotion of solidarity among women worldwide. Reilly describes cosmo-feminism as a model that "... rejects the West-centric, falsely universalized, and undemocratic imposition of narrowly defined understandings of human rights" (Reilly 181). As addressed by Edward Said and other scholars, the loopholes in the idea of cosmopolitanism lead to Eurocentric misrepresentations. Likewise, showcasing an unbiased portrayal of cosmo-feministicic ideas isn't easy. If not done correctly, it can lead to the depiction of a faux version of feminism called feminism-lite. In other words, it can also be said that the seemingly cosmo-feministicic ideas, having superficial or individualistic aspects of gender equality, could be referred to as feminism-lite.

While describing the rise of cosmo-feminism, Reilly explains that several variables have come together to focus traditional feminist political theorizing on the global arena and the potential for feminist solidarity and gender justice outside of the "liberal democratic state" (191). She furthermore elaborates that the modern globalized world requires redefining the focus of feminists worldwide. In this regard, the efforts and influence of third-world postcolonial feminists are noteworthy. In this regard, names of Spivak, Torres, Mohanty, Hooks, and Russo are prominent. Reilly states that the efforts of these scholars have led to an increasing restructuring of feminism. The result focuses on "the need to address the gendered impacts of globalization and refocus attention on the interplay between economic, social, and political arenas" (182). This impact of cosmo-feminism on understanding global economic issues is elaborated on in this study.

Furthermore, Reilly has proposed the idea that the notion of cosmo-feminism involves five mutually constitutive moments. According to her, understanding global feminism as a transformational political paradigm necessitates considering these various components. As this research is limited to the postcolonial analysis, the researcher has only utilized three of the five constitutive moments as explained by Reilly, which are:

i) A global feminist consciousness that challenges the systemic interplay of patriarchal, capitalist, and racist power relations.

ii) Recognition of intersectionality and a commitment to cross-boundaries dialogue, networking, and social criticism.

iii) The development of collaborative advocacy strategies around concrete issues. (Reilly 184)

Reilly explains that in the post-September 11 global settings, the credibility of the international human rights framework comes up against significant obstacles. In light of this, an important ongoing issue is to broaden the study of cosmo-feminism and employ international human rights to combat the gender elements of "socioeconomic inequality and abuses" (194). Various scholars also challenge the credibility of these claims; for instance, Gibb gives an alternative idea. She claims that the people who have been taught to think of themselves as cosmopolitans might at least be interested in embracing or even inventing (if not having) their roots and culture. Thus, the claims of postcolonial cosmopolitanism and transnationalism seem unachievable in

several ways, as Gibb explains (251). Firstly, this idea challenges the subjectivity of individuals and gives an impression that all cultures and traditions are trivial to be followed. Secondly, she emphasizes that any centralized "transnational" society might act as restricting and even dictatorial due to opposing worldviews. Finally, she describes the challenge of transitioning to transnational existence and finds it difficult to be undisputed. She suggests that while highlighting the problems of computationalism, the conflict between the national and transnational conceptualizations of religion is an excellent place to start. Relating these objections to cosmo-feminism, the present study has also identified the disoriented projections of Muslim women in the name of cosmo-feminism.

The concept of feminism-lite is a relatively new term used to unveil the so-called political agendas under the guise of feminism. As the present study analyses three graphic novels having female protagonists; hence feminism is a prominent theme in all the selected works. This research will distinguish real and faux feminism by analysing each novel under the lens of cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie designates the danger of feminism-lite as, "Beware the danger of what I call Feminism Lite. It is the idea of conditional female equality. Please reject this entirely. It is a hollow, appeasing, and bankrupt idea" Kapur argues that such hollow feministic ideas are considered "lite" since they make no assertions about causing a 'transformation in the form of a "big bang" movement' (12). Such ideas do not support any one theoretical viewpoint either. They are merely positioned as critical methods of both prevailing views on women's sexuality and the participation of some feminist movement members in upholding a sexually sanitized vision of female subjectivity. The present study has illustrated these tribulations of feminism-lite in graphic literature.

In this research, the concept of feminism-lite will be explored through Dux and Simic's ideas of "Feminist Denial." Dux and Simic reject any binary between women, whether she is young or old, working or childless career-oriented, Muslim or secular; all stand equal and deserve equal rights. In this regard, these theorists write, "Young women, old women, Muslim women, they all have their ideas about what is important. And they are all right in their way" (Dux and Simic 204). These critics have also talked about the media- representation and visual politics, which promote the idea of faux-feminism. While explaining the symbolic politics of the Western media, Dux and Semic explain how a 'pole-dancer (shown as a liberal woman) is a

victim of false feminist 'empowerment'' and how 'the oppressed Muslim woman' (as shown in the Western media) is shown to be 'ignored and abandoned' by feminism (5). While explaining the flawed sense of feminism, Dux and Simic express that "feminists have become 'so obsessed with anti-racism and multiculturalism' that they refuse to support their 'Muslim sisters,' leaving it to others to criticize sexist Muslim practices, in particular advocating the removal of headscarves" (152). Furthermore, to support this argument, the critics have elucidated how feminism should not be in charge of the choices of Muslim women. They elaborate that many Muslim women who wear [sic] the veil is not "'either/or 'force' vs. 'choice'" but a multifaceted negotiation in which women "do not negotiate on equal terms" (163). It explains that the effort of imposing the same criteria of feminist solidarity cannot be applied to all women.

While drawing the contrast between real and fake feminism, Dux and Simic describes that the faux feminist critics blame feminism and do not go into the idea of complexity and diversity within feminism. On the other hand, the critics of real feminism go 'deep into structures and societal attitudes to try to implement change' (7). A modern term used for fake feminists is "straw women," whom Hester calls "staples of the modern era" (501). This thesis finds a gap in the debate of 'Cosmo-feminism vs. Feminism-lite' by firstly building a contrast between these two concepts and then directly associating this phenomenon with the postcolonial gender rudiments. Here the researcher has created a research gap by connecting the idea of 'Cosmo-feminism vs. Feminism-lite' with the concept of postcolonial gender concerns. This connection makes it easy to understand when a writer deals with feminism and to what extent that portrayal is unbiased and promotes cosmo-feministicic ideas. If not, the portrayal can be subjected to feminism-lite, which ultimately considers biasness towards Muslim women. The inappropriate handling of feminism, which we call feminism-lite, results from prejudice. The researcher has made an effort to understand the underlying meanings behind this bias. It is analysed how the representation of Muslim women in Western graphic novels pertains to either fake or real feminist understanding. Furthermore, the researcher investigates that whether the writers dealing with characters of Muslim women seamlessly represent the concept of cosmo-feminism or not? If not, what could be the underlying reasons of the questionable portrayals?

Here it is important to mention that the researcher has modified the feminism-lite theory while contrasting it with the cosmo-feminism concept. The rationale behind this modification was firstly to create a research gap in the study and particularly in the theoretical framework. Secondly, this modification provided a touchstone to analyse the graphic novels under discussion. Hence, without this modification a unique and useful way of understanding representation of Muslim women in graphic literature could not be introduced. For this, I have discussed the feminism-lite concept in light of postcolonial gender concerns. Although feminism-lite and postcolonial gender concerns share certain similarities, such as their shared focus on advocating for women's rights and promoting gender equality, it is important to acknowledge the inherent tensions that exist between these two perspectives. Feminism-lite is frequently linked to feminism that has its roots in the Global North, potentially lacking in its ability to sufficiently address the distinct obstacles encountered by women in the Global South. Postcolonial gender concerns underscore the imperative of prioritising the perspectives and lived realities of marginalised women hailing from the Global South, while simultaneously interrogating the hegemony of Western feminist discourses. A critical and nuanced approach is necessary when examining the interplay between feminism-lite and postcolonial gender concerns. The recognition of the limitations of a diluted form of feminism in addressing structural inequalities is a crucial aspect. Moreover, the incorporation of postcolonial perspectives that prioritise the experiences and agency of women who are marginalised in the Global South is essential. By prioritising intersectionality, questioning cultural relativism, and employing structural analysis, it is feasible to cultivate a more encompassing and all-encompassing comprehension of gender-related matters within postcolonial settings. Furthermore, the cosmo-feminism vs feminism-lite debate constructed by the researcher is entirely based on the postcolonial gender concerns, which is the rationale behind altering these concepts in accordance with the present research objectives.

While establishing cosmo-feminism vs feminism-lite debate, another important concern is the conflation of both these concepts with the idea of 'Orientalism'. The conflation of cosmo-feminism and 'Orientalism' arises when the cosmopolitan and feminist principles of cosmo-feminism are not implemented in an all-encompassing and intersectional fashion. Should a cosmo-feminist perspective prove itself incapable

of acknowledging the multiplicity and autonomy of women hailing from diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby perpetuating narratives that are inherently Western-centric, it runs the risk of fortifying 'Orientalist' frameworks. The aforementioned action may entail the imposition of Western feminist ideals or the audacious assumption of "rescuing" or "liberating" women from non-Western societies, all the while neglecting to consider the intricate socio-cultural contexts and complexities that they encounter. The researcher calls this fallacy feminism-lite, which occurs when the idea of cosmo-feminism is not materialised in its ideal form. This thin line of demarcation between cosmo-feminism and feminism-lite provides a framework of the present research.

3.2 Research Methodology

According to renowned cultural studies expert Stuart Hall, representation is a vital component of the process through which meaning is created and shared among members of society. Language, signs, and images that stand for or symbolize things are crucial components of these representations (254). As the present study deals with representations in hybrid texts, all these components proposed by Hall are clarified in this study. It is a qualitative research based on 'Critical Content Analysis'; hence, the Qualitative content analysis (QCA) approach is best suited for this work. This research method also adds validity and truth-value to the research as the data collected is non-interactive (Biber and Leavy 140).

Furthermore, due to the need to juxtapose different perspectives of postcolonial gender concerns, the 'Comparative Method' is also applied in this research. Edward Said has also applied this method of "comparative literature of imperialism" (18) in his studies. The biographical technique of research, which follows the life story of the authors of the fictional narratives, also has a place in the study. This method helps understand the East vs. West binary drawn by the diasporic and Western writers.

As this study examines the portrayal of Muslim women in Western graphic novels, the researcher has read and understood the implicit meanings depicted through these hybrid texts; immediate attention was given to what is included and what is excluded in these works. Furthermore, the graphic novels' style, placement, and perspective were also examined. It was also found that sometimes the narration and the illustration are complementary; other times, there is a massive disconnect between

the two (the verbal narration says one thing, but the illustration ignores or contradicts it). After all these observations, the researcher moved toward selecting and adapting the theoretical framework and research methodology.

According to Beach et al., content analysis is an analytical strategy considering a text's content from a theoretical standpoint, "such as sociohistorical, gender, cultural, or thematic studies" (130). As elaborated in the earlier sections, the theoretical underpinnings selected for this research align with the study's methods. The QCA approach helps examine the relationships between words and concepts entrenched in cultural artifacts (Krippendorff, 219). As this study analyses texts with pictures, the coding scheme through QCA is formulated. There are three strategies for constructing code frames in the QCA approach, i.e., deductive, inductive, and combined. The researcher selects the inductive/deductive or combined approach for this research as it provides more flexibility in analysis. The deductive approach uses a predetermined coding scheme based on Seemin A. Raina's study (2009). Next, the inductive approach to QCA is used by creating anchor codes from the study's research questions. Schreier states, "In QCA, it is usually best to build your coding frame using the same material that you want to analyse" (91). As a result, an adapted coding scheme is designed for this study.

After several readings of the selected works, the researcher analysed the three selected graphic novels and found some prominent patterns common in all the works. For instance, the Muslim-female protagonists, the concern of attires, oppression of women, etc. All these patterns are discussed in later chapters. After identifying the recurrent patterns prevalent in the selected works, the researcher has adopted some codes from the study of Rania (2009). It is to be noted that the researcher has not developed these codes by herself but has relied on pre-existing coding scheme of Rania (2009) and has selectively chosen some relevant codes for the present study. The following table shows the codes and categories developed by Raina (2009). Since Raina deals with extensive data in her research and her area of research is also vast; hence it was not possible to utilize all her codes in the present study. For this purpose, the researcher omitted the codes from Raina's study irrelevant to the current research goals. These three omitted codes are FF=Facial Features, BD=Backdrops, and RW=Representation of West. As these three codes do not align with this study's requirements, it was essential to exclude them. On the other hand, the selected codes from Raina's study are AD=Authenticity within Detail,

GP=Gender Perspectives, DC=Diversity in Characters,

RP&R=Resistance to Patriarchal Society and Religion, PS=Patriarchal society,

SS=Struggle for Survival, PC= Personal Connections

SJI=Social Justice Issues, HA=Historical aspects and I/O=Insider/Outsider

Perspectives.

  The following table shows the patterns and codes developed by Raina for her postcolonial study on adolescent and graphic literature.

Codes and Categories

Reading	Picture Books - 9 Codes	Novels - 13 Codes	Categories
	FF=Facial Features	SJT=Social Justice Issues,	Social Conscience
	BD=Backdrops	BD=backdrops	Melting Pot
	AD=Authenticity within Details	AD=Authenticity within Details	Culturally Conscious
	RR=References to Religion	RR=References to Religion,	
	HA=Historical Aspects	HA=Historical Aspects	
	GP=Gender Perspectives	GP=Gender Perspectives	
	PC=Personal Connections	PC= Personal Connections	
	DC=Diversity in Characters.	DC=Diversity in Characters.	
	I/O= Insider/Outsider Perspectives	SS=Struggle for Survival,	
		PS=Patriarchal Society	
		RP&R=Resistance to Patriarchal Society and Religion,	
		RW=Representation of the West,	
		I/O= Insider/Outsider Perspectives	

Codes and Categories Developed by Raina (2009)

  Following Raina's (2009) codding and categorization method and knowledge requirements of the present study, the researcher selectively adopted the codes and

categories of this study, as shown in Table 3.1. The analysis chapter discusses all these codes, patterns, and categorizations per the textual evidence.

Table 3.1: Codes and Categories

10 Codes identified in Selected Graphic Novels

Codes	Categories
AD=Authenticity within Detail	Social Conscience
GP=Gender Perspectives	Melting Pot
DC=Diversity in Characters	Culturally Conscious
RP&R=Resistance to Patriarchal Society and Religion	
PS=Patriarchal society	
SS=Struggle for Survival	
PC= Personal Connections	
SJI=Social Justice Issues	
HA=Historical aspects	
I/O=Insider/Outsider Perspectives	

Source: Adopted by the researcher from Raina (2009)

After understanding the codes and categories, I also developed my definitions of the categories used by Raina (2009). Following are the definitions of categories developed by Raina (2009)

1. *Social Conscience:* Books that present how the Muslims as 'others' live for the mainstream audience in the U.S.;

2. *Melting Pot:* Books that portray Muslims similar to the mainstream society within the U.S. so much so that they depict no nuances that are religiously and culturally distinct; and

3. *Culturally Conscious*: Books that show sensitivity and an awareness of authenticating details about the lived experiences, beliefs, and cultures of Muslims nationally and globally.

The first category defined by Rania is 'Social Conscience.' According to her, the books in this category implicitly contain a racist and Eurocentric view. These works present the Muslim characters in front of the U.S. mainstream audience, but

deep down, these characters are 'othered.' This representation needs desegregation, and a global and unbiased image of Muslims should be presented. The only positive point of such representation is that Muslims are brought into the limelight through such books, which builds curiosity in the readers to understand the culture and traditions of Muslims.

The second category is 'Melting Plot,' which addresses the books that treat Muslims like the mainstream society of the U.S. Such works ignore the diversity of cultures and traditions. These books display the everyday human experiences and ignore the ideas like diversity, imperialism, racism, etc.

The third category, ' Culturally Conscious,' deals with work sensitive to cultures. The Muslim characters in this category are treated as distinct yet equally important to white people.

The researcher has adapted these definitions according to the present study,

1. *Social Conscience***:** Graphic novel that intends to advocate the rights of Muslim women but ends up presenting them as exotic and sexual 'other' in the eyes of the Western world;

2. *Melting Pot***:** Graphic novel that presents the idea of the universality of the human experience while dealing with Muslim women and criticizes Islamic traditions; and

3. *Culturally Conscious***:** Graphic novel that displays Muslim women within the context of their societies and is sensitive towards authentic details, beliefs, and cultures of Islam globally.

The present study has adapted Raina's (2009) category definitions to align with its research objectives, as evidenced by the data collection and composition methods. The author acknowledges that their background as a Muslim and Pakistani may influence their interpretation of the text, but has tried to maintain objectivity throughout the reading and analysis process.

The researcher then prepared a checklist or criteria for interpreting, categorizing, and analysing the selected three categories. Raina has created this checklist according to her research interests; the following table shows the requirements for analysis, categorization, and interpretation developed by Raina.

Criteria for Analysis, Categorization, and Interpretation

Social Conscience	Melting Pot	Culturally Conscious
1. Characters/plots/settings that are dated and focus on the exotic or differences.	Emphasize none of the differences between the audience and the protagonist through thought and action.	Shows research into and an understanding of the many Islamic cultures being represented.
2. Surface level understanding of the belief system of Muslims.	Eliminates religious and cultural differences.	Respectful references to the belief systems of Muslims.
3. Emphasize stereotyped world views of Muslims with focus on social issues and global conflicts.	Emphasizes the desire to assimilate within the dominant culture.	Challenge stereotypes and worldviews.
4. Explain how the 'other' lives for the mainstream audience in the U.S.		Books are interesting and keep the attention of the audience while providing details of the culturally relevant context.
5. Lack of variations in visual images characters.		Picture Books having authenticating visual and cultural details.
6.		Present Muslim cultures as progressive while staying within the belief systems.
7.		Contains visible and invisible signs of religious and cultural nuances.

Criteria for Analysis, Categorization, and Interpretation Developed by Raina (2009)

As the researcher deals explicitly with the representation of Muslim women in Western graphic novels, it is crucial to narrow down the criteria for analysis. For this reason, the cauterization is specifically made according to the female Muslim characters in the selected works. Table 3.2 lists the category descriptions adapted from the research of Raina (2009).

Table 3.2: Criteria for Analysis, Categorization, and Interpretation

Social Conscience	Melting Pot	Culturally Conscious
1. Muslim women depicted as a commodity for men.	Veil presented as a device of oppression on Muslim women.	Veil presented as a harmless cultural norm.
2. Sexual objectification of Muslim women.	Muslim women presented as victims of oppression in a fundamentalist society.	Variations in representation of Muslim women.
3. Muslim women as helpless creatures; victim of brutality by men.	Depiction of the negative role of institutions in restricting Muslim women.	Muslim women are shown as empowered and progressive.
4. Muslim women having the urge to empower themselves but not allowed by the society.	Presenting Muslim women as well-informed and rebellious.	Muslim women portrayed as grounded in Islamic traditions; yet understanding towards women outside their belief system.
5. Lack of variation in visual representation of Muslim women.	Showcasing inclination of Muslim women towards Western culture.	The challenges faced by Muslim women are presented as general issues instead of religious or cultural stereotypes.

Source: Adapted by the researcher from Raina (2009)

It is important to note that these categorizations do not reflect the ultimate outcomes or the conclusions of the research study. These classifications are only based on the selected works' perceived knowledge. Justification or negation of these categories is more likely to happen after the in-depth analysis and discussion of the selected works. Furthermore, I have placed the graphic novels into specific categories according to the codes and patterns in these works. It is important to note that the

novels I have put in particular categories may partially deviate from the existing categorization. This deviation or alliance is thoroughly discussed in the analysis part. Table 3.3 shows the graphic novels placed within the three categories.

Table 3.3: Graphic Novels Placed within the Three Categories

Social Conscience	Melting Pot	Culturally Conscious
Habibi (2011)	*Persepolis: The Story of Childhood (2003)*	*Lissa: A Story about Medica Promise, Friendship, and Revolution (2017)*

Source: Adopted by the researcher from Raina (2009)

The criteria for placing these graphic novels into these three categories is based on reading these works and the recurrent patterns found in these novels. Furthermore, this categorization is illustrated in the analysis section to understand the typology provided by the researcher.

CHAPTER 4

COSMO-FEMINISM OR FEMINISM-LITE?: SELF-REPRESENTATION IN DIASPORIC LITERATURE

This chapter analyses Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood. For this, it is essential to understand the circumstances in which the writer has written this graphic novel. The biographical details of the author create a foreground for the analysis. Marjane Satrapi was born in Rasht, Iran in 1969. She is a French-Iranian children's book author, cartoonist, graphic novelist, and film director. She currently resides in Paris and often contributes to publications in international magazines, such as the New Yorker and the New York Times. She is famous for her award-winning graphic novels Persepolis, Embroideries, and Chicken with Plums. Her books investigate the seams and intersections between East and West. Satrapi is the only child of parents who worked as engineers and fashion designers, respectively. Her family's Western lifestyle attracted the attention of Iranian authorities during the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and by 1984, her parents had decided to move her to Austria to attend school. In Austria, her sense of alienation was heightened by a broken romance, which sparked a downward spiral that left her homeless and a drug addict. At 19, she returned to Tehran to finish her studies in art before returning to Europe in 1993 following a broken marriage. She studied art in France, and by the middle of the 1990s, she had settled permanently in Paris. Her famous book *Persepolis* was released in France. Satrapi's religious beliefs are unclear; although she is a born Muslim, she finds religion a social constraint. She is a diasporic writer with a complex religious and cultural background, which hints at the presence of multifaceted themes in her writings.

The publication dates of the selected graphic novels are important to discuss because literature is always relative to the time it is produced and read. Discussing the graphic novel *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood by* Marjane Satrapi was first published in 2000 in French and later translated into English in 2003. The time when it was made available for the broader audience after the translation was the time of global chaos. The September 11, 2001 attacks in America created hatred against Muslims in the entire Western world. The graphic novel produced at that time, referring to Muslims as fundamentalists, reinforced the existing stereotypes against

Muslims. In this scenario, the graphic novel under discussion holds a challenging position as the author has written about her firsthand experience as an Iranian woman.

On the other hand, the portrayal of Islamic fundamentalism has bought this work into the spotlight of Western arts and media. In this situation, as a researcher, it is challenging to understand this work of art according to its historical underpinnings instead of analysing it based on the audience's perception. In saying so, it is vital to mention Lila Abu Lughod's conceptions of postcolonial gender concerns. She emphasizes that colonialism and imperialism have profoundly impacted gender relations in many societies regarding how gender is constructed and how power is distributed between men and women. She writes, "…feminism always occurs in particular contexts, historical and social" (Abu-Lughod 23). At the same time, Abu-Lughod emphasizes that avoiding simplistic and essentialist views of relations in postcolonial societies is essential. She notes that gender is always situated within complex social, economic, and political structures and that the experiences of men and women can vary widely depending on a range of factors such as class, ethnicity, religion, and regional differences. Overall, Abu-Lughod's work emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and cultural specificity of gender relations in postcolonial societies and recognizing the diversity and complexity of those experiences. Following Abu-Lughod's concepts, this novel is analysed historically to understand its cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite representations.

The graphic novel *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood is* set in 1980s Iran when the Islamic Revolution occurred. The novel portrays the impact of the war and religious extremism on the lives of Iranians while exiting to the West is shown as the only source of liberation from all ailments prevalent in the East. After this surface-level description of the novel, it is essential to go back to the history of Iran in detail. Indo-European invaders named the vast Iranian plateau where they settled in the second millennium B.C., while Elam and Babylon were developing civilizations. "Iran" comes from "Ayryana Vaejo," meaning "the origin of the Aryans." These semi-nomads became the Medes and Persians. Cyrus the Great destroyed the Medes' first Iranian nation in the seventh century B.C. He founded the Persian Empire in 600 B.C. Iran was called Persia until 1935, when Reza Shah, the father of the last Shah, ordered everyone to call it Iran, Rich Iran. Its wealth and location made it vulnerable: Alexander the Great, Arab neighbors to the west, and Turkish and Mongolian rulers

conquered Iran. Persian language and culture survived these invasions. Invaders adopted this strong culture and became Iranians. Then, Iran changed in the 1900s. Oil was discovered while Reza Shah modernized and westernized the country. Invasion followed oil. British influence on the Iranian economy was strong. The British, Soviets, and Americans asked Reza Shah to fight Germany during World War II. Reza Shah, a German sympathizer, declared Iran neutral. The Allies invaded Iran. Reza Shah was exiled, and his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, became the Shah. Iranian Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq nationalized the oil industry in 1951. Great Britain banned Iranian oil exports in retaliation. The CIA and British intelligence overthrew him in 1953. The Shah, who had fled, returned to power after conquering Mossadeq. Until 1979, the Shah ruled Iran. Since then, this ancient and great civilization has mainly been discussed with fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism. Since this study is focused on postcolonial gender concerns, it is noteworthy that despite Iran never being subjected to formal colonization, its modern trajectory was nevertheless influenced by Western imperialism. This impact persists in modern depictions of gender and sexuality within Iran (Moallem 336). It shows that even without any direct colonial invasion, imperialism still leaves a mark on the histories of nations.

The graphic novel under discussion is an autobiographical fiction presenting the childhood of Marjane Satrapi. The protagonist Marji is a clever, lively, and highly modern child who resides with her parents in Tehran, the capital of Iran, during the turbulent late 1970s and early 1980s. This tale describes how Marji and her family endured and were affected by volatile events such as the Islamic revolution, the removal of the dictatorial Shah of Iran, and the devastating Iran-Iraq war. Marji struggles to adapt to the changes of radical Islamicists at her French-English multilingual liberal school. The female and male students were separated from classes, and veils were made obligatory for girls.

Meanwhile, Marji's wealthy and modern parents participate in the large protests against the new state's harsh conduct regulations. Marji experiences a contradiction between her profoundly spiritual feelings and her parents' austere modernism. Since she was six years old, Marji thought she would one day become a prophet. But as a result of the revolution, Marji abandons these objectives to study and imitate protestors and revolutionaries. Over time, the relationship between Marji

and God gets strained as she and God discover that they have little to talk about, although God still visits her occasionally. At this time, Marji develops a good bond with her communist uncle Anoosh who recently returned from jail. When Islamic extremists extend their control, they hunt him down, imprison him, and then execute him. The death of her new idol saddens Marji. She abandons her trust in God and challenges the regime-supportive propaganda she hears, especially at school.

After the exile of the Shah, the fundamentalists remained in power, and people had to obey them. The parents of Marji encouraged her to tell everyone that she prays daily, a falsehood they hope will keep their daughter safe from fundamentalists. Marji becomes increasingly defiant, as she perceives school regulations as hypocritical and difficult to obey. Marji's rebellious attitude increases with time, ultimately putting her in danger. During an altercation, she accidentally strikes her principal, dismissing her. The Iran-Iraq war initially rosed patriotism in Marji, but later she recognized that Islamic rule requires the war to continue to exist and maintain power. The deaths of innocent citizens in the name of nationalism seemed absurd to Marji. Realizing that Marji's chances of exiting Iran are diminishing, her parents make the painful decision to send her overseas to complete her education in Vienna. She spends her last night in Iran with her grandma, who gives her wise counsel and encourages her to be compassionate and understanding in Vienna. The novel's final scenes are when Marji turns to say goodbye to her parents for the last time at the airport. She discovers that her mother, devastated by the loss of her only child, has passed out after bidding farewell to her.

The central themes of this novel are the oppression of Muslim women in a radical society, Islamic fundamentalism vs. modernity, nationalism, spiritual growth or bildungsroman, and class conflict. Through her novel, Satrapi has raised her voice against the exploitation of women's rights in Iran. As the writer belongs to a modern family, she found Islamic traditions suffocating for women. She has exhibited a strong discontentment towards the idea of a religious society; instead, she idealizes a secular state where everyone lives according to his or her own choice. These themes Satrapi addresses make this novel a debatable diasporic work of art that needs critical explication.

Discussing the novel *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood,* as this is a diasporic novel, the postcolonial gender themes are inevitable in this work. The explicit postcolonial gender themes discovered in this work are; the presence of a binary between Eastern and Western culture, Muslim women showcased as oppressed and having no choices of their own, emphasis on Muslim women's attires, and debatable description of Religion. The first and foremost concern of the researcher while reading and observing this book is to understand the writer's agenda behind writing this graphic novel. It is more likely to note that Satrapi's biographical background and the novel's themes justify the I/O perspective. Since the writer has written about her lived experiences in Iran as an Iranian woman, this cannot be ignored that she is an insider who has more knowledge about the sociopolitical situation of her country. It is important to note that the insider may not always be authentic. Satrapi is also a diasporic writer; hence, Satrapi is playing a hybrid role by being both an insider and an outsider. The researcher tries to understand whether her portrayal is unbiased or if she is influenced by the West while writing her novel. In such a vulnerable position as a writer, Said refers to as a 'native informant' (324). According to Said, a native informant provides knowledge about the East to the West, is trained by the West, and, if lucky enough, finds a chance to settle in the West. Said also points out the hypocrisy of the West in the case of Iran and says that the United States of America condemns the violent reaction of Iranians, but ironically, during the Pahlevi era, the United States assisted in the killings of Iranians (52). Here the role of Satrapi as a hybrid (both insider and outsider) writer is essential to be understood because her efforts in highlighting the challenges of Iranian women cannot be ignored precisely by calling her a native informant.

As the setting of this novel is 1970s Iran, the involvement of history and politics is inevitable in this work. The first and foremost portrayal to be discussed in this graphic novel is the depiction of the veil. Satrapi has named the novel's first chapter "The Veil." Since the beginning of this chapter, she has shown the veil as a device of oppression against Muslim women. As I have placed this novel in the "Melting plot" category, it is essential to explain that the explicit portrayals discussed in this are not the outcome of the analysis. Instead, the in-depth analysis shows the implicit reasons behind the problematic portrayals as discussed by the researcher. In Figure 1, Satrapi has pointed out the issue of veil-wearing obligations at schools after

the Islamic revolution. The illustration shows that the girls are uncomfortable with this transition in their uniform code, and the veil is an obstacle to their freedom of choice. As visibility politics in literature generate complex outcomes and generalizations, Satrapi's remonstration of the veil somehow stigmatizes Islamic traditions. Because those unaware of the history of Iran would take the veil as a sign of oppression of Muslim women around the world, now discussing Satrapi's portrayal of historical aspects (HA), it can be said that the Islamic history of Iran is very complex.

Veiling and unveiling in Iran have never been the choice of women, but the patriarchal and political powers are there to regulate this for women. Lila Abu Lughod, in this regard, writes that the modernization of women in Iran was not the choice of women. She calls this phenomenon "modernization from above." (Abu-Lughod 223). In 1936, Reza Shah banned the veil in Iran, as he wanted Iran to enter the modern world. Then in 1979, with the emergence of the Islamic Republic by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the veil was made a compulsion on Iranian women. Here it is essential to state that this phenomenon of veiling and unveiling is purely political and is not associated with Iran's culture. In this regard, Abu-Lughod writes, "…to defend the Muslim against neo-imperialism and cultural loss that come to Iran disguised as modernization. The history of Iran is narrated as a "fall" into colonialism" (219).

On the other hand, it is also wrong to stigmatize Islam in all this political chaos. In this regard, while discussing the political situation of Iran during the Islamic revolution, Said says that it is "wrong and foolish to regard "Islam" as a block" (147). He adds that associating bad attributes with the Iranian Islamic revolution and Islam as a religion, in general, would lead nowhere except to anarchy and an "irrational frenzy" (153) in the country. He suggests that more sophistication and sensitivity are required to deal with such topics.

In Figure 1 veil is presented as a device of oppression against Muslim women. This depiction of Satrapi is questionable as she has a hybrid position, both an insider and outsider, simultaneously making her an East ambassador and a supporter of Western traditions. In this instance of Figure 1, a dialogue between two girls, where a girl in the veil is grabbing a girl without a veil by her throat, says that 'execution in

the name of freedom' (Satrapi 6) shows the situation of religious extremism in Iran. No doubt, the political case of Iran was and is not ideal for women. Furthermore, this portrayal by Satrapi shows that wearing or not wearing a veil is an issue created by the political powers to govern and rule the masses. Otherwise, the veil is merely a meaningless symbol for young Iranian girls who have seen their grandmothers being forced to remove veils and their mothers being forced to wear veils. As the fundamental Iranian government is forcing women to wear veils, the VO code is prevalent in Figure 6. These girls are shown as victims of oppression. The PS and RP& R codes are also found in this example because most girls, including Satrapi,

resist the religious beliefs imposed on them. Hence, it can be concluded that the veil is undoubtedly presented as a sign of oppression of Iranian women Satrapi. Still, the historical background of Iran shows that this portrayal is authentic. The writer has shown the subjective reality to be perceived by the audience. The state should not decide the veiling or unveiling of women,

Figure 1 Veil Presented as a Device of Oppression on Muslim Women, Satrapi (6)

and on the other hand, West should not generalize that veiled women are oppressed and are needed to be rescued.

Figure 2 shows the protagonist's agony, showcasing the general situation of Iranian women in a fundamentalist society. When her teacher asks Satrapi what she is doing on the ground, she replies, "I'm suffering, can't you see?" (Satrapi 97). This seemingly funny dialogue with the pictorial representation is significant. Here the mental situation of a young girl shows that Muslim women are the victim of oppression in Iranian society. The code of SS is quite evident in this instance, which refers to the 'struggle for survival.' Muslim women are trying to survive in extremist Iranian society. Satrapi shows how suffocating the experience of a woman's existence becomes in her community. While discussing the gender perspective (GP) in this figure and overall in the novel, it can be said that women are easy targets for the political powers. These influential people treat women as objects, which can be molded according to political decisions.

Here it is important to note that the entire responsibility of creating a culture is associated with women in Iran. The government defines rules for women (sometimes to un-veil and sometimes to re-veil) and, in doing so, thinks that culture is formulated. Lila Abu-Lughod defines culture as "The essential tool for making others" (143). The forced culture created by

Figure 2 Muslim Women Presented as Victims of Oppression in a Fundamentalist Society, Satrapi (97)

the Iranian government by violating the rights of women is merely a tool to create 'other,' which in this case is the West. When Iranian women were forced to remove their veils, the phenomenon of becoming the 'other' was happening. On the other hand, when women were ordered to re-veil, the phenomenon of differentiating oneself from the 'other' happened. In both scenarios, culture has been used as a tool, and women have been treated as objects for creating a culture.

The sufferings of women in the hands of political powers also create a generalized view of Muslim women in the West. The uncritical observation of such representation of Muslim women can be problematic as it generalizes the highly complex experiences of Eastern women. In this case, diasporic writers like Satrapi's position becomes very slippery. The over-generalized views of Western feminists can also challenge the ideas of writers like Satrapi. Abu Lughod explains that Middle Eastern feminists deal with the personal and complex issues of Eastern women. The complexity of these issues, if not understood from a critical point of view, can nullify the sole purpose of such representations. "…the Western feminists initiate campaigns that make them vulnerable to local denunciations by conservatives of various sorts, whether Islamist or nationalist, for being traitors" (Abu-Lughod 44). It happened to Satrapi, and her graphic novel is highly criticized because of the complex identity construction of Muslim women in Iran.

Nevertheless, it is the role of the readers and researchers to promote broader rather than relying on common notions. Here it is also important to mention that Satrapi is showcasing the sufferings of Muslim women in Iran and telling the story of her miserable experiences. Hence, she should be free to express her existential crisis and traumas in a theocratic society. Here the code of personal connections (PC) is evident as Satrapi has an emotional connection with everything she represents in her novel.

In Figure 3, Satrapi has depicted the negative role of institutions in restricting Muslim women. As shown in the illustration, Satrapi's school principal instructs the parents and asks them to teach their daughters to wear veils properly. In response, Satrapi's father says, 'If hair is as stimulating as you say, then you need to shave your mustache!' (Satrapi 101). Here again, Satrapi has protested the idea of forcing women to wear a veil. She has presented the negative image of the school institution by showing that the restriction of wearing a veil is taking away the right of freedom from Muslim women. As cultural hegemony is created and maintained through institutions, educational institutions play an integral role. In her graphic novel, Satrapi criticized the educational institution for being highly politicized. These institutes regulate per governmental instructions. The primary purpose of these so-called educational institutions is not to provide education but to tame the new generations under political agendas. Here veil imposed by the educational institution is highly criticized by Satrapi. In this regard, Abu-Lughod writes, "One cannot reduce the diverse situations

Figure 3 Depiction of Negative Role of Institutions in Restricting Muslim Women, Satrapi (101)

and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing. And we should not underestimate how veiling has entered political contests worldwide" (Abu-Lughod 40). Satrapi's criticism of the idea of veiling is not targeting Islamic traditions. Still, she is targeting the hypocrisy of the Iranian government, which uses Islamic traditions as a disguise to serve its political agendas.

As the Muslim women portrayed by Satrapi have different interests and ideologies, it can be said that the code of DC, i.e., diversity in characters, is prevalent in the novel. Showing women with varied ideologies also promotes the idea of cosmo-feminism, which believes in the concept of diversity and inclusiveness. Satrapi's work critiques Western hegemonic agendas, which she argues have engendered a brand of Islamism in Iran that has deprived her of her individuality and freedom of choice. The uncritical argument that the veil is merely presented as a symbol of oppression Satrapi, posited by some Western critics, can be viewed as an instance of projecting secular and individualistic "Western" values onto Muslim societies and therefore lacks persuasive force. On the other hand, Satrapi's positioning within the educated, upper-class elites of the "Western" society questions her position as a diasporic writer. Satrapi's class politics and Westernized upbringing concerning Iranian religious and cultural history might have hindered her ability to create an unbiased portrayal of women in Iranian society. It is worth noting that Satrapi's account is subjective and individualistic, representing another perspective on Iran and its impact on Iranian society. It is important to note that this should not be confused with the prevailing image of Iran. This perspective diverges from the Western media and the Islamic Republic's account. In this regard, Satrapi expounds that her literary work predominantly revolves around women's struggles in Iran, necessitating her addressing the theme of violence. It can be said that *Persepolis* goes beyond mere visibility politics and instead presents an ethical and thought-provoking visual aesthetic. The work showcases censored and censured elements through a pressing process of re-representation and re-symbolization.

Concerning postcolonial gender concerns in general and Cosmo-feminism vs. Feminism-lite research in particular, Satrapi's depiction of women's lives in contemporary Iran after the creation of adverse versions of the West during the Revolution has shown the complexity of women's rights in Iran. In this graphic novel, the idea of the West is reconstructed by Satrapi to address her own domestic as well

as political problems rather than playing the traditional postcolonial role as the everlasting dominant paradigm that postcolonial nations struggle to escape. Satrapi has shown the interaction of the Iranian elite with Western influences in more nuanced ways that have developed over time. This interaction highlights governmental repression in the name of the Iranian Islamic government, which portrays the West as Satan and battles against Western influences in a decidedly "us vs. them" mentality. This binary helps the government exploit the public's rights and force them to follow the rules. Hence, the state is essential in creating grand notions that govern the common masses' lives. For instance, the rights of women in Iran, as described by Lila Abu-Lughod, are subjective to the needs of the state. For example, if the state provides some fundamental rights to women, women should be "…subjecting those rights to regulations, demands, and agendas of the state…" (Abu-Lughod 115).

Satrapi has also pointed out this hypocrisy by the contemporary Islamic state of Iran.

The before mentioned discussion links the idea of the ultimate freedom of women as presented by Satrapi. In her graphic novel (Figure 4), Satrapi has idealized individual thinking based on facts and in-depth criticism

Figure 4 Presenting Muslim Women as Well-Informed and Rebellious, Satrapi (144)

rather than religious or cultural biases. She romanticizes the well-informed and rebellious image of a woman who stands for herself. In Figure 4, Satrapi corrects the wrong information regarding political prisoners told by her teacher. When the teacher says that there are no more political prisoners since the formation of the Islamic Republic, Satrapi stands up and says, "We've gone from 3000 prisoners under the Shah to 300,000 under your regime" (Satrapi 114). This rebellious and well-informed picture of an Iranian woman by Satrapi shows that Muslim women are not required to be rescued by the West. As Abu-Lughod writes, "Projects of saving other women depend on and reinforce a sense of superiority and are a form of arrogance that deserves to be challenged" (Abu-Lughod 47). Satrapi, an Iranian woman, has shown her deep connection with the society of Iran and her desire to make Iran more inclusive. This post-9/11 intervention presented by Satrapi seeks to educate Western readers about the misrepresentations of Iran and Islam. With the evocative image of the veiled girl, which is common in Western rescue projects, Satrapi's *Persepolis* draws attention to and critiques a larger context of widespread and humanitarian discourses on postcolonial gender concerns. She emphasizes the connection between gender and state violence, portraying Iranian women as diverse. She captures the complexity of how controlling women is a part of the 'Cultural Revolution' and that some women support it. Women's choices are unique, and all women, irrespective of their choices, should be treated equally.

Satrapi interprets the presence of Western culture in contemporary Iran and the hybrid identities it creates substantially differently. According to Satrapi, Westernization in Iran may appear superficial. Still, it is a stylized and politicized Westernization, an appropriation of Western goods and practices that arises not from the West but rather from the political environment in Iran. Therefore, Iranians' hybrid identity is not the result of their interactions with the West to imitate it, nor is it the result of their use of Western technologies to rebel against it. Instead, it is the reaction of Iranians to their administration while being constrained in developing a counter-discourse by their government. Due to the constraints on creating this counter-discourse, following Western traditions for Iranians is more of a mental survival strategy. In chapter 15 of the novel, Satrapi, the protagonist, starts smoking cigarettes to rebel against her mother's strict rules. Her mother was afraid of the fundamentalist society they were living in, but Satrapi as a young girl, could not understand her

mother's concerns. Satrapi was not impressed by the Western culture of smoking cigarettes, but when the public sphere gets too harsh, an outward rebellion naturally forms. In Satrapi's narrative, the divide between the public and private realms, between Fundamentalist Iran and Contemporary Iran, is so great that this cultural intermingling fails to produce hybrid subjects capable of challenging authoritative discourse. Instead, this intermingling gives birth to unstable minds suffering from Imperialism, fundamentalism, and existentialism. It is essential to mention Abu-Lughod, who writes about the "hybrid sources of rights" (Abu-Lughod 178). She believes that only the lived realities of women can be taken as a benchmark to understand women's rights. In this case, the lived experiences of Iranian women like Satrapi are also hybrid, and some hybrid sources of rights must be provided to fulfill such women's requirements.

The title of the graphic novel *Persepolis* also depicts Iranian hybridity. Persepo-lis means "The city of Persians." It served as the ceremonial capital of the Persian Empire from 550 to 330 BC when Alexander the Great invaded Persia, took it captive, and destroyed it. Persepolis was overshadowed by the metropolis of Shiraz centuries later, following the Arab conquest of the Persian Empire. Despite being in ruins now, Persepolis remains an essential part of Persian identity since it recalls a time when Iran was a strong kingdom and before the advent of Islam. Reza Shah Pahlavi utilized Persepolis in 1971 to host the celebration of Iran's 2,500-year monarchy, which, according to Satrapi's grandmother's memoir, incensed her. The Islamic Republic of Iran has attempted to downplay the significance of Persepolis since 1979 as part of a broader campaign against Iran's pre-Islamic past. Satrapi makes a political statement against an Islamic regime that rejects Iran's diversity of opinions and identities by titling her novel after the western name for this pre-Islamic city that is crucial to Iranian identity but a source of irritation for the current Islamic regime. No work of literature can be written or read in a vacuum; the same is true with this graphic novel. The pre-Islamic history of Iran, then the modernization of Iran, then the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and finally, the creation of a hybrid culture in Iran shows that culture is fluid and changing. The political powers try to hold the culture and force people to follow their agendas. It is a futile effort that only creates anarchy in society and gives birth to rebellious people like Satrapi in the novel under discussion.

The before mentioned discussion helps to understand figure no. 5. In this instance, Satrapi is shown to be inclined toward Western culture. Her inclination is the result of the restrictions imposed on her. She rebels against set boundaries defined for the women in her society. In this example, she encounters the morality police who call her a "Little whore" (Satrapi 136) just because her veil is not per the moral standards created by the guardians of the revolution. Satrapi has criticized this morality police by questioning their job of telling Muslim women their duties. Iranian officials began this strict code of conduct for Muslim women, making women like Satrapi rebels. Even though she has no wrong views on Islam and even has no deep connection with Western traditions, the strictness of her state compels her to do whatever the state prohibits. The inclination of Muslim women towards Western culture is not merely out of interest and curiosity. But it is an outcome of the social suffocation created by the theocratic state of Iran.

In Figure 5, Satrapi is seen to be tortured by the morality police in Iran. She dislikes the idea of the imposition of the veil on Iranian
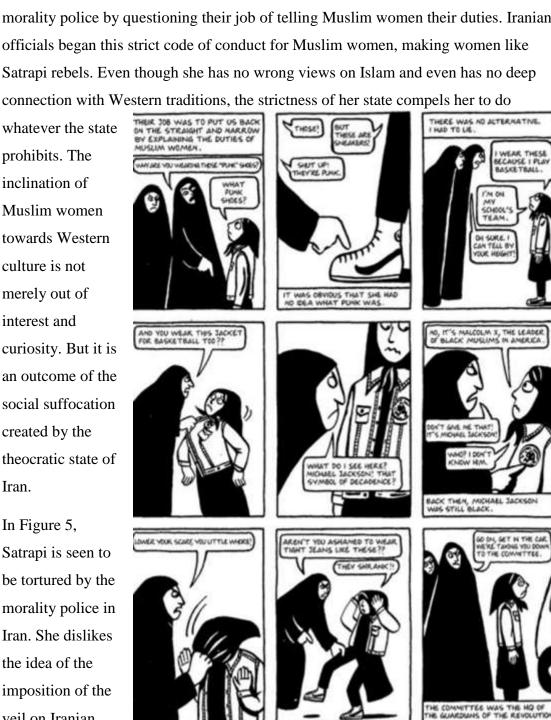

Figure 5 Showcasing Inclination of Muslim Women towards Western Culture, Satrapi (136)

women, and here she is criticizing the fundamentalist women who have become the custodians of religion. The politics involved in the 1970s Iranian Islamic revolution were quite complex. In this regard, Said writes that the Oriental Program created after the Islamic revolution in Iran produced a drama in which "the so-called Orientals acting the part decreed for them by what so-called Westerners expect; Westerners confirming their status in Oriental eyes as devils" (Said 104). In this instance, the RP&R code is dominant as Satrapi resists religion. The codes of SS and SJI are also prevalent in this instance as Satrapi is struggling to survive in a fundamentalist society, and she has raised her voice against social justice issues.

This chapter explores the graphic novel Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood by Marjane Satrapi. Satrapi aims to inform Western readers about Iran and Islam, but it is challenging to displace the West as an excellent source of knowledge. Her prologue states, "The wrongdoings of a few extremists should not judge an entire nation." Satrapi intervenes to alter public opinion rather than organizing for a specific political intervention. It is crucial because those privileged Western readers who have picked up her book and read it has the power to challenge generalized narratives that portray all Muslim females as helpless victims. Iranian officials have charged this novel with showing hostility towards Islam, yet at the same time, numerous experts, global media, and publishing sectors have praised it. Satrapi and *Persepolis* appear to be in the middle of an ideological, political, economic, anthropological, and spiritual conflict between Iran and the West. The disagreement about *Persepolis* itself and the ignorance around it, however, is the issue.

Discussing the visibility politics in the graphic novel Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood by Marjane Satrapi, the writer has used the visibility strategy to highlight the 'individual truths' and challenge the monolithic idea of female identity in Iran. As "visibility does not always strengthen collective identity. The emphasis on individual "truths" can also heighten internal differences within the movement" (McCammon, Holly J., et al., eds 378). Through the novel's graphic representation of the female Muslim protagonist, Satrapi globally advocates Iranian women's rights. Furthermore, the visibility tactics in this novel emphasize the difference in women's choices in a society, i.e., Iranian society. In short, Satrapi's visibility politics of postcolonial gender concerns mainly focuses on diversity and complexity in the lived experiences of Muslim women.

It is very challenging to provide a solid criticism of this graphic novel. However, it can be said that Satrapi's views presented in the graphic novel are highly complex and require an in-depth study of the socio-political situation of Iran. As Abu-Lughod says, lived experiences of women can determine their rights. Hence, in her work, it would not be wrong to say that Satrapi has presented a cosmo-feministicic view of Muslim women's rights. Furthermore, cosmo feminism in times of conflict is an interaction with nationalism and geopolitics that bases its support for cosmopolitan pacifism on gender issues. *Persepolis* demonstrates that Satrapi is both an Iranian patriot and a non-patriot, supporting the Iranian revolution and the war with Iraq. Her hybridity shows no limitations on women's rights; women's rights are subjective to their sociopolitical and religious situations. Muslim women's rights should not be generalized as Abu-Lughod says, "…gendered Orientalism has taken on a new life and new forms in our feminist twenty-first century" (Abu-Lughod 202). Hence, Satrapi has challenged the monolithic idea of Islamic Feminism as perceived by Western feminists and has portrayed the cosmo-feministicic views on Muslim women's rights.

CHAPTER 5

COSMO-FEMINISM OR FEMINISM-LITE?: (MIS)REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN BY A WESTERN WRITER

The present study is pivoted on the revelation of the political schemas recognized in contemporary Western graphic novels. In this regard, the first and foremost concern of the researcher is to connect the dots and read between the lines. For this purpose, a detailed analysis of the author's background and the graphic novels has been made. This examination foregrounds the entire argument of the present research. As this research primarily pertains to underlining the "social, cultural, and political contexts," it is integral to note that 'critical content analysis' supports highlighting these milieus in which the books are written and read. (Galda et al., 356). As this study encompasses graphic novels written by authors of distinct ethnicities, it is vital to observe the milieu in which these works are created. The authors' social, cultural, and religious backgrounds are essential to be discussed here as they reflect on the themes and images portrayed in the graphic novels.

Craig Thompson is a white-American cartoonist-writer who comes from a staunch Christian family. He was born in Michigan in 1975 and resides in Portland, Oregon. The award-winning books *Good-bye Chunky Rice*, *Blankets*, *Carnet de Voyage*, *Habibi*, and *Space Dumplins* are written by Thompson. He grew up with his brother and sister in rural Marathon, Wisconsin. Thompson's parents were devout Christians who instilled rigid ideals about the family and religion in their kids. His early life and education had a solid basis built on the Bible. He was homeschooled for a year using resources from the Christian Liberty Academy and the Bible as the primary text. As a high-school student, Thompson spent an hour a day reading the Bible. As a young boy, Thompson avoided concepts and literature that did not align with the Bible. After his schooling, he faced self-recognition issues and started questioning his religion. Presently, Thompson is no longer a Christian, but he still believes in the teachings of Jesus. This introduction demonstrates that the author of *Habibi* lacks a first-hand understanding of Islamic culture and traditions; hence, his writing about Muslim women may have some biases and misconceptions.

Craig Thompson's graphic novel Habibi portrays two escaped enslaved children, Dodola and Zam. The novel explores the dangers and adventures they encounter in a contemporary, fictional Islamic country called Wanatolia. Dodola is a nine-year-old Arab- Muslim girl whose destitute, illiterate parents have sold her into marriage. Her spouse raped her and encouraged her not to be ashamed of sex within the union. Over time, her husband teaches her to read and write Quran, and she finds beauty and comfort in the Quran. One day some intruders break into their home, murder her husband, and abduct her. They deem her to be enslaved.

Meanwhile, she witnesses that these men are going to murder a three-year-old boy named Zam. She claims the boy is her brother even though he is black and she is Arab. Although they do not believe her, they still let her nurse the child. Luckily, she evades her abductors with the help of Zam just before being sold in a slave market. Together, they reside in a deserted, abandoned boat. Dodola resorts to scavenging and prostituting herself to tourists for food and money to feed and clothe herself and Zam. As she conceals Zam in the boat, she gains a reputation as the "ghost courtesan of the desert."

One day, some men discover Dodola in the boat when Zam is at the reservoir gathering water. They kidnap her and force her to enter the harem of the Sultan of Wanatolia, who has heard of her charisma. The Sultan agrees with Dodola. He will grant her one request if she could charm him for seventy consecutive nights. If she does not comply, she will be executed. On the seventieth night, the Sultan announces he is tired of her. She attempts to escape but is sentenced to seven months in the dungeon.

Meanwhile, Zam waits for Dodola's return to the boat. Coincidently after struggle and survival, he becomes a eunuch in the palace of the Sultan. There he finds Dodola, and they both run away from the palace. Dodola and Zam discover their old boat in a garbage dump, where families eke out a living by collecting trash. They do not intend to continue living in the dump, so they catch a ride on a garbage truck back to the contemporary, traffic-filled city of Wanatolia. They pretend to be married, and Zam obtains factory employment to support them. At the novel's end, Dodola and Zam rescue a slave girl to keep her from suffering as Dodola faced as a child. They finally intend to leave the city.

Through this novel, Thompson highlights the themes of the oppression of Muslim women, patriarchal Muslim society, and the struggles of enslaved people in middle-East. However, several critics have expressed aversion regarding the book's depiction of sex as these obscene graphic details overshadow the writer's intended message. The concern of cultural appropriation is also notable, given that Thompson, a white American, writes without a comprehensive understanding of the Arabic language or the historical backdrop of the Middle East. The racial stereotypes and dehumanization of many Arab characters are also problematic in this novel. In general, *Habibi* is a story written by a Westerner for a Western audience about a much-maligned Eastern culture and Islam.

The settings of the selected graphic novels are important to understand the binary of East versus West implicitly created in the graphic narratives. The graphic novel *Habibi* takes place in a fictional country called Wanatolia. This imaginary Orientalist Arabian landscape seems to be inspired by nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings. Here the setting of the graphic novel plays a very integral role in defining the storyline. Interestingly, Craig Thompson has never visited any Middle-Eastern country except Morocco, so this novel is a complete work of Western imagination.

It is also important to note that the graphic novel *Habibi by* Craig Thompson was published at a very peculiar time, i.e., September 2011. It was May 02, 2011, when Osama bin Laden, the founder and head of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda and the most wanted man on the American wanted list, was shot and killed by American forces during a military operation in Pakistan. This incident increased already existing tension between Muslims and the West, and Islamophobia elevated again. At this time, this graphic novel that showcases Islamic culture showed varied themes. In this regard, Lila Abu-Lughod writes, "…after September 11, 2001, when widespread concern about Muslim women's rights took off. I worry about how representations of Muslim women's suffering and arguments about their lack of rights have been working politically and practically (25)" Thompson's display of violence and brutality on Muslim women raises this concern put forward by Abu-Lughod.

Spiegelman rightly states that "the stereotype is the basic building block of all cartoon art" (3). The selected graphic novels' background, setting, and characterization make it evident that these narratives encompass some debatable

postcolonial gender concerns. Firstly, discussing the graphic novel *Habibi*, the most prominent postcolonial themes identified in this work are; an exotic portrayal of Eastern land, stereotyping of Eastern Arab Muslims by the depiction of patriarchal men vs. meek women, sexual objectification of the Orient women by stark-naked illustrations, and representation of oppression on the orient women in the hands of their men. The biographical details of the writer of this graphic novel, i.e., Craig Thompson, make the neutrality and authenticity of this work questionable. Being a white American man, his depiction of fictional oriental land somehow signifies the occidental desire for representation of an exotic Eastern land. Through his work, Thompson has shown his interest in Arab culture and Islam. Still, quoting Said, such works are merely [sic] encyclopedia of exotic display and a playground for Orientalist scrutiny (161). As this graphic novel is entirely a work of fiction with a biased portrayal of Muslim women's image, it can be said that it lacks authenticity within details (AD). Although the writer has done significant research on the Arabic language and Arab culture, without any firsthand experience, everything seems super exaggerated and pigeonholed from plot to characters.

Furthermore, Said refers to that in Western writings, Eastern women are mostly presented as a victim of "the male power-fantasy" and "express unlimited sensuality," shown as "stupid" and "willing" creatures (207). The researcher found almost all of these features in this graphic novel, which is furthermore elaborated on in the discussion. Considering the insider/outsider perspective I/O, as Thompson belongs to the West and is an outsider in the case of knowing the Orient, it can be said that his Orientalist imagination has a "chameleonlike" quality (Said 119). This quality is designated to this writer because it seems that he has created a specific image of the Arab and Muslim world for the Western (especially post-9/11 American) audience.

Through this graphic novel, Thompson is focalizing the concern of Muslim women's empowerment, but the visibility politics in the novel bring forth many questions. Said has pointed out that the "Romantic Orientalist project" was a powerful tool for generalizing the Orient (115). The romantic tendency of the Western portrayal of the Orient is explored in this work. Said doubts such Western writers of having "sexually crazed minds" (314) and found such fictional depictions as "escapism of sexual fantasy" of the West (190). The obsession with Thompson with the sexual fantasy of the Orient is evident in *Habibi.* In this graphic novel, the writer seemingly

advocates the rights of the protagonist Dodola, a Muslim woman. It leads to predict that, being a Western writer,r Thompson is engaging with the grand notion of cosmo-feminism and is speaking up for women's equal rights globally. In doing so, somehow, the writer unknowingly sexualizes the protagonist. Here concern is that either the writer is promoting cosmo-feministicic ideas or is subjected to feminism-lite by his flawed representation. And if his representation is prone to feminism-lite, then his implicit purpose seems to be merely sexualizing the Muslim character. Hence, it can be said that to display cosmo-feministicic ideas; somehow, the writer became prone to feminism-lite agendas by showcasing the sexualization of the Orient. The phenomenon of 'Sexualizing the Orient' is relatively longstanding; the sensual oriental representation is evident in Co1eridge's Ethiopian Maid character in *Kubla Khan*, in Shelley's sensual oriental dream woman in *Alastor,* and Byron's heroines in his oriental tales (Oueijan 9). From colonialism to this era of postcolonialism, the Orient has been reified as a sexual object who quenches the exotic thirst of the Occident. In the nineteenth century, this idea of oriental sexualization originated when Western travelers visited Turkish harems. Several scholars, including Said, Behdid, Kabbani, Lowe, and Oueijan, have maintained that the nineteenth-century Orient was the focus of Western interest in various ways and significantly impacted the emergence of "Romantic culture." This Romantic culture has distorted the image of the Orient in literature, art, and paintings, and its impact is still prevalent. The gender perspectives (GP) in this novel show that Thompson has objectified the character of a Muslim woman in his work; hence gender display in this novel is stereotypical. It is also important to note that the code of personal connections (PC) is absent in this graphic novel. As Thompson has no personal links to the subject he is writing about, this reduces the credibility of his in-depth knowledge of his work's topic.

In Figure 6, Dodola, the protagonist of the novel *Habibi,* is seen to be abducted by the robbers, and meanwhile, her husband screams, 'She belongs to me' (Thompson 22). Through this instance, it can be said that Muslim women are depicted as a commodity for men. Furthermore, in the facial expressions, Dodola explicitly proclaims her terrified state. It shows that the writer has raised the concern of social justice issues (SJI) in the graphic novel. This display of the Orient woman as a commodity by Thompson signifies "Oriental despotism and sensuality" (Said 102). Furthermore, as Oueijan explains that through the portrayal of the "violent passions of

Oriental men" and "submissive passivity of beautiful veiled Oriental women,"
Western writers create a fixed image of the sensual and alluring Orient (6).

In Figure 6, it can be seen that Dodola, hidden in a large trunk, is treated as an
object that must be protected from robbers. Furthermore, the contentment of robbers
after having Dodola refers to their lustful desires toward her. The facial expressions of
the robber holding Dodola showcase his licentious desires toward her. Throughout the
novel, Thompson showcases Dodola as a helpless creature who is impoverished and
ill-treated at the hands of men; hence there is no diversity in character (DC). In Figure
6, the feebleness of Dodola assigns erotic attributes to her, as Oueijan points out that
the "passivity and compliance" of the Eastern women "dehumanizes" them (9). This
dehumanization of Eastern women not only stigmatizes the women but also signifies
the generalization of the brutality of Eastern men. Abu-Lughod has interrogated such
biased Western portrayals by raising the question about the "imaginative suffering" shown by such writers, and she also questions that does it provide them "some kind of pleasure" and "the reassurance of utter distinction and separation from those who suffer. (106). The exotic desires of Western writers

Figure 6 Muslim Women Depicted as Commodity for Men, Thompson (22)

somehow attach specific attributes to Muslim men that they (Western writers) themselves want to commit. This sexual tension behind the guise of cosmo-feministicic ideas of empowering Muslim women leads to exposing the feminist-lite agendas of the writer. The visibility politics of showcasing oppressed and sexually maltreated Muslim-Arab women in front of the Western audience can never be an honest depiction. Undoubtedly, social problems prevail in every society, either East or West, but the white man's burden on Western writers like Thompson is problematic and condemnable.

Figure 7 refers to the blatant sexual objectification of Muslim women committed by Thompson. Dodola is shown as a prostitute who sells her body to win some provisions, and through this profession, she survives in the desert.

The Muslim men are shown to be stimulated by her charismatic and seductive body. Thompson has associated some superficial qualities with the bodily charm of Dodola. As Said

Figure 7 The Sexual Objectification of Muslim Women, Thompson (148)

refers that the Western attributes of the Orient are 'romantic and even messianic (154); in this regard, Oueijan also writes that the "Oriental female is sometimes raised to the level of spiritual Sufism" by Western writers (11). In Figure 7, some men from a caravan take pleasure from Dodola's body, and one of them says, 'Let me show you how to tame a woman' and then 'he is just gonna watch on this round' (Thompson 148). These dialogues show that Dodola is sexually objectified and treated as inferior. The patriarchal society (PS) code is explicit here because men enjoy taking advantage of Dodola. Furthermore, the struggle for survival (SS) code is also prominent here as Dodola is doing prostitution business for her survival. It is also important to note here that the code of historical aspects (HA) is shown as absent in this graphic novel as the writer has given many Islamic references in his work. Still, the novel's story does not operate under any valid historical links.

While discussing the stigmatization of Muslim women in the hands of Western writers, Oueijan puts forward a question. He points out that the association of prostitution with Muslim women is a wrong generalization. Western writers make. On the contrary, he proclaims that all Western or Eastern women face this issue of bound prostitution. Every prostitute, regardless of ethnicity, is 'passive and submissive' in front of their clients. In addition, throughout history, women's sensuality 'has always been dominated by males' (Oueijan 9). Most of the illustrations by Thomson in this novel display the half-naked or even entirely naked body of Dodola. This portrayal is unnecessary and only showcases the writer's obsession with the oriental female body. Abu- Lughod has rightly stated that in Western discourses, "Orient were either portrayed as downtrodden victims who were imprisoned, secluded, shrouded, and treated as beasts of burden or they appeared in a sensual world of excessive sexuality" (88). In this instance, the code of AD is not found because there is no such logical authenticity in the details of desert prostitutes. The fantasy of the Western writer is nothing more than a fictional exploration of Arabian culture.

Figure 8 is the perfect portrayal of the Western misconceptions regarding the oriental harems. As Oueijan explains, the 19th century Western literary figures and artists represented the "Eastern men as the sensualist lords of the harems and the masters of the aura of female sexuality and the Eastern females were depicted 'as the fairies of sensuality and seduction" (1). In this novel, Thompson has also contributed to this kind of sexualization of the Orient. When Dodola is taken to the palace of the Sultan, she is given the task of pleasing the Sultan for seventy nights, and in return, she is assured of having whatever she desires. Here the phrase by Sultan, "Please me for seventy nights in a row" (Thompson 200), shows that Muslim women are nothing more than a subject of lust for Eastern men. It also signifies that these women are helpless creatures and victims of brutality by men. The quest of Dodola, as shown in this scene, is only for freedom, which signifies that Muslim women are caged and sexually abused by their masters. The facial expressions of Dodola vs. Sultan in Figure 8 show the binary of gender, i.e.,

Figure 8 Muslim Women as Helpless Creatures; Victim of Brutality by Men,
Thompson (200)

feebleness vs. authoritativeness; here, the code of gender perspectives (GP) is evident as the female is shown as a meek create. Furthermore, Dodola is clearly shown as a victim of patriarchy; hence patriarchal society (PS) code is also prevalent. Another essential thing observed in this illustration is the portrayal of women in the Sultan's harem. The graphic depiction of these Eastern women is immodest. Oueijan describes that the Western imagination of the oriental harems is distorted as it purposely depicts Eastern females 'half-naked' in their harem (7). Again, the code of AD is absent here because the life of Eastern women in harems is misrepresented in this novel. While explanting the distorted Western representation of oriental harems, Oueijan explains that Eastern men are portrayed as the masters of the sensation of female sexuality and the sensualist lords of the harems.

On the other hand, the literary and creative works of nineteenth-century personalities and painters who toured the East and contributed to the sexualization of the Orient were spiced with ideas of the Eastern females as the fairies of sensuality and seduction (1). Elucidating the Western erotic desires, Ouejian explains, over time, the presence of the Eastern female in works dealing with the East became a necessary component of seductive allure and sensual charm. On the other hand, the Western gaze on the East—specifically on women— also rekindled 'Western reflexive moments' of 'inner contemplation' (Oueijan 12). It shows the interest of Western men in concealed Eastern women, whom they might not have seen but fanaticized due to exotic charm. In the guise of advocating Muslim women's rights, Thompson has somehow sexualized the image of a Muslim woman.

Figure 9 gives the generalized opinion that Muslim women are urged to empower themselves, but society does not allow them to get empowerment. It shows that the only concern of Eastern men is to get sexual pleasure from women; besides that, women are not worthy enough to obtain an education. This stigmatized depiction seems unauthentic and somehow lacks credibility. The apparent intentions of Thomson while creating this artwork could have been advocating women's rights in the East, but how he presented his stance is ironic. While promoting the oppression of Eastern women, he patently objectifies Eastern women. Here it is crucial to mention Abu-Lughod's concept regarding the rescue mission of some Western writers. She names such rescuers of Muslim women as "moral crusaders," "the moral crusaders who view Muslim women as distant and different and want to save them" (201). Here Thompson also seems like a moral crusader.

As Oueijan refers that Western writers are always curious about oriental females. ". . . the secretive manner of her life, her submissiveness, her passivity, and even her assuming the role of a phallic female, excited the Western sense of the exotic,

Figure 9 Muslim Women Having the Urge to Empower Themselves but not Allowed by the Society, Thompson (225)

seductive, sensual, and erotic Orient" (12). The same curiosity is seen in the novel *Habibi* by Thompson. In Figure 9, when Dodola is studying in the library, a man asks her, "Studying alone? This is not a proper place for a woman" (Thompson 225). This dialogue shows the societal position of a woman in Eastern society.

Furthermore, the man tells Dodola that her place is in the harem and she cannot roam around freely without a man's guidance. It again shows the rigidity and hypocrisy of Eastern cultures and traditions where women are treated merely as a tool for the sexual gratification of men. The code of RP & R is evident in this instance as Dodola is resisting the Eastern patriarchal society. The AD code is missing in this example because the extreme level of patriarchy and oppression showcased by Thompson seems nothing more than a super-exaggerated fallacy.

Figure 10 denotes the lack of variation in the visual representation of Muslim women; hence the code of diversity in character is missing here (DC). In this instance, the entire naked body of Dodola is showcased by Thompson. Throughout the novel, the writer depicts Dodola as half-naked or even entirely naked,

Figure 10 Lack of Variation in the Visual Representation of Muslim Women, Thompson (631)

albeit there are some rare instances where she is also seen in clothes.

It points out the sexualization of the Orient practiced by Thompson. In this regard, Oueijan explains that the descriptions of the Western writers "unveiled the most private and seductive of Eastern female life" (7). The veiled Eastern women have always been the center of curiosity for Western men. By the sensual portrayal of Dodola, Thompson seems to have this trait of Western gaze towards Eastern women. The portrayal by Thompson raises the question: Is this novel pornographic literature? Abu-Lughod has commented about the effects of a genre of pornography by saying that such a genre contains" objectification of subjects and its depiction of violence, sexual force, and bondage— when it is tied to a racial politics and a legacy of colonial or racial domination" (103). It indicates that Thompson's naked images are problematic and questionable.

Here the dialogue of Dodola, "Over time my sky crowded with churning sweaty faces" (Thompson 631), points out the brutal and lustful nature of Muslim men. The facial expressions of the men shown in the illustration signify that these men crave the body of Dodola. Meanwhile, Dodola's facial expressions show her terrified of these monstrous men. It shows that the patriarchal society (PS) code is evident here. Here the code gender perspectives (GP) signify that the attire of Dodola, being a woman, as Thompson depicts, is a problematic portrayal of gender. Her nude graphical portrayal gives no applicable message but is only objectifying her sexually. The diversity in character code (DC) is also missing here because no evident diversity is seen in the character of Dodola. She is always seen as a victim in the hands of men. Her parents sell her; her husband rapes her; she becomes a prostitute and is ill-treated by men, and so on.

As "visibility strategy often aims to depict the group and its experiences – particularly its oppression" (McCammon, Holly J., et al., eds 378), Thompson has also used this strategy to highlight the oppression of Muslim women in a Muslim society. In the novel *Habibi,* the oppression of Dodola takes various forms, and while experimenting on this character, Thompson somehow deviates from his mission of advocating Muslim women's rights. Hence, in light of the visibility politics of postcolonial gender concerns, this novel provides a questionable image of Muslim women in front of the global audience. The damsel in distress sort of image of the

protagonist portrayed as a strong character but always ends up being exploited by men, unveils the loopholes in the character. Furthermore, the stark naked images of the protagonist presented by the writer also bring forth the visibility politics. These naked images of the protagonist show that the writer's form of representation is inclined to the phenomenon of sexualizing the Orient. In short, through the politics of visibility, Thompson has presented an image of an oppressed Muslim woman, but in doing so, he sexualizes the Muslim woman's image.

This chapter has analysed the critical problems behind Thompson's portrayal of Muslim women in *Habibi*. On the surface level, it can be said that the writer has made an effort to showcase the typical Eastern-Arab-Muslim society where women are oppressed. Through this depiction, the writer may have tried to bring forward the voice of Muslim women in front of the world. If these intentions are supposed to be genuine, then it can be said that Thompson advocates cosmo-feminism and supports the idea of global feminism. But ironically, this is not the case here because his representations have various loopholes. These ambiguities displayed by Thompson more likely signify that his work of feminism is flawed and hence can be called a feminism-lite portrayal. The researcher has discovered that the form of representation, i.e., sexualization of the Orient in this scenario, makes Thompson's feminism flawed.

CHAPTER 6

COSMO-FEMINISM OR FEMINISM-LITE?: RELIABILITY IN THE PORTRAYAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL FEMINIST ADVOCACY

The novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* is a work of collaboration between two writers of different ethnicities. It foregrounds that the graphic novel must intermingle diverse ideas across cultures. Sherine Hamdy is a second-generation Egyptian-American. She was born in New York to Egyptian Muslim parents and was raised in Mexico City. She is a Muslim by religion, and presently she resides in Irvine. As a child, she had cross-cultural experiences in the summers; she lived in Egypt and the rest of the year in America. She is a medical anthropologist and graphic novelist. Since 2006, she has been a Brown University professor specializing in anthropology. Her award-winning essay *When the State and Your Kidneys Fail: Political Etiologies in an Egyptian Dialysis Ward* and her acclaimed books, *Our Bodies Belong to God: Organ Transplants, Islam, and the Fight for Human Dignity in Egypt* and *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* became the source of her recognition in literary as well as academic circles. Hamdy is interested in studying social issues in Egypt and America, specifically female health concerns and global economic issues affecting health facilities. Her researches and writings highlight the unequal distribution of resources, which results in negligence of health services provided to the common masses.

Coleman Nye is a white-American writer, academic scholar, and professor. She teaches gender, sexuality, and women's studies at Simon Fraser University. Her areas of research interest are critical race and gender theory, performance studies, and feminist science and technology studies. She is Sherine Hamdy's Ph.D. student, and together they wrote a well-acclaimed graphic novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution*. Her most recent book, *Biological Property: Race, Gender, Genetics,* explores the epistemological connections between property-based conceptions of inheritance and genetic understandings of relationships.

The graphic novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution,* was published in 2017 when science and technology were booming, and

global issues became the center of debate in academia and literature. Hence, this graphic novel is more advanced in its approach and style. As this study deals with the graphical representation of Muslim women, gender is a question of concern in this research. The authors' backgrounds have already shown that the writers of two of the three selected graphic novels are females, and only one author is male. This variable of gender reflects on the analysis of the literature, which is expounded broadly in the following chapters. The protagonists of all the selected graphic novels are also female Muslim characters. The graphic novel Lissa A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution is an exception because it has two protagonists: an Egyptian-Muslim girl and an American-Christian girl. This novel attempts to display cultural and religious unity; hence, two protagonists from East versus West are showcased.

The setting of the graphic novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* is in 2011 Cairo, Egypt, and America during the Egyptian Revolution. At that time, America had an outbreak of invasive cancer, and simultaneously Egyptians also faced health issues like kidney and liver failure. This juxtaposition creates an impact of emotional harmony between East and West. It showcases that the global economy, distribution of resources, and healthcare concerns are equally crucial for all nations.

This graphic novel focuses on the experiences of two female protagonists, Layla and Anna, whose friendship transcends and is periodically broken by class, ethnicity, religion, and cultural divides. The story starts in Cairo, Egypt, where Layla and Anna first met. Layla is an Egyptian Arab whose father is a porter, and Anna is a white American whose father works in an oil firm in Cairo. Both the protagonists face the deaths of their dear ones at the hand of chronic diseases. Anna's mother's death from breast cancer prompts Anna to pursue genetic testing, leading to the finding that she carries the BRCA1 mutation. At that time (2011), America had a severe outbreak of cancer disease, and the country faced health turmoil. Anna decides to undergo a preventative double mastectomy but cannot tell Layla since she is so opposed to her (now) healthy body being mutilated. Here the difference in opinions brings a gap in their friendship. Anna leaves for America, and Lyla continues her medical studies in Egypt. She is shown as a progressive and headstrong Muslim girl who plays a vital role in developing her society. In the meantime, Layla deals with her father's slow

deterioration and eventual death due to kidney failure. This tragic incident in the life of Lyla leaves her devastated, and being a porter's daughter, she also faces economic pressures. Layla's parents and even her brother Ahmed are shown to be dependent on her in one way or the other, which shatters the stereotype of women constantly being reliant on men.

This story is narrated against the political disturbances of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, which resulted in widespread civil unrest, civilian deaths, and injuries. During this chaos, the bond between Layla and Anna conveys the loud message of putting humanity first. During protests in Cairo, Layla used to provide medical care to injured protestors. In contrast, Anna, who returns to Cairo to help her friend, Layla, used to carry supplies to volunteer medical teams. This harmony among two young girls shown amid the 2011 Egyptian Revolution depicts that revolution is mandatory to gain societal rights. The Egyptian vs. American and Muslim vs. Christian friendship showcase that every woman has complexities and problems; regardless of belief system, culture, and religion, all women must support each other and embrace their differences. The novel's final scenes are when Anna confesses to Layla that she got her breasts removed through surgery. Irrespective of the clash of opinions, Layla hugs her and apologizes for not being an understanding friend.

The themes displayed in this novel are selfless friendship, women empowerment, the role of women in the development of society, cross-cultural harmony, health concerns in society, and revolution. All these ideas showcase the appropriate reflection of a society where everyone seems to have hardships in life, but these problems are not linked to religion or culture. This novel is a deliberate effort to show that women from different cultures and beliefs can be friends and acknowledge their differences without judgment.

Discussing the general postcolonial themes in *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution,* the most prominent ones are; the East vs. West binary, the ethnographical contrast between East and West, differences between Eastern Muslim women and Western women, and the promotion of the concept of sisterhood beyond borders, races, and religions. The writers of this novel, i.e., Hamdy and Nye, have deliberately created this blend of East and West to showcase the organic form of feminism and sisterhood beyond diversity. The subtle topics of this

novel give a license to check the credibility of this work. As this work deals with history and anthropology, its concerns Said in this regard cannot be ignored. According to Said, the power associated with the "outside Western ethnographer-observer" is always more than the Eastern counterpart (103). Lila Abu-Lughod, while talking about Egyptian women during the 2011 crisis, says, "Basic conditions of these women's lives are set by political forces that are local in effect but national and even international in origin" (24). This claim of Abu-Lughod provides the basis of the entire debate in this chapter. As Hamdy has displayed the struggles of an Egyptian girl Layla in this novel, it is evident that the writer has linked the gender issues faced by Layla to the global crisis, which in some way or another affects Layla's life. As one writer of this novel is diasporic and the other is Western, the I/O perspective is present in this scenario. Hamdy is the insider of Eastern culture, and her knowledge and experience have created a personal connection (PC) with her work. However, the Western influence on the diasporic writer cannot be ignored. Said argues that the world's anthropology, history, and cultural studies are viewed as "Western super-subject" (76) by the Europeans, and postcolonial history is created anew by the West. The historical and cultural details provided in this novel are found to be well-researched and un-problematic to answer this concern; the authenticity within details (AD) code is explored and

This chapter analyses the graphic novel Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution by Coleman Nye and Sherine Hamdy under the lens of cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite. The researcher has tried to find out that while conveying the message of cosmo-feminism as portrayed in the novel, how unbiased the representation of Muslim women is. Identifying any bias can lead to discussing the presence of feminist-lite agendas in the novel. As this graphic novel is a collaborated anthropological effort to display the friendly co-existence of Eastern vs. Western women; hence the broader views of Said on this field are essential to discuss. Said believes that subjects like anthropology are prone to bear generalized opinions on different cultures. He explains this concept by saying that "a network of related generalizations" (119) is created due to the specifications of anthropology. Furthermore, this chapter analyses and compares the selected three graphic novels from the cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate perspective.

In Figure 11, Hamdy and Nye have presented the veil as a harmless cultural norm. The protagonist Layla and her mother are shown in a veil, and the context of the novel demonstrates that these Muslim women are not bound to wear veils, but it is their choice to practice their cultural and religious customs. When her mother says, "Keep checking in to let us know how you are. And don't forget your prayers", Layla replies, "I know mama, see you soon. Inshallah." (Hamdy and Nye 61) This exchange of dialogues between the mother and daughter shows the strength of their family bond and the connection of a young Muslim girl with her cultural and religious roots. The writers' image construction of a young Muslim woman is genuine and unproblematic.

This positive image of Islam and Muslim women leads to the fulfillment of the Cosmo-feministicic aim of cross-cultural harmony. While discussing the evils of stigmatization of Islam, Reilly argues that fundamentalism should not be solely associated with Islam as the act of fundamentalism is ". . . pervasive in many regions, also undermine democratic values and potentially promote terrorism (e.g., attacks on abortion clinics); and free-market privatization is not equivalent to democratization." (Reilly 187) By

Figure 11 Veil Presented as a Harmless Cultural Norm,
Hamdy and Nye (61)

portraying independent Muslim women, it can be said that Hamdy and Nye have deliberately tried to display an impersonal image of Islam.

This image shows the willful obedience of Layla when she listens to the religious directions of her mother. The gender perspectives (GP) code depicts that the attire of the veiled Muslim women is not a sign of oppression but choice and freedom. This example is missing the resistance to patriarchal society and religion (RP&R) and (PS) patriarchal society codes. The authenticity within details (AD) code is prevalent as Hamdy has tried to create a picture of ordinary Egyptian women through her work. Such representation also aligns with the anthropological studies of Lila Abu-Lughod. Hamdy is a modern Muslim anthropologist, so she does not shy away from representing faith-based feminist ideas in her novel. In this regard Abu- Lughod writes, "…many educated cosmopolitan Muslim women are no longer defensive about exploring what Americans would call "faith-based" feminism" (177). This

acceptance of faith-based feminism shows the diversity and inclusivity in the works of writers like Hamdy.

Figure 12 shows a very logical transition in the attire of Layla. Muslim women only wear a veil before non-mahram (men outside their blood relations). In this scene, Layla is not wearing her veil before her brother

Figure 12 Variation in Representation of Muslim Women, Hamdy and Nye (140)

Ahmed. It shows that the writers have created variations in the representation of Muslim women. Instead of showing the veiled woman throughout the novel, the writers choose to discover all sides of the life of a Muslim woman to showcase the delicacy and detail of the religious customs of Islam. This effort by Hamdy and Nye effectively understands the complexity of Muslim women's rights. Religious and sociopolitical situations influence women's lives. Hence, these factors together pave the way to make human rights discourses, as Abu-Lughod writes, "mixed religious and political identities that define the rights claims and consider the hybrid sources of rights" (178). Hence depicting and understanding the religious concerns of Layla and other Muslim women in the novel are equally crucial to the political debates in this work.

The code of historical aspects (HA) is prevalent in this novel because the Egyptian history and lives of Egyptian women are depicted following the historical pieces of evidence. The veil is also a part of Egyptian culture, and the writers have portrayed it positively. In this regard, Reilly explains that the goal of Cosmo-feminism is to challenge the "false dichotomies that pervade understanding of the international arena-especially in the Western, "developed" world (181). Here the writers have not falsely displayed the veil as a tool of oppression for Muslim women; instead, they have represented it as a diverse attribute of Muslim women. It shows that the variation among different cultures worldwide must be treated with respect and harmony. Cosmo-feminism only protests for the broader women's rights, like the issue of social, economic, healthcare rights, etc.

Furthermore, figure 12 also shows that Muslim women have their say in front of the male household members. When Layla says to Ahmed, "…please don't go to the polls" (Hamdy and Nye 140), this resistance of Layla to stop Ahmed from going to protests demonstrates her steadfastness towards her opinions. She grabs Ahmed's arm to stop him, and body language strongly influences the other person. In this example, Layla's veil-less attire and her bond with her elder brother depict the variety and strength of her character. The writers have created the character of Layla to show the other side—a positive and realistic side—of Muslim women in front of Western readers. In this regard, Abu-Lughod writes that creating an oppressed image of Mulism women to advocate human rights is a fallacy. She calls this phenomenon the hegemony of human rights. Abu-Lughod writes, "Human rights ideals have become

hegemonic .. Muslim women rights…Choice, consent, and freedom are the grammar. So let us look at what this grammar allows and does not"(203). The writers of this novel have written out of this grammar as described by Abu-Lughod. The code of diversity in characters (DC) is most prominent in this example, as Layla's character is diverse and robust.

Figure 13 shows Muslim women as empowered and progressive citizens of their society. In this example, Layla provides first aid to the protestors of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Layla is an integral part of her society, and men around her are shown to rely on her assistance.

The way she directs men by saying, "You can put him down there" (Hamdy and Nye 206) and pointing her finger toward the ground displays her expertise in her work.

The idea of Cosmo-feminism promotes "action-oriented networking" (Reilly 188) among women across borders. The label of oppressed Muslim women is just a stigma associated with Muslim women, which leads to generalizations and stereotyping. It, in return, fades the true spirit of advocacy for women's rights. Hence as Reilly says, action-oriented networking is necessary instead of

Figure13 Muslim Women are Shown Empowered and Progressive, Hamdy and Nye (206)

superficial generalizations of a particular group of women. Here it is also important to mention that these problems in Egypt shown by Hamdy and Nye do not reflect Eastern inferiority. Instead, it is important to understand that Anna, an American girl shown in the novel, also faces many issues in her life. In this scenario, Abu-Lughod writes, "…none of us is immune to suffering or difficulties, or the potential of violations of the most horrible sort" (221). This contrast between the problems of a Western and an Eastern woman in the novel shows that, in one or another, women around the globe are somehow dealing with issues.

Another essential factor noted in this example is the role reversal between Layla and her brother Ahmed. In the symbolic portrayals of Muslim women, the writers mostly showcase women as dependent and meek creatures who rely on the male members of their families. Here the writers have broken the code of this falsely generalized redundant theme and shown Layla as the savior of her brother. In this figure, Ahmed is badly injured after getting hit by a rubber bullet, and the rescuers bring him to Layla. It is quite evident from this scene that Muslim women are equally involved in uplifting their society. If men are fighting for civil rights, women are saving the lives of these men to help them, and together they pave the way toward the betterment of their society.

Figure 14 shows that Muslim women are grounded in Islamic traditions yet understand women outside their belief system. It is an ideal case of the advocation of cosmo-feministicic ideas as the essence of this theory is in cross-cultural harmony among women around the globe. In this example, Layla and Anna have a dialogue where Anna confesses that regardless of Layla's disapproval, she got her mastectomy surgery done. Layla shows her concern for Anna's health regardless of her difference in opinion due to her religious beliefs. Layla's dialogues after knowing the truth show her adaptability and respect for a Christian American woman. "You're right, Alhamdullilah! Thank God you don't have cancer!" these dialogues of Layla promote the idea of sisterhood beyond borders. In this regard, Reilly writes that cosmo-feminism promotes "women's diverse perspectives in a globalizing era" (Reilly 194). The diversity in the character of Layla shows that the code of variety in characters (DC) is prevalent in the novel. The definition of women's rights is very subjective. In this instance, Anna thinks breast surgery is her choice, but Layla does not like her idea. In the end, Layla accepts their difference in opinions. This acceptance is the true essence of cosmo-feminism. Abu-Lughod defines the complexity of rights "as projects imagined and pursued by people in particular social settings, whether in their families or court, in international organizations created

Figure 14 Muslim Women Portrayed as Grounded in Islamic Traditions,
yet Understanding towards Women Outside their Belief System.
Hamdy and Nye (227)

to realize them or grassroots ones that use them as tools" (220). Hence understanding women's religious and sociocultural backgrounds is crucial to recognize their rights.

In Figure 15, the challenges faced by Muslim women are presented as general issues instead of religious or cultural stereotypes. Layla belongs to a low-income family whose father is a bawab (gatekeeper) and lives in the house of their masters; she has to face many challenges during her father's ailment. Going through the strenuous routine of medical practice, taking care of her diseased father, emotionally supporting her mother, and fulfilling all duties of her brother, who is busy in protests and working in the house of their masters to be a breadwinner, Layla bravely performed all these duties. These issues Layla faces are not linked with patriarchy and religious fundamentalism; instead, they showcase the economic struggle of a girl from a low-income family. In this regard, Reilly writes that cosmo-feminism aims at engaging ". . . with global political, legal, and economic arenas in the struggle to keep a focus on women's human rights issues at the macro level" (192). Abu-Lughod

Figure 15 The Challenges Faced by Muslim Women, Presented as General Issues Instead of Religious or Cultural Stereotypes, Hamdy and Nye (209)

links global inequalities with the social issues of Egypt. She writes, "Global inequalities that have their own colonial and contemporary histories have positioned places like Egypt in certain ways too, condemned to endemic poverty" (251). Interestingly, Hamdy herself remarks in an interview that her agenda behind creating this graphic novel was to highlight social issues like the global economy and unequal distribution of resources and healthcare facilities.

In Figure 15, the dialogues between the house owner lady and Layla show the binary between rich and poor. Besides knowing the calamity fallen on Layla and her family, the lady has no sympathy for them. She scolds Layla, saying, "If your family cannot do it, we'll have to find another bawab!" (Hamdu and Nye 209). It can be seen that Layla is worried because of the rude behavior of the house owner lady, but the last picture shows her rebellious attitude when she sticks her tongue out. The diversity in character (DC) code is present in this example as Layla is shown as a diverse and progressive woman. The authenticity in details (AD) code is prevalent in this example as the writers have depicted a realistic story of a Muslim woman challenged by financial issues.

It can be said that Hamdy and Nye are successful in the portrayal of cosmo-feministicic ideas in this novel. Furthermore, through this graphic novel, the writers have touched on a very delicate and complex topic of the friendly co-existence of Eastern and Western women. This topic has been displayed neutrally without any prejudice or bias. Hamdy's depictions are well-knitted and unbiased, besides being in a vulnerable position as a diasporic writer; the three constitutive moments explained in the light of Reilly's conceptualization of cosmo-feminism also align with the portrayal of Hamdy and Nye. Firstly, this graphic novel provides a global feminist consciousness that has challenged capitalist agendas. Secondly, it has promoted cross-cultural dialogue and harmony among women. Thirdly, the novel has offered authentic advocacy to address concrete issues women face. All these three progressive aims of cosmo-feminism are embedded in the selected graphic novel.

As "visibility politics have been influential in recruitment and solidarity for women's movements, as well as in shaping larger cultural change" (McCammon, Holly J., et al., eds 378), the politics of visibility in the novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* also promotes the solidarity for

women's movements. Furthermore, this novel is also an effort to promote diversity and inclusion between women of different cultures; hence, it deals with a global perspective of gender issues. The visibility strategy in this novel concentrates on celebrating the traditional choices of Muslim women and promoting the idea of harmony among women of East and West. This novel presents a very modern yet traditional image of an educated Egyptian girl who is aware of her rights and follows her religious and cultural traditions. In short, the visibility politics of postcolonial gender concerns in this novel showcase the strong yet traditional Muslim women character in front of the global audience.

It is essential to mention that the researcher has used the term authentic by intensely analysing the works under discussion. Muslim women's historical, cultural, and socio-political situations are read and related to understanding the authenticity of representations. As I read and analysed the selected graphic novels, I investigated the questions of cultural authenticity in relation to authors as insiders and outsiders of the cultures and the significance of the authors' authority in producing a narrative. While writing this thesis, I came up with a preliminary working definition of the term "authenticity" in graphic literature that reads as follows: claims that cultural authenticity is a complicated concept to define. Still, it could be seen as a literary work that "resonates with values and beliefs of certain cultural groups and specific projects the diversity within them" (Raina 41), giving voice to many rather than just a negative few.

The comparison between the selected three graphic novels, under the lens of the cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate, clarifies the analysis before heading toward a conclusion. The similarities in the works under discussion are that all three selected graphic novels have female Muslim protagonists, encompass postcolonial themes, and advocate cosmo-feministicic ideas. The line of demarcation draws when writers from different backgrounds associate their own beliefs and bias in their works. Firstly, Marjane Satrapi, the writer of *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, has spoken against her culture. Here it is important to note that writing against one's own culture does not necessarily means that the feminist portrayal by Satrapi and invalid, as Abu-Lughod writes that women's rights are a very complex subject that should be understood in the backdrop of history and sociopolitical situation of women. In this case, Satrapi's experiences made her rebel against her culture. The forces of un-

veiling and re-veiling imposed by Iranian authorities on women reduced Iranian women to mere objects. Satrapi does not support this objectification of women and protests against such practices. It can be said that Satrapi's work globally created a negative image of Muslim women in Iran. But her representation is not devoid of facts. Even in recent times, the incident of Mahsa Amini shows that Satrapi was ahead of her time when she protested against the theocratic state of Iran. It can be said that Satrapi's work is a cosmo-feministicic effort to celebrate the diversity in Muslim women's rights discourses. Secondly, the writer of *Habibi,* Craig Thompson, a white American, incorporates feminism-lite agendas in his graphic novel. He is advocating Muslim women's rights, but in doing so, he somehow sexualizes the Orient subject. Dux and Simic have explained that the issue of the "image problem" (6) is very evident and transparent in feminist studies.

Hence in the light of present research, if the writers are creating inappropriate images of Muslim women, their feminism can merely be called "Feminism of convenience" (23). Thirdly, the graphic novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* by Coleman Nye and Sherine Hamdy contains a realistic portrayal of Cosmo-feminism concepts that can pave the way for improving the harmony between East and West. This novel perfectly promotes the real meaning of feminism as Dux and Simic refer that real feminism is ". . . more accessible, more diverse, more plural and more fun (8). The comparison between the three selected graphic novels makes the difference between real and fake feminism more clear and more critical. In the modern world, Muslim women's rights have become very complex, and progressive and right-winger feminists should join together to understand the diverse needs of Muslim women. Abu-Lughod writes, "The line between progressives and right-wingers has blurred in this shared concern for Muslim women" (7). Here it is important to note that all Muslim women have the same rights demands. The example of Satrapi shows that Muslim women's rights should not be dealt with as a monolith.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The present study is an effort to elaborate on the postcolonial visibility politics involved in the selected graphic texts under the debate of cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite. The process of analysing a graphic novel is itself complex, as these artistic works ". . . depict the absence through the ineffabilities of the gutter' (Viljoen 17), which equally paves the way in the process of meaning construction as the present themes do. The qualitative content analysis, background and biographical analysis of the works, comparison, and contrasts between the selected graphic novels, and detailed explanation of the hybrid texts have clarified the explicit postcolonial schemas and concealed agendas behind illustrations of Muslim women in the selected works. To represent the complexity in the representation of Muslim women characters in graphic literature, the researcher has selected the three graphic novels: *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2003)* by Marjane Satrapi, *Habibi (2011)* by Craig Thompson, and *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution (2017) by* Coleman Nye and Sherine Hamdy. Thompson represents the damsel in distress image of a Muslim woman who is nothing more than a sexual object. He advocates Muslim women's rights through his work, but his representation reflects the occidental mindset. Satrapi, a diasporic writer, displays the image of Muslim women with the knowledge of her own experiences. Satrapi's representation shows her culture in a bad light, but her experiences justify her portrayal. By protesting against her culture, she has demonstrated the diversity in rights claims of Muslim women. It can be said that Satrapi adheres to cosmo-feminism agendas in her work. Hamdy and Nye have made a very keen effort to display the character of a Muslim woman who is neither oppressed nor a sexual object. This depiction explains the possibility of presenting Muslim women's image without attaching redundant stereotypes.

Furthermore, the study's finding elaborates on the authenticity of the thesis statement and resolution of the research questions. This research aims to find the postcolonial undercurrents prevalent in the deceptively ingenuous depictions of Muslim women in graphic literature.

7.1 Findings of the Study

The first and foremost understanding developed from this research is the level of politics involved in graphic novels. The selected graphic novels enclose the themes which promote postcolonial visibility politics in literature. Santesso and James explain these graphic politics by elaborating on the stigmatization of Muslim characters in graphic novels. They state that the "... hybrid combination of mutually corrupting exigency and volitional design" (44) of the graphic novels enclosing Muslim characters makes this literature highly political. The other detailed outcomes of the study are explained through the endorsement of the thesis statement and the elucidation of the research questions.

7.1.1 Endorsement of the Thesis Statement

The endorsement of the thesis statement has been made through the qualitative content analysis of the selected graphic novels. The codes and categories adapted for the content analysis made a reliable criterion for analysing and interpreting the selected works. Through the analysis, the researcher has underlined the political and religious schemas in portraying Muslim women in selected Western graphic novels. Furthermore, the analysis also links postcolonialism and feminism, showing that the advocacy of Muslim women's rights in Western literature may incorporate postcolonial gender concerns. It is also noted that Western and Eastern writers are equally involved in forming visibility politics through their works. On the broader level, the writers are advocating the supreme cosmo-feminism agendas, but the analysis illustrates that implicitly these writers may also promote feminism-lite representations. The flawed feminist portrayal by the writers through the stereotypical representation of Muslim women is accentuated through the analysis.

7.1.2 Elucidation of the Research Questions

The three research questions developed for this research are elucidated in this section. Firstly, discussing the first question, which encompasses the inclusion of postcolonial gender rudiments in the selected graphic novels, it can be said that the selected works' themes, characterization, illustrations, and dialogues make it explicit that the postcolonial gender concerns are widely prevalent in the literature chosen. The panoramic view of the postcolonial themes in the selected hybrid texts clarifies that the most prominent shared themes in the selected works are: Muslim women are

the protagonists, the binary of East vs. West is created, problems faced by Muslim women are addressed, gender perspectives of Muslim women are mainly highlighted in the illustrations and the inside/outside perspective of the writers directly involves in the construction of visibility politics. All these conditions make it explicit that postcolonial gender concerns are inevitable in the selected graphic novels. Furthermore, it can be said that the prevalent postcolonial gender concerns in the selected novels bring forth the politics of visibility.

Secondly, addressing the second research question regarding the authenticity of Western writers in displaying Muslim women, it can be said that Habibi Thompson's representation is somehow propelled by the presence of Muslim women's exotic (mis)representation leading to the phenomenon of sexualizing the Orient. Thompson highlights the sequence of oppressions endured by an Arab Muslim woman, but in doing so, he victimizes his protagonist by treating her as a sexual object. Thompson, a male-white-American writer, is in a slippery position and disposed to such a predisposition. The graphic novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* is co-authored by an American writer, Coleman Nye. In the case of this work, the researcher did not find any feminism-lite ideas. Whereas, Thompson's work falls under the category of "victim feminism" (Dux and Simic 10). Instead of highlighting the grand ideas of feminism, he has restricted his representation to victimization and stereotyping of Muslim women. Hence, Thompson has displayed feminism-lite ideas through his work, while Nye has promoted cosmo-feminism agendas.

Thirdly, the analysis of Muslim diasporic writers is also essential. Marjane Satrapi, the writer of *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood,* is a French-Iranian writer who has depicted her life experiences during the 1970s Iranian Islamic revolution through her work. The researcher finds her representation unbiased as she has shown the social problems faced by Iranian women in the 1970s. The graphic novel *Lissa: A Story about Medical Promise, Friendship, and Revolution* is also co-authored by a diasporic writer Sherine Hamdy. Hamdy is an Egyptian-American writer who has portrayed the life of an Egyptian girl during the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Hence it can be said that both these works showcase cosmo-feminism ideas.

The analysis of the selected works under the cosmo-feminism vs. feminism-lite debate explicates that Thompson has sexualized the Orient subject under the guise of cosmo-feminism. It expounds that the feminist portrayal of the writer is flawed and hence can be put into the category of Feminism-lite. In this regard, Dux and Simic have rightly pointed out that "Anyone can use feminism to support any position at all (22)". On the other hand, Satrapi, Nye, and Hamdy have presented the true essence of cosmo-feminism through their novels. Hence, one of the three selected graphic novels can be categorized as comprising Feminism-lite themes, while two novels are found to portray cosmo-feminism ideas realistically.

7.2 Recommendations for Future Studies

The study's limitations do not cover all the possible arenas of this research; hence the researcher provides some recommendations for future studies which could be fruitful for novice researchers in graphic literature. Firstly, it is noted that all the selected graphic novels overtly depend on history in one way or the other. In this scenario, the theory of critical historiography can also be used as a lens to analyse these texts. Furthermore, the blend of critical historiography with postcolonial theory is ideal for understanding the connection between history and colonialism as depicted in graphic literature.

Secondly, as representational politics is the most significant element in hybrid texts, neo-orientalism can also be discovered in these works. The concept of neo-orientalism is contemporary and relevant to the themes of the selected graphic novels. This concept can pave the way for understanding the role of contemporary literature in depicting Islamophobic rendering.

Thirdly, the researcher finds the need to elaborate the comparison between cosmo-feminism and feminism-Lite further. The researcher develops this comparison to underline the reasons behind the pro-feminism ideas of writers. This debate is novel and needs more research in literary theory. In the contemporary age of meaninglessness, it is important to draw the line of demarcation between faux and original theories; otherwise, the trend of meaninglessness and blurred boundaries will make it difficult to understand the problematic representations in literature.

Lastly, the theory of cultural pluralism can also be addressed to understand the selected texts. In the present age, every individual and every society holds specific

ideologies. For instance, the recent chaos in Iran after the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of the morality police has created a rage in the Iranian public. The veil debate has created a split between East and West and between modern and traditional Eastern individuals. It questions the credibility of culture in general and cultural pluralism in specific. Another example relevant to this debate is the outrage of Palestinians on creating the character of Sabra by Marvel Comics. Sabra is an Israeli superhero who rescues Palestinian kids amid war. This blurring of the boundary between the oppressor and the savior is bizarre and needs proper research to understand this new comic character by Marvel.

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