

Conclusion

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In the Western world, the feminist movements have brought lots of changes in the lives of women. It has given many women rights like to vote education, gender neutrality, equal job opportunities, reproductive rights and even property rights. Hence, it can be asserted that feminists have struggled against all odd aspects such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and life assaults to protect women. Instead of fulfilling the traditional interest of men for reproductive purposes, they shared their experiences in developing theories, and put more stress on the rights of women. Their rights campaigns provided some protection for women and brought about drastic change in their social status.

During the early modern period, the women of the West Asian region were primarily inspired by the western feminists thoughts, especially by the works of Madame Sevigne, Jane Austen and T.S. Eliot. During the French colonization of Egypt, the remarkable work of Qasim Amin “*Liberation of Women*” which was published in 1899, played as a catalyst in the changing feminist dynamics of the Arab world, especially in Egypt and Lebanon. His emancipatory reforms paved new ways for the young scholars and activists to write and advocate women’s issues in a new social and political spectrum. Further, women activists like Huda Sharawi in Egypt, formed a patronage and a notion of ‘pan-feminism’, wherein women raised their voices in asking for their equal rights. She was able to become the first public voice on behalf of all the women of the Arab societies. Many women in various countries followed her footprints and fought against the dominant and prevalent social structures and obligations in the Arab societies of those times. In this way many female were seen active in the emancipation of women and their households.

As discussed, how Egyptian and Lebanese women played multiple roles inside and outside their homes and became the moving force in the development of their nation and state. Especially after the advent of the French socio-political structures, women were accustomed to the concepts of modernization, industrialization and educational advancement. Further, during the later period of the 19th Century, women of the Egyptian and Lebanese society were seen as role models in the whole Arab world. They were also actively involved into literary compositions, storytelling, arts and

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drama, dance, hosiery, small scale household businesses, medical nursing, babysitting, catering, animal husbandry, agriculture, etc.

The formation of Egyptian Feminist Union proved to be as a landmark, which further allowed women activists like Zainab Ghazali and Malik Hafni Nasif to lay down the foundation of '*Islamic Feminism*' as a response to the prevailing dominance of the western feminist thought. They were the pioneers in the field of '*Islamic Feminism*' in the 20th century, that deals with the higher status of women under the Islamic values. They not only wrote extensively on the malpractices of their societies, but also got involved in the activism that promotes women as a pious and an equal member of the society. They often quoted the Islamic scriptural texts that describe women as pious entities, with examples of characters like Mariam, who is described as the only woman in the Quran with an exclusive chapter devoted to her and addresses her as the most pious women ever lived. It also gives mention to the wives of the prophet as believing women who are titled as "Mother of the Believers". Emphasis is also made on the fourth chapter of the Quran entitled Al-Nisa' meaning 'the women', which is also the most discussed chapter of the Quran that deals with the issue of women related to marriage, divorce, inheritance and family values.

Further to this debate, Egyptian activist and feminist Nawal al Saddawi wrote extensively on the malpractices of Islam in putting the female body politics as an agent of oppression. Her advocacy against female genital mutilation has been highly appreciated by the West, but at the same time, it was being criticised by the male patriarchal religious hegemonic clergy of the Egyptian society, who argued that female circumcision is ordained to be an act under the divine law and as a physical symbol of prestige. In other words, many male orthodox sections of the society proposed domestic laws where they allowed such malpractices to be performed in the households so that female sexual sanctity and symbolic virginity can be achieved. Apart from Sadaawi, many other female activists joined hands with her and promoted awareness schemes for the prohibition of such malpractices. In many rural and nomadic Arab societies, this practice of female circumcision can be seen as a symbol of Bedouin culture that has related itself to the rituals of Islam and certain cultural vices. Therefore, in Egypt a long struggle is seen among the women activist who not only liberated themselves, but also educated the rural women for their well-being in

terms of female hygiene, sanitization, puberty, pregnancy, child labour, breastfeeding, child-rearing etc.

Hence, the Egyptian women had very few opportunities to get access to the advance modes of sensitisation which the West was offering, due to the fact that Egypt has a huge population and a large number of them belong to the rural areas and were illiterate. For this cause and for speaking against the government policies towards women, Sadaawi also faced imprisonment and exile. People like her faced the same trials and had to stop advocacy against such malpractices. Recent example of women exploitation can be seen during the demonstrations at the Tahrir Square, where women were seen brutalized and beaten up and at the same time many women rejoiced chanting slogans of freedom and nationhood.

In this process, after Egypt, Lebanon began to welcome those feminist movements. The Lebanese women chose the power of pen and started writing against the gender inequality, calling for women empowerment and freedom. They criticized existing the social and cultural taboos and urged in breaking all social, political, and economic restrictions against women. In Lebanon, the precursors of modern feminism was Nazira Zain Al Din who advocated for secular feminism of the west, followed by prominent scholars like Zainab Fayyaz and May Zaide, however, there were very few voices who innate the concept of Islamic Feminism, that was being continuously challenged by western feminist group in the secular Lebanese society. Interestingly a clash between Christian and Muslim feminist activists can also be seen in Lebanon, whereby the governmental set up in the country allowed both these voices to prosper.

With the publication of Layla Balbaaki's "Ana Ahya" (I live), and the most controversial "*A Spaceship to Tenderness*", the Arab literary arenas came to a storm with a feminist writing that was never been seen before in the Arab world. It talked about female individualism and feminist utopia, where women could snatch her rights from her men and were also able to create her own individual rights and hegemonic actions. She uploaded female sexual orientalism and feminist desires that had long existed but never discussed. In the same league, many other Lebanese female scholars and activists worked immensely for the emancipation of women and often came across controversies which sometimes led to the banishment of their public appearance or their writings. In order to avoid such menace, many women wrote

under ‘anonymous names’ and sometimes by using male titles, that somehow saved their identity and allowed their work to get published without being threatened. Gradually, the Lebanese women could not remain untouched with controversies like many of their Egyptian contemporaries whereby their work got banned and their lives were under stake. Popular Lebanese scholar Hanan Al Shaykh rose to fame by writing feminist narratives that deal with patriarchal exploitations and feminist fantasies, that young girls and women hold in their tender heart for years which are not publicly spoken.

Furthermore, in the development of feminist discourses, the division of class, under the upper and lower class, has been a major point of discord in both Egyptian and Lebanese societies. The upper class Elite women of Egypt and Lebanon followed the steps of their European counterpart and tried to copy their dress codes and mannerism, in order to be considered as westernized. The Western imitation was prominent in the late 19th century, especially among the upper class women. Due to Europeanization, the veil began to disappear and changes in the manner of dressing among women were commonly seen as a symbol of modernization. However, dressing in any sort of style, women in Egypt, veiled or unveiled, joined many professional activities.

Hence, the Egyptian women were the primary agents of change in the Arab nationalist as well as socialist perceptions in the whole Islamic world. They were seen as guiding stars who broadened the way for the rest of the Arab women to encapsulate such feminist characteristics that were previously unknown to the middle eastern Orient. They initially adapted the French lifestyle and witness the cultural exuberance of the European west in a way, that they could adopt and innate some of their feminist instincts and glamour to fit in the Egyptian urban societies. Therefore, the urban women not only replicate the French orders but also tried their level best to educate rural women to be active in whatever they do in their personal lives at the same time taught them to be equal partners in the nation building process. Hence, the upper class population was given more accessibility to education. Men also saw the advantages of adopting Western ideologies in their lifestyle and forced their women to follow the same. Financially, the rise of European capitalism benefited certain classes, such as the Egyptian and Lebanese upper classes and the new class of educated civil servants, who were increasingly employed as administrators and servants of the British colonial state, while worsening the economic condition of other classes, such as the lower

classes and the religious ulama class. However the Lebanese society has built up concordance with both the western and traditional feminist approaches.

Therefore, as it has been discussed, the emancipation of women started by Qasim Amin in Egypt changed its substance and essence, with the changing of the government structures prevailing in the Egyptian society as the Socialist, Marxist, Capitalist, Secularist and Islamic. Whereas in Lebanon the democratic and secular set up has allowed foreign NGOs, women's committees, self-help groups, educational institutes etc. to unify the Lebanese women in seeking equal rights and opportunities while ignoring their diverse background. In this way, during the post-colonial era, the feminist discourses in Egypt and Lebanon, which started as a phenomenon at the same period resulted in varied forms, as a result changed with the governmental set ups and diverse religious demography's.

The Feminist movement in Egypt and Lebanon experienced many transformations in the late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, in addition Egypt faced many hurdles as compared to Lebanon from society, government and the fundamentalists. The endurance of women's movement was thrived by the emergence of press, social activities, charities, public lectures, public protests, national resistance and national and international women conferences. The main obstacle faced by the women activists of Egypt, which hindered the advancement of women's organizations like EFU, NFW, AFU, MWS etc. was the continuous negotiated control between the secular state and the religious establishment. The two main competing nationalist and Islamist movements always promised support to the women's rights movement, and as a result, gained support from women. However, the secular and religious agendas of the Nationalist and Islamist movements did not place women's rights as a priority and did not ever change over the years. Although it was slightly less difficult to struggle with the Egyptian government in power in the early 1950s, the women's right movement challenged the secular nationalists and Islamic conservatives for equal political rights, education rights, reform in personal status law and gender egalitarian society, which were in fact pledged to the women's movement. Any progress by the women's rights movements in Egypt were accomplished at a sluggish rate and required daring confrontation and encouragemnets from the feminists and activits like Huda Sharawi, Nabawiyya Musa, Malik Hifni Nasif and Doria Shifaq.

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Since religion and culture has always been an integral part of the Arab societies, the Egyptian and Lebanese societies also witnessed a convergence of Feminism and culture, keeping their traditional and religious roots intact. As a result, the concept of Islamic feminism rapidly grew and touched the heart of adherent Muslim women to seek feminist refuge in Islam and wrote extensively on the status and rights of women in Islam. As an answer to Western feminism, the realm of Islamic feminism held proved to be a tremendous success by the Muslim women, not only in the Arab world but in almost all parts of the Muslim majority countries.

It can be argued that radical feminism grew simultaneously in the state of Lebanon and Egypt but it gained more controversy in Egypt than in Lebanon. However, the tenets of radicalism were nearly few in both these countries. But in the case of Egypt, women who belonged to the radical group often faced harsh consequences and resentment from their communities when they spoke up against the patriarchal dominance as well as misinterpretation of religion in their societies. Sometimes they were persecuted by the public and sometimes had to face government trials which often ended up in putting them behind the bars and more often allowing them to escape from their countries in order to save themselves. Activists like Nawal al Sadaawi, spent more than 20 years in jail yet her fascination towards women emancipation could not hinder inside the thick corners of imprisonment. Therefore, many radicals step down from writing and public activism because of the fear of being put into trials, by being a victim of public humiliation. Egypt, as a religious society, also did not flourish in the Western notions of radical feminism, which often argued for the equal rights of women and men in all sectors of public and private life which is against the teaching of Islam. However the radicals grew in the expat Egyptian community and also along the modern, Muslim and Coptic community but remained under the curtains of public highlights.

Lebanon was again in the forefront for asking the newly drafted rights of women who could write their own destination by themselves. These radical writings rapidly affected the lives of young women who were dreaming big for their future goals and were trying to attain and mimic the western progressive lifestyle. They won strenuous battles for providing constituted rights to the LGBT community and women of disabilities and all backwardness. The radical separated the dictates of religion over women and allowed democratic values to nurture in the lives of young women and

girls. In many cases, many demonstrations and activities of these groups sometimes offended the normal public life and governments working, but at the same time it allowed many young women to speak their heart out who were previously seen silent in their societies. Hence, the radicals are considered as the most successful group in providing women better opportunities, rights, public services, education, work and government platforms. They not only uplifted the underlying problems of their society, but they tried to find out the solutions to it in building a better democratic structure for their country. Lebanon at the Democratic model succeeded in giving rights to the women which were previously unknown in the Arab world, yet the women's participation in the public sphere is still very low.

In Lebanon, the secularists gained wide popularity and warm welcome in almost all the part of the country and abroad. The Lebanese women enjoyed the unique constitutional setup given to them by their law. It gave huge success to the Lebanese women to speak in public sphere about the trinitarian outlook of their Parliamentary Constitution. Women fought elections and ran businesses which eventually gave them confidence and capital that is the utmost need for holistic empowerment. The Lebanese women, thus became the figures of women emancipation, not only in Arab world but in larger Asia while keeping its adherence to the long customs as well as to the newly constructed 'secular sisterhood' values. As examples of modesty and modernity, the Lebanon women were successful in hitting the religious barriers that hindered their development in order to achieve what the West has somehow not experienced till now. As a result, religious practices and beliefs were considered a private business that should be performed individually and at home. But when the law is applied, it did not discriminate on the basis of religion and belief system. Therefore, Lebanon as a secular model succeeded in imparting the secular values to the citizens, however some instances were recorded where religious conflicts took place in Lebanon and in contacts with women, differences of opinion was easily seen in the public and private arenas. Since these clashes were minimal and of low intensity, they were mostly handled by the government and law enforcement agencies.

The efforts of women writers of Egypt and Lebanon in changing the conceptions of modern Arabic literature were of prime importance. In the 20th century, although the Arab women writers and intellectuals were concerned with many issues, that in a way gave voice to their experiences, but two narratives had the most impact on their

writings. The first is the writing on the social issues and nationalism and second is the war narratives and their experiences while living at war zone area. Arab women writers are known for their literary contribution in the field of novels, poetry and essays for decades in the Arab world. The pioneers of the Arab women's writings were Lebanese writers like Zainab Fawwaz, May Ziyada and Labiba Hashim and Egyptian writer like Aisha Taimuriyya.

Although women were writing from half of 20th century, but their works got recognition only in the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of a prominent Egyptian writer and activist Nawal El Sadaawi, the Syrian writer Collete Khuri and Labenese writer Layla Balbaaki. Their works got recognition in the world as they began to be translated in the 1980s. The first international feminist book fair was organized in London in 1986, where two prominent female figures of literary world were introduced to the world, one was Lebanese writer Hanan al Shaikh and the Egyptian writer Alifa Rifaat. In Egypt the feminist writings of Nawal al Sadawi, Afifa Rifaat and Salwa Bakr, even though belongs to different feminist orientations and generations yet they call for change by challenging gender roles and patriarchal oppression paving way for women equality, emancipation and self-fulfillment.

In describing the trauma, agony, suffering and turmoil caused by the foreign occupation and war, the Beirut Decentrist have done a much greater job in putting the scars of war on paper. Writers and activists like Layla Balbaaki, Hanan al Shaykh, Gadaah al Samman wrote about women issues portraying women character as subjugated, alienated, oppressed and tortured. The subjectivity of women is seen as a commonality in works of these activists who mostly used a female protagonist suppressed under the violence of war and occupation.

Hence this study has made an attempt to bring forth certain aspects of women in the Egyptian and Lebanese society from the historical times to the present day era, it has enrooted the underwent debates on the topic of gender and women emancipation that has long been untouched till the wake of postcolonial, cultural and comparative studies. As a result, the underline centuries of women egalitarianism existing in the Arab societies are swiftly unfolded, which gave a multi-dimensional vision to study the Arab women in a postcolonial competitive structure. The richness and embodiment of a three layered feminism consisting of the Western, the Arab and the

Islamic, provided a pinnacle of educational methodology related to the study of Arab women in various perspectives.

One of the most important differences between the two societies that have touched the lives of women in both the countries is the issue and role of religion. Religion has always played an important part in the lives of women in the Arab societies and therefore, Egypt and Lebanon have become more active and sophisticated on the subject of women in religion, specially the rights of women in Islam and Christianity.

However, many controversies have also risen up in the society that has stirred the whole Arab world and the large Muslim majority countries, at the same time provided an avenue for large number of scholars and activists to explore and study the west and the east, the Ethno and the Arab centrism with the new emulsified lens for a better tomorrow.