DEPRESSING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE MISOGYNIST PROJECT OF POLITICAL ISLAM AND WESTERN ACADEMIA IN THE BACKDROP OF LITERARY WORK OF KHALED HOSSEINI "A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS"

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ABSTRACT: *This paper seeks to explore the role of political Islam, its relation with the West and its impact on the women of Afghanistan. It discusses the term political Islam, discourse issue of Islamic feminism, demonstrates the power of patriarchy and displays the Western project to support misogynist construction of Islam. It shows how the framework of Islamic feminism re-describes political Islam as a discursive establishment, simultaneously; it presents Esposito's insights on the representation of political Islam in the West. Furthermore, this paper investigates the subjugated Living of women focussing on an understanding the misogynist attempts that marginalize women. A small critique of some postcolonial works illustrating the chauvinist character of identity politics in Muslim societies is used to explore the set assumptions. Theoretical model of Islamic feminism provides methodology for analyses of A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007). This paper concludes that this novel presents a flourishing view of Islam and reinforces the need to educate the West about the Islamic concept of peace, tolerance and gender indiscrimination.*

KEYWORDS: Islamic Feminism, Representation, Patriarchy, Political Islam

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is an Islamic country and 84% of its population is Sunni Muslim. The majority of the population inhabit the remote/rural areas and are divided in tribal, ethnic and other clan based groups. Notwithstanding the attempts of the defunct Soviet Union to alter private and public life of Afghans into a secular one, as well as the US aid and support, nothing could significantly transform the life style of Afghans. Religion coloured with tribal and cultural traditions govern the system of life in Afghanistan and offer the essential source of living. They barely accept any contemporary legal system(s), but traditional customs and religious practices provide the very basis of their life setting the very foundations of political Islam by giving an allowance to governing elites and western academia to support one another on a dialectical level.

The term political Islam denotes the admittance of Islam into the secular province of politics. Islam, like any great religion, provides an extensive set of codes. It further adumbrates the belief that affairs of state is and must be a domain of the faith. First, political Islam pertains to conservative Islamic political parties and movements, which have discarded hostility and made a premeditated move in the direction of western styled politics through free elections.

Second, whereas radical groups are a danger to the region and to Western countries, including mainstream political Islam in the governance of their countries in the long run is good for domestic stability and regional security. It also serves the interests of Western powers in the region to promote and even pamper political Islam.

The rationale of this research is to highlight the beleaguered and intensely subjugated living of Afghan women in the backdrop of a nexus that latently exists between political Islam and the West. It would focus on understanding the propaganda attempts of Western academia to undermine Islam through politicizing its outlook by showing it as a misogynist religion. It would also embrace Islamic feminist standpoint emphasizing individual agency and tenders an academic apparatus to resist and challenge the chauvinist character of the continuing identity politics, predominantly political Islam. The aim of this study would be to facilitate women to subvert the authorities of political Islam as well as to challenge the monolith of western academia, and to observe what both political Islam and western academia promote and perform in the name of Islam and postmodernity respectively.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES & METHODOLOGY

This research pursues to investigate patriarchy in political Islam and representation or image of Islam in the West through the lens of Islamic feminism in A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) by Khalid Hosseini. The reason for this investigation is to illustrate that women have faced a surge of political Islam that has generally entailed a retrogressive gender agenda. While political Islam has brought about many hindrances for the individual rights of modernized and privileged urban upper and upper-middle class women, it has ironically pressed a growing number of formerly marginalized, lately urbanized middle class conventional women into social, political and religious activism. Therefore, it is significant to test the hypotheses that patriarchy drills its authority over women in varied ways by domestic physical mistreatment and by traumatizing the feminine psychology socially, economically, and politically; that there will be a negative correlation between the misogynist attempts of Western academia and politicized Islam; that the results for the changes required in the existing chauvinist character of the continuing identity politics, predominantly Islamism will be highly significant; and that there will be significant results for including the literary work of Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns in the framework of this study.

This paper seeks to show an urgent need to draw the influence of patriarchy over women. In addition to this need, studying the depressing connections between the misogynist project of political Islam and Western academia may possibly display their agenda. Furthermore, the existing sexist nature of the ongoing self/male political beliefs consciously instilled in Islam is giving support to the project of political Islam. The results of the study would demonstrate the need of the liberating women especially Afghan women and the changes that are significant to improve the existing tribal and traditional system of Islam in Afghanistan by depoliticizing this representation or the image of Islam in the West. This study plans to suggest that Afghan literary work written by Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) may contribute significantly to check the hypotheses made in this study. This study will contribute to encourage the local researchers in the understanding of localized possibilities of Islam. Integrating local Afghan literature is a step to raise consciousness about promoting cross-cultural understanding of Islam. Qualitative approach is being opted in order to test the aforementioned assumptions in an effective manner. This approach shall be quite

helpful to explore the issues according to the context, understanding the problems and getting new insights. This paper will be equally critical as well as descriptive in character. It will focus on the descriptive analysis of the four characters Mariam, Laila, Rasheed and Mullah Faizullah from Khaled Hosseini's A Thousand Splendid Suns (2009) significant in throwing light on the above made assumptions. Theoretical scaffold of Islamic Feminism props up this examination of four characters descriptively and analytically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rebecca Stuhr (2009) tenders the crux of the novel when she asserts that Hosseini tells the stories of Mariam and Laila, but he also narrates the story of Afghanistan depicting the role and place of women in Afghan society. The novel describes a changing Afghanistan, a nation of social, cultural, and economic plurality, a nation that has experienced hostile political disorder, a nation of heritage and history, and a nation of despair and desolation. Through Babi, Laila's school teacher's father, Hosseini projects the cultural and literary traditions of Afghanistan. The two giant Buddhas in Bamiyan symbolize religious broad-mindedness, warmth to the stranger, and a place of culture. Hosseini seems to fancy his readers to identify the other side of Afghanistan that was creative and thriving and rejects the constructed politicized outlook of Islam which is flaunted depressingly in the West (2009, pp 47-64).

It was found that West altered and wrongly depicted Islam and Muslim world. This anti-Islamic campaign has attained a massive proportion after the dissipation of communism. Before 9/11, there has been only a limited supply of research about coverage and portrayals of Muslims and Islam by the Western Media. Most of the research projects regarding images of Islam based on quantitative method of research. For the most part, quantitative studies have focused on specific types of Muslims, mainly Arab community. This paper is concerned with Afghan Muslim women. The issue may be raised, why bother? Why study Afghan Muslim women? The academic world by abandoning the study of Afghan Muslim women, keenly maintains this natural alliance of Islam and the Middle East. This is awkward, since it negates the authority and legitimacy of non-Arab Islam and Muslims. Moreover, by making the Middle East focal point, researchers further solidify and establish the accepted belief that Islam is a monolith and is devoid of diversity. In examining Afghan Muslim women, this paper contributes to the movement of Afghan Muslim women to a focal point in the discourse concerning Muslims and Islam.

Voiceless women of Afghanistan & Patriarchy

Afghanistan, like many countries, is a veteran of political differences over definitions of nationhood, modernity, identity, ethnicity and women's rights. However, the importance of the woman issue to the power conflicts between centre and margin and to concerns of ethnic and national identity in Afghanistan has largely been voiceless. In fact, prior to the rise of the Taliban, the implications these political conflicts have had on the status of Afghani women that were, in many cases, ruthless – have been largely unnoticed in the literature. The condition of women's rights in Afghanistan since its independence will be examined in the following brief review.

This study expresses that women's rights in Afghanistan have been absolutely challenged throughout various historical periods. Afghanistan, ever since its independence, has observed a reoccurring disagreement between cultural and individual, traditional and modern forces and this has intensely influenced the position of women. Notwithstanding the formal establishment of some women's rights principles, the patriarchal social makeup and ethnic feudalism influenced Afghani women experiencing first-rate life and rights in diverse ways.

The novel under spotlight begins with the birth of Laila 'the inqalibi girl' (2007, p. 71) in 1979, when the Soviets took over; their strategy toward Afghan women was one of far-reaching alterations. In their efforts to patent the method for the manufacturing of socialism, a series of actions were launched and the Soviets were resolute to put an end to out-dated practices and customs that degraded and subjugated women (Edgar, 2006: 252). Consequently, modifications in the status of women were introduced. Female education was essential in the construction of a new Afghan identity under the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). The Soviets also introduced strategies that prohibited forced marriages and a minimum marriage age was made mandatory, with a punishment of up to three years of imprisonment for violations (Skaine, 2002).

However, whilst this law supported the freedom of women, its plan was supposed to be as a straight and open attack on Afghan culture and custom. The resistance to the Soviet incursion was presented as a resistance to both Western and socialist influences, since both were seen as potentially undermining Islam through secular nature. During this period Afghan women were made captive to the belief that women's rights were western and that the modernizing government of Afghanistan was just replicating the so-called bankrupt western (or Soviet) model.

Skain (2002) surveys the Afghan history and proves that the militarization of [Afghani] society, mainly by male leaders in the past twenty years eased the reinvention of patriarchy. While a few protests to compulsory education for girls were a product of chauvinism, others derived from the view that educating women debased the women and the household because they were not properly veiled. Others alleged that such education, as is an attack on Afghan culture and identity and therefore an intolerable intrusion in domestic life. The mujahidin encouraged non-co-operation by girls to return to their homes in order to condemn the Soviet occupation. They undertook to re-establish educational institutions for girls when they thrived in ousting the outsiders.

Feminine lives under Taliban

The observers such as Sultani *et al*. (2009) demonstrate that the most solemn breaches of women's rights in Afghanistan occurred under the Taliban from 1994 to 2001. Women were beleaguered by intense subjugation and were viciously punished. Budding as a new martial, gendered and biased power, the Taliban declared that they are re-establishing peace and safety through the imposition of an austere Islamic system. Taliban's interpretations of Sharia and conventional ethnic regulations of justice were used to validate their plan. These in turn strictly influenced women's rights in Afghanistan. After capturing Kabul in 1996 and having power over of ninety percent of the country, the Taliban kept the Constitution in abeyance and issued religious rulings that prohibited women from holding government jobs and wearing a veil made mandatory. In civic life, women were to be covered from top to toe in a burqa. Women were not allowed to be dressed in white socks or white shoes (white being the colour of the Taliban flag). Also, it was indispensable for houses and buildings in community

outlook to have their windows dyed over if females were there. Illogically, throughout this gendered period, as all the economic activities came to a stop, poverty and food shortage led many women to turn into sex workers and some were forced to marry members of the Taliban as their way of ending prostitution. The Taliban's harassment was the most domineering in Kabul where most educated Afghan women studied, lived and worked.

Since the ouster of the Taliban in late 2001, the world has been informed that feminine lives have improved. Formerly restricted to their dwellings, girls were reported to be enrolled in schools. In 2008 girls constituted 35.5 percent of students (Sultani *et al*. 2009). Women and girls no longer tackle Taliban-era restrictions to gain access to health care services. Since 2004 the Afghani government and NGOs have initiated several programs targeted at improving women's status and public participation. Nevertheless, these enhancement and emancipation cover a more disheartening reality. Many women and girls in Afghanistan still continue to resist patriarchy. Many women do not access the health services and the main reason for this includes the absence of female physicians and health personnel (ibid, p.5). This research argues that despite major improvements after the Taliban regime was abolished; the livings of Afghan women are still entrenched in pervasive dramatic and brutal hostility.

Keeping in view of the fact that since the 1970s, owing to the mounting political Islamic environment, which involves imposition of a retrogressive gender project, many Muslim women feel obligated to alter and advance women's responsibilities and rights inside an Islamic construction. For the educated women who fancy settling the religious aspects of their identity with an empowered social status based on egalitarian gender relationship and freedom of choice in their personal, family, and socio-political life, Muslim feminism tenders an academic apparatus to resist and challenge the chauvinist character of the continuing identity politics, predominantly political Islamic in its outlook. The goal of this obligation is to enable women to turn the table on political Islamic authorities, to take Islamist men to task on what they preach and practice in the name of Islam.

At least three reasons are to be taken into consideration to view the momentous campaign for Afghan women's rights. First, it illustrates the way global awareness is invoked; literary circles are mobilized and western academia respond. Second, it was the campaign that helped to internationalize the plight of Afghan women, primarily at the instigation of expatriate Afghan women's groups and secondarily at the behest of post-Russian period of Afghan literature. Third, the agenda to stop gender apartheid and the battle against gender regime was conceivably the real factor that attracted the interest of western academia and galvanized so much awareness as to depict the predicament of Afghan women. A key thrust for the interest group for women's citizenship rights in Muslim countries has been political Islam. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism with its patriarchal agenda has been an impetus to make women think of their right for place in an Islamic society. This has corresponded to the growth of the population of middle-class and educated women with objectives of parity, mobility, and empowerment. Muslim women are reluctant to acknowledge notions of difference that interpret into imbalanced rights and second-class citizenship. Hence, the stress on reforming the conservative Muslim society and the need of greater politico-socio cultural rights and participation of women has been felt. As such, it is apparent that the struggle for a progressive Islamic society is entrenched in domestic issues of politico-socio cultural settings.

The case of Afghanistan is conceivably an intense occurrence of the sway of the universal over the local, and it demonstrates the degree to which the mobilization and mobility of feminist associations, encouragement, and resources can shape the way of domestic political battles. It is in this backdrop that throughout the past two decades, a change-oriented religious feminism—branded in the West as Islamic feminism or Muslim feminism—has developed among Muslim women in different societies. This development materializes principally in cities among educated, middle-class Muslim women who, unlike many past pioneers of women's rights and feminism in the Muslim world who were of laic liberal, socialist (Western) direction, are unwilling to abandon their religious orientation and hold Islam as a important constituent of their racial, cultural, or even national identity. A growing body of literature and discourse on Islamic feminism has appeared in the field of the Muslim Women's Studies inspiring at times constructive and at times disruptive deliberations among scholars and activists concerned with women's issues in Muslim societies.

We tend to overlook that Islam, like all other religious institutions, is a human or social construct, hence it is neither a historic nor monolithic, reified, and fixed. The struggle to regulate or modernize religion to the new realities of modern, egalitarian and democratic gender regime has taken place from both within and without the religious institutions and it has been an unending process in the Christian (Protestant and Catholic) contexts. Thanks to the surfacing of a stronger middle class, modernity, and vigorous bourgeois broadminded fight for individual rights and humanism, the reformation of religion, secularization and democratization of society have been achieved much more effectively in the highly developed and industrialized Christian West. Nayereh Tohidi (2001, pp. 140-141) describes that the Muslim cultural location; nonetheless, the interaction of geographic and geopolitical drawbacks, colonialism and underdevelopment has slowed down the evolution of analogous processes, hence further complicating attainment of civil rights, especially women's rights. Sedgwick (2010) rightly points out that modernist rational and liberal attempts to reinterpret or reform Islam emerged almost a century ago by theologians and jurists such as the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh.

Islamic Feminism & Political Islam

Like added mechanism of the contemporary (and perhaps post-modern) restructuring activities within Islam, Muslim feminism also is a Quran-centred discourse. Wadud (1999) admits that the Quran, perceived as the undying and unmatched manuscript, offers for Muslims equally the initial basis and the summit of convergence of many diverse, human interpretations in the light of definite socioeconomic and political locations. She notices the plasticity and progression as an indispensable part of Quranic philosophy, because Islam was revealed for each and every one and for all times. Consequently, its jurisprudence must be competent of act in response to extensively varied wants and problems. Nevertheless, an imperative challenge for Muslim feminists is that the Quran is seen as the statements of God and accordingly unchallengeable. In response, to this statement, she points out that the representational wording of the Quran is not decisive. Rather the interpretation of the Quran by men forms the basis of Islamic law, application, and practice. This male (ulama) monolithic to interpret the Quran or engage in ijtihad is what Muslim feminists are challenging now. This challenge receives support from Muslim feminists when they question the politicized interpretation of some selected text that can possibly offer extensively contrary messages, and their exegesis are inevitably influenced, if not out exactly motivated.

Elucidation of the current Islamist and other religious fundamentalist movements indicate that theocratic states are not able to give power to women nor are they able to give a comprehensive democracy for their citizens. Religion is significant but should be separated from state control. Muslim feminists appear to be a predictable and constructive constituent of the current change, reform, and development of Muslim societies as they face modernity. In the short run, Muslim feminists may serve as a kind of Islamisation of feminism for some. In the long run, in a society that tolerates and protects open discussion and debate, Muslim feminism (as did Christian feminism) can assist the modernization and secularization of Islamic societies and states. Bargaining with modernity can take many forms. Although feminism and women's movement has become more global than ever before: sisterhood is not global nor is it local; women's solidarity has to be negotiated within each specific context.

Muslim females suffer the consequences of oppressive interpretations of the Qur'an (Barlas, 2002). Access to the Qur'an's teachings is mediated by Qur'anic tafsir, which is explanation, interpretation, commentary and elucidation, undertaken to understand the Qur'an and its commandments. The Qur'an and its tafsir encode law, culture and the mores and norms of Muslim societies. Qur'anic interpretation has almost exclusively been conducted by men who have enshrouded the Qur'an with their masculine world-views (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002). Thus, according to Amina Wadud (1999) and Asma Barlas (2002) it is not the Qur'an that is misogynist, patriarchal and oppressive but rather its interpretations and its interpreters.

Islam, Political Islam & the West

Islam in western literature has chiefly tended to be represented as a monolithic patriarchal body. Lila Lughod (1989) affirms that by depicting Islam as a monolith, definite scholars are disposed to paint naive portraits of very multifaceted socio-religious viewpoints. Western representations of Islam are predominantly and traditionally positioned in the Middle East. The inheritance of Orientalist research has fashioned a cached storehouse of constructions and images that represent Islam and Muslims as the other (Said 1995). Lughod (1989:280) demarcates the three central zones of theorizing within Middle East Anthropology: segmentation, the harem and Islam, and how they are essentially theoretical metonyms by which a complicated, varied and massive territory is misconstrued. A gendered element of the Orientalist homogenous authoring of Islam and Muslims, have highlighted Muslim women as subjugated, stiff, subservient and scruffy, on the Western representation.

The study of Islam in the West has become a hunt to diminish mixed religious practice into a perfect essence. Academic circles in the West invents and identifies the question of woman in Islam decisively in the geographical field and framework of the Middle East. Two principles are undergirded by this academic discourse; the legitimatizing of Middle Eastern forms of Islam as real, despite of the fact that three quarters of Muslims are not Arabs, and situating the Arab world as the axis of the Muslim world in both accepted and academic discourses. The validation and justification of an Arabized Islam is emulated in scholarly literature where plentiful books and articles are in print attending to the women and/ in Islam question strictly in reference to the Middle East; academic literature dedicated to south Asian Islam or south Asian Muslim women especially Afghan women are sparse. This study explores the prospect to remedy this disparity to some extent and bring South Asian particularly Afghan Islam to the centre from the margin.

Western academia equates Islam with fundamentalism. It is said that this term is a concoction of policy makers and contrivances of western media moguls (Said, 1997: pp. 16) and due to the manipulative technique of repetition frequently used by the main stream media, the term fundamentalism is conceived by the US and Europe necessarily a recourse to terrorism, radicalism, extremism and fanaticism. Words like fundamentalism, terrorist, extremist militant and violent were found to be linked with the words like Muslim, Islam and Islamic (Mirza, 1996: 538-539). Such words and phrases have been applied or associated with Muslim world. For example, 'Islamic militant from Pakistan', 'Pakistan backed Muslim rebels', 'Islamic terrorist training camp', 'Islamic fundamentalist theme', 'rogue state', 'Taliban are the pawn of Pakistan Intelligence Agencies', 'Pakistan maintained links with terrorists in the region', 'Libya supports terrorists', 'Iranian or Palestinian terrorist groups', 'Pan Arab fanaticism', 'Libya's terrorism', 'Militant Muslims' have been used for American enemy Islamic countries.

Representing Islam as Political Islam

Another important facet of this paper is to explore the politicized representation of Islam. Theories of post colonialism exceedingly owe a favour to the insights into workings of language and discourse that construct images, which are aligned with the dictates of the centre. Constructionist approaches to representation displaces realists' proposition of true representation through language. It is useless to judge genuineness of representations by comparing them to their realms as sense of reality is conceived inside one's head. Representations, hence, are symbolic of the real world. There is always a degree of abstraction involves in the work of representations. Representations always take away some aspect or add more to their originals. The debate, above, also informs that languages are inherently cultural creations and embody worldview of those who speak them. In addition, humans are not free thinking individuals instead are constructs of language/discourse.

Making use of these insights, postcolonial theory emerged and presented a devastating censure of colonial and neo-colonial representations of non-Europeans. Post colonialism is a method/approach to subvert the assumptions held by colonialism. Postcolonial approach involves strategic reading of texts to disrupt Eurocentric biases inscribed in them. It brings into play thoughts such as equality, liberation, and democracy so as to combat domineering formations of prejudice, bigotry, and manipulation (Nayar, 2008, p. 17). It stresses the need to replace traditional reading practices and proposes to reconsider our reading habits (Mcleod, 2007, p. 33-4).

For centuries, West has constantly misunderstood Islam as Said (1995) asserts that Islam represents not only a formidable competitor but also a late coming challenge to Christianity. In one-way or the other, Muslim countries have always remained hurdles in the way of Western domination of non-Western regions. Since the time of Crusades, Islamic regions such as Arab and Ottoman had many military confrontations with Europe and were quite successful in terrorizing Europe. This century's long political history is working behind the images of Muslims and an impression of being combatant is built in relation to their portrayals.

Said (1995) proves that orientalists usually portrayed Muslims in relation to violence and bloodshed, for instance, Arabs were associated with rivalry and warfare and Muslims were represented as superstitious and anti-modern. Thus, Orientalist's discourse has constructed Islam as an antithesis of Western civilization.

Some new labels are added to the old collection of images of Muslims, for instance, fundamentalist (After Iranian Revolution, 1978–79 and Rushdie Affair), fundamentalism and terrorists (After 9/11). Characteristics of Islam are similar to old stereotypes of it. Seen through Western eyes, Islam is still a jingoistic religion so Muslim the ideal enemy of Middle Ages has now been named as Islamic fundamentalist. There again, fundamentalism is very hard on women, it does not allow freedom of speech, and time and again Islamic Sharia has been related to violence. In short, it is still medieval and barbaric and poles apart of the secular, liberal, humane West.

DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

The contention that this study seeks to explore is to scrutinize what image of Islam has been constructed through such characterization. These texts show Islam and fundamentalism as one; for instance, Rasheed was not bothered much by the Taliban. All he had to do was grow a beard, which he did, and visit a mosque, which he did (p. 168). In Ali's Brick Lane (2005), Karim and Questionnaire are jihadis. These novelists have discussed contemporary problems; but, remained powerless to exhibit open-minded and unbiased character of Islam. In the vein of their Western contemporaries, Kureishi and Ali create generalized representation of Islam as they fuse Islam and fundamentalism. No attempt is made to underscore the moderate propensity of Islam. Bapsi Sidhwa's American Brat (2005) is also a noteworthy effort on religion. She assesses Zoroastrianism such as their need to marry outside Parsi community but she never in the least degrades the religion. Her novel illustrates a profound insight into her faith and its rituals. This self-importance is a rarity in Kurieshi and Ali's novels. She also denounces the politicization of Islam in Zia's time. When Feroza is inclined towards fundamentalism, her mother censures Zia and political Islam and not Islam. Now, it goes without saying that images (of non-Western people and cultures) constructed by postcolonial writers are needed to be analysed. Postcolonial writers are considered 'metonym' (Nayar, 2008, p. 70) of Asian communities of their origin. It is important to ask whether their portrayals are representatives of the society they are representing or does it reinforce the images that West seeks (ibid).

A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) & Representation

A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) generates a rugged patriarchal representation of a husband who uses enormous hostility on her wives. Furthermore, he shows Muslims as shortsighted that underlies Western are far-sightedness. This husband becomes an insignia of the entire category outside the novel. Hosseini (2007), apart from creating this category, produces two characters such as Babi and Mullah Faizullah who come forward to reject this stereotyping, whereas Rasheed approves stereotypical images of Afghani husband. Therefore, Islam becomes the motivation for such violence. Connecting them to Islam is a misrepresentation of it. Islam has no place for such aggression.

The character of Rasheed in A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) puts forth that Islam encourages patriarchy in which women has no liberty. Rasheed as a husband thinks that women are born to serve men and their place is home as he says, "a woman's face is her husband's business" (p. 47). He is a sadist who pitilessly torments his wives and shows no regret. Contrarily, when Maiam finds some porn pictures showing the obscenity revealed in them, she questions by herself "a woman's face is her husband's business" (p. 54). He

assumes himself to be a legitimate owner of a commodity who can deal with it as any business deal. He is so narrow-minded that he opened Mariam's mouth and dropped a handful pebbles into it (p. 67). A layman might think him as a rare exception within Muslim community with potential to subvert stereotyped image of Islam. Therefore, it is essential to analyse how such characters misrepresent Islam. The conventional wisdom, in any western state views religion as simply a personal matter, endorses the domineering control of Taliban in the name of religion. The rulers in Muslim countries take the help of religion to prolong their rule as Hosseini (2007) points out, "Najibullah changed tactics and tried to portray himself as a devout Muslim" (p. 102).

The worldwide political resurrection of religions in the most recent decades of the twentieth century has confronted with, some could assert dazed, the belief, undeniably the doctrines of the prophets of postmodernism. This argument has been chiefly vibrant in the Islamic world. The Iranian revolution, the appearance of new Islamic republics in Iran, Afghanistan and Sudan, and the application of Islam by Muslim administration and resistance activities, the contributions and achievements of Islamic candidates and movements in local and national elections reiterate the existence and influence of Islamic principles and discourse in Muslim affairs of state and cultures. Advocates of secularism sponsored by the West have repeatedly distinguished it as the most exceptional system to encourage broad-mindedness, pluralism and equality in a social order in which government is not subjected to any one religious philosophy. Nonetheless, as Talal Asad (2003) has presaged, secularism in spite of its origins and history as a response to the religious wars that beleaguered Afghanistan, does not essentially assure compromise and broad-mindedness. Asad reminds us saying, "A secular state does not guarantee toleration; it puts into play different structures of ambition and fear" (2003 p. 6-7). Hosseini foretells the consequences of this augury when Laila watches the Land Cruiser speeds down the street and she shudders to think that the murderer of her parents live in posh homes and appointed ministers (p. 248). This abominable truth slays her and shows the negative correlation between misogynist political Islam and the western academia.

A trademark of Islamic political beliefs has been the conviction that Islamic ideology and ethics administer all facets of life and that Sharia operates as a structure for all individual as well as social mores, whether in civic or confidential sphere. This principle contradicts the suggestion that a contemporary state's legal system should not be dependent on any religious institution. Hence, at risk is not only how one appreciates secularism but how Muslims envisage the role of the Sharia and its capacity to transform and get used to current apprehensions and circumstances. For Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, (2010) among the highest ranked and respected religious authorities in the world at the moment, the orthodox Islamic tradition is fundamental and authoritative. Secularism and Islam, he believes, are irreconcilable in a country in which the majority of the population is Muslim. His concerns about secularism are not only religious but are also profoundly political. His concerns are proven in A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) when a young Talib shouts through the loudspeaker and says, "He was a communist and akafir. This is what we do with infidels who commit crimes against Islam" (p. 165). This catastrophic downfall of Najibullah is in harmony with the views of Qaradawi (2010).

The rationale behind political Islamic rule is to build things straightforward for people, not complicated and that the obligation of Islamic legal expert is to pave the way of transformation rather than plainly to adhere to the history and resist restructuring. Qaradawi,

(2010) like several Islamists and secularists, examines Christianity and Islam as essentially dissimilar in the ability to acknowledge the parting of religion from politics. He mentions the accepted opinion based upon Jesus' instruction in the Gospels to offer to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's as testimony that Christianity allows the division of life into two components: one for religion and the other for the state. Islam, contrariwise, he stresses, signifies an indivisible harmony in a life ruled by God only, God who is Lord over equally the heavens and the earth. In his opinion secularism seeks to dictate Islam and diminish its accepted pre-eminence to one area of life that is a political, patriarchal and academic arrangement that Islam ought to repudiate. Islam is the way out to all breakdowns and efforts in society crafted by secular and the West sponsored regimes. Ironically, religious elite takes benefit from this belief and the interest of West is served when they mutually support the draconian regimes in Muslim countries. If the West resists the change process in certain countries, it has its own reason behind this reaction. The examples of American and European government reactions toward change processes in Palestine and in Lebanon reflect Qaradawi's (2010) concerns. They employ it as a strategy against political Islam by matching Islam with fundamentalism and radicalism and valuing secularism as an unavoidable clause to democracy.

Tamimi Azzam (2000) concedes that whereas ideally Islamic state practising religious principles would be a peaceful one, this model is very hard if not impracticable to attain under existing state of affairs as extensively demonstrated in A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) . Hence, he sums up that until an accurate Islamic state can be established based on principles of consultation (shura), the next best alternative is a secular democratic government which fulfils the type of the rule of reason because such a government is not as much iniquitous as an autocratic arrangement of government that claims to be Islamic. Taliban support those that oppose multicultural, multi-religious, and multinational life. The infighting and inability of Islamic political parties to work together led him to conclude that the mixing of state and religion was counter-productive. The aim of the imposition of Islamic law should be to pave religious and cultural pathway that advance moral values in society rather than a political Islamic state. The chief ways to this course are education, to change individuals and society, and exchange of ideas, an open exchange, to create affinity between Muslims and other religious communities as well as between the Muslim world and the West. Huge majority of Muslims articulate faith as a significant element of their every day lives and that having a rich spiritual life is necessary. The customary response to what Muslims have a high regard for is authenticity to their religious beliefs. The declaration they most intimately correlate with Muslim nations is attachment to their spiritual and moral values is decisive in their development.

Many believe that political freedom and self-determination are political virtues that they esteem most about the West. Yet, even though Muslims do not consider the west is serious about self-determination and democracy in their respective states, many say political autonomy and emancipation and freedom of speech is what they admire most about the West. Simultaneously, Muslims critique their own societies, demonstrating that lack of political freedom is what they least admire about the Islamic world. It is appealing to note that regardless of importance that most Muslims give to political and civil liberties and freedom of speech, majority of Muslim do not support extensive acceptance of Western reproduction of democracy and secularism. They like to see a religious type of democracy in their countries, at least in the sense that they want Sharia to be a starting point of legislation though not the only the starting place.

Influential Islamic intellectual activists and religious leaders, neo-traditionalists and post modernist, across the Muslim world engage in a process of rethinking Islam's relationship to the West. They insist a better democratization and Sharia as a source of law and the need to address the sustained centrality and influence of the conservative practices of Islamic law that give no respite to an uprooted, displaced, adrift and forlorn girl (Mariam) born in a god forsaken country as depicted in A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007).

A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) & Political Islam

They discard the approach that focus largely on examining points of disagreements between Islam and West, at the same time disregarding all active resemblances between the two cultures. Extraordinarily, the hunt for points of disagreements is not done in order to appreciate the conduct of Muslims but primarily in order to highlight dissimilarities and distinctiveness, completely stressing the dominance of West. In this connection Hippler (1995) is of the view that those who fancy preserving the antagonistic representation of Islam in the West primarily adopt such an approach. The rise of Taliban has been characterised in the Western historical thoughts only as a fervent appearance of religious enthusiasm, disregarding all the social, political, and economic features which augmented the emergence of this new group. There are a range of sources which add to the unhelpful representation of Islam and to the saga of the Islamic danger to the West. In other words, when the collective truth demands an unhelpful approach towards a definite racial or cultural group, the aforesaid actors rise to execute that demand, fuelling more dissemination of the negative attitude in society to the group concerned (Shadid & Van Koningsveld, 1994). Contrariwise when they serve the interest of the West, they become freedom fighters (mujahideen). Rasheed in A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) rightly remarks, "Meet our real masters, Pakistani and Arab Islamist. The Talibans are puppets. These are players and Afghanistan is their playground." (p. 183). Shadid & Van Koningsveld (1994) are of the opinion that primarily the negative image of Islam in Europe was religiously stirred following the occupation of their countries by the Muslims, the religious hierarchy tried to create an obstacle against any appeal of Islam may have applied over their ruling elite, by conveying persuasive substantiation of the pre-eminence of Christianity to Islam. Islam was considered to be a deterioration of the eventual reality and Christianity was displayed as the decisive conclusion of the evolutionary course. Esposito (1992) owns similar opinion and shows this negativity that is yawning the gap between the two religions.

It is noticeable that West promotes larger hold and harmony inside its own society, predominantly among its geographical components to limit the growth of the martial strength of Confucian and Islamic countries. Alongside this tactical move, West also functions to strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate Western interests and principles. The participation of non-western states in these institutions is a pre-requisite to gain support and aid; no matter how misogynist, patriarchal and domineering their agenda may be. This argument gains strength from Hippler (1995) who states that by a negative presentation of Islam apart from of what Muslim elite do in the name of politicized Islam, "We [the West] invent an Islam that suits us, that best fulfils our politico-psychological needs."(p. 24). This misrepresentation is politically crafted and succeeds in fencing off the identity of the West that consequently fortifies itself at the expense of Islam. Esposito (1992) mentions that existing political, economic, and social systems of political Islam had proved unsuccessful; a disillusionment with, and at times a denunciation of, the West; a pursuit for self and better validity; and the assurance that Islam without political agenda provides a self-

sufficient ideology for state and society, a valid alternative to secular nationalism, socialism and capitalism (p.14). Regarding the definitive objectives of an Islamic welfare state, it is important to note that the majority of Islamic movements have defined the psychological, social and political goals which they want to achieve. At the psychological level they wish to maintain Islamic identity which has undergone serious changes because of colonialism and the continuing process of Westernisation. Kabul presents an example of it when in A Thousand splendid Suns (2007) Kabul secretly takes the name of "Titanic city" (p. 180).

Indisputably, some of proponents of political Islam do employ violent behaviour in order to attain their political objectives. Radical groups, who partake in the deliverance of occupied territories, make use of attacks on government offices and representatives. Such behaviour in particular has offered the political leaders of the countries concerned and Western academia with a more than sufficient prospect to misrepresent Islam, not only of the political Islam but also of Islam in general. The insistence on jihad, use of violence, and other such expressions of Islam all fortify the phantom of the 'Islamic threat' and make its denunciation tremendously complicated. The characters of Babi, Tariq and Laila utterly reject these expressions when they endeavour to inform the society. They appear to be dynamic by stressing the point that the west should change their policy position.

In the light of the detailed examination of the issue raised, a set of archetypes is found between the direction of western policies toward Islam in general and political Islam in particular and patriarchal hegemony existing in Muslim countries. Islam is reduced to political Islam. The point that this paper makes is to locate the true sprit of Islam reflected through the characters such as Mariam and Laila. These characters are the means of transporting Islamic ideology that distinctly represent the soft image of Islam. Hence, they signify the potential to subvert the discursive position of political Islam by showing the text position of the characters as potential voice of Islam.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Afghan narratives is replete with examples where the Afghans are engaged in developing Islamic symbols, slogans, parties and actors to justify their great effort (jihad) and mobilize popular support. However, in doing so, they to some degree damage the image of Islam. The postmodern period witnesses the appearance of contemporary Muslim states whose pattern of progress is deeply influenced by and obliged to Western secular paradigms. Few questioned the accepted wisdom that modernization meant the progressive Westernization and secularization of society. Afghanistan shows a polar position reflecting the relationship of religion and secularism.

It is suggested that the image of Islam and Muslims in the West requires powerful and determined hard work from the Muslim themselves, both in the Muslim world and in Muslim communities in the West. A widespread course, starting from within by merging apparatus of Islamic effort on the popular and official levels, should be started. It should assist Muslims emerging as a nation with an identical culture and civilization in order to have their better image in the world and make the West realize the mistake they commit to support the proponents of Islam. Useful plans have to be undertaken to educate Western academia, on the Islamic conception of amity and acceptance. In addition to this, it is a responsibility of every

Muslim professional to illuminate the mistaken scrutiny of Islam assumed by a majority of the West that direct to conflict and confrontation between the West and Islam.

In order to shun the growth of new bigotry about Islam and Muslims, it is indispensable for the Western academia to regulate their existing inaccurate observations and measures and support a pre-emptive approach, i.e. a well-balanced and prejudice-sensitive approach. This can only be comprehended, if the dependable segment of the West happens to be persuaded by the truth that they are indeed contributing to this stigmatising course and recognise the need for change as well. Such a pre-emptive approach can be put into practice if researchers start differentiating between the political Islam and the Islam which is reflected through the characters of Hosseni's novel (2007) emphasise the existing multiplicity of opinions in the Muslim World.

Generalised presentation of Islam and Muslims especially by negative messages strengthens the argument developed in this paper that West depresses the majority of Muslim population by maintaining an ambivalent rather than a decisive policy toward political Islam. This inconsistency on the part of Western academia fails to tell the whole story, to provide the full context for Muslim attitudes, events, and actions, or fails to account for the multiplicity of Muslim belief. While it sheds some light, it is a partial light that blurs or deforms the full picture. As a result, Islam is effortlessly reduced to stereotypes of Islam against the West. Discriminatory and consequently prejudiced study adds to our unawareness rather than our information, contracts our viewpoint rather than widening our perception, reinforces the predicament rather than opening the means to new way out. Hosseini concludes A Thousand Splendid Suns (2007) giving an optimistic message without any marked elation but an expectation and yearning for secure future with a focus on children. Hosseini (2007) augurs well with the children that a healthier and more humanitarian Afghanistan would emerge from the chaos of a war beleaguered country. His characters direct the spotlight on the comfort and security of the children, the most helpless in times of war and want.

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