POSTFEMINIST AND ISLAMIC FEMINIST DISCOURSE: AN ANALYSIS OF DISCURSIVE PRACTICES OF MUSLIM FEMINISTS

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ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: Postfeminist and Islamic Feminist Discourse: An Analysis of Discursive Practices of Muslim Feminists

New feminist initiatives with indigenous instruments to combat challenges faced by women are emerging from different geographical locations to suit their local socio-cultural environment. One such instance is Islamic feminism where Muslim women are reclaiming their rights through Islam and Quran and in effect liberating Islam and Muslim women from patriarchy. Postfeminism like other non-essentialist movements is an amorphous phenomenon; there is no fixed definition of it. Postfeminist agenda revolves around challenging victimization, favouring autonomy and inculcating responsibility. Based on liberal humanism, it is very adaptive concept that accommodates myriad versions of women's movements. This study is postfeminist framing of Muslim women's fiction, specifically, women from Pakistan and Arab world. The objective of the study is to investigate discursive patterns that emerge from creative constructions of Muslim women as protagonists in Chick-lit. It proposes the concept Islamic postfeminism, which is a merger of secular and religious sensibilities without betraying any of the respective traditions. Owing to complex web of affiliations and influences, Islamic postfeminism is a nexus of Islamic feminism, post-colonial feminism and post-structuralist feminism. In addition to theoretically situating this merger, this study examines the ways that re-orient Muslim womanhood as it appears in contemporary anglophone writings of young Muslim women, hence recontextualizing postfeminism in Muslim contexts. There is no single, homogeneous, explicitly traceable Islamic feminism or postfeminism in literary discourse of Muslim women. Rather we observe a fluid, free-spirited, juvenile, version of postfeminism that is simultaneously bold and impressive in its manifestations. These postfeminist Muslim writers are shedding the burdens of affiliations and expectations of Muslimness and are producing characters that do not necessarily wish to foreground their religious self as a form of identity. They are living their lives to the full, without being fearful of being tagged as good or bad Muslim. This contemporary phase in feminism marks generational difference and evolutionary nature of the concept.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BFTA	Beautiful From This Angle
GOR	Girls of Riyadh
KYAKM	Karachi you're Killing Me
NSC	No Sex in The City

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To all the friends outside Pakistan, experiences and memories that work as a refuge in this arduous journey of life.

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DEDICATION

To my Resilient Single Mother Kulsoom Akhtar and myself

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter provides the contextual ground for the current study to facilitate readers by briefly detailing the key domains including: postfeminist Islamic discourse, literary discourse analysis, and Islamic feminism. Furthermore, the problem statements, delimitation, and significance of the study are given to set out the thematic and methodological foci for the present thesis.

In the Western social contexts, the feminist movement roughly over the last two centuries has tremendously impacted women's struggle for their rights. In spite of the various vicissitudes, the feminist movement has come a long way, since the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects (1796)* by the 18th-century British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Feminism has gained a lot of attention, probably more than any other social movement, and drew controversies too. However, at the same time, it has achieved significant success on the political, social, and legal fronts for women. Whether it was winning the place in universal suffrage or having the right to own property, feminism as a socio-political movement has created quite a stir in the male-streamed world, especially in the European and American contexts. Having said that, it is also no secret that the negative impacts and consequences of this highly charged movement have contributed in the disturbed family lives, alarming divorce rate, single parenting, and a general waning of social-ethical responsibility. Therefore, a strong reaction and intellectual response to the feminist ethos and ideals is visible in the contemporary Western academia and socio-cultural spaces. This contemporary form of feminism is termed as postfeminism.

Along with postfeminism, what is dubbed as Islamic Feminism has also been making a strong social statement. This intellectual departure is mainly calibrated on two lines: firstly, the ideas and ideals of Western feminism are not representative of Muslim women's concerns; secondly, that Muslim women have their rights bestowed to them by Islam, but denied by the patriarchal structures in the Muslim societies. Muslim women since nineteen-nineties, more systematically, are producing indigenous feminist scholarship that is more relatable to women living under Islam. *Ijtihad* is a key element of this revisionary scholarship that forms the basis of progressive Islamic gender theory and practices. Islamic

feminists are claiming their rights to produce religious knowledges arguing that lack of female presence in religious domains has resulted in persistence of patriarchy in Muslim majority states. Some Muslim female scholars of Islam working on presenting gender egalitarian face of Islam do not want them to be tagged as Islamic feminists, since they situate their efforts of working for the cause of women under the category of Islam, taking Islam for granted as gender-just belief system. Some non-Muslim scholars and experts of Islam are also advancing the discourse on Islamic feminism from non-faith position relying on Islam as a source of constructing their episteme. The ones, regardless of gender, who believe in Islam as a faith position in advocating Muslim women's rights are called Muslim feminists, whereas those who consider Islam as a source of knowledge for the same are knowns as Islamic feminists.

The discourses on Islamic feminism and postfeminism formally, using the specific nomenclatures, emerged in early nineteen-nineties. Both these worldviews have their roots in anti-foundationalist ontology that discourages essentialist categorisation and promotes diversity and appreciation of differences. Literary realisation of postfeminist motives in fiction is coupled with chick-lit. Chick-lit is literature produced by women that denounces traditional feminist notions and celebrates femininity. Such literature aligns with postfeminist notions of body, sexuality, individuality and choice. Chick-lit is considered as representative of young women's concerns. The plots usually centre on love lives of single women, hunt for men, struggles of professional life, consumerism and cosmopolitanism. Primarily a Western tradition, the chick-lit has now become a transnational genre based on a shared structure and motivations. However, non-White, ethnic chick-lit is enriching chick-culture by incorporating local sensibilities without compromising on chick-tradition. Muslim-chick-lit in this regard provides a fertile site for analysis. Muslim women, conveniently, conceived as submissive sex slaves, are complicating the conceptions about them through production of chick-lit. In such literature, we come across women who have complete autonomy over their sexuality, sex life, love, intimacy and marriage. Interestingly, despite enjoying this elaborated freedom, they do not betray their religious affiliations or cultural bindings. Hence, there is merger of religious and secular, creating and promoting hope, independence and resistance.

The section below gives a brief overview of the concepts of Postfeminism, Islamic feminism, and Chick-lit before they are dealt with in more detail in the coming chapters.

1.1   Brief Review of the Key Concepts

According to Ann Brooks (2003), feminism has moved away from its foundations in the liberal humanist models of Western Enlightenment since the period of the second wave and now the challenges of subaltern discourses have forced it to redefine itself and to become more responsive to a range of political and ethical challenges. In this 'postfeminist' age, the term feminism and the associated ideas are no longer clearly defined. Looking at feminist movements, feminist texts and feminist ideals promoted at different times and places, it appears that there is no unanimous definition or agreement on feminist agenda. Postfeminism to Alice (1995) is an expression of a stage in the constant evolutionary movement of feminism, once seen as 'anti-feminist', the term is now understood as a useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism. Postfeminism represents feminism's maturity into a confident body of theory and politics, representing pluralism. It facilitates a broad-based, pluralistic conception of the application of feminism, and addresses the demands of marginalised, diasporic and colonised cultures for a non-hegemonic feminism capable of giving voice to local, indigenous and postcolonial feminisms. Instead of writing off post-modernism as an exercise in fragmentation and relativity, it can be viewed as an expansion of choice and way of broadening of feminist horizons.

Postfeminism is maturity of feminism into a body of knowledge where it is appreciative of diversity within feminist circles, one, and a feminist facet that is more relatable for modern, urban women of today, the other. Postfeminism is not 'post'-ing of feminism where feminism might be perceived as a concern of past cancelling out all the feminist success accomplished throughout these years by women in different parts of the world who are connected through the spirit of global sisterhood. 'Post' is not synonymous with 'end' or 'after'; it is an admission of feminism in to a non-essentialist realization of the concept, like post-colonialism or post-modernism. This contemporary, non-essentialist, pluralistic, inclusive version of feminism is a multifarious concept that draws upon and inspires academic/theoretical deliberations, media representations, women's activist movements, and popular culture. Postfeminism to some (Modleski, 1991; Whelehan, 2000 among others) is a reconnection of women to pre-feminist stage, where they are concerned about domestic affairs, no less than their professional commitments and familial affairs. According to Susan Faludi it is a 'backlash' of feminism in a sense of antifeminism; the

women who had won their way to political, economic, and social equality of genders, now wanted to rejoice their beauty and bodily freedom. It is a movement in which young girls are at the forefront and they provide a cheerful, ironic and subtle critique of feminism without engaging in heavy theoretical duels; media-inspired realities have become real than the real ones (Faludi, 1991). They do not hate men, but hunt them; they want to get married and have children. They do not burn bras, but exhibit them, considering it an expression of their wholesome self-determination. Bodily self-expression and celebration of female beauty, in all its forms, is a postfeminist concern.

Islamic Feminism can be placed in the third wave of feminisms together with Black, Latin, indigenous feminisms and any other that comes from the awareness of belonging to a particular identity (Ahmed, 1993). One of the Islamic feminist agenda is to debunk the stereotypes about Muslim women who are always seen as passive and subjected. Islamic feminism is also a coordinated set of ideas as well a practical plan of action, rooted in women's critical awareness of how a culture controlled in meaning and action by patriarchy, oppresses women and dehumanizes men (Ahmad, 2002). Islamic feminism is a reform movement that works for the inclusion of Muslim women in all areas of social life, to end myths and misunderstanding about Islam. Islamic feminists believe that the current interpretations of Quran have been twisted for maintenance of patriarchy. They are of the view that most of the interpretation we listen from muftis, sheikhs and mullahs do not follow an unbiased hermeneutical work, but are an un-pleasant attempt to legitimize male opinions in the name of religion. Gender activism intolerant to all inequalities in Muslim societies eventually came to be known as Islamic feminism. Scholar-activist women who had defined themselves in overtly religious terms and produced Islamic feminist discourse were at the forefront to make the voice of Islamic feminism heard as a separate entity. Fatema Mernissi's, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam (1991);* and, *Women and Islam: A Historical and Theological Inquiry (1993)* and are considered as defining texts in this regard. Amina Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective (1991)* is marked as the beginning of female exegeses of Quran. Through her hermeneutic work, Wadud advanced a Qur'anic theory of gender equality across the public/private spectrum, followed up by another seminal work *Qur'an and Woman (1999).* Asma Barlas a Pakistani-American carried the tradition forward in *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an (2002).*

The early theorists of Islamic feminism have been criticized for their apologetic tendencies in providing alternative explanations of the parts of religious texts that were favouring patriarchy. In the middle of the first decade of twenty-first century, some producers of Islamic feministic discourse moved away from foundationalism into a 'post-foundationalist Islamic gender critique' (Rhouni, 2010). Amina Wadud in her second book, *Inside the Gender Jihad (2006)*, explicitly announces that she is moving beyond her earlier apologetics. She stresses the importance of seeing the Quran, not as a fixed text, but 'as an utterance or text *in process'*. Saying 'no' to what is no longer acceptable does not mean rejecting the Quran, but celebrating it by enacting the scripture's higher principles. According to Wadud, in conceptualization of feminist thought in Islam historical context of message is vital. *Asbab al-nuzul* are significant in meaning making process of Islamic texts, for example, the debate relating to issues of slaves is not relevant to modern day dynamics of society. Quranic scholar Fazlurrehman uses the term 'ration legis' that implies following the essence. Quranic commands are like conditional clauses, and the nature of conditions is linked with various social and historical variables (Rehman, 1980). For example, according to Fatima Mernissi, in Quran the order of veil was according to those socio-historical conditions (Mernissi, 1993).

Islamic feminism though values Islamic sources for inspiration; however, it is a mix of secular ideology and new social sciences tools as a method. In its activist goals Islamic feminism and Muslim secular feminism, have same agenda. Muslim women's oppression is twofold, one at the hand of patriarchy and second through feminist seclusion in global cause where they remain unheard. In a segment of Western conceptualisation, Islam and feminism cannot coexist and Islamic feminism is an oxymoron. At the same time, there are pockets in Muslim societies who consider Islamic feminism a liberalist invention that has no place in Islam. It is not Muslim women only channelizing feminist motives through religion; other major religions of the world have done so too, but predominantly Western feminism has been secular and the role of religion in Western societies has been not as domineering as in Muslim societies (Badran, 2009). Women scholars of Islam primarily promulgate their argument by presenting re-interpretations of Islamic sources of knowledge that yet were viewed only through male lens. They are revisiting these sources and deconstructing them objectively along with highlighting the instances of gender equity and female dignity in Islam (Badran, 2009).

The third key aspect of this study is postfeminist chick literature. The characteristics that such literature exhibits include: humour, urban heroine, love, marriage, dating, relationships, drugs, party, sex, beauty, and rebellious attitude to break conventions. With the growing use of technology, association with literature is getting weaker; this reading void is filled by chick-lit that has gauged a great commercial success throughout the world. According to Imelda Whelehan (2005) chick-lit taps into tensions, contradictions, and realities of young women's lives that till very recent remained unattended. The genre not only gives us an insight into how women of today, think, live and express their identity, but it also works as a parameter of how their life pattern have evolved, how this change redefines gender roles and identities in our societies. They are like self-help books that assist women to shuffle between traditionalism and post-modernity. These works have the potential to train them to cope with urban lifestyle and combat patriarchy courageously. Burcu Baykan is of the view that chick-lit fiction works are 'functional' texts as they address and negotiate the challenges and conflicts faced by women in their daily lives (2015). "[C]hick lit plays with narrative viewpoints, slang or domestic language, renditions of urban life and customs that are not only colourful, but are particularly insightful into the 'zeitgeist' of nations undergoing rapid transformation amidst the pressure of globalization" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 226).

Often, in literary circles, chick-lit fiction is mistakenly regarded as having lesser or no symbolic significance. But "if we give a closer look these are not only the girl-meet-guy kind of stuff; rather the novels deal with many important social and emotional issues like gender discrimination, corporate culture, matrimony and relationships, and describe the transition youth is going through" (Oberoi, 2017, p. 131). Chick-lit is unjustly criticized as self-marketed, short-lived, funny fiction with no serious food for thought. According to Ferriss and Young, the deprecation of chick-lit is largely owing to its association with females, as producers and readers; this feminization of the genre is resulting into scepticism and doubts (2006). Chick-lit is even tagged as stories of bad women, who are not worth deeming as role models. Ferris and Young in another study point out the negativities associated with chick-lit are due to the prefix 'chick' that gives it 'girlish infantilization'. Formulaic construction of this genre is also subjected to criticism, but that objection can be dismissed since structural adherence is essential to establish it further as a recognizable genre (Ferriss & Young, 2008).

Caroline J. Smith (2008) traces the history of chick-lit back to female centred novels of Charoltte Bronte and Jane Austen. In contemporary tradition, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary (1998)* marks the beginning of chick-lit tradition. Non-Western chick-lit from Arab world, India and Pakistan is adding new tinge to this genre. With local sensibilities and religio-cultural experiences that shape their realities in these parts of the world, women are diversifying chick-lit tradition. Ferris and Yonug (2006) also acknowledge the need of coming out of 'Bridget Jones clone' as a prototype for all constructions and readings of chick-lit works. Some of these variations/sub-genres include: 'mum-lit', 'work-lit', 'sistah-lit' along with socio-economic, ethnic, religious zests—globally. The discourses on marriage, sex, feminism, and social life have evolved a great deal. There is continuous enrichment taking place in portrayals of young women and how this genre is to be viewed and valued.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The **objective of the study** is to explore the importance of celebrating difference and diversity within feminism that is one of the primary thesis of postfeminism, focusing on experiences of Muslim women, and living in a wide variety of social and political contexts. This project started with the aim to look into both theoretical and creative discourses on Islamic feminism, and accordingly study the works embodying it. However, with the gradual understanding of contemporary debates, based on readings in the field, and an effort to situate the Islamic feminism in the postfeminist theoretical framework, the emphasis shifted to what now I call 'Islamic Postfeminism'. Islamic postfeminism, simply put, is a merger of secular and religious with postfeminist sensibilities without betraying any of the respective traditions. Owing to a complex web of affiliations and influences, Islamic postfeminism is a nexus of Islamic feminism, post-colonial feminism and post-structuralist feminism. This multilayered complexity begins with Muslim feminism's bifurcation into secular and religious feminisms. Secular stream adheres to Western notions of gender equality and female liberty whereas religious group proposes indigenous, religiously invoked version of female freedom. The concept of Islamic postfeminism, I suggest, challenges the notions that frame Muslim women as unhappy voiceless victims of patriarchy in Muslim socites. In addition to theortically situating this merger, this study aims at examining the ways that re-orient Muslim womanhood as it appears in contemporary anglophone writings of young Muslim women, hence recontextualizing postfeminism in Muslim contexts. It adumbrates how contemporary Muslim female fictionists are

challenging the stereotypes of Islamic-femaleness through unconventional yet realistic, free and forward-looking portrayal of their female protagonists.

The following research questions are focused in this research:

1. What are the dynamics of Islamic feminist discourse and what hermeneutic paradigms are being used by Islamic feminists to voice their concerns?

2. What are the facets of contemporary postfeminist discourses?

3. What discourse patterns emerge from Muslim women's chick-lit fiction and how they function as alternative resistive discourse paradigms to bridge religious and secular divide in Muslim settings?

1.3 Method and Conceptual Framework

The interest in constructing, conveying, and interpreting meaning contained in words and around has a long tradition in different disciplines. Philosophers, anthropologists, psychologists, semiologists, linguists all have been venturing into the quest of meaning and processes involved, with an emphasis on one or the other aspect of it. Discourses be it written or spoken, literary or social, follow specific dynamics of production and realisation; accordingly, the frameworks devised for decoding them vary. Study of discourses, for this research, drawing upon Foucault's notion, is the study of functioning of gender structures, and ideology through deconstruction of discursive constructions. Michael Foucault (1972) views discourse as: 1) it creates the world by shaping perceptions of the world, pulling together chains of associations that produce a meaningful understanding, and then organising the way we behave towards the objects and people in the world. 2) Discourse generates knowledge and truth; knowledge/truth is not only communicated through language since certain discourses in certain situations have power to convince people, to accept statements as true, even the ones without any objective truth value of it. 3) Discourse says something about the people who speak it. By analysing a discourse, one can often tell things about the speaker's gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class position, and more specifically speaker has implied relationship to the other people around him too. 4) Discourse operates by being intimately involved with socially embedded networks of power, social, cultural, and even possibly political power (Foucault, 1972).

Foucault's notion of poststructuralism empowers researcher to construct his own truth and understand the value of objective subjectivity. Feminist realization of Foucault's

ideas about discourse is helpful in dealing with literary texts produced by Muslim women. Foucault did not give any explicit model of engaging with discourse; however, his notions of discourse encourage self-reflexivity in the process of research with an emphasis on plurality and multiplicity. According to Foucault, the truth is relative which is based on our social, cultural experiences. We as analysts can only give our viewpoint on how we interacted with a particular discourse. The categories of race, religion, sexuality etc. are essentialist descriptions. A researcher should be aware of his subjectivities, to be able to utilise them in research. As opposed to conventional view of author, in poststructuralist tradition, literary text embodies multiple realities of author's world, however these realities are subjective and may not be representative of truth, both producer and reader of text have their own subjectivities (Foucault, 1972). Following Foucault's poststructuralist notions, "[t]here is no *method* to discourse analysis in the way we traditionally think of an experimental method or content analysis method. What we have is broad theoretical framework concerning the nature of discourse and its role in social life, along with a set of suggestions about how discourse can best be studied and how others can be convinced findings are genuine" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 75)**. The particular form of discourse analysis that I present engages with discursive elements of Muslim women's literary discourse in contemporary postfeminist reality.** These discourses provide subject positions that constitute, reproduce or challenge existing gender norms and relations.

1.4 Delimitation

The study is delimited by selecting a sample of four fiction texts produced by Muslim women from three different geographical locations. *Karachi You're Killing Me[1] (2014)* by Saba Imtiaz*; Beautiful from This Angle[2] (2010)* by Maha Khan Phillips*; No Sex in the City[3] (2013)* by Randa Abdel-Fattah; *Girls of Riyadh[4] (2007)* by Rajaa Alsanea. The selection is made on keeping in view the overall topical bent, that is, portrayal of postfeministic trends in the texts. My selected literary discourse comprises of texts from Arab world (Saudi Arabia, GOR), Western diaspora (Australia, NSC) and Pakistani (KYAKM and BFTA) Muslim female fiction. A text coming from a certain cultural background becomes a bridge between that culture and rest of the world. It helps promoting understanding among people and societies. The study of lead ladies, and discursive elements from these texts,

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[1] KYAKM
[2] BFTA
[3] NSC
[4] GOR

would help understanding comparative postfeminist positioning of modern Muslim women living in different cultural backgrounds.

1.5 Significance

There is a tendency in academia and sociocultural discourses to oversimplify the category of Muslim women. Through this research, I set out to establish that the concept of feminism and category of Muslim women must be complicated and broadened in order to accommodate the contemporary realisations of both. The significance of this study is in creating and promoting alternative discourses of Muslim feminism that define their expressions of freedom without dislocating them. There is no denial of the value of Islamic feminism as representative of Muslim women at gender equality front and providing them breathing spaces. Although, apparently, Islamic feminists are using Western political framework, yet at the same time they are appropriating it by highlighting the role Islam plays in their identity. This study advances our understanding of how Muslim women use their suppression as an opportunity and motivation to come at the forefront and subvert the discourses that marginalise them. This new form of cultural critique emerging from margins is strengthening the feminist ideology further.

The selected literary discourse for this study, chick-lit, has come a long way from *Pride and Prejudice* to *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Despite the enormous production and consumption of chick-lit in last two decades, there is still a dearth of investigative, critical works available in the field. In this regard, Muslim chick-lit presents an interesting site to observe patterns of resistance, rebellion, self-determination, and constructing new gender identities in its subtleties. In this study, I tackle with discursive expressions of Muslim womanhood and their feminisms. In the process, an effort has been made to theoretically ground and substantiate the creative representations by relying on multiple tools and strategies available to study gendered literary discourses.

This research explores unique combination of Islam feminism and postfeminism. Postfeminism is a new area of academic investigation, as the review of literature for this study shows there is not much work done in this domain yet, and even lesser on framing of postfeminism along with Islamic feminism. Building on that, this thesis presents a unique nexus of two emerging domains, which has implications for bringing religious and secular together. Moreover, it presents an alternative buoyant, carefree image of Muslim women than painting them as stereotypical voiceless victims of patriarchy. I argue that all women

share the same essence of womanhood; only melting of ego from various social institutions is required to narrow down the differences and strengthen the feminist cause that would result into more pleasant and productive societies.

1.6 Chapters Division

Chapter 1 – Introduction: This chapter aims at providing contextual ground for the current study to facilitate readers by briefly detailing the key domains including: postfeminist Islamic discourse, literary discourse analysis, and Islamic feminism. Furthermore, the problem statements, delimitation, and significance of the study are given to set out the thematic and methodological foci for the present thesis.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review: This chapter comprehensively surveys, reviews, and critically engages with available literature in five major domains: history and development of feminism, Islamic feminist thought, Postfeminism turn in feminism, Postfeminist literary discourse, and Muslim women's fiction. It lays the basis of theoretical merger of Muslim feminism with postfeminism, which in turn orientates the coinage of 'Islamic Postfeminism'. There is also a detailed section on creative constructions of Muslim women by Pakistani and Arab women writers. Moreover, throughout this chapter, a concise summary of significant ideological strands has been visually presented in the form of figures and smart art to not only reflect on researcher's understanding of these ideas, but also to facilitate the readers.

Chapter 3 – Methodology: This chapter begins with shedding light on a whole host of traditions and debates in the domain of discourse analysis. It then addresses the pressing question of literature-linguistic divide in the field of English studies. The third emphasis of this section is feminist approaches to discourse analysis, where I discuss Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis. Furthermore, it provides a methodological review of academic studies in Pakistani and Arab literature. All these deliberations situate the methodological framework and method for the current study, which provides the closing of this chapter.

Chapter 4 – Analysis: This chapter traces discursivities of postfeminism in the works of Muslim feminists. Four selected texts include: *Beautiful from This Angle; Karachi you're Killing Me; No Sex in the City; Girls of Riyadh.* The analysis also elucidates the poetics of Pakistan and Arab chick literature. As an outcome of analysis and discussion in this section,

the researcher has made an effort to textually substantiate the concept of Islamic Postfeminism.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion: This chapter revisits the research questions posed at the very beginning of the research and the answers this study has come up with against each of the research questions. It then consolidates the argument by forming a nexus of theoretical underpinnings and postfeminist discourse analysis. Moreover, here I concede the limitations of this project, along with highlighting the future research possibilities.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Feminism: Tradition, Facets, and Genealogy

In order to understand the concept of Islamic feminism in postfeminist times, it is important to briefly study the genesis of feminism, the early history, and philosophical roots. According to Deana Goodman there are two ways of thinking about humans: there are ones who are inspired by Plato and say that both sexes complement each other. Second, the followers of Descartes, who do not believe in complementarity, they are of the view that human mind controls actions and emotions, body is not much significant in shaping individuals. Both believe that women are oppressed, but their perspectives vary regarding realisation of this oppression. Platonians argue that men oppressed women by ignoring their contributions in human development and by misusing their masculine power. Whereas, Cartesians relate female oppression to psychological oppressions (Goodman, 1998). Women's struggle to combat male-inflicted oppression is commonly known as feminism. According to Sarah Gamble (2006) feminism has been the most influential movement of twentieth century that affected and influenced a variety of social, political, economic and cultural domains. It is one of the most engaged cultural and philosophical construct. Feminism is fighting against the norms that demonize and discriminate women and associate all positive aspects with men only, be it social or cultural. Despite widespread engagement and popularity of feminism, many groups of women still do not associate themselves with feminism. According to Stephaine Hodgson, though manifestations of feminism have been very varied throughout the history, yet the spirit of all these efforts has been the same that is fighting patriarchy. Even if some of the earlier efforts were not explicitly termed as feminism they were feminist in spirit. Feminism formally organized itself in late nineteenth century to early twentieth century (Hodgson, 2006). According to Maryin Perry during Enlightenment period philosophers and critical thinkers were battling against all forms of authority on humanitarian grounds, and feminism turned out to be one of those concepts that negated power hierarchies among men and women (Perry, 2000). Collective **feminist concerns** of women in Enlightenment era were equality in public spheres, economic prosperity, marital independence, and better compensation for their

household duties. Their individual success in different countries varied depending upon local situations. Feminist ideology of nineteenth century Enlightenment, according to Karen Offen, can be divided in two streams. One, **'relational feminist'**, following Platonic view, highlighted the acknowledgment of significance of women as house makers and peace keepers, second, **'individualist feminist'** who advocated equality and female growth in multiple spheres of life without over emphasising women's role as mothers only (Offen, 2008). On the whole, **first wave** of feminism was primarily linked with the struggle of recognition of women as different from men and their rights in social, educational and economic fronts. In this movement white middle-class women were propagator and major beneficiaries. After Second World War, feminist movement in the Cartesian spirit challenged, radically, complete patriarchal make-up of societies than emphasizing on a few elements or aspects only. In nineteen-sixties, feminism entered in second wave with a radical turn where women wanted equality on all fronts (Threfall, 1996). According to Zeenath Kausar (2005), feminist facets of **second wave** included liberal, Marxist, existentialist, radical, psychoanalytical, gender/neo-Marxist versions of feminism. This was the period when feminist choice of appearance and conduct started to be negatively stereotyped. Another important development in second wave was difference of opinion and lack of accord in feminist voices. Women located in different geographical regions started presenting their own versions of feminism. This is marked as arrival of **third wave** of feminism. All those groups of women, who earlier were kept outside of mainstream discourses on women, now emerged at forefront to claim their visibility—black, Muslim, lower class, LGBTQI etc. Feminism in third wave has no fixed agenda but a multitude of expressions of freedom (Kausar Z. , 2005).

In the sections below the development of feminist thought is dealt in some detail from historical perspective.

2.2 Early Feminism

Stephaine Hodgson (2006) provides a detailed account of Early Feminism. In Early Modern period, between fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, no systematized legal or political success of women was witnessed, however there were individual instances of accomplishment in arts and politics. Some paradigms of collective efforts included doing away with negative views about women, valuing support network for women and arguing that ideas of women inferiority are cultural rather than natural (Hodgson, 2006). Classical philosophy did not value women much and in medieval period, women faced mixed

situations of favourable circumstances and hostility. During Renaissance, under the influence of humanist philosophy, views about education of women changed positively. Education for women started to be deemed as productive, but the beneficiary of female education was supposed to be her family only, as women were not allowed to go out and interact with men. Till sixteenth century it was men who were giving their views on/about women. Women in married relationship were considered as subservient to men. They could not keep property in their name. A woman would bring dowry for her husband as a compensation for providing her food and shelter. Women legally could not claim their own children. In the middle of sixteenth century, ideas of treating them with respect and love started to be appreciated. Women writers started celebrating their mothers. Writers played a key role in later part of early modern period in developing communities of women. Women poets started glorifying their female friendships outside marriage—emotionally, intellectually and spiritually[5]. In the middle of seventeenth century, women preachers got some space in religious milieu too. Women writers started to highlight and take inspiration from strong women from classical mythology, history, religion and politics. Mary Ward in early seventeenth century created 'Institute of the blessed Virgin Mary' and its devotees played their role to provide free education to girls. Women by the end of seventeenth century started competing with men professionally, especially on literary front. Early modern period can be summed up as an era of social, cultural, and literary progress for women (Hodgson, 2006).

2.3   First Wave Feminism

According to Valerie Sanders (2006), Mary Wollestonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)* is considered as a pioneer text of French feminism or modern feminism. She addressed the problems faced by women of eighteenth century especially in the backdrop of French revolution. In the development of the concept of feminism, nineteenth century is linked with formation of the key concepts, emergence of influential figures, and the beginning of formal usage of term feminist and feminism. Wollstonecraft was the first one who addressed women issues from the perspective of a middle-class woman, especially of a mother. In her book, the concept of ideal woman is presented as a woman who can juggle between domesticity, femininity, and education. She was not radical in her approach; primarily her emphasis was on education and intellectual development of

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[5] to the extent that one could misperceive it as lesbian eroticism

women. To Wollestonecraft, female virtue was superior to elegance. She focused on education and manners than chalking out any extensive feminist agenda. In order to end gender-divide she asked for co-education in early schools. Education of women, to her, is a way towards economic independence and a real contribution towards social development, however, Wollestonecraft, at no point envisioned role of women in legislature. The notion of 'separate spheres' surfaced during the first wave suggesting men are for jobs outside home and women for work inside the four-walls of home. However, defying that, the volume of the working middle class women increased after industrial revolution, as women started to work in factories, along with familial responsibilities. According to Sander, the contrastive views of John Stuart Mill and John Ruskin about love and its nature are of a great significance in late nineteenth century. Ruskin says a woman is romance, whereas to Mill it is sexuality that is reality. Ironically, once again, it was two men debating about women and their feelings. Mill strongly opposed the idea of men's superiority based on their physical strength. He bashed legal traditions that favoured men in maintaining this inequality (Sanders, 2006).

Caroline Norton, an activist of first wave played her role along with Thomas Talfourd to get *Infant Custody Bill (1839)* approved. Before this bill, children could not be kept by mother in case of separation between husband and wife. Now, women could claim the custody of children under the age of seven, but still for that to happen they had to prove their moral character that they never indulged in adultery. The age restriction of children for custody was gradually raised up to sixteen years from seven years in twentieth century; in 1973, the children of any age were declared under the equal custody of both parents. The second front, Norton battled on was of married women's issues regarding financial status. Before she advocated for the rights of married women, any money made by women would be saved in the name of her husband; women could not own anything. She played her role in changing this, with the introduction of nearly eighteen laws dealing with different aspects of women's property and ownership of assets. Norton also played her part in *Matrimonial Cause Act (1857)* dealing with divorce issue. Prior to that, a man could leave her wife based on charges of adultery, but women needed a proof of incest or bigamy before filing a divorce case. By the end of nineteenth century additions were made to the reasons on which women could file divorce, such as domestic abuse. The decade of 1850s was very important in terms of feminist activism including social and legislative changes. A London based group 'Langham Place' encouraged women not to limit themselves to marriage and

motherhood only and develop a professional life. "We want work" became a collective slogan of women in the second half of nineteenth century. In America, Seneca Falls convention of (1848) is considered as a cornerstone of feminism. In terms of agenda, the issues of American and British feminism were nearly the same, just that the speed of reforms in American feminism was slow as compared to Britain. In US feminist progress varied geographically on most issues, e.g., right to vote was introduced in different times in different states of US. The professions that were closer to women's presumed role in domestic sphere, for example teaching, started to gain greater acceptability in public for them to be joined. Many institutes across England, including medical colleges, started to intake women candidates that resulted into trained female workforce. In addition to teachers and doctors, women also were given jobs in public offices in clerical positions. By the end of nineteenth century women successfully launched campaigns for "matrimonial law, property, ownership, child custody rights, work and educational opportunities, and government regulation of sexual morality" (Sanders, 2006, pp. 22-23). Ironically, some women groups themselves were against suffrage, it was not until 1918 that they could vote and that too was only for women over 30, which in 1928 was normalised for women of all ages. The harbingers of Victorian feminism of nineteenth century mainly were Caroline Norton, Florence Nightingale, Emily Davies, and Barbara Bodichon. Their efforts resulted into many social and political reforms. Men throughout this first wave supported women in achieving their goals. As a result, feminism by the end of nineteenth century had achieved the status of a significant socio-political ideology (Sanders, 2006, pp. 22-23).

2.4 Second Wave Feminism

Nineteen-seventies is marked with beginning of second of second wave of feminism. According to Sue Thornham (2006), the stance of second wave feminists was that personal institutes like marriage, child rearing, and sexual interactions are being used for political purposes, to maintain and manipulate power hierarchies. During second wave, Women's Liberation Movement emerged that based itself on civil rights, anti-war sentiments and student activism. *The Feminine Mystique,* by Betty Friedan is a key text in the foundation of second wave feminism (Friedan, 1965). In this book, she studied the dissatisfaction of US women on their role being capped to households only. Friedan also initiated National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 to tackle the issue of sex discrimination on liberal tradition of equal rights. In America in 1968 people protested beauty pageants and trashed all those items that were used in such competitions by women as to them sexualisation of

female body oppresses them. In United Kingdom, the second wave was more of in Marxist socialist tradition where women working in industries protested for equal wages as compared to United States' radical liberal tradition. They based their activism on quality of educational opportunities, equality of pay scales, 24 hours opening of nurseries, availability of free contraception and abortion rights for women. In UK too, as in US, feminists protested Miss World competition in London (Thornham, 2006).

The second wave feminists started to differ on the idea of unified feminist agenda and what women liberation means to them. They also questioned that why dominant groups in feminism did not leave room for equality within, that is representing and addressing women of all colours, races, religions and genders. In the decades of nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies Black women played a significant role in radical feminist movements, especially in highlighting sexism. The Black women were under double jeopardy as they were oppressed by their gender as well as their race. These women formed National Black Feminist Organisation and refused to join mainstream women's liberation movement until the time feminism becomes antiracist and ant-imperialist in its stance. Class was an important point of divergence in women's liberation movement of second wave, as women from working and lower middle classes did not associate themselves with feminism, objecting their invisibility in global feminist sisterhood. Another group that felt left out was homosexual women, like black women, they felt double jeopardy, one because of their gender and second because of their sexual orientation, which feminism did not address (Thornham, 2006).

Simone de Beauvoir's concept of cultural construction of women, in her book *Second Sex*, was significant in new theoretical development of feminism in nineteen-seventies. Beauvoir presents the co-contrastive nature of 'self' and 'other' and does not deny the subsistence of 'other' considering its value in strengthening 'self'. She says women are a product of society and civilization, but in our societies women have always been the other, strengthening men's self. Women have become what men wanted them to be, by internalizing men's discourses about them. Most of the analyses of this othering are reductionist in nature: biologists tap into physical ability of women; psychologists say it is an unconscious derive; to Marxist it is a matter of matter. Beauvoir suggests that men will have to give up on their sole position of self/subject for their socio-economic gains. In addition, it is on women to challenge their position as others to metamorphose themselves into subject from other (Beauvoir, 1988). Like French, Beauvoir, in US Friedan's ideas

shaped development of second wave ideology. Friedan believed in empowering women from within existing structures by changing cultural perceptions about femininity. Mass scale education and employment opportunities for women, to her, could solve many problems. She raised feminist consciousness by criticizing women for being responsible for their lower position in society. She researched upon her college classmates about their experiences of being housewives and named their dissatisfaction as 'feminist mystique'. To her, satisfaction of women lies in fulfilment of their femininity. Though the understanding of nature of that femininity is complex, yet women can get closer to it by giving up the desire to be like men. Her book *Feminist Mystique* is a representative of liberal feminist agenda where she thinks women need to work on their consciousness raising and come out of self-inflicted misery (Friedan, 1965).

Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics (1970)* asserts patriarchy is not an individual male dominance but a systematic oppression of women including racial, economic, colonial, political and cultural suppressions. Millet considered cultural and ideological factors as major elements resulting in patriarchy. To her pornography is a cultural equivalent of rape. Millet does not consider women complacent in facing patriarchal oppression; rather she thinks patriarchy is politically maintained in which women are designed to feel obliged to men because of their dependency on men (Millett, 1977). Like Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone in her book *The Dialectic of Sex (1970)* considers patriarchy the earliest form of oppression and discrimination that is politically maintained. In Firestone's radical feminist world, the introduction of reproductive technology would remove sexual differences and socio-cultural odds of familial bindings, marriage, motherhood and romance, but that requires a major revolt from women (Firestone, 1979). To radical feminists, change is only possible through revolution, whereas, liberal feminists believed that feminist objectives could be achieved through existing structures.

During nineteen-seventies in Britain, as opposed to radical or liberal feminism, socialist and psychoanalytical streams of feminism dominated. 1n 1966 Juliet Mitchell wrote an essay *'Women: the longest Revolution'* in which she criticized Marxists for ignoring women in their revolutionary ideas and ideals. Mitchell in another work in 1971 along with criticizing Marxists, found faults with radical and liberal feminists for not giving any materialistic analysis of women's oppression. She agreed with radical feminists on the point that oppression is ideological, since women's psychological determinism reflects in their personal practices. Mitchell denounced liberal feminists for over simplifying

patriarchy and ignoring its historical context. To her, addressing women's oppression and finding a way towards liberation requires dealing with 'production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization' (Mitchell, 1975). Following radical feminist tradition, Sheila Rowbotham in her book *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World (1973)* stimulated working class women to take control of their production (economic means) and reproduction (sexual being) (Rowbotham, 1973). Rowbotham, Millet and other second wave feminists relied on psychoanalysis to understand how sexual identities are acquired and maintained. However, they negated linking patriarchy with subconscious, as it would mean accepting hierarchy of genders based on biological differences.

According to Toril Moi, in her book *Sexual/Textual politics (1985)*, French also formed women liberation groups during second wave like American feminists. In France the first women's group, 'Liberation Movement, the French' was formed in 1968. French feminist relied on Lacan for understanding women's treatment as 'Others'[6], whereas, Americans followed Freudian psychoanalytical notions. In Lacan's understanding, infants learn culture through two processes: first, construction of individual identity through mirror images, second, by acquiring language/symbolic order. This second element, symbolic order (language) is patriarchal, where it gives higher value to masculine entities. Linking source and solution of women's oppression with language faced criticism, since following this view undermines socio-economic and political efforts and goals that feminism has been emphasizing throughout the years of struggle (Moi, 1985).

Rosi Braidotti reproves feminist theory of second wave as very deterministic and political (Braidotti, 1994). Laura Mulvey, similarly commented that second wave theoretical stances were more of political necessity than a real expression of female-will. Some of these notions were also very ambitious and far-flanged (Mulvey, 1989). From nineteen-seventies to the end of twentieth century, feminism has developed into a sound academic and theoretical concept; however, the differences within feminist realization have weakened its political and activist spirit that resultantly made second wave feminism dissolve in to postfeminism[7].

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[6] Also see Beauvoir's concept

[7] Postfeminism being the major forte of this thesis, it will be discussed in detail after Third Wave Feminism

2.5   Third Wave Feminism

Third wave originated concurrent to postfeminism in nineteen-eighties mostly because of contributions and critiques made by non-White feminists. According to Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake all different strands of feminist activism, theory, and realization are a part of 'third wave' feminist agenda. Third wave's inclusive approach makes it a movement of social justice and equality than merely a theory (Heywood & Drake, 1999). Bell Hooks is a significant name in developing third wave feminism. She contends that feminism needs to incorporate plurality of views and avoid assumptions and absolutism (Hooks, 1984). Third wave, as opposed to postfeminism, values theoretical constructs and considers itself a continuation of earlier feminist traditions. It addresses concerns of migrant communities and women on margins. Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, Helen Cixous are some important theorists of third wave. Third wave feminists solely focused on inclusivity and diversity, whereas postfeminism had other agendas too.

Germaine Greer is an influential name in developing third wave feminism (also a major contributor in second wave). In her 1999 book, *The Whole Woman,* she criticizes media led postfeminism of nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties by saying bodily over-self-expression[8] is an abuse of women at the hands of multinational corporations. What a group of women perceives as freedom, it may be an oppressive act to others. She viewed posfeminism just as an escape, not a solution. Speaking of feminist diversity, to her, a real feminist is equally concerned with the issues of women of all economic classes, religions and ethnic origins and challenges all hegemonic structures. She says postfeminism is a utopia, whereas feminism is still quite relevant, and its future is important for women. Yes, feminism should address the concerns of younger women but, postfeminism is a misrepresentation of them (Greer, 1999). Among non-Western feminist scholars, Chandra Mohantay has powerfully challenged the constructs that posit third world women and their experiences as a monolith. She considers it in line with totalitarian colonial hegemonic discourses that marginalize colonized subjects, in this case third world women (Mohanty, 1998). An influential critic Gayatri Spivak believes translation of ideas, feminism, beyond boundaries of its origin with exact sameness is not possible and should not be strived for, especially considering the complexities of language and rhetoric (Spivak, Outside in the Teaching Machine, 1993). The essence of third wave feminism is acknowledging

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[8] The standpoint of postfeminism

differences among women and in feminist thought, or for that matter gender and sex categories, to begin with. Fatima Seedat charges the third wave feminism with necessitating feminism for other/all women. Although, third wave feminism appreciates diversities in feminist cause, yet it views feminism as unavoidable necessity (Seedat, 2013).

2.6   Islamic Feminism: Understanding the Concept

"The accident of birth and our experiences shape our feminism and sometimes chain us" (Mir-Hosseni, 2011, p. 7)

Discourses on 'rights' knowingly or unknowingly are presenting Muslim women as victims of all forms of patriarchy, with no triumph or success stories to celebrate. So, we need to be wary of the fact, not to develop a colonial order in the name of humanitarian acts. New feminist initiatives with indigenous instruments to combat challenges faced by women are emerging from different geographical locations to suit their local socio-cultural environment. One such instance is Islamic feminism where Muslim women are reclaiming their rights through Islam and Quran and in effect liberating Islam and Muslim women from patriarchy. Mir-Hosseini defines feminism in two dimensions, one broadly as a movement against all discriminations against women, second on epistemological front that it is a knowledge project that focuses on legal perspectives and traditions to challenge patriarchy. Islamic feminism is at third place in hierarchy where it comes under postcolonial feminism that is a domain within feminism (illustrated in figure 3 below). Feminism broadly has two aspects, ideology and activism. On ideological front feminists, develop women friendly epistemology and scholarship, whereas feminist activists work towards utilizing and implementing the ideological agenda of feminism for the betterment of lives of women. One ideological variant of feminism is postcolonial feminism in which women of colour object their objectification in the name of feminist objectives and seek for just representation in global feminist movement. Postcolonial feminism gave rise to many indigenous versions of feminism, based on ethnic, geographical and religious variations of women. Islamic feminism in postcolonial tradition is an indigenous version of feminism that relies on Islam to achieve feminist agenda. Islamic feminists work towards religious reformation and make efforts to address the concerns of Muslim women that remained neglected under the umbrella concept of feminism (Mir-Hosseni, 2011).

Feminism	• Ideology • Activism
Postcolonial Feminism	• Decolonising feminist thought • Indigenous Agenda
Islamic Feminism	• Reforming religion • Focus on Islam and Muslim women
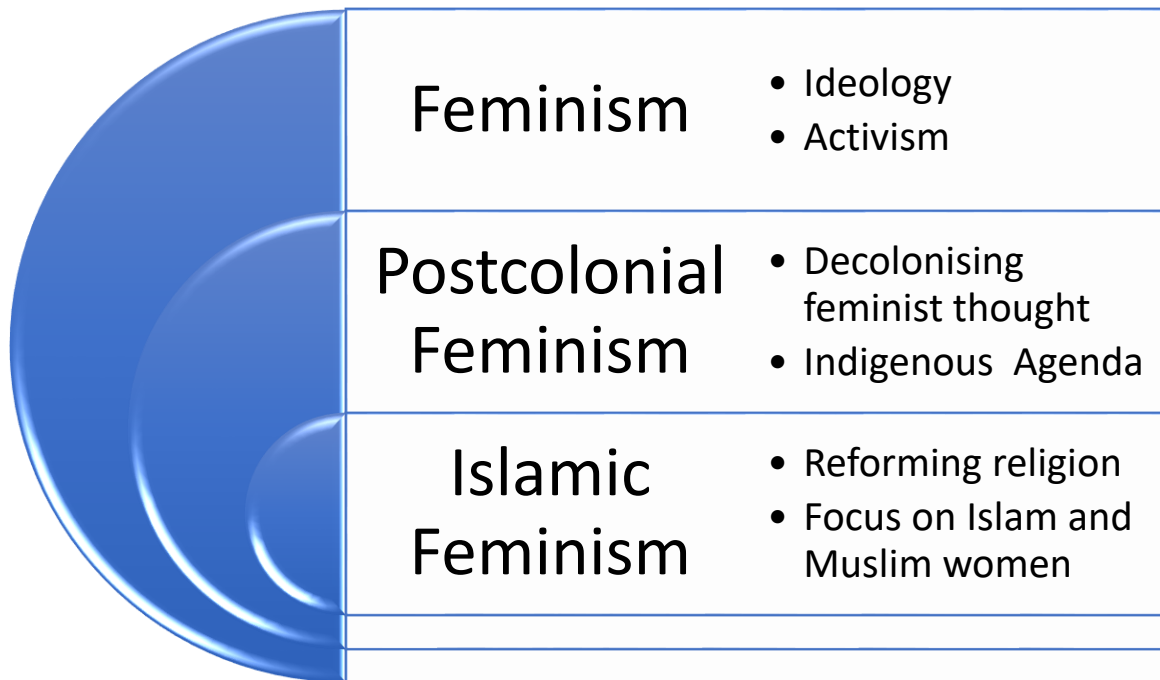
Figure 1: Feminism-Postcolonial Feminism-Islamic Feminism

The concept of Islamic feminism is highly fluid in terms of its formation, acceptance, and realization. Islamic feminism being transnational in nature; people have very varied associations with it, based on geographical, social and cultural variations. This diversity exists on multiple levels: diversity of Muslim women, diversity in Islam, diversity of manifestations of feminism and Islamic feminism in Muslim societies. The place of Islamic feminism in discourses on women is highly debated. There is hardly any consensus on definition of the concept. However, the primary agenda of Islamic feminism is to debunk patriarchal realizations of Islam and bettering the lives of Muslim women. We have scholarly contributions in developing Islamic feminist thought from women living in Muslim majorities, as well as from women in Muslim minority spaces, equally. The proponents of Islamic feminism are divided on the nomenclature of the concept. Some of the contributors of this ideology are not willing to be tagged as 'Islamic feminists' or for that matter, 'feminists'. "Islamic feminism is not a coherent identity, but rather a contingent, contextually determined strategic self-positioning. Actions, behaviours, pieces of writing that bridge religious and gender issues in order to create conditions in which justice and freedom may prevail do not translate into a seamless identity." (Cooke, 2001, p. 59). Islamic feminism is antiracist, non-discriminatory, timeless version of global feminism that seeks for human equality both in public and private spheres (Badran, 2009). According to Mariam Cooke: "Whenever Muslim women offer a critique of some aspects

of Islamic history or hermeneutics, and they do so with and/or on behalf of all Muslim women and their right to enjoy with men full participation in a just community, I call them Islamic feminists. This label is not rigid. It does not describe an identity, but rather an attitude and intention to seek justice and citizenship for Muslim women" (Cooke, 2001, p. 61). In brief, Islamic feminism is a discourse of Muslim women where they are countering the constructions that exclude them from social, cultural, political and literary front.

Scholars of Islamic feminism critique multiple aspects of Islamic epistemology of women. They are of the view that Quran is gender-just; it has been a victim of patriarchal interpretations. *Hadith,* in certain cases is deemed as a weak source of religious knowledge to rely upon especially since *asnad* of misogynist *hadiths* that are used by men to maintain their patriarchal supremacy, are not reliable. Islamic *shariah* has dominantly been male centred and consequently the *fiqh* derived out of it is patriarchal. Classical Islamic jurisprudence dates to ninth century, so consequently prevailing *fiqh* is representative of the time and culture of its revelation. Hence, Islamic modernists emphasize the need of *ijtihad* and gender inclusive religious interpretation to combat cultural patriarchy in the name of Islam. Islamic feminist discourse is a progressive realization of Islam that suggests a revisionary project based on contributions from *tafsir, Ijtihad,* linguistics, history, literary criticism, sociology, and anthropology. In *tafsir,* Islamic feminists suggest the role of female exegetes in interpreting Quran, since the revelations concerning women issues cannot be best explained by men. They also consider the role of *ijtihad* important to make Islamic teachings in synchronizing with contemporary sociocultural realities. Meaning making is a science that has developed a great deal, so taking Quran as text, reliance on linguistics and the tools it offers for analysis can make meanings making process more comprehensive. Out of the three religions that follow the book, Islam is the one that from the beginning is founded on the principles of gender equality, but unfortunately is viewed as patriarchal. Islamic feminism just makes the principles of gender equality in Islam accessible to masses; the structure is already there in Islam sources as discussed (Wadud, 1999; Badran, 2009).

See Appendix 1 for illustration of Islamic feminist discourse and critique based on multiple sources.

2.6.1 Progressive Islamic Thought

> Women lose much more than men as a result of the social conservatism that is everywhere a marker of fundamentalist movements. From Afghanistan to Algeria to Sudan, Pakistan and Iran—Indeed everywhere in Islamic societies—women are systematically brutalized and caught in a deadly crossfire between the secular and fundamentalist forces. (Moghissi, 1999, p. 2)

Tracing the history of Islamic progressive thought Raja Bahlul (2000) refers to Averroes[9] [1198] in rational realization of Islam who as a polymath brought theology and human sciences closer. Islam that dates backs to 8th century should be reinterpreted—no doubt with keeping the original spirit intact—to suit twenty first century realities. This viewpoint started to become mainstream in late nineteenth century with Islamic scholarly contributions from Western diasporas which is often termed as 'Arab Renaissance' (Bahlul, 2000). The notable scholars in Islamic progressive thought are Qasim Amin, Muhammad Abduh, and al-Taher al-Haddad. According to Barbra Stowasser, there are three crucial elements in understanding contemporary realisation of Islam i.e., *Ebadat, Muamlat*, and *Maslaha. Ebadat* are religious acts and obligation for which exact adherence to revelation is a compulsion. *Muamlat* are social affairs and anthropomorphic aspects that should be performed under the broader guidelines of Islam, however there is multiplicity of realisation in performance. *Maslaha* is shared interest, a working concept behind *ijtihad* and *fatwas* (Stowasser, 1994). For example, Muhammad Abduh's 1972 fatwa says ruler of time can ban polygamy[10] considering the familial problems being caused by it (Abduh, 1972). "The *Mu'tazilites*[11] advocated a 'rationalist' interpretation of Islam, which led them to believe in divine justice and freedom of the will, and to offer non-literal interpretation of anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'an" (Bahlul, 2000, p. 5). Islamic modernist /moderate voices amidst conformist/conservative/fundamentalist milieu are equally loud. Another such voice is Yousaf al-Qardawi, emphatically stressing on acknowledging female intellectual and creative fertility in his 1991 writings (al-Qardawi, 1991). Similarly, according to Bahlul (2000) Ghazali presents a liberal view on Muslim female dressing asking for shunning unnecessary hiding and self-imposed 'ghostly appearance' restrictions. He also shares Amin's thoughts on absolute permissibility of women working outside their

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[9] Ibn Rushd
[10] In Islam polygamy is allowed, a man can have four wives simultaneously
[11] Those who rely on reason in interpretation of religion

home and living as working women, which implies men played/are playing their role in reformist gender thought in Islam. Furthermore, he interestingly relates the origin of progressive-fundamentalist divide with *Mecci* and *Medani* geographical distinction, where traditionally *Meccans* have been more rigid and *Medani* more flexible and adaptive[12].

Feminists and *sufis* share the centrality of experience in their epistemology. Sad'diyya Shaikh presents thirteen-century *sufi* scholar Ibni Arabi as a precedent that there is nothing inherent in Islam that is patriarchal or misogynist. Ibn-i-Arabi has a special place in Islamic history due to his command on cosmology, his tradition of *sufism*, and above all his progressive views and practices about women and gender in Islam. Shaikh relates Ibn-i-Arabi has lived life to his mystic views and experiences. In thirteenth century, the way he radically relied upon and valued women in intellectual and spiritual pursuits is very uncommon and uncharacteristic of what people know of a Muslim male scholar. His treatment and dependency on women—his wives, sisters, daughter and female teachers—sets a quality example for feminists and pro-feminists of today in integration of gender equality beyond scholarly activism or personal/political objectives (Shaikh, 2013).

2.6.2   Islamic Feminism: Polemics on Nomenclature

Other than conceptual complexities, nomenclature has also been a major issue in Islamic feminism. Margot Badran and Asma Barlas are two key figures in developing the dialectics on nomenclature. In nineteen-nineties, in different parts of the world, both in Muslim majority and Muslim minority countries, the term Islamic feminism came in use by people belonging to a variety of professions. Young Muslims have taken up Islamic feminism as their identity and the term is expanding fast over the internet. But the women working on Quranic exegeses were not using 'Islamic feminism' as a label for their work. They would just call themselves theologians working in Islam tradition for female centred discourses (Badran, 2009). Muslim women either through religion or through socio-politics have been wanting and struggling to present their form of feminism, resolutely; a movement, an ideology, they could claim the ownership of. Naming is a key concern of Muslim feminist theorists. Using the term feminism, they claim, is ignoring the feminist past of Islam that goes back further than the coinage of the concept 'feminism'. The confusion that prevails around the nomenclature of Islamic feminism is a result of misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and mischiefs (Sanders, 2006, pp. 22-23).

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[12] See also Najdi-Hijazi division, a related concept

It appears from the studies, the scholars who are into hermeneutics they do not take the label 'Islamic feminism' and Muslims who are on applied activist stream of the concept use the label comfortably and own it. There are also some efforts made by Muslim women to come up with alternative expressions for intersection of Islam and feminism, for example, Amina Wadud uses the term 'gender jihad' to reinvestigate Islam's treatment of gender categories (Wadud, 2006). Fatima Seedat considers using term Islamic feminism as adhering to Western constructs that is against the spirit of diversity and anti-colonialism. Seedat's primary thesis is that 'sex equality', as she calls it, in Islam should not only be viewed through this coined concept of Islamic feminism. The struggle or concerns of Muslim women are not same as of Western women and using the term Islamic feminism is denial of this difference. She raises the question, does feminism account for Muslim women's experiences? (Seedat, 2013).

Mariam Cooke (2001) uses the term Islamic feminism and justifies its use. Cooke is of the view that the term 'feminism' has a history, and background of struggle associated with it. No culture can claim the ownership of the concept. It is equally Eastern and Western at the same time; it belongs to everyone. Therefore, the usage of term feminism for the rights of Muslim women is perfectly apt. Feminism is an ideology, identity, awareness, attitude and activism that all who are fighting against gender imbalance can claim the ownership of. Similarly, Margot Badran considers the label Islamic feminism as helping Muslim women's struggle becoming a part of global cause. Badran says: "I believe that the new radical feminism in Muslim societies— that is, 'Islamic feminism'—will play a salient role in (1) the re-envisioning of Islam, (2) the constitution of a new modernity in the twenty-first century, and (3) the transformation of feminism itself. Feminism may even get a new name" (Badran, 1999, p. 165).

Asma Barlas's concern on nomenclature is that feminism as an over-arching, all-encompassing narrative disadvantages Muslim women: one by making the world feel that Muslim women cannot/should not live without it; second, it is colonial/neo-colonial discourse characteristically. Feminism disowns women's struggles who resist being entitled as feminists and agreeing to its monolithic agendas. Moreover, accepting feminism as a term that serves representation of women globally, in effect, apparently, requires taking liberal democratic West as a centre. Even if feminism is considered as an inclusive concept where it does not neglect any other women (including Muslim women) and their efforts, still using the term implies submitting to feminism's patronizing position. According to

Barlas, when Muslim women raise their voices for rights, they are inadvertently tagged as feminists, ignoring their unique positionality. Even sharing similar agenda or ways to achieve it, should not necessitate their ways to be called as feminism (Barlas, 2004). Another dimension to Barlas's argument is the concept of doing feminism and taking Islam for granted that she elucidates in her 2007 work, *Engaging Islamic Feminism: Provincializing Feminism as a Master Narrative.* Baralas is of the view that the production of Muslim women is a considerable factor in determining the directions of debate on naming. There is a difference between association and getting named. Othering of Muslim women works on two levels, first, they are objected lacking the ability to assimilate and second their gender activism is discarded as not synchronizing with feminism (Barlas, 2007).

The debate on naming should not be overly emphasized unless labelling is causing a danger to ideology or activism of Muslim women living under Islam or elsewhere. If there are similarities in cause, then word play, and unnecessary confrontation is unjustified, in fact it deviates the attention from the motive of bettering lives of women living in different socio- geographic conditions.

Women resisting the label Islamic feminism	Women using Islamic feminsm
Amina Wadud	Assia Djbar
Fatima Mernissi	Zeba Mir Husseini
Asma Barlas	Mariam Cooke
Riffat Hassan	Margot Badran
Fatima Seedat	
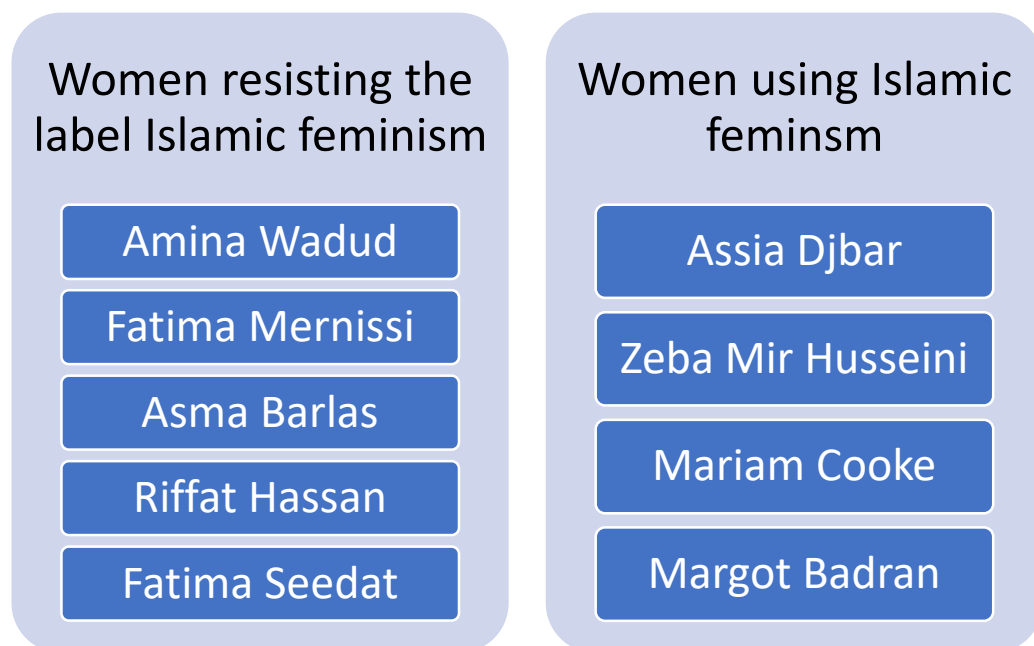
Figure 2: Division of Scholars on using the nomenclature Islamic Feminism

2.6.3   Islamic Feminism: A Histography

Islamic feminism is new feminism of twenty-first century. Badran premises Muslim feminist methods in the tradition of third-wave inclusivity of feminism where they get welcomed in the umbrella of 'feminism'. Feminism and colonialism both came to Middle East at the same time i.e. in nineteenth century. This was the time when people were developing and engaging with new identities and the world was experiencing socio-economic, educational and technological evolutions. In Arab world Muslims were looking for religious reforms. National boundaries were being emphasized. Pluralistic religio-cultural identities were emerging with a secular bent. Emergence of Islamic feminism can be linked broadly with modernism and modernity, women getting access to literacy and spreading their work through newly emerging press. (Badran, 2009). In a postcolonial world, newly formed Muslim countries mainly had secular governments. The religious chasm created was filled by Islamists in the late nineteen-seventies which started to deflate again in nineteen-nineties and finally in two-thousands with US invading Afghanistan and Iraq (Badran, 2009). In all this, Muslim women found themselves at 'crossfire' as one justification provided for these attacks was to 'save Muslim women'. Islam in the first decade of twenty-first century came under serious attacks from US-neoconservatives and progressives from within Muslim circles (Mir-Hosseni, 2011). Initially, Islamic feminism emerged with nationalist decolonial agenda both in East and West. In the East, the access to literacy and higher levels of learning including religious knowledges empowered women to become producers of religious discourses. While in the Western diasporas, second generation of immigrants felt uneasy to accept unquestioned patriarchal interpretations of Islamic teachings. Therefore, they launched a massive learned reinvestigation of Quran and *hadith* (Badran, 2009). In tracing feminist voices in Islam Mir-Hosseini considers 1979 as an important year, first as UN recognized agenda of "elimination of discrimination against women" and second the Iranian Islamic revolution. Because of UN resolution, both women rights movements and human rights movements in nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties expanded globally to end violence against women. In that upsurge, various cultural and religious movements and versions of feminism emerged. Especially in Islamic context, in Iran, post 1979 rise of Islamists and their consistent 'regressive' gender policies made influential women like Shahla Sherkat, Azam Taleqani, Zahra Rahnavard, and Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, who earlier were supporting Islamists, raised their voices against religious patriarchy—a 'radical identity shift' (Mir-Hosseni, 2011).

According to Mariam Cooke, in 1920s, women were using religion, Islam, to develop grounds for equal participation of men and women in everyday life. For example, Huda Shaarawi in Egypt, Nazira Zayn al-Din in Lebanon argued that aspects of religion dealing with lives of women should be interpreted by women only for they know their world better. Bouthaina Shaaban in 1998 republished two seminal texts by Nazira: *Veiling and Unveiling (1928)*, *The girl and Shykh (1929),* that strengthened Islamic feminism. In nineteen-nineties sermons of Muslim women started being tapped to be shared with public and Islamic feminism went beyond scholarly debates towards a public idea that Muslim women welcomingly embraced. The earlier Islamization of nineteen-seventies was owned by lower middle class only, but this gender-just Islamic discourse became popular in a myriad of groups regardless of their economic class or profession. Working women and house wives, alike, started showing interest in Islam in this new phase of revival of Islamic teachings. This growing trend of women learning Islam formally in Islamic institutes, or in weekly study circles helped them in interpreting Quran with a female insight. Media and technology has also been instrumental a great deal in connecting Muslim women to create virtual communities for collective resistance (Cooke, 2001).

Margot Badran as a historian writes, until nineteen-seventies there were no formal written records of Muslim women's feminist efforts. Nineteen-sixties are considered as **first wave of Muslim feminism[13]** that was secular in its demeanour; it was the time when globally second wave of feminism was flourishing around the world. An unbiased investigation of history reveals that Muslim women did not borrow the concept of feminism from the West. It was a product of their own independent mature gender thinking having roots in Muslim intellectual deliberations. The misconception that Muslim gender thought is nothing, but Western imitation is harming feminism and weakening its universal appeal, since the cultures that have traditionally been different to the West will not own it as their representative voice. So, one it is slanting historical facts and second escalating hatred and differences (Badran, 2009). The proponents of first wave of Islamic feminism had dual identity e.g. Nawal Al Sadawi brought feminism and socialism together and Inji Aflaton promoted Marxist feminism. However, Muslim youth was unable to relate to these prevailing complexities; they wanted something that could represent them solely. Along with this lack of sense of association of Muslim youth, banality of the existing notions of feminism paved the way for Islamic feminism, or the **second wave of Muslim feminism**

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[13] Muslim Feminism and Islamic Feminism are similar concepts, but not the same

in nineteen-eighties. Quran to these young women was a resort to find answers of women's concerns. This gender awareness was religiously determined based on *ijtihad* and reasoning. Women belonging to this group did not call themselves feminists, as to them it was just Islam that they were relying on to work for rights of Muslim women. Later in Iran and in other Muslim countries some Muslim women came up with the term 'Islamic feminism'. In 1990s discourse on Islamic feminism thrived and scholars produced a great deal of scholarship in it. Muslim secular feminists of first wave played their role in spreading the ideas of Islamic feminists[14]. The term Islamic feminism started to be used in nineteen-nineties in Iran, Turkey, South-Africa and eventually across all Muslim *ummah* by various scholars and activists. Initiators of Arab Muslim feminism were secular women with inclination towards Western thought and an accommodative attitude towards religion. They did not discard religion, instead advanced religious reforms. Islamic feminists of that time were secular nationalists with religious reformist manifesto (Badran, 2009).

2.6.4 Islamic Feminist Thought: Seminal Contributors

Islamic feminism is a multidisciplinary concept, sociologists, historians, theologians, journalists, and gender polymaths have contributed in its development as a concept. Leila Ahmad, Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud, Shereen El-Feki, Margot Badran, Mariam Cooke, Leila Abu-Lughod, Saba Mehmood, and Asma Barlas are some of the influential contributors in the field, along with many others. Some of them are discussed in detail below.

2.6.4.1 Amina Wadud

Figure 3: Concept of Islamic Feminism by Amina Wadud Summarised

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[14] this also shows that the disparity between secular and religious is shallow and only politically motivated

Amina Wadud is a major contribution is in Quranic hermeneutics. She presented the concept of valuing female exegetes. Wadud raises critical hermeneutics questions to understand Quran:

1) 'What the Qur'an says, how it says it'

2) 'What is said about the Qur'an, and who is doing the saying'

3) 'What is left unsaid: the ellipses and silences?' (developing certain linguistic measures for constructing categories of thought that are not explicitly articulated in Quran, but can be deduced from existing structural forms)

4) 'How and where the Quran uses certain grammatical constructs?' (some light might be shed on a subtler encoding for the construction of its trajectories)

5) 'How do various Qur'anic passages on similar themes correspond to each other?'

6) 'Are there passages that set up hierarchies of meaning through which we can analyze increased parameters of meaning on specific themes, despite the absence of explicit mention in the text?'

7) 'How much is left unsaid? How many forms are excluded absolutely? Can we fill in the gaps of these exclusions by charting the inclusions along the lines of some schematic chart?'

8) 'How is one thing brought into relief and another ignored, since both effect textual coherence?'

9) 'What can be learned through the relationship between foreground and background in Quran?'

(Wadud, 1999, pp. xiii-xiv)

Amina Wadud applied postmodernist methods on Quranic reading to bring to surface gender equality/equity for Muslim women in her ground-breaking work *Qur'an And Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from Woman's Perspective (1992).* According to Wadud: "[…] the more research I did into the Qur'an, unfettered by centuries of historical androcentric reading and Arabo-Islamic cultural predilections, the more affirmed I was that in Islam a female person was intended to be primordially, cosmologically, eschatologically, spiritually, and morally a full human being, equal to all who accepted Allah as Lord, Muhammad as prophet, and Islam as *din*" (Wadud, 1999, pp. ix-x). It is essential for the

nourishment of Islamic intellectual ethos to value women in the production and propagation of knowledge. The primary flaw in Islamic epistemology is that men are taken as centre and then women are placed and argued to be in comparison with men. In interpretive methodologies gender is a key variable. Wadud by emphasizing on gender talks about female exegeses of Quran to make interpretation of Quran gender inclusive to avoid any bias (1999).

According to Wadud, Quran should be understood in coherence, not relying on contextually irrelevant interpretations. Instead of gruelling over the particulars, the universal essence of Quranic message must be focused on as a guiding principle. The language of Quran, Arabic, is not the only language to grasp the authentic meanings, but to get the valid meanings. Arabic is a highly gendered language, there is a separate word/form for each noun which limits the scope of going above gender or making efforts for advocating gender neutrality. Quran can be equally well translated and understood in any language as it is a universal document free from confinements of human languages, Quranic message transcends these limitations. Quranic message should not get affected by the limitations of language. Quranic text provides ethos and possibilities, not the definitive implications and applications. Literal meanings of Quranic words might not help us create a just social order in all the situations, so there is a need for establishing a method where not only rights of women are propagated but they are also acknowledged as producers of discourses on religion and gender. The universality of Quran entails developing a framework for a deeper understanding and contemporary implications. Wadud suggests two aspects of developing such framework. First: "in the social, political, and moral arena, a reciprocal relationship must be made between particular historical or cultural practices during the time of the Qur'anic revelation as reflections of the underlying principles and the diverse reflections of those principles in other historical and cultural contexts." Second: it requires a process of "keeping words in context and referring to the larger textual development of the term." This means valuing both surface meanings and deeper meanings and creating connection between the two (Wadud, 1999, p. xiii).

Considering syntactic and morphological patterns of Arabic there is greater occurrence of trilateral roots, which creates possibilities of multiplicity of meanings. "The Qur'an is not just descriptive; it is prescriptive, with a goal of achieving some response from readers as part of the process of surrender and belief. This responsive efficacy increases in proportion to the complexity and totality of human motivation, which extends

beyond mere rational cognition to include emotive impact" (Wadud, 1999, pp. xiii-xv). No reading is objective. She categorizes Quranic readings into "traditional, reactive and holistic" (Wadud, 1999, p. 1). Traditional interpretation methodology is atomistic in nature, where sequentially from the first verse till the last interpretation is provided by following certain criteria or focusing on some dimensions. There is no effort made to, thematically or principally, link various parts of Quran. First, proponents of traditional methodology are predominantly males, so the female perspective is either ignored entirely or framed through male lens. Because of such readings, women appear marginalized, and, very unjustly, this marginalization has been featured as propagated by Quran. Second, reactionary exegeses are mostly feminist inspired, and they validate their stance by highlighting the poor and problematic status of women in Muslim societies. In the process, knowingly or unknowingly, they happen to widen the void between Islam and Muslim women by overlooking the fact that Islam/Quran intrinsically is in favour of progressive womanhood and gender inclusive practices. Third, holistic reading considers various functional categories of society including linguistics possibilities and interpretive patterns to give its perspective about women. Holistic readers claim their analytical outcome to be free from biases and stereotypes. The hermeneutical dimension of holistic approach considers context, grammar and ideology as its essential elements.

The message addressed to a specific gender is not limited to that gender only. Quran addresses all genders and mostly plural form is used, unless the discourse is about a specific gender. Wadud has interpreted verses dealing with women on the bases of Quran only to keep the external influences minimal. In her approach, she develops the context of interpretation by looking at treatment of similar topics in other places of Quran, language and structure used in all descriptions, and broader Quranic worldview. Language and prior text is important in holistic reading. The prior text of the individual reader means the language and cultural context in which the text is read. Quran is a dynamic document. To limit its interpretations is negating its self-stated principle of universality and applicability. Quran's accommodative nature strengthens its status as an empyrean accord. Quranic worldview must be taken into account while associating linguistic meaning to different terms used in Quran. The principles of language, textual understanding and cultural theories affirm pluralistic inclusiveness of Quran and that in no way sabotages its fundamental principles or teachings (Wadud, 1999).

There are anatomical differences between men and women that Quran acknowledges, but based on that it does not fix gender roles. Quran is also a culturally capable that credits cultural variations. In seventh century, Quran aggressively dismissed evils of sexual abuse and child marriage that prevailed at that time; reformed practices like polygamy and concubinage; however stayed quiet about some issues like role of men and women in family life. This neutrality of Quran is questioned by feminists. Wadud says Quran provides guiding principles on how human beings should conduct themselves and leaves the possibility of varied realization of those principles open to its believers. Principles are more important than particulars. For example, modesty is a principle and its particulars were realized as veil and seclusion at the time of its revelation by those financially well off as they were considered more respectful than others were. Moreover, Quran intends to encompass all aspects of human life, not the issues of gender only, so some aspects of it are explicitly pinned down, whereas other not so (Wadud, 1999).

It is important to acknowledge the role the historical context plays in understanding of religion, along with philosophy and intellectual tradition in implementation of progressive thought. Religion emphasizes and strengthens faith, which generally means believing without evidence. However, this faith position by no means implies that there is no rational ground of religion. In Islam, the use of reason towards the aspects that effect human life and coming up with their religiously inspired consensual interpretation is called *Ijtihad*. The essence of message and will of God should prevail—practices evolve according to socio-cultural-historical needs of people living it. If we consider the times fifteen hundred years ago, absolute gender equality might not have been possible. It was the time when morality and ethics, in general, were non-existent. Men dominated not only women, but also other men too, and power prevailed. The essence of Islam is will of God and maintenance of high morals. Islam in terms of moral and rights abolished many pre-Islamic practices that were disadvantaging women. Based on historical context and reason, gender-conscious reading of religious texts would help us enact the essence of Islam according to requirements of modern times (Wadud, 1999).

2.6.4.2 Mariam Cooke

Mariam Cooke focused on histographies, autobiographies and fiction to see the construction and function of Islamic feminist discourses. In her book *Women claim Islam*

(2001), she has dealt with comparative version of war stories[15], women's life in diaspora, role of language in construction of women's identity, edifice of the concept of Islamic feminism[16], and intellectual development of Arab women in their homelands and in diaspora. In an earlier work, *Multiple Critiques: Islamic Feminist Rhetorical Strategies (2000),* Cooke addresses various dimensions of Islamic feminism ranging from discourses, praxis, to networks and how they add into broader stream of de-colonial feminisms. The notion of 'multiple critiques' promulgated by Cooke is a realisation of richness of the concept Islamic feminism and responsibilities that are attached to it. An Islamic feminist must address and balance out religious, cultural, local, and transnational ideologies, affiliations and concerns. Cooke uses the term 'multiple critiques' to represent the 'rhetoric strategies' of Islamic feminists. Referring to the works of Gilory and Bhabha, she is of the view that by balancing multiple identities, Muslim women are perfecting the art of decolonized subjects. Cooke seems to resonate the concept Gayatri Spivak, women are 'doubly marginalized', when she says Arab women suffer twofold, one by unequal gender relations in favour of men, and second through the situations/conditions that European colonizers have created for them. Cooke contends Muslim women resist structures and challenge the discourses that try to inscribe what is 'good' for them. They fight against the empire and the neo-colonial mindset at home and outside. In doing that they become a part of the global gender equality frameworks. Summarily, a Muslim woman's battle is on multiple fronts, which is adding vitality to women cause. Muslim women under Islamic feminism are justifying their experiences and challenging constructs that frame them as victims. Hence, the term 'multiple critique' refers to a multi-layered critique that Islamic feminists are developing in challenging victimhood, decolonizing Muslim woman, maintaining complex identities, balancing local and transnational, religious and secular among others (Cooke, 2000).

According to Cooke, Islamic feminism is an anti-separatist concept; it sides neither with Muslim women groups who consider feminism a neo-imperialist notion, nor with those Western women who reject the existence of patriarchy in the contemporary world. Islamic feminists say patriarchy exists and feminism is valuable and applicable, but with recognition of diversity of the cause. Islamic feminism connects Islam to active contemporary gender politics, and creates acceptance for Muslim women's identity in this

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[15] US-Arab Wars
[16] Especially, the concept of 'multiple critique', a rhetorical stance

milieu. Islam and feminism are not oxymoronic in nature, in fact, they complement each other, juxtaposition and unification of the two forms a powerful concept. In explaining religious half of the term Islamic feminism Cooke chalks outs three categories: Muslims, Islamic and Islamists. Muslims, inherit Islam as a faith, by the virtue of their birth in Muslim communities. They are culturally Muslims and might not strictly observe all rituals and practices of Islam. On one extreme of the continuum are Islamists, who are stringent devotees and work towards formation of some Islamic state. In between lie 'Islamic', who have their own standpoint in valuing Islam as a faith, however they believe in expansion of possibilities of what Islam has to offer to the world. This is the version of Islam that Islamic feminists follow, that is progressive and appreciates multiplicity (Cooke, 2000).

Muslim > Islamic > Islamist

Mariam Cooke raises/addresses some critical questions in her works that I have collated below.

- 'How can one be modern, global, and yet observant?'

- 'What role will Islam play in shaping ethical, modern citizens who are able to survive in, as well as to critique, a rapidly transforming world?'

- 'Will Islamically inspired responses to globalization help or harm women?'

- 'How will horizontal networking transform human relationships that have traditionally been based on vertical hierarchies?'

- 'What does Islamic feminism mean? Is it not a contradiction? What is the difference between the ascribed identity of "Muslim" and the achieved identity of "Islamic"?'

- 'When do women who think of themselves as Muslims, or whom others describe as Muslim because that is the religion of their birth and of their identity cards, become Islamic?'

- 'How those who position themselves as Islamic feminists share a rhetorical stance?'

- 'How do they adapt their convictions that women have certain rights with the perceived need to subsume them to the community interest?'

- 'How will the ways in which they position themselves to assert responsibility for the construction of their own, new religious "identity" change the face of Islam?'

- 'How does participation in jihad allow for feminist activism?'

- 'What does it mean to intercalate scripture with history as an Islamic feminist?'

- 'Are those countries where Westernization has failed now doomed to global marginalization? Or is there something new happening in those spaces where the nonglobalizable survives?'

- 'What are the dynamics underlying the construction of new and increasingly effective positionalities, identifications, and networks of accommodation and rejection, creation and endurance?'

- 'What are the geopolitics of global citizenship for which borders are places across and in which to live, and not lines that demarcate the beginnings and endings of national territories?'

(Cooke, 2000)

2.6.4.3 Leila Ahmad

Leila Ahmad acknowledges Western feminism and its efforts in promoting liberty and freedom for women, but at the same time criticizes how it failed to accept the same rights for Muslim women who wanted to situate their version of free will in their religion and culture. Islamic jurisprudence is based on interpretation of *shariah.* Male scholars traditionally have been maintaining interpretations that suit men. Leila Ahmed in her book *Early Islam and the Position of Women: the Problem of Interpretation* (1991) exemplifies this by taking up idea of polygamy in Islam along with some other discourses. According to Ahmad, there was no jurisprudence made on polygamy and it was left open to individual choice, but male dominant discourses justify it to the extent of compulsion. In Quran it says[17], if a man cannot do the justice, he cannot keep more than one wife and warns men that they will not be able to keep equity among wives. The places where Quran has maintained ethical egalitarianism, it is male interpreters who consciously or unconsciously have complicated things against women. Another example is of the concept of *qiwamah[18]*,

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[17] Meanings

[18] Muslim men refer to *qiwamah* (men are leaders-a naïve translation) mentioned in Quran to maintain their superiority. Islamic feminist understanding of this concept implies that man should take care of his wife and assist her even in household duties. There should be equity as both men and women complement each other.

which is interpreted by male scholars as authority over women, whereas it actually means to serve, to protect—an alternative interpretation. Like the concept of *qiwamah* is the concept of *infaq* which means providing for home. A feminist perspective on *qiwamah* is not only financial responsibility on men, but taking care of children and helping women with households too. By thoroughly researching verses, that are referred against women working outside home by male scholars, Ahmad proves that the constructs restricting women from working are cultural than religious. There are sections of Quran that are holy, where there is no element of subjectivity acceptable, but for other sections sacredness means keeping the essence intact while making interpretations (Ahmad, 1991). In her recent book *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America (2011),* Leila Ahmad raises many questions in the context of *hijab* and extremism in Western context. I have collated them below:

- 'Was some kind of extremist, militant Islam taking root in the West, including in the United States?'

- 'Was that what the presence of the *hijab* signified?

- 'Could the Muslim Brotherhood have somehow managed to establish a foothold here and in other Western countries?'

- 'Where were these young women getting their ideas that they should wear *hijab*?

- 'Since they [Muslim women] lived in a free country where it was quite ordinary for women to challenge patriarchal ideas, why on earth did they feel bound to accept whatever it was that they were being told?'

- 'Was that [hijab] a sign of growing anti-Western feelings among Western Muslims?'

- 'What kind of Islam was this, exactly, that was gaining ground here, and how had it gained institutional dominance?'

- 'How would it [Islam] evolve and develop in American society?

Men ought to take care of wives because they give birth to children and are mothers, not because they are women. Women do more so they deserve more. Moreover, if a woman is independent, and is providing financial support to family, the concept of *qiwamah* loses its legitimacy entirely regardless of all interpretations (Cooke, 2001).

- 'Would it [Islam] move toward blending and accommodation, or were we heading towards clash and collision?

- 'Why, after nearly disappearing from many Middle Eastern and Muslim-majority societies, had the veil made a comeback, and how had it spread with such remarkable swiftness?'

- 'How and why had women come to be drawn to this movement, and how and why had they been persuaded to adopt the veil, first in the Middle East and then globally? What was in it for women?'

- 'What exactly *was* Islamism from the point of view of women?

- 'What role, if any, had women themselves played in the Islamist movement and in spreading the resurgence of Islamism and the veil?'

- 'What men's roles had been in strategizing around women's involvement, as well as around methods of spreading the veil?

- 'How would Islamism adapt to its new democratic environment, and how would it evolve and develop in relation to women in particular? Or would it perhaps fail to adapt, or even actively resist adapting to its new environment?

- 'Were we embarked on a course that would inevitably lead to clash and collision?'

   (Ahmad, 2011, pp. 3-13)

2.6.4.4   Leila Abu-Lughod

We must look closely at what various forms of rights work and women's advocacy actually produce in the world by way of careers, social distinctions, public discourse, new social and financial circuits, documents, legal debates, travel opportunities, intellectual excitement, and even hope. Some of these effects are unintended. Some may even harm the women they intend to help, especially when caught up in international politics. (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 200)

The representation of Muslim women has been a problematic front since long. They have been orientalised, Islamized, and at times unnecessarily sympathized. Leila Abu-Lughod has presented an ethnographic account of misrepresentation of women focusing on stories of Muslim women from Egyptian context. She questions the very notion that Muslim women are oppressed, and says even if there exist instances of their oppression,

Islam is not the reason for this oppression, she contends. The choice of Muslim women to dress in certain way should not be equated with oppression, this attire and religious norms that they follow is an integral part of their identity. Especially in diasporas, it has communal value for religious sisterhood and presence in public spheres. According to Lughod, post 9/11, Muslim women have been gaining greater attention in the whole debate of feminism. Western feminists, especially American feminists consider it their duty to go beyond domestic feminist concerns and address issues of women globally, and in this quest Muslim women have become their favourite audiences by highlighting their victimhood in Muslim societies. But despite this growing interest in Muslim women, Western feminists largely failed to understand the concerns and reality of Muslim women. Abu-Lughod puts into perspective all such debates on representation and misrepresentation with a purpose to bridge the gap between Muslims and the West. Abu-Lughod also questions the cosmopolitan Islamic feminism on sociological and legalistic grounds with an argument that there always remains incommensurability between actual needs and their realization in any framework that claims to be the sole saviour of women rights.

Abu-Lughod deconstructs the dynamics of violence in Muslim societies by concentrating on lives of women in rural Egypt. She reports, in Muslim world women are relying on 'faith based feminism' in place of borrowing global language of rights for women. They are involved in religious reforms, political activism and community service, simultaneously. Because welfare is quintessential in addition to modernist gendered reforms in religion. There is a great diversity in how Islam is perceived and practiced in different segments of Muslim society. For example, educated urban Egyptians practice religiously inspired cultural aspects: parents send their daughters to learn Quran and get involved in religious activities wherein, the motives sometimes are not entirely religious. Girls work towards religious diploma to avoid boredom while waiting for their marriage proposals. Abu-Lughod describes her experience of talking to a Bedouin woman who had an opinion that 'men should rule'. But the question arises, is she getting all these ideas from Quran? No, this reaction was a reaction resulting from her son leaving her for his wife. Therefore, she thinks if he were a 'man' their family would not have disintegrated. In another case a woman due to violent behaviour of her husband did not want to live with him. Whereas, on knowing the details it revealed that she had some childhood trauma that was the cause of her unrest. Consent in marriage is a key feminist issue. Muslim women are invoking Islam and the words of Prophet Muhammad that marrying someone you have

not seen is wrong. Women in North Africa have developed 'model marriage contract', where there are, even, clauses and conditions allowing a man to take a second wife. Consent does not mean saying yes or no only, it is also about having means to make choices. Women in certain situations believe on their *Naisb* (fate) or do *Istikhara* (consult God). "Family is about living together, across individual differences, in ever-changing relations not just of affiliation or affection but of dependency, struggles over authority, and ambivalence" (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 220).

There are four significant points that Abu-Lughod emphasised through her work. First, sufferings of women vary; there is need to understand dynamics of violation of women/human rights. Instead of objectifying sufferings of distant people, local communities should be prioritized. Second, the rights of Muslim women have their own subtleties, they should not be oversimplified to monolithic agenda of equality only. Third, ignoring the history, politics, and lived experiences of communities of women, the roadmap of future cannot be designed. Fourth, there are multiple factors that are in and beyond our control, they shape us. So, before having a desire to remake Muslim women, there is a need to understand, what discourses on rights can offer, and how well-equipped they are to deal with diversity of female situation and experiences (Abu-Lughod, 2013).

2.6.4.5   Asma Barlas

Asma Barlas in her seminal work *Believing Women in Islam: Understating Patriarchal Interpretations of Quran (2004)* has presented egalitarian readings of Islam that Muslim and non-Muslim groups interested in hermeneutics, admire. Barlas's study is situated in Quran, hadith, sunnah, shariah, and the principles of textuality and intertextuality to construct the argument. Addressing the issue of Muslim women and feminism, she divides women working for feminism in three groups: Pro-faith group, Islamic feminists, and the women who take Islam for granted in drawing upon their methods (Barlas, 2004). In her book *Engaging Islamic Feminism: Provincializing Feminism as a Master Narrative (2007),* Barlas describes evolution of her engagement with Islamic feminism in five stages. Stage 1: She preferred to be called a woman who believes in Islam and follows Islamic principles than being called a feminist. Islamic teachings, she considered, value women, that is a feminist agenda in itself. Stage 2: She advocated decontextualization and recontextualization of Quran to discourage Muslim male-centred Islamic sexual politics. This involved relying on feminist-idiom for negotiating Muslim women's rights, without maligning Islam as a religion. Stage 3: Inspired by Badran's

definition of Islamic feminism—a movement that derives its manifesto from Quran for holistic gender equality—she accepted herself as an Islamic feminist. This definition does not seek for Quranic interpretations of Islam to suit feminism; rather it situates feminism in Islam, by arguing Islam was there much before feminism surfaced. Stage 4: Barlas' postcolonial sensibility and secular worldview kept her away from using the language of feminism for addressing issues of women. Further, she negated the need to have a unified definition of the concept of Islamic feminism, and suggested to let the concept mature by repeated redefinitions. Stage 5: Barlas opined, over usage of the term 'feminism' devalues indigenous voices with diverse experiences. We should resist definitions/naming even if it is required for epistemological or ontological reasons. Naming others is reductive, violent, dishonest and imperialistic. Feminism should not stick itself to enlightenment's legacy of universal descriptions, rather embrace and encourage self-naming to ensure honesty and originality. One might be believer of a faith, but his/her political ideology may differ, partially or entirely, from the faith position (Barlas, 2007).

2.6.4.6 Fatima Mernissi

Fatima Mernissi as a scholar of *hadith* challenged those sayings that were linked with Prophet Muhammad falsely to promote patriarchy and misogyny, through her book *Veil and Male Elite (1991)*. For example, the *hadith* associated with Prophet Muhammad referring women should not be given important responsibilities, Mernissi argues, is false and the narrator himself is not worth relying upon (Mernissi, 1991). Raja Rhouni appreciates Mernissi's work on *hadith,* primarily *Al-Bukhari,* where she has not tried to pick sections of women friendliness of Islam rather has presented a holistic sociological and historical critique (Rhouni, 2008). Mernissi talks about *isnad* of *hadiths* that are misogynous in nature[19], as well as she questions political and psychological status of the narrator. Furthermore, Mernissi has emphasized 'interactive character of Quran' and

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[19] Rhouni questions Mernissi's this approach of challenging the narrator than finding new ways of narrations. To her this is foundationalist/essentialist tendency towards knowledge production. First, this approach is not applicable to many *hadiths* and secondly, if *asnad* of those misogynous *hadiths* are found reliable then we have to believe in them. By relying on the works of Abu Zeid and Muhammad Arkoun, Rhouni advocates need of contextual approach than favouring one or the other reference in search for *asl* (foundationalist approach).

'presented Muhammad in his full humanity'. She focused on political and psychological contexts of revelations while discussing *Asbabul Nazul*.

In, *Scheherzade Goes West: Different Culture, Different Harems (2001),* Mernissi provide anti-orientalist multicultural critique of Muslim women's representation in art, literature and history, by comparing Western and Eastern traditions. Imagining it as another one of East-West divisionary discourse where someone has successfully advocated Muslim cause would be belittling the Mernissi's magnificence in fertilising the concept of femininity in her work. To her, the image of woman emerging from Islamic art, history and literary traditions is that of cerebral confronter, vandal, and sagacious planner, paradoxically it looms in western imagination as an odalisque, aphrodisiac, and abject. Thousand and one nights/Arabian nights is full of stories of Muslim women very uncharacteristic of Western imagination about them. Only educated women have/had access to the heroics of Muslim women for others it was presented to them in distorted form. The lead character of *Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade, is very often misrepresented as nude and plump, that embodies eroticism, exoticism, and enslavement. Whereas, according to Mernissi, the original version's Scheherazade had desires to travel, explore, and learn with a mature sense of love and sexuality. Mernissi in the book raises many questions that I collate below:

- 'Is there a link between the fleshy nude painted by the German artist, the dancing Scheherazade of German ballet, and puzzling fearlessness of Western men in the harems of their Western minds?'

- 'Do Western men reduce seduction to body language only?'

- 'Is seduction divorced from intense communication?'

- 'Who is the Scheherazade created by Western artists?'

- 'What weapons do men endow her with to enable her to seduce them?'

- 'What happens to our queen when she goes to West?'

- 'What changes do Western artists inflict on Scheherazade in order to make her conform to their fantasies when she crosses their frontiers?'

- 'Does she become more or less powerful in their fantasy?'

- 'Does she retain her status as a queen or lose it?'

- 'Why did the enlightened West, obsessed with democracy and human rights, discard Scheherazade's brainy sensuality and political message in their version of the tales?'

- 'Why do Western and Eastern men dream of such different beauty ideals and what does the beauty ideal tell us about culture?'

- 'Why would a progressive Western man like Kant, who was so concerned about advance of civilization, want woman with paralyzed brain?'

- 'Could it be that the violence against women in the Muslim world is due to the fact that they are acknowledged to have brain, while in the West, they are often considered to be incapable of deep or analytic thought?'

- 'What happens to women who refuse to conform in the West?'

- 'What happens to man's emotions when female beauty is an image—and that image is fabricated by the man himself?'

- 'What happens to shifting boundaries and unstable privileges when the filmed or painted harem image is introduced as a strategic component of sexual dynamics?'

- 'What kind of women haunt Muslim artist's fantasies? What kind of women they paint when dreaming of beauties?'

- 'Is there a tradition of painting in Islam? Does not Islam forbid representation of human figures?'

- 'Is there a link between Kant's philosophical concept of beauty and Ingres's passive model of the harem beauty?'

- 'How did Nur-Jahan present herself to the crowds? Did she have a strategy of visibility?'

(Mernissi 2001)

2.6.4.7   Margot Badran

Margot Badran in her book *Feminism in Islam Secular and Religious Convergence (2009)* gives details of her quest as a historian where she travelled widely in East and West to meet the protagonist of major movements of feminism in Islam and studied the interaction between two dominant trends i.e. secular and Islamic. The concept religious and

secular has multiple connotations. So before describing any of these groups and what they propagate, it is important to understand the historical and contextual development of them first. These terms are flexible; their fixed interpretation would be erroneous. Islamic feminism is beyond the binaries of East and West, liberal and conservative, religious and a-religious. It uses English, a global language, dominantly with borrowing of certain terminologies from Arabic. It presents itself as an ideology that can be owned and advocated even by those who do not belong to Islam or for that matter any religion, taking it as a worldview, an ideology. It brings all groups and versions closer to each other to narrow down distances and divides. Activist goal of Islamic feminism and secular feminism are no different. Those who consider there is a divide are mischievously misrepresenting women and their cause in Islamic societies to distract them from their agenda of creating breathing spaces for all without any distinction (Badran, 2009).

Religion plays an important role in the lives of Muslim women. Feminism in Muslim societies be it secular or religious, in some way or the other is coupled with religion. On the contrary, in the West despite some occurrences of femininsing theology in mid nineteenth century (Women's Bible), on the whole feminism and religion have been poles apart. There is a difference in terms of scope too, in the West either it was religion inspired feminism or adapting theology to feminist concerns, audiences/affiliates of such connections have been limited in number, whereas religious feminism in Muslim societies has been wide in its societal reach. Secular tradition in Muslim feminism started in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, primarily in Africa and Asia during the rise of struggle against colonialism and flourishing modernism. Their agenda has been equality based feminism beyond religious affiliations. They advocated socio-political equality of citizens. Emergence of Islamic form of feminism is relatively recent, late twentieth century, as a result of dominance of progressive political Islamic thoughts in Western diasporic communities and in East/middle East and Islamist movements in Iran and Sudan. Notably, both Islamic traditionalists and progressive/secular both have had the associations with Islam in defining their sort of feminisms, although apparently it seems as if secular feminists would be entirely away from religion, not so (Badran, 2009).

Islamic feminism, as the name suggests, is not strictly religious in its sense, rather it is a way to create gender egalitarian Muslim societies through progressive hermeneutics. Islamic feminism, in spirit, is not anti-secular at all; it focuses on societal reforms and creates gender balance. Early on, Islamic feminists were Islamist in their approach, while

Muslim secular feminists were making efforts to re-envision Islam and Islamic practices in order to defeat patriarchy through gender equity, complementarity and equality. Islamic feminists are transnational; we find Islamic feminism equally robust in Muslim majority and non-majority states alike. Nevertheless, at the same time each version of Islamic feminism has a national dimension to it, which makes it closer to secular feminism (Badran, 2009).

Figure 4: Connection between Secular and Islamic Feminism

2.6.5   Can non-Muslim speak on Islamic feminism?

Considering Islam's growing presence in Europe, Renata Pepicelli in a study titled *'Why Keep Asking Me about My Identity? Thoughts of a Non-Muslim'* associates herself with Islamic feminism by arguing that it is a concept that involves her society and its people. She perceives her study of Islamic feminism[20] as an affiliate of her broader interest in studying women movements. Pepicelli propounds that a multicultural citizen is an assemblage of multiple identities; since she experiences Islam around her, Islam is a part of her identity. Pepicelli claims, she has ties with Islam: she relates to Muslims, reads books on Islam authored by Muslims, and has spent segments of her life in Muslim countries. Above all, keeping her personal associations aside, modern Europe cannot be perceived without Islam. This association is not based only on recent presence of Muslim immigrants in Europe or because of converts; Islam has history in Europe that dates back to fifteenth century (Pepicelli, 2008).

According to Pepicelli, Islamic feminism is a transcontinental phenomenon. Women from all over the world, living in different parts are generating discourse on Islamic feminism and are participating in Islamic feminist activism. Since, Islamic feminism negates both Islamism and Western prejudices against Islam; it creates grounds of bringing

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[20] Islamic feminism and Muslim feminism are related concepts. Islamic feminism relies on Islamic sources from epistemological perspective, whereas Muslim feminism is reliance on Islam from faith position. So, to be an advocate of Islamic feminism, one does not need to be necessarily a Muslim or believer of Islamic faith.

Islam and the West closer in harmony. On the other hand, Islamic feminism is narrowing down the divide between religious and secular Muslim women by producing pluralistic discourses. Post foundationalist gender critique and plurality of dialectics is well maintained by following the principles of Islamic feminism. Moreover, Islamic feminism is a scholarly tradition than an identity, so regardless of faith affiliations anyone can take it up and further its ideological standpoint. She further adds, after 9/11 the image of Muslim identity in diasporas is central to many cross ethnic dialogues. There is a growing realization that stereotypes mistakenly linked with Muslim women and Islam, in effect, are weakening the cause of women in general. In multicultural societies, people and cultures interact, no one can live in close communities, issues and concerns are shared. Religion cannot/shouldn't divide universal sisterhood (Pepicelli, 2008).
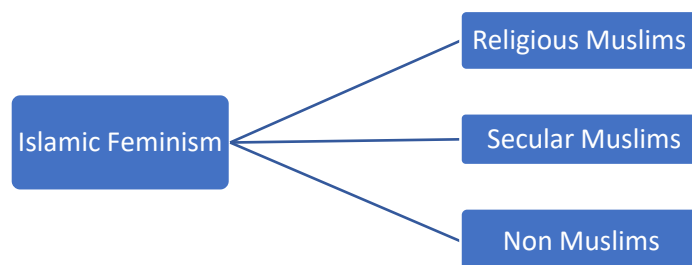
Figure 5: Islamic Feminism Contributions

2.6.6   Islamic Feminist Dialectics: An Overview of Key Concepts

To begin with, Ziba Mir-Hosseini reiterates that there is no one single definition of the concept Islamic feminism. The constituent elements, Islam and feminism have a variety of interpretations and meaning associated with them, so when they come together these complexities and intricacies add up. The concept is both local and global in each of its context and realisations. Scholars working in Islamic feminism adopt a trans-cultural, tans-national, pluralistic approach to ensure inclusivity. Islamic feminism assits Muslim women living in diasporas to overcome cultural confusions they face due to differences in home and target cultures. Muslim women in Asia, Africa and the West all are supportive of Islamic feminism. By working within a secular and Islamic framework, Islamic feminists are challenging the sexist status quo without pushing a Western agenda. The contribution that Western feminists can make toward Islamic feminism is to acknowledge that religious and cultural traditions of Muslim women require them to conduct themselves differently and their version of female freedom is no less important. Mir-Hosseini, like Margot Badran

and Mariam Cooke, differentiates between Islamic and Islamist. Islamic is taking inspiration/guidance from Islam as a source and Islamist is considering certain inflexible interpretation of Islam as the only possibility and *sharia'h* the ultimate solution. Islamists limit Islam to a religion whereas, it is a *deen* that means it covers faith, beliefs, practices, traditions, institutions, and legal systems. Moreover, she considers important to differentiate between *deen* and *mar'efat deen*. Faith is subjective part of religion and revealed text is objective part. By posing questions at text, we engage with it and that is *mar'efat deen*. Another important distinction to be made clear is between *shariah* and *fiqh*. *Shariah* is theological and sacred part of Islam whereas *fiqh* is a legal milieu that is based on human interpretation, man-made and any claim to fixity of it in one form would be unfair on both religion and its believers. Mir-Hosseini questions the validity of concept 'Islamic feminism' and its relevance in contemporary debates on gender and religion (Mir-Hosseni, 2011).

Sad'diyya Shaikh talks about **'intersectionality'** where gender as a category is studied with power, religion, colonial status, race, class, sexuality and other social processes as a knowledge project. Such treatment of gender, to her, will promote multiple positioning and minimize objectification of certain groups of women. Feminist scholarship needs to be more inclusive where no group is marginalized, including religious groups. She is of the view that when we decide to value women's experience, the next thing that emerges is how to tackle diversity of women's experiences. In that, she suggests the concept of 'intersectionality' helps, where one social identity is co-constructed by other forms of identity collectively. Following that, realization of feminine experiences is not dependant on gender as a category, but other variables such as religion, class, race, and power. This approach negates and nullifies misrepresentative universals. Sad'diyya Shaikh also uses the term 'multiple critique' as used by Mariam Cooke, but with a different set of geo-political points to frame feminism in Islamic context. She makes three major assertions in establishing Islamic feminist agenda: first, being very open and receptive about generating religiously oriented gender critiques from within Islam circles; second, highlighting and celebrating neglected histories of gender-just Islam; third, challenging marginalization and objectification of empire (Shaikh, 2013).

There is a group of Muslim women whom Hamid Dabashi calls '**native informers'**, who have their own objectives in presenting Islam as patriarchal. This then is used as an argument by US to justify their war against terror. These Muslim women are received as

authentic voices being insiders and victims at the same time[21]. They do a disservice to their fellow Muslim women by strengthening the stereotypes and widening the distances between the East and the West. Their memoirs are appreciated, their writings are applauded, and they are given awards by Western organisations. To Dabashi, neither gender is an innocent category nor is Islam a monolith, so both must be destabilized in order to accommodate diversity and promote multiplicity (Dabashi, 2011).

There prevails in some groups a misunderstanding that **feminism is Western construct**. An unbiased analysis of history reveals that it developed in France, US, and Arab world nearly at the same time with variations in what they were fighting for. Nationalist strands of Muslim feminism critique Western totalitarianism and imperialism. To them, women belonging to diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds cannot be represented under the hegemonic monolith of feminism. However, this disagreement should not be taken as clash, rather an effort to make feminism more inclusive. There is a need to acknowledge that all feminisms are equally authentic, and none is a clone of the other. Islamic feminists did not borrow the concept feminism from the West. Their movement is indigenous that has nationalist, humanist indigenous roots. The secular feminism of twenty-first century should view Islamic feminism as a novelty that was needed for a harmonious twenty first century to break the intellectual stagnancy on feminist ideological front. Islamic feminism has surfaced in interesting times of cyber space and social media and that is generating opportunities for mass spread of idea and creating spaces for positive dialogue (Badran, 2009).

Feminism		
France	US	Egypt
1880	1910	1920

Figure 6: Badran's Chronology of Emergence of Feminism around the World

Quran provides **broader protocols**, but does not determine the exact socio-cultural adaptations of gender roles. Gender protocols are based on mutual understanding, freedom and acceptance, than fixation or determination, irrespective of the context. Based on biological differences disfavouring a gender is inhuman and un-Islamic. Biological differences are created by God for providing both genders a chance to complement each

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[21] Nawal al-Sadawi, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji, Azar Nafisi are some of such native informers

other, not to discriminate. No doubt, men cannot bear child, women do, so Quran asks men to support women in providence of financial means. Along with Quran, *hadith* is a major source of Islamic teachings. There are *hadiths* that are associated with holy Prophet peace be upon him, but have weak or no *silsila*. Islamic feminists debunk these misogynist *hadiths* to expose how they have been misused to promote patriarchy. Fatmia Mernissi and Hedayat Tuksal have worked on reinterpretation of *hadith* in Islamic feminist tradition. Two other sources of Islamic guidance are *fiqh* (Interpretations of Islamic law) and *shariah* (Islamic laws). In many Muslim majority countries, state along with male scholars, has promoted the version of *fiqh* that disadvantages women and strengthens patriarchy. Mixing the boundaries of *sharia* and *fiqh* is used to promote anti-egalitarian version of Islam by Islamists. Islamic feminists are playing their role in providing revisionist women-centred *fiqh,* and they have achieved some success too in the recent past in reforming *Mudwana* and *hadud*[22]. Furthermore, Muslim women are becoming more visible and influencing in religious places and in production of Islamic knowledge through cyber space they are spreading their message everywhere (Badran, 2009).

Despite all these revisions there are Muslim groups that term interpretations of Islamic feminists as un-Islamic and want for feminist realizations in stricter Islamist parameters. Whereas, the Islamic feminists yearn for finding a middle way of gender-sensitive Islamic practices to establish of gender-balanced human agency in accepting holy and interpreting sacred, relying on scoio-historic reality and reason. Raja Rhouni presents the idea of **'post foundationalist gender critique'** of Islam, wherein, she writes Islam with small letter i, with an intention to negate rigidity and fixation by Islamic orthodoxy. She emphasizes the value of non-essentialist understanding of women issues with reference to Fatima Mernissi's works. According to Rhouni, gender differentiation was a norm of the time and society in which Quran was revealed, not something espoused by Quran. The purpose of Quran was to communicate with people it was revealed to, so we find the nature of its message is descriptive than prescriptive. Quran is communication not legislation. (Rhouni, 2008). On the same grounds, Mohammed Arkoun suggests relying on modern methods in religious realisation that were not available in earlier times. The focus should be on what has not been heard and said yet, than finding the real, by utilizing humanities and social sciences, which he terms as **'Applied Islamology'** (Arkoun, 2007). Raja Bahlul suggests three tiers method in affirming or advocating Islamic feminist position i.e. valuing

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[22] Mudwana is Muslim family law and *Hadud* is laws on adultery

historical context, using reason and logic, and considering gender as a variable in interpretations of religious texts. Bahlul has primarily relied on existing works and presented it in a systemized manner (Bahlul, 2000).

Islamic feminists not only take refuge in Islam but also criticize Islamic history and hermeneutics too. The gulf between men and women about faith position is widening where men's Islam, with a few exceptions, is medieval and women's Islam full of compassion, care and courage. The history of this neglect is not a recent phenomenon. Cooke refers to works of Nazira Zayn al-Din (from Libya) that detail how men have been an official authority on theological issues dealing with women. Gender of author is important in realizing scriptural reality. If **female scholarship in religion** disappears, we will only have *fatwas* asking women to cover up, by men. Women are entering, and they should be, more actively in theological debates to present their situation locally and transnationally. Islam provides them this opportunity of complex self-positioning (Cooke, 2000).

Islamic feminists create their complex self-positioning by balancing their feminist and Islamic identities where none is compromised, supposedly. Reliance on religion through Islamic feminism, generates a reason to own feminist discourses without charges of ideological treason. "It is from official historiography and hermeneutics that they derive their strategies to construct a feminist position that resists exclusion and locates authority within the same cultural boundaries" (Cooke, 2001, p. 82). Islamic feminism questions the way knowledge has been produced to harmonize patriarchal ways. Cooke details the **value of religion** in national histories and its contemporary relevance. Islamic feminists are trying to cancel out negativities of globalisation by promoting and interrogating transnational Islam that bridges the gap between local and transnational. Religion has been a uniting force for a long time before nationalism, especially for ex-colonies it was an important part of identity to fight for rights. Islam provides sociocultural capital that binds coreligionists together beyond national boundaries. Travel and cosmopolitanism is emphasized in Islam in the forms of *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah), *Ziyaras* (visits to shrines), *Hijra* (migration for religion)*, Rihla* (travel for knowledge). To Jose Casanova, it has become a fashion now to privatize religion, limiting its role and depriving it from its potentials on many sociocultural fronts (Casanova, 2007).

2.6.6.1 Islamic Feminist Agenda

There is a wide range of issues that women in different Muslim societies face, and their efforts to better their situation is broadly covered under the umbrella of Islamic feminism. However, based on geographical realities, their feminist agendas and manifestations vary. For example, in India, Indian feminists frame their agenda keeping in view dynamics of Hindu-Muslim politics; in Afghanistan, the context of war and cultural practices are significant in shaping women's experiences; in Bangladesh, Bengali feminists are fighting against acid attacks and sexual violence against women; in Malaysia, *Sharia* law and its modernist/progressive interpretations are on feminist plan; in Egypt Muslim women's movement is imagined in a new revolutionary context where they are on forefront of political activism. Therefore, to pin down a fixed set of agenda items for Islamic feminist cause would be reductionist. Islamic feminism is individualistic and collective simultaneously, moreover constantly evolving and reshaping itself to encompass a myriad of experiences and concerns.

> Each country in which Muslims live has inherited a different history. In some countries, Muslims are minorities; in others, they are majorities. In a few countries, most are wealthy; in others, they are poor. The careful ethnographies that anthropologists and sociologists have written; the vivid documentary films that have been produced; the historical studies that those who work in the archives have published; the fiction, poems, and essays that women from these communities have created; the studies of law and legal reforms that experts have contributed— all confirm the tremendous diversity. (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 13)

Liberal democratic ideology that is against Muslim veil in the West has constantly not been able to accept this discourse on choice and consequently has failed Muslim women to achieve freedom and equality in their own lands. Dress is overly emphasized as a symbol of freedom or subjugation. Living in a certain social class, and religious community requires us to stick to a specific set of choices. We need to understand social and political conditions in which people live before tagging them oppressed and rushing to their rescue. Freedom should to be grounded in the everyday lives of people. The American realisation[23] of a Muslim woman is an individual suffering at the hands of male cruelties due to unjust teachings of Quran. However, Islamic feminists argue, first, Quran does not carry any such

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[23] In this accusation on Islam as an oppressive religion, some Islamic insiders like Ayaan Hirsi Ali have played their role too, who blame Islam as for misery of women in Muslim majority countries.

traditions; second, callous behaviour of men towards them is not the only concern of Muslim women. There are abundant stories of courage, resilience, faith in God and family love, which never get attention. Women, Muslim women, find it disappointing when their circumstances are ignored, their successes not celebrated, and their cultural dynamics overlooked in the process of envisioning, providing and implementing 'best' form of 'freedom' for them. There is much more in the lives of Muslim women than presence or absence of freedom only. They face wars, deaths, failures in relations, and disturbed love lives, but what worries their saviours most is their outlook (Abu-Lughod, Do Muslim Need Saving, 2013).

Taking on the issue of veiling Martha Nussbaum combats Western critique by presenting an alternative perspective. In her analysis of debates on veil, she simplifies the argument by stating veil as a piece of cloth only that has got no power of oppressing any one. To allow women to freely use it to their likings is respecting their choice and banning it would be against the progressive liberal values. We should rather ban the glorification of practices like plastic surgery and over reliance on cosmetics to please male gaze. Those who support the ban on veil in public as a security hazard, how can they ignore the fact that sometimes people simply cover their face to save themselves from cold or dust. There are professionals who cover their face to perform their tasks effectively like doctors, dentists etc. Hence, what matters most is to understand and appreciate diversity of dressing choices than limiting it. There are graver issues that make women suffer than veil or not to veil: economic inequality, huger, domestic and sexual abuse etc. (Nussbaum, 2012). Adding an interesting perspective, to Lila Ahmad, veil and class relationship is important to be understood in the debates on veil in Western diaspora. The West was not concerned about *hijab* when Muslim women were cleaners and doing menial jobs, but now that they are becoming teachers, lawyers, experts in social and natural sciences, so their position of influential authority is a cause of the unrest. Veil could be an emblem for oppression or liberation, nonetheless it is fashion too—a style statement, a cultural and a transcultural artefact (Ahmad, 2011). A third perspective on veil is of Mariam Cooke who considers veil as a significant identity and unity marker in representations of Muslim women. Muslim women belong to diverse cultures so are the forms of veil that they use to cover their head or/and face. There is no denial that in many societies veil is forced upon Muslim women too, to some extent, however, there are Muslim women who veil by choice to assert their religious and political selves. In addition, there are social and economic implications of veil

too. For some middle-class women it works as a shield enabling them to go out of their homes, get education, and work without being tagged as immodest or less respectful[24]. The divide on acceptance of veil is not only between believers and non-believers of Islamic faith, but even with in Muslim circles there are groups who have varied sentiments about veiling and its forms. Veil is not merely a piece of cloth; there is a multi-layered symbolic significance of it (Cooke, 2000).

2.6.6.2   The Question of Coexistence: Why or Why not Islamic Feminism?

Islamic gender theory and Western feminism apparently do not go well together, but that is misconception. Islam and feminism are not incompatible. Islam is not the only religion charged with patriarchy, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity; all have religious sections that for their vested interests propagate patriarchy imbued with religion and vice versa. Women in all these religions, in contemporary history, have been re-reading scripture to negate prevailing androcentric order (Shaikh, 2013). Rita Gross, a Buddhist feminist, says, to understand religion in its true spirit, gender as a category cannot be ignored. It is relevant to both men and women as they share the world and what goes on it—beliefs, rituals, practices, and institutions. She further adds that inclusion of women in religious and social debates should not be a supplementary, but a blend where they are an integral and complete part of it. Only then, we can work against their systematic exclusion from mainstream discourses (Gross, 1996). Feminism as a progressive ideology accommodates a variety of contexts and positionalities, be it religious[25] or sociocultural worldviews. Further, Islam provides space for feminism that is sensitive to its religio-cultural norms. So, buying into Western notions of exclusivity and alienation of Islam and feminism is unjust, that would only result into increased radicalized interpretations of Islam where women would be visible lesser and lesser. The coinage of 'Islamic feminism' and coexistence of Islam and feminism is favourable both for Islam and feminism (Bahlul, 2000). Along with the Western incredulity, the disbelief in Islamic feminism is an outcome of cynicism from certain circles among Muslim women who question the need of feminism. The antagonists of feminism consider feminism a blasphemy to Islam. To them feminists promote Western agendas and objectify Muslim women as sufferers of patriarchy, that is, coupled with Islam. Orientalist portrayals of Muslim women in arts and literature[26] have

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[24] Sadly, on the other hand, some women are not able to work in certain roles because they carry veil
[25] Religion itself along with other soul sciences has always been keenly concerned with issues of women
[26] See Fatima Mernissi, section 2.4.6

played a role in affirming the annoyance of these groups towards feminism. But in no way, shunning away from feminism is a logical reaction to such portrayals; instead appropriation of feminism is an alternative. Disdaining feminism reinforces misogynist image of Islam and stereotypes about Muslim women (Badran, 2009).

Fatima Seedat proposes that both Islam and feminism as two intellectual responses to colonial and neo-colonial forces against Muslim women. She builds up her argument on postcolonial lines by challenging the centrality of Western values and European ideologies, incapable of aligning with many local realities, as a point of reference. Premising upon Chakarbarty and Barlas, Seedat questions the concept of bringing Islam and feminism together. To her, relying on European socio-political frameworks is accepting the European hegemony, whereas Islam has its own history of promoting gender equality. The modernist efforts of Muslim women are primarily engagements with Islam although they may have implications for feminism too. This is what Seedat terms as **'taking Islam for granted'** i.e., looking for solutions in indigenous/Islamic tradition for all concerns of women. In this tradition Islamic history of gender equality is linked with contemporary practices of Muslim women working for the same cause. It dismisses over generalized constructs of Muslim women need saving from Muslim men. Therefore, the rejection of label Islamic feminism is in alignment with greater postcolonial constructs of resisting marginalisation, objectification, and Western patronizing. A careful convergence with acknowledging historical tradition of intellectual thought of Islam and Muslim women is acceptable, otherwise, Seedat argues, differences diversify when celebrated, they do not divide (Seedat, 2013).

Mir-Hosseni claims **Islamic feminism is not suited to us**, but not for incompatibility of Islam and feminism, issues of nomenclature, or Western affiliations of the concepts, but for other reasons. In an interesting turn to this debate, according to Mir-Hosseni, when Islam is linked with feminism, these Islamic feminists put gender equality and Muslim women's welfare at the background and start promoting Islamist political agenda[27]. Some of them insist upon traditional gender roles and others including the young Islamic feminist activists promote Islam than Muslim women. Second, Islamists themselves claim, they do not need any sort of feminism as Islam gives women all they need. So, they are challenging the very utility of feminism and Islamic feminism for

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[27] Mir-Hosseni terms Islamic feminism as 'unwanted child of political Islam'

Muslim women. Third, in nineteen-nineties when Islamic feminism started to strengthen its roots, ironically, its pioneering members disowned it. They disassociated themselves with feminism, Islamic or secular and nomenclature became a bone of contention. Fourth, those who discredited Western feminism for Islamic feminism had discrepancies in their personal life and in the academic stance that they propagated. They enjoyed all the perks of Western feminist success to suit their life style at home and wanted 'Islamic' feminism for their fellow Muslim women—hypocrisy at its best. Fifth, Islamic feminists are divided in their opinion; there are many differences on the understanding of its constituent elements i.e., 'Islam' and 'feminism'. Sixth, Islamic feminism is challenged by 'Muslim traditionalists' who resist change, 'Islamic fundamentalists' consider s*hariah* as the sole solution. Secular fundamentalists too are against the marriage of religion and feminism. Seventh, in post 9/11 world women's rights are a part of bigger unit i.e., human rights and Islam does not enjoy a positive image in this domain. Eighth, we need to look at how and why the Islamic feminists who earlier were believers of irreconcilability between Islam and feminism have become now advocates of it, what lead to this change?[28] (Mir-Hosseni, 2011).

2.6.6.3 Muslim Feminisms: Secular vs. Islamic

Women have been faithful carriers of culture in Islamic societies. Men even if deceive cultural values are not answerable, whereas women are held accountable, since there is a potential danger of dishonour. From the early twentieth century to twenty-first century, Muslim women have been battling with patriarchy and their struggle was not merely an ideological struggle, but something that has improved the lives of many living under Islam. This jihad of gender was not against infidels, but against their same faith followers where winning gender justice was the motive, *jihad* through *ijtihad.* This re-appropriation helped clarifying stereotypes against Islam and bridged religious and secular. Muslim women who are making efforts for women's cause follow two broader paradigms, secular and Islamic. **Muslim Islamic feminism** relies on *ijtihad*, women-centred Quranic exegeses, gender egalitarian Islamic principles, and complete equality in all public and private spheres. Muslim Islamic feminism is an effort for gender egalitarian Islam where Islamic modernists, driven by progressive ideology rely on *ijtihad* and take into consideration women's perspective in Quranic exegeses to advocate complete equality in

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[28] Studying the lives of protagonists of Islamic feminism is important to understand the real motives behind it

public and private sphere. **Muslim secular feminism** is activism for socio-political equality between genders that is based on anti-colonial, humanist, and nationalist approach. This includes political rights, reforms in laws, access to and representation of women in religious spaces like mosques following modernist Islamic spirit. Secular Muslim feminism though imbued with religion, primarily is a movement based nationalist feminism (Egyptian, Syrian etc.), whereas Islamic feminism tries to develop a religiously galvanized model for egalitarian Islam with lesser explicit emphasis on activism. The valance of **what is secular and what is religious** remains volatile; these concepts have been evolving over the time. There is no hard line between religious and secular in the context of feminism. Secular and religious among Muslim women both converge for improving the life of Muslim women. Furthermore, historically too there have been no major clash of interests or ideological differences in secular Muslim feminism and Islamic Muslim feminism, in fact secular Muslim feminism lead to religious version of Muslim feminism. At this point, it is also important not to confuse Islamic with Islamist. Islamist is linked to political Islam with un-challenging, conventional realization of religion whereas; Islamic means modernist, progressive ideology (Badran, 2009)[29].

Interestingly, secular tendencies of Muslim feminism developed in **areas** where Islamism and political Islam were having a stranglehold, whereas Islamic feminism flourished in areas that had secular outlook. The meaning of 'secular' has been changing in its appeal in Muslim world. *Almaniyya*, was the initial word used for secular in Arabic, meaning worldly. The implication of it was that state and religion should not be entwined, or state should be representative of all religions. In practice, despite growing appeal of modernity and secularism, Islam remained official religion of Arab world and Middle East. Turkey, declared itself as secular state. During nineteen-seventies, with the rise of Islamism in Iran, secular meant, anti-Islamic or against Islam and the women advocating feminism they were perceived as transgressing set limits of Islam. Seculars believed in modernity, religious in tradition, and the gulf between the two widened. In the last part of twentieth century, both religious and secular came closer with a realization that Islam has a role to play both in *deen* and *dunya*, separating the two would be limiting the potential of what Islam has to offer (Badran, 2009).

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[29] The figures in appendix illustrate the concept of Muslim secular feminisms and Muslim Islamic feminisms

Muslim feminism has matured to the point where divide between secular and religious is blurring now. It is important to understand individual standpoints of secular Muslim feminists and Islamic feminists in relation to feminist identity. No doubt, both share feminist discourses and procedures, but they differ in their association, ownership, and manifestations of the concept. To secular feminists, nationalist identity is the representative identity; they share global feminist cause, but they are Egyptian feminists, Palestinian feminists, Syrian feminist or Turkish feminists etc. Islamic feminists on the other hand take up de-colonial Islamic identity that has its roots in Islamic theology and tradition with a progressive approach. "We all have multiple identities, naming just one seems, to many, to threaten their other identities" (Badran, 2009, p. 310).

Islamic feminism	Secular Feminism
Muslim Feminism	
Theory	Activism
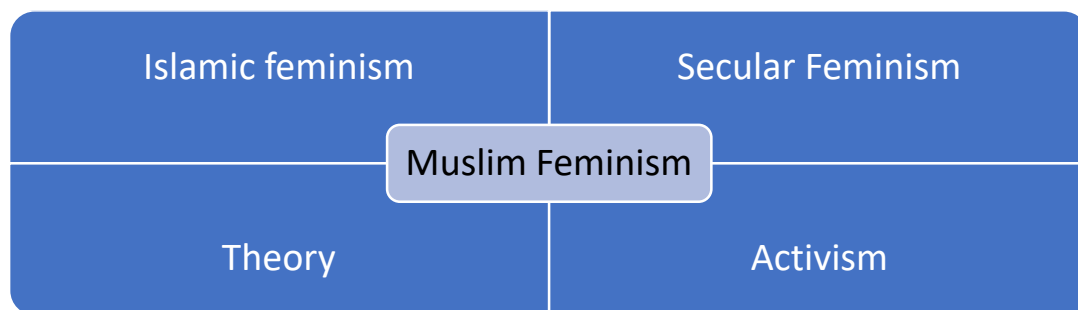
Figure 7: Muslim Feminism and its Facets

2.7 Postfeminism: Understanding the Concept

Postfeminism is feminist today (Kim, 2001; Kavka, 2002; McRobbie, 2004). As an ideology it is emerging and evolving, concurrently situating itself on poststructuralist epistemology that permits it to tolerate a wide range of definitional possibilities. The suffix feminism, in postfeminism is still subject to varied interpretations since its surfacing dating back to late nineteenth century, so the expectancy of having a definite definition of postfeminism will remain a fallacy. The hybrid origin of the concept is traced back to late twentieth century neo-liberal politics, media and popular culture (Genz & Barbon, 2009). One understanding of the concept postfeminism is that feminism has achieved its objectives in emancipating women, all the struggle starting from first wave suffrage movement to radical second wave agenda, now there is no relevance of it in modern women's lives; this is an era of 'new femininities' (Gill & Scharff, 2011). In the same study Gill and Scharff suggest that postfeminism develops sensibility of freedom in women without involving them in heavy debates of feminist politics. Postfeminism is more of a cultural turn in

feminism that does not affiliate it with any political motives. To Ann Brooks, postfeminism is multi-disciplinary concept: "Many of the writers, theoreticians and practitioners discuss postfeminism as an intersection of a number of theoretical, conceptual and disciplinary influences" (Brooks, 2003, p. 4).

Faludi (1991) writes, postfeminism is a backlash against feminism in which women are providing subtle critiques of feminism. Postfeminists are reverting to those privileges that women lost at the hands of feminism, including, celebrating femininity, working on female beauty, domesticity and interest in men. Imelda Whelehan terms this backlash as retrosexist where people are glorifying the sexist notions of prefeminist times (Whelehan, 2000). According to Smith (2005), feminism just focused on young white heterosexual white women. Whereas, postfeminism addresses feminist diversity and plurality. Further, feminism did not cover many of the choices that women actually make in their everyday lives, postfeminism taps into all those unattended domains. To Faludi (1991), one of the major reasons of feminism's shift to postfeminism is popularity of pop culture, and desire in women to embrace femininity. In the feminist journey, many women were showing indignation at the deprivation of their rights to sexuality and men. Postfeminism was "a reactionary return to definitions of women's happiness as realizable only through men" (Crane 1994, 257). Some other forms of this return to traditional femininity including love for fashion, beauty, and family/home. Domesticity is valued in postfeminism that has resulted in publication of home-advice manuals and self-help books, since women were not prepared for this change (Smith, 2005). Women want to be women again by following 'mommy track' (Braitwaite, 2004). Feminist women suffered identity crisis as their preferring career over marriage resulted in disorientation and disappointment[30] (Walters, 1995). Feminism, no doubt has contributed a lot, and women accept it, but they at the same time now feel burdened by the expectations that association with feminism bring upon them, so they prefer postfeminist realness and liveliness (Braitwaite, 2004). The similar views are presented by Carne (1994), where women refused to link themselves with feminism[31].

Popular culture is significantly influencing young people's reality. Postfeminist women prefer individualism to sisterhood (Braitwaite, 2004). This individualism of

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[30] Whereas, Whelehan (2000) considers this return to family inclination as emotionally blackmailing women towards traditional femininity.

[31] On the contrary, in an empirical study Hall and Rodriguez (2003) found that postfeminism still is believed to be a myth and women are following feminist notions.

postfeminist woman, in Bellefante (1998) words is 'self-obsession'. McRobbie (2004) considers that postfeminism has burdened women with the responsibility of making right choices, when they claim to 'have all'. Dickerson (2004) describes beauty as a pressure put upon women by media driven unreal standards. Tiggeman's (2006) research found that the negative complexes about body image prevailed more in youth who were heavy consumer of television. In another study by Andsager (1999), the results show that gender stereotypes and gender roles in young adults were synchronising with movies they watched. Media is significant in the flourishing of the concept postfeminism, by portraying feminists as man-hating, bra-burning, hairy lesbians (Walters, 1995). Furthermore, it is promoting consumer culture by using femininity as a tool (Black, 2006). Braithwaite (2004) considers it a misrepresentation and exploitation of women, presenting them frivolous, mindless consumers.

Postfeminism is a sensibility and an atmosphere with a network of possible definitions. Its origin is traced to be hybrid, in media, journalism, neo-liberal politics and popular culture. Postfeminism is still emerging and developing. The spirit of postfeminism is expanding the range of feminist concerns. When feminism is appropriated along postmodern lines, it functions as postfeminism (Nicholson, 1992). In postmodern feminism, gender is just one variable among many other variables to relate with issues of women (Fraser & Nicholson, 1988). According to Brooks (2003), postfeminism links feminism to historical and critical development in the field, as well as connects with contemporary discourses on post-structuralism, psychoanalytic theory and post-colonialism. "Postfeminism is by definition contradictory, simultaneously feminist and antifeminist, liberating and repressive, productive and obstructive of progressive social change" (Projansky, 2007, p. 68). Instead of defining postfeminism, it is understood through its manifestations. Genz and Barbon (2009) investigated postfeminist cultural texts and theories by following a contextual approach that creates connection between various articulations. The prefix post in postfeminism has three implications: one, discontinuation of feminist tradition, where feminism has become a thing of past; second, it is a phase in the development of feminist thought, third, an ambivalent positionality, where the term can be associated as well as disassociated with feminism. A definite definition of postfeminism is not possible because the suffix feminism in postfeminism, too, lacks an agreed upon definition.

Postfeminism is a broad concept with varied realizations and interpretations. Relying on various studies, summarily, it includes: 'an epistemological break within feminism', 'a historical shift after height of second wave', 'a backlash against feminism', and 'postfeminism as a sensibility'. First, in epistemological development postfeminism supports diversity of feminist facets. This postfeminist realization is anti-hegemonic, postcolonial, and democratic. The second sense of the concept is feminism is a concept of past and we have moved to third/fourth wave of feminism. Third, postfeminism as a backlash applies that feminism has achieved its goals and women are now going back to prefeminist lifestyle and preferences. Fourth, developing postfeminist sensibility applies, women are free to make their choice without associating themselves with any form of feminist politics.

2.7.1 Postfeminism: The Origins

Nancy Cott traces the roots of postfeminism back to 1919 in Greenwich Village where a group termed their movement of trans-gender and trans-sex morality as postfeminism. Then two world wars did not allow the concept to emerge completely and it culminated and resurfaced in nineteen eighties (Cott, 1992) . Susan Faludi in her book *Backlash* writes postfeminism started in nineteen-twenties when ex-feminists started making public confession against feminism[32]. She is of the view that like other post movements postfeminism is reactive to earlier forms of feminism (Faludi, 1991). According to Lynne Alice, postfeminism's emergence is a point of contention. There is no agreement on when it started, but that it sprang as an outcome of success of suffragette movement in US and of second wave feminism in nineteen-sixties (Alice, 1995). According to Sarah Gamble, the term came to surface in nineteen-eighties through media where it was used to express a jubilant detachment from fixed theoretical constructs of feminism (Gamble, 2006). Genz and Barbor consider postfeminism a result of other social and cultural norms of late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The term, itself, emerged by the end of twentieth century to the beginning of twenty-first century, simultaneously with the concepts like 'girl power', 'postmodern feminism' and 'third wave feminism' (Genz & Barbon, 2009).

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[32] that she terms as 'backlash' as discussed earlier

2.7.2   Postfeminism and its Discontents: Discursive Modalities

According to a wide number of theorists, postfeminism like other non-essentialist movements is an amorphous phenomenon; there is no fixed definition of it. Postfeminist agenda revolves around challenging victimization, favouring autonomy and inculcating responsibility. Basing itself on liberal humanism, it is very adaptive concept that accommodates myriad versions of women's freedom movements. The influential figures in the study of postfeminism are not agreed upon since the field is still developing and maturing. There are contributions being made by many scholars dealing with different aspects of postfeminism, however a consensus upon key contributors does not exist. Just like Islamic feminism, there are scholars in postfeminism who do not use the term postefeminst as an ideological construct for their work (Gamble, 2006). Popular culture, academic writings, and socio-political investigations all have, contributed, and experienced the presence of postfeminism. Postfeminism is appreciated for its pluralistic outlook, however it is criticized for lack of clear definition and solid theoretical underpinnings (Genz & Barbon, 2009). The very nature of concept is such that there is no single definition of it. "Many of the writers, theoreticians and practitioners discuss postfeminism as an intersection of a number of theoretical, conceptual and disciplinary influences" (Brooks, 2003, p. 4).

The earlier understanding of postfeminism was that it is against feminists. But in fact, it is a realistic movement, where younger feminists decided to divert from some of the feminist stances that were negatively resulting into disturbed family life, single parenting, depression, suicide etc. In nineteen-seventies, feminists differed substantially on the major causes of female oppression. Nonetheless, some of the causes that they unanimously considered responsible for female oppression were: "male control of women's fertility, patriarchal system of inheritance, [and] capitalism's need for a docile labor force" (Barret & Phillips, 1992, p. 2). Theorization of the concepts like 'oppression', 'patriarchy' and 'women' in connection with class, race and ethnicity is important in feminist theory. Postfeminism challenged the consensus on various concepts of feminism based on critiques that came from women of colour, ideas of sexual differences and identity, along with feminism's interaction with anti-foundationalist cultural critiques (Brooks, 2003). Furthermore, "postfeminism concentrates a great deal of representational attention on home, time, work, and consumer culture and tends to produce narratives and images that

represent female anxiety and fantasize female empowerment in these realms" (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 4).

Chela Sandoval writes postfeminism challenges hegemonic structures of feminism. The earlier forms of feminism were about equality and postfeminism is about difference, diversity and change (Sandoval, 1991). According to Anna Yeatman, postfeminism is a mature form of feminism where it promotes pluralism and change (Yeatman, 1994). Feminist theories are differentiated either based on the processes that is applied in their formation, or the viewpoint they promote (Alice, 1995). Following that, on theoretical front, postfeminism challenges stereotypical notions of feminism about oppression, patriarchy, sexuality, identity etc. to recontextualise them in the paradigm of poststructuralist cultural politics. Earlier feminist theories were materialistic in their approach, while postfeminism relying on the works of Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan appropriates feminist notions so that they become more relatable and applicable (Barett, 1992). In postfeminism cloak, feminism has visible links with cultural theory in describing feminism's 'turn to culture'. Michele Barett notes the value of 'process of symbolisation', 'subjectivity', 'psyche' and 'self'. Postfeminism's political side comes from post-colonialism and a 'shift from equality to difference' is based on postmodern spirit. All these aspects are important in 'feminist epistemological project' (Barett, 1992).

According to Genz and Barbone (2009) postfeminism and its cultural forms incorporate the role of cultural politics, popular culture, 'representation and cultural space', pornography, performing arts, media and film theory, semiology, semiotics, and discourse analysis. It includes not only 'representation of women in different cultural forms', but also 'rupture[s] the coherence of address', 'dislocate[s] meaning', and 'destabilise[s] theory'. Postfeminism is an interdiscursive and intercontextual concept, so creating 'academia' vs. 'popular culture' divide disintegrates the concept. The beauty of this concept lies in its complexity and liminality than confining it to a well-defined box. Postfeminism is not a 'new' feminism that is revolutionary in its nature, but the one that negates exclusionary logic. It is neither utopia, nor nostalgia; postfeminism is a resistance project.

> The relationships between feminist and postfeminist discourses are multiple and varied. Confusion rules as postfeminism is variously identified or associated with an anti-feminist backlash, pro-feminist third wave, Girl Power dismissive of feminist politics, trendy me-first power feminism and academic postmodern feminism. (Genz & Barbon, 2009, p. 10)

2.7.2.1   Postfeminism and Academia

In academic debates postfeminism like other post-movements deconstructs feminism. This deconstruction is on two levels, first postmodernist front, not taking woman as a monolith, second as a multiculturalist ideology, valuing women of all races, ethnicities and geographical origins. It challenges universal sisterhood from the perspectives of margins. Posfeminists give importance to postcolonial feminism, queer feminism, and versions of feminism emerging out of a variety of identity markers of religion, race, sexuality and economic class. It problematizes essentialist notions of femaleness and homogenous notions of second wave feminism: "Postfeminism thus embraces a complexity of vision and gives vent to the multivalent, inharmonious and conflicting voices of contemporary women, including the 'other' voices of feminists themselves. The postfeminist movement insists that feminism has to be viewed pluralistically" (Genz & Barbon, 2009, p. 30). Amelia Jones comments that postfeminist stance makes feminism de-radicalise itself (Jones, 1994). Postfeminists address subjectivities and differences. Postfeminist critique deconstructs and democratises the categories of man, woman, and feminist. It dissolves disciplinary boundaries, and makes disciplines converge. Postfeminist subject is considered decentred, in which it has one existence out of many. Postfeminism is also in close connection with cultural theory and subaltern studies.

In postmodernist spirit of the word, postfeminism challenges Universalist approach and accommodates a variety of feminist versions. Sheila Tobias considers postfeminism attractive due to its accessibility to all women without too much of theoretical complications. Moreover, postfeminism does not undermine the value of feminist success over the years, but appreciates feminist activism (Tobias, 1998). Ann Brooks in her academic engagement with the concept deconstructs binary oppositional contrasts of gender categories in the spirit of liberal humanist values. "In the process postfeminism facilitates a broad-based, pluralistic conception of the application of feminism, and addresses the concerns of marginalized, diasporic and colonized cultures for a non-hegemonic feminism capable of giving voice to local, indigenous and postcolonial feminisms" (Brooks, 2003, p. 4). The concept of postfeminism has evolved to a movement that accepts diversity and is a meeting point of 'anti foundationalist' discourses such as 'postcolonialism', 'post structuralism', and 'post modernism'. Postfeminism, post-colonialism, post-structuralism, post-modernism all share the prefix 'post' that does not mean the end of either of these concepts, but critical engagement with the earlier notions

in respective domains. The nature of that engagement varies, for example in post colonialism, the emphasis is on how colonialism affected power structures and marginalized indigenous identities. In post-modernism, 'post' refers to challenging the modernist worldview of constructing reality. Whereas, in postfeminism, 'post' implies moving away from imperialist, essentialist understanding of the concept feminism towards a pluralistic, inclusive and diversified realization of it (Brooks, 2003, p. 4). According to Rebbeca Walker, young women have a different viewpoint towards the world, they demand flexible identity, than the one based on contradictory pairs of good vs. bad; the lesser flexibility of earlier versions of feminism makes women of today fear feminism (Walker, 1995).

2.7.2.2   Postfeminism and Politics

Postfeminism responds to and is emblematic of the paradoxes of modern-day politics and culture, seeking to reconcile feminist ideas of female emancipation and equality, consumerist demands of capitalist societies and media-friendly depictions of feminine/masculine empowerment…For us, it makes more sense to examine how power functions in contradictory ways in postfeminist discourses and how engaged individuals rework notions of agency in the context of postfeminist politics. In this way, while we do not engage in a simple celebration of postfeminism and its representations, we hope to provide a critical analysis that elicits and reveals its drawbacks and possibilities, its transgressive and retrogressive dimensions. (Genz & Barbon, 2009, p. 41)

Postfeminism is primarily a non-political ideology. Connected to that is the fact, the times in which postfeminism has appeared, people in general have lesser explicit political affiliations. Postfeminism's most of political causes have been on cultural front, for example, beauty pageants and the cultural politics that surrounds it. Brett (1992) is of the view that postfeminism is feminism's turn to culture. To Shelly Budgeon, postfeminists have a liberal humanist political philosophy that promotes individualism resulting into neo-liberal consumer culture. It further implies that postfeminist agenda would depend on individual choice and lifestyle than a fix set of rules (Budgeon, 2001). Women can do whatever they want without worrying about anachronistic political activist goals, and that is real feminism. Being empowered is making most of one's potential, orthodox feminists over gloss victimization that harms women. It portrays them as meagre creatures who have no resilience, which is not true. "Sexism is past, choice, empowerment and feminism is

present" (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 2). The severity of collective female victimisation has lessened, so there is a need to address individual concerns. Elspth Probyn calls it 'choiceoisie', women choiceoisie their life according to their own desires and ambitions than being influenced by other factors that surround them. Postfeminism celebrates success and favours individual efforts and diversity (Probyn, 1990).

Diane Negra, in her influential book '*What a Girl Wants: Fantasizing the reclamation of Self in Postfeminism' (2009)* challenges the success of feminism. Negra questions, if female freedom is the focus of feminism, then why women are still not happy? Referring to an article published in New York Times in 2006, she observes that a group of Christian women were increasingly disposed to conservative dressing and their numbers were constantly increasing through networking with women who shared the same ideology. Another article published in the same year hinted towards the rise in income disparity between males and females. Since the years nineteen-nineties, college graduate women were earning less than men did. These two inferences allude to the fact that feminist claims of equality and promotion of liberal values were not bringing change in the lives of people, instead they were showing retaliation against them (Negra, 2009). Where lies the fault, in feminist ideology or implementation? To me, the general lack of synchronisation between the aspirations of modern women, and feminist ideology, is causing young feminists to adopt as their representative ideology.

Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff in their book *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity (2011)* discuss the close connection between neoliberalism and postfeminism based on similarity of features. They write, neoliberalism means different things to different people and its meanings have been constantly evolving. A shared understanding of the term is that it allows businesses to develop and people to invest with lesser governmental regulations. Neoliberal economies do not discourage privatisation and introduce new taxes to turn down public deficit. There are three levels on which neoliberalism and postfeminism are connected: first, both ideologies share norms of self-regulation; second, both favour individualism; third, considering the worldview of postfeminist women they become ideal subjects of neoliberalism (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Moreover, they add in postfeminism new identities, which Gill and Scharff call 'subjectivities'. In our times, 'figure of pregnant beauty', 'sexual entrepreneurship', 'individualisation', 'empowered subjects', 'defying objectification', 'controlling gaze', 'sexualized self-representation', 'counter hegemonic modes of femininity', 'desacralisation

of social life', 'domestication of married women', 'transcultural comparisons', 'liberalisation of global economy', 'neocolonialism' and 'erosion of grand narratives', all are shaping individual and collective identities (Gill & Scharff, 2011).

2.7.2.3 Postfeminism: Body, Beauty, and Sexualities

Postfeminist sensibility includes the notion that femininity is increasingly figured as bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification in the ways some women are presented; an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of 'makeover paradigm'; a resurgence of ideas of natural sexual difference; the marked 'resexualization' of women's bodies; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 4)

Naomi Wolf in her famous work, *The Beauty Myth (1990)* deals with unrealistic demands of female beauty in media and society[33]. She is of the view that feminism has not adequately utilized the potential and momentum it once acquired. Although not entirely, yet feminism is responsible for not tackling the issue of prejudiced idealized portrayal of women beauty standards on media. "We have become responsible for the design of our bodies" (Giddens, 1991, p. 102). Postmodern desire to have body like popular cultural icons is making people victim of plasticity, diet routines, heavy exercise and liposuctions. Media instigates this 'physical iconography' for capitalist gains (Schwichenberg, 1993). The juncture of postmodernism and capitalism results into bodily materiality that Susan Bordo calls, 'cultural plastic'. She explains that it is the desire and efforts to meet certain beauty ideals in terms of 'hair', 'face shape', 'skin colour' etc. which is normalised as femininity through media, magazines, and movies. Talking about the downside of it Bordo writes, "they reproduce on the level of discourse and interpretation the same conditions which postmodern bodies enact on the level of cultural practice: a construction of life as plastic possibility and weightless choice, undetermined by history, social location or even individual biography" (Bordo, 1993, p. 270). She further relates beauty to Foucault's notions of discursive construction of power, especially by relating it to racial and ethnic politics of beauty. In postfeminist context, the female body does not aim to fight

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[33] In her later book '*Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and how it Will Challange the 21st Century*' *(1993)*, she clearly describes herself as postfeminist

'sexualisation and objectification', but problematizes notions of 'sexual difference' and 'erotic politics' to refashion identities in pluralistic ways (Bordo, 1993, p. 283). Bordo writes this 'control' over body, to postfeminists, is empowering individual feminine self than serving as, or victim of, capitalist consumerism.

The 'burden of lookism', using Lazar's metaphor, makes women experiment harmful beauty procedures. The desire of 'doing beauty' has become an integral part of 'doing femininity'. Second wave feminists condemned normative beauty expectation and the beauty industry associated with it, however, postfeminists consider it an enjoyable female pursuit (Lazar, 2011). Beauty industry polarizes feminine and feminists. Lazar in an empirical study analysed the discourse that beauty industry capitalizes on, tactfully tapping into socio-psychological expectations on women. There are two types of patterns that advertisement industry relies on: one, the discourse on liberty coupled with beautification, implying unless a woman looks beautiful she is not completely liberated; two, the discourse on right, which reinforces in women the spirit to look good as their fundamental right over their bodies. "The notion of emancipation is based on a discourse of rights, which is central to most second- and third-wave feminist perspectives…the regime of representation has shifted ostensibly to one of progressivism, while maintaining the normalization of beauty practices as fundamentally constitutive of feminine selves" (Lazar, 2011, p. 49). Adding another perspective to beauty industry debate, Negra argues that "[p]ostfeminism thrives on anxiety about aging and redistributes this anxiety among a variety of generational clusters while also always extending the promise/possibility of age evasion" (Negra, 2009, p. 12).

Debates on sexuality in (post)feminist context are heavily influenced by the works of Micheal Foucault, particularly *History of Sexuality (1976).* He discusses a range of ideas on sex and sexuality, but the ones relevant to feminist debates are: "his disruption of fixed and stable categories of sexuality and sex; his conceptualisation of new forms of power; his relationship between power and pleasure; and his articulation of the link between resistance and identity" (Brooks, 2003, p. 190). Foucault understands the relationship between body and sexuality, but he does not explicitly discussed it in his work (Bailey, 2003). According to Bailey Foucault's work has feminist compatibility in understanding power, identity and resistance (Bailey, 2003). Drawing upon Foucault's work, Bordo (1993) contests that female 'docile bodies' can be agents of suppression or/and subversion. A blind consumption of cultural industry may lead to subordination. The female workout at gym

can enhance work efficiency or might function as a tool towards 'feminine decorativeness' in male dominant contexts[34].

Gender/sexual identity in postmodern tradition of multiplicity is comprehensively framed by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble (1990)*. She presented the notion of 'gender performativity' which implies our sexual/biological differences have lesser role in determining our gender identity, gender is performative that is socially constructed. She also provides a critique of foundationalist subject positioning in feminism, the premise of postfeminism. Butler's work creates space for theorizing other forms of identity including gay, lesbian, trans etc. than heterosexual identities only. Martin (1992) asserts that Butler's inclusive identity framework negates sexual essentializations and marginalisation. Similarly, Elspeth Probyn (1987) discussing the relationship between postmodern, body and feminism, critiques essentializing tendencies of feminists in understanding bodily subjectivities.

2.7.2.4   Postfeminism and Popular Culture

To ensure pluralistic feminist identities, to Ann Brooks, it is essential to study the nexus of postfeminism, popular culture, and politics of representation (2003). Popular culture, specifically media, and postfeminism are closely connected. Our understanding of feminism is linked with what media portrays to us. Postfeminist media representations of feminism challenge the second wave notions that feminism is anti-glamorous/anti-feminine. Popular culture provides freedom of choice, however postfeminism's entry into popular culture is considered as compromising on theoretical potential of feminism. Feminism has become "rigid, serious, anti-sex and romance, difficult and extremist", on the contrary, "postfeminism offers the pleasure and comfort of (re)claiming an identity uncomplicated by gender politics, postmodernism, or institutional critique" (Negra, 2009, p. 2). Postfeminism is softer and accommodative version of feminism. It is marked by 'chick flicks', 'celebrity consumerism', 'emergence of female lifestyle icons', and 'female choice' (Negra, 2009, p. 2). "The term 'postfeminism' has been used widely in popular culture, in particular as a descriptive marker for a range of female characters, from Helen Fielding's heroine Bridget Jones to the Spice Girls and the cyberbabe Lara Croft." (Genz & Barbon, 2009, p. 25). "Feminist tools of analysis are effective in reading postfeminist

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[34] Especially academia, she gives the example

texts, thereby countering the postfeminist presumption that feminism is dated, irrelevant, and inapplicable to current culture" (Negra, 2009, p. 4).

Postfeminist cultural forms are doing and undoing feminism at the same time. Ann Brooks (2003) discusses how postfeminism re-evaluates various manifestations of popular culture, including rituals, style, music etc., and presents them as sights for resistance. Postfeminism's turn to popular culture looks at cultural positionality of various groups of women. Popular culture in new cultural studies focuses on agency than the debates about high-low cultures. It looks at production of culture by ordinary people. In that, intellectuals of cultural studies have the responsibility of highlighting and combating hegemonic elements and practices in popular cultural productions. Romance as an element of femininity is highlighted in popular culture, and its realisation takes place in the form of sex, not in the form of traditional love. Cultural studies and postfeminism share search for new possibilities and critiques. TV dramas and fiction texts provide space for new complex readings. Popular cultural icons in postfeminist context provide women new confidence to express their sexuality, but at the same time, these icons carry the danger of capitalism. According to During "cultural populism requires a very nuanced account of these relations between cultural markets, and cultural products. And between culture and politics, in order convincingly to celebrate (some) popular culture as progressive" (1993, p. 18).

2.7.3 Criticism on Postfeminism

Postfeminist ideology/agenda is attacked by critics saying it takes us back to prefeminist age by ignoring the entire history of feminist struggle. Countering this notion, Tania Modleski in her book *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age (1991)* writes, 'post' does not mean end of feminism or going back to pre-feminist times, rather it is maturity of feminism in to an inclusive concept, representative of a wider community of women (Modleski, 1991). Postfeminism is also criticized for its loud voices on sexual freedom that reinforce women's insecurities. Addressing this issue of sexuality, Katie Roiphe opines, women of nineteen-fifties had similar fears that they struggled to wipe out from the minds of women of their generation through feminist writings and activism (Roiphe, 1994). Rene Denfeld backs Rophie's argument that unquestioned causes of morality and purity would take us back to the helpless state of women of nineteenth century (Denfeld, 1995). On the same lines, Genz and Barbon (2009) pose the following questions:

1) 'What does the category of popular feminism imply?'

2) 'Can feminism be political and popular at the same time?'

3) 'Once feminism has become a commodity, does it still have the power to enforce social change?'

Questioning the prefix 'post' in postfeminism, Fernando Toro claims, when we do not know how to describe or signal the change in the development of theory and ideas we complacently start calling it 'post' (Toro, 1999). Anne McClintock presents the similar view that we should not over celebrate the prefix 'post' as it is replaced by a variety of neo-colonial structures (McClintock, 1995). Lisa Adkins denounces postfeminism as a 'failed reproduction of feminist consciousness' where younger feminists have corrupted feminist legacy (Adkins, 2004). Postfeminism's commercial manifestations in the form of 'Girlies' and 'Chicks' is considered as selling out feminist principles for capitalist gains. It is a feminist regression, where female 'body' is being used as a marketing device. Postfeminism is charged as an illegitimate child of feminism that promotes sexist notions. To Negra (2009) postfeminism disfavours single woman by raising their cultural profile and not the status. Some critics like Lee (1988) and Kaminer (1995) consider postfeminism as an elitist discourse that can benefit only educated, economically stable, privileged women and most feminists consider their empowerment discourse clichéd. Bonnie Dow suggests that postefeminist individualism would weaken collective feminist identity and concept of sisterhood (Dow, 1996). According to Brenner (2000) in postfeminism, lack of activity on socio-political front makes women obsessed with personal self. Similarly, Whelehan (2000) comments that deficiency of attention at workplace results into women's being over responsive to intimate expressions. Fluidity and theoretical inconsistency of postfeminism is a hindrance towards political activism and influence, which is perceived as non-commitment of postfeminists.

Despite all the critical comments on various aspects of postfeminism, Genz and Barbon (2009) argue that the criticism on postfeminism loses its worth considering postfeminism provides a new way to perceive the categories of politics, power, and femininity. The functioning of this sensibility is actualised through analysis of inequalities of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and disability (Gill R. , Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of a Sensibility, 2007). Placing feminism and postfeminism head to head in clash with each other, does not bring any good to either of the ideologies, or to the women

(Siegel, 1997). Hence, there is a need to appreciate that postfeminism adds a new dimension to feminist thought, more relatable for women of today. I wrap up this section with Sandra Ponzanesi's comprehensive words:

> It is a question of 'double entanglement' rather than a straightforward rejection or accusation of the postcolonial cultural field. It is a new reality that combines commerce and political contestation, which perhaps has always been there, but now acquires specific connotations and particularities due to the rapid change in forms of communication and travel, and the shifting notions of medium specificity. In an era when literature seems to be very much challenged by the advent of digital technologies, the success of chick lit, and with it of the various ethnic chick-lit genres, is a testimony to the enduring force of women penning their stories, forging their identities across generations and cultures. (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 227)

2.8 Postfeminist Literary Discourse

In the domain of literary studies, postfeminist women's fiction is characterized by chick-lit, romance literature, genre fiction or popular fiction.

2.8.1 Chick Lit: Tracing the Origin

The term 'chick-lit' was first used, inadvertently[35], by Criss Mazza and Jeffery Deshell (1995) for an edited collection of works of contemporary feminist writings to showcase how they are different from mainstream feminist notions and closer to postfeminist understanding of the concept, which turned out to be a brand name for what became an entire publishing industry. Mazza (2006) writes, the purpose of their book was to highlight postfeminist elements in the writings of contemporary women. She explains, "This was the ironic intention of our title: not to embrace an old frivolous or coquettish image of women but to take responsibility for our part in the damaging, lingering stereotype. […] What we couldn't anticipate was that less than ten years later our tag would be greasing the commercial book industry machine" (Mazza, 2006, p. 18). Mazza describes chick lit fiction as embodiment of postfeminist sensibilities:

> [S]imultaneously courageous and playful; frank and wry; honest, intelligent, sophisticated, libidinous, unapologetic, and overwhelmingly emancipated. Liberated from what? The grim anger that feminists had told us ought to be our

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[35] *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction (1995)* and another co-edited work a year later, *Chick-Lit: No Chick Vics (1996)*

pragmatic stance in life. […] Liberated to do what? To admit we're part of the problem. How empowering could it be to be part of the problem instead of just a victim of it? I can't remember the titles we rejected, but the one we ultimately chose encompassed all of the above. (Mazza, 2006, p. 18)

There are a few other descriptions of the origins of chick-lit too. Yardley (2006) writes that the label chick-lit was used for 'City Girls Books' by Harlequin publications. She is of the view that Helen Fielding's novels, as they are believed, do not mark the beginning of chick-lit. Fielding herself claims she had the influence of Jane Austen's works. To Yardley, Marian Keyes is the 'godmother of Chick Lit'. She further traces the chick-lit elements in Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (1973). According to Smith (2007), the history/tradition of chick-lit goes back to female centred novels of Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austin. However, in contemporary tradition, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary (1998)* marks the beginning of chick-lit tradition (Ferris and Young, 2006).

2.8.2 Characteristics of Chick Lit

The characteristics that such literature exhibits include: humour, urban heroine, love, marriage, dating, relationships, drugs, party, sex, beauty, and rebellious attitude to break the set conventions. According to Gormley (2009), chick-lit is authored by females and majorly read by women, this is one of the defining characteristics of chick-lit. Although, some male writers have produced chick-lit too, yet with female names. Second characteristic of chick-lit is its romantic comedy plot with ostensible consumerism. The lead lady is always in search of a man. She has great urge for shopping and all the events are framed in a humorous tone. Third, these novels have very distinctive cover designs that identifies them with the characteristics of chick-lit. Chick-lit covers are designed with bright colors and images of consumer culture such as, high heels, lipsticks, shopping bags, and other similar semiotic resources. Rocio Montoro, synthesizes Gormley's characteristics into the following chick-lit definition:

[A]uthor, reader and protagonist are female, with the latter living in a markedly consumerist society in which she thrives; additionally, the original Chick Lit novels tend to prefer a woman who is white, middle-class, heterosexual, young and single. This woman also has some idealistic romantic aspirations and beliefs which often give rise to comedic moments; comedy, in turn, is further exploited as a means to disguise this protagonist's shortcomings and some of her many flaws as well as to

downplay the general vicissitudes of her life. Finally, the physical packaging of these novels uniformly links the genre in the way particular semiotic resources are exploited. (Montoro, 2012, p. 3)

Cabot Heather (2003) defines chick-lit as a genre of fiction where women balance out (/try to), the professional, personal, and emotional challenges of modern life. They negate romantic ideals, have experimental sex-life, and maintain a persistent desire to cope with beauty and fashion demands. The fallible nature, self-deprecating discourse, and constant struggle of the heroine on multiple fronts makes reader sympathise with her. Furthermore, the genre constructs itself by confessional style, first person narratives, and reliance on modern communication means, such as emails, chats, messages, diaries, in writing style. Humour, wit, and colloquialism are common denominators of this genre (Cabot, 2003). Adding to that, the stylized packing with handbags, lipsticks, cocktails, and heels add to the 'chick-ness' of this genre. This not only works as a marketing strategy, but also the readers are able to foresee the lively content of the novel (Mabry, 2004).

Chick-lit heroines are "not perfect but flawed, eliciting readers' compassion and identification simultaneously… [authors] deploy self-deprecating humor that not only entertains but also leads readers to believe they are fallible-like them" (Ferriss & Young, 2006, p. 4). According to Criss Mazza, "It's writing that says women are independent [and] confident, but not lacking in their share of human weakness [and] not necessarily self-empowered" (1995, p. 9). "The typical chick-lit protagonist is, as a result, not perfect but flawed, eliciting readers' compassion and identification simultaneously. The heroine of these books can be rude, shallow, overly compulsive, neurotic, insecure, bold, ambitious, witty or surprisingly all of the above – but we love them anyway" (Ferriss & Young, 2006, p. 4). In order to counter postfeminist anxieties of staying spinster and fear of facing an uncertain future, chick-lit heroines enjoy sexuality as a compensation to allude confidence. Ponzanesi relates the self-mockery of chick-heroine to her negotiation of sexual volatility (Ponzanesi, 2014). To McRobbie, this frank sexuality is a reclamation of joyful, unapologetic femininity of these girlish girls (2009). Ariel Levy opines, overly confident sexual-self reconfirms patriarchy than undoing it, reducing women to sex-beings (Levy, 2005). Describing it as, 'raunch culture', she is of the view that excessive display of sexuality is equivalent to female chauvinism that re-enslaves them (Levy, 2005). According to Rochelle Mabry:

Contemporary works provide important new visions of women's voices, communities, and experiences as sexual beings. They are not perfect visions by any means, but they are a step beyond earlier 'women's texts,' which have been even more tightly bound by traditional ideas of what women should be and how women should behave. (Mabry, 2006, p. 205)

Chick literature has now grown out of the boundaries of fiction into 'chick culture' and 'chick-industry'. "Along with chick flicks, the most prominent chick cultural forms are chick TV programs" (Ferriss & Young, 2008, p. 2) which portray the lives of 'twenty- to thirty something middle-class women'. According to Joanne Knowles, "Considering not only the nature of the commentaries produced about chick-lit, but the identities of those writing them, allows us to develop a sense of an alternative chick-lit industry, in which the nature of writing and reading, the politics of publishing and selling fiction, and the way women are represented in contemporary popular media, are debated by those who are themselves stakeholders in these debates" (Knowles, 2008, p. 219). Furthermore, chick-lit now has many sub-genres and sister-genres that have emerged out of it, or share commonalities with chick-lit: 'hen lit', 'matron lit', 'lady lit', 'chick lit jr.', 'mommy lit', 'Ethnick lit', 'Sistah lit', 'Chica lit', 'sastra wangi', 'fragrant literature', 'Hungarian chick lit', 'Christian chick lit', 'church lit', 'lad lit', 'dick lit', 'bride lit', 'wedding fic', 'Bridezilla novels', and 'Southern fried chick lit' (Ferriss & Young, 2006, pp. 5-7). Rocio Montoro, considering the amusement value of chick-lit calls it 'cappuccino fiction' (Montoro, 2012).

2.8.3   Chick Lit and Women's Romance

According to Harzewski (2006), chick-lit has adopted elements from other genres including romance literature. Romance, and funny diction formula is the reason of success behind this literature, attracting young readers in great numbers. Readers see their lives reflected and talked about in these novels, so they can relate with it, as opposed to romance novels based, merely, on fantasy. Chick-lit fictions do not necessarily have successful love story resulting in marriage or companionship, nonetheless, protagonist laughs at herself and uses self-deprecatory tone to enhance the realistic appeal. Chick-lit and romance literature are sister genres, having many commonalities. First, both have female authorship and readership, mainly (Montoro, 2012). Second, both overtly feminize, theme, content and settings (Dixon, 1999). Third, both are commercial genres and focus on salability of the work.

Along with similarities, Montoro (2012) lists some of the difference between romance literature and chick-lit. Chick-lit is urban literature based in metropolitan settings, whereas romance literature is set in exotic settings. Second, chick-lit heroine takes her misadventures lightly, on the contrary in romance literature heroine is brave and wants to win in most situations. Third, there are narrative and stylistic difference between two genres. Speaking of difference between the two genres, Gill and Herdieckerhoff raise some questions:

> Specifically, we ask whether and in what ways chick lit might be said to be 'rewriting' the romance by breaking with conventional formulae. Do chick lit novels offer new versions of heterosexual partnerships? How different are their constructions of femininity and masculinity from those of 'traditional' popular romances such as those published by Harlequin or Mills and Boon? How, if at all, are they positioned in relation to feminist ideas and concerns through their expression of a postfeminist sensibility? (Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006, p. 489)

Romance literature promotes ideal love, whereas chick-lit is about real-life love, dissolving idealism of romantic hero. This genre does not claim to be thought provoking, but entertaining and reflective of social realities of women. Heroine of chick-lit is not an escapist. She faces all the challenges and is identifiable with the readers and everyday living characters. Chick-lit is not a conventional romance genre, it has its own unique constructions that include: "its emphasis on the role of sexual adventures in the romantic quest; the nature of the conclusion of the romantic plot; the importance of the heroine's expression in the world of work, and her evolution as a professional woman; the delight and consolation the heroine finds in indulging herself, particularly in consumer goods; and the privileging of entertainment value, particularly humour, over any challenging or experimental content or style" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 58).

2.8.4 Consumerism and Cosmopolitanism in Chick-Lit

Chick-lit heroines are consumers of *Cosmopolitan* and keep themselves updated with what is happening in fashion and beauty industry. We find references to "women's advice manuals, such as women's magazines, self-help books, romantic comedies, and/or domestic-advice manuals" (Smith, 2008, p. 5) in a myriad of ways. Cosmopolitanism and consumerism are related concepts in chick-lit, since there prevails the ideology of consume and achieve. Chick-lit fiction directly refers to many "consumer culture mediums like

women's magazines, other popular fiction texts, consumer products, movies, and television" (Smith, 2008, p. 6). This functions as a direct or indirect encouragement to buy these products. These novels provide women readership advice on how they should conduct themselves in a modern world and what increases their appeal to men, in particular. The positive reinforcement of these life hacks takes place through heroine's accomplishment in her love life. There are also instances where the consumption of consumer culture and women's advice manuals is satirized.

The whole chick-lit cultural industry is under capitalist influence from authors, editors, publishers to readers—agents, publicists, marketing departments are actively playing their role in making chick-lit a commodity. Quite a few chick-lit authors, for example Carol Wolper, Sophie Kinsella, have been a functional part of consumer industry before they started their career as chick-fiction writers. To target the popular culture admirers, authors try to copy or mimic the writing style of popular magazine. Chick-lit works based on shared value, primarily appraisal of popular culture, have crossed cultural boundaries in terms of readership and authorship, both. Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* has been translated into more than thirty languages. The reach of these texts is expanding through their film adaptations too. Technology is playing its role too in the promotion of these works, authors share their website address in the novel and encourage readers to stay updated with their future works. Publishing houses have created reader lists that they keep updating on new books, reading materials, and events (Smith, 2008).

Fashion is an important element of chick-lit heroine's identity and desire to assimilate in modernity. "[C]onsumer goods are essential to chick-lit heroines' self-conception and self-presentation, and writers commonly give as much attention to the obtaining and assembling of outfits as to the maintenance of faces and bodies" (Wells, 2006, p. 62). According to Harzewski along with structural attractiveness, chick-lit plots are centred on consumerism that legitimizes feminine practices of mass consumption of capitalist products (Harzewski, 2006). Questioning this capitalist consumerism portrayed in chick-lit, Ferriss and Young write, "is chick-lit 'buying in' to a degrading and obsessive consumer culture, or is it ultimately exposing the limitations of a consumerist's worldview?" (Ferriss & Young, 2006, p. 11). McRobbie is against postfeminist consumerism in antifeminist sense and considers it as a 'cheap pleasure' (2009). Ponzansi adumbrates chick-lit postfeminism puts women in a position where they have to juggle between desire and responsibility in current consumerist society (2014).

2.8.5 Chick-Lit Feminism and Postfeminism

Chick lit articulates a distinctively post-feminist sensibility characterised by an emphasis on neo-liberal feminine subjectivities and self-surveillance and monitoring; the notion of the (sexual) body as the key source of identity for women; discourses of boldness, entitlement, and choice (usually articulated to normative femininity and/or consumerism); and a belief in the emotional separateness of men's and women's worlds. It is also characterised by an entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist discourses. (Gill & Herdieckerhoff, 2006, p. 487)

Feminism and postfeminism are apparently contrastive viewpoints, where feminism (second wave) theorizes concepts and postfeminism deconstructs the category of woman. Feminism is generally perceived as against femininity, as feminist 'kill joy'. However, this binary opposition and mutual exclusiveness gets bridged in chick-lit. According to Rocio Montoro in chick-lit "femaleness can be conceived of as an expression of ideas which are situated half-way between feminist and postfeminist ideals" (Montoro, 2012, p. 121). "To suggest this is not to suggest that we live in a […] post-ideological world, but to entertain the possibility that feminist beliefs may have entered the mainstream more fully than we realise" (Hanson, 2004, pp. 25-26). Chick-lit is not aimed at showcasing feminist success, but realities of postfeminist women of today and her affinity with popular culture (Mazza, 2006). Is postfeminism simply negating feminism or there is an associated complex political agenda? McRobbie (2009) is of the view that postfeminism is not only aggressive suspension of feminist agenda, instead it accommodates cultural and political aspects of feminism. One of the postfeminist facet is redrafting gender hierarchies with consciousness of social class, ethnicity and race. Postfeminism in the popular cultural fiction means "gently chiding the feminist past, while also retrieving and reinstating some palatable elements, in this case sexual freedom, the right to drink, smoke, have fun in the city, be economically independent" (12). "However, this also gives rise to new anxieties. There is the fear of loneliness, the stigma of remaining single and the risk and uncertainties of not finding the right partner to be a father to children" (20).

The postfeminist proposal is to "move beyond feminism to a more comfortable zone where women are now free to make their own choices. Withholding critique and proposing individualization and personal choice as straightforward emancipation leads to a kind of complicity with the dominant regime" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 167). "This comprises the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life [. . .]

with processes of liberalization in regard, substitute relation to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations" (McRobbie 2009, p. 12). Postfeminism "mingles progress and retrogression, collusion and critique, resistance and recuperation" (Genz & Barbor, 2009, p. 178). "The coexistence of contradictory liberal and conservative values, that makes the postfeminist 'momentum' a far more sophisticated and pernicious reality than a simple backlash towards the feminism" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 172).

2.8.6 Chick-Lit Slamming and Substance

A meta-industry of commentary and debate has thus developed alongside the industry of chick-lit production, resulting in an ironically parasitic relationship between the two, in which the production of commentary flourishes by propagating criticism of the genre on which its existence depends. (Knowles, 2008, p. 219)

Chick-lit is, unjustly, criticized as self-marketed, short lived, funny fiction with no serious food for thought or symbolic value. According to Ferris and Young, the deprecation of chick-lit is largely owing to its association with females, as producers and readers; this feminization of the genre is resulting into scepticism and doubts (Ferriss & Young, 2006). Chick-lit is even tagged as stories of bad women, who are not worth deeming as role models. The negativities associated with chick-lit are due to the prefix 'chick' that gives it 'girlish infantilization' (Ferriss & Young, 2006). Whereas, those in favour, dismiss the criticism by saying it is the result long-prevailing bias against women's writings. This form of literature has opened avenues for critiquing contemporary cultural products and the society we live in. Adding to that Julliet Wells asserts, "any genre favoured by women writers and readers necessarily deserves literary regard" (Wells, 2006, p. 68) since, this fiction is reaping great financial success for women[36]. Formulaic construction of this genre is also subjected to criticism, but that objection can be dismissed since the rapid pace, technology oriented, first person discourse makes it equitable with autobiography and memoirs (Ponzanesi, 2014). Bainbridge (2001) in a newspaper article dismissed chick-lit as 'froth' that generated debates on merits and demerits of the genre. Chick-lit may not be the exact representation of next generation fiction of women, but in genealogy it is 'younger sister' to the works of Jane Austen, in a light-hearted and less complicated way.

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[36] According to Ferris and Young, chick-lit genre provides opportunities to fresh writers to express their talents without much pressure and expectations (2006).

Misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the term has lead to mixed reactions towards chick-lit. Some feminists have ragged a war against chick-lit, claiming it sabotages the struggle and success women have achieved over the years. They are of the view that excessive femininity of postfeminist women is drawing daggers at feminism. Chick-lit authors are presenting women as sexed up objects. Man-craziness and helplessness in emotional fulfilment of heroines is criticized. However, this is countered by the argument that settling down with a man for life is sexual slavery, and the heroines of chick-lit rebel against it. Kiernan (2006) argues the aversion of sexual relation "doesn't signify liberation; rather it seems to suggest a resigned view toward revisiting feminist sexual politics" (215). Fashion and consumerist tendencies of chick-lit have also gained varied responses. Those in favour consider it as an expression and assertion of female identity, and the opponents call it buying into capitalism. Jessica van Slooten (2006) studied in detail the phenomenon of fashion and consumerism in chick-lit. The chick-lit critics opine appearance and beauty, obsession with weight, height and complexion, the chick-lit traits, reflect negative complex and narcissism. Noami Wolf, in her famous book, *The Beauty Myth* (1990/1991), criticises the unreal beauty standards promoted by media have neurosis attached to it; women feel burdened to live up to these societal cultural standards.

Literature by women performs two functions, either it depicts strong female characters or deals with everyday reality of their modern life. According to Ferris and Young (2006) postfeminist chick-literature does both; it deals with relationship issues, career struggle, love life, and consumerism, all tied with humour. Women want role models that are relatable with their social reality; addressing that, feminism and femininity both are redefined in postfeminist chick literature. Such literature creates a community of women, who cross cultural boundaries and connect with other women based on shared values of freedom, choice and norms of popular culture. According to Sonia Vashishta Oberoi, "if we give a closer look these are not only the girl-meet-guy kind of stuff; rather the novels deal with many important social and emotional issues like gender discrimination, corporate culture, matrimony and relationships, and describe the transition youth is going through" (Oberoi, 2017, p. 131).

Imelda Whelehan (2005) maintains that chick-lit taps into tensions, contradictions, and realities of young women's lives that remained unattended yet. Chick-lit not only gives us an insight into how women of today, think, live and express their identity, but it also works as a parameter of how their life patterns have evolved, and how this change redefines

gender roles and identities in our societies. Chick-lit is like a self-help book that assists women to shuffle between traditionalism and post-modernity. These works have the potential to train them to cope with urban lifestyle and combat patriarchy courageously[37]. According to Ponzanesi, chick-lit "genre raises issues of major concern to contemporary cultural and feminist studies: the issue of commodification and consumerism, of race and class, of appearance and success" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 164). To Burcu Baykan, chick-lit works are 'functional' texts as they address and negotiate the challenges and conflicts faced by women in their daily lives. She also studied the reception of chick-lit and the role it can play as a resistant literature to break free (Baykan, 2015). Furthermore, chick-lit is an essential element of popular culture. "Chick lit as a genre has not only contributed to popular culture, it has also exposed and replicated many of the divisions and inequities characteristic of the early 20th century. Generational conflicts between mothers and daughters, and second- and third-wave feminists are central, as well as the division between women in terms of age, class, race and ethnicity" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 172).

2.8.7 Ethnic Chick-Lit

According to Oberoi, chick lit brings to the fore real issues of women of today than portraying some imaginative super women and works emerging from Asia and other non-Western settings have added their own cultural flavour to chick literature (Oberoi, 2017). The inclusion of chick-lit from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and China has diversified chick-lit genre and enhanced its appeal. Cultural/country specific politics of these areas along with chick-lit sensibilities are enriching the canvas of this genre. These variants of chick-literature do not simply borrow the chick-lit conventions, but add to "[p]ostcolonial connotations of this genre, in relation to issues of identity, nationality, imperialism and neoliberal structures" (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 177). For example, the Indian chick-lit is a productive predecessor of Western chick-lit, with home grown patterns of affiliations, family, and companionship. Desi heroines of this genre struggle between tradition and modernity, love and arranged marriages, social shift, singlehood, societal expectations, and challenges of career all in a chatty humorous tone (Ponzanesi, 2014, p. 177). "The women in these stories utilize food ways to construct their own unique racialized subjectivity and to engender agency" (Williams, 2007, p. 77).

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[37] Tania Modleski (2008) urges to support chick-lit in place of 'big boy books'

Similarly, Ferriss and Young write, "in the decade since Bridget Jones, it [chick lit] has crossed the divides of generation, ethnicity, nationality and even gender" (Ferriss & Young, 2006, p. 5). Ethnic chick-lit, on contrary to formula chick-lit engages with diaspora struggles cultural displacements and women's experiences of postcolonial world (Barber, 2006). It also incorporates transnational feminism, globalization and questions of race, ethnicity and class. Postfeminist political strides are highlighted through chick-lit's ethnic subgenre. It shows "a re-visitation of gender roles that are maybe liberal and postfeminist, but also propose different forms of femininity, selfhood and agency" (Ponzanesi, 2014, pp. 201-202). Ethnic chick-lit testifies cosmopolitan spirit of chick-lit genre, provides window into exotic, and opportunities for budding authors in this thriving field[38] (Smith, 2008).

In this thesis, I have taken up to study the construction of Muslim chick-lit discourse, produced by Pakistani and Arab, Muslim authors.

2.9 Muslim Women's Fiction, Postfeminism, Literary Discourse: A Survey of Academic Investigations

This section provides brief reviews of the research done in the following domains: Pakistani Anglophone literature, Arab Anglophone literature, postfeminism/chick-lit, and literary discourse analysis. I have included all critical studies on Pakistani or Arab women fiction that may or may not have adopted a feminist perspective towards its reading to observe the overall trend in these studies till now. The research scholarship discussed here is retrieved from combination of key word searches on Pakistan fiction, postfeminism, chick-lit, Arab fiction, feminism etc., in national and international repositories. I do not claim to have included all the works, but most of the significant works have been touched upon. The purposes here is to see what dimensions of Pakistani and Arab literature have been explored and what frameworks have been relied upon in those studies. The studies are chronological arranged in four separate sections.

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[38] However, it is reaching its saturation point in West. Studies show a decrease in chick-lit readership in last few years.

2.9.1 Studies on Pakistani Writings

Lisa Lau. 2002. Women's Voices: the presentation of women in the contemporary fiction of south Asian women (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Durham University)

Lisa Lau studied issues and themes addressed by South Asian, mainly Indian, women in their Anglophone writings that include: negotiating with patriarchy, debates on identity, binaries of self vs. other and centre vs. periphery. Moreover, she addresses the politics of production and reception of such literature.

Summer Pervez. 2007. "Postcolonializing" Deluze: Transnationalism and Horizontal Thought in the British South Asian Diaspora (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Ottawa)

Summer Pervez applies French philosopher Gilleze Deluze's philosophy in re-evaluating postcolonial concerns of identity, ethnicity and migration. Her corpus for analysis includes works of Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureshi, Meera Sayal, Monica Ali, Sunithi Namjoshi and some works of British-South Asian cinema. She suggests that it is necessary to remodel cultural poetics to incorporate diasporic representations.

Munawar Iqbal Ahmad. 2009. Post-Independence/Post-Colonial Pakistani Fiction in English: A Socio-Political Study with Focus on Twilight in Delhi, The Murder of Aziz Khan, Ice-Candy-Man, Moth Smoke (Unpublished PhD Thesis, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad)

This study is a story of Pakistan as presented by Pakistani creative writers in English fiction. *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) by Ahmad is a story of conditions of Muslim in pre-partition India; *Ice-Candy-Man (1988) by Bapsi Sidhwa* about partition and making of Pakistan; *The Murder of Aziz Khan (1967)* by Zulfikar Ghose about post-independence politics of Pakistan; *Moth Smoke (2000)* by Mohsin Hamid about post nuclear Pakistan. All these works have been analysed by applying postcolonial theoretical constructs along with social theories of Foucault, Gramsci, and Althusser. The main objective of the study is to see socio-political evolution of Pakistan since 1947.

Shazrah Salam. 2011. Unveiling the Sacred: Reading the Gendered Female Body in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction (Unpublished Master Thesis, Massey University)

Taking body as a sociological, theoretical framework Shazrah Salam engages with Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Bride (1983)* and *Water (2006).* She delineates with the issue of how

female body in South Asia, India and Pakistan, is under religious and cultural control. Exposition of female objectification, patriarchal cultures and sexual repression of women in the name religious and social norms, power hierarchy, is dealt with as reflected by Sidhwa through her works.

Cristy Lee Duce. 2011. In Love and War: The Politics of Romance in four 21ˢᵗ Century Pakistani Novels (Unpublished Master Thesis, University of Lethbridge)

Cristy Lee Duce presents a postcolonial analysis of four Pakistani fiction works by two male and two female writers. The works include: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, *The Wasted Vigil* by Nadeem Aslam, *Trespassing* by Uzma Aslam Khan and *Burnt Shadows* by Kamila Shamsie. In his reading, he has focused on functioning of romance and intimacy as a strategy to express marginalized experiences along with a study of delineation of gender understanding, perspectives on global politics and perception of what constitutes public and private by these writers.

Amber Fatima Riaz. 2012. Architectures of the Veil: The Representation of the Veil and Zenanas in Pakistani Feminists' Texts (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Western Ontariao)

Fatima Amber favours veil, *dupatta*, and *chador* by arguing that it provides a 'third space' to women to engage with the world outside their home without ignoring Pakistani social realities. The literary texts under analysis are, *Blasphemy (1996)* by Tehmina Durrani and *Mass Transit (1998)* by Muneeza Naqvi along with some Multimedia representations of veil from Pakistan. Her focus is on spatiality of veil in a gender segregated society like Pakistan (that I do not agree with entirely, this has complex dynamics based on socio-economic class), where different forms of veil function as a supportive facet than detrimental.

Zia Ahmad. 2012. Status of Women in Pakistani Fiction in English: A Postcolonial Feminist Fiction (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Islamia University Bahawalpur)

Zia Ahmad has reviewed (than thoroughly analysed) the portrayal of women in Pakistani fiction for a very broad time bracket of 1940 to 2005. He divides these works in three sections: 1940 to 1970; 1970 to 2000; 2001 to 2005. Postcolonial feminism is claimed to be the guiding framework for the study, which has been vaguely applied to the selected works without developing any substantive line of argument. His analysis sums up the portrayal of Pakistani women in very generic feminist way claiming that in all these works

we find women in oppressive conditions as well as resistant to patriarchy. Socioeconomic situation of women is 'described' as they appear in these works.

Abu-Bakar Ali. 2012. Agency and its Discontents: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of Pakistani Women (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kings College, London)

Ali develops a complex argument on revisiting gendered history of Pakistan by focusing on works by Pakistani women from 1947 to 2005. The selected works are quite diverse and so are the ways in which they have been used to question agency ranging from postcolonial theoretical debate, Indo-Pak partition, romance narrative, to varied transnational responses by diaspora and theorization of gender and nation in postcolonialism.

Works included: Khadija Mastoor's *Godfather*; Hijab Imtiaz Ali's *Tempest in Autumn*; Farkhunda Lodhi's *Parbati*, A.R. Khatun *Grandma's Tale*; Qaisra Shahraz's, *The Holy Woman;* Bapsi Sidhwa's *An American Brat*, Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography,* and Uzma Aslam Khan *Trespassing.*

Madeline Amelia Clements. 2013. Orienting Muslims: Mapping Global Spheres of Affiliation and Affinity in Contemporary South Asian Fiction (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of East London)

By focusing on nine fiction and nonfiction works of Kamila Shamsie *(Kartography; Broken Verses; Burnt Shadows)*, Mohsin Hamid *(Moth Smoke; Reluctant Fundamentalist)*, Nadeem Aslam *(Maps for Lost Lovers; The Wasted Vigil),* Sulman Rushdie *(Shalimar The Clown; The Enchanters of Florence)* Clement deconstructs connective attempts of South Asian writers in the first decade of post 9/11 world. Her analysis of the characters in these works situates that these authors are implicitly or explicitly are engaging with Islam through: strategic occlusion, re-culturing, re-writing (in the process sometimes reaffirming), and refusing proclivities, in order to re-orient Muslims and what Islam. She argues that these authors have consciously attempted Muslims' abilities to transcend inter and intra cultural differences than mutually negotiating them.

Gohar Karim Khan. 2013. Narrating Pakistan Transnationally: Identity, Politics, and Terrorism in Anglophone Pakistani Literature after "9/11" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick)

Relying on transnationalism as an analytical framework Gohar Karim Khan has studied five works of Pakistan English fiction: Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant*

Fundamentalist (2007) and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2008), Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) and Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (2009). Her argument is that these writers combat Islamophobia and negative stereotypes about Muslims through constituting 'zone of contacts' that are beyond contrasting binaries and promote 'togetherness in difference'. Such transnational narratives are a form of 'literary resistance' that counterbalances post 9/11 ill imaging of Muslims.

Fariha Chaudary. 2013. Hiding and Seeking Identity: The Female Figure in the Novels of Pakistani Female Writers in English: A Feminist Approach (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Huddersfield)

By focusing on the works of Bapsi Sidhwa (*The Pakistani Bride 1990; Ice Candy Man1998*, Qasira Shahraz (*The Holy Woman 2001; Typhoon 2003*), and Urdu works of Umera Ahmad (*Meri Zaat Zara-e-Benishan*), Fariha Chaudary highlights sexual violence and patriarchal control over female body in Pakistan. She examines how these works are representative of social ills like sham honour, forced marriages and rapes prevalent in Pakistan. This study also explores oppressive and resistive structures of Pakistani women.

Nadia Z. Hasan. 2015. Unscripting Piety: Muslim Women, Pakistani Nationalism, and Islamic Feminism (Unpublished PhD Thesis, York University Toronto)

Piety politics, its inhibition and formation among Pakistani women through explication of views and engagement with the women of two Muslim female organizations Al-Huda and Jamat-i-Islami is the objective of this study. Relying on religiosity as framework, Nadia Hasan ethnographically explores and juxtaposes religious and secular productions of knowledge in interpretation of perceptions and practices that Muslim Pakistani women opt for themselves. It is an interesting study that provides insights into lives of Pakistani religious women in understanding the motive, sacred/spiritual, than cultural/sociological in espousing to seemingly patriarchal practices. She concludes by emphasizing understanding religiously inspired pious subjectivities of Muslim women that derives there episteme and ideology both, in place of seeing secularization as one-size-fits-all solution.

Charlotte Bryan. 2017. "The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban": A Comparison of Narratives between Articles in U.K and U.S. Websites with *I am Malala* (Unpublished Master Thesis, University of Stavanger)

This study compares US and UK media narratives about Malala Yousafzai's book *I am Malala. The Gaurdian*, *The Daily Mail*, and *New York Times* function as a data source that is deconstructed by the researcher applying semiotics, feminist, and postcolonial criticisms.

2.9.2 Studies on Arab Writings

Malika Mehdi. 1993. Tradition and Subversion: Gender and Postcolonial Feminism, the case of Arab region (Algeria) (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick)

Malika Mahdi makes a comparative investigation of representation of women in male machoist literary discourses and feminist discourses that subverts them in postcolonial Arab society. A focus is on how women are framed into subordinate sex. This situation worsens further in disfavouring Muslim women when they are described by the West in essentialist notions. The study concludes by suggesting the need of acceptance and inclusion of new forms of feminism.

Jennifer S. King. 2003. Islamic Feminism vs. Western Feminism: Analyzing a Conceptual Conflict (Unpublished Master Thesis, Dr. Norton Mezvinsky University)

This study is an effort to understand 'conflict' between Western feminism and Islamic feminism using Paul Weh's "Conflict mapping guide", a sociological framework that systematically studies disagreement.

Tayyiba Rehman. 2005. Muslim Feminism. A case study of Fatima Mernissi's works and thought (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham)

This thesis provides a case study of works of an important contributor in Muslim gender thought, Fatima Mernissi. A critical examination of her ideological evolution reflected in her writings spanning over three decades is the focus of this research. Tayyiba Rehman observes a shift in Mernissi's approach from western secularism in nineteen seventies to Islamic historical in nineteen eighties. She concludes by saying that her work may at points lack methodological soundness but it contributed a great deal on social, political and ideological fronts.

Amal al-Ayoubi. 2006. The Reception of Arab Women Writers in the West (Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Edinburgh)

Amal relying on polysystem, manipulation, and reception theories shows that the works of Western Arab writers should not be reduced to orientalism as a reading lens only, they are complex and hetrolithic. Her study includes works of Nawal el Sadawi, Hanan al-Shaykh and Sahar Khalifa.

Safina Lakahani. 2008. From Orientalism to Postcolonialism: Producing the Muslim Woman (Unpublished Master Thesis, McGill University)

This study provides postcolonial critique of Margot Badran and Mariam Cook's works in ways of how they adhere to secular liberal values and as a result re-inscribe orientalists' productions of Muslim women.

Anne Johanna Tuppurainen. 2010. Challenges Faced by Muslim Women: An Evaluation of the Writings of Leila Ahmed, Elizabeth Fernea, Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud (Unpublished Thesis University of South Africa)

By applying an eclectic framework of religious studies, feminist-qualitative research and Islamic feminist studies this research endeavours to identify and suggest a solution of the problems faced by Muslim women in contemporary societies. In order to comprehensively cover all issues of Muslim women 'Giele/Smock/Engineer framework' was developed that included aspects of personal, professional and political lives of Muslim women. The identified aspects were addressed by women-cantered approaches derived out of critical engagement with the works of Leila Ahmad, Elizabeth Fernea, Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud.

Saiyma Aslam. 2010. Study of Status and Role of Arab Muslim Women with Special Reference to Fatima Mernissi and Nawal el Saadawi (Unpublished PhD Thesis, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad)

Saiyma Aslam has reviewed the works of Mernissi and Saadawi to see what indigenous version of feminism is provided by these two scholars to suit Arab world's reality. The conclusion mentions justice, democracy, and *ijtihad* as important elements to envisage a progressive feminist solution for Muslim women. The chapter on mobility and travel of women provides some interesting insights.

Ching-Ling She. 2010. Breaking the Silence: Nationalism and Feminism in the Contemporary Egyptian Women's Writings (Unpublished, PhD Thesis University of Leicester)

This study analyses liberation strategies of Egyptian women writers of twentieth century. The writers under considerations are Huda Shaarawi, Zainab al-Ghazali, Nawal El Sadawi, Latifa al-Zayyat, Ibtihal Salem, Alifa Riffat, Salwa Bakr and Adhaf Soueif. She argues that "writing corporeality for contemporary Egyptian women complicates the modern national space and history" (She, 2010, p. i).

Taghreed Mahmoud Abu Sarhan. 2011. Voicing the Voiceless: feminism and Contemporary Arab Muslim Women's Autobiographies (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Green State University)

This study is aimed at viewing alternative realities of Muslim women's life through their biographies relying on transnational feminism as a framework. The works under readings are: Harem Years by Huda Sha'arawi, A Mountainous Journey a Poet's Autobiography by Fadwa Tuqan, A Daughter of Isis by Nawal El Saadawi, and Dreams of Trespass, Tales of a Harem Girlhood by Fatima Mernissi.

Yousef Awad. 2011. Cartographies of Identities: Resistance, Diaspora, and Trans-cultural Dialogue in the Works of Arab British and Arab American Women Writers (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Manchester)

Yousef Awed compares the poetics of two different yet related Arab migrant communities on both sides of Atlantic i.e. US and UK. He analyses six works of four authors, two Arab-Americans and two Arab-British. These works include Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma*; Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent*; Adhaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*; Lila Halaby's *West of Jordan* and *Once in Promised Land*. The analysis highlights that Arab-British writers engage in transcultural dialogue more visibly whereas Arab-Americans try to subtly question the stereotypes about Muslims. Awed links to different migration experiences of sets of authors. Analyses in general deal with socio-political aspects, debates on Islamic vs. secular feminism, intertextuality and identity construction.

Firouzeh Ameri. 2012. Veiled experiences: re-writing women's identities and experiences in contemporary Muslim fiction in English (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Murdoch University)

By focusing on four texts: *The Translator* (1999) and *Minaret* (2005) by Leila Aboulela, *Does my head look big in this?* (2005) by Randa Abdel-Fattah, *Sweetness in the belly* (2005) by Camilla Gibb and *The girl in the tangerine scarf* (2006) by Mohja Kahf, produced by Muslim women living in the West this study seeks to explore practices of Muslim women writers towards fighting their misrepresentations and narrow descriptions. It shows that Muslim women have complex, multi-layered identities and diasporic experiences are making it even more diverse, to portray them as victims or survivors of Muslim patriarchy is faulty. Further, it argues that there is no major conflict in Muslim and Western values, both can co-exist.

Abdullah H A Alfuzan. 2013. The City and Social Transformations in Arabic Literature: The Saudi Novel as a Case Study (1980-2011) (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of Leeds)

The concept of city as a construct has been explored through a thematic approach in this work by analysing Arabic literature (Saudi) from 1980 to 2011. The emerging themes include: religion, freedom, alienation, war, extremism, communication patterns between genders, individual freedom and condition of women.

Angeline Rebecca Binti. 2016. The Ideas of Feminism revealed through the main characters in Hannah Shah's Imam's Daughter (Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis, Santa Dharma University)

This study is analysis of *Imam's Daughter* through a feminist lens. By focusing on representation of various characters' struggle the researcher has emphasised the need of feminism for representation of women's concerns.

Sherin Hany Abd Rabouh. 2017. Becoming Women: Gender and Religion/Culture in Novels by Nawal El Saadawi and Gabriel García Márquez (Unpublished Master Thesis, The American University of Cairo)

This study utilizes Simone de Beauvoir's concept of women's treatment as 'second sex'; and Edward Said's notion of 'feminised orient' as conceptual frameworks to make a reading of concept of womanhood and the role of religion presented in two works: Nawal El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* and Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death*

Foretold. The methodological apparatus of the study comes from Michel Foucault's notions of discourse and Giambattista Vico's concept of history. There are issues of language/expression in this study that weaken the presentation of argument.

2.9.3 Studies on Postfeminism

Barbara Kastelein. 1994. Popular/ Postfeminism and Popular Literature (PhD Thesis, Warwick University)

This is one of the pioneering academic investigations of postfeminism in fictional and non-fictional works of nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties. An eclectic framework work based on feminist critical theory, cultural studies, and intertextuality has been relied upon to analyse works under three subcategories: 'women on sex', 'crime writing', and 'literature of popular therapy'. She concludes by saying that these writings are progressive and complex.

Kristen Gange. 2001. *Ally Mcbeal* and the Problem of Postfeminism (Unpublished master Thesis, Rohde Island College)

Ally Mcbeal, is a very popular American comedy drama that is studied by Kristen Gange by applying a postfeminist lens. The analysis reveals that the protagonist, Ally is iconic representation of postfeminist women in congruence with Susan Faludi' notions of postfeminist backlash.

Jennifer P. Barber. 2006. Indian Chick-Lit: Form and Consumerism (Unpublished Master Thesis, University of North Carolina)

Focusing on representation of identity, this thesis analyses Indian-US chcki-lit. The study shows that though chick-lit generically presents the characters, which women can easily associate with, but Indian-US chick-lit presents women that do not assimilate and maintain a complex hybrid identity.

Michele M. Glasburgh. 2006. Chick Lit: New Face of Postfeminist Fiction (Unpublished Master Thesis, University of North Carolina)

Using Susan Faludi' 'backlash theory', this study provides a postfeminist analysis of ten chick-lit fiction works. "Analysis has found that chick lit does generally reinforce the notions of postfeminism/backlash, however the characters displayed anxiety over how to incorporate feminine paths into their lives and generally disregard motherhood" (Glasburgh, 2006, p. 1).

Emily Mathisen. 2010. A Textual Analysis of Book Review of Critically Acclaimed Chick Lit Novels, 1998-2008 (Unpublished Mater Thesis, University of Toronto)

This research is an analysis of reviews of critically acclaimed chick-lit/genre fiction published in '*The New York Times*, *Library Journal, Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist*' to gauge how this genre is received. The textual analysis shows that it is thought of as having lesser symbolic value as compared to other forms of fiction.

Amanda Soza. 2014. Girls will be Girls: Discourse, Poststructuralist Feminism, and Media representation of Women (Unpublished Master Thesis, Boise University)

The application of Foucault's notions of discourse on television show *Girls* is the central point of this research. It interprets, through poststructuralist feminist lens, how femininity is constructed in this media text. Further 'how women make sense of past and negotiate future public performances of femininity'.

Angeline Masowa. 2016. Gender and Humour: Complexities of Women's Image Politics in Shona Humorous Narratives (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Zimbabwe)

This study analyses representation of women in humour of *Shona* language. By referring to various social theorists Angeline argues that humour is a sight to study social behaviours. A corpus of jokes for this study was collected from social media and studied with the application of 'Superiority Theory of humour, Incongruity, and feminism'. It revealed 'women are presented as immoral, malicious, and intellectually, socially and emotionally inferior to men. It further suggests that humour reinforces all these stereotypes.

Natalija Gulei. 2017. (De)Construction of Gender Stereotypes in Helen Fielding's Novels *Bridget Jones's Diary (1996)* and *Bridget Jones: the Edge of Reason (1999)* (Unpublished Master Thesis, Vilnius University)

This study applies a three tier analyses of Helen Fieldings' *Bridget Jones's Diary (1996)* and *Bridget Jones: the Edge of Reason (1999)*. A close reading has been done to deconstruct gender stereotypes and identity of female characters relying on intertextuality, new French feminist theory (Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Helen Cixous), and Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. The study reveals that traditional gender roles are being subverted and women have more agency in contemporary world, but their identity is still tied to male member s of society.

2.9.4 Studies on Linguistic Investigation of Literature

Lindsey Ann Hewitt. 1992. A Sociolinguistic Study of Literary Dialect in the work of John Galt and Christian Johnstone (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow)

This thesis is one pioneering study in sociolinguistic analysis of 'literary dialect' to see its communicative functions. Hewitt argues to discredit the dichotomy between 'linguistic form' and 'linguistic function'. The study of linguistic usage, to him, adds to 'established literary conventions. Hewitt analysed the works of two nineteenth century Scottish writers one male, John Galt, and a female, Christian Johnstone to describe nineteenth century Scottish dialect and the functions performed by such description e.g. the study of verisimilitude impression, development of characterization, and analysis of thematic and stylistic functions. The methodology used for this analysis is an adaptation of and derivation from existing linguistic research including 'dialectology of West-Mid Scots', some primary sources of the time of production on these texts, and synchronic and diachronic modern linguistics research. Analysis of 'dialect component' of literature was done by defining meta-variables adopted from sociolinguistic research, along with utilizing 'Oxford concordance program' to count the occurrences. This dialectal study Hewitt suggests compliments traditional literary studies.

Kalaivahni Muthiah. 2009. Fictionalized Indian English Speech and the Representation of Ideology in Indian Novels in English (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of North Texas)

Muthiah relies on Fowler and Chelliah's framework to do a linguistic study of Indian Anglophone Fiction. This study analyses the construction of ideology by Indian writers, through providing a linguistic criticism of the four-selected works. The researcher identifies thirty-five features of Indian English (IndE) and presents a data based observation that there is higher frequency of usage of IndE by writers where masculinity of characters is foregrounded.

Muhammad Ali. 2012. Language Appropriation in Thousand Splendid Suns (Unpublished M.Phil Thesis, International Islamic University, Islamabad)

This research applies linguistic concepts of Ashcroft, Kachru, Chelliah and Muthiah to study how Khalid Hussein has used the techniques of language appropriation in his work *Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Muhammad Sheeraz. 2014. Cultural and Ideological Representations through Pakistanization of English: A linguistic critique of Pakistani-American Fiction (Unpublished PhD Thesis, International Islamic University, Islamabad)

Sheeraz chalks out sixteen features of Pakistani English Fiction by applying an eclectic framework, which he calls "three dimensional model of postcolonial linguistic critique", to study "three Pakistani-American fiction works, namely, *An American Brat* by Bapsi Sidhwa, *Home Boy* by H. M. Naqvi and *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin" (Sheeraz, 2014, xvi). His study revealed that the frequency of usage of Pakistani English is very low, but occurrences of these features contribute to formulating a distinct variety of English.

Studies reviewed in this section (2.9) expose the existing gap in the field of Muslim women's literary discourse scholarship. There is hardly any work available on postfeminist study of literary discourse produced by Muslim women. In order to address this niche, the current study takes up the works of four Muslim women fiction writers from Pakistan and Arab world for a postfeminist analysis. The modalities of this literary discourse analysis are discussed in the coming chapter on methodology.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Debates on Literary Discourse Analysis

Literature is a communicative domain for creating and contemplating alternative worlds; even a realistic or documentary reconstruction of reality shows us the "real" as one among a set of alternatives… Interpretation cannot be the imposition of harmony and order alone, but the enactment of a dialectic between harmony and conflict, between order and incongruity, between real and potential-which brings us to much the same standpoint as discourse analysis. (Beaugrande, 1993, p. 436)

Since, my concentration primarily is on literary discourses; this chapter will review some of the debates on how to approach literary texts than placing them in pre-determined socio-political categories of analysis only. In the process, I would try to debunk the myth of literature-linguistics divide in dealing with literary texts. Linguistics (read as discourse analysis) is mistakenly detached and delinked from the study of literature due to disciplinary rivalry between the two that exists based on academic materialism rather than any solid dialectical differences[39]. I consider discourse analysis as an umbrella discipline that studies discourses be it literary or social with the help of sociolinguistic devices to decipher, decode, and deconstruct the meaning. The purpose of this activity is to maximize the potential of literary construction by identifying, engaging and appreciating the abstractions in the text that might have remained unattended otherwise. The discourse analyst as a social scientist contributes in constructing new knowledge by applying critical matrices, sensitive of how text's specific constructions is helpful in deeper understanding of it.

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[39] Maingueneau (2010) draws an analogy between the study of religion and literature to explain this. Religion is studied both in departments of anthropology and departments of theology, the ones in religious studies take religion as doctrine, a divine message, whereas in social sciences/anthropology it is perceived as an element that helps societies function—the functional aspects of it. In the same way literature is studied in humanities departments either linguistically providing its critique or conducting critical studies following some socio-cultural worldview and how it is reflected in the literary text.

3.2 Discourse Analysis: A brief overview

> Discourse analysis involves the careful reading of texts with a view to discerning discursive patterns of meaning, contradictions, and inconsistencies. It is an approach that identifies, and names language processes people use to constitute their own and others' understanding of personal and social phenomena. These processes are related to the reproduction of or challenge to the distribution of power between social groups and within institutions. Discourse analysis proceeds on the assumption that these processes are not static, fixed, and orderly but rather fragmented, inconsistent, and contradictory. It is a form of analysis that is attentive both to detail in language and to the wider social picture. (Gavey 1989, 467)

Discourse analysis is used to study texts based on how language and context are functioning in the text both at micro and macro levels. Discourse analysis is a combination of contextual and functional features that make it qualitative and quantitative, both (Barton, 2004). Ethnography of communication by Schieffelin, Interactive Sociolinguistics by Tannen, Genre Analysis by Swales, Systemic Linguistics by Halliday, and Critical Discourse Analysis by van Dijk are some dominant paradigms that deal with a variety of data sources to study how language is organised by users and what are the implications of it. Critical discourse analysis covers the widest variety of data types among all approaches. Charles Bazerman's (1981) seminal study differentiates features and functions of texts in the contexts of the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. Chafe and Danielewicz, (1987) studied in detail the differences between oral and written discourses by a qualitative inductive inquiry. Douglas Bieber (1988) in his quantitative approach, Multidimensional analysis, categorizes discourses in five sections: involved vs. informational production, narrative vs. non-narrative concerns, situation-dependent vs. explicit reference, overt expression of persuasion, and non-abstract vs. abstract information. Susan Peck MacDonald (1994) studied the pattern of discourse in psychology, history, and literary theory. Rich feature analysis (RFA) by Barton (2004) is especially designed for analysing written texts. Rich features are those aspects of language that help shape the meaning in a composition. Rich feature analysis inductively or/and deductively identifies meaningful aspect of composition, interprets them and then tries to theorise them based on emerging patterns for a specific text type. Importantly, it connects the linguistic and contextual features by relating linguistic occurrences with implications for meanings. RFA as a comprehensive model covers both linguistic "bottom-up" and larger socio-

political, cultural frameworks with a focus on gender "top-down". It relies on qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse written texts.[40]

3.3   Common Roots of Literature and Discourse

Teun A. van Dijk in his book *Discourse and Literature* (1985) has laid the foundation of studying literature by applying the methods of discourse analysis. According to Van Dijk:

> In the past two decades it has become even more clear than in the previous two thousand years of tradition in poetics and rhetoric, that the study of literature and the study of discourse are inextricably intertwined. The structural approaches to discourse that have emerged in literary scholarship, semiotics, linguistics and the social sciences, are hardly concerned with a strict distinction between literary and non-literary genres. (Dijk, 1985, p. vii)

Language and literature departments around the world differentiate between literary and non-literary genres of discourse. But interestingly, in literary discourse analysis tradition, that can be traced back to around 1965, the divide between literary and non-literary discourses is hardly respected, both types are treated as data sets for analysis, which have the potential for systematic investigation and the modalities of that analysis depend on nature of data and objective of analysis. The same holds for the distinction between linguistics, semiotics, anthropology or other disciplines in the humanities and part of the social sciences. In literary discourse analysis, the specific 'status' of literature is 'an automatic by-product' of a full-scale analysis of the socio-cultural and institutional analyses of various discourse types emerging form respective societies and cultures (Dijk, 1985, p. 7).

In recent times there is a greater emphasis laid on interdisciplinary studies and the crossing of boundaries between anthropology, poetics, stylistics and other disciplines. In the domain of linguistics, focus is shifting from single sentence to texts and discourses that are broadly studied in sociocultural contexts, by applying insights from anthropological linguistics, and pragmatics, than merely relying on morpho-syntactic units of analysis. In relation to that, disciplinary boundaries are getting thinner and making sense of language/linguistic reality, collectively, is becoming interdependent on various

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[40] For more details see (Barton, 2004), pages 65-75

processes/aspects that together contribute in formation of deeper, holistic, and comprehensive realisation of language regardless of medium or nature of text.

> [F]rom Russian Formalism to French and soon international Structuralism, we witness an increasing tendency towards the integration of poetics, linguistics, discourse analysis and other disciplines within an overall study of semiotic practices, in which especially a distinction between literature and other discourse types hardly made any sense, at least from a theoretical, structural, point of view. (Dijk, 1985, p. 4)

Linguistic study of literature is not a new tradition. Propp in 1928 linguistically analysed Russian folk tales. In his morphological analysis, he linked various structural features to related narrative functions. Propp's study later became the foundation for structuralism. This idea of study of structures, structuralism, later as a worldview was adopted by a variety of disciplines including anthropology and film studies[41]. The 1960s are considered an outpost of structural studies. In this period, the analysis of texts based on genre became central in literary studies. Works were being done to uniquely describe and theorize the linguistic poetics of poetry, short story, drama, myth and other literary expressions. The nineteen-seventies is marked with increasing interest in inter-disciplinary studies, where boundaries between various disciplines blurred. Even, the dubitable language vs. literature debate became of lesser significance as an outcome of increased interaction between linguistics, language studies and other social sciences (Dijk, 1985, pp. 3-5).

According to Dijk, the trend of systematic/structural investigations initiated many new ways to explore a wide range of texts. Starting from the interest in structure of narratives like folk-tales and myths, the study of social and anthropological structures like advertisements and mass media got picked up, and finally it influenced kinetic articulations like dance, film, and moving images. Semiotics[42] and its systems of interpretation were over-arching that could cover various units of meaning in narratives, literary discourses, and visuals, both still and moving. In this stream of structural studies tagmemics[43] is another method that looks at functionality of various grammatical categories in terms of

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[41] Ronald Barthes applied structuralism in many areas of social sciences and humanities

[42] Ferdinand de Saussure is the founder of study of signs and semiotics as a method, see (Saussure, 1959/2011)

[43] For details see (Pike, 1967)

their positionality in a sentence. Tagmemics is a mode of linguistic analysis based on identifying the function of each grammatical position in the sentence or phrase and the class of words by which it can be filled. Text linguistics[44] developed the study of structure further and incorporated notions of 'generative aspects of grammar' by Chomsky and 'narrative structures' from French structuralism to analyse discourses (larger units of language) than phrases, clauses, sentences or paragraphs. The contextual features and functional aspects of texts were taken into account by text linguists[45]. Systematic functional grammar is another dimension in the structural study of texts that emphasized on forms and functions that language performs in a text, and created connections between stylistics, poetics, and linguistics[46].

3.4   The Linguistics of the Novel

According to Roger Fowler (1977/1989), a novel is a 'cultural institution' that is linked with disciplines like history, sociology, media, cinema, science. Most of the classical criticism perspectives are designed by keeping poetry or drama as a genre in view, there is very little theorization of the fiction available. The novel still is a relatively newer domain in literature.   Linguistics is not only useful for analysis of ordinary everyday communication; it can/should study the language of fiction too. Two pioneering works in the study of fiction, still relevant and relatively recent, are Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961); *David Lodge's Language of Fiction* (1966). Another important publication was the periodical *Novel* started by Brown University in 1967. From the reader's perspective, there is a misconception that novel provides a direct insight into the world without worrying too much about the craft of the process. The world in fiction is a product of the author's art of creation, i.e., mainly language, in the words of Fowler 'linguistic characteristics of the novelistic technique' (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 3).

The linguistic study of literature does not mean the "formalistic analysis capable of only tracing the outline, texture, and contours of a text, but as a mode of analysis which can suggest interpretations of structural forms (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 4). "[With] a linguistics [analysis] which treats the sociological and psychological aspects of language, we can

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[44] For more on text linguistics, see (Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981)

[45] The studies that followed included analysis of poetry, drama, fiction etc. Now the focus was not on analytical aspects of text, but constructive description, say what aesthetic principles, thematic categories, and various devices are used to generate poetry prototypes. Such mechanisms in recent times are being used for automated text generation and simulation processes which are domains of digital humanities.

[46] For more on SFG, see (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1985/2004)

begin to interpret a writer's linguistic structures in relation to the values and preoccupations of the community for which he writes" (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 4). Therefore, I am taking the novel as a genre and studying it with the help of discourse tools to see the socio-cultural and religious implications with the Islamic feminist and postfeminist theories. The linguistic nature of fiction is closely linked with the structural criticism, the New criticism, the French structuralist ideas about language and the technique of fiction.

Traditionally a piece of literature is studied through language, plot, character, setting, and theme. Some of the linguistic equipment/principles that Fowler utilizes in the analysis of fiction include text and sentences, deep structure and surface structure, paraphrase and ambiguity, elements of deep structure, meaning and world-view, transformations, and speculative extensions[47]. Fowler in the second chapter of his book refers to the 'components of sentences to provide a model for the elements of texts' (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 28) and exemplifies them with the help of a wide variety of literary works. The discourse level linguistics study is beyond the micro level features of the text. It deals with the sociolinguistics of characters, events, and the reflection of time in which it is written. Furthermore, with how the author adjusts the language of his characters in accordance with the realization of his character (Bakhtin's dialogism); 'authorial and narrative voices', and 'various voices which speak in a novel'[48] (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 78). Russian formalists theorize the difference between story and its narration as 'fabula'[49] and 'suzet'[50]. The real author[51] is traced through the text whereas; the applied author lies in the author's biography: "Novelistic design and its execution are made in the medium of language, and a language is the property of a social community, impregnated with the values and thought-patterns of that community" (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 80).

In Roland Barthes's view of narrative, discourse is the text that belongs to readers: "Narrative discourse is created out of the interaction of the culture's conventions, the author's expressive deployment of these conventions as they are coded in language and reader's activity in releasing meaning from the text" (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 81). Linguistic criticism looks at presence of author in the text; the relationship of the author with his characters—how s/he controls his/her thoughts, actions and speech, the internal and

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[47] For detail see (Fowler, 1977/1989), pages 5-25
[48] 'there is always a teller in the tale'
[49] actual events of the story
[50] how author has arranged the plot
[51] what he says in the texts

external perspectives, the choice of words, the structural techniques, the discourse structure and psychological makeup; the sociolinguistic structures, clusters of linguistic features, authors' style, reflection of class and ideology through language, mode, tone, relationship between characters, the sociology of the novel, how your readers view the text, experiences and knowledge matches or contradicts with writer (Fowler, 1977/1989, pp. 85-121) [52]. "In every communication, whether it is a novel or a casual conversation, a great many diverse systems of knowledge are brought into play. This is another way of saying texts are exceedingly complex" (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 125). "The novel, like all other texts, but perhaps to a greater degree than many, is polysytemic" (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 126). "Structural analysis and contextual analysis can be integrated; and I would like us to think of structural analysis as essentially a point of entry into the interpretive activity of setting a work within the community's framework of values" (Fowler, 1977/1989, p. 128).

3.5   Discourse Analysis and Literary Theory: Closing the Gap

According to Robert de Beaugrande (1993), the origin of literary theory is linked with efforts to organize methodology to study literature be it inspired by linguistics (for example formalism) or mythology (Fyer's Anatomy). Some forms of literary criticism are very close to linguistic analysis, for example, Formalism and New Criticism, both treated text like an artefact on paper. Literary theory has shifted its focus from text to reader in Marxist, Freudian, feminist and other socio-psychological analyses. By mid-nineteen-seventies, the role of both the author and his biography played in interpretation started to be considered less valuable: author became implicit. "Hence, literary theory finally began to turn from the *real author* toward *models of the author* which any real author would fit only approximately. Here, authorship is more a performance and a goal than a state or attribute of a person" (Beaugrande R. d., 1993, p. 435). This progress resulted into startling disruptions—ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings than fixed interpretations. And gradually literature started to be conceived as discursive engagement with texts (than an object) in literary theory, the point that discourse analysts also argued about. "Literature is not a set of 'objects' but a mode of discursivity and engagement, which is very appropriate and productive, but it could not have seemed auspicious as long as "discourse" itself was not a prime theoretical entity either in literary studies or in philosophy, history, and science" (Beaugrande R. d., 1993, p. 436).

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[52] and how all this is achieved through language

Like the application of discourse methods in other domains, literary studies have also become the sphere of discourse analysis with a shift in the standpoint that interpretation should not be imposition. It is an interplay of fixation and flexibility. This shift helped in lessening the quest for right model of literary theory that may take any or all the three stakeholders author, text, and reader into consideration. Literary theory's consideration, now, of text as a discourse has made literature an open transaction that can be studied with the application of a variety of frameworks. Both cannon and popular have become the object of study. The notion of literary 'tradition' has been replaced by literary 'institution' that includes academy, publication, propagation and politics of literature too. The 'aesthetics of literary reception' rests with reader. In discourse analysis, now in literary theory too, style is not just an embellishment, but also a discursive strategy to achieve literariness in which author balances between expectation and innovation. Both approaches now value text as a source for analysis. Literary theory still looks for authentic, established texts whereas discourse considers a wide range of texts without any pre-sets. As the main aim of literary theory is eloquence so underlying procedures of texts do not manage to attain much attention. Nevertheless, literary theory is not completely disassociated from dynamic methods of analyses. Methods in text analysis keep on evolving through mode of 'self-reflection' and considering the nature of data. Both approaches are trying to create balance between theory and practice by designing the projects of social relevance (Beaugrande R. d., 1993).

> To attain more powerful and unifying methods, we would have to address *types* of texts and *conditions of text production and reception.* We confront so much data in text and discourse that exhaustive treatment, either in the minimal units of "structuralism" or the formal structures of "generativism," was neither readily feasible nor particularly informative. Instead, we would have to proceed from the focal points of *control,* such as topic, goal, and situational context, in order to determine which units or structures are the more *relevant* ones for a given concrete domain. (Beaugrande R. d., 1993, p. 9)

3.6   Text Linguistics and Literary Theory

Beaugrande (1993) uses text linguistics and discourse analysis synonymously in their treatment of literary texts i.e. looking at content and context both. There is a growing trend in literary theory to consider 'literariness' rather than to focus on a single text only which is closing the gap between literary theory and discourse analysis. Both modes of

analyses have started to use common terminologies like 'textuality', 'intertextuality', and 'discourse'. Moreover, the degree of generalizability of research findings of both approaches is bringing them together: literary analyses are yielding greater generalizability, whereas, approaches of linguistics/text linguistics are becoming less structured, more interdisciplinary. Discourse seeks for balance between generality and specificity. Discourse analysis is not merely a mechanical linguistic analysis of text following certain algorithms but a 'procedural heuristic' in which we construct novel meanings holistically. It does not yield to mathematically correct meanings, but a strategy of generating powerful meanings. Traditional grammar prescribes, linguistics describes, and discourse analysis applies. The objective of discourse analysis/text linguistics is to ease out access to knowledge and understanding and critiquing social structures.

As opposed to Sassure's concept of considering language as an entity, text linguistics does not study language for language sake, but through language processes of discursive constructions are analysed. Text linguistics takes language as an interactive event rather than as an object. Textual structures take their meanings when they occur in a text-event as opposed to general linguistics that takes language as an abstract system of choices or fixed artefacts. It did not merely consider the linguistic aspects of text, because such analysis would result into a lot of data without concrete findings, for there exists a large variety in literary texts. So instead focus was on how the text is produced and received, initiating from context, theme, and situation. It approached language as a diversified process, where various social variables play their role in its construction and realisation of it. Style, a concept considered valuable in linguistic analysis is perceived as 'mode of discursivity with concrete social consequences' in text linguistics (Beaugrande R. d., 1993, p. 432). This shift away from Sassurian linguistics of static structures to dynamic and discursive views of language helps towards describing text types and formulating frameworks of analysis[53]. Text linguists work towards engaging with data of diverse social situations to challenge status quo for a just social order (Beaugrande R. d., 1993, p. 432).

3.7 Literature and Discourse Analysis

The concept of literary discourse analysis, by Dominique Maingueneau, is an approach to text that balances out 'textualism' and 'sociologism' bringing text and context

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[53] somewhat like grounded theory

together than valuing one over the other. Literary discourse analysis is a way to move from the creator of text to the conditions of creation. It relies on pragmatics, one, and the relationship between text and context, the other. A major change in study of literature was witnessed in nineteen-sixties when the focus of literary studies shifted from aesthetics and critique to structure. Initially, these studies of structure focused on macro categories of pattern, paradigm, syntagm, and connotation than micro levels of phrase, adjective or aspect. This literary structuralism resulted into development of fields like narratology, lexicology and science of versification. Lexical structural studies helped bringing linguistics and literature together where the vocabulary of literary works was studied with the help of lexical statistics, and componential analysis. Structural linguistics started to be used as an aid to sociological and psychological interpretations[54]. In nineteen-seventies, the study of language of texts developed further and the domain expanded beyond merely looking into structures towards text linguistics that eventually matured in the form of literary discourse analysis (Maingueneau, 2010).

Discourse analysts consider the real author, the author in the text, and the way author represents himself or his/her pen identity in the text over a period. Moreover, it may look at author post-production which includes author's behaviour as a producer of text. "Discourse analysts try to take into account at the same time how texts are produced and consumed and how they are commented on, transformed, ordered or stocked: these dimensions are inseparable" (Maingueneau, 2010, p. 6). The discourse analytic approach takes author as a representative of literature as an institute. It makes the inside vs. outside and 'textualisim' vs. 'sociologism' divide obsolete, which resultantly broadens the possibilities of meaning in literary texts. Maingueueneau uses the term 'generic rites' to suggest entrance of literary studies into larger spaces that include production, consumption, socialization of both writer and text in multiple ways. "For discourse analysts, there is no inside[55] and outside text. What is "inside" must construct its own "interiority" through interdiscourse" (Maingueneau, 2010, p. 7) [56].

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[54] Literary analyses were relying, dominantly, on sociology and psychology for meaning, but now it began to become autonomous.
[55] The researchers who approach the text from inside their work is categorised into stylistic studies.
[56] On the contrary Piere Bourdieu (1992) maintains inside, outside distinction.

Maingueneau suggested **four modalities** of incorporating linguistics in literary studies. First, as a tool in literary analysis in the form of atomistic or organic stylistics[57] to facilitate interpretation of text. Second, describing texts on linguistic properties relying on pragmatics, text linguistics, or discourse analysis e.g. doing genre analysis or studying linguistic features of texts with a visible ideological bent e.g. feminism, modernism, etc. This approach helps determining properties of a group of texts in general based on shared patterns. Third, questioning the debates centred on text and context relationship in a variety of discourse communities of literary studies and beyond. And the fourth modality is concerned with broader category of literary discourse including genres like chronicles of literature, interviews, television, etc., to study literary formation holistically (Maingueneau, 2010).

According to Maingueneau, two dominant views[58] to approach literature are hermeneutic and discourse analytic methods. The distinction between the two is based on focus/purpose of analysis in each approach. Hermeneutic approaches focus on classic works to study uniqueness of interpreter and text, mainly focusing on a time period or author; the possibilities of new meanings for such analyses is in-exhaustive. Whereas, **in discourse analysis of literature texts mostly are contemporary along with its para-literature features** including interviews, experience of author, experience of reader, mass media opinions, etc. This approach is more process oriented where conditions of the interpretability (which, where, by whom) are focused. In discourse analysis, the emphasis is on the methods and concepts rather than time periods or authors. Moreover, how various variables create uniqueness in a literary text. Further, Maingueneau introduced two important concepts in literary discourse studies: "self-constituting discourse" and "scenography". The perspective of considering a text as self-constituting discourse implies that meaning emerges from text, its reading, presentation and publication. Whereas, "scenography is both what discourse comes from and what discourse generates" (Maingueneau, 2010, p. 13).

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[57] Atomistic stylistics focuses on procedures and linguistic tools, relying on categories of descriptive grammar and rhetoric, which are essential to produce a text. In organic stylistics, procedures are not important, uniqueness of texts hints towards meaning.
[58] For a comprehensive comparative analysis, see table, p.15, (Maingueneau, 2010)

3.8   The Sociolinguistic Study of Literature

Barbara Fenllel and John Bennett (1991) draw on a range of possibilities to study literature sociolinguistically. They discuss and exemplify the role of sociolinguistic concepts like speech community, social network, and politeness principle in the domain of literary reading. These sociolinguistic theories are particularly helpful in analyzing language of various characters in the fiction and to see the implications of such analysis for understanding the power relationships, construction of identity and membership of a certain speech community. Flouting the standard principles or adhering to them has insinuations for realizing author's manipulation of language to leave certain impact on the reader. The rapport of protagonist and other characters is significant too in such analysis as it hints towards range of possibilities to arrive at meaning. Paul Hopper in his book *Discourse Analysis, Grammar and Critical Theory (1988)* highlights the role of conversation analysis in the study of literature. Sociolinguistics broadly analyses social systems that are in action in a literary discourse (Hopper, 1988). Fenllel and Bennett (1991) are of the view that sociolinguistic tools are underutilized, as there are not many studies available that examine literature with sociolinguistics concept[59].

According to Milroy's social network theory, people show solidarity and agreement by using a representative dialect of a speech community (Miroy, 1980). Sociolinguistic analysis treats fiction as a data source, like any other data source. Some other tools/methods that sociolinguistic studies of literature rely on include: dialect studies, semiology, dialogism, use of pidgins and creoles, speech markers, politeness and face. Dialect studies are important to determine the regional membership of author, for example black, white, Arab, Asian etc. as well as to study the diachronic variations in terms of either a text synchronizes with representative characteristics of the time it was produced in or not, say, Elizabethan drama, modern fiction or contemporary short story. Further, adopting a dialect has cultural and political significance too, for instance Rudyard Kipling achieves political objectives by exploiting dialect continuum in his writings. These dialectal variations and their analysis also play a role in development of plot and reader's realizations of major events in the story. Individual authorial dialect distinguishes an author from others and develops his/her linguistic identity that in more refined ways[60]. Readers who are familiar

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[59] It is important also to understand the difference between sociology of language and sociolinguistic. Sociolinguistics is the study of language about society, whereas in sociology of language, the object of analysis is society under the influence of language.

[60] It is being used in computer based author identification programs too

with sociolinguistic theory can predict characters' behavior in fiction, moreover, they can comment on how aptly the author has reflected his linguistic sensitivity through his language choices for them. Is a bartender's discourse different from a medical counselor? Does a reader get the real feel of different characters through their language choices? Or if author is relying on some linguistic innovations, what is the dynamics of it? (Fennell & Bennett, 1991)

3.9 Feminist Post Structuralism and Discourse

Chris Weedon, Nicola Gavey and Judith Baxter are the proponents of feminist post structuralism. The idea of feminist post structuralism was presented by Chris Weedon in 1987. Post-structuralist feminism relies on a myriad of theories[61] from sociological, psychological, political and language domains. Weedon described feminist post structuralism as "a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (Weedon, 1987, pp. 40-41). According to Weedon, to end hierarchical relationships between men and women a mere uncritical subversion of relationships is against post-modern spirit rather it may promote undesirable alternative hegemonic structures. Further, language has the primacy in meaningful expression of female experience, otherwise it loses its inherent value. Feminist tendency to fix notions of womanhood universally does no service to women but favours status quo. Subversion of patriarchy requires challenging and engaging with subjectivities (Weedon, 1987).

In Weedon's view signifying practices are important in constructing knowledge along with language. Moreover, language is not innocent, it contains subjectivities which are manipulated and exploited. She reverberates Foucault's idea that language is an element of discourse; in entirety, discourse is constituted by social, political, ideological, cultural, and historical. Discourse constitutes and is constituted by individual and society, and that is subjective[62]. Feminist post structuralism's strategies for change emphasize on rearrangement of social and cultural elements of discursive constructions. Discourses might be contradictory in how they view and construct identities, behaviours, and the world

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[61] Post-Sassurean linguistics; Althusser's theory of ideology; Lacan's psychoanalytical theory; New French Feminists—Kristeva, Cixous, Irigaray; Philosophical contributions by Derrida, Barthes, Foucault

[62] So discursive construction of female freedom may involve opting to be a career woman or good mother or a housewife or all or none of these.

around us, in all this, their subjective positions are not to be discarded but deciphered and engaged. Individuals (/women) are free to side with, resist, or counter discourses that affect them, and produce alternative discourses. In feminist context, a woman might associate with feminist notions and at the same time appreciate femininity[63] too. There is no 'essential female nature', so the contextualization of experience is important in realizing feminist cause[64] (Weedon, 1987).

Poststructuralist feminism shares common grounds with other forms of feminism as it raises consciousness about gender structures. Poststructuralists believe there is no fixed reality, and it has multiple expressions. In addition, contemporary feminist understanding emphasizes the multiplicity of feminist facets. Both feminism and poststructuralism consider knowledge as a collective formation of string of events and experiences. Another commonality between the two is there view towards construction of knowledge that is: valuing systematic inquiry, no absolutism, acknowledging subjectivity, social constructionism, plurality of meaning, variety of sources including science and literature, and structuralist systematic production of knowledge (Gavey, 1989).

Poststructuralists view language as a discursive element in the construction of knowledge. Language does not simply convey ideas, but it is a complex web of subjectivities that is used to maintain power. This power construction along with linguistic activity is supported through social practices that ultimately generate a complete discourse. Post structuralists discourage essentialist descriptions, even the concept of womanhood or what feminism entails is poised in a variety of ways. Literary texts in post structuralist conceptualisation are not creations but reproductions. These texts reflect authors' experience of his times including social, political, cultural, economic insights. To understand text in post structuralist tradition is not a unified, mono-dimensional process, meanings are multiple, and they may evolve with every reading exercise. Language is a subjective entity and so are its producers and receivers (Gavey, 1989).

> What feminist poststructuralism offers us is a theoretical basis for analysing the subjectivities of women and men in relation to language, other cultural practices, and the material conditions of our lives. It embraces complexity and contradiction and, I would suggest, surpasses theories that offer single-cause deterministic

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[63] See postfeminist debates on new femininities

[64] Implications even for accommodating or/and challenging some orthodox/heterodox norms of Islamic feminism

explanations of patriarchy and gender relations. It not only gives credence to women's active resistance to patriarchal power (as well as our oppression by it), but it also offers promising ways of theorising about change - all of which are important to feminism. (Gavey, 1989, p. 472)

3.10 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) by Lazar brings studies in feminism and critical discourse analysis closer. It helps us to study the gender relations between men and women, between women, and among women groups in terms of power imbalance, and its effects on the conceptualisation of identity. Feminism in gender debate has always been influential in supporting women cause, similarly the other side of it in terms of its feminist backlash also enriches gender discourse. Gender as a category is interdisciplinary in nature that affects and is affected by a variety of variables such as class, ethnicity, sexuality and others. Totalizing realisations of gender are discriminatory and problematic. Gender relations emerging from imbalance of power, play a significant role in construction of individual identity. Feminist facets and postfeminist 'reverse sexism' make realisation of gender even more complex. Feminist critical discourse analysis deals with such intricacies and subtleties. Feminism and discourse studies both are enriched by interdisciplinary connections with each other and beyond: ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality, culture, class, position, geographical location, ideology, sexism, power relations, as a system of oppression (Lazar, 2007).

Humanities and social sciences in general and language studies in specific have been predominantly male-streamed. These disciplines need a feminist insight to defeat hegemonic gender order. Feminism and CDA both address social inequalities; feminist linguists have been working under CDA methodologies but without naming it as feminist CDA. First, the connection between gender and discourse is not always feminist in nature so it must be clearly distinguished. Second, women's contribution in propagating and making the discipline, CDA, move forward has not been duly acknowledged. As a result, the diversity of CDA and CDA with a feminist focus also gets reduced. FCDA is not limited to relying on feminist scholarship during analysis, but creating systems of articulation and theorization that challenge imbalanced gendered structures prevalent in societies. Third, to promote feminist critical awareness in discourse practices, especially with increased value of discourse in linguistics, a collective visibility is vital, and it has political implications too. Fourth, feminist CDA has not been relied upon extensively, for reasons unknown,

despite popularity of discursive approaches in social sciences and humanities. Fifth, feminists and discourse analysts share the goal of fighting injustices, but their visible interactions have been minimal. Feminist approaches are descriptive while FCDA is explanatory. The marriage of description and explanation results into powerful theorisation and strategies for social change. Sixth, Feminist CDA has political aspect attached to it where it analyses and reasons with discursive representations of gender regarding power and ideology. Seventh, FCDA is comprehensive framework that is multimodal in nature providing semiotic tools and techniques to deal with a variety of texts and talks (Lazar, 2007).

FCDA generates this awareness that discourses are not neutral they are gendered. Hence, to approach them a framework aware of gender sensitivities is required. It tries to emancipate women and is realised as 'feminist analytical activism'. A common individual is not able to see the underpinnings of critical structures of power or ideology in a text; not all women have feminist insights. FCDA-ists use linguistics and feminist wisdom to better women's condition. It also narrows down the gap between theory and practice, whereby academics involve in activism, contributing to women's cause than just writing about it, since deconstructing discourses has implications for mobilizing women towards creating equitable spaces. Feminist critical discourse analysis does not opt for a politically neutral stance. It redefines objectivity by focusing on marginalized perspectives towards construction of such knowledge that claims to be representative of all segments of society (Lazar, 2007).

Gender ideologies are perspectives that result into practices and the ones in power their ideologies prevail. Feminist view of gender binary is not limited to physical aspects leading to difference in choices, professions, and practices but it is a social division that is exploited in favour of men to sustain power and dominance in multiple domains. One example of such dominance is through language where certain male nouns and pronouns are considered as representative of both genders, making women less visible. Gender discrimination is not individual, but it is institutionalised in a variety of settings where both men and women start to believe it as natural or normal behaviour. Gender normative framing of a myriad of social behaviours promotes dualism, even if some gender transgresses them. It reinforces heteronormativity that men are/should be like this and women are/should be like this (Lazar, 2007).

Gender relations are not simply a struggle for power between men and women. It is about understanding subtleties that exist among any two people from same or different gender groups. There is diversity within and among different genders. For example, the LGBT community is further marginalised and disadvantaged in campaigns on gender rights. These subtleties vary according to different cultures and modalities. From a feminist perspective sometimes, they are overtly present in the form of sexism, but it is not always a linear relationship instead a network of relationships. In modern and late modern societies, the exertion of power is covertly exercised cognitively and that is misrecognized. To normalize and reaffirm power hierarchy among genders, the sexist content from the past is reframed in a relaxed tone[65]. Feminist discourse analytic approach studies such overt and covert power relations especially realising that power asymmetries and the strategies to resist them both are discursive and dynamic. FCDA is linked with feminist theory extensively. It presents a framework that is sensitive to diversities and accommodates differences. Feminists view discourse as one element that constitutes and is constituted by society discursively. This construction in discourse is reflected through identities and relationships[66]. The first aspect of gender rationality is the concept of being a man or woman itself, what it entails, and how in a variety of discourse forms and mediums it is enacted. Secondly, how groups of men or groups of women promote or oppose gender oppression practically in androcentric settings that includes attitudes and actions both (Lazar, 2007).

Social construction of gender includes 'doing gender', ethnomethodologically, and 'gender performativity' in postmodern spirit. Feminist CDA is interdisciplinary both theoretically and methodologically. It relies on a myriad of socio-political aspects in the context of gender where structures of power and ideology are deconstructed. In terms of method some rely on textual analyses while others do it by interviews and observations. The data considered for analysis can be multimodal in nature too. FCDA's categories and levels of analyses are derived from various aspects of linguistic studies including semantics, pragmatics, SFL, ethnomethodology, genre, narrative, interdiscursive analysis etc (Lazar, 2007).

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[65] that is termed by Williamson (2003) as 'retrosexism'
[66]Lazar (2000) terms the study of such identities and relationships as 'gender relationality'.

In recent times, there is an increased emphasis on studying social practices and learning from them, this is called critical reflexivity[67]. The implications of reflexivity for FCDA are on three levels, first to understand institutional practices, second for feminists to create gender just social structures through theoretical additions, and third in academics. One example of critical reflexivity, in institutional practices, is introduction of courses like 'language and gender' in universities that are taught from a feminist perspective and in effect they promote critical awareness on women issues. Reflexivity also promotes progressive values. On theoretical level, reflexivity addresses ideological concerns and advances the discipline by incorporating recent contributions in the field. This also implies that current liberal views about feminism are flawed as they ignore diversity, so we need to revise feminism keeping in view third wave trends of diversity and differences. Postfeminism, its critiques, celebration of improved freedom, and 'power feminism' are some dimensions of critical reflexivity. In academic practices it implies, for example, materials, publications and events on feminism should not be ethnocentrically biased. There is also a need of avoiding academic neo imperialism in research practices where power hierarchies are reinforced. Concomitantly, 'marked inclusion' of non-Western scholarship should be discouraged. Here marked inclusion refers to giving othering space to ideas and contributions made by people not belonging to first world (Lazar, 2007).

3.11 Pakistani and Arab Literature: Methodological Review of Academic Studies

Table 1: A Methodological Review of Academic Research on Pakistani Fiction

Author	Year	Methodology
Lisa Lau	2002	Close Reading
Summer Pervez	2007	Gilleze Deluze's philosophy
Munawar Iqbal Ahmad	2009	Postcolonialism Social theories of Foucault, Gramsci, and Althusser
Shazra Salam	2011	Body

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[67] To read more on critical reflexivity, see (Giddens, 1991)

Cristy Lee Duce	2011	Postcolonial Analysis
Amber Fatima Riaz	2012	Multimodal Analysis
Zia Ahmad	2012	Postcolonial Feminism
Abu-Bakar Ali	2012	Close Reading
Madeline Amelia Clements	2013	Close Reading
Gohar Karim Khan	2013	Transnationalism
Fariha Chaudary	2013	Feminist Approach
Nadia Z. Hasan	2015	Ethnography
Charlotte Bryan	2017	Semiotics, feminist, and postcolonial criticisms

Critical investigations of Anglophone Pakistani literature is still a new field, there are not many works available academically engaging with Pakistani literature in English. For this research project, I reviewed[68] the works done on Pakistani English literature in Pakistani universities and abroad for postgraduate degrees, either by Pakistanis or by foreigners. Table one, above sums up the details of methodological focus of each of the research thesis dealing with some aspect of Pakistani literature. Majorly, the trend of these investigations has been to provide socio-cultural, postcolonial, and transnational critiques of Pakistani literature by relying on close reading of the texts under study. There has been

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[68] The works that were electronically accessible

very little to no methodological innovations or experimentations while conducting these analyses. That is understandable as the Anglophone Pakistan literary tradition itself is relatively young. Nearly all of these academic research projects are studies of fiction and some aspects related to it, no works on other genres is done. There is one ethnographic study, but that does not deal with literary discourse and has been included in the review only because of its potency for Pakistani women's lives and worldviews.

Table 2: Methodological Review of Studies in Arab Literature

Author	Year	Method
Malika Mehdi	1993	Feminism
Jennifer S. King	2003	Paul Weh's "Conflict mapping guide"
Tayyiba Rehman	2005	Case Study
Amal al-Ayoubi	2006	Polysystem, manipulation, and reception theories
Safina Lakahani	2008	Postcolonialism
Anne Johanna Tuppurainen	2010	Eclectic framework of religious studies, feminist-qualitative research and Islamic feminist studies
Saiyma Aslam	2010	Close Reading
Ching-Ling She	2010	Nationalism, Feminism
Taghreed Mahmoud Abu Sarhan	2011	Close Reading
Yousef Awad	2011	Close Reading
Firouzeh Ameri	2012	Close Reading
Abdullah H A Alfuzan	2013	Concept of City

Angeline Rebecca Binti	2016	Feminism
Sherin Hany Abd Rabouh	2017	Simone de Beauvoir's women as 'second sex', Michel Foucault's notions of discourse, Giambattista Vico's concept of history, Said's notion of 'feminised orient'

Arab literature in English is more diverse and rich in tradition as compared to Pakistani literature. Both Arab-American and Arab-British authors have contributed a great deal in producing Arab literature in English. It will not be fair to compare the entire set of writings from Arab region, in terms of number, to the writings from one country. Table 2 above provides an overview of academic research done on Arab Anglophone literature[69].

3.12 Methodology for Current Study

This study is based on postfeminist modelling of Muslim women's literary discourse. My method is largely a qualitative inductive inquiry. I am engaging with literary discourses without going into linguistic critique of them, instead the emphasis is on cultural, theological, ideological, and social analysis. Considering the nature of texts in the study, my framework of analysis is an eclectic formulation having elements from postfeminist cultural theory, Islamic feminism, poststructuralist discourse analysis and literary close reading. In poststructuralist discourse analytical approach, a given discourse is valued most than any other elements outside text. It involves readings of texts with a view to analyse discursive constructions. Relying on feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis, the elements highlighted in the text and categories/themes formed for analysis form a unique relationship between producer and researcher of the text. As a researcher, I have tried to 'examine the archaeology' (Leavy, 2000) of selected literary discourse holistically. This approach can be aptly summarised by the following words of Prior: "The task of the researcher is to disentangle the rules of association by means of which the representation is structured, the genealogy of the various elements contained in the and the image of 'reality' which the text projects" (1997, p. 70). For the current study, the text is deconstructed to its essence to engage with primary units that are at working in construction

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[69] Postgraduate dissertations, electronically accessible

of meaning. Textual observations are approached with a view to theorize emerging themes than to place them in pre-determined categories to suit a specific interpretation. "For feminist poststructuralism, goals of scholarship would include developing understandings or theories that are historically, socially, and culturally specific, and that are explicitly related to changing oppressive gender relations. Rather than "discovering" reality, 'revealing' truth, or 'uncovering' the facts" (Gavey, 1989, p. 463). A focused coding procedure is used to substantiate the final argument with the help of textual evidences. However, at no point postfeminist intent is compromised during the process.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

4.1 Postfeminist Poetics of Pakistani Chick-lit

Pakistani progressive writings have a history that links it to the traditions set by Progressive Writers' Movement (*Anjuman Taraqqi Pasand Musannifeen*) in 1932 that promoted anti-imperialist leftist ideology. In this progressive tradition both male and female writers contributed in exposing sexual hypocrisy and normalising intimate aspects of human life without any guilt or shame. According to Rahkshanda Jalil (2015) before partition, Muslim women like Rashid Jehan were writing progressively to expose sexual hypocrisy of people of India. In her collection *Angaray* in (1931), she asserted that societies, religions, cultures, and political interests, all in one way or the other have been hampering the progress towards sexual autonomy and rights. Referring to Qudratullah Shahab, Rehman (2015) notes indignation, revolt, and sex as the preoccupations of Urdu short story of the time. Modernist Urdu literary contributors like Sadat Hassan Manto and Ismat Chughtai have some very explicit references to sex and intimacy—her short story *Lihaf is on lesbianism*—considering it as a natural human instinct. Others had to camouflage their treatment of sex by arguing that they are dealing with the issue in order to make people disapprove it. Pre-partition Muslim poets like Mir Taqi Mir, Hakim Momin Khan Momin, Mirza Ghalib also have erotic elements in their poetry which they never felt apologetic about. In recent history of Pakistan, it has been middle class prudery that did not allow any latitude to modernist liberal values of expressing sex and intimacy through literature. Despite secular outlook and disfavouring of religious orthodoxy, Anglophone Pakistani writers could not present objective treatment of sex as a biological human desire and sexual empowerment of people. In Pakistani Anglophone fiction by women, traditionally, we find construction of gender, gender mores and their realization under the influence of cultural hegemony, either in the guile of religion or by over-valuing orient. Gender segregation, arranged marriages, repressed sexualities, tabooing premarital or outside marriage sex, mass gender discomfort, dominant role of parents, even for that matter grandparents, in determining the course of sexual and married life of young adults, girls as *izzat* than humans are recurrent in Pakistani Anglophone female fiction. The female characters that emerge strong, by feminist virtue, are typically presented as overcoming

socio-economic odds. A completely independent woman having control over all aspects of her life including, love, relationships, sexuality, and mobility is less visible. But pleasantly, in this new millennium postmodernist fiction, there are writers like Saba Imtiaz, Moni Mohsin, Shazaf Fatima Haider, Maha Khan Phillips who are producing bold female characters convinced to live and talk about their sex lives. This is how they are decolonizing gender as a category in a Pakistani context. By a postfeminist reading of *Beautiful from this Angle (2010)* by Maha Khan Phillips and *Karachi you're Killing me* (2014) by Saba Imtiaz, this section adumbrates how contemporary Pakistani fictionists are challenging the stereotypes of Asian-Islamic-womanhood through, unconventional yet realistic, free and forward portrayal of their female characters. Further, important to the dialectics of this study is the role progressive creative constructions can play in re-envisioning gender normality in Islamic Pakistan.

Feminism is a travelling concept that metamorphoses itself into target geographical, religious and cultural terrains. Owing to complex web of affiliations and influences, Pakistani feminism is a nexus of Islamic feminism, post-colonial feminism and post-structuralist feminism. This multi-layered complexity begins with Muslim feminism's bifurcation into secular and religious feminisms (Badran, 2009). Secular stream adheres to Western notions of gender equality and female liberty whereas religious group proposes indigenous, religiously invoked version of female freedom. Islamic feminism (Ahmad, 1991; Barlas, 2004; Wadud, 2006; Badran, 2009) is re-envisioning the concept of independence and equality in Islamic/Quranic framework that involves Muslim women's inclusion in religious affairs (and spaces), advocacy for acceptance of culturally/religiously defined ways of female outlook, reinterpreting Islamic scholarship to liberate it from male-suited, patriarchy-promoting, anti-women versions of Islam. In Pakistan, feminism or fighting for female rights, simply, is a class-centered concept. The agenda, concerns and expressions of subversion of patriarchy are tied to what economic class a woman comes from. Additionally, religious affliations are a key factor in formulating Pakistani women's feminist scholarship and activism. There are Pakistani women associated with *Al-Huda* and *Jamat-e-Islami*[70], while other side of the dice is humanist, activist, pro-Malala, pro-Qandeel Bloach[71], young Pakistani educated women. The concept of Islamic postfeminism, challanges the notions that frame Muslim women as unhappy, loveless, voicless victims of

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[70] Both considered as female Islamist groups
[71] A bold Pakistani media celebrity who was killed by her brother in the name of honour

patriarchy in Islamic Pakistan. This section of the study aims at framing postfeminism[72] with Islamic feminism in a Pakistani context. In addition to theoreatically situating this merger, it draws upon portrayals of postfeminist female characters and discursive constructions in the works of Pakistani female writers to substantiate the argument. Further it examines the ways that re-orient their womanhood as it appears in contemporary anglophone writings of young women, hence recontextualizing postfeminism in a Pakistani context. Having said that, there is no denial that social identity of Pakistani female writers cannot be detached from their religious identity, that is, Islamic Identity. So, it is important then to observe what values and traditions they inherit and how they are reflected in their works.

The works selected for this study, *'Beautiful from this Angle (2010)* by Maha Khan Phillips and *'Karachi You're Killing Me' (2014)* are set in Karachi. Both novels have multi-layered plots with bold female characters, not very common in Pakistani locales, where they party, use drinks and drugs, discuss and date men, and get involved in sex and intimacy outside marriage. Interestingly, nothing is done secretively, but presented as normative behaviour. Some of the postfeminist chick literature patterns that emerge in both the works are excessive partying, use of drinks and drugs; anti-extremist discourse, dating, sex, love, marriage, intimacy, hunt for men, mockery, humour; consumerism; swear words, individuality replacing sisterhood, body image, fashion etc.

4.1.1 Beautiful from This Angle

There are three parallel plots in *Beautiful from This Angle*[73] (2010) with two narrative voices, one from inside and one from outside. Main plot deals with story of three friends Amynah—an Oxford graduate, party animal, with progressive worldview; Mumtaz—US passport holder, simpleton, with interest in film making; Henna—daughter of a landlord, in love with Javed since the age of fourteen, and avoids anything 'immoral'. Along with the main plot, there is a subplot on weekly column by an anonymous writer who leaks the inside stories of elite party culture of the city, Karachi, titled 'Party Queen on the Scene'. The third subplot is oppressed women's novel that Amynah is writing in which she shares/mocks stereotypes about Muslim/Pakistani women and how all these accounts are manipulated by the West in maintaining Islamophobia. The novel provides a

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[72] The contemporary form of feminist movement, explication of the concept is there in the paragraphs to follow

[73] Will be referred to as *BFTA* in rest of the study

critique on Islamism and Zia's Islamist policies in Pakistan during nineteen-eighties. The alternative identity of Pakistani Muslim women surfaces in the novel where she is enjoying bodily freedom in the form of sex outside marriage, praising men for their looks, masculinity and beauty, dating men and developing intimacies with them. In a humorous, joyful, chick-lit tone, Phillips satirises the hypocrisies of Pakistani society and destabilises the notions of Pakistani Muslim womanhood. The novel opens with a letter to the editor of an angry reader of Party Queen's column, from USA, saying that Amynah's column is not a real representation of Pakistan: "Your anonymous author is more concerned with parties, drugs, and alcohol than with saying anything substantial about the life in Karachi…by portraying our country to be nothing but a den of sex and drugs, a minority of people who because of wealth or status think they are beyond the law" (Phillips, 2010, pp. 3-4)[74] . The irony of his anger here is that he is a guy who is living in first World and is not happy with a little freedom that our women of third world happen to enjoy, a reflection of primitive male mentality that is mocked in the novel. It further alludes to the fact that certain extremist Muslim attitudes would, as a matter of fact principle, object to the content of such a column, as well as to chick-lit. Amynah also shares snippets from the novel she is writing on oppressed women in Pakistan.

4.1.2   Karachi you're Killing Me

Karachi you're Killing Me[75] *(2014)* is story of Ayesha, the protagonist, who is a young single journalist in her twenties based in Karachi. The story is in the form of a diary, spanning over a period of six months. Her character is an ardent representation of a postmodern Pakistani urban girl for whom personal freedom and pleasure is the top most priority. Ayesha excessively parties, smokes cigarettes, and drinks alcohol heavily along with fulfilling all her professional commitments. Appearance, beauty, body and self-care are emphasized throughout the novel as essential elements of a woman's life; characters rely on cosmetics and anti-ageing processes to keep their persona young. Girlfriend, boyfriend culture that is considered a taboo in Pakistan, Saba Imtiaz treats casually; relationships are made, maintained, exploited, and if unsuccessful hardly mourned. There is a frequent flow of hugs, kisses and bodily touches between characters. Sex and relationships outside marriage is one important theme that emerges through the events in this work. Ayesha is attracted towards a US journalist, Jamie, dates him and sleeps with

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[74] Subsequent references from this book will just have the page numbers in citation
[75] Will be referred to as *KYKM* in rest of the study

him on multiple occasions. Jamie steals an investigative news story of Ayesha that disturbs her a lot. She finally realizes that she loves her childhood friend Saad and decides to marry him. Both Saad and Ayesha, have had physical relationships before marriage, and they knew about each other's indulgences, but this did not affect their relationship and they got married at the end of the novel. It reflects that in a modern day elite Pakistani culture there is a growing acceptance among youth to have relationships and getting laid before marriage. Virginity is not fussed upon and present is not spoiled because of past. If two people consider that they like each other and want to spend their lives together, their past lives worry them the least. *KYKM* is normalising sex outside marriage. Further, we get to observe a mature control over sexuality as Ayesha spends time alone with her friend in Dubai and nothing 'indecent' happens. The book fleshes out interesting insights on love, relationships, personal freedom and causal sexuality of a young Pakistani woman.

4.1.3 Emergent Sexualities and Intimacies

Sex is a dirty word, female sexuality cannot be talked about, and women must not express their sexual desires, this is how generally Eastern/Islamic societies are tuned to act. On the contrary, according to Shereen El Feki: "there is a long and distinguished history of Arabic[76] writing on sex—literature, poetry, medical treaties, self-help manual—which has slipped out of sight" (Feki, 2013, p. 13). At present our, "sexual hibernation is just one element of a broader intellectual decline that gained momentum during the colonial period: since Bonaparte, we've witnessed a negative evolution of Muslim societies. Especially over the past half century, since the collapse of Nasserism and nationalism, our societies have been on the defensive in the process of closing in on themselves" (Bouhdiba, 2012, p. 231). According to Wilhem Reich "the goal of sexual suppression is that of producing an individual who is adjusted to the authoritarian order and who will submit do it in spite of all misery and degradation" (Reich, 1973, p. 98). There is nearly no work available on history, attitudes or development of sexuality in Pakistan. Very recently, Ibrahim (2016) has developed a discourse on the issues related to gender and sex in Pakistani society. He is very critical of some of Islamic scholars like Ashraf Ali Thanvi and poets including Akbar Allabadi and Iqbal, on their unfair treatment of women that accommodates/promotes misogyny. He argues that there is need of realising the fact that sexuality is not only about

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[76] Even in Quran, there is a story of uncontrolled female sexuality, Yousaf and Zulekha. Zulekha's husband brought Yousaf home to adopt him as a son, but stunned by his beauty, she made an attempt on Yousaf in the burning passion of sexual desire.

men; women also have sexual rights and desires. Ibrahim also considers lack of sex education as one of the reason behind growing viewership of pornography in Pakistan.

The female characters in *BFTA* and *KYAKM* enjoy their sex life to the full, fearlessly. Both Amynah and Ayesha, the lead ladies, casually sleep with different men, portraying sex as a commonality. These young women enjoy male body and provide graphic details of their sexual activity in the novels. Moreover, there are plentiful particulars of male female intimacies in the form hugs, kisses, and intimate touches. Generically perceived discomfort of opposite gender characteristic of Eastern women is non-existent in both these works. Like prototypical chick-heroines, these Karachi girls live their social life, they party, drink, and date along with workplace, professional engagements. Religion and the concept of piety is often relied upon, misleadingly, to hide sexual distress in our Eastern cultures. Whereas "sharia is a text that can be interpreted in the sense of sexual liberty or in the sense of oppression. If the politicians decide on the sexual liberty, then the Islamic scholar will find a way" (Dialmay, 2009, p. 6). In postfeminist chick-lit tradition, Phillips's text has abundance of sex interactions in varied forms. Amynah phonicates when away from her boyfriend Kamal: "It's been six hours and thirty-two minutes since I left your bed. Of course I'm missing you....I'd love the sound of your voice it's throaty and sexy and perfect. Well Mr Khalid, you'll hear it plenty later, when we have phone sex" (41). She repeatedly sleeps with Kamal and the sexual events are very vividly described in BFTA.

> A vague recollection of kissing Kamal in the lobby makes her groan with horror. So much of being discreet. She gets out of bed and realizes that she is naked. She cannot see any clothes around so she wraps herself in the bedsheet, feeling insecure in her nakedness. Then she hears the shower and relaxes and heads towards bathroom. Kamal rinses shampoo off his hair, oblivious to her presence. Amynah watches the suds slide down his body and feels a sudden urge to join him in the shower. (96)

A further twist to the sex plot of this novel appears when we get to know that Amynah's mother was also having physical relationship with an MNA[77]: "Amynah learnt of her mother's infidelity when she was nine. The boyfriend, the married MNA, arrived on the scene and has remained a permanent fixture" (104). Amynah describes how she was

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[77] Member National Assembly

often bribed by presents to get out of the scene, still she would, occasionally, come across the guy touch up her mother or leching over her. Females, once married are supposed to be at the mercy of their husbands for their bodily satisfaction. In this case, Amynah's father was living in another city with her brother for business purposes, ignoring sexual needs of his wife. So she did not stay passive and fulfilled her needs with another man, the MNA. Another, sexually autonomous character is Mumtaz's[78] sister Sophie who enjoys sleeping with different men. First, she had a relationship with Amynah's friend Faisal and then with a wealthy businessman: "Sophie is with Asghar Alam…Sophie has stripped down to her bra and is running towards water. Asghar follows as fast as he can, his naked belly wobbling" (229).

Female sexuality and self-determination over body is a key postfeminist concern. Sexually, the image of Muslim women that looms in the minds of Western audiences is that of a passive harem concubine lying in inviting positions for men (Mernissi, 2001) or desexualized individuals who have lost the sense of enjoying even in a married relationship (Feki, 2013). In the backdrop of a Pakistani post-two-thousand society of booming technological developments and social media where young people have more access to opposite gender[79], they develop feelings, want to make love, still the discomfort to own sexuality and to talk about it, as a source of human pleasure and bodily necessity, is immense and hypocritical. Shattering all these negativities Saba Imtiaz's Ayesha is a sexually, active and aggressive, man-hooker. *KYAKM* is full of explicit references to sex. She emerges as a sex adventurist female party girl who allows herself to get ensnared by men. To her, bodily satisfaction is important for peaceful living. Ayesha, the protagonist details her sex adventures with different men in the novel. Ayesha says, "I really want to meet someone NEW. Like, someone I don't feel ashamed about fucking" (Imtiaz, 2004, 9)[80]. A very casual approach towards sex is expressed in this book. Ayesha was physically attracted towards Jamie, a CNN correspondent in Pakistan. After having met him a few times, she developed the desire to sleep with him: "I actually wore lacy black underwear tonight. As I get into a cab all I think about is how much I want to rip Jamie's clothes off" (82); "I really, really need to have sex, to feel someone's body pressing against me other

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[78] Amynah's close friend

[79] (or the same)

[80] Subsequent references from this book will just have page numbers in citations

than the cat's" (115). She, represents a sex starved, occasionally self-deprecating too, character in the novel:

> I am single, and even if this whole thing with Jamie ends up with me doing the walk of shame home and never hearing from him again, it'll be worth it to feel like someone finds me desirable. I have a drawer full of lacy lingerie that mocks me every morning (94).

Ayesha despite knowing that Jamie does not love her, and their relationship is entirely based on bodily desires, still commits to it and gives a bold description of her sex experience: "I felt like every single part of me had come alive, like a head rush, an erotic ice cream headache […] Why did I not jump Jamie the first night we met" (122). With Jamie she enjoys the sexual activity more than once and joyfully says: "sex is actually better than it was the first time, which I did not think was possible" (151). Outside marriage sex is a reality that we just do not have the courage to admit in Muslim societies, especially for females. No doubt, Islam forbids such relations to both men and women, however in case of Muslim women sex outside marriage is equated with dishonouring the family, not the act of an individual. In KYAKM, not only the protagonist, but other characters too take sex as a normative behaviour. At Karachi literature festival, Saad, Ayesha's friend, claims: "I've had sex with most of the people here, Saad announced, far too loudly. 'I've already seen the best of them" (47-48). Sex is talked about and discussed in the novel; Saad explains Ayesha his sex escapades and what sex positions he likes. Ayesha too explicitly asked him the sensual details of the night he spent with a girl and why he calls her a starfish, Saad answers: "A starfish is a woman who just lives there, makes you do all the work" (12).

In both these novel sensual proximity and physical intimacy is not shied away. Tactile relationship is presented as strengthening the connection between two persons. The female characters show abundance of physical touches, and overflow of hugs and kisses. There is general sense of comfort and openness towards body, gender mixing, sensuality, and sexuality. Both Ayesha and Amynah develop friendships and go out with males, sometimes with the ones whom they have met just once on at a party. Throughout the novel *BFTA*, the protagonist Amynah shares intimate moments with her friend Faisal, and lover Kamal: "She grabs Faisal from behind and kisses him on his neck, pulling him towards glass dance floor. He smiles and kisses her on the cheek" (15); "propping themselves up against the unseen side of the building kissing" (16). Expression of intimate desires gets full description in *BFTA*, referring to her boyfriend Kamal Amynah says: "She needs to get

high, have a few laughs snuggle up with Kamal under a blanket" (142); "He leans over and kisses her on the mouth" (100). Amynah's friend Mumtaz also gets physical with Monty: "Monty leans over, grabs Mumtaz from behind and kisses her neck" (152). All these expressions of intimacy and sexual self-determination, situate the bodily freedom of young Pakistani women. Shattering all the taboos, they are claiming the liberty to love and to be loved without curbing their desires under some culturally defined patriarchal control.

Sexuality is believed to be a male-driven domain in many cultures. A woman with sexual explicitness is questioned for her morality and chastity. Where men can have relationships outside marriage, if a woman does so she is a whore. Contrarily, Imtiaz has portrayed sexually empowered female characters, who enjoy their sensuality and sexuality without creating a fuss about it. In *KYAKM*, Ayesha initiates and facilitates the intimate encounters. She provides her place to her friends for fulfilment of intimate desires. As a resistance to supressing female bodily needs, Ayesha's intimate connections with Hassan, Jamie and Saad are very explicitly described in the novel. Kisses are commonly exchanged, referring to Jamie Ayesha says: "He leans in and kisses my cheek, and says 'hello again' rather close to my ear" (60); "A designer kisses me hello and whispers" (115). The act of kissing gets more intense as the story moves on: "I kissed Jamie on the cheek and pushed the call button to summon the elevator. Jamie stepped in after me, brushed the hair away from my face and kissed me, a soft gentle kiss" (121); "Mouth slightly open, and in spite of small snorts issuing from it I still wanted to kiss it. Wondered if he'd be weirded out if I made out with him while he slept" (122).

4.1.4 Chick-lit and Party Scene

Amynah the lead character of *Beautiful from This Angle (BFTA)* and Ayesha the protagonist of *Karachi You're Killing Me (KYAKM)* are party animals. The party scene is very heavy in *BFTA*. The exuberant details of Karachi's nightlife and partyholic girls construct an alternative discourse on Pakistani women's identity, wherein, they dance, drink, and have freedom to fun. Though it might not be representative of all Pakistani women, yet the resistive value of such discourse cannot be undermined. 'Party Queen on the Scene', a weekly column, is a layer of plot that throughout the novel fleshes out details of Karachi's nightlife. The details that we get to know about these parties make us realize that it's an insider's description, the one who certainly knows the etiquettes and is familiar with party culture, not a borrowed swank. Parties and nightlife is a class symbol as well, so are the standards of morality. In Pakistan, there are no public bars or nightclubs. So, most

of these sprees referred in the novel are private events with invite. We find the mention of wide range of such parties in both the novels, especially in *BFTA*. These are arranged by different elite segments of society and non-governmental organisations. The very opening of *BFTA* is studded with five different themed parties: 'post-Ramzan parties' (6), 'The Heart Centre's Black and White Evening' (6), 'Ali Habib's Sadists and Virgins party' (7), 'The Cancer Trust's Arabian Nights' (7), 'Sindh Club Ball' (7). In this party culture, NGOs also organize such gatherings to raise money for charity. Drinks, tobacco, and drugs are common party props on these events: "it's hardly a rocket science. Throw a party and most of Karachi, gagging for thrills and pills, turns up" (6). Youth associates these gatherings as an expression of their freedom. They want to maintain a lifestyle where their choices are not under constant checks and value judgements. These parties can also sometime turn into wing-ding:

> Zazoon who has never been to Pakistan before, clearly a little stunned by the way Karachi parties, especially when our favourite soap-manufacturing King, Murtaza Ali, made off with one of their belly dancers against her wishes in a drunken rampage. I'm not joking. Physically grabbed her off the stage and made a run for it. (7)

The exhibitionism is at its extreme on these events. The more lavish a party is, the better the organizer is applauded. There is a competition to bring novelty in these parties to keep the audience interested. People of all ages use these parties as socializing opportunities and hooking persons from opposite gender. There is no mention of abiding by or overlooking religious values and message by the party girls in the novel. Following the secular spirit, religion and personal choices are not mixed. Amynah, the protagonist, performs and respects Islamic practices like Ramdan, however at the same time she does not compromise on her fun. She keeps her personal and religious identities separate, none overlaps with the other: "but believe me, luvvies, I needed that time to prepare for the spate of Post Ramzan Parties" (6). Now this expression of 'Post Ramzan Parties' can be interpreted in many ways. Some people might say this is a disrespect to religion, others might opine liberals/seculars are not following Islam 'properly', but this is the way things are and we need to accept it.

Karachi's nightlife is portrayed as a guilt free phenomenon, where the participants carry their true selves, they drink and dance copiously: "charity aunties are out of touch with the younger crowd who wants to be sophisticated when you can be sexy" (6). "The

guys look nervous—the whisky is going fast...so they are downing their drinks in quick successions" (13). Karachi beach party added a new flavour to the whole party scene of the novel. It had heavy music, massive dance floor, drugs, and turtle pits were made that provided attendees perfect privacy for a drink or a joint. "Two hundred designer-clad skinny people gathered at Sandspit[81] and are partying the night away in darkness" (9). Couples show off their dance chemistry to seek attention. Amynah grabs Faisal, her friend, "hogging the floor with sexy dirty dancing" (16). As a protagonist she owns her choices, and does not hide anything hypocritically. She criticizes those girls who go to the parties and then do not want to be seen drinking or enjoying.

In *KYAKM,* it is not only Ayesha, the lead character, but also her friend Zara also gets involved in the bash: "Zara parties like her life depends on it and knows absolutely everyone, and if she doesn't she will find a way to get their entire bio data" (6). Parties in *KYAKM* are means to socialise and meet potential partners, and of course to enjoy the luxury of dancing and drinking: "The bar runs the length of the garden and there are about a dozen bartenders whipping up drinks. People are already on dance floor and a few guys have rolled up their jeans and are sitting on the edge of the pool" (10). Either in *BFTA* or in *KYAKM*, there has not been any effort made by narrator to justify the actions of the girls. Religion and morality do not come in conflict with individual liberty and choice to determine the life pattern. Freedom gets paramount importance in these chick-lits, religious identity of these Pakistani young women is just one form of their complex beings, besides that they are individuals with human needs and desires. This self-assertion of women may not be representative of all Pakistani women, but its existence should not be undermined to counter discourses that present them only as shackled beings.

4.1.5 Drinking Alcohol and Smoking

Quran prohibits intoxicating substances be it alcohol[82] or drugs. Although some Muslims who are residing in Western diaspora argue that if you do not lose your senses or get drunken/intoxicated alcohol is not prohibited, yet most scholars consider this argument deliberate deception. Islamic logic against alcohol is that it makes us forgetful of the duty to God. In Quran, there is clear guidance, not to go near *nimaz*, if you are drunk. It is not only the consumption, buying, serving and selling is also forbidden. The secular Muslims

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[81] A beach in South West of Karachi
[82] Ironically, the word alcohol has Arabic root, 'al-khol' that means intoxicating substances. In Quran the word, Khamr is used for alcohol.

are of the view that Quran prohibits intoxications for two reasons, one, considering it harmful for humans, and second a drunken individual cannot worship God. They argue that the aspect of affirming prohibition of alcohol based on worship holds validity, however drinking should be tolerated since individuals can decide for themselves, what is 'harmful' for them and what is not. Islamic religious tradition does not allow drinking, but Islamic cultural tradition has been tolerant of drinking. In classic stories of '*Thousand and One Nights*', alcohol is consumed in great amounts and prominent Muslims including caliphs and kings have been using alcohol. In Arabic poetry, there are odes to drinking, known as *khumaryat*. Drinking and singing have been elements of Muslim festivity. Muslim countries like Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco have centuries old tradition of producing and consuming wine. Sixteenth century ruler of India Jahangir was a heavy drinker. Omar Khayyam, a celebrated Muslim poet, highly valued drinking[83] in his poetry by linking it with power of philosophical inspiration. Historians write that Arab Caliphs, Turkish Sultans, and Mughal Emperors all excessively consumed alcohol and made utmost efforts to hide it (Mernissi, 2001). Therefore, alcohol Islamically is *haram*, but culturally it has been condoned[84].

Regardless of this *halal-haram* debate, alcohol in both these works has been used by women as another form of exercising freedom. They do not claim to be showcasing ideal Muslim womanhood. Nonetheless, saying no to religiously defined morality discourses is highlighted here. Amynah and Ayesha in these Pakistani chick-lit fictions are heavy users of alcohol, cigarettes, and joints; most of their parties and nightlife is centred on drinking and drugs. Amynah is a trendy and lively girl who attends parties and "believes in alcohol, cigarettes, and Hello" (44). Amynah inherited drinking culture from her mother: "Mummy always said learning how to make a good vodka Martini was far harder than memorising the Koran. Amynah can make forty-eight cocktails, but has never learnt how to pray" (81). She also knows how it works at parties and ridicules Mumtaz, her friend, for getting high after one drink only. People of all age groups celebrate their freedom by drinking and dancing the nights away. The soirees that take place at beaches are full of all kinds of stuff. Alcohol is not only used at parties by these girls, but they also rely on bootleggers to deliver it to them at their doorsteps: "when there's a dearth of booze in the city, you don't complain. My bootlegger says nothing's coming in" (12). Furthermore, a

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[83] Although metaphorically
[84] In Pakistan non-Muslims can buy and sell alcohol, but Muslims cannot.

variety of beers, wines, and liquors are used by Amynah and Mumtaz in *BFTA*: 'glasses of whiskey-pani' (13), 'vodka-nimbu' (13), 'gin-and-tonics' (13), 'Vodka-7up' (15), 'Heinkene bottles' (22), 'champagne' (121), 'bottle of scotch' (131), 'Jack Daniel's Whiskey' (161), 'pint of Guinness' (201), 'whiskey soda' (217). These party youth of Karachi also consume tobacco and drugs as an element of pop culture: 'Malbro lights' (8) 'Smoking joints' (23) 'poppy' (117), 'heroine' (117).

In *KYKM,* the lead character Ayesha excessively smokes and exploits smoking as a tool to venture into men's world. "Ali's cameraman has penchant for filming footage of women smoking, and showing it to everyone in the *News 365* office. Clearly, women smoking passes for pornography these days […] You seem like a nice girl. Why do you smoke" (21). Smoking is equally injurious for both men and women, but women smoking is perceived as a filthier act. Ayesha mocks the double standards of our conservative societies. Similarly, there is mass consumption of alcohol in this novel too with great liquid-courage: "We are going to celebrate all bloody night. Zara hands us tumblers of what I can only hope is whiskey and Coke" (14). Ayesha has been drinking since she was young: "The last time I did shots was with my 22-year-old cousin at a wedding. I had to drink about a litre of 7-Up to get rid of the nausea" (61). The ability of not to get high or drunk after small amount of alcohol is considered as a symbol of elitism. If someone cannot handle drinking she does not belong to the group: "If you can't handle it, don't drink. These new money types I tell you" (106). Since, it is illegal to carry any type of alcohol without permit in Pakistan, so we see characters making an effort to hide it away from police: "I pray silently that the cops don't stop us instead; I have a bottle of Murree beer in my handbag" (28); "the event managers think we're sneaking in booze in plastic water bottles!...'Well, yes, but how else is one supposed to survive fashion week?'" (106). Ayesha consumes alcohol as relaxant too in her hectic work routine. Like Amynah of *BFTA*, Ayesha relies on bootleggers to get wine: "Isloo is out of red wine after the cops shut down the Korean's bootlegging ring. It is fucking disaster" (237). Bootlegging alludes to rich drinking culture of Karachi, where women are mass consumer of alcohol. Undoubtedly, all this drinking and drugs may not be as prevalent as presented, however, it destabilizes the notions of Muslim womanhood and emphasizes exercise of choice.

4.1.6 Dating, Relationships, Love and Marriage

Feminism seems to have robbed of women from one important source of happiness in their life—men. Instead of abhorring men, postfeminist women choose to make love

with them. One of the defining features of postfeminist chick literature is girl's hunt for guys, though, traditionally, in most cultures it is men who admire female beauty and romanticize it. In *BFTA* and *KYAKM* men are the objects of female gaze. Women admire their bodies and masculinities. Generally, looks are not the identity marker for men, but in the spirit of reverse sexism and honest admiration, in both the works, men are praised by the protagonists Ayesha and Amynah. In the contemporary postfeminist world, men are objectified, and they carry the burden of masculinity—chiselled six packs and gym toned bodies. However, male objectification does not affect them socio-psychologically as the female objectification does to women. In these fiction works, we find instances of male beauty adored and sought after by women, belligerently. In *BFTA*, Amynah describes her crush Kamal's appearances in alluring details: "He is smiling in crinkly, sexy sort of way. He has beautiful thick brown hair…Kamal is tall, he towers over her. So rare, in this city, a man with height" (16-17). Amynah was appalled by Kamal' masculinity, "his muscular long limbs, his big workman's hands, his well-sculpted torso, and the way his hair falls over her breasts" (101). There is no mention of intellect, professional success, or other traits as a criterion of male attractiveness; only their physicality is stressed upon: "And, babes, he's so fucking sexy. And great in…" (29). In *KYKM*, for Ayesha it was difficult to stay without men, she had serious yearning for them. Ayesha's New Year resolution was not to stay single: "New Year. New Ayesha. Must socialize and meet people, preferably of the single male variety" (23). In both these novels the noticeable aspect is that the choice lies with women to pick their men. Ayesha also expressed her frustration of not finding it easy to find men of her choice. "Where am I ever going to find a guy in the wasteland that is Karachi, where it is easier to hire an assassin than meet an attractive, intelligent, normal, single man?" (15). She describes her longing for Saad in these words: "For some reasons I feel like I 'm going to cry…I just want to put my head on his shoulder and tell him how miserable I've been" (11). Later in the novel she got ensnared in the charm of a white man and becomes over-joyous at getting an opportunity to see him: "Oh fuck it. He's a good-looking man who wants to have dinner with ME" (80). Ayesha's friend Zara too had an eye on a young bartender: "'Isn't that bartender cute' Zara says as she stares at a kid, who is barely twenty" (224).

Meeting guys and dating them is not stigmatized in both the works. The female characters in both the novels openly date, the affiliations they develop over drinks in the parties, or the persons they like elsewhere. However, the nature of these affiliations is

presented as fickle. The girls do not seem to have an issue, if their partners are having multiple affiliations. In *BFTA*, Amynah told Mumtaz's sister Sophie that Faisal, her new boyfriend, has been with her and he is not a one-woman-man. However, very unlikely of an Eastern woman, she seemed to bother least; all that mattered to her was his company at present without worrying about the past. Moreover, later in the novel Amynah, despite knowing Faisal and Sophie's relationship, she calls him for her own pleasure. "She calls Faisal and asks him to come over with the good stuff. 'Bring that annoying little bitch if you must'" (124). In *KYKM* Ayesha keeps moving on to new partners as Amynah does in *BFTA*. Zara, a friend of Ayesha, introduces Hasan to Ayesha by saying: "When was the last time you went on a date?" (31). Moreover, Ayesha very comfortably accepts and understands dating culture and divulges her friend Saad's dating scene to the audiences: "Saad's girlfriends have often told me they find him far too aloof and emotionally attached" (137). Men are a topic of the frequent conversations for these girls. Zara guides Amynah about her relationship with Jamie: "Look date a gora all you want, but please don't become a cliche" (93).

Romantic, long-term love seems to be out of place in these works, instead impulsive, sensual affiliations flourish. Both lead characters are doubtful about the concept of marriage. They believe marriage marks your inability to date and shackles you down. Moreover, it brings complexities, expectations, and unwanted responsibilities. Amynah believes, "no one stays faithful. That's why Amynah has sworn never to marry and never to have children" (45). She is also weary of how men want their wives to be superwomen who are able to seamlessly shift roles when required: "Why are all men like this? On the one hand, they expect you to act like hookers in the bedroom. On the other, they want you to dress piously and touch their mother's feet" (100). A woman in Eastern cultures is expected to please every member of the family at her in-laws, not only her husband, since marriage is considered a bond between two families, not two individuals. This contradicts general ideological pattern of postfeminist tradition, where women are salvaging their faith in institution of marriage. The same disbelief in marriage is prevalent in *KYAKM,* to Ayesha marriage is just a compromise on personal freedom. Hence, she vows to herself, not to marry: "I remind myself how much I love being single and not having to account for every second of my life to someone" (30); "I am a hard core reporter, an intelligent, independent woman who is perfectly happy being single" (127). Riffat Aunty, mother of Saad, reaffirms Ayesha's incredulity: "getting married and settling down…Where's fun in that beta? Enjoy

yourself. Travel. See the world. Maybe get married. Don't have kids, they're so overrated" (43). So, largely marriage is feared to be a detriment to free-spirited, breezy, lifestyle. This can also be read as shying away from responsibilities that married life confers upon an individual, primarily, the children. Men too question the concept of marriage in the novel, when Saad ex-girlfriend suddenly married he remarked:

> [W]eddings now seemed like a game of musical chair. Honestly, isn't it just a bit desperate?...it's as if they ran out of people to date, landed up on the facebook and clicked on the first profile photo that came up and thought 'ha, this could be the one, he's been here all along. (149)

Ayesha mocks married women's continuous struggle and fanatic devotion to get their husband's attention, for that they can even cut their wrists: "Tsk, you know Kamran should really spend less time at the office. Think of his poor wife sitting at home all evening. Clearly she felt like she had to get his attention" (105). To her, husband-wife-sass love tringle is the worst part of married life in Pakistan, where there is always a constant tug of war. Moreover, talking of mismatches in marriages, Ayesha says, there are young girls who marry 'factory boys' due to their riches having "no idea what her husband does. And they rarely have anything to talk about other than their business" (41). Despite the anti-marriage stance of Ayesha, there is a moment of postfeminist fear of singlehood that she voices in the novel:

> I will be single forever, the drunk old auntie forever who kids hate at parties because they keep making them refill their drinks and fetch ice, I'll be that girl who everyone invite to dinner out of pity because I am old and broke. (178)

4.1.7   Body, Postfeminism and Pakistani Chick-lit

Body is a pivotal aspect of postfeminist politics. Female beauty is celebrated and even commodified without considering it as objectification. Women feel proud of their bodies, and they make efforts to keep them in shape. In enhancing the need and desire of beautiful gym-toned bodies, media is functioning as a catalyst. Feminism that was considered an 'f' word[85] has got a realistic and popular makeover in postfeminism. From hating men to finding best looking men is the journey from feminism to postfeminism (Kim, 2001). Postfeminism has re-feminized women. They are now valuing sexiness, fun, pleasure and fashion (Braitwaite, 2004). Nevertheless, the downside of this beauty-quest

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[85] For more see, (Beck, 1998)

is, looking good has become an added responsibility on women (Dickerson, 2004). Beauty is a facet of freedom and independence that women must handle, without making it a disadvantage for them (McRobbie, 2004). Beauty and consumerism become allied concerns in the study of chick literature considering the shopaholic heroines in these works. According to Julliet Wells "[C]onsumer goods are essential to chick-lit heroines' self-conception and self-presentation, and writers commonly give as much attention to the obtaining and assembling of outfits as to the maintenance of faces and bodies" (Wells, 2006, p. 62). Protagonists of both these novels show concerns about and make efforts to keep up their appearances through spending time at the gym and consuming branded accessories. In *BFTA*,

> Amynah is wearing the right sequined Armani number she bought in New York last summer the one that shows off her long model's legs and make her look sexy and different from the we-only-wear-black-at-parties crowd. She's got pink streaks in her blow-dried-to-perfection-hair and she's really proud of them. (11)

The desire to look good and keep the body maintained is not limited to younger characters only; even Amynah's mother is a regular gym goer: "mummy got home from working out at sindh club gym" (22). Diet control and food plays crucial role in staying in shape, girls in the novel keep, with a conscious effort, their intake in check to avoid overeating: "Tell Mumtaz not to eat too many biscuits, she'll just become fat and how will she find a husband then?" (111). This explicates that the motive of self-care and bodily consciousness is to stay attractive to attract men, though some feminist social scientist criticize it as a submissive practice. As a symbol of conspicuous consumerism, the idea of Thorstein Vebler (1994), we see girls showing off their use of branded products. Ayesha "opens her small black Prada bag and hunts around for a Marlboro Lights, grasping tightly on her furry pink lighter from Harrods" (8). In a modern-day world, along with the looks, dress is a significant element of females' personality: "Amynah has dress to be admired. Mumtaz has dress to be criticized" (11). Dress is also a marker of social class and in some cases a religio-politic identity, especially in case of Muslim women's hijab. Ayesha does not hold favourable views about hijab; she supported Nilofer's (a poor village lady) detestation to use hijab: "Nilofer used to hate having to cover her head, to have any restriction on her whatsoever" (54).

In *KYKM,* female characters, irrespective of their age, rely on a range of beautification procedures and different fine treatments to look good. Ayesha applauds the

decision of fashion week sponsors to have provided them anti-aging creams (and condoms) in the welcome bags. Like *BFTA*, one of the prime motives of girls to stay beautiful is to keep their men interested in them, if "they gained twenty kilos […] their husbands went and married their teenage neighbour" (179). We get quite a few mentions of waxing, threading, moisturising, wrinkle removing treatments, manicures, pedicures, airbrushes etc. throughout the novel. Referring to his boss Kamran's wife, Ayesha says:

> his wife's just had another Botox shot, her eyebrows are so far up her forehead they look like they were drawn on. And I swear I heard her saying that she wants a second nose job, even though she now snores thanks to the first one she got she wanted to look like Nicole Kidman. (224-225)

Ayesha, the journalist and lead character of the novel shows anxiety on not having enough money to keep up with her beauty routines: "I have no money to get my hair done, get waxed or get anything nice to wear. I leap into the shower hoping to at least give my legs once over with a razor only to botch it and the next thing I know my knee's spouting a river of blood (80). She debunks how saloons exploit young women's insecurities about their looks, in order to convince them to spend more on various beauty treatments: "your skin is going to look like a 50-years-old's in five years" (113). In addition to beautification, Ayesha used to spend a lot of time on dressing up for her dates. In a mode of self-realisation, she relates to a study that "women spend sixteen minutes on average everyday deciding what to wear" (114). There, we also find use of and yearning for expensive handbags like, "Bottega Venetta clutches" (30) and "Limited edition Moleskine" (68).

4.1.8   Pakistani Chick-lit Discursivities

Humour is an important[86] element in the construction of chick-lit that both these works deploy. There are many instances where a variety of techniques including language variations are applied to lighten-up the diction that characterises chick-lit genre. In most instances, the function of humour is non-didactic, mainly there are linguistic digressions, swear words, situational comic scenes with cultural flavour and mockery/satire of certain local practices and events. According to Ferriss and Young chick-lit lead ladies "deploy self-deprecating humor that not only entertains but also leads readers to believe they are fallible-like them" (Ferriss and Young 2006, 4). The hilarity of these chick-lit heroines

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[86] Critics observe humour as an element that makes chick-lit marketable.

makes them likeable and the deployment of slapstick humour wins readers sympathy. Some of the instance of humour as a narrative strategy in Pakistani chick-lit are shared below.

In *KYKM* Saad's friend Nina at Karachi literature festival observes every female and passes funny comments: "Nina pointing to every girl there—single, married, nine months pregnant" (48). Ayesha, the protagonist, ridicules the language and content used in some twitter accounts by desperate Pakistani males: "'looking for frandship' and 'NO MoReSiSteRz OnLy FrienDz No MoRe ThaN FrienD !!!!!'" (54). Ayesha mocked the content of an advertisement selling sex-boosting products: "Married or Getting Married Soon? Introducing Men-Taur, Ultra Men Power! Complete Herbal Cure for treating Erectile Dysfunction, Enhance Stamina and timing for sexual satisfaction with zero side-effects" (202). In *BFTA*, Party Queen's column brings up hilarious comments about party scene of Karachi and Muslim fanaticism. In her first column she mocks the attire of these 'fundoos' (extremists) and suggests them to take their beards off to become more sociable. Referring to a terrorist (who is dead now) party queen addresses her readers:

> By the way has anyone else noticed that Osama Bin Laden would be a real hottie if someone shaved off his facial hair and dressed him up in Gucci? This whole Tora bora wearing-fatigues-in-a-cave thing just doesn't do him any justice, I'm telling you. (7)

At a beach party somebody was taking random pictures, Amynah, the protagonist jokingly says that they are going into repository of some desperate *wedera*[87]:

> 'Behenchood,' she mutters, heading towards the sea. No doubt, the photos are going to end up on one of Karachi's society pages. Or worse, the guy is some sleazy wadera type who is saving them for his collection. (10)

In both the novels female characters are using swear words, probably to burst the stereotype that women are supposed to be nice and gentle. There is excessive use of word 'fuck' in *BFTA*: **'**She fucking loves' (8), 'fuck off' (10), 'Fuck off and die' (12), 'What crazy mother fuckers' (14), 'Fuck it lets go' (16), 'The fucker' (16). Some Urdu swear words also used to create a humorous effect: Behenchod (10), 'Ullo ki patthi' (24), 'Chutia' (27), 'Haramzadi' (27). However, it is important to mention that these swear words, not only add to the humour as a narrative strategy and provoke laughter, but also show anger and aggressiveness of the lead ladies too. In KYAKM, too, there is plentiful use of swear

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[87] Feudal landlord

words: 'Fuck fuck fuck' (59), 'asshole' (72), 'fucking miserable this day' (90), 'no fucking way' (146), 'the motherfucker stole my story" (174), 'lying asshole' (180), 'I knew the asshole' (183), 'No, not just assholes' (183), 'I bloody well got mugged' (189), 'Fucking signal' (190), 'Fuck Kamran. Fuck his job' (194), 'MOVE MOTHERFUCKER' (196), 'Fuck my life' (202), 'I'd tell you to fuck off' (249), 'Fuck this' (252), 'you motherfuckingassholewhatthehellareyoudoinghere' (226).

Imtiaz and Phillips have subtly criticised hypocrisy, deception, and double standards of people. Amynah hates the girl who come to parties but cannot face people while drinking: "Even at a party like this girls don't want to be seen drinking in case it ruins their reputation the hypocrisy of Karachi" (15). Phillips in a subplot consisting of three sections, titled 'the oppressed woman's novel', has criticised the portrayal, for vested interests, of Muslim women as miserable beings: "Oh God. That's so been there, done that. Mukhtaran Mai[88] and all that" (30); "Another isn't-Islam-terrible-to-women- scene" (31); "Babes the shit these women write. It's such a fucking joke. I swear you'll die of hysterics" (34). In *KYAKM*, Ayesha mocks illogical religiosity on her meeting with Spiah-e-Sahaba spokesperson: "I adjust dupatta on my head…Despite the reputation he refuses to make eye contact with me because I'm a woman, so I'm directing my questions to the ground." (77). Further, she makes fun of conservative clothing: "'In my country we do not show our legs. We show a little here,' gesturing towards her neckline, 'and a little here,' pointing toward her midriff. 'But not our legs. We do not have the miniskirts in Pakistan, you know'" (119). Ridiculing censoring of content on television having any sexual connotations, Ayseha told what Nusrut Bhutto[89] said in an interview: "Pakistan bans condom ad starring controversial actress" (136).

4.1.9 Against Extremism

Both these works embrace liberal ideology and explicitly negate fundamentalism and religious extremism. There is an expression of hatred against extremism, that is either explicitly expressed or humorously mocked. In *BFTA*, the Sindh club party was shut down by extremists at which party queen says: "Religious fundoos…I hate the bloody fundoos. They are so bloody ugly. SHAVE THE BEARDS BASTERDS, darlinks, and maybe the rest of us will treat you with a little respect" (7). Amynah asks: "Liberalism or Islamisation? what is the future of Pakistan?...Islamic psychos threw acid on women's faces if they think

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[88] A Pakistani village woman who was raped
[89] A political leader

they are showing too much flesh. I too lived in the eighties, but that hardly applies to people like us" (26); "Do not the girls know Islamic fanatics—the ones with the green turbans, what are their names again—moved into the basti some time ago and are trying to turn everyone into extremists?" (59). In both works Zia-ul-Haq's Islamisation is cursed for pushing Pakistan into forced religious fanaticism. Ayesha: "I mean we were meant to be a pluralistic society. This is really all Zia-ul-Haq's fault, screeches the feminist poet" (52). There is also a mention KLF[90] as a progressive gathering.

As oppose to feminist sisterhood, postfeminism focuses on individuality and personal choices. Amynah despite having a close connection with Mumtaz, ridicules her: 'At a party like this, of course, Mumtaz is a joke' (11). Mumtaz also did not remain faithful to her friend and cashes on the success of their joint documentary project, compromising on the principles of dignity and integrity. She joined a political party as representative of women's issues. Amynah and Mumtaz parted on these words of Mumtaz to Amynah: "you want to drink yourself to death and do drugs" (188). This shows that when priorities change, a modern woman does not care about changing her affiliations. Her personal self is her the top most priority.

4.1.10 Conclusion

Indigenous chick-lit with Pakistani flavour, subconsciously aware of Islamic bindings, and in parts breaking free from them in secular spirit without any guilt is the new face of Islamic postfeminist discourse. Through this chick-lit, Muslim women are creating new spaces of tolerance and resistance in Pakistan where piety project is not enforced upon individuals. This is an effort towards creating a society that respects differences and understands that there can be good Muslims and not so good Muslims, but they all have equal citizenry to Pakistan. For Western audiences, only the inclusion of these chick-litish characteristics in fiction may cause ripples, but for majority of Pakistani audiences getting familiar with existence of care free, smoking, drinking, dating, buoyant woman in Pakistan is a revelation. It at the same time, reflects the fact that Pakistan is a class based society where one subsection of the society is totally ignorant of others' realities. It can be debated that to what extent this postfeminist chick-lit is representative of all Pakistani women or evolution of societal norms and gender patterns in general. If not an apt reflection, but an exaggerated, spiced up fictive narration, still it is an effort desirous of challenging the

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[90] Karachi Literature Festival

framing of Muslim Eastern women—subversion of agency, control, expectations, and expression.

Both these works convey the message that there do exist Happy Muslim Women, who live their lives to their will. Nadia Hasan in an ethnographic engagement with Pakistani women of Al-Huda and Jamat-i-Islami observed that their pious subjectivities are religiously inspired and pleasing God for spiritual nourishment is what drives their conduct (Hasan, 2015). "Collective unease with the sex makes tackling the fallout--including violence infection, exploitation, dysfunction, conjugal dissatisfaction, and profound ignorance--all the more difficult" (Feki, 2013, p. 5). Had it all been misogynistic and gloomy, we would not have illustrious examples of Muslim women from history, or from the contemporary literature produced by women form an important Islamic country. These discursive instances from contemporary Pakistani fiction disqualify all those planted perceptions of Muslim women's victimhood. On the whole, versions of modesty and freedom, not only between cultures, but within cultures on individual level may vary; Pakistani women living under Islam are equally open to modernity and social evolution taking place around them. If not entirely successful, they are striving sincerely to reach the goal of holistic freedom. Their struggle should be acknowledged, than paying undue attention to politically inspired Western discourses that paint theme merely as victims of patriarchy to serve their vested interests. Pakistani women love to be loved and are sensitive to value of emotions, intimacy, and desire. They take pride in their beauty and like to express it. They cherish male attention than constantly whining about male gaze, with an understanding that there are religious and cultural restrictions that they are supposed to abide by, but they are equally free to reinterpret them or may be flaunt them too. Religion is an affair of personal choice—not a communal thing. Pakistani women have been and are learning to live a joyous personal life sticking to their individual worldviews of righteousness without disrespecting any religious sentiments of the place. Islam has been (ab)used by religious orthodoxy to maintain control over people's lives in the affairs where there is no definitive theological verdict of righteousness. Muslim world is highly diverse in terms of cultures, geographical conditions and economics. Islam encourages pluralism and freedom of expression. In Islam, unlike Catholicism, there is no humanly central authority to force uniformity of religion so naturally Islam is pluralistic. This is a misconception (and mischief) that *shariah* denies equal rights to men and women in Islam. Islamic feminists and female scholars of Islam have successfully challenged all such

notions relying on Quranic hermeneutics. Even the exile of Eve from heaven has lesser misogynistic version in Islam as compared to Christianity.

4.2 No sex in the City and Islamic Postfeminist Discourse from Diaspora

> The diasporic intellectual acts as a perpetual party pooper because her impulse is to point to ambiguities, complexities and contradictions, to complicate matters rather than provide merely for solutions, to blur the distinctions between colonizer and colonized, dominant and subordinate, oppressor and oppressed. (Ang, 2001, p. 2)

No sex in the City[91] is a tale of four girls from different ethnicities and religious affiliations who tell their stories of search for Mr. Right in their lives. Abdel-Fattah has delicately balanced secular and religious in this work where freedom and right to exercise choice wins at the end. Esma, the protagonist, is a considerate daughter who courageously helps her father to pay the mortgage at the cost of her own future dreams. As a girl warrior, she fights on multiple fronts: her professional duties, emotional combats, and supporting her father financially and socially by keeping his secrets of gambling, buried in her[92]. At parallel, she battles with sexual harassment she had to face at her workplace. Dany, her boss, a married man, constantly bothered her indecently. Esma tolerated him initially and then sued him legally and won a compensation. Another appreciable aspect of her life is her volunteering for Sydney's refugee centre that she considers significant in the synthesis of her life. Esma's closest circle, 'No sex in the City' club, was a multi-faith group of Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian friends. Her boss, apparently, wanted to set her up with a non-Muslim Australian friend of him, Marco. So, the spirit of multiculturalism freely flows through the novel. At no point, there appears to be any abhorrence among the four girls, Lisa, Ruby, Esma, and Nirvana; they all liked each other as if they were real sisters. They mutually consoled themselves and shared their love lives at regular 'No sex in the City' gatherings. This concept of comforting sisterhood has both feminist and postfeminist appeals here. Gender hierarchy does not appear a relevant category, the girls, all four of them, are not struggling at the hands of patriarchy by any means. Their meetings under 'No Sex in the City' club are centred around girlie gossips—men, dates, and relationship stories.

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[91] Will be referred to as NSC

[92] Had she made public that her father had put their life at risk by losing all his possessions in gambling, this might have ended the wedlock between her father and mother, as it was a serious betrayal to the faith her mother had in him.

In terms of narration, Abdel-Fattah keeps the readers involved with interesting stories and amusing details about all different characters in a light tone.

'No sex in the City' juxtaposes Islamic progressive and Western secular viewpoints on dating culture, relationships, sex, and marriage. The protagonist, Esma, is an Australian Muslim with Turkish roots. Muslim diaspora in the West is in the middle of the continuum from liberalism to conservatism[93]. The patterns of halal dates are described in a light-hearted, yet meaningful tone. These are religio-culturally appropriate ways of approaching prospective life partners, where the agency of final decision, in most cases, is with the participants. Instead of being defensive or apologetic about Islamic traditions and values, Abdel-Fattah vocalizes them in a rational way through the lead lady Esma. Despite living in a non-Islamic culture, followers of Islamic ideology are connected through a shared culture driven by Islam. Faith based practices are beyond any geographical bindings. So, Muslims wherever they may live, there are similarities in the way they conduct their lives. In fact, the blurring of boundaries between religious and cultural is minimal in diaspora Muslim communities.

Esma is a good looking, bold and expressive Muslim girl who works in a recruitment agency. The character of Esma personalises a postmodern Muslim woman, who is simultaneously gallant and belligerent. The identity she foregrounds is of a woman that believes in a value system driven by her faith position, in this case Islam. Living in Australia, she connects and engages with people from multiple faith communities having varied worldviews. There is an elusive equilibrium between assertion and assimilation of self and other in the novel. Esma, does not disregard the practices of her Western friends and colleagues, however, in the process, there is no compromise on her own ideological positionality. What does freedom and liberty of a woman in the West and elsewhere mean? To what extent our viewpoint and conduct is justified when we interfere with other people's reality in modern day globalised world? Can modernity and tradition co-exist? These are some of the questions Randa Abdel-Fattah delineates with through the protagonist Esma in this book. Esma does not drink, yet she attends cocktail parties of her colleagues.

4.2.1 The Dynamics of Halal Dates

Randa Abdel-Fattah, in an effeminate tone, is challenging the stereotype that Muslim girls are bound to say yes to their parents' choice when it comes to the marriage

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[93] Pakistani fiction is most liberal, diaspora in the middle, and Arab world on the 'conservative' extreme

question. Esma's parents wanted her to marry, they facilitated her with access to possibly suitable matches, but did not force their will on her. In fact, they respected her decision whenever she said no, to any of the guys presented for marriage. Nevertheless, at points, Esma's mother advised her not to be too harsh on men, while making her choices. Following are some of the question that I focused on during the reading of the text: What are those things Esma appreciated in those men? What did Esma's checklist consist of? How she praised men? What role parents played in these halal dates? What did they talk about on these meetings? How did the conversation and connection move forward? Why they accepted or rejected each other? How the rejections were received? How did men conduct themselves in these meetings?

Esma met many guys, and the details of three of them, Yasir, Metin and Aydin, are given in this book, other are briefly mentioned[94]. Some of them, Esma said, were not willingly involved in the process, "one guy, Ali, already had a girlfriend he had every intention of marrying" (38). All these meetings were arranged through family or friends' references. On such meetings, permissible/halal dates, "two people get to know each other with a mutual understanding that their 'dating' is limited to their search for a marriage partner" (8). Esma had to follow certain protocols on these dates. Her father had devised a rule to follow what she calls, 'Rule of six'—to meet a guy there should be present, at least six people, however he eventually relaxed her on that (32). In the course of novel, when Aydin and Esma decide to meet, she did not allow him to pick her from her home. "I've avoided him picking me up from home because although my dad's relaxed the Rule of Six, he doesn't need to know I'm out following the Rule of Two" (114). Despite developing greater understanding with Aydin, by the end of novel, referring to her father, Esma reiterates: "he's never going to accept you arriving on our doorstep to take me out on a date [….] Mum keeps him in the loop" (164). On the whole, these dates are under somewhat strict parental scrutiny, to ensure no boundaries are crossed.

She is a twenty-eight-year-old virgin who never had any physical relationship with any male. At parties, she confronted remarks from the guys like: "So you're twenty-eight. And you've never had sex? Never even kissed a guy?" (8); "How can you marry a guy you've never even kissed?" (8); "So how do you get to know a guy before you get married?

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[94] Esma met a few guys that she did not approve of: Syef who wanted premarital relationship; Mohamad who wanted drinking and clubbing; Hassan who did not know much English; Kamil who was traditional and did not see the value of female education.

You need to try before you buy" (8). Her no sex before marriage slogan often wins her tags of 'old-fashioned', 'prude', 'frigid', 'picky', and 'fussy' woman (9). As a narrator, she introduces herself in the novel in a holier-than-thou tone:

> I'm attractive (according to my friends and family who never, ever lie about these things). I've got a master's in human resource management, I volunteer every month at the Sydney Refugee Centre, I'm well travelled, I have excellent taste in music, I watch the ABC news, I have the Guardian saved as an application on my iPhone, I'm very good at getting maximum points out of two-letter words in Scrabble, I never jump queues, I pay my bills on time, I never order 'just a salad', I'm great with kids, I don't freak out at the sight of a spider, I turn off the tap when I'm brushing my teeth – Goddammit! I DESERVE TO BE SWEPT OFF MY FEET! (Abdel-Fattah 2013, 7)[95]

Esma's choice of life partner was the person who would be a Muslim with same level of religiosity as hers, educated, employed, considerate of social justice, attractive ('not super model'), and who would bring something special in her life. Religion to Esma was a determining factor in marrying someone of her choice. She strongly believed in marriage as an institution and disapproved cohabitation or girlfriend, boyfriend relationship. Danny, Esma's boss, the antihero, constantly challenged her Islamic choices and lifestyle. Esma mostly tried to ignore him to avoid any argument on religion: "I'm uncomfortable with Danny giving me a hard time about my faith" (24). However, eventually at a colleague's farewell party she decided to shut him up once for all. "Okay, forget the drinking thing,' I say. 'Lots of people who aren't Muslim don't drink. But let's look at the fact that I won't have a relationship outside of marriage" (24). "I want to marry a Muslim, that my faith[96] is important to me and I want to be able to share it with my partner" (24).

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[95] The subsequent references to the text will just have page numbers
[96] Islamic feminism

4.2.1.1 Yasir

Esma met Yasir through Muslim community connections, her first prospective match. They add each other on Facebook[97] and decide to meet. Esma dresses up and puts on makeup to give Yasir a good impression. The scene of their meeting is described in a tongue-in-cheek fashion:

> I enter the Strand, trying to remember all the magazine articles I've read about the most flattering and slimming way to walk. Keep my thighs close together, one foot crossing over the other, try to walk sideways (reducing frontal view of body mass), stick boobs out (don't have much to stick out), keep shoulders back and head up to avoid any double chin ... Those poor models. They really do deserve their million-dollar salaries. (34)[98]

This lively tone in description of the pattern of dates is characteristic of chick-lit. Reflecting on her knowledge of dating that she developed by reading books on love by famous 'love gurus', Esma says: "[t]here are no rules for first dates, but I've been on enough to know there's a standard repertoire of safe topics: travel, personal interests, friends, taste in music, film and books, and a bit of current affairs" (34). Yasir shares with Esma that he started his professional life as an account and now he is a builder. He tells Esma the details of how and why he switched professions. The conversation later turned towards religion, since as a coreligionist in a non-Muslim country religion always becomes an unavoidable topic to create connections. Esma liked Yasir; he was a delightful man who made her laugh: "His profile pic doesn't do him justice. He's a trendy dresser (tick!) and has a real presence about him (tick!). Some guys exude confidence and he's one of them (two ticks!)" (34). Humour and jokes worked as a connecter between Esma and Yasir. On their second date, Esma shared funny stories with Yasir about her job as a recruitment consultant. She told Yasir, there was a person who would apply for every job they advertised, and another guy on his CV had a reference of a female escort. To Esma, "[i]f you can laugh with a guy for a couple of hours, I reckon it's a safe bet that you're onto a good thing" (39). Esma was a highly organized and disciplined individual whereas, Yasir was a relaxed, nonchalant man. However, this difference of personalities did not affect their relationship. Esma's mother always checked with her the progress of her halal dates, this time too, she asked her, if

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[97] There are multiple references to facebook in the novel, that allude to the role of social media, especially facebook, as an element of popular culture, and as a tool to connect with people.
[98] Body

Yasir was serious or not. Because, according to her experience, in general, men were less interested in a married relationship and wanted mere companionship without commitment.

They meet for a third time too, but to Esma's surprise, right after two days of their third meeting, Yasir rejected Esma saying: "I don't want to hurt you by dragging this on any longer. It's just ... I don't see us together… But I think it's best if we just stay friends. I'm really sorry" (46). Without giving any reason, Yasir escaped. Yasir's approach did not grieve, but baffled Esma, a guy who was flirting and sharing future plans with her two days ago, now thinks their relationship cannot work. His asking Esma of staying friends, reflects that he was a weak guy who wanted to be in woman's company, but was not ready for commitment. This also shows a growing trend in men to stay single. Esma snubbed him fiercely and remarked: "Stay friends? Listen here, you moron, I'm almost thirty, I have all the friends I want in my life" (46). Though, it was a strong reply from Esma, yet the mention of age[99] hints two connected probabilities, one, she is conscious of growing old, second in our societies, marriage is an age-barred phenomenon, especially for women. If a woman crosses the age of thirty, her prospects of getting married become lesser. Later in the novel, when Esma tried to reject Metin, her mother also hinted towards her age saying she should be less critical of men while nearing thirty: "My own mother is basically telling me I'm approaching a use-by date" (89).

Esma optimistically faced this rebuff from Yasir. In her words, "I know I can get through this. I've always had an endless capacity for optimism. I might whine and vent with my girlfriends, but deep down I know that love is waiting for me somewhere" (47). No sex in the City club girls worked as a support system for Esma. She shared with her friends that more than Yasir's rejection, she was upset at Yasir's approach. He should not have backed out when they had developed good chemistry. Despite Esma's remarks about her mom, she played an important role in consoling her by saying whatever happened was good for her, it was in her *kistmet*[100], things could have been even worse if the 'idiot', Yasir, changed his mind at a later stage. Esma's dad also supported her and his remarks for Yasir neatly sum up the male mentality: "The men nowadays are gutless! They want to have their fun, but when it comes to deciding about marriage, they're like kids in a toy shop. They

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[99] There are a few more references to female age and marriage, too in the novel.
[100] In Islamic ideology, fate plays an important role. Fate vs. freewill debates are there since long. But, a great number of Muslims believe human beings have limited control over the worldly affairs. They will have to face, what they are destined to. Fate can only be changed by praying God.

want everything and when you ask them to pick one, they can't. They're either greedy or too stupid to know what's best for them" (48).

4.2.1.2 Metin

Esma's second halal date guy, suggested by her mother, was Metin —a German Turkish doctor settled in Sydney from the last few years. He was tall, sociable, and handsome. In postfeminist tradition girls are very expressive and generous in praising men. Esma's praises Metin in these words:

> I go weak at the knees. Some people are just made perfect. They're like hand-crafted furniture. It's a little like walking through Ikea and seeing an antique masterpiece sitting among the Billy bookcases…I'm trying so hard to look past his personality and accept him purely for his looks…he's the most unbelievably good-looking male I have ever met in my entire life. (83)

At their first meeting at Esma's house, she was blown away by his looks, but the weird aspect of his personality was his self-absorption, he hardly asked anything from Esma about her, however, provided extended responses to Esma's questions about him. Despite the fact she was attracted by his appearances, after the first meeting with Metin, Esma said to her mom that she did not want to consider him. Esma's mother insisted her to meet Metin again as he meet all the requirements of Esma's checklist; to her, a person cannot be judged in two hours. Esma responded that he did not even try to show interest in me: "[H]e's just socially inept and needs a little nudge in the manners" (84). On their second meeting, at her mother's insistence, she noticed that random girls were showing interest in him. She felt good that Metin was her date for that night and confessed that in spite of his earlier in-sociability, her eyes would get viewing pleasure for a few more hours. Adding further to the sensual description of Metin, Esma described his voice as: "deep, masculine, sexy – SHUT UP – voice" (98). In this meeting, Metin shared with Esma, his first impressions of Australia when he moved here from Germany. By now, Esma had known much about Metin, and he still did not ask anything about her. So, she took the plunge and said: "'Okay, Metin, some basic rules! Ask me questions. What's my job? Where did I grow up? Where have I travelled? Have I ever been arrested? What's the weirdest food I've ever eaten? Hit me with your most ridiculous question, but at least ask me something!'" (100). Esma's frustration at lack of flow in their conversation clearly marks Metin's indifference. Metin did not seem to be making an effort to develop understanding with Esma. Clearly Esma

was showing interest in him, but he was cold in his response. The slightest of attention from Metin was making Esma glow: "'You know, you're quite cute when you're crazy,' he says and my heart kind of explodes" (100).

After their second meeting, Metin sends a facebook friend request to Esma and she accepts it. They started talking more often and the level of comfortability increased between the two. A few days later, Metin sends flowers to Esma, at that her mom excitingly asks Esma to send her a thank you message or a call. Now, eventually, there were signs of Metin showing interest in Esma. Their third meeting takes place in a Mexican restaurant, where they share the details of their past love lives. From here onwards, a new aspect of Metin's personality surfaces. He started inquiring Esma about her male friends on facebook and said, "to be honest, I don't believe guys and girls can just be friends" (123). Esma shoots back, "but if I'm in love with somebody else, I'm not going to allow myself to ever cross the line with a male friend" (123). Consequently, their conversation goes twitchier and they discuss the value of trust in relationships. Metin said he did not doubt her, but cannot trust her male friends[101]. Esma replied: "We can't segregate ourselves from the opposite sex; that's not how the world works. Each of us is going to be thrown into situations where we're tested. Ultimately, it's about our character" (123). Later, over the phone Metin asked Esma if she has ever kissed a guy, however, she avoids the topic at which Metin tags her as conservative. Next, Metin calls Esma and asks her about a party she attended last night, particularly at what time she was back. Esma became furious at Metin's questions and said even her parents never interrogated her this way. Esma's fourth and final meeting takes place with Metin on a dinner. She shared with him the story of Danny, the harasser. Once again, he infuriates Esma by implicitly blaming her for the happenings: "If you'd put a stop to things from the beginning, I guarantee it wouldn't have continued. Joking around, innocent flirting – the way we behave gives people permission" (155). She all of sudden, broke up with him and said: "I've got self-respect. And I won't let you take that away from me… It was nice getting to know you, Metin, but I don't see a future for us" (155).

4.2.1.3 Aydin

Just after two weeks of she met Metin, her mom convinces her to see Aydin, the third guy her mom suggested for Esma through a family connection. "What if Aydin is the right guy? Or what if meeting Aydin will convince you Metin is the right guy? None of us

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[101] Metin's behaviour raises a question in my mind that should his conduct be read as a Muslim male's behaviour only or all men think the same way?

knows what kismet waits for us" (106). Eventually Esma agreed to meet Aydin. This is how she described her first impression of Aydin:

He doesn't have the making-me-melt-give-me-a-cold-shower effect that Metin does. But Aydin is attractive (his head is shaved – a look I love on guys who can carry it off, which he can) and he oozes charm, with that affable smile and laidback vibe. Within about fifty seconds of meeting him I like him enough to be thankful I agreed to him coming over…There's something sensual and exciting about his energy and passion. (107-108)

On their first meeting at Esma's home, the conversation begins with usual small talk on weather, traffic, and property prices in Australia. There seemed a greater connection and chemistry in conversation between the two than she had with Metin. Esma talked to him about his filmmaking and the politics of filmmaking. Aydin asked Esma about her job, hobbies, favourite books, and movies. After their first interaction ended pleasantly, they meet again for a dinner. This is how Esma describes what she observed in Aydin[102]:

Aydin's dressed well and smells amazing; he's exuding sexy confidence and making me go weak at the knees. He's not catwalk good-looking, and although he's solid, he's not big and buff like Metin. Oh, and he's only slightly taller than me (I shouldn't have worn heels because we have a Tom and Nicole case on our hands). But when he smiles, it's magnetic. (114)

Their conversation on the second meeting once again went seamless. Particularly, Esma shared her refugee centre experiences with him. On Esma's question about what would he look for in his life partner, Aydin replied shared values and similar goals. They talked about religion, past relationships, gender equality and hypocrisy. They discussed how values are a fluid concept and the importance of having the ability to adjust with your partner in a relationship. Esma got impressed by his approach towards life and made her mind to go with Aydin: "I spend the night tossing and turning, my brain about to explode, because something tells me Aydin is The One" (117). After a few days, their third meeting takes place. This time around, Esma asked him about his family. He reluctantly told that he has a younger sister and an elder brother and avoids giving any details about his brother. Esma found it contradictory that he was the one who talked about truth and honesty and now he was hiding his family details. Aydin and Esma kept talking on the phone. One night,

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[102] The continuity of description of males based on their physical attractiveness

Esma, talking late night over the phone, asked him about his past relationships by saying she was not insecure, but curious to know, as she believed past shapes us. Aydin ducked her question by replying they should enjoy present without worrying about the past. Next, Aydin decides to make a documentary on asylum seekers that pleases Esma a great deal and strengthens their bond further. Their fourth meeting takes place in Aydin's car where he finally shares all the details[103] of his brother that he kept hidden from her. His brother, Karem, who was in jail at the offence of a murder. Kareem killed a man, hitting him with his car, while driving on drugs. Aydin also told that her the reason of not sharing this earlier, he said, he feared she might break up with him because of that. He further confessed that he had girlfriends in the past, but he is still a virgin[104]. He justified his choice of not to go all the way with any of the woman he met by saying that he himself wanted to marry a virgin girl[105], so did not believe in double standards. Esma was dazed to know that he never had sex in his life:

> I'm thinking this guy has character. I'm thinking that I don't care what the movies or magazines or society says, sex is a big deal and being with someone who 'saved' himself for me is exciting and terrifying and thrilling all at once. But I'm not about to tell him that. (166)

Esma and Aydin come across Metin outside refugee centre. At this point, Esma felt guilty that she did not tell Aydin about Metin. "This is so humiliating, I think to Myself… I realise I've reached the heights of hypocrisy… I do not have the moral high ground here (170). Esma then explains everything about Metin-Esma-Aydin triangle to Aydin. Aydin as a progressive male did not create a fuss and hugged Esma for her honesty and this was the moment she was kissed by a male in her life for the first time, her first kiss: "before I know what's happening he's in front of me, kissing me long and hard on the lips…There's tenderness and forgiveness in his eyes (170). Hence, Aydin turned out to be the guy that Esma decides to marry. Aydin was closer to the checklist Esma had devised in which character of the partner she highly valued. Once again, the tie between Aydin and Metin is important to be given attention to. Though Esma, expressed her guilt for leading on two

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[103] Good image of family and belonging to a good family is shown important in both the novels. Marriage is a bond between the families, not only individuals.
[104] Virginity of males is equally important in Muslim value system as is of females when two people are deciding to get married.
[105] The meaning of a verse of Quran is that good women are good men and bad women for bad men

guys simultaneously[106], and acknowledges that if that would have happened to a woman she would feel betrayed, yet this provided her an opportunity to contrast the good and bad sides of the two men in deciding best for her. She chooses intellectual capability of Aydin over physical attractiveness of Metin. Aydin is a character representative of progressive males. Aydin believed in openness and truthfulness of relationship. He said to Esma: "Our parents' generation is all about saving face. But things have changed. People our age tolerate and accept a lot more" (164). Aydin is a family oriented man and vows to respect Esma's responsibilities to take care of them. "I would never expect the woman I'm with to turn her back on her parents, especially when they depend on her" (165). The following words of Esma sum up her regard for Aydin: "All the failed matches and arranged dates have been for a reason. Because waiting for me at the end of that long line was Aydin. The One. Mr Right. My soulmate. And the wait was worth it" (179).

4.2.1.4 Online Dating and Social Media

As a sign of changing patterns of interactions, the book incorporates the use of social media and online dating websites. Esma was reluctant to use matchmaking websites, as to her, using them was a sign of desperation, and failure to find partner in the real world. Esma says: "but as adamant as I've been about never veering into online dating territory, I'm starting to reconsider. That's what happens when the offline scene is so woeful – you change strategy and become more flexible" (51). Meeting online, Esma considered, as putting your heart for sale. Moreover, on these websites, "the majority of guys are pathetic, sad, idiotic losers who are socially dysfunctional" (62). Some of them are not even willing to pay the fee to unlock the complete profile, and expect you to pay it, others, send creepy messages. Esma got a message that she reads out to Metin: "I'm looking for a Muslim woman who adheres to the tenets of Islam and is able to assist me in all endeavours. She has to be attractive and beautiful with curves that excite my sacred minaret" (121). The effect of social media on modern day relationships is also reflected in the novel. Metin inquirers Esma that why she has so many male friends on facebook. On another instance, Esma's boss used facebook to establish that that they had some sort of relationship.

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[106] Esma: "a part of me is also enjoying the attention" (134)

4.2.2 No Sex in the City and Postfeminist Discursivities

4.2.2.1 Intimacy and Sexuality

At no point during the novel, there takes place an intimate talk with any of the men Esma dated. Metin tried to open up with Esma, that she tactfully ignored, and got tagged as conservative by him. Nevertheless, there are a few mentions of intimacy, but in the form of its negation. Esma's control over her sexuality is powerful. The descriptions of all the men Esma dated were amorous that shows she had intimate desires, but was controlling them due to religious obligations. Esma describes the commencement of second episode of her halal dates with Yasir as:

> I walk over to him and his smile is so genuine, so warm, it makes me melt. We don't hug or kiss (although I'm obviously thinking about what it would feel like), just shake hands and take our seats. Granted, I'm far from being the world's most religious person, but if there's one thing I won't compromise on, it's my 'no touching before the ink dries on the marriage certificate' rule (except for shaking hands – ooh, how positively scandalous!) (38)

In Esma's search for Mr. perfect, when there was a tie between Aydin and Metin, Esma admits that she is physically and sexually attracted towards Metin. She admits her lips are thirsty to kiss the lips of a man, and be closer to someone's chest. Esma fantasizes being in the strong arms of Metin. But she fears if she allows an opening to her desires, she will not be able to control them.

> That sexual desire is such a powerful, intoxicating force that one small kiss can lead to much much more. If the end of that journey is forbidden to me, then so is the start, because there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that if Metin were to start that journey, I wouldn't want him to stop. (123)

NSC does not only emphasize the value of female virginity, even male virginity is valued before marriage. Esma cries with joy when she knows Aydin is virgin. "I get the feeling you think I was some kind of player […] 'I've never gone all the way,' he whispers. 'You're a virgin!' I cry" (166). Esma and Aydin both present a control over their feelings and desires, inspired by their self-determined, religiously oriented boundaries. Later in the novel Esma develops a good chemistry with Aydin; while sitting in the car with him she introspects why her parents did not allow her to be alone with a man. Esma's non-Muslim friend Lisa and Ruby too did not appreciate the idea of casual sex. Lisa, the Jewish girl

says, "I'm not interested in the occasional fling or casual relationship. That's not because I'm religious. It's because I'm just not a casual person. I don't fling anything or anybody to the side" (57). Ruby, the Christian girl, had the same views; she wanted commitment from the guy before having any physical relationship: "Well, no, not if it was just casual, although God knows I'd love to. But that's not me either. I know this confident exterior is deceiving, but deep down I'm old-fashioned too" (57). Upon Ruby's dismissal of pre-marital sex, Esma says to Ruby she was not a virgin, Ruby replied: "It's been so long, my hymen has probably grafted back together" (58). On the whole, sex outside marriage is disfavoured in the novel.

There is some discussion on sex in a married relationship too. Esma attends a gathering of her sister Senem's five married friends who talk about their intimate life very frankly, though Senem and Esma have never discussed such things. One of the girls Sue says, "you can always pick a newlywed girl because their hair's never done – what's the point when they're showering all the time?" (79). Esma was the only virgin in the gathering, she felt "embarrassed by how open and candid these women are about their sex lives, throwing out all the strict religious rules about keeping your relationship with your husband a private matter" (79). The girls also discussed that how after having children, it becomes difficult for women to enjoy sex: "Steven had the gall to come home the other day all excited that he' d bought me some herbal tablets,' Sue moans. 'He thinks it will help with my low libido" (79). The girls express the value energy and peace of mind to enjoy sex: "It's not that I'm rejecting him. I adore him. I'm just tired all the time. I'm juggling being a mum with my job at the bank. It's full-on" (80). Senem says: "Not all guys are slack around the house, and not all women get turned off sex" (80). Zuleyha adds: "Men are just born lazier and hornier than women. So don't get into any relationship with false expectations" (80). When Senem was about to leave her house after marriage her mother tried to give her 'birds-and-the-bees speech', the instructional manual for sex, at which both sisters stopped her and said they were provided the sex education at school: "our religion teacher at Turkish weekend school had answered all our questions about sex and periods, and taught us sex wasn't something to be ashamed about so long as we experienced it only through marriage" (80).

4.2.2.2 Discourse on Marriage and Married Life

NSC mainly deals with the aspects of approaching prospective life partner and developing understanding with the intention of getting married. The post marriage life and

its complexities are not given much space. However, the characters do reflect on some aspects of the concept of marriage in Arab women's context that are applicable to other contexts too. Marriage is presented as a source of joy and an institute that solidifies love. This gets reflected in Esma's remarks on her friend Nirvana's engagement: "It's funny how weddings almost always make people gush and go all warm and fuzzy. No matter your background, almost everybody seems to get it: the idealism, the joyous optimism, the wholehearted belief that your love is indestructible" (66). Furthermore, In Arab societies the age of a female is one of the important aspect of marriage prospects. If women pass a certain age, it becomes difficult for them to get married in an arranged fashion. However, Esma, the protagonist was resolute to challenge this norm: "I won't force myself to settle just to satisfy some arbitrary time limit… 'Well, I'm not a can of tomatoes, I'm a vintage cheese, and I'm only going to get better with age!'"(89). She also believed that in Arab societies, marriage is not about two individuals, but it is a bond of two families, referring to Aydin Esma says: "We've both had it drilled into us that you 'marry a family, not a person'" (134).

Marriages either arranged or love, is entering an unknown territory, many things reveal after marriage, for example sexual compatibility. Esma says: "'One of my mum's friends told me marriage is like a watermelon. You don't know if it's a bad one until you look inside'" (91). She further adds: "The idea frightens me. How am I supposed to know whether a man I've met twice is trustworthy?" (101). Referring to her father, Esma comments that even after marriage it is hard to completely know your partner, since her mother believed that Esma's dad was responsible and supportive, whereas he had been addicted to gambling. She believed the most important element in a married relationship is truthfulness. People act out "a part before marriage, only to let the truth of their personalities surface when it was too late" (131). So, presenting your real self to your prospective partner is essential. Speaking of ingredients of a successful marriage, Esma's married sister Senem suggested economic stability, trust, and dependability as three key aspects. Esma's mother gave following profound remarks about conducting married life:

> There's no perfect relationship […] Our marriage is far from perfect. We're happy because it's possible to be happy and flawed […] marriages needed a reset button […] A chance to reinvent yourself every three or five years. So you could start all over again, go back to when there was some mystery to the person you were getting involved with. Back to when you couldn't possibly believe your life would be one

endless routine […] if you press reset, you lose all the shared experiences, the tenderness that comes with familiarity. It would be like learning a language and then suddenly forgetting it, having to start from scratch again. (152)

Marriage brings responsibility that not all women are able to handle easily. Child rearing is a complete job in itself. Esma's friend Arzu finds it hard to breastfeed her baby, "my nipples are seriously aching, she whispers. They're all cracked, and honestly, when she latches on it's like a million knives being stabbed into the tips of my —" (28-29). Arzu and her husband Yasin often fight over care of children. Arzu says that before their son Malek was born, they used to have a perfect relationship. But now, "he fusses over how I feed her and wrap her and how I put her to sleep and what brand of dummy to use" (74). Sanem's friend Lana says, having babies disturbs even your sexual life: "Out the baby pops and then the only thing you think about when you see a bed is sleeping! It's all you think about, day and night" (79). There is also a debate on when to and when not to have children in a married life. A woman should not allow herself to get pregnant if the two of them are not in a good relationship, because if divorce happens the child will suffer. Anil's sister Neela took pills and aborted the baby because she was sick of Sunil's nastiness and bad behaviour. So, did not want baby. Lisa also criticised her client for having a child in a disturbed companionship. Esma's boss Danny appears as an anti-marriage fanatic. Danny's views on marriage are very derogatory: "But trust me: you don't want to get married. Only masochists choose that path" (11). He remarked about Esma's colleague Sara:

> Apparently she doesn't want to be a working mum. She's too much in love with motherhood,' he says sarcastically. 'After all the time and money I invested in building her career, she throws it away to spend her days breastfeeding and changing nappies…Don't either of you even think about having a baby in the next five years if you want to see yourselves moving up in this place. (55)

4.2.2.3 Feminist Facets in No Sex in the City

The discourse on the whole in the book is centred around religiously inspired womanhood in diaspora. However, 'No Sex in City' club is representative of female sisterhood, crossing all ethnic and gender boundaries. The protagonist explains the logic of this connectivity as: "There are many things that unite us, not least that we're active in the community, passionate about politics and human rights, single, living at home and time poor" (8). The girls shared "emotional baggage, horror stories, impossible checklists,

twenty-something angst and an appetite for a high-calorie emotional-eating pig-out session[s]" (9). Importantly, they helped Esma battle against Danny the harasser by advising her not to blame herself for his creepiness and assisting her legally to fight against him. Esma speaking of Danny her boss says, "He unfortunately belongs to the segment of the male population that thinks misogyny is endearing" (154). The novel exudes feminist stance of girls on many occasions. Esma the protagonist conveys: "I'm not one of those girls who needs a man to complete her. If that was the case I would have settled for the first, fifth or tenth guy I've met or been set up with. I want to settle down. But I don't want to settle" (28). Esma, the protagonist wants to get married, but it does not turn into her weakness. She considers it a religious, social and emotional need and not a financial support system or dependency on a man. Emotionally too, she was in control of her feelings and had learnt to tame them without denying their existence. "But I also know this: I'm whole, whether I'm single or married, in love or out of love. And I'm determined to be my own person no matter what" (155). It is important to clarify that she was not a man-hatter, but had a certain concept of manhood in her mind in a postfeminist spirit: "I've always had a thing for tall guys and it's the kind of thing that goes against every feminist bone in my body. I feel protected in a helpless-heroine-engulfed-in-the-arms-of-a strong-prince kind of way" (120). At no point, Esma was willing to compromise on her freedom: "I wanted to start working, enjoy financial independence, travel. Work out who I was and what I wanted in life" (32). There are quite a few instances in the novel where she expressed travel as an important element of her life[107]. Esma commonly asked the question about travel experiences whenever she met a prospective life partner. One of the reasons that she liked Metin was, settling down with him, could provide an opportunity to frequently travel to Europe, as his parents were living in Germany.

Along with these feminist instances, Esma also had a fear of staying single like a typical postfeminist chick-lit heroine. She describes her hunt for men in a self-deprecating tone. The agony of unsuitable matches is visible in these words of Esma: "'Do we have signs painted on our foreheads, Ruby?' 'Yes. Only Losers May Apply'" (30); "I have this secret fear that I'll be that girl [...] the girl nobody falls in love with" (50); "I try very hard not to burst into tears. The pressure feels so intense; there is no hope on the horizon […] So should I be accepting the possibility that my destiny is to be single? To die a virgin?

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[107] Considering Muslim women's history, travel has been used as an expression of freedom and desire to explore.

(What a chilling thought!) Childless? Loveless?" (89); "I really do approach every new meeting with a guy with honest-to-God optimism that this time could be it. Why else would I have agreed to meeting so many guys?" (98). The following passage in a stream of consciousness way sums up Esma's anxiety:

> I start conjuring up more horrid details in my self-pitying projection. I'll be fat – because nobody will be seeing me naked so I may as well have a cottage-cheese arse. And I'll probably be hairy – I mean, really, there'll be nobody to complain about spiky legs. The more I imagine, the more ridiculous and irrational my projection becomes. (90)

Anil as a male character advocated gender equality. He was of the view that male's pre-marital fooling around is accepted, but for females it is considered highly detestable act. Men in our society and culture are provided more leverage than women. "There's no room for learning from your mistakes if that mistake happens to involve sex before marriage. That's just the way it is. For girls. Not for guys" (117). The curfew, limits, and rules are different for men and women. Esma remarks: "My parents don't enforce their rules with me. I can do whatever I want – they're not with me every moment of the day. Ultimately, I'm the one who makes the choices about my life. They just raised me a certain way. I've embraced my traditions because I believe in them" (117).

4.2.2.4 Workplace Harassment: Is Feminism still relevant?

Esma's flirt boss constantly harassed her in different ways. He would pass unwanted compliments, seek advice on his disturbed married life, generate excuses to go out, mock her decision of not marrying a non-Muslim, and ridicule Esma's volunteering services for Sydney refugee centre. He twice used social media to create an impression as if they were very close or even more, by posting messages on Esma's facebook wall. In all this, Danny used job promotion as a card to allure Esma. She tolerated Danny, because she needed this job, and did not want to create a fuss about the happenings. "Every time Danny edges into sleaze territory I have to bite my tongue, because my parents' house, and maybe their marriage, depends on me keeping this job" (13). The range of Danny's topics of discussion became filthier with every passing day. Here are some of the examples: "Mary got her period yesterday,' he says wistfully. Ew ew ew ew! 'Danny,' I say firmly, 'I don't need to know that" (55); "What kind of lingerie do women like? Bra and undies set, or a corset type? I don't trust this sales lady (she wants to sell me everything). Black or red? Please

help" (87); "I want to get her something to cheer her up. Make her feel sexy again, because she's feeling so depressed about her body that she won't let me near her" (118); "There's something about you that makes me forget myself. I'm clearly too comfortable with you" (118).

Danny wanted Esma to date Marco, his friend, and said things that were against her Islamic values: "you can have some fun, and Jesus, if it works out and you're that desperate for commitment, he might even call himself your boyfriend" (11). Danny called Esma backward for missing the joys in life, but she was never intimidated at his words. Against her desire, he many times tried convincing her to drink and go on dating and to loosen up. "Someone as gorgeous and fun-loving as you shouldn't be dragged down by archaic rules" (24). Metin comes to Esma's office to pick her up for dinner where in the lobby they come across Danny, by seeing them together, Danny abruptly remarks, "have you got a boyfriend? [...] what a little hypocrite you are […] Not so innocent after all […] Esma's sex life is her own business. Have fun Esma" (133). Danny once asked Esma to come to office on Saturday for two hours for work, when she got there; she realized she was the only one in the office.

Esma was annoyed at his behaviour from day one, but she was tolerating Danny for her needs, she expresses this on many occasions: "The employer/employee handbook didn't include a chapter on how bosses should seek marriage advice from their employees. But I can't exactly tell him to piss off. I have to put on an act" (22); "There is a line. Professional and personal. You're crossing it" (55); "Danny has crossed the professional line one too many times and that his antics are unacceptable" (71). Esma wondered to what extent it was her fault to give Danny this liberty to harass her by staying quiet: "Here I am in a situation that is spiralling out of control, feeling utterly disempowered. How do I respond without opening a Pandora's box?" (104). She eventually talks to Danny about his behaviour, who instead of addressing the issue, twisted the conversation and ended it with promotion bait, one again. Esma's conscience was disturbing her at her silence: "I feel ashamed... compromised somehow. I've always been so assertive. Demanded that people, especially guys, show me respect" (119). Esma tells her No Sex in City friends that Danny has been harassing her. All of them scolded her for not sharing this earlier and that she should not be blame her for all that has been happening. Ruby helps Esma draft a letter of demand against Danny and suggested to find a new job meanwhile. Esma, finally goes to Danny and puts up the letter of demand to Danny:

I've been putting up with your sexual harassment for too long. I've got two words for you, Danny: constructive dismissal. Because I'm hereby giving you notice. I refuse to spend one more day as a victim of sexual harassment. (174)

4.2.2.5 On religion and Family Values

During the conversations with Aydin Esma clearly states that she values religion much, but she is relaxed in practicing it. She sometimes prays and fasts, but sometimes does not. Islam to her was an ideology that derived her life and she would feel good if she and her partner would offer the prayer together. Esma questioned Aydin about drinking alcohol, he said, he used to a year ago, but not anymore. Esma clarified Aydin, "Having an alcohol-free house is a big deal to me. But I'm not going to impose that on anybody; it needs to come from them" (115). She further added that he might develop a sense that she is extremely religious, but, in fact, there were a few things she did not compromise on. Esma and her mother were strong believers of God and His will in human events, which is mentioned as kismet (fate) in the novel. Esma made *dua* (prayer) to Allah for everything she needed:

> Whenever I need something I suddenly become devoted to my prayers. I begged God for the following: To send me Mr Right. To give me the intelligence to judge fairly and wisely. To let me fall for the right Mr Right…I also asked for forgiveness…Then, for good measure, I jumped onto a charity website and donated some money to a well being built at an Indonesian orphanage. (82)

Family is presented as a valuable unit in determining and developing relationships. When Esma was supporting her parents with mortgage, her sister Senem and brother-in-law Farouk temporarily moved in to their house to save money for their new house. During that period Esma and Farouk decide to make a foreign trip. This strip Esma thought was an extravagance and she expressed her opinion very loudly in front of Farouk. Later she realised that this was a disrespectful to her brother-in-law, so she apologized him through her sister Senem: "Tell Farouk I'm sorry and I'll never speak to him again if he doesn't move in because of me. Sorry for the tantrum. Bad day at work. I heard the shopping in Hawaii is amazing. I'll give you my wish list when you go" (129). Furthermore, the repute of family is shown as an important element in making new relationships as marriage is about two families coming together. Aydin confessed to Esma that he did not tell her about

his brother who was jailed, just because she might break up with him because of this, as no one would want to marry in a family having criminal records.

4.2.3 Conclusion

NSC alludes to the fact that secular and religious can coexist. It present postfeminist realities framed in Islamic sensibilities that I term as Islamic postfeminism. Esma as modern young Muslim female balances her religious affiliations and emotional instincts. She likes men, dates them, but within certain set limits of Islam. Esma's encounter with Yasir, Metin, and Aydin shows some of the dynamics of halal dates. These are arranged meetings where none of the participants transgresses the boundaries set by Islam, that means strictly no physical touch, and two people meet with a clear purpose of getting married. The participants talk about topics like interests, work, religion etc. They share numbers, hang out, text, talk for hours on phone, flirt, and meet as many times as they want, just that, intimacy is forbidden. Summing up the particular experiences, the guy, Yasir, proved to be weak nerved and backed out from committing himself to marriage, despite the fact that they had developed liking for each other. Esma and Metin's halal-dating can be said to be an affair of a Muslim male and a female in which an overly handsome guy and a smart, successful girl were trying to see their compatibility for life long relationship that ended due to male partner's cynicism and overprotectiveness. Out of all three men, she was able to have deep conversations, on complex issues, with Aydin. They had more in common. It shows that for a young Muslim woman in diaspora, along with appearances of a male, ideology and worldview matters much to be a marriage material. Metin's physical appeal and successful career could not win Esma over, however, Aydin's morality and clear heartedness did. More importantly, the power of decision lied with Esma to pick either of the men, since both were interested in her, an aspect of strong feminist appeal in the novel. Additionally, she could compare what both men had to offer while making her decision. Furthermore, in the beginning of novel Esma's checklist had religion as a determining factor in the life partner selection, however she clarifies herself that she is not a strict practicing Muslim. She does not pray five times a day, does not cover her head and irregularly observes fasting in *ramdan*. Therefore, religion is used as an ideological standpoint, nevertheless, its realisation is perceived in the form of values like truthfulness, honesty, and progressive worldview than *ibadah*.

4.3   Postfeminism and its Discursivities in Arab Women's Fiction: A Case of Girls of Riyadh

4.3.1   Love, Matrimony, Sexuality and Saudi Sensibilities

All those desires, discriminations, success stories, confrontations that otherwise might not have seeped in mainstream discourses are subtly said through the stories that mirror Arab women's lives. *Girls of Riyadh*[108] is a postmodern cyberfiction that delineates with the subjects usually we do not get to hear much about i.e. the quest of heterosexual love and matrimonial expedition of young Arab women from a lesser women friendly geography of Saudi Arabia. Though in last two decades the scholarship on alternative discourses producing Muslim women have been multitudinous, yet there is a scarcity of critical investigations dealing with creative constructions of postfeminist, empowered, Muslim woman, not battling with patriarchal power structures, but negotiating aspects that matter most in real life: human associations and familial formations. This section engages with the categories of love, marriage, and sexuality drawing upon the lives of four educated, successful, 'velvet class' Saudi women in *GOR*. The significance of this study is linked with carefully challenging some of the stereotypes about Arab women as victims of forced marriages and their commonly perceived discomfort with love at large. Pleasantly, these women possess sensual sensitivities and affectionate desires, but with Saudi/Islamic sensibilities that obligate them to tie the marriage knot before pursuing any physical pursuits. This in no way incapacitates them from loving men, rather appropriates the meaning of love in Islamic framework. The diversity of situations and respective choices made by these girls during the novel also hint upon socio-cultural dynamics, patterns, and preferences of Saudi women in participating institution of marriage. The study reveals, it is men who need to man up against cultural conventions since women are increasingly expressive in their choices and brave enough to face the consequences audaciously.

Love before marriage or after? Acceding to *Salafism*[109] in some Islamic states love is scandalized, lovers are demonized, and their associations bantered. Whereas, in *Sufi* Islam, love, both spiritual and physical, is the essence of existence. Ibn-e-Arabi a great *Sufi* mystic preached that there is hardly any difference between love of a woman and love of divine, both are connected (Mernissi, 2001). Ibn-e-Arabi's writings have vivid descriptions

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[108] Girls of Riyadh will be referred to as GOR in rest of the paper
[109] Ultra conservative sect of Islam originated in 18th century Saudi Arabia

of erotic feelings of his beloved Nizam. He considered love as a 'cosmic mystery' that has 'slippery nature of attraction' towards 'other'. In *Sufism* sensuality is taken as a source of energy. A philosopher and politician, Ibn-e-Hzam wrote a complete book on mysteries of emotions in eleventh century, in his words, "to be able to enter into the world of emotions and sexual attraction without looking silly or becoming embarrassed, one has to make pleasure a sacred priority and allocate time for it, just as one would with religious festival" (Mernissi, 2001, p. 127). Be it the story of Zulekha in Quran, or Muslim princesses (Gahlia, Shirin, Scheherzade, Nur Jehan) in folktales, art, and oral traditions, Muslim women have been expressive in their sexuality, and they are aggressive followers of love. They drove horses, crossed seas and battled all the odds to hunt their love (Mernissi, 2001).

The only permissible form to physically actualise romantic love without defying limits set by Islam as a faith position is to confine it in married relationship. In Islamic *shariah* sex is a regulated act. Any sexual relationship outside marriage is considered *zina*, illicit sex. *Zina* is crossing the boundary set by Islam, *hadd*, which is a punishable offense. According to Quranic teachings, believers should get married to avoid transgressing the boundaries: "Marry off the single among you and those of your male and female slaves who are fit for marriage. If they are poor, God will provide for them from His bounty: God's bounty is infinite, and He is all knowing" (Quran 24:32). In *hadith,* too, we find emphasis laid on marriage: "Whoever marries safeguards half of this faith, let him fear God the second half" (Farah, 1984, p. 49). Though it is a disputed concept in Islamic *shariah,* yet to steer clear from *zina,* some couples also arrange *zawaj mut'a*[110], the marriage that is time barred and much more relaxed regarding its implications on divorce, and inheritance, than conventional Islamic *nikah*. Marriage in Muslim ideology is a religious obligation that one is bound to follow, so it becomes a sacred sanctity than merely a companionship for bodily pleasure or planning a family.

Matrimony is a mystery that haunts Muslim minds in a myriad of ways: when to marry? to whom one should marry? what is the best age to marry? love or arranged? socio-economic status and appearances or righteousness and piety? monogyny or polygyny? Islam bestows women a great deal of socio-religious freedom, though, unfortunately, that is not prevalent in cultural practices of some Muslim societies where patriarchy is unjustly justified by religious orthodoxy. The freedom of choice in marital affairs entirely rests with

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[110] Muta'a is not allowed in *Sunni* Islam, but *Shiites* consider it *halal* (permissible)

women as independent individuals; parents can provide counsel, but they cannot impose their preferences. In Islamic law, willingness of male and female is the most basic element of *nikah[111]*. Even after marriage if a woman finds mental, moral, or behavioural mismatch with her husband she has the right to get separated.

Shereen El Feki (2013) describes three phases of marriage in Arab culture, *shoufa[112]*, the meeting of two people interested in marriage, *katb al-kitab,* writing of the marriage contract, and *farah*, public celebrations of wedding. To look for potential matches, the services of *khatba*, the professional matchmakers are hired, or familial acquaintances are relied upon. Marriage ceremonies of friends and family also serve as a hunting ground for mothers-in-law to hook a prospective wife for their sons, and knowingly, young women attend such events enthusiastically[113]. With the evolution of social structures and growing usage of internet, young people are increasingly meeting online too; however rest of the formalities followed stay intact. In Islamic cultures, ironically, it is not women, but men who are facing pressure to manage marriage modalities as they include providing *mahr,* the money to be given to bride, *shabka*, the golden jewellery given by groom, and *mu'akhkhar*, the contract to provide a certain amount of money to bride if they get divorced. Moreover, men are responsible for providing living for women in a married relationship.

Girls of Riyadh reflects progressive womanhood in a Saudi context where women are presented seamlessly synchronising with normative human behaviour of attraction towards opposite gender and fearless expression of desirability. The anti-prototype portrayal of narrowing the chasm between men and women, men submitting to traditional sociocultural constraints, women defeating all barriers in protecting their love life is shrewdly presented by Raja Alsanea in this chick-lit cyberfiction. *GOR* is a story of four young girls Gamrah, Sadeem, Michelle, and Lamees who break away with the stereotypes of 'caged virgins'[114] associated with Muslim women. They emerge as empowered, independent, and successful women who out of their own free-will shikar men that is characteristic of postfeminist women. The appealing aspect of this entire search of love and

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[111] *Nikah* (Islamic marriage contract) that connects two people and brings a shared set of responsibilities on them. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) devised a balanced familial system for the followers of Islam where woman in a wedlock feel social, economic and spiritual ease and comfort. A man is answerable for providing safety, and ensuring wellbeing of his wife with respect and dignity.

[112] *Shoufa* is an arranged meeting that provides a man and a woman an opportunity to develop further familiarity with the intention of getting married.

[113] In Arab cultures marriage ceremonies are strictly gender segregated events.

[114] For more on the concept see (Ali A. H., 2008)

matrimony is, not betraying indigenous religious and cultural norms, rather subtly negotiating them with a sense of victory than victimhood. There were no visible win-win situations; these girls fought their way through all the challenges that Saudi society had to offer in the form of gender expectations, religious obligations, and longstanding traditions. The conflict in successful actualisation of love in the form of marriage arises when men succumb to social pressures in selecting life partners. Contrarily, the female characters throughout the plot remain true to their love and stand by it. The 'techno-rhetoric' (al-Ghadeer, 2006), the pattern of revealing the story in cyberspace in the form of emails, contributes to chick-appeal of the text. Furthermore, it substantiates that Arab women are creating alternative spaces and mediums for themselves to express and resist. The chatty, tongue-in-cheek style of the 'e- narrator' highlights that these girls are living their lives fully, also tapping into taboo spheres like female drinking, driving, and travelling alone.

The stories of all four girls are stimulating in how they meet their partners, complexities of married lives and their spirited post-divorce living.

4.3.1.1 Gamrah

Gamrah studied history at the university and was married to Rashid in an arranged fashion who was doing his PhD in Electrical Engineering from Chicago. Rashid was apparently a suitable match as he was a decent looking, educated man from a respectable family. Gamrah believed in the power of love and romanticized her marriage as an outlet of love. "Love and tenderness and emotion like feelings stirred her heart" (Alsanea, 2005, p. 30)[115], but, unfortunately, Rashid did not express any intimate feelings towards her after their first night mishap. Gamrah's mother had given her primitive advise of not being easy for her husband in bed to fully ignite the spark in him[116]. Instigating her she said her elder sister delayed the first sex till fourth night. This sex advice backfired, and Rashid did not touch her for seven nights, not even when they were in Italy for honeymoon. Um-Gamrah considered it as an act of devil and then started advising her daughter, how to turn Rashid on. Sex talk and sex education in Muslim, especially Arab societies before marriage is avoided considering it as a taboo. Strangely, "Gamrah got immersion training in the art of seduction from the same women who had ripped pages out of the romance novels Gamrah used to borrow from her friends at school" (13). The eccentric sexual behaviours of Arab

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[115] The subsequent of references to the text will just have page numbers in citations
[116] According to Kecia Ali "For the Muslim jurists, sex is a husband's right and support is a wife's right. Many things about marriage flow from this simple exchange" (Ali, 2010, p. 94)

world are ridiculed here. In most Arab houses, young men and women are exposed to sex only as a sinful act that they must refrain from. This unease with sex is not Islamic, but cultural. Feki (2013) in an ethnographic study on sexuality in Egypt also reiterates the mass discomfort of Arabs with sex education. Referring to a sex expert in her study she further suggests: "sex includes practice and dialogue, so in the first day of marriage, do not expect that you will be so happy, because you need experience, which will happen after spending more time" (146).

Gamrah's inactive post-marital sex life was not only because of her initial withholding strategy, but also because of Rashid's extra-marital relation with a Japanese girl. When Rashid and Gamrah moved to US, their relationship grew into a compromising husband-wife bond. Rashid provided her enough money to run the house and bear her personal expenses, in return she took care of cooking and laundry. Islamic feminists assert that domesticity[117] is wrongly attributed as a female-only sphere; men are equally responsible to perform domestic duties. According to Kecia Ali (2006), the homemaker/provider division is mutually negotiable between husband and wife; the roles can be shared or switched when required. Gamrah's all needs were met, except the bodily desires. Her efforts towards finding reasons of Rashid's lack of interest in her took a new turn when she found pictures of Rashid with a girl. Gamrah bravely traced down all the links and figured out who that girl was. The girl, Karai, was Rashid's sex mate. The circumstances got even worse when Gamrah upon meeting Kari abused her in public for having relationship with her husband. During all this fiasco, Gamrah had made herself pregnant with Rashid by not using contraceptives, though he did not want a child yet. This was an effort on her part to keep their marriage intact. So, having a child is portrayed as a connective element that could help the marriage continue. But this is a questionable act. Should a child be brought in the world when two people are on the verge of separation?

Despite all the efforts, her marriage failed, and Rashid divorced her. Quranic teachings emphasize on resolving the issues between spouses to avert separation or dissolution of matrimonial contract, but if there is no possible solution both should amicably part ways[118]. "God did not make lawful anything more repugnant to Him than

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[117] Whereas in a postfeminist tradition, Walter (1995) argues that domesticity and motherhood are in fashion again because of feminist backlash.
[118] Divorce/*Talaq* can be *raj'i* that is revocable or *ba'in*, irrevocable. In revocable *talaq* husband can go back to his wife after *idda,* the waiting period of three menstrual cycles.

divorce" (Sunan Abi Dawud)[119]. It is not only men's prerogative, women can give divorce too, however they have to recourse to a judge. Women can even put certain clauses for divorce to automatically happen in their marriage contract, for example the clause of end of marriage if the husband takes the second wife[120]. Gamrah moved back to her mother's house and started raising her child as a single mother and a business woman. Though she occasionally expressed her love for Rashid even after divorce, yet she was not majorly grief-stricken on her un-successful marriage. Gamrah started chatting with boys in online chatrooms, but considering the shallowness of boys online, she never got seriously involved with anyone. She took her revenge from Rashid by giving the picture of Rashid's sister to an online 'lover', presenting it as her own picture, which she later felt guilty about. Till the end of story, she remained open to the idea of re-marrying, but despised all attempts of a compromised marriage. Overall, her character is reflection of resilience, love, and sincerity of Saudi women.

4.3.1.2 Sadeem

Sadeem was a beautiful young girl, the prettiest of the four whose mother died when she was very young. Due to her feminine body, her girlfriends used to joke with her by saying that you have got the 'talents', the boobs and botty, so your marriage is not going to be a problem at all. This stands true, since in most cultures female beauty is as an important factor in marriage prospects[121]. Sadeem was studying business management when she signed the marriage contract with Waleed, a communication engineer who was serving as a civil servant. She caught the attention of Waleed's aunt on the day of Gamrah's marriage ceremony, who sent a proposal to Um-Sadeem, since marriages are set by elders in the family. When Sadeem and Waleed meet for *shoufa*, lawful viewing, both felt the click and showed willingness to proceed to *nikah*. During *milkah,* the period between *nikah* and final departure of the girl from parent's house, Waleed started visiting Sadeem's house. They talked for hours, enjoyed music and shared laughs together. Waleed would kiss on her cheeks while saying good-bye, since they were legally husband and wife now and wedding function was just a formality to follow. Waleed one night moved from the cheeks to her 'virgin lips'. "She was convinced that he wouldn't be satisfied unless she offered him little

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[119] The source for this quotation is Kecia Ali (2006)
[120] To be a second wife is generally not considered a bad thing by Arab women, as it provides a them benefits of married life as well as shared relief from household responsibilities and taking care of their husband.
[121] On body politics see: (Wolf, 1990); (Badran, 2009)

more of her 'femininity', and she was willing to do anything to please him, the love of her life" (37). But, strangely, after that night, Waleed distanced himself from Sadeem and after three weeks sent her divorce papers. Divorce with Waleed psychologically hurt her more than emotionally. She wanted to know the reasons that made Waleed divorce her when they adored each other. Probably, Sadeem's intimacy and sexual comfort with Waleed made him feel as if she was easy or already had experience—a regressive Arab male mentality.

Divorce did not end Sadeem's strong-willed life. She went to London and started working there to detach herself from the past. As a book-lover, she read all the books that she wanted to read till now. In London Sadeem met Firas, her second love, which strengthened further on their return to Saudia. She confessed, "I can't help it! I'm deeply in love with him. I'm used to having him around. His is the first voice I hear when I get up in the morning and the last voice I hear before I fall asleep at night. All day long he's with me wherever I am" (188). Firas was a progressive man who did not care about the fact that Sadeem was a divorcee. His love for Sadeem was not amorous only, he inspired Sadeem towards religion. "She found herself strongly inclined to accept all his ideas of making her a better Muslim and primed to embrace them, especially since he didn't make a big deal of anything" (161). This is manifestation of Islamic idea of love, where one works for mutual spiritual wellbeing. Firas used to hang up the phone, if the time of prayer came while talking to Sadeem. He also hinted her politely to use *abaya*, to avoid any unwanted attention of men. When Sadeem's father died, Firas became her support. He prayed for her father and asked her to say Amin after him, while other visitors showed no respect or sign of grief" (223).

They stayed connected for four years, but finally Firas failed. Sadeem says, "All men were the same. It was like God had given them different faces just so that women would be able to tell them apart" (233). He married a girl of his family's choice. Once again, Sadeem was not mortified at this breakup, but mystified that how could a resourceful man like Firas failed to convince his family towards his love. Although Waleed tried to come back to Sadeem after marriage, and she initially allowed him too, out of sheer lover for him, yet eventually she could not compromise on her self-respect "There were no tears, no hunger strike, no sad songs—not this time.…She was embarrassed to remember that she had once imagined that theirs would be among the most heart breaking and legendary love stories in history" (282). Firas divorced her wife and begged to recouple with Sadeem that she refused. Sadeem at the end of story married her cousin who was madly in 'love' with

her. Sadeem's choice in marriage insinuates that a girl should marry the person who loves her than to whom she loves. Further, it suggests that to be able to achieve the person whom you love is not always the ultimate form of love. Sadeem's love for Firas arched over her love for herself. It also embodies a complex condition of love and marriage as possibly spheres with separate foci. Unexpectedly, in a conservative society like Saudia, it is women who appear to be valiantly consolidating their love, whereas men are failing them in their love lives by following the conventions of practical materiality in the selection of their life partners. They liked strong and independent women, but when it came to marriage men preferred docile ignorant girls.

4.3.1.3 Michelle

The third girl of the gang, Michelle had *Najdi* beauty and American personality, the liberal most of them all. She spent her early childhood in US and on her return to Saudia, joined an elite English school. Faisal, her lover, met Michelle, when the girls were roaming in Riyadh masquerading as men at Gamrah's hen do. Michelle took the initiative and called Faisal for a meet up. To win her trust that he is not a flirt, but a man from a respectable family with sound values, Faisal showed her around his university, and his father's business place. Later, occasionally, they met in private at Um-Nuwayyir's house too, a divorcee who facilitated the lovebirds. At no point there developed a physical relationship of any sort between the two, though they shared romantic moments together. Like Firas of Sadeem, despite all the goodness and nicety, Faisal's love for Michelle could not give him power to argue against her mother's standards of marriage that were based on valuing family lineage. And, he married the girl of his mother's choice who was least good looking by any beauty standards. The following words of Michelle reflect/mock the helplessness of a Saudi man: "Poor miserable Faisal! He cried, too, poor Little Faisal under the feet of his cherished mother. He loved no one in the universe more than his mother" (108). Like her friend Sadeem, Michelle was baffled that how could an educated, open-minded man like Faisal, helplessly marry an ordinary girl, just because she belonged to her mother's social circle. A moment of female triumph surfaces when Michelle expressed that "she was lucky, because she was not from the kind of family he was from. Her life was simpler and clearer, and her decisions were her own, not those of the 'tribe'" (126). Later, Michelle joined media and started her professional career in UAE. The loss of Faisal did not scar her for life, and she met Hamdan a fellow colleague at her workplace. Due to nature of their work, Hamdan and Michelle spent much time together which developed affinity in them. However, this

time around, Sadeem was not willing to settle for anything less than perfect and till then she decided to stay single.

> Now I can't settle for less. I just can't! My love for Faisal—that was the love of my life. Look, even though I threw him out of my life, he still stands there inside my mind like a statue that I measure every man up against, and unfortunately, they all come out short. And of course I'm the one who really loses after such comparison. (303)

4.3.1.4 Lamees

Lamees, a medical student, with a tall gym toned body, was the only success story in securing the man she loved. She was briefly attracted towards Ali, the brother of her classmate who was their senior in the same college. In Saudi Arabia unmarried couples are not allowed to be together in public places. The religious police caught Ali and Lamees in a café and involved their parents in the affair that sadly ended their relationship. The other guy Lamees met was also a medical graduate, whom she met during her medical training. Nizar was a gentleman with good personality and manners. When Lamees met Nizar, she had a feel that he was the right guy, she wanted to settle with. Lamees strategized an approach to trap Nizar in her love, by not responding to Nizar's advances for nearly three months. This could have backfired as did Garmrah's delaying tactics. Moreover, during this period, she felt irresolute, attracted by Nizar. However, Lamees had learnt from the experience of her friends that allowing men to develop an amicable relationship before marriage, in a Saudi context, lessens their resolute to marry with the same woman. Eventually she won the battle of nerves with Nizar. "Fate didn't disappoint her. In fact, the plan she was intending to cut short succeeded. He came to her father to officially ask for her hand. Three entire weeks before her absolute drop-dead deadline!" (241).

Getting married to Nizar brought a visible change in Lamees, she turned more religious and started wearing hijab[122]. Religion is used as a recourse. Post-marriage change in Lamees draws our attention towards the stability that women experience once they get married. "Lamees felt that she had all the freedom, she wanted, before her marriage and during her honeymoon. Now it was time to pay her dues to God, especially after He had

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[122] To read more on episteme of hijab and Muslim women, see (Ahmad, 2011); (Abdelal, 2017)

granted her such a wonderful husband" (274)[123]. All her friends envied at their married life. We get to know the concept of a perfect marriage through the married life of Lamees and Nizar. Nizar, was always tender and kind towards his wife. They both complemented each other in this relationship. For example, Lamees was sensitive and Nizar was temperamentally very cool. Nizar was extravagant while Lamees was judicious in spending. Lamees and Nizar collectively ran the household. Nizar always lend her a hand to manage the domestic tasks. Lamees also had a wonderful relationship with her mother-in-law that solidified her bond with Nizar further. The desire to keep looking for better, though is a human instinct, however must be overcome, as it minimizes our chances to achieve the real bliss of married life. The secret of contended life lies in accepting your partner and accolading each other.

4.3.2 Postfeminist Discursivities and Girls of Riyadh

4.3.2.1 Intimacy and Sexuality

Some aspects of Arab sexuality and sexual behaviours have already been highlighted in the first section dealing with love, and marriage pursuits of the four girls. Here the focus is the chick-lit tone of the novel in dealing with intimacy and sexuality and to what effects. The public expression of intimacy is very rare in Arab culture, even among married couples. At Gamrah's wedding the young girls who were attending the wedding started shouting: "We want a kiss! We want a kiss" (11), asking Rashid and Gamrah to kiss on stage, but Rashid did not kiss her. Gamrah felt embarrassed for Rashid not kissing her. Sadeem and Waleed's intimacy is also described in some detail in the novel: "Waleed had been accustomed to kissing her cheeks […] But one evening his parting kiss was decidedly hotter than usual […] that long, needy kiss on her virgin lips" (36). Sadeem and Firas's physical connection is not given much space in the novel, however there are some mentions of her sensual desires: "She was studying his white teeth, deep in serious thought. It really was the cutest little gap. Would her little pinkie finger fit in it? "Sure."" (134).

Gamrah, Sadeem, and Michelle discussed the value of romance in a married relationship at Lamees's wedding. They envied girls who get a *Hijazi[124]* husband as they are very expressive in showing their affection and love. *Najdi[125]* men are stern and hardly

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[123] This shift in Lamees and the concept of perfect marriage portrayed here can be expanded further by reflecting on its congruence with some of the concepts of Islamic feminism. For more on dialectics of Islamic feminism and Muslim women's fiction, see (Abdullah, 2017)

[124] People from Western part of Saudi Arabia. Main city of *Hijaz* is Jeddah.

[125] People from *Najd,* geographically the central part of Saudi Arabia. Riyadh is in *Najd*.

look at their wives smilingly. Sadeem says to Gamrah: "Remember how Rashid reacted when we told him to kiss you during the wedding? And look at this Nizar, all he does is kiss Lamees's forehead every couple of minutes, and then her hands and cheeks" (263). Gamrah replied: "I swear to God he's a real man" (263). Along with textual implications the debate on sexuality, sexual behaviour and sex education, sporadic use of erotic expressions and details enhance chick-lit appeal of *GOR*. Some of the instance include: '[Gamrah] raised the neckline of her dress to keep it dropping over her small breasts' (5); 'to cover her cleavage' (10); 'spangle-edged, jingly scarf around her hips' (20); 'Lamees wanted to ask her how she was finding marriage so far, and what the wedding night was like' (254). Homosexuality is also slightly incorporated in the novel through the queer character of Um-Nuwyyir's son and the story of 'Arwa the lesbo', the lesbian girl at King Saud university. Arwa was a pretty girl with masculine stride in her personality. Arwa sometimes dressed queerly, wearing men's underpants. She once looked at Sadeem and passed mysterious smiles to her. Girls used to avoid her due to her queerness. The motive of introducing female homosexuality by the novelist is vague here, wherein, either she wants to highlight existence of such sexual orientation or wants to create acceptance for such people in Saudi society. In Muslim societies homosexuality is considered as a disease: "even if showing signs of being homosexual might not be considered an illness in America, in Saudi Arabia it was an utter calamity, an illness worse than cancer" (137-138).

4.3.2.2   Understanding of Men: A Female Perspective

All men initially were good to women, but had their flaws. Rashid an educated guy from a respectable family cheated and divorced his wife. Waleed who loved Sadeem, divorced her for no reason. Metin, a doctor, turned out to be a cynic. Michelle's father was liberal man, who married a Muslim convert from US. He occasionally drank alcohol with her daughter. But, by living in Saudi Arabia, he too becomes somewhat like them and did not allow Michelle to marry Mathew because he was Christian. All the girls based on their encounters, reveal their experience of men in an instructive tone in the novel. According to Sadeem: "A guy will begin backing off from a girl and even trying to escape as soon as she seems available. Because then he feels, Okay, I don't have to do anything to get her. She is no longer a challenge. He doesn't say this to her face" (202). Men draw psychological pleasure out of winning women over. Sadeem further commented that all men, however nice they may appear, in essence, are the same: "But it appeared they were cut of the same cloth after all. Apparently, all men were the same. It was like God had given them different

faces just so that women would be able to tell them apart" (233). Saudi men want to keep their supremacy in the relationship: "Men who came from this part of the world, Sadeem decided, were by nature proud and jealous creatures. They sensed danger when face to face with females who might present a challenge to their capabilities" (276). They want to assert their masculinity and superiority in the married relationship. For women, love and respect coexist, but for men it is different. "Men don't necessarily love the ones they respect, and women are the opposite. They respect only the ones they love!" (282). Men, she further added are confused and insecure in what they want in life, so when they come across women who are clearheaded, they refuse to get attached with them. She aptly analyses men in Arab society in these words:

> They are slaves to reactionary customs and ancient traditions even if their enlightened minds pretend to reject such things! That's the mold for all men in this society. They're just pawns their families move around on the chessboard! I could have challenged the whole world if my love had been from somewhere else, not a crooked society that raises children on contradictions and double standards. A society where one guy divorces his wife because she's not responsive enough in bed to arouse him, while the other divorces his wife because she doesn't hide from him how much she likes it! (303)

According to Michelle men cannot love, they are rational and timid in their approach. "No matter how impressive he is or how refined his thinking is or how much in love he is, he still considers love something that can only happen in novels and films. He doesn't get it, he doesn't conceive of love as a foundation that builds a family" (203). Men do realize that love is basic human need; however, they are not courageous enough to go for it. Lamees also shared her deep observations about men and how to maintain a fruitful relationship, resulting in marriage, that she wrote in the form of a journal. Let men initiate, no attachment before proposal, stay mysterious, learn from experiences of other women, be selectively responsive to the phone calls, do not dictate him what he must do, make no effort to change him or yourself, accept him with flaws or leave, do not give up your rights, do not overlook his wrongs, let him confess the love first, give him maximum three months to indicate his intentions, and stay alert to signs to sense danger.

Um-Nuwayyir, the veteran, had devised a complete theory about the types of Arab men. "Um-Nuwayyir classified people of the Gulf and Arabs in general based on a number of factors, including strength of personality, self- confidence, good looks and so forth"(76).

In terms of personality there are two types of men, strong and week men. Strong men have motivation for economic self-improvement. These motivated men are of two types, either they respect others' viewpoint, or do not care about it. Weak men lack the power of initiative, so they either listen to family or listen to friends. In terms of confidence, there are two types of men secure and insecure. First type of secure men is confident, modest, affectionate in behaviour, people respect them, and they are mentally at peace. Second type of secure men is over-confident, under achieved, shallow inside, and people hate them. The Insecure men also have two types: one who make no big claims, the mostly have some physical, social or emotional problems and people feel sorry for them; second type is those insecure men who claim to be secure, they are super sensitive, assertive, and loud. Another division of men based on religiosity is very informative and has implications on their marriage preferences too. There are three types of men: extremely religious, moderate, and escapee/wild. Extremely religious are those either who were extremely liberal earlier or who fear they may turn extremely liberal. These extremely religious types of men prefer religious wives and polygamous families so that their marriage does not affect their religiosity. Moderate men have two types. One, who are different from extremely religious people only based on their treatment of women, they can marry liberal woman, if they are sure of her love and morals. Second, the seculars, who only follow five basic principle of Islam, they want to marry a woman who is as liberal as they are, no *hijabi*, pretty, open-minded and stylish. Escapee or wild men have two types: gradual escapee and the ones with liberal upbringing. Men with liberal upbringing to the point of atheism have pathological suspicion due to experience with cheap girls; these girls are guilty unless proven innocent. Such men prefer inexperienced girls or the flirt type who knows how to hide stuff from their husband. Gradual escapee men are extremely liberal, but pretend to be extremely religious to avoid social embarrassment.

In order to completely understand the marriage matches, Um-Nuwayyir also explained the types of women based on religiosity. Extremely religious women have two types: sheltered and bow to fate type; second, sheltered but with fantasies. Sheltered women are happy with whatever their fate gives them. They marry the person with same religiosity level as theirs. If they marry a liberal man, their life becomes miserable. Sheltered but with fantasies women know what liberty is, however they control themselves through self-discipline or through family checks. Moderate women have two types: not religious, not liberated type and fashion victim type. Fashion victim type are fine with either wearing

hijab or throwing it away, or wearing body-fitted abaya. Their choices are linked with whatever men and mommies of these prospective men want to see in a woman. Not religious, not liberated type of moderate women are observant, and do not sin, but their inspiration of virtue is morality not the religion. They have strong personality and do not submit to zealous groups. Escapee women have two types: one, wild before marriage, the ones who were extremely liberal before marriage, but after marriage, if they get a man of their taste, they turn religious. Second, wild after marriage type of women, these women are extremely religious (sheltered) before marriage, but turn bad after marriage due to a liberal husband, bad marriage, or disloyal husband.

4.3.2.3   Traditional Feminist Undercurrents

Though the main plot centres around postfeminist concerns of marriage, love and sexuality, yet the expression and conduct of different characters throughout the novel reflects visible feminist tone. The female narrator, who did not disclose her identity, makes an audacious statement that excites audience: "I expect nothing. I fear no one. I am free" (2). She understands that the stories that she is sharing might create a havoc in Saudi society, since they have the potential to inspire other women live carefree too. Men's insecurity is highlighted through Gamrah's efforts to make herself independent in Chicago, she "noticed how quickly Rashid would insist on helping her as soon as he realized her determination to teach herself" (88), which reflects that men want to keep their superiority sustained. If women get to achieve something, they try to claim a share through rendering wanted/unwanted assistance. Gamrah wondered, "[d]o men sense a threat to their authority when they begin to catch on that a woman is developing some real skills in some area?" (88). "Do they consider a woman reaching independence and working toward her own goals an illegal offense against the religious rights of leadership God bestowed upon men?" (88). In Muslim societies often, religion is abused to limit women's roles outside household affairs.

When Gamrah got divorced, Lamees tried consoling her by making her realize that she did not need a man to complete her, and without a man she can live more freely: "Damn men! Bastards! They have always been such a pain and headache!" (139). Michelle also showed visible feminist tendencies. In the words of narrator: "Michelle had become truly frightening lately, the way she talked about freedom and women's rights, the bonds of religion, conventions imposed by society and her philosophy on relations between the sexes" (195). She guided Gamrah to fight for her rights, and do not sit at home like an

aimless divorcee. Sadeem's remarks on Gamrah's divorce also reflected feminist courage and anger: "I'm sick of how we let everyone else control us and lead us through this life. We can never do anything without the fear of being judged holding us back. Everyone steers us along according to what they want. What kind of life is that? We don't have a say about our own lives!" (199). She wanted women to be thoroughly independent in all affairs of their lives. She was of the view that women should themselves come out of marriage if at any stage they feel that their relationship is not working and not let men fool us: "[W]e stupid girls never pick up on them. We go on working on the relationship until it kills us" (203). Later in the novel when her uncle brought an awkward man as a marriage proposal for her, she agitatedly said to her mother that she did not need not want to get married to be under some sort of protective shield of a man: "Does your brother think I'm a disgrace, or I cannot protect my own self?" (215). She was livid that her father and uncle did not support her and pushed her towards an unsuitable match:

> He doesn't have even one word to say about his own daughter in front of your bossy brother? And this brother of yours, what do I have to do with his daughters whom he wants to marry off? He wants to dump me on that old defective junk of a man. (215)

At Gamrah's situation, the narrator remarks that marriage in Arab societies is used as tool to exercise control over women: "a man needs to feel the weight of his own superiority and masculinity when he is with a woman. Otherwise, what would prevent him from marrying someone just like him—another man?" (277). Later in the novel, at Lamees's wedding when girls were appreciating Nizar' affectionate behaviour towards his wife Lamees, Michelle remarked that her freedom after marriage in making her own decisions is more important than these loving gestures:

> Our problem here is that we let men be bigger deals than they really are. We need to realize—assume, even—right from the start that things like letting us graduate are not even optional, it's just what makes sense, and our eyes should not fly out of our heads if one of these men actually does something right! (264)

4.3.2.4   Veils, Abayas, and Religiosity

In *Girls of Riyadh* there are element of religiosity as faith in God, and observing Islamic teachings. In terms of dress, women did use abayas, "but these abayas weren't loose teepees that you see women wearing on the street. These were fitted at the waist and hips

and they were very attractive!" (17). Sociology of abayas in Muslim society is a much debated topic. There are various purposes that veil and its various forms serve. Veil is sometimes simply used as a mean to hide identity, for example, in the beginning of novel when girls were driving the car at pre-marriage fun night of Gamrah, they kept their faces veiled, to remain unrecognizable as in Saudi Arabia, women in general are not allowed to drive. Abaya is presented as more of a cultural norm in the novel. When Sadeem went to stay in London she "took off her abaya and head covering to reveal a well-proportioned body encased in tight jeans and a T-shirt, and a smooth face adorned with light pink blush, a little mascara and a swipe of lip gloss" (69). This shows that the modern Arab girls dressed according to cultural norms of the place. They did not staunchly adhere to veiling or not veiling. The same thing happened again on Sadeem's return to Saudia, in the plane, "women were all lined up, and so were the men, down the aisle, waiting to get into the toilets to put on their official garb. The women would put on their long abayas, head coverings and face veils, while the men stripped off their suits and ties" (130). Lamees, as a symbol of religious affiliations started using veil after marriage. Lamees's decision to veil was praised by her friends, and they wished her luck towards this new spiritual journey. However, Michelle reminded her "how hideous hijab-wearing women usually looked and how the hijab restricted a girl from being fashionable because it also required covering her arms with long sleeves and her legs with long pants or skirts" (273). The conflicting opinions about veil are not only prevalent in this novel, but otherwise too, Islamic scholars have divided opinions on veil and its modalities.

4.3.2.5   The Female Body and Appearances

In chick-lit tradition, the importance of having good-looks and perfect body is glorified in the novel. A woman at Gamrah's wedding talking of Sadeem comments: "She's a good deal prettier than the bride. Can you believe it, I heard that Prophet Muhammad used to send up prayers for the unlovely ones" (6). Girls excessively rely on beauty products, makeup, liposuction, botox, control their eating habits, and go to gym to get a perfectly toned body. Michelle ridicules Gamrah on her wedding day: "By God, her makeup is painful! Her skin is too dark for such a chalky foundation…and look at the contrast between her face and her neck. Eww…so vulgar!" (8). The beauty of girls is sarcastically mentioned as their talent: Michelle says: "The most talented of us is Sadeem— look how feminine she looks with those curves. I wish I had back bumper like hers" (8). The girls in the novel discuss how they starved themselves to stay slim and they were

envious of the girls who eat as much as they want and never get fat. Lamees had this realization that she was distinctively tall and in a good shape. On Gamrah's wedding Sadeem who herself was good looking and had a feminine body, asked Lamees not to dance closer to her so that she may not appear bulky to people in comparison to her. Gamrah on the wedding day "rubbed her body, legs, thighs, and feet with whitening lotion her mother made for her with the lotion of glycerine and lemon that her mother made for her" (12). She also got all hair removed from her body and face at Moroccan *hammam* before marriage. Even after divorce, Gamrah kept up her beauty regime:

> In Lebanon, Gamrah submitted to the makeover procedure called "tinsmithing." It began with a nose job. It ended with sessions of facial chemical peeling. The regime also consisted of a strict diet and exercise program under the supervision of an extremely elegant specialist, and Gamrah topped it all off with a new hairstyle and coloring at the hands of the most famous and skilled hairdresser in all of Lebanon. (166)

White colour as a beauty marker is stressed upon by girls in the novel. It appears from the discussion between Gamrah and Lamees that girls with fair complexion have better marriage prospects. Gamrah scolded Lamees: "These days, when everyone is going with whitening lotions, you have to go and burn yourself under the sun…Have you ever heard of any mother who wanted to find her son a black bride?" (198-199). So, having darker skin for a female is perceived as a disadvantage. Lamees argued that they need to challenge these beauty standards of Arab society, we cannot define our preferences according to what pleases 'old ladies and their darling little boys?'

4.3.2.6 **Women Hunting Men**

Very unlike Saudi Arabia, the Girls of Riyadh discussed men and sought after them. The text did not give an impression that these girls had any parental pressure in selection of their life partners. There took place two arrange marriages in the novel, with willing consent of the girls, both failed. Whereas, Lamees successfully married the man she loved and Michelle as a true postfeminist character openly appreciated male beauty and pursued it. At Gamrah' wedding when groom and his friends entered female side of the guests to perform some wedding rituals, it discomforted all women, but, "Michelle remained Michelle: she stayed exactly as she was and eyed at the men one by one, paying no attention to the mutterings and truly sharp stares that she drew from some of the women" (10).

Michelle was impressed by Faisal's masculine body and appearances. "She couldn't help noticing that his T-shirt showed off his broad chest muscles and biceps in a very flattering way" (26). Later, in Dubai, she was attracted towards her male colleague Hamdan's beauty: "The most handsome thing about him was his nose, as sharp and fine as an unsheathed sword. He had a trim, light beard and a truly infectious laugh" (249). Sadeem also expressed her preference of what kind of men she liked: "She preferred darker skin; his complexion was fair with pinkish hue. His shadowy moustache and goatee and those glasses with thin silver frames added a lot of charm to his face, though, she thought" (34). Lamees before marrying Nizar had a crush on Ali, though that had tragic ending, yet she admired his looks: "Ali was a full six feet tall, maybe even a little bit more. And then there were his looks! He had a tanned complexion and very thick and dark eyebrows, and he positively exuded masculinity" (154). Both Sadeem and Michelle discussed fine details of Nizar's grooming at his wedding ceremony. Sadeem commented: "Nizar is positively glistening, he's so clean and tidy! Just look how perfectly trimmed his goatee is" (264). Michelle added that *Hijazi* men take good care of themselves, in general:

> Those guys get a scrubbing, a Turkish bath and facial threading so they won't be too hairy, plucking and a pedicure and sometimes even a waxing. Not like the guys from Riyadh, where the groom looks just like all the guests except for the color of his bisht.[126] (264)

This generates a discussion on what girls prefer in a man in terms of his looks and personality. What marks male beauty? Do girls prefer well-groomed men or rough and tough macho males? Is it only about looks, or personality is measured by how they carry themselves? Sadeem said: "I prefer a man who is a little untidy. It's so much more masculine—he doesn't have the time or the vanity to dress up and buy the latest fashions and act like a teenager who has nothing better to do" (265).

4.3.2.7 Facets of Love

> We have to distinguish between love as a practice and a behavior, on the one hand, and love as an emotion, on the other. It is right Islamic practice i.e., Halal to feel love, but if love turns into acts of love, such as a touch or a kiss or an embrace, it is against the law of Islam i.e., Haram. Many bad things will result, because it is difficult for the person in love to keep that love in check. So what is the love that

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[126] Traditional black cloak that men wear on top of their thobes for important occasions or events

we do want? We want love that changes hearts and souls. We mean love that pushes those who have it to perform deeds that will then get documented in history as a beautiful love story. (98-99)

Love in *Girls of Riyadh* finds its expression in multiple forms, ranging from celebrating valentine day, expressing acute desire of companionship, philosophising its meanings and manifestations, fragilities and strengths, Islamic meanings of love and, lessons learnt from lived experiences about love. Saudi Arabia appears to be a hard terrain when it comes to love between a boy and girl outside marriage. Um-Nawayyir, a firm advocate of love believed that "genuine love had no outlet or avenue of expression in this country. Any fledgling love relationship, no matter how innocent or pure, was sure to be seen as suspect and therefore repressed" (101). The narrator reaffirms the same: "Love was treated like an unwelcome visitor in our region" (64). The narrator in a prologue to one of the chapters, details the concept of love in Islam by quoting the words of Jassem Al-Mutawa'[127]:

> Love is a matter of the heart, and a person has no control over it. Human hearts lie between two fingers—the fingers of Allah the merciful—and He tilts them as He wills. If love were not so very precious and fine, then so many people, ever since the time of the prophets, would not have ventured there. The Prophet—may the blessings and peace of God be upon him—stressed that the flame of love can only be quenched by marriage. For love which is bound by the reins of chastity and piety gives no cause for shame. But if the marriage does not occur, then patience with the bitterness of disappointment is the only solution. (98)

This clearly means that feelings of love are given to human beings by Allah. He puts love of people in our hearts, and when it is love for a person of opposite gender, they should get married. Further, there is an emphasis that the feelings and desires aroused by love should not lead a believer towards any physical act that transgresses the limits of Islam. Love itself is pure feeling, even prophets of Islam loved women, but the only permissible way to fulfil the desires is marriage.

Dealing with the subject of romantic love, in *GOR*, Sadeem shows the intensity of love for a man beyond bodily attraction. When Sadeem got separated from Waleed: "she

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[127] A scholar from Kuwait who often appears on TV and discusses issues of love, marriage and relationships

cried and cried, mourning her first love, buried alive in its infancy before she could even find pleasure in it" (70). Even after divorce, Sadeem's love for Waleed did not die. Upon moving to London, she imagines how she would have loved to come to London with Waleed on honeymoon: "It was as if something inside of her were still waiting for Waleed's return" (72). Sadeem's second love was Firas that turned out to be even stronger, deeper and holier than her love for Metin. "Her love for Firas was too strong to be affected by a past, or a present, or a future—and anyway, she knew that of the two of them, she would always be the one furthest from perfection!" (163). Sadeem could not marry Firas, but her love for Firas remained with her, that to an extent in the novel challenges the notion that love's only accomplishment is marriage. The pull of Sadeem's love, eventually made Firas realize that he cannot stay in peace without Sadeem, so he divorced his wife and returned to Sadeem, however, she now refused to accept him. Firas accepts that those who advised him that love will grow after marriage were wrong. "He told her that he pitied his fiancée because she was engaged to a man who had tasted perfection in another woman and that taste would remain forever on his tongue, making it impossible for any ordinary woman to erase it" (235-236). Sadeem used to write poetry and her love stories in a sky-blue scrapbook; these lines show the intensity of her love for Firas: "I screamed when I heard your darling voice, I was so happy! Your voice washed my heart clean of whatever pain was there. Firas, my love! I yelled" (256).

4.3.2.8 Divorce

There take place two divorces in the novel, and both relate to the sexual activity. In one, Gamrah's, there was sexual sedentariness, the cause of divorce, and in the other, Sadeem's, presumed over involvement that resulted in separation. These male driven divorces are in no way justifiable in the novel or generally in the society, but they allude our attention to the value of sexual satiation in married life[128]. In Islam, there are sayings and doings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that extol pleasure of sex in married couples. "Let none of you come upon his wife like an animal, and let there be emissary between them, the Prophet is reported to have said. What is emissary, O messenger of God? A clueless believer asked. The kiss and words, he replied" (Farah, 1984, p. 106) . According to Bukhari's hadith quoted by Ali: "If a man invites his wife to sleep with him and she refuses to come to him then angels send curse on her till morning" (Ali, 2006, p. 11). Heba

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[128] And sex education as discussed earlier in the paper

Kotb, Arab world's famous sex therapist advises women to be active sex partners in a married relationship and understand man's needs than passively receiving sex (2004).

In both cases of divorce, the life of divorces is presented as having challenges, however the girls do not mourn at their separations and continue to live a routine life. Gamrah did not want to have the baby once she was a divorcee because she wanted to marry again and feared no one will marry her if she had a child. "Her sole aspiration was still marriage to a man who would snatch her away from her solitude and make up for the hard times she had seen" (196). Despite being divorced by their son, Gamrah did not treat Rashid's parents badly; she named her son after his grandfather that made them jubilant. Gamrah's mother initially started to treat her coldly after divorce and limited her freedom and mobility. She regularly sneered her by saying "What? Did you forget you are a divorcée?" (139). The narrator of the story puts forth questions to the readers objecting the maltreatment of divorcee women. "Is divorce a major crime committed by the woman only? Why doesn't our society harass the divorced man the way it crushes the divorced woman?" (192). We must support the divorcees than looking down upon them, since both men and women are equally responsible for the end of marriage, blaming women only is utterly unfair. Like Gamrah, Sadeem too, as a brave woman went on with her life. She loved Firas after divorce, did business, and completed her education. Another heroic divorcee in the novel was Um-Nawayyir, who provided girls the space and support to do all those things secretly that were otherwise not allowed in Saudi society. "Um Nuwayyir opened the door of her own home to the hapless lovers" (101). She at the same time took care of the girls as her daughters, and kept a constant check.

4.3.2.9 Polygyny

The concept of polygyny[129] is also touched upon in the novel. The women from elite classes who are exposed to Western notions of freedom of choice and liberty might be changing the way they approach their love life and marriage, but this change is not representative of entire Saudi society yet. The university life in Riyadh provided much diversity, as girls from all over Saudi Arabia came there to study. Some of these educated girls were even willing to find second wives for their husbands. "Sadeem told her that one of their classmates was always saying that she was on the lookout for a bride for her husband, whom she had married just one year before, so that she could present him with

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[129] In Islamic *fiqh,* polygyny is supported under certain conditions, in fact preferred. For more on the subject see (Ali, 2006)

the bride herself!" (50). This polygyny favouring girl naively argued that by making her husband busy with other wife, she would have time for herself and her children. And if the second wife is from economically lower strata of society then she will be doing all the chores too. The women in favour of polygyny associate it with *sunnah* and those against it consider it unjust for women and point out that all the wives of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) were divorcees except Aisha (R.A.). So, before quoting the example of prophet's life we need to understand the conditions under which he married those women. Further, a man has no right to have more than one wives, if he fails to demonstrate the ability to keep justice between wives and their children. "There has not been a coherent alternative to the classic understanding of marriage as a fundamentally gender differentiated institution which presumes, at least at some level, male authority and control" (Ali K. , 2006, p. 22).

4.3.3   Conclusion

GOR in its folklore appeal intrigues us with stories that evoke joy of partial female feat, and angst at clinkers of men. Religion no doubt supervises the trajectories of their affectionate-selves, however, the blurring of boundaries of religion and culture is unmistakable. The sexual undertones of the book do not undermine Islamic insights, no extra or premarital relationships, nevertheless, give us an inkling of how embracing sexuality can better married lives. Surah 2, verse 187 of Quran says husband and wife are garments for one another. Sexuality can be talked about, and one can discuss, what they want from their partner in a married relationship. Islam does not forbid at all to teach young people about sex, its pleasure, morality and hygiene. There is a need to develop a relationship of trust than censoring all the content that may be suspected of having some sexual tinge. Culturally acceptable ways of meeting the would-be life partner through arranged dates provide decent opportunities of finding a match, but limiting it as the only possibility is brutal. It was significantly saddening to see the conduct of educated, apparently 'mature' male characters in their treatment of love and married lives. Rashid and Waleed portray a disappointing face of Arab masculinities. They broke their marriages without having any solid reasons. Firas, and Faisal two timid men, did not have enough resilience to stay firm and advocate their romantic affiliations. It is important here to highlight that at no point we get textual evidence that these guys deceived their girls or were fooling around with no intentions to marry them. They just proved to be mommy's boys. Contrarily, Nizar emerges as a progressive Islamic male, living an ideal married love life.

In *GOR*, the impact of narrative is more important than its representativeness. There is a need to shift focus from what is wrong with Arb world to what they are doing rightly. The postfeminist women in *GOR* have the autonomy to love or not to love, marry or not to marry, bursting the foggy corridors of old traditions. They are marrying to the partner of their choice, willingly accepting separation if marriage does not work well, remarrying than crying over the spilt milk, or simply postponing marriage out of their freewill. *GOR* is not about women rights in Islam or fight against patriarchy, but a genteel depiction of an insider about the evolving love, and marriage scene in Saudi settings. Such writings from Muslim females from Arab world are resisting stereotypes, challenging taboos, and creating spaces for increased jovial livings in these parts of the world.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter encapsulates and consolidates the findings of postfeminist readings of selected texts. Based on these findings, it further presents a thesis statement to conclude the scholarly contribution made by this project. It revisits the research questions posed at the very beginning of the research and the answers this study has come up with against each of the research questions. It then consolidates the argument by forming a nexus of theoretical underpinnings and postfeminist discourse analysis. Moreover, here I concede the limitations of this project, along with highlighting the future research possibilities. The following research questions are answered in this research:

1. What are the dynamics of Islamic feminist discourse and what hermeneutic paradigms are being used by Islamic feminists to voice their concerns?

2. What are the facets of contemporary postfeminist discourses?

3. What discourse patterns emerge from Muslim women's chick-lit fiction and how they function as alternative resistive discourse paradigms to bridge religious and secular divide in Muslim settings?

Based on the discussion in the previous chapters the answers to these questions help develop the narrative below, precisely.

4.4 Islamic Feminist Discourse and Postfeminist Discourse

In the meaning making processes when it comes to religiously determined discourses, women voices are marginalised and not given enough weightage and space. Now the revisionist epistemology of Muslim female scholarship is presenting/producing women friendly interpretations of earlier male dominated discourses. *Ijtihad* is a central construct in this liberatory theological paradigm. They are of the view that Quran is gender-just, it is the male-centric interpretation of religion that translates *Shriah*, in turn *Fiqh* in the disadvantage of women. Quran, they consider a text, a source material, which has its linguistic validity and like other texts loses its vitality if perceived in absentia of sociocultural tools. Male scholars of Islam have been using misogynist *hadiths* to maintain patriarchy. Whereas, *asnad* (sources), of many of these narrations are weak or questionable. Moreover, the role of women in Quranic hermeneutics is crucial because a male cannot do

justice to the interpretive process of revelations concerning women's lives. Valuing female exegetes is critical in Islamic feminist hermeneutics. It is essential for the nourishment of Islamic intellectual ethos to value women in the production and propagation of knowledge. Moreover, instead of getting tangled in particulars, universal (timeless) essence of Quranic teachings is to be relied upon as a guiding principle in interpreting them. This universality of Quran entails developing a framework for holistic understanding and contemporary implications (Amina Wadud is influential in furthering this thought; Chapter 2 has a detailed discourse on it). Holistic reading considers various functional categories of society including linguistics possibilities and interpretive patterns to give its perspective about women. Holistic readers claim their analytical outcome to be free from biases and stereotypes. The hermeneutical dimension of holistic approach considers context, grammar and ideology as its essential elements.

Islamic feminism and Islamic feminist discourses embark upon progressive Islamic thought that embraces diversity, diversity of religious realisations, diversity of the geographical origins, and diversity of women/men who associate it with, own it, and propagate it as an ideological construct. Islamic feminism is an attitude. This attitude is aggressively inclusive, anticolonial, anti-racist and pluralistic. Classical Islamic methodologies, coupled with women centred interpretations and reliance on new social sciences tools with secular orientations spring the genesis of Islamic feminism. Muslim women under Islamic feminism provide a multi-layered critique that challenges victimhood, decolonizes Muslim women, helps maintaining multiple identities, balances local and transnational, and reconciles religious and secular. Islamic feminism connects Islam to active contemporary gender politics, and creates acceptance for Muslim women's identity in this milieu. Islamic feminists also question cosmopolitan Islamic feminism on sociological and legalistic grounds with an argument that there always remains incommensurability between actual needs and their realization in any framework that claims to be the sole saviour of women rights. They are involved in religious reforms, political activism and community service, simultaneously. Activist goal of Islamic feminism and secular feminism are no different. Those who consider there is a divide are mischievously misrepresenting women and their cause in Islamic societies to distract them from their agenda of creating breathing spaces for all without any distinction. Islamic feminism is not strictly religious in its nous; rather it is a way to create gender egalitarian Muslim societies through progressive hermeneutics. Islamic feminism is a transcontinental,

post-foundationalist gender critique than an identity marker, so regardless of faith affiliations anyone can take it up and further its ideological standpoint.

Contemporary form of feminist ideology gets its actualisation in postfeminist dialectics. In this era of new femininities the concerns of first and second wave are becoming less and less relevant to the women of today. Postfeminism is a dominantly cultural turn in feminist cause, where sensibility of women's freedom is devoid of any political agenda. Feminism in its postfeminist form has become increasingly interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary. It still being a movement or an ideology in its infancy, has varied realization and they are continuously evolving and enriching the concept. Postfeminists are reverting to those privileges that women lost at the hands of feminism, including, celebrating femininity, working on female beauty, domesticity and interest in men. Postfeminism addresses feminist diversity and plurality. One of the major reason of feminism's shift to postfeminism is popularity of pop culture, and desire in women to embrace femininity. Some forms of this return to traditional femininity include love for fashion, beauty, and family/home. It is also perceived as a reaction to feminist movement that deprived women from expressing their sexuality and desire for men. Popular culture is significantly determining and shaping the postfeminist identity. In postfeminism gender is just one variable to relate with issues of women. Basing itself on human liberalism, it is very adaptive concept that accommodates myriad versions of women's freedom movements. Popular culture, academic writings, and socio-political investigations all have, contributed, and experienced the presence of postfeminism. The earlier forms of feminism were about equality and postfeminism is about difference, diversity and change. Postfeminism challenges stereotypical notions of feminism about oppression, patriarchy, sexuality, identity etc. to recontextualises them in the paradigm of poststructuralist cultural politics. Earlier feminist theories were materialistic in their approach, while postfeminism relying on the works of Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan appropriates feminist notions so that they become more relatable and applicable.

4.5   Emerging discourse patterns from Muslim Chick-lit and Islamic Postfeminism

There is no single, homogeneous, explicitly traceable Islamic feminism or postfeminism in literary discourse of Muslim women. Rather we observe a fluid, free-spirited, juvenile, version of postfeminism that is simultaneously bold and impressive in its manifestations. These postfeminist Muslim writers are shedding the burdens of affiliations and expectations of Muslimness and are producing characters that do not necessarily wish

to foreground their religious self as a form of identity. They are Muslim by faith, but the course of action of their lives is not religiously determined. They are living their lives to the full, without being fearful of being tagged as good or bad Muslim. This contemporary phase in feminism marks generational difference and evolutionary nature of the concept. The buoyant women of these postfeminist works might appear less realistic and not representative of mass majority of Muslim women in these countries, nevertheless it reflects how these women are envisioning their freedom. At the same time, these works are a stark commentary on moral, sexual, and marital hypocrisies and confusions prevailing in Muslim societies. They reflect on feminist agenda driven by socio-political realities of the time. Women writing in postmodern world can be prehistoric and vice versa, however these women are sagacious and progressive. Muslim chick-lit discourse emerging from the selected works is characterised by innovative diction (emails, confessions, tech discourse etc.), colourful representation, satire, liberated sexuality, short-lived romance, consumer culture, same gender bonding, elitism, and images of commodified femininity.

Insufficient and incomplete knowledge of people about Islam makes them believe that Islam is not a female friendly religion. Muslim women are not as down trodden as they are, sensationally, presented in international media, literature, and in the organisations working for women rights. Muslim women themselves are vibrantly participating in rights discourses where they speak for not only Muslim women but also for global issues that concern women. They are well informed in their opinions and methods of advocacy where Quranic principles, female history and experiences, global politics, and family dynamics of women are taken into account. So, 'gendered orientalism' should be combated to make most of the efforts made by diverse women communities. In developing the language of rights, choice, diversity and freedom should function as a grammar, else these discourses despite being pro-women would turn hegemonic in their effects. The solution is to protect women by raising awareness, and making culturally sensitive arrangements than playing the blame game.

Muslim women's writings are not representative of women only, but of human condition. There are representations, misrepresentations and politically inspired portrayals. There are women writing against men, and women writing against hegemony—imperial, religious, racial, and cultural. In a globalized world where everyone knows something about other, authenticity of description rests upon the fact who is saying it. Intersection of gender and faith is not always feminist. Sometimes women just express without wanting to be

tagged as oppressed or empowered. This study contributes to create and promote alternative discourses on Muslim feminism that define their expression of freedom without dislocating Muslim women. The concept of Islamic postfeminism challanges the notions that frame Muslim women as unhappy voicless victims of patriarchy in Islam. Postfeminist Muslim chick-lit narrows religious and secular divide in Muslim feminism. Critical discourses and discussions add up to the entire debate of Muslim femaleness. In this regard, literary and scholarly discourses have been brought together to make the discussion and discipline forward or at least take/incorporate an interesting new turn in gendered Muslim discourses. Creative writers through their creativeness and scholars by applying their criticality are creating new conducive spaces by shifting walls of narrowly defined epithets about Muslim women.

4.6   Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

This research has attempted the merger of two emerging discourse domains, i.e. Postfeminism and Islamic feminism, however there is still need to situate Islamic postfeminist discourse on broader textual evidences from a variety of Muslim geographies to add inclusivity in the concept. The current study is based on a selection of four texts from Pakistan and Arab world, however future researchers can build up on this and substantiate the argument by broadening the data set. Moreover, lived experiences of Muslim women can be added to solidify the study further. Ethnographies of ordinary Muslim women and those who become the voices of Muslim women by writing creatively or critically can bring in interesting reflections on how they visualise and then portray, what to them postfeminist discourse is. It will further help us realise that to what extent these women are aware of, contribute, and utilise contemporary debates in feminist academics.

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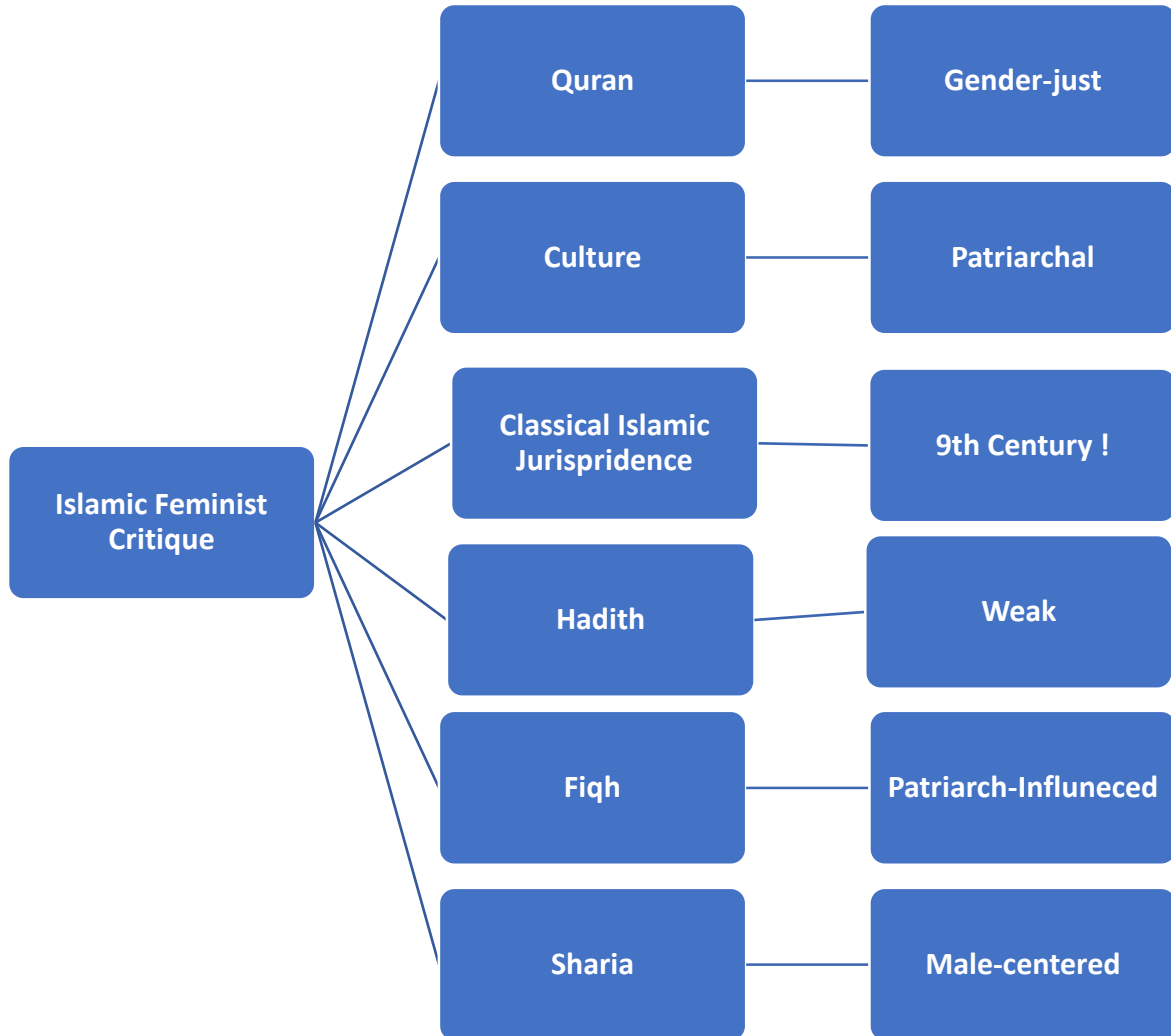
APPENDICES

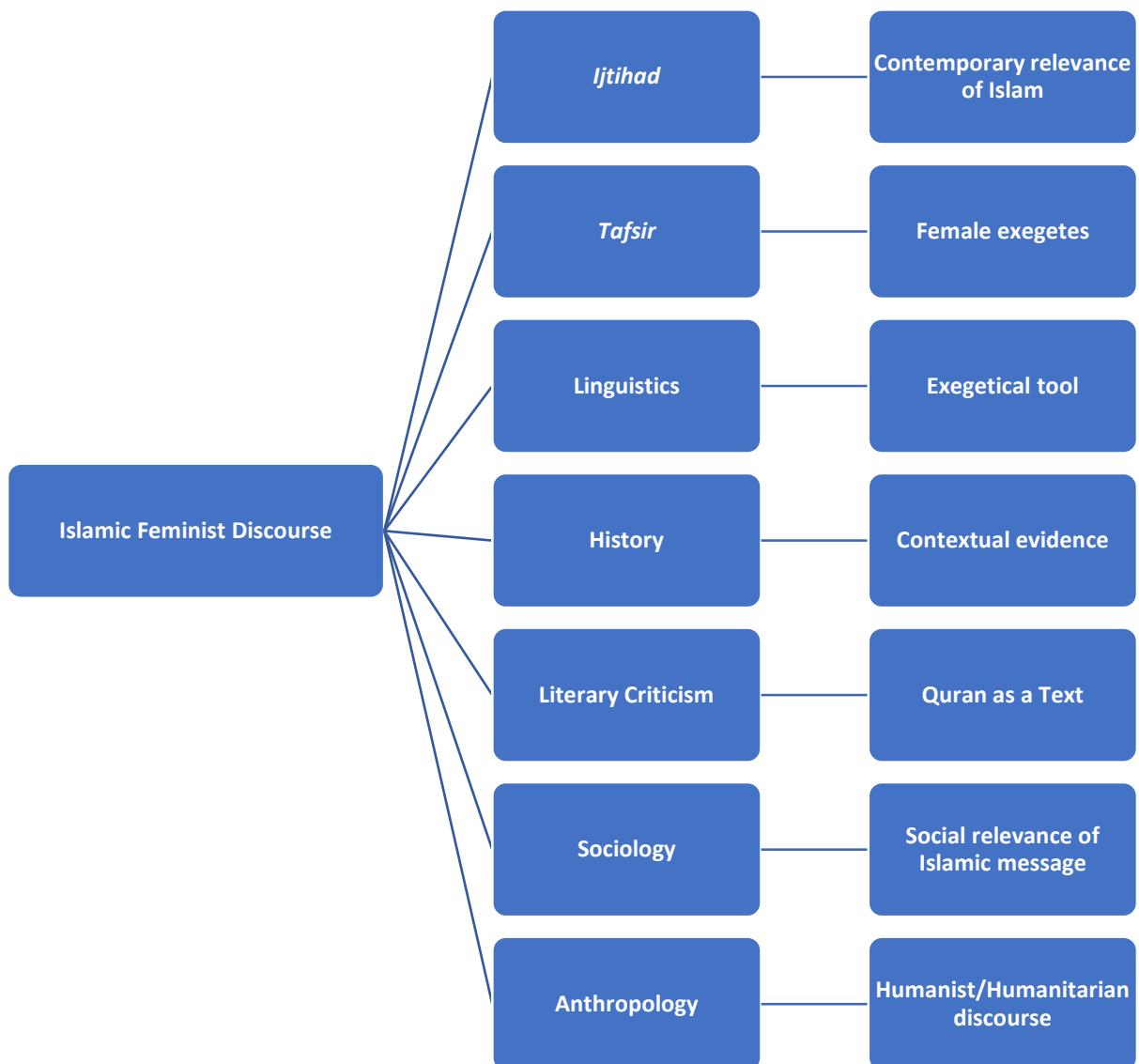*Figure 8:* Elements of Islamic Feminist Critique

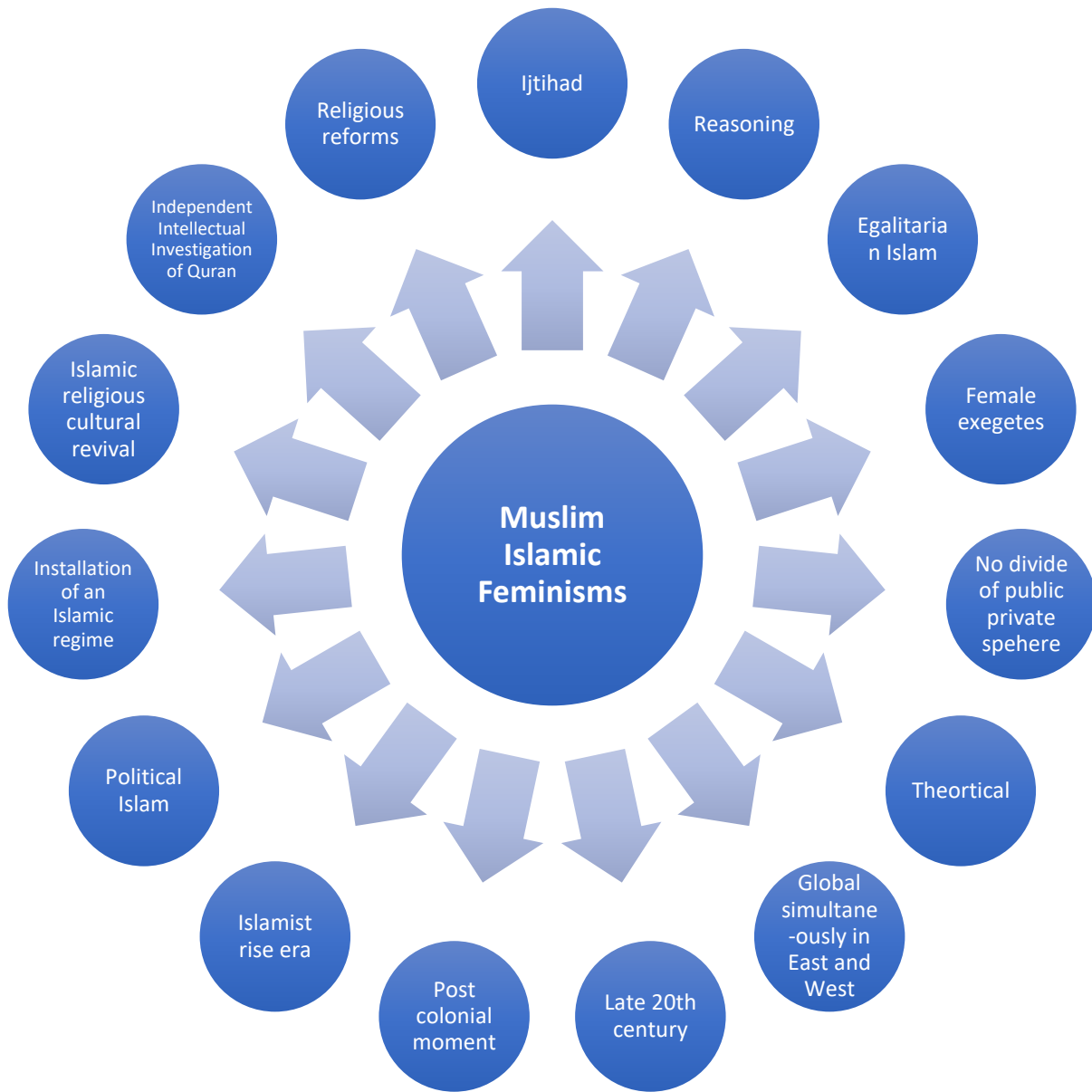*Figure 9:* Elements of Islamic Feminist Discourse
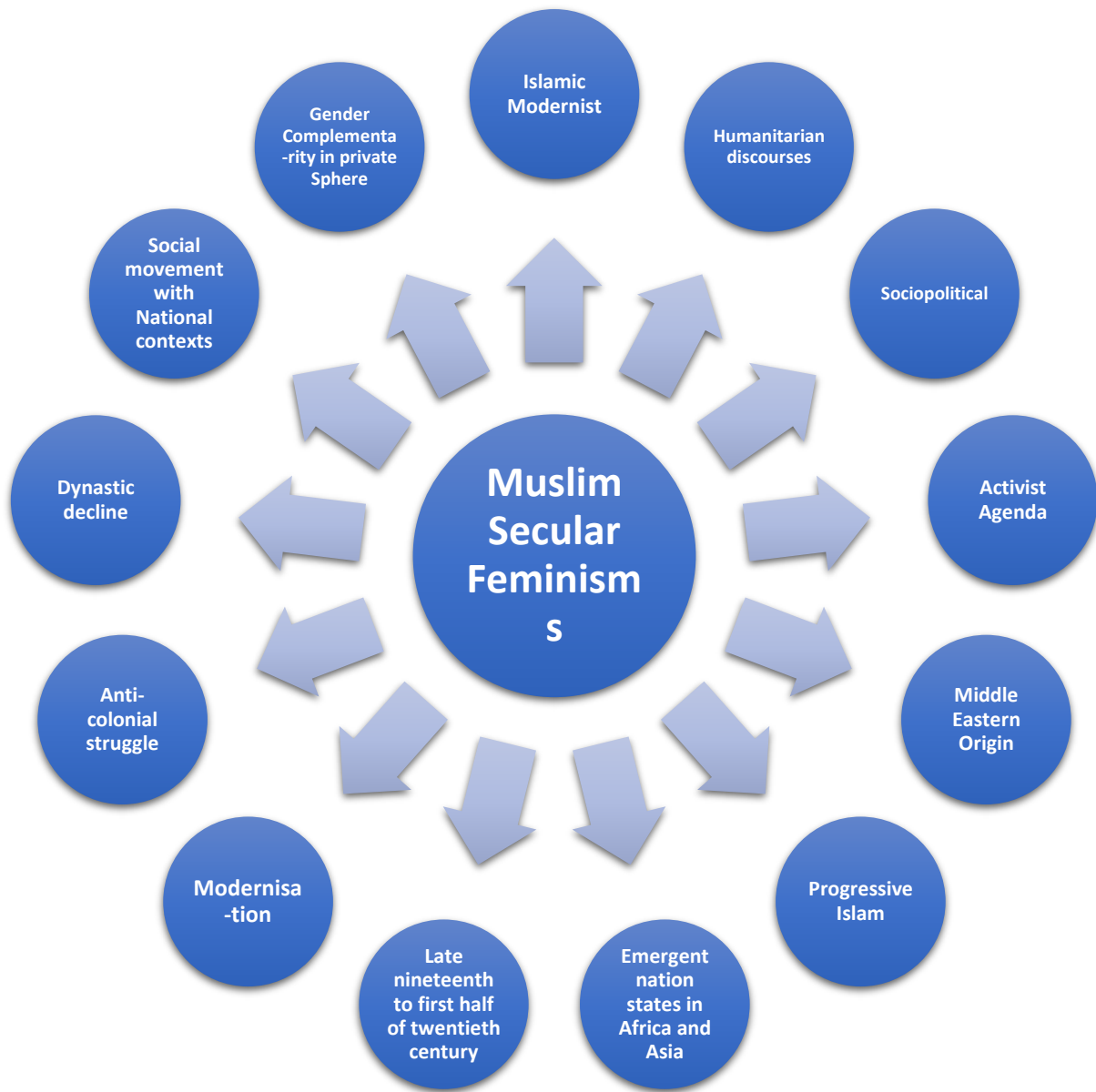
Figure 10: Muslim Islamic Feminisms

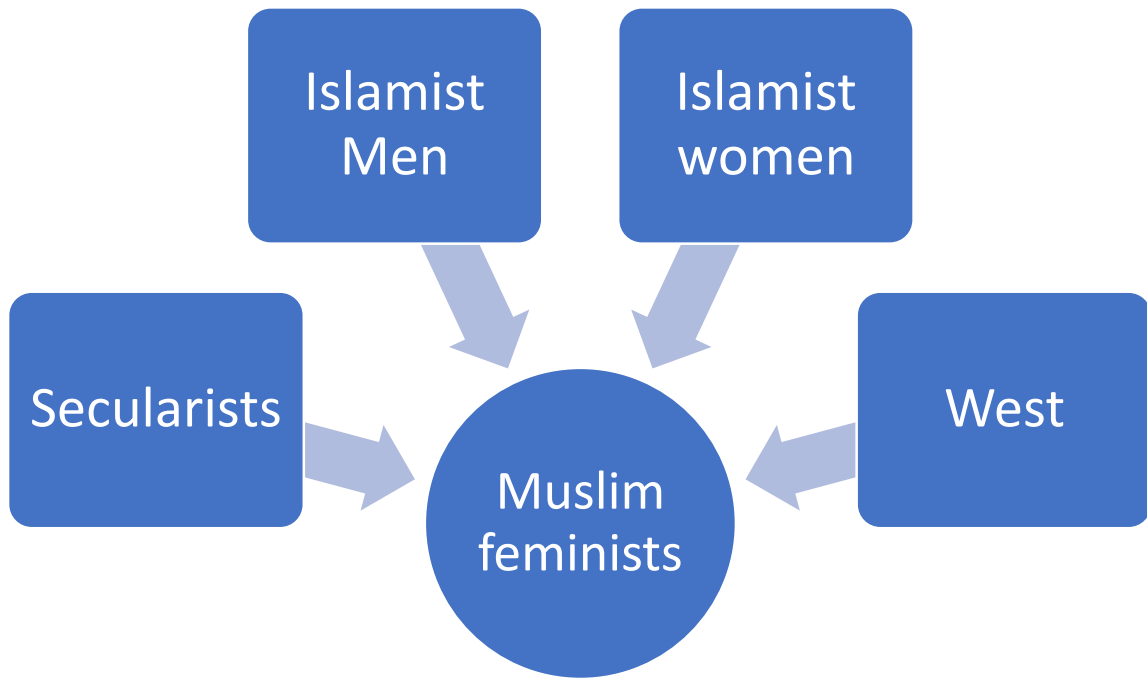*Figure 11:* Muslim Secular Feminisms

Figure 12: Critics of Muslim Feminisms

Table 3: A Review of Academic Work on Pakistani Fiction

Author	Year	Method	Theme	Writers/Works Under Study
Lisa Lau	2002	Close Reading	Representation of women	Indian Writings
Summer Pervez	2007	Gilleze Deluze's philosophy	Transnationalism	Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureshi, Meera Sayal, Monica Ali, Sunithi Namjoshi
Munawar Iqbal Ahmad	2009	Postcolonialism social theories of Foucault, Gramsci, and Althusser.	socio-political evolution of Pakistan	*Twilight in Delhi*; *Murder of Aziz Khan*; *Moth Smoke*
Shazra Salam	2011	Body	Body	*The Bride*; *Water*
Cristy Lee Duce	2011	Postcolonial	Gender understanding, romance and intimacy	*The Reluctant Fundamentalist, The Wasted Vigil, Trespassing Burnt Shadows*
Amber Fatima Riaz	2012	multimodal	Veil	Blasphemy; Mass Transit
Zia Ahmad	2012	Postcolonial Feminism	Representation of Women	Pakistani writers from 1940-2005
Abu-Bakar Ali	2012	Close Reading	Postcolonialism, trans-nationalism, romance	*Godfather; Tempest in Autumn*; *Parbati, Grandma's Tale*; *The Holy Woman; An American Brat*, *Kartography; Trespassing*
Madeline Amelia Clements	2013	Close Reading	Politics of global affinity and affiliation	*Kartography; Broken Verses; Burnt Shadows; Moth Smoke; Reluctant Fundamentalist; Maps*

				for Lost Lovers; The Wasted Vigil; Shalimar The Clown; The Enchanters of Florence
Gohar Karim Khan	**2013**	**Transnationalism**	**9/11**	*The Reluctant Fundamentalist; How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*; *Burnt Shadows*; *The Wasted Vigil; In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*
Fariha Chaudary	**2013**	**Feminist Approach**	**Female Body**	*The Pakistani Bride 1990; Ice Candy Man1998; The Holy Woman 2001; Typhoon 2003*
Nadia Z. Hasan	**2015**	**Ethnography**	**Piety Politics**	**Muslim women's Organizations**
Charlotte Bryan	**2017**	**semiotics, feminist, and postcolonial criticisms**	**Media narratives**	**I am Malala**

Table 4: A Review of Academic Work on Arab Fiction

Author	Year	Method	Theme	Writers/Works Under Study
Malika Mehdi	1993	Feminism	Critique of women as subordinate sex.	Algerian writings
Jennifer S. King	2003	Paul Weh's "Conflict mapping guide"	Islamic feminism vs. Western feminism	Nonfiction works
Tayyiba Rehman	2005	Case Study	Ideological Evolution	Fatima Mernissi' works
Amal al-Ayoubi	2006	Polysystem, manipulation, and reception theories	Reception of Arab Women	Nawal el Sadawi, Hanan al-Shaykh and Sahar Khalifa
Safina Lakahani	2008	Postcolonialism	Orientalism	Margot Badran and Mariam Cook's works
Anne Johanna Tuppurainen	2010	Eclectic framework of religious studies, feminist-qualitative research and Islamic feminist studies	Challenges faced by Muslim Women	Leila Ahmad, Elizabeth Fernea, Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud.
Saiyma Aslam	2010	Close Reading	Status of Arab Muslim women	Mernissi and Saadawi
Ching-Ling She	2010	Nationalism, Feminism	Nationalism, Feminism	Huda Shaarawi, Zainab al-Ghazali; Nawal El Sadawi; Latifa al-Zayyat; Ibtihal Salem; Alifa Riffat; Salwa Bakr; Adhaf Soueif
Taghreed Mahmoud Abu Sarhan	2011	Close Reading	Alternative female voices	Harem Years by Huda Sha'arawi, A Mountainous Journey a Poet's Autobiography by Fadwa Tuqan, A Daughter of Isis

				by Nawal El Saadawi, and Dreams of Trespass, Tales of a Harem Girlhood by Fatima Mernissi
Yousef Awad	2011	Close Reading	Transcultural Dialogue	include Fadia Faqir's *My Name is Salma*; Diana Abu-Jaber's *Arabian Jazz* and *Crescent*; Adhaf Soueif's *The Map of Love*; Lila Halaby's *West of Jordan* and *Once in Promised Land*
Firouzeh Ameri	2012	Close Reading	Women's Identities	*The Translator* (1999) and *Minaret* (2005) by Leila Aboulela, *Does my head look big in this?* (2005) by Randa Abdel-Fattah, *Sweetness in the belly* (2005) by Camilla Gibb and *The girl in the tangerine scarf* (2006) by Mohja Kahf
Abdullah H A Alfuzan	2013	concept of city	Religion, freedom, alienation, war, extremism	Arabic literature (Saudi) from 1980 to 2011
Angeline Rebecca Binti	2016	Feminism	Women's Concerns	*Imam's Daughter*
Sherin Hany Abd Rabouh	2017	Simone de Beauvoir's women as 'second sex', Michel Foucault's notions of discourse, Giambattista Vico's concept of history, Said's notion of 'feminised orient'	Womanhood	Nawal El Saadawi's *The Fall of the Imam* and Gabriel García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*

Table 5: A Review of Academics Research on Postfeminism and Chick-lit

Author	Year	Short Title	Key Points
Barbara Kastelein	1994	Popular/ Postfeminism and Popular Literature	'women on sex', 'crime writing', and 'literature of popular therapy'
Kristen Gange	2001	*Ally Mcbeal* and the Problem of Postfeminism	Ally—a postfeminist woman
Jennifer P. Barber	2006	Indian Chick-Lit: Form and Consumerism	Maintaining a complex hybrid identity
Michele M. Glasburgh	2006	Chick Lit: New Face of Postfeminist Fiction	Susan Faludi' 'backlash theory'
Emily Mathisen	2010	A Textual Analysis of Book Review of Critically Acclaimed Chick Lit	Reception of Chick-lit
Amanda Soza	2014	Girls will be Girls: Discourse, Poststructuralist Feminism, and Media	The application of Foucault's notions of discourse
Angeline Masowa	2016	Gender and Humour: Complexities of Women's Image Politics	representation of women in humour
Natalija Gulei	2017	(De)Construction of Gender Stereotypes in Helen Fielding's Novels	Close reading to deconstruct gender stereotypes

Table 6: A Review of Linguistic Study of Literature

Author	Year	Short Title	Key Points
Lindsey Ann Hewitt	1992	A Sociolinguistic Study of Literary Dialect	Sociolinguistic analysis of 'literary dialect' to see its communicative functions
Kalaivahni Muthiah	2009	Fictionalized Indian English Speech and the Representation of Ideology	Fowler and Chelliah's framework to do a linguistic study of Indian Anglophone Fiction
Muhammad Ali	2012	Language Appropriation in Thousand Splendid Suns	Linguistic concepts of Ashcroft, Kachru, Chelliah and Muthiah to study how Khalid Hussein
Muhammad Sheeraz	2014	Cultural and Ideological Representations through Pakistanization of English	Sixteen features of Pakistani English Fiction, three-dimensional model of postcolonial linguistic critique

Table 7: A Review of Discourse Approaches

Discourse Approach	Key Studies	Key Concepts
Ethnography of communication	Saville-Troike, 1989; Schieffelin, 1990; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1990	Linguistic Anthropology, Language Socialization
Interactive sociolinguistics	Schiffrin, 1984; Tannen, 1984, 1993	Interaction patterns in small social groups
Genre analysis	Johns, 1997; Swales, 1990	Structure of Academic Discourse Communities
Systemic linguistics	Halliday, 1978, 1998	Focus on textual structure drawing upon social semiotics
Critical discourse analysis	van Dijk, 1998	Drawing upon social theories the study of ideology in language