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**ENGLISH: PAKISTANI FEMINISTS AND ISLAMIC STUDIES  
SCHOLARS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT FEMINISM  
AND GENDER ROLES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT:**

*The paper aimed to explore the perceptions of the Pakistani Islamic scholars and feminist activists regarding the concept of feminism, gender roles, sexual orientations and reproductive rights. A qualitative research method was employed to investigate this phenomena and the study adopted a social constructionist epistemology. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to determine the sample. A total number of 16 research participants (8 feminists, 8 Islamic scholars) in the age bracket of 40-55 years were selected and in-depth interviews were undertaken with them. The study concludes that feminists and Islamic scholars agreed that feminism was a movement for women emancipation but differed on the points where Islamic scholars thought that the movement had some Western and men-excluding ideologies. Gender roles were thought to be a social construct by the feminists while Islamic scholars stressed on the complementarities of gender roles. However, both groups agreed that compulsion in roles assignment was uncalled for. Many of the differences that had been enmeshed in the minds of both sides were merely a*

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*misinterpretation of Islamic scripture or faulty cultural norms, which had been disguised and portrayed as religious injunctions. Both groups felt that a collective discourse of academia and development sector is needed to reach a mutual platform where both groups can work together for the betterment of women and dispel the misconceptions attached to each side.*

**KEYWORDS:** Gender Roles, Reproductive rights; Feminism; Sexual

### **Introduction**

The altercation between religion and feminism started right from the inception of this concept. During the French renaissance, a group of notable women got up and raised their voices against the atrocities being inflicted upon women in the name of religion. The church took this upheaval as a blow on the religious injunctions and openly criticized the women movement and categorized it as mayhem to disrupt the conventional religious practices. Such an attitude of the Church towards women movements which in future identified themselves as feminist movements was a reason enough for the religious entities from all faiths to condemn the feminist movement and its adherents<sup>1</sup>. All the major religions are seen in the same light and accounted for but Islam particularly has gained a reputation for being anti-woman and for aiding a segregated social system when women are economically and politically disassociated<sup>2</sup>. According to many commentators, Muslim women have come to live under a particularly conformist patriarchal gender-based

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<sup>1</sup> Jakubiak, M. and Murphy, S. (1986), Feminism and Religion. *Counseling and Values*, 31: 157–164. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-007X.1986.tb00487.x

<sup>2</sup> Hashim, I. (1999). Reconciling Islam and feminism. [Special Issue]. *Gender and Development*, 7(1), 7-14. doi: 10.1080/741922938

system that embraces Islam and Shari'a in its most reactionary and inflexible form regarding Muslim women<sup>3</sup>.

However, other commentators disagree with such a view, arguing that Islam provides significant rights for women, which are often far more extensive than the rights which secular legal systems provide for a state's female citizens. Islam's class-less message warrants unalienable rights to Muslim women, namely the right to life, the right to obtain education, the right to conduct business, the right to inherit and maintain property, and the right to keep their names<sup>4</sup>. The Islamic scholars and activists simplify their case of women quality in Islam through this Quranic verse. Distinctively, it states, "He has made for you mates of your own kind" (42:12), and "He it is who has created you from a single soul and made there from its mates, so that the male might incline towards the female and find comfort in her" (7:190).

However, Islamic scholars at the same time are frequently mistrustful of feminism, because they see the feminist emphasis on equal rights as at odds with the Islamic notion of the complementarities of the sexes, and the specific roles and rights laid down for men and women, which they believe reflect their particular strengths and weaknesses<sup>5</sup>. Many Islamic activists/scholars mainly argue that feminism is a Western secular concept that is trying to break the strong institute of family in

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<sup>3</sup> Abu-sharaf, A. (2006). Women in Islamic communities: The quest for gender justice research. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 28(3), 714-728. doi: 10.1353/hrq.2006.0027

<sup>4</sup> McGuire, M. B. (2002). *Religion: The social context*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

<sup>5</sup> Afshar, H. (1997). Women and work in Iran. *Journal of Political Studies*, 45(1), 755-67. doi: 10.1111/1467-9248.00110

Islamic traditions by ending the tags on assigned roles to men and women. By doing so, it is going against the principles of Islam, which is egalitarian in itself<sup>6</sup>.

As a result of such conflicting and dichotomous ideas and controversies, relationship between Feminism and Islam is quickly becoming a topic of widely grown interest in studies of Muslim countries<sup>7</sup>. However, one needs to understand that one cannot presuppose that Muslim women all over the world are under the same shadow since the interpretation of Islam and practices in every country vary from one another.

Although considerable research has been done in Pakistan on the issue of feminism but surprisingly hardly any substantial research exists which takes into account the views of the Islamic and feminist perspective alongside. This paper brings together distinguished women and men researchers, academics, activists who are self-proclaimed feminists and Islamic studies scholars who will give their expert opinion on the perception of feminism, views on gender roles, differing sexual orientation and reproductive rights. It aims to investigate whether an actual opposition exists in principles of Islamic teaching and feminist school of thought or there is a line of connectivity between each other in a way or another which can help foster a mutual platform that can help elevate the status of Pakistani women and shun the stereotypes that have been created nationally and internationally about them having an antagonistic

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<sup>6</sup> Ezzat, H. R. (2000). Secularism, the state and the social bond: The withering away of the family. In J. Esposito & A. Tamimi (Eds), *Islam and secularism in the Middle East*. New York: New York University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Cornell, D. (1998). *At the heart of freedom: Feminism, sex and equality*. USA: Princeton University Press.

relationship. This paper also aims to dispel the constant contention that exists between these two schools of thoughts by getting to know through people who are well read and informed in their respective fields. Although there are a variety of theories and ideologies recounted to feminism globally; legal feminism, Marxist feminism, cultural feminism, liberal feminism, post-modern feminism but this research simplistically bases upon feminism movement in Pakistan which currently is not married with many prefixes.

### **Research Methodology**

This research study involves understanding the perceptions of Islamic scholars and feminists regarding the phenomena of feminism, gender roles, differing sexual orientation and reproductive rights hence the type of qualitative research design used was phenomenology.

### **Selection of Participants**

The sample included 16 research participants in the age bracket of 40-55. Eight males and eight females were selected purposefully through snowball sampling. All participants belong to the upper socio-economic strata and shared the same race and religion (Islam). The sample was divided into two groups, i) 8 Feminists and ii) 8 Islamic scholars.

#### **Inclusion criteria for Feminists**

- Self-proclaimed feminists.
- Experience of 10 years or more in the field for women rights. (activists)
- Experience in academia/research of 10 years or more. (academicians)

### **Inclusion criteria for Islamic scholars**

1. Moderate Islamic scholars with a doctorate degree in Islamic Studies
2. Experience of 10 years or more in the field for women issues. (activists)
3. Experience in academia/research of 10 years or more. (academicians)

### **Sources of Data**

The major source for this particular research was empirical data which was gathered from field work. The empirical data comprised of in-depth interviews with the academicians and activists. Besides in depth interviews, other sources were also consulted such as religious texts, books, published researches, articles, blogs and websites to completely explore the holistic view of the research area.

### **Construction of In-depth interview guide**

The in-depth interview guide was designed according to the research rule. The first part was based on demographics not only to get the general information, but also to make the respondent feel at ease and to develop a friendly environment for sharing persona information and views to make the in depth interview fruitful. The second part of the in depth interview consisted of general questions about the topic to prepare the respondents for deeper investigation. The third portion consisted of the semi-structured key questions which fulfilled the actual purpose of this research. The last portion of the interview was based upon general recommendations to get the valuable views of the respondents. The questions of the in depth interview were open ended and unambiguous.

The guide was designed logically in such a manner that maximum information was gathered without any hard to the respondent's interests. The tool was made in English and translated in Urdu alongside but since all the respondents were educated enough, there did not come a need to use the translated version.

### **Data Analysis**

All the participants allowed audio-taping the entire interview session. Confidentiality as well as anonymity of participants was assured and therefore factitious names were used in the study. Transcription of the verbatim was started the day after completion of our tape-recorded interviews. The interviews duration lasted for 35 minutes on an average and it took approximately more than three hours to transcribe them each. The verbatim of the research participants was not only transcribed but also aspects of paralanguage (pauses, soft tone, stuttering etc.). The data was analyzed thoroughly by giving it a reading at least thrice and tried to make sense out of it. Quotes were highlighted that were found to be significant. Afterwards, the data was divided into smaller units termed as categories or sub-themes. Later on, the sub-themes were reintegrated that were related to each other and the major ideas, patterns, or themes were unfolded that emerged from the analysis. In the end, common themes across cases were interpreted by discussing how the findings from this study linked with the findings from past studies in this area.

### **Findings**

There were four main overarching questions in this qualitative study which were followed by probing questions to get to an understanding of the views of Islamic and Feminist schools of thought.

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Islamic school of thought is divided in several groups but this research specifically embarked on interviewing people who belonged to the reformative movement i.e. the one which believe in keeping the historic and main crux of Islamic values alive along with keeping up with modern contextual studies. Similarly, liberal feminists were chosen since they are the ones most active in feminist activity in Pakistan. The researchers sought to get an understanding of how the concept of feminism was conceived by the Islamic and feminists. Although there are several types and variations of the feminist movement but all over the world, but there is a specific version of feminism to which a person seems to identify with so we desire to see how differently or similarly the two groups identified with the movement. Secondly, the researchers wished to find perspective on the gender roles concept as to whether they are specified for either of the gender or not. Thirdly, this study aimed at finding out the views on differing sexual orientation. And lastly, freedom and decision making power in the reproductive rights of women were discussed to gain a deeper insight.

It is not a goal of qualitative research to generalize findings<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, it was not the purpose to confine the participants' understanding in an attempt to generalize the findings to all of the Islamic and feminist school of thought population. Our aim was to capture the units of implication and significance from each individual experience and unite them together to capture the essences of their shared perceptions of these phenomenon. The themes and sub-themes which emerged from the

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<sup>8</sup> Patel, R. (1991). *Socio-economic political status, and women and law in Pakistan*. Karachi: Faiza Publishers.



data collected through interviews were descriptively analyzed and the similarities and differences in viewpoints of both schools of thought were described side by side.

### **Feminism: The Concept**

All of the sixteen participants agreed that feminism was a movement for women rights and women have been fighting a long struggle for recognition in the society. Almost all of them were of the view that the women had been on the depriving end in the rights issue. Many of them gave a brief history about the movement of feminism in the world while others discussed how feminism shaped in Pakistan. But in gist, it was unanimously depicted as a movement vouching for women rights. For instance, Ali stated, *“Feminism for me.... if I have to give it a simplistic definition is the movement to give half the population of this world i.e. the women their due rights and give them the peace and status they deserve. It aims to bring the women at par with the men in every way. It is not a competition between men or women as it is conceived by the conservatives nor is it that women who have some sort of a grudge with men, they are its originators. It is simply a conscious effort by conscientious people if I may say so to work for a society, a world where there is no bias based on gender”*.

Whilst the participants from Islamic school of thought also felt that it was a women’s right movement, but they saw feminism through the lens of religion. Just like Jehanara argued, *“Feminism in my opinion, being a Muslim woman, is a movement that gives rights to women that have been given by Islam but denied by the society. We can focus on such things and it gives us an opportunity to keenly observe and evaluate our society and see where we are lacking because we stand at a point in time where we*

*simply cannot close our eyes and blindly follow 'religion' because that's what it say since there a lot of misinterpretations of religion around the world. You must prove and justify them using legitimate evidence. You have to know and understand the feminist movement and being Muslim women you have to see how it fits into your society and for me this is the importance and perspective of feminism”.*

Although the main concept of feminism being a women rights movement was described as the same by participants of both groups but a sub theme emerged in the Islamic perspective as most of them thought that the way feminist movement conducted itself it seemed as if it was wary of the male population and had a disliking for them. For example, Isra said, “....there is a strong sense in which you feel that feminist movement sidelines the men and get a feeling that it is an anti-man movement. They should also involve men with them since by sidelining them they only endorse the fact that women are a special entity and they should have special privileges”.

Although this concern was mainly pointed out by Islamic group, Badriyah from the feminist group also acknowledged that unfortunately the vibes that feminism movement gave is that of a men-repelling movement. “Feminism appears to have turn into a polarizing term, and thusly regularly misses the mark in its definitive mission: sexual orientation equity”.

Nearly half of the participants having Islamic perspective felt that feminist movement is a Western concept and its foundations are rooted in the West, hence, its notions are not compatible with the religious and cultural values of Pakistan. They also felt that this movement may have its

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advantages and benefits for women but its hidden Western agenda makes it hard to digest. As Nauman commented, “... *feminism is a movement for women rights, which wants women to have as many rights as men and as much respect as men which is completely appreciable but there are some hidden agenda from the West in this movement too which they want to project. I feel Islam and feminism can work together if this movement keeps in mind the context of the area it is projecting itself in*”.

On the other hand, Ali from the feminist group accredited the fact that feminism was a Western concept as was thought by half of the population in Pakistan but if it was something useful, it should be given a chance. “*Also, another big opposition this movement gets is the notion that it is a western agenda/movement. Heck, yes, it grew from the West but what if we take some good from the West. Will it become a sin? Does our religion condemn taking anything from the West? As far as I know, Islam doesn’t even consider boundaries. Do you reject a newly converted Muslim because he is from West, no, right? That is because he is bringing goodness with him. Similarly, if a good concept is coming from West, adopt it but of course shape it within your religious and societal norm...no issues then*”.

### **Gender Equality**

Scholars from both the groups agreed that men and women are born equal and have no reason for either of them to feel superior over one another. Gender equality means having equal opportunities and equal rights for women just like men. Dania commented on equality of men and women and rights issue in this way, “*What I mean by equal rights is in terms of actually there are three determinants that one should consider*

*when you look for equality of rights: First is access, the accessibility of education of men and women should be the same. The second is equal enjoyment; the space given at home or outside should be the same irrespective of whether you're a man and a woman. Thirdly, outcome should be equal. I can give you specific examples, for instance in terms of equality of outcome for instance working in an institution at the same level, at the same hierarchy the pay scale would be different for the man and the woman. This is what the concept of equal pay for equal work is about. Because she's a woman she's earning less maybe because men are better at negotiations so they receive a better package. So, accessibility, enjoyment and outcome are the determinants that define that there is reality between men and women”.*

The participants from the Islamic school of thought were in full agreement that the men and women are equal as human being but almost all of them raised the point that there is a difference between being equal and similar. All of them quoted one or another verse from the Quran or a ahadith explaining how Islam has kept the status of both men and women equal. Kanita stated, *“Islam completely endorses equal rights for men and women. Women and men should have equal rights for sure but equality certainly does not mean similarity. So let's not create a havoc over Islamic rights given to women or men on the point that they are not similar. They just cannot be similar since men and women are not similar in their personalities and approaches. Islam is actually the religion which realizes that men and women are made such that they complement each other hence they have complementary rights and in no way one of the other gender can claim that they are lesser or more in any way. It is stated in Quran.... “In Allah's eyes, better is the person who is better in piety”, so*

*it has been made very clear that no preferences are based on gender in Islam only in deeds and ‘Tāqwā’.*

All of the sixteen participants felt that there was no such differentiation in men and women differing in their intellectual capacities. The gender played no part in any way over the capacities in intellectual arena. The feminists and Islamic participants both agreed that such a presumption had existed because of the societal and cultural set up which had allowed only the men to reach the elevated positions in the market and corporate jobs. However, the Islamic thought participants were also of the view since women tend to have a nature of nurturing. They are more suitable for taking care of children and household.

### **Gender Roles**

The feminist participants agreed that specification of roles for each sex is a construct formed by the society and it has nothing to do with a gender’s natural instincts. They argued that since birth a girl is treated in a way which makes her realize that she is fragile, sensitive person and that she is expected to be taking care of the house and family, whilst, the boys are encouraged to be tough and physically strong, providers of the family. Further, almost all of them agreed that there is no compulsion as to whether a man should be the earning hand and the woman be the care taker of the family. They felt that this matter should be based on the free will of the individual not because belonging to specific gender curtailed that. As Anum said, *“I don’t believe into people being put into fixed roles simply because they are man and a woman as long as the marriage works and they are earning are okay with the distribution of roles so even if you want to go ahead with the gender division of labor where one is working*

*while the other one is at home that fine but I think it is up to the individuals regarding how they want to distribute the labor, if a man wants to be home doing chores, and woman wants to work then that is how it should be*". Similarly Ghazanfar supported the same views in these words and made clear that these gender roles are decided by society, religion and physiology does not have anything to do with it. *"What if a woman wants to earn and do the living while a man wants to take care of the house and kids..... we are talking about equality of rights, then there should be equality of roles too. Gender roles are defined by our society and environment not subscribed by religion or any dictionary"*.

Another argument put forward by feminists was that gender roles are defined to uphold male superiority in the society. This setting in which a man is to provide the financial and physical security, a woman becomes dependent on the man as a result she is bound to obey in no matter what and in such circumstances, the male folks take advantage of their situation and indulge in discriminatory and unjustified practices. As Farooq mentioned this notion in these words, *"I feel specified and assigned gender roles are the first attestation of male supremacy and are the root to sexism, on the grounds that they oblige that everybody accommodate and assume their particular part and that there should be a set pattern. In this setting man gets to have an upper hand and the woman his subordinate so naturally a form of injustice prevails"*.

On the other hand, the Islamic scholars thought that a man and woman had been given specified roles, in which a man is to earn and protect his family while woman is to take care of the family and household. The physiological and psychological anatomy of men and women is different, therefore, Islam has bestowed upon them roles to

complement their personalities. As Kanita said, *“Men and women have been made in a way that they complement each other in every aspect of life. Where man is aggressive, woman is tender, where man is tough, woman is sensitive, where man is mentally tough, woman is emotionally strong, where man is physically strong, and woman is fragile. I am not implying that it does not happen vice versa, it does happen but those are exceptions. And no, I do not buy the logic that society makes them learn these things and traits, some things are just innate”*. Furthermore, another scholar Osama said, *“Settlement on these roles of a man and woman does not create an unequal hierarchy or is not violation of rights of any gender, and rather it blends harmoniously into a family system which creates a bliss over all”*.

Although the Islamic scholars emphasized on the segregation of gender roles, but they also argued that by assigning man the earning hand role, it does not imply that women cannot work; they can work if there is a need in the family or even if they wish to work and can manage between their responsibilities. The example of Holy Prophet SAW was also given by scholars as how he helped in house chores and used to do his own work. *“Islam provided such a liberating platform for women, that if a woman works, her earning is only hers, she is not bound to give it to her husband or spend it in house”*, Osama comment.

### **Different Sexual Orientations**

The feminist activists did not see having different sexual orientations any issue or a threat to society. Sexuality is a fluid concept and something which could not be controlled externally cannot be reprimanded and sidelined like a taboo. Badriya felt strongly over this

issue and commented, *“This is very much a person’s body that dictates him/her about who he/she wants to have a relationship with..... Do not bring the sermons in it please. Everybody knows that this attraction thing is innate so how can you oppose an innate feeling? Ellahi also had similar views, “Well I am nobody to judge somebody’s sexual preferences nor is someone to judge mine, right? It’s his or her choice, right. If, however, God has created these kinds of people since centuries who the hell am I to object their preferences. This is not a new phenomenon, lesbianism and gays especially in this part of the world. So, I’ve no problem with them. If a person has a different sexual orientation, it is his/her problem, as long as it does not affect others in a way of infidelity or trespassing others. It’s like, you know, everybody has their own will, I respect their... I mean everybody deserves respect”.*

On the contrary, the Islamic scholars gave a completely contradicting perspective. It is an unnatural phenomenon which defied the normal dynamics of a human being. Scholars gave reference of the Quran which described ‘Qaum-e-Loot’, which was destructed due to their homosexual tendencies. They admonished the concept of ‘freedom of expression and living’. They felt that unbounded liberties have led the society to forget their inner true self and spirituality and made it to unleash the animal in it. Isra said, *“I think a man is a combination of body and soul. When your inner animal overcomes your soul then you deny spirituality. When man thinks himself beyond this spirituality, he becomes unnecessarily independent. He thinks that he is not accountable to anyone. Then man becomes only an object in hand of his self-defeating desires”.*

Scholars described homosexuality an illness/character which has been falsely given a label of free will or innate phenomenon. And in



creating this illness, the society's ever increasing exposure of all sorts of content that add frustration and desperation in the masses. They argued that if it had been a natural instinct, Allah would not have accorded it as such a major sin and kept such a severe punishment for it since He is an all knowing being. Misbah asserted, *"If a person is sexually malfunctioned, you should treat it as an illness. Is he is living his life like rest of the 99.9 % people? No, he's not..... Is his body biologically functioning the way it should, no, it's not..... He's not reproducing biologically. That means he is an ill person. Why do we call it an orientation? Why don't we label him as ill? If it would have concept, Allah would not kept its punishment so strict. Secondly, let's face it society is adding too much of exposure and giving a great deal of unrequited liberty"*.

### **Reproductive Rights**

All the feminists had the consensus that the reproductive rights, which includes choice in child birth, child space or using contraception etc. be the right of a woman. They argued that it is the woman who has to bear the pre and post pregnancy issues, thus it must be woman's decision to have when and how many children to be born. However, the feminists also thought that husband's wishes and desires should also be taken in consideration but husband's wish came as secondary as compared to the woman. As Hamid expressed, *"It is the woman's body which has to go through all these processes, so she should be the one making the decision too. Husband if he is a good one and they have a happy relationship, then mutual decision would be great in this regard. Otherwise through and through it is her body ultimately, so her choice!"*

The participants of Islamic school of thought touted that the rights concerning child birth, child space and contraception involved constituting a family, so all these decision should be taken mutually by husband and wife. Kanita said, *“Of course, women have to make this decision since they know well about their body conditions and circumstances about whether they can take care of the new born baby well but having said that, the final decision she makes should be made after the consultation with her husband as this decision is about creating or not creating a family. And a family does not get formed in a void, your partner is equally responsible...either husband or a wife...of course wife gets to have more leverage since she also is responsible in practically giving birth....so I’d rather say decision should be mutual in an ideal relationship. And if the relationship is not ideal then of course, woman needs to stand up for herself”*.

While the feminists saw the right of contraception as a fundamental right and saw it as basic as the right of child birth. Badriya was of the opinion that, *“..... contraception is such a basic right, that at this time and age, we do not even need to debate over its permissibility or non-permissibility. And I feel we do not need to bring religion into this since I believe Allah is very compassionate and he would always want the welfare of His being. If the woman or for that matter a man does not desire a child whether because of having hands full or for medical reasons, He would want to keep His being happy so putting restrictions in the name of religion is plain wrong”*.

Islamic scholars thought that contraception was allowed in Islam but there are certain prescribed ways in the Sharia which one has to follow. However, many of them raised their concerns and reservations

regarding the wide spread birth control campaigns. They felt that bringing a private and personal domain into the public sphere did not make sense and only added to unnecessary exposure to other's lives. Isra said, "*I do not see why it is believed that Islam does not allow contraception. It very much does but yes there are specified ways to go about it. Any method which results in killing of the zygote as a part of contraception is not allowed in Islam. And the other thing, these wide spread mass level birth control campaigns do not make any sense...why you are bringing a private and personal familiar issue into the public. You cannot dictate others what they would want to do*".

## **Discussion**

This study embarked on seeking the views of two schools of thoughts; the Islamic Reformatives and Liberal Feminists on the perception of feminism, gender roles, differing sexual orientation and reproductive rights. While through the process and quest of this study, it was found that since the inception of the movement of feminism, religion and feminism have been on the contradictory stands. Elliot, a renowned researcher and feminist was of the opinion that the religious entities found it a threat to their traditional values while the feminists saw religion an obstruction in achieving their goals<sup>9</sup>. However, this present study did not see the participants belonging to feminists and Islamic school of thoughts in total opposition of each other. Although, they did differ in a few positions but the contradiction was not too wide. Both of the groups' participants conceived the movement of feminism as a women's rights

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<sup>9</sup> Elliot, C. (2008, August 19). I am not praying [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/aug/19/gender.religion>

movement aimed at alleviating the status of women in the society and bringing them at par with men. However, the Islamic scholars also adhered to the notion of feminism as a Western concept and had some hidden agenda which was in negation of Islamic values and cultural values although not entirely. Hashim (1999) also endorsed this notion in his article stating that since feminism term and movement was coined in the West, the Muslims and feminists have an antagonistic relationship as the West has had a biased attitude towards Muslims. Although the Islamic group participants did agree with many of the issues raised by the feminist movement, some of them voiced their opinion that this movement sometimes reeked of being a male-repellent or men-excluded movement which gives off wrong meaning<sup>10</sup>. Since any movement cannot be complete without taking in account both the genders. Ali (2008) also expressed how some tactics and traits of feminist movement make people believe it to be a man hating movement compelling women to leave their male counterparts and be independent<sup>11</sup>.

Views on gender roles among the participants of two school of thoughts differed on the point that feminists thought gender roles as a social construct and have no relationship between physiologies of psychology of a gender. They also asserted that patriarchal society had fed the specific roles into the masses. This notion is also endorsed by Mirkin (1999) who believed that women and men were fed a specific role into

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<sup>10</sup> Hashim, I. (1999). Reconciling Islam and feminism. [Special Issue]. *Gender and Development*, 7(1), 7-14. doi: 10.1080/741922938

<sup>11</sup> Ali., Rasheed, S., Mahmood., Amina., Moel., Joy., . . . Leslie. (2008). A qualitative investigation of Muslim and Christian women's views of religion and feminism in their lives. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 14(1), 38-46. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.14.1.38>

their minds since their inception and man was given an authority which seemed like a feasible pattern for the men folk so the trend remained<sup>12</sup>. On the other hand, Islamic group participants agreed that some patriarchal traditions were responsible for the way women were made to perform only the specific roles but Islamic Sharia has also given man the breadwinner duty and woman the care taker duty and their duties are complementing their needs and personalities not in any way lowering the woman's status. They believed that Islam is a religion which encouraged both genders to be a helping hand to each other, but Allah has given supremacy to men over women as being guardian and protector of women. Lorber (1994) also states that people or families stuck to traditional and maladapted cultural values were the ones that made man a supreme being<sup>13</sup>. However, some of the scholars added that the verses in the Qur'an and traditions in the Hadith that suggest male superiority were meant for a specific sociopolitical context in which patriarchy was a part of the social fabric and not a religious doctrine<sup>14</sup>.

The analysis shows that the views on differing sexual orientation were poles apart of both the groups. While the feminists believed that it was individual's personal matter whether they felt attracted to the opposite gender or the same gender. Furthermore, this orientation was a matter of innate spirits and an outsider cannot dictate that to someone. Damji in his 2003 research also endorses the concept of free will. On the other hand,

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<sup>12</sup> Mirkin, H. (1999). The pattern of sexual politics: Feminism, homosexuality and pedophilia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 37(2), 1-24. doi: 10.1300/J082v37n02\_01

<sup>13</sup> Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of gender*. New York: Yale University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Bari, F. (2000). *Women in Pakistan: Country briefing paper*. Manila: Asian Development Bank.

the Islamic perspective participants opposed this concept vehemently and found it unnatural and defying the dynamics of normalcy. Renowned Jurist, Al-Hibri (1997) research also suggested that Muslims are in general averse to any orientation that deviates from normal<sup>15</sup>.

The literature suggests that in the beginning, many of the radical and socialist feminist movements viewed the concept of motherhood as a hurdle in the progress of women but later on feminists changed their standpoint. They found it as a beautiful concept but believed that reproductive rights should only reside with women. Sanger (1992) also endorsed that women were the sole decision maker in this regard. On the other hand, the Islamic participants believed that reproduction was a way of constituting a family and family is formed through husband and wife mutual input, hence, all such decisions should be taken with mutual consent<sup>16</sup>.

Conclusively, as shared by all the participants and found through data analysis, many of the arguments been plastered by feminists on Islamic school of thought are a result of mere misinterpretation of Islamic scriptures. Similarly, many of the thoughts that Islamic scholars hold against feminists are outcome of lack of knowledge of the area or association of radicalized feminist theory with the mainstream liberal feminism. Participants of both sides agreed that many of the cultural norms were the reason of discrimination and patriarchy which were adhered by the masses perceiving them as carrying religious significance.

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<sup>15</sup> Al-Hibri, A. (1997). Islam, law and custom: Redefining Muslim women's rights. *American University International Law Review*, 12(1), 1-44.

<sup>16</sup> Sangers, M. (1922). *Woman and the new race*. New York: Library of Alexandria.

Some of the participants were of the point of view that many of Quranic references were taken out of context by Islamic preachers, leaders and local tribe-head so as to maintain their supremacy within false realm and guise of religion. This paper suggests and concludes that modern social norms are changing, most significantly in expectations about gender roles and this primarily is because the moderate religious leaders and scholars are working hard to eradicate the misinterpreted Islamic theology. Religious beliefs and practices are a crucial element of how these norms and expectations are fashioned. This is the most noticeable in the public sphere but it is also imperative in private confines, especially in groups of people, where religious viewpoints can outline gender dynamics in many ways. What's needed, urgently, is a thoughtful conversation about how Islam and feminism are linked. There is a need to inculcate the understanding which honors and respects feminism's central commitment to true equal rights and women's religious tradition and dedication to their essential Islamic values.



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