

## Human Rapacity and Mercy: Alternative Realisms in the Debates of Feminism

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**Abstract:** At the dawn of the third decade of the present millennium we are at such a juncture in the saga of feminist history that allows us to question a surrogate representation of feminism. Problematizing the phenomenon of feminist representation, some critics are of the opinion that truth is being displaced by certainty and is no longer sought in relation to the world, but is located in Cartesian entities like ideas, pictures, and representations. Tracing the progression of its exemplifications in Cartesian illustrations, this paper explores different aspects of this representation and studies the metamorphosis of feminist movement in the present times. It also studies the portrayal of feminism resulting mostly in a boo ha-ha, a noise and obscenity straddling more with an unwomanly woman rather than its focus upon the actual women's rights. This study explores the rhetoric of academics, social and cultural critics, and literary voices, mostly from the present millennium contending this trend. However, this research paper also adapts some oracular ideas of critics like Sara Suleri's essay written in the last part of the twentieth century. Though not strictly in the paradigm of feminist discourses, Suleri emphasizes on the need for alternative answers. This paper argues that sloganeering of iconoclastic and idiosyncratic typecasting of feminism need not be imposed on such a colossal scale across academic, polemic, and cultural platforms. They should not be considered the alpha and omega of understanding the whole situation. Consequently, lightly adopting the theoretical lens of Suleri's essay, this paper presents this pervasive issue of feminism, womanism, and women's rights in the light of plurality of solutions; one of them being the importance relevance and revisiting the injunctions of our religious text. (280 words)

**Keywords:** feminism, womanism, women's rights, obscenity, feminist movements.

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*Thus representation functions as an inherently contradictory notion.*(Colebrook 2000, 49)

## Introduction

A recently emerging scenario in the context of feminism, is the foregrounding of representations of feminism across different social and media platforms while the truth about feminism is being compromised. Due to this burden of Cartesian representation, the feminist movement in the present times has metamorphosized into a boo ha-ha, a noise, and obscenity, which is mostly resulting in a picture of an unwomanly woman. It may be argued that rather than focusing upon the actual women's rights the iconoclastic and idiosyncratic typecasting of feminism are being imposed on such a colossal scale across academic, polemic, and cultural platforms that the truth about the actual women's rights is increasingly marginalized. The sloganeering element has camouflaged the understanding of the whole situation. Consequently, it would be helpful to seek truth about this pervasive issue of feminism, womanism, and women's rights in the light of plurality of solutions. Lightly adapting Sara Suleri's suggestions about the plurality of solutions in her essay "Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition" (1992), this paper studies some selected Ayaat of the Holy Quran as possible alternate answers. This exploration is also an endeavor to bring out the relevance and importance of revisiting the injunctions of our religious text.

## Representation of Feminism: Navigating through the Critique

In this section, I briefly highlight the defining features of different waves of feminism in order to contextualize the discussion following it. This section is a brief overview of how the suffrage movement of the first wave of feminism to secure the legal rights of women and the right to vote became the rights to reproduction and equal pay issues in the second wave. While the third wave primarily focused on a fight against patriarchy and other gender issues.

Many contemporary feminist critics problematize several modes of feminist representations. Tracing the ebb and flow of feminism, Martha Rampton, in her article "Four Waves of Feminism" asserts that in the early stages of feminism it was generally perceived that since women were considered morally more superior, their presence "in the civic sphere would improve public behavior and the political process." Feminism was interrelated with the temperance and abolitionist movements and gave voice to now famous activists like the African-American Sojourner Truth (d. 1883), who demanded: 'Ain't I a woman?'" Rampton believes that this trend was seen as a threat for a "Victorian America" who were aghast to see "women acting in very 'un-ladylike' ways (public speaking, demonstrating, stints in jail), which challenged the 'cult of domesticity'" (Rampton 2015, 2008). She argues that at this stage it was generally perceived that since women were considered morally more superior, their presence "in the civic sphere would improve public behavior and the political process" (Rampton 2015, 2008). However, the voice of second wave of feminism, spanning from the 1960s into the 90s, according to her, had its major focus on issues of sexuality, reproductive rights, and equality rights. She writes about the bandwagon element of the second wave feminists who initiated

protests against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968 and 1969. Feminists parodied what they held to be a degrading 'cattle parade' that reduced women to objects of beauty dominated by a patriarchy that sought to keep them in the home or in dull, low-paying jobs. The radical New York group called the Redstockings staged a counter pageant in which they crowned a sheep as Miss America and threw "oppressive" feminine artifacts such as bras, girdles, high-heels, makeup and false eyelashes into the trashcan. (Rampton 2015, 2008)

Thus, many feminist critics trace the trajectory of the political, legal, and equality rights of the three or four movements of feminism. While, in the present millennium, many are discussing about the modes of representations of these issues across academic, cultural, and polemic platforms.

Several feminist critics are now questioning the prevalent reliance on the representation of feminist issues. In the beginning of this present millennium, critics like Claire Colebrook (2000) investigate the idea of representation. In her article "Questioning Representation," she questions the phenomenon of representation and believes that truth has been displaced by a constructed certainty which has swept the contemporary world into a tunneled vision about feminism. She states: "In modernity, [ ] truth is displaced by certainty. Truth is no longer a relation to the world, but is located in ideas, pictures, representations and other all too Cartesian entities" (Colebrook 2000). This unidimensional understanding about any phenomenon is contested by critics like Sara Suleri, who support the need for alternative realism in her article written in the last part of the twentieth century.

Some critics problematize the representations of feminist issues. Pamela Aronson, in her article, "Feminists or 'Postfeminists'?: Young Women's Attitudes toward Feminism and Gender Relations" (2003) speaks about "[a] late 1990s cover of Time magazine with the caption 'Is feminism dead?' feature[ing] photos of prominent feminist activists." Aronson believes it to be so because "[t]he second-wave women's movement has simultaneously experienced great successes and backlash" (2003, 903). According to her, some current academic circles do not agree to the "generally negative picture of contemporary feminist consciousness," (Aronson 2003, 905) as, in their view, they are discovering an actual third wave feminism. In benefaction of their argument they believe that the women who came of age in the 1990s were more inclined towards supporting "feminist goals and are more politically active to achieve these goals (e.g., abortion rights activism) than women who came of age in the 1980s" (2003, 905). In her explorative study she maintains that the "negative as well as the positive prognosis of these studies should be taken with a grain of salt." She asserts that the "fence sitters...[and]...the 'I'm not a feminist, but...' approach" (Aronson 2003, 906) is more related to the privileged cultural position, a position from a vantage point or a comfort zone of academic discussions. This view is sustained by many other critics including Spivak.

While Aronson discusses the armchair feminists and their influence on the actual society, Indian academic, Sherry Sabbarwal asks a pertinent question: *Where do we go from here?* According to her article, "The Changing Face of Feminism: Dilemmas of the Feminist Academic" (2000), Sabbarwal asks some valid rhetoric questions:

Are the feminist academics fighting against the conservative forces, and side by side, becoming the authors of reform? Or is it all a fantasy, a falsehood, and above all, wishful thinking aimed at deluding ourselves? ...First, what is the state of feminist studies today and second, what are the feminist academics actually doing? (2000, 267)

The implicit answers in these questions are quite instructive for our understanding about the changing forms of feminism and its ostensible concerns of women's rights. Sabbarwal, however, is critical of the smug academic feminism, which has given up the real activist ideals of feminism. Instead of "developing new knowledge, new ways of thinking and, most importantly, new ways of being" the contribution of these armchair feminist academics is reduced to being only hypothetical in nature. Sabbarwal sees this nose-diving trajectory of feminism. She writes that

despite being well established and having grown into an accepted and respected critical mode of analysis, [feminism] no longer contains the political ethos of the women's movement in the first wave. I do not know the solution to this predicament...What is required further is to combine competent performance as professionals with the celebration of our womanhood, however difficult it may be...instead of hiding them behind a pretentious facade of feminism" (Sabbarwal 2000, 276-7).

These words, besides drawing our attention to commemorate the real aspects of womanhood, make us rethink about the actual role that the contemporary feminist movements are playing.<sup>1</sup> Thus, this well established and accepted mode of analysis is no longer of much help. Rather, the current image of feminism, due to its polemic nature, seem to have gone into disrepute and lost its valid claims of representation.

A cultural critic representing the youth, Meghan Murphy is a freelance writer and journalist and founder and editor of *Feminist Current*, Canada's leading feminist website launched in July 2012. In her blog article, "defining the f word: why we need to be radical with feminism," she expresses her views on the menace of feminism:

Unfortunately, turning feminism into a trendy buzzword has caused, "Are you a feminist?" to become a troubled question - not because it's a bad one, but because the answers often are. In an effort to popularise the movement and, some might say, to draw in supporters, the word, in and of itself, as devolved into a meaningless - but approachable - term; one

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<sup>1</sup> Similar points are raised in Pakistani context in the article, "Women's Rights or Ontological Erasure?: A Feminist Insight into Women Protection Bill (2015)" *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-e-Niswan (PAWS)*. ISSN 1024-1256. Volume 25. Issue No 1. 79-97 (June 2018) <http://www.pakistanwomenstudies.com/pjws/issue/view/7><http://www.pakistanwomenstudies.com/pjws/article/view/55/51>

that vaguely means "equality" (for whom and with what?), "empowerment" (on what basis?), and/or "choice" (in what context?). (Murphy 2016)

Here Murphy questions the unchecked use of the slogans of equality, empowerment, and freedom of choice. She is mindful of the past feminist fight against male supremacy and a general goal towards women's liberation, which she believes was something radical and somewhat frightening. Therefore, the popularized terms of equality, empowerment, and choice, on account of their being vague, are reduced to being metaphors only. While on the other hand, for the ones who favored status quo, she believes, the recent decades have brought a distinctly "feel-good" approach.

However, she draws our attention to another important fact that explains why the genuine demands for equality, empowerment, and choice are now increasingly becoming vague metaphors rather than concrete demands with conviction. Murphy believes that it is because

feminism hasn't escaped a neoliberal, consumerist culture that offers self-help books and positive mantras as a solution to social problems and presents individual 'choice' as the epitome of freedom. What was once a class struggle - a fight for women's collective rights and towards an end to the oppressive system of patriarchy - and certainly a political one, became a hashtag, a selfie, a backdrop, a selling-point, a buzzword. Anyone could say, 'Yes! I'm a feminist!' and be applauded, without really understanding what that should mean.... (Murphy 2016)

The neoliberalism and consumerist culture are therefore the implicit menace which are compromising the real feminist issues. Murphy is quite candid in her criticism of the consumerist culture. Her words bring out the obfuscations of the self-help literature and other such means of, the so called, fight against patriarchal oppression. The selling-point of feminism, therefore, is reduced to being only a metaphor. She also points out that

Second wavers once fought companies like Playboy and the sex industry, more broadly, making obviously connections between the objectification and commodification of women's bodies and the global epidemic of violence against women. But the third wave and an era of heightened individualism popularized the idea that if a woman 'chose' to 'self-objectify' and claimed to feel good about said choice, that was the end of the conversation....third wave feminism said, 'It's her choice and choices equate to empowerment. (Murphy 2016)

In other words, she points out the internal rift between the second wave feminists who denounced everything feminine and the third wavers, who (probably tired of portrayal of themselves as the plain Jane) came full circle to flaunt every aspect of their womanhood under the apparent rhetoric of empowerment. However, critics like Murphy are critical of this seeming claim of emancipation and point out the actual reason of commodifying aspect of capitalist consumerist culture.

In a similar vein of questioning the boo ha-ha of feminism, Eika Adams, raises quite pertinent observations in her article "Chanel Stages Feminist Protest, But Was It Genuine?" (2014) when she asks, "Enrolling an army of physically formatted women (i.e young, tall, beautiful,

skinny, white) to talk about feminism feels ironic as formulaic beauty is something that feminists tend to want to separate themselves from” (Adams 2014). Thus, she is also critical of the disparity between the walk and the talk aspects of such protests.

After this brief overview about the contemporary clamor in feminism and its academic, cultural, and popular critique, let us turn to the main discussion of this paper. The following section serves as the main discussion about the importance of an alternate mode of addressing the *apparent* forms of feminism. I argue that this phenomenon, which is cumulating into an anti-intellectual sloganeering, instead of helping the cause of feminism, inadvertently, seem to harm its long-borne standing.

### **Academic Self-Censorship and Feminism: A Way Forward**

Academics like Sara Suleri make the postcolonial and feminist academics mindful of their duties. She is of the view that the literary and cultural interpreters need to talk about the theoretical concerns pertaining to the “marginal groups,” of postcolonialism and feminism but should refrain from giving frivolity in solutions. In other words, for either of the two marginal groups of postcolonialism and feminism, Suleri does not favor the popular solutions that give in to the pressures of being politically correct, or those solutions that are sanctioned by the cultural criticism. Suleri’s groundbreaking essay, “Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition” in 1992 proves quite oracular in terms of the double issue of post-colonialism and feminism. Instead of giving in to “rampant and gleeful anti-intellectualism” (1992, 756), of conjoining the concerns of post-colonialism and feminism, Suleri is of the opinion to keeping the two separate. She criticizes the bandwagon element that is usually adopted to become more subservient to the popular critique, especially in the case of postcolonialism and feminism. Otherwise, the “dreary reiterations” of anti-intellectualism of “thought police” and “multiculturalism” would get the better of academics. In other words, these modes of grim reverberations would be “demonstrative of the academy’s spinelessly promiscuous submission to correctness.” In fact, she calls it “our anathema” (1992, 756).

Suleri therefore, does not accept the imbrication or overlapping of the two identities of postcoloniality and womanhood, because in so doing, a racially female voice is reduced to becoming a metaphor only. Such an identity is neither of any help to the cause of feminism nor postcolonialism. She also draws our attention to the rigid structure of certain academics trying to regulate the cultural differences into grouped identities. And anyone who is unable to abide by the rules upheld by this thought police on the one hand and multiculturalism on the other, is bound to be lopped off.

Contextualizing this theorizing in the current gleeful noise about women emancipation, it may be seen that it is reduced to the level of hollow sloganeering and has almost become an intolerant climate. Suleri believes that we, as intellectuals should put this question to ourselves and should rise to the occasion of making certain clarifications. Suggesting a “two-tiered response,” lest we are “lopped” off, Suleri exhorts “the academy [to] persist in making a resolute attempt to

present some firm alternative opinions.” Putting it simplistically, she suggests that “if we must be freaks, let us be freaks with a voice” (1992, 757). She, therefore, decries any readymade and popular solutions, which do not allow any difference of opinion. She reminds us:

The concept of the post-colonial itself is too frequently robbed of historical specificity in order to function as a preapproved allegory for any mode of discursive contestation. The coupling of postcolonial with woman, however, almost inevitably leads to the simplicities that underlie unthinking celebrations of oppression, elevating the racially female voice into a metaphor for ‘the good.’ (1992, 758-9)

In fact, Suleri’s words makes one dare to stand against this rampant and pervasive rhetoric of anti-intellectual sloganeering of women’s rights. As part of the academy, like Suleri, we need to question ourselves:

how plural are we in our constructions of singularity; and how singular in our apprehensions of the plural?...For until the participants in marginal discourses learn how best to critique the intellectual errors that inevitably accompany the provisional discursivity of the margin, the monolithic and untheorized identity of the center will always be on them. (1992, 757-8)

Thus, with these questions in mind we set to answer some issues raised in this anti-intellectual sloganeering that acts as a thought police for anyone who dares to think in any alternate forms.

As discussed in the previous section, the cultural theorists and academics of the present century have exposed the disparity between the apparent sloganeering on the one hand and an armchair intellectualism on the other. Resultantly, it is not much help for any real amelioration of women. Rather than making the actual issues of women as only a metaphor, Suleri’s analogy of postcolonialism (or feminism) to be read as a “free-floating metaphor” (759) may come handy to understand the importance of alternate opinions and plurality of solutions. We should not be afraid to address this issue with plurality of solutions and a rigorous revisionary scrutiny of our religious texts may come as quite helpful to answer some questions regarding feminism.

After this at length discussion of Suleri’s acerbic stance towards the question of specific and “metaphoric postcolonial feminism” (761) espoused by her in 1992, we may see many examples of Suleri’s suggestion of using “local example of how realism locates its language within the postcolonial condition” (Suleri 1992, 766). In this context, examples like Katy Salmasi, a graduate from Art University of Tehran and her PhD in Philology, who has written 15 plays may serve as a glocal answer to the question to feminism. Her stance may be seen as truly feminist when it may be seen that since 1992, she has also directed 13 plays, such as *Ten Minutes at the Train Station*, *Faust*, *Medea* and many other. Salmasi believes that:

The Women’s Rights activists in Iran, independent of any political links, try to curb the Superpowers from poking their noses in their social affairs. This move for independence has included Secular Women as well as a few Moslem Women who have feared religious

turmoil. Nowadays in Iran, Women make distinctions on matters of law, and struggle against pickets, traditions and degrading implications regarding women. (Salmasi 2010) Salmasi is therefore, quite critical of neoliberal global dictations in Iranian perspective of feminism. She, in fact, shows the world an alternate way of upholding the true spirit of feminist ideals by pursuing her dreams and finding no local critique for her standpoint. Similar glocal examples may be seen in the entrepreneurs like Razia Sultana, an unlettered woman from Sialkot, Pakistan, who now owns a football manufacturing factory (Akbar n.d.). While the innumerable examples of women professionals (Nadeem 2021)(Sulaiman 2018) in any Muslim country (former colonial entities) may be instructing to update our understanding of the subject.

Similarly, as mentioned above, Suleri in her article, “Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition” discussed a local example of an ordinance imposed in 1979 in Pakistan as locating realism through “that other third-person narrative known as the law” (1992, 766). In the same vein, the study conducted in the article about *Women Protection Bill (2015)* discusses a downtrodden en-feminine entity of Pakistani society. In this article, Aamir argues that raising the position of a femme fatale, a cavia cobaya, or a guinea pig to someone with voice and agency is a rigorously metamorphic process. This impasse can be addressed by the unreading of patriarchal interpretations of the sacred text of Quran, as studied and emphasized by Dr Asma Barlas. The article also discusses that in the absence of such measures the textuality of the bills like *Women Protection Bill (2015)*, instead of safeguarding, may jeopardize its primary purpose. The ambiguous and confused state of affairs, instead of the intended periodic sensitization and awareness may actually desensitize and orchestrate near anarchy on the societal level. The author emphasizes that without taking into account the framework of the actual spirit of Islamic injunctions, the feminist praxis, of twice oppressed by gender and by law, will lead to an acrimonious conundrum (Aamir June 2018, 79-97).

### **Alternate Approaches for the Debates of Feminism**

In this section, I argue that apart from local examples of alternative solutions this Boo ha-ha, this noise, and this obscenity, which impels the phenomenon of feminism more towards creating more unwomanly women with the least attention to womanly women’s rights, can be addressed with some more recommendations in the same direction. With the phrase “Humans are ever inclined to selfishness” (4: 128), Allah draws our attention to selfish human nature but with words: “And do not forget kindness among yourselves” (2: 237), Allah calls us to the goodness that we always need to remember in all our dealings of this life. For me the importance, relevance, and revisiting the injunctions of our religious text and the Word of the Creator of all the worlds, The Holy Quran, needs to be paid a focused heed to, lest the term feminism becomes the bane of our times.

Discussing some relevant passages may serve as an example of alternate means of addressing this monolith representation of feminism. In Ayat 21 of Surah Ar-Rum (30), Allah SWT clearly points out the origin of human being and the androgyny that may dispel the



unmindful sloganeering and its unchecked acceptance in the general public, especially in terms of feminism. Allah says:

And among His (wonderous) signs is that He created for you from your own selves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you love and mercy between your (hearts). Indeed in that are signs for a people who think and ponder. (30: 21)

Thus it may be seen that instead of reducing a human entity as a “racial body...[and] the naked category of lived experience” (Suleri 1992, 761), as we may put it in a postmodern lexicon, Allah is drawing our attention to the wonderous sign of creating spouses as reciprocating better halves for each other. Not only that but Allah is clearly indicating that He (SubhanahuWaTa`ala) has put *Muwada and Rehmat*, a deep and innate love and mutual mercy, between them (though a husband and wife do not have blood ties between them). And in the ending words of the same passage, the repetition of the word *Ayaat* used in plural form shows Allah’s emphasis on the phenomenon and process of thinking; that the thinking souls get a lot of understanding from these wonderous signs that Allah has made in the form of husband and wife. It should also be borne in mind that the word *Ayaat* need always to be understood in the closest rendering of its meaning as wonderous signs. So, when Allah calls the relationship between husband and wife as a wonderous sign, the words in which this news is given to us are also a wonderous sign of the Creator.

In this postmodern age, a monolithic representation of feminism seems ironic because postmodernist analysis of feminism calls for a plurality of solutions. Again, one of the solutions can be to consider the words of our Lord Almighty. Allah gives a detailed account about the mutual relationship between genders and lays down the basic precepts about conjugal laws in Surah Al-Baqarah especially from *Ayaat* 221 onward. A close reading of these *Ayaat* opens up a new chapter of understanding. Unfortunately, as the reality stands, these injunctions may not be seen being followed in practical ways, perhaps in most of even the Muslim countries around the world. However, if we cannot reach a certain height in our goals we do not bring down the bar of standard down. Similarly, it is our deficiency if we are unable to implement God’s words in true spirit. Repealing the laws, and that too God’s laws, is not an answer. Nonetheless, it is observed through history that reiterating these laws has helped Muslim and non-Muslim<sup>2</sup> societies in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> The example of Native American, African Americans, and Mormons may be cited as examples. These principles of Native Americans may further be seen in the paper, “Contemporary Native American Literature and the World: Issues, Debates and Representation in Selected Literary Texts,” in *Pakistan Journal of American Studies*; Quaid-e Azam University, Islamabad. ISSN 1011-811X. Volume 36, No. 2 Fall. 39-61.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348351583> Contemporary Native American Literature and the World Issues Debates and Representation in Selected Literary Texts. And see <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/mormons#:~:text=Mormons%20are%20a%20religious%20group,than%2016%20million%20members%20worldwide> for some explanation about Mormons.

Besides drawing many diverse in-depth inferences that Quran offers to its readers, even a cursory glance at the wordings of certain selected passages can be instructive for a very basic level of human existence. In Surah Al-Baqarah, after laying down the rules for selection of a spouse (221) and giving glad tidings for the ones who come in the shelter of Allah and develop a God conscious spousal sexual relationship (222-223) Allah indicates how to behave humanely in case of even a divorce (226) and why it is important for women to refrain themselves from remarrying for a certain time (228). The explicitly laid down rules of divorce (227-232) stand in sharp contrast to the mockery of marriage and divorce that is generally witnessed in some cases globally, and hence used for making uninformed slogans and jingles as is witnessed in the case of feminism (Bachom 2020) (Newman 2019) (Aurat March 2021 Islamabad 2021). For instance, the underlying principle that Allah provides even in the case of divorce, and certainly in a balanced conjugal relationship goes unnoticed in the ruse that transpires in feminist sloganeering. In Ayat 237 of Surah Al-Baqarah, Allah says:

And if you divorce them before consummating the marriage but after deciding on a dowry, pay half of the dowry, unless the wife graciously waives it or the husband graciously pays in full. Graciousness is closer to righteousness. And do not forget kindness among yourselves. Surely Allah is All-Seeing of what you do. (Al-Quran n.d.)

It may therefore be seen that the dower money that Allah declares to be a gift from Him that the husband is enjoined upon to pay his wife (Surah An-Nisa Ayat 4) is supposed to be carried out even in the case of divorce. It is quite important to note the cardinal principle laid down by Allah in case of discord resulting in divorce for any number of reasons; namely to never forget mutual kindness even while parting. When a society is raised on such principles of kindness, the question of mindless sloganeering about the pseudo rights would never arise. Or as Suleri would put it: "Realism of race, gender or profession gives too parochial or phantasmagoric category of addressing these issues" (Suleri 1992, 762).

Interestingly, when we try to unpack and understand the term *نِهَا* *Nihla*, that is mentioned in Surah An-Nisa Ayat 4, it opens new chapters of understanding. Ironically the second part of this ayat is quite well known among Muslim scholars; namely to eat any portion that women forgo them from the dower money. However, understanding the term *nihla* by one of the most authentic encyclopedias of Arabic language, *Lisan ul Arab* by a lexicographer, Ibn-e- Manzoor Al-Afriqui, makes us understand that the dower money that Allah has enjoined upon men is actually a gift from Allah that HE has enjoined on men to be given to women when they go in wedlock. This meaning brings a complete paradigm shift in our perceptions. Men come to know that it is not them who are gifting the women, but it is Allah's gift that they are supposed to give women. Imagine the amount of goodwill and rapport being generated between the opposite sexes, if men are conscious of the fact that Allah has shown mercy on them by being mindful of their wealth status and not burdened them unnecessarily, and yet, it is HIS onerous command that they are carrying out, and women are mindful of the fact that Allah is making the men pay a gift on HIS behalf.

Similarly, Allah's use of an interesting allegory in explaining the mutual relationship between husband and wife needs to be internalized for a sustainable existence in this world. Allah tells us that they complement each other as garments for each other in ayat 187 of Surah Al-Baqarah where He uses the phrase

“Your spouses are a garment<sup>1</sup> for you as you are for them.”

The metaphor of a garment holds the connotations of not only covering mutual shortcomings, but it also has an inference of beautifying each other. Just as a garment can provide a weather shield in harsh climates, it fulfils many other purposes, including an armor which can provide a safeguard against any physical or metaphorical enemy. The metonymical expression of garment encompasses all possibilities of protection and a sense of fulfilment for human existence in this world.

Academic feminism needs to investigate the reasons of a disregard of such pure goodness and the reasons of weakening the foundations of the means of human chapter on this earth. The contemporary postmodern world with its increasing propensities of breaking the family units, politically engineered promotion of homosexuality and directionless feminism, and reducing any phenomenon to the banality of easy dichotomies of pro and anti, as is seen in the convenient representationalism of feminist sloganeering, need not be taken on their face value. The increasing trend of such divisive strategies need be taken with a grain of salt and the “rude abrasions that Western feminist theory has inflicted on the body of ethnicity” (Suleri 1992, 764) need to be analyzed without any partisan approach.

An academic and critic, Camille Paglia, who is well known for her fiery expression, is increasingly serving as an anathema for today's postmodern feminist variants. Being a feminist herself, she is critical of the new tendencies in feminism, mania of gender transition, other assorted queer trends, and advocates for ruling out men bashing out of feminism. Through her reiterative statements in her various talks, she exposes the cult of exploitation of gender identities as a recurring sign of cultural collapse throughout the history of civilization. In her debate entitled “Feminism: in conversation with Camille Paglia” in 2016 and the subsequent section in the talk entitled “Lesson from History: Transgender Mania is Sign of Cultural Collapse - Camille Paglia” she debunks many myths that have been piling up in terms of modern-day feminism and transgender madness. In her 2017 book, *Free Women, Free Men: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, which is basically a collection of her well-known essays that she has written over her academic career, she writes:

The problem with too much current feminism, in my opinion, is that even when it strikes progressive poses, it emanates from an entitled, upper-middle-class point of view. It demands the intrusion and protection of paternalistic authority figures to project a hypothetical utopia that will be magically free from offense and hurt. (2017, n.p.)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As this book is downloaded from Z-Library and converted from an epub version therefore does not have page numbers.

Paglia views these present forms as “mental illness” and signs of decadence and a reason for annihilation of societies. Emphasizing on the need to learn our lessons from history, she opines that whenever a society is on the verge of its death it indulges in criminal cults (Paglia 2016, Lessons) that may be seen in modern feministic and transgender trends and are seriously damaging the cause of actual feminism.

What Paglia is describing for western society, somewhat similar idiotic scenes on the same leanings may be seen in modern-day Pakistan’s feminist processions (Happenings 2021). Such events and processions are being funded and aided by oppressive social forces, which, instead of giving strength to the actual feminist ideals, are trying to steer this ship of feminism into disrepute. Suleri, in her aforementioned article, though written before the modern feminist and transgender frenzy, makes an important point:

Within feminist movements Third World nationals often assume the role of mediator or interpreter, explaining the "bad" black people to their white colleagues or helping the "naive" black people to understand whiteness. ... Unwittingly assuming the role of go-between, of mediator, she re-inscribes a colonial paradigm.” (1992, 765)

Though the context in which Suleri is writing is about whiteness, but the words may befittingly be used for the subscribing mode adopted by the ‘Aurat March(es)’ (in Pakistan) that are getting more and more radical in their sloganeering and are a cause of damage to the real feminism that our Creator has bestowed us with.

A detailed analysis of the word of God to address and add to different dimensions of feminism can only be addressed in a full-length paper. Here I would restrict myself to giving only two more references that work as alternative points to ponder in order to resolve some of the ambiguities generated by pervasive cartesian entities as representation of feminism.

There is one particular Ayat of Surah An-Nisa which is often misunderstood and misquoted and used as a means for confusing a very important concept about feminism. I argue that Allah is the biggest feminist (if we have to use this modern-day jargon) and no feminist agenda in the whole human history can be this profound as given by Allah Almighty. In Surah An-Nisaayat 34 Allah Ta`ala says:

Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with.<sup>1</sup> And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them ‘first’, ‘if they persist,’ do not share their beds, ‘but if they still persist,’ then discipline them ‘gently.’ But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them. Surely Allah is Most High, All-Great.

Thus, on the onset one ambiguity that has been generated and fueled over decades is the word *Alqawwamoon* القوامون, generally mistranslated in Pakistani and Indo-Pak sub-continent context as a ruler over women, gets resolved. Investigating the real meaning of this word reveals that a man is not only a caretaker, as is written in the translation quoted above, but also a supporter, a guardian,

and a manager (Zulfu 2001, 1973, 554). These meanings change the entire fabric of our perception.

This analogy becomes helpful when we see that Allah has made a man thus because of the money he spends on his family. Exceptions should not replace rules, and so, any common discrepancies that are taken as case in points to this principle are oddities and should be dealt as such. All genders are equal in the eyes of God, in fact, even the inter-gender or intra-gender, who are thus by some abnormality in birth, not a cosmetic one, as can be seen as an example of Brown University that Paglia quotes (Paglia 2016).

Instead of looking at this term, *Alqawwamoon* القوامون, antagonistically, one tends to internalize the concept of being a manager, guardian or a supporter. It becomes a simple equation of a boss and employees. One is selected as a boss by some criteria by a company and the others as employees. A boss is held responsible for any allocated task and a boss is considered good who takes care of his team and makes them work in a congenial manner. However, this caretaker not only ensures these points of looking after his womenfolk, but also spends his entire earnings on his wife and his family. While a wife, even if she happens to be a business tycoon like Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ first wife Um-Alkhadeeja Radi-Allahu-unha, or his wife Um-Ayesha Radi-Allahu-unha, a teacher, or his wife Um-Salma Radi-Allahu-unha, a leather tanner, she is under no obligation to spend her money on her husband. Besides the liberty of working with dignity, these examples and many others stand as living examples of true emancipation for women. There can hardly be any justification of modern-day sloganeering when one understands how Allah and His last messenger, and even all His messengers, have upheld these precepts; especially when we hear Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ open declaration of love for his wife and asking the coachmen of camels to go slow because there are glass-vessels (women) sitting on the camels (Al-Bukhari n.d., 'Hadith' 6149). Like any modern-day understanding, the narrator of this Hadith comments that if such a comment would have been made by any other than Rasoolullah ﷺ, the other men would have made fun of him. Such comment by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ indicates that he is clearly breaking any taboos associated with female gender and openly declaring about their preciousness and irreplicable aspect in this metonymic expression.

The second concept, which is problematized by some feminists is *Nashooz* نشوز, which is translated here as 'ill conduct.' One of the reasons of associated common misunderstanding of beating etc. in this context is simply because the mention of this term in the context of men is never foregrounded and never brought under discussion. If we juxtapose the use of this term in the above ayat, and then the following one, we see that the edifice built around this term crumbles completely. In the same Surah An-Nisa, ayat 128, Allah says:

If a woman fears indifference or neglect from her husband, there is no blame on either of them if they seek 'fair' settlement, which is best. Humans are ever inclined to selfishness.1 But if you are gracious and mindful 'of Allah', surely Allah is All-Aware of what you do.

Here the word *Nashooz*, used for men, and the clear indication that human beings (not just men nor women) have the inherent propensity towards selfishness. The Creator, knowing well His creation, lays down the cardinal principle of being gracious and God conscious and the problem can be resolved quite amicably; just like the manager knows that he cannot mistreat his team of employees because he would be answerable to the owner of the company he is working for. Furthermore, we get a better understanding of *Nashoozin* in the light of *Lisan ul Arab* and Professor Zulfu's dictionary<sup>4</sup> rendering which describes this term as to have emotions of hatred and aversion for his or her companion (spouse) and lead ugly and sour, unhappy and uncomfortable life (Zulfu 2001, 1973, 667) (Qureshi 2020, 215). Thus, this hatred is reciprocal and cannot be on the part of women only as is generally perceived and then contested needlessly.

These stated passages offer a fresh perspective to understand the complexities of representational feminism unless we want to turn a blind eye to a possible solution given by no less than the Creator of this and all the other worlds, of which human existence is a considerable, and yet just a part. And lest our intellectual selves fall prey to what Allah has pointed out in Surah Al-An`am, 6: 91 when Allah states:

And they have not shown Allah His proper reverence when they said, "Allah has revealed nothing to any human being." Say, 'O Prophet,' "Who then revealed the Book brought forth by Moses as a light and guidance for people, which you split into separate sheets—revealing some and hiding much? You have been taught 'through this Quran' what neither you nor your forefathers knew." Say, 'O Prophet,' "Allah 'revealed it!'" Then leave them to amuse themselves with falsehood.

The choice is ours, whether to hide the instruction manual and try to lead our lives on hit and trial principles, or to take help from our machinery's guidelines supplied by our Creator.

## Conclusion

We have seen that any monolithic representational claims of feminism that are causing a storm in a teacup may be seen as a sloganeered boo-ha-ha, a noise, and even an obscenity. These postmodern cults which are causing an uproar in the present millennium are countered by many feminist academicians, literary, social, and cultural critics. To understand and propound a certain brand of feminism erected on self-righteous principles may only be understood in terms of a postmodern obsession. Instead of "enacting strategies of belligerence that at this time are more divisive than informative," (Suleri 1992, 765) and scaling down any other possibilities of alternative modes of understanding may be detrimental for the very existence of human life of which man and woman are a pivotal part. Any parochial understanding has had devastating consequences in history.

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<sup>4</sup>Ma`anZulfuMadina was an Associate Professor of Middle East Languages and Cultures, Columbia University, New York, USA. In the preface of this dictionary, he writes that he started this project in 1959 which gets finished in 1973 when he is writing the preface.

Summing up the whole discussion, it may be said that this paper adds to the criticism of many academics, literary and cultural theorists who are problematizing the rampant and gleeful anti-intellectualism of some feminist factions as manifested in the postmodern sloganeering. An alternative lens of an everlasting instruction manual for human being adds discursive possibilities in the field of feminism. It can be helpful to root out the causes of this continued obsession in some factions of feminism, which, instead of helping the cause of feminism in a healthy dimension, is, quite devastatingly, damaging its very idea.

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