



## **The Study of Islamic Feminism; Mapping in Laila Aboulela's *The Translator***

**Mahnoor Shahid Mufti**

University of Management and Technology, Lahore  
mahnoormuftiofficial@gmail.com

**Zarmeena Khan**

Lecturer at University of Central Punjab  
zarmeena.khan@ucp.edu.pk

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to make personality analysis in the characters of Sammar, Nahla, Mahasen, and Yasmin from Leila Aboulela's novel *The Translator* under the lens of Islamic Feminism, which was first, named by Margot in 2002. In this research the rules and regulations and rights which are set for the betterment of the women by Allah Almighty Himself are being discussed in the light of Sunnah, Hadith and Qur'an which is also taken as the sacred text. Different words, phrases and expressions are interpreted on the basis of religion and culture. Under this term it is believed that Islam has provided women with all sorts of rights consisting even of those which one could not even imagine, it gives the message of equality and also commands its believers to protect them like a treasure but also gives a free will to them. Where the society wants to treat them differently and creates such roots in the mind of people that a man's conscious and unconscious simultaneously control his personality; his actions as well as his discourse for treating Muslim women as inferior to them thus since childhood all sorts of knowledge, discourse, myths, stories, beliefs, art, literature, fairy tales and culture etc. influence their unconscious mind. In *The Translator* Leila Aboulela in a unique way explains these archetypes through the life of her protagonist and that how religion in being intertwined by culture and that how much a lady specially have to fight for using her Shariya rights. To show that there is need to unveil certain mysteries in the universe, which hold connections and ties among different phenomenon.

**Key Words:** Leila Aboulela's *The Translator*, Culture intertwined with Religion, Islamic Feminism, Shariya Rights

### **I**

Feminism is essentially a variety of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a typical goal: to outline, establish, and win political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to ascertain academic and skilled



opportunities for ladies that are as capable as men. It's been centuries since women are suppressed by males, they are kept away from important centers like, economic, politics, and especially from writing, they are considered as imperfect man because they lack of a penis which is considered to be a pen and thus only men can write. They were considered superior because they create immortal thing (which is literature) and women create mortal thing (that is a human being). Common words used to address a woman by this male dominated society were irrational, emotional and Others, which traced their path of someone who does not have their own "I" identity (as said by Lacan where 'I' depicts self) they are the subjects of men, just used for their sexual pleasures, and as the second class citizen. Jane Tompkins in her essay *Me and My Shadow* concluded this entire movement as: "What engages me is the way women are used as extensions of man, for their pleasures, their devices as their servants, otherwise the Western world does not or rarely give rights to women and also considers and treats them as nothing which makes Western World as having no woman." (Tompkins). Jane Tompkins' statement is a depiction the state of women at that time. Men were considered as heroes but they forget that heroes are born by the heroes not by the slaves. They labeled women as an object of physical attraction towards oneself and that it is the only objective of a women's life.

Additionally, as we know that when a movement starts many of the critics, writers etc. takes part in it to spread the voice of voiceless. Similarly as the time passed many critics took part in this movement like Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Simon De Beauvoir, Helen Cixous, including feminist writers like Virginia Wolf, George Eliot, Sylvia Plath etc. to show and to revolt the stereotypical notion about woman abounded in the literary canon. Gradually but slowly things begin to change. Law became a helping hand of women as well, woman begin to take part in many of the male dominated fields like economics, politics, writing etc. to spread their voice and to show what they really feel and who they really are, and now in this present time it's reaction is lucid comparatively more than men, women are successful.

While we are mentioning about Feminism, which is unfurl everywhere in this world there is another term or we can say erudition which is 1400 years old and which was given especially for Muslim Women. Muslims are 24% of the total population in numbers and are increasing day by day. In the present time Islam is the second largest religion which is being followed where first is Christianity. Like every other religion Islam is also having some sets



or we can standards of responsibility, respect, rights and regulations for every gender. It can be traced that Islam goes back to the time when Adam and Eve first stepped in this world. It is assumed that since then the conflict between genders and the way each gender should be treated was started. When we talk about Islam and Woman Gender in 2002 critic Margot Badran coined the term Islamic Feminism to address the rights and feministic approach of Islam. She defines it as: “As a standard combination of Islam and Feminism which advocates the Feminist discourses according to the rights and rules under Muslim paradigm” (Badran)

As mentioned above by Margot Badran, Muslim paradigm in most simplified terms means the path showed by the Allah Almighty Himself along with the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W) which is stored in Sunnah, Hadith and Quran. Just like every religion Islam teaches its followers to respect each and every creation of Allah. Therefore they have been assigned with different sets of rights and rules to follow. When we think about Islam the first image that arises in our mind is of a woman being confined and thus a question arises about how women must be in Islam?

We live in an era where Islamophobia is popular due to the image of the Muslims around the globe. The stereotypical image of Muslims portrays them as people who are authorized for wrong doing along with gender biasness being a prominent issue. World critically believes that Islam is a religion that confines womanhood. It is commonly anticipated that its women have no free will. Whereas in reality Secular Feminism itself wants rights equivalent to the set of rights and respect given to the Muslim women. We can also see that how these anticipations are baseless because on the vary surface level of Islamic knowledge one can trace that when a Muslim woman is born she is Al-Rehmat (Blessing from Allah), when she turns into someone’s wife she completes his Deen (Religion), and when she gives birth to the child she is having Al-Jannah (Paradise) under her feet. This is not only the respect given to women but a clear depiction of their status in Islam as well. Throughout the detailed reading of Islam we can find many such evidence of women having higher status then the men of their society.

Moreover, before discussing about the topics related to the Islamic teachings one point should be cleared that there are two approaches for Islamic teaching first is the Cultural Teaching; where religion is tamed according to the cultural preference. As the example of this



we can see that in our society women are preferred to be modest and often a verse from Quran's chapter 24 of Surah-Al Noor (the Light) in the verse 30 is recited which states "Say to the believing women that: they should cast down their glances and guard their private parts (by being chaste)..." which is the second half part of the Quranic verse, the first part of this verse states "Say to the believing men that: they should cast down their glances and guard their private parts (by being chaste). This is better for them." This example does not only show that how hypocrisy works in our society but also portrays that how our culture subjugates women in the name of Islam. The second is type of the teaching is the Transcript Teaching; the actual religious teaching that is preserved in Sunnah, Hadith and Quran.

It's been more than three decades where the new era of scholarship has been appeared primarily by the question of gender justice and methodological amelioration's. This study consists of the critical revisits and analyze things into its components which are dominated by the religious interpretations, to show the patriarchal elements and decimatory against women and aims to produce new knowledge that will make an ease for gender equality and justice within the Islamic Paradigm. This study predominantly focuses on the Muslim women and Muslim female scholars from all around the world and from different cultures like South African, American, Canadian, Pakistani, Indian, Chinese etc. and this new scholarship has been named as the Islamic Feminism.

Furthermore, when we mention Islamic Feminism through the lens of Quran, Hadith and Sunnah we are talking about the transcript teaching. A question arises over here is that what Islam basically say about both genders and their treatment? The answer lies in the History of Islam itself. Before Islam officially came into being and before the Holy prophet (S.A.W.W), there came 1, 23999 prophets to preach Islam, but none of them could do it as well as Muhammad (S.A.W.W) did. In the pre- Islamic period women were treated in an inhumane way. They were beaten brutally, daughters were buried alive, and were used as prostitutes. After the arrival of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W) and Islam, things changed drastically. Especially the standards and sets of respect, rules and regulations for women, Quran mentions about the duties of men and woman and their rights as "And for women are rights over men similar to those of men over women." (The Holy Quran)[2:228].



As mentioned in the verse above, it is lucid that Islam does not promote the slash system; person on the right side is superior than the left one. This is not the only time when Quran mentions woman having same rights as men. Our Holy Prophet and the beloved Messenger of Allah (S.A.W.W) while addressing Muslims on the occasion of his Farewell Pilgrimage, warned the people against the values which he feared would be neglected after Him and considers women's right as one of the important issues about whom he said: "O people, it is true that you have certain rights concerning you women, but they also have rights over you" later He (S.A.W.W) added "Remember you have taken them as your wives, only under Allah SubhanaTallah's trust and with His permission" and later he again added "Observe your duty to Allah in respect to the women, and treat them well." (at-Tirmidhī).

Through the mentioned above Hadith, we can observe that the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W) has preached Allah's message to treat everyone equal, no one is superior to anyone and especially treat women with respect and love, which portrays that in Islam they are considered as the Crown of men. While sharing the sayings of our beloved Holy Prophet and of Allah and of Quran, Sunnah and Hadith. The question arises over here is that are these only sayings or these should be applied by Muslims as well?

Answer to this question can be traced through a keen analysis of our surroundings and self. Islam has always promoted peace, value of one's individuality and self. Throughout the history we find countless figures promoting Transcript Teachings including women who have ruled the world when West was still dominated by men and their brutal behavior towards women was considered normal which could be traced in the work of writers like Marry Wollstonecraft, Sarah Scott, and Fanny Burney etc.

While talking about women empowerment one of the major problems that have been recorded over the centuries is about women being protected by men. In Islam this role of security even though has been given to men but women are not have been restricted of doing the same. We can see many Muslim women, who have worked as shields even for many of the brave Kings as an example we can mention women like Urdubegis who fought battles and were the shield of Kings like Shahjahan who are also mentioned in the Kishori Lal's book The Mughal Harem. Mentioning about women and battles we cannot neglect these Kashmiri Turks, Habshi and Tatar women called Urdubegis. The world knows that what kind of power did



the King Shahjahan and his empire had. While mentioning his power Kishori Lal in his book *The Mughal Harem* explains his powers secret as Urdubeigs. They were the group of Kashmiri, Habshi, Tatar and Turk women who were assigned to shield the emperor and the zanan khana of the Mughal Mahal.

Additionally, Lal also elaborates about the life of Mughal ladies. They lived in a different Mahal which was also called as Harem it had only women. Different rooms were allocated for each and every princess because they observed purdah and thus the administration of their living was entirely run by ladies and khuwajasarah's. This administration had over 5000 servants and noble women under the vision of Akbar who organized zanan khana. The task for its protection was given to Habshi's, Turk's, Tatar and Kashmiri women because they did not observe purdah. Many of these women were purchased as slaves and were trained for this position with the training of weapon combat, specifically lance and archery, a great deal was spend on them by Mughal which paid them off. As Mughal emperors spends great deal of their leisure in zanan khana, these women used to protect them while they were asleep. These ladies were terribly skillful warriors, in 1719 Farrukhsiyar hid in his harem fearing his life, and the armed guards of Mahal readied themselves for battle

Likewise, as another example we can see the life of Hazrat Khawlah bint al-Azwar (R.A); who was a warrior, a nurse, a companion of Our Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W), a noble sister and a daughter. She was skilled in such a way that in many battles when she covered her face people used to take her as Khalid bin Waleed. Thus often Islam is also considered as a feminist religion because of the rights and liberation which it gives to women. It says that women are not just for the household chores but they can fulfill any imaginable criteria of excellence. It is evitable in many Muslim households the treatment of ladies or women is based on love and respect. Even though just like exceptional cases there is only two to three percent of total Muslim population which does not follow the path showed to them by the Holy Prophet. These exceptional cases are somehow given more media coverage, which depicts the wrong essence of Islam and Islamic Teaching.

## II

We live in a society where since childhood women are taught to be pure, never even talk to a man; have command over each and every household chore. They have been prepared



to be a commodity of men who will then have a right to treat them the way they want to. Just like the jahiliya (which literally means barbarism); the pre-Islamic period.

Likewise, Fatema Mernissi in her book *Beyond the Veil* discusses this time of the Jahiliya, as “where unbridled, narcissistic, sexual consumerism ruled and women were reduced men to anonymous sexual commodities and denied them the right to fatherhood” (Mernissi). Shedding light over the brutal and inhumane experiences of women in Pre-Islamic period Mernissi’s statement gives a vivid picture of women at that time. Including treatments like being treated as commodities, used as prostitutes, beaten for no reason, the man who had a girl as the new member of the family was mocked by the society and was forced to hide even his face before leaving his home. Thus many of the girls were burned and buried alive, women were labeled as sex maniacs’, irrational and weak being; they believed that men were not emotionally weak personalities when it comes to the physical attractions between two sexes.

Also, Mernissi in her book gives answer to this assumption of women being emotionally weak personalities as an attribute associated with the females of the society. While arguing about this she explains it through the women’s charm mentioned in the *Garden of Lovers* a book which was written in the 13th century by Imam Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziya, meditating on the Korean verses “He (God) created the human being weak” interpreted as “man who is fragile because if he looks at the woman he cannot restrain himself” (Mernissi). Relating it through the transcript teaching of Islam it can be observed that Allah Almighty Himself commands that “Ask your believing men to lower their gaze and ask your believing women to cover themselves” (The Holy Quran)

Moreover, naturally it can be observed that there is an attraction between men and women which can be felt by everyone but It cannot be considered as a base to state that one gender is superior emotionally than other. It is universally impossible for both of the sexes to control their tendencies and emotions. The basic concept of couples in Islam is due to these different tendencies which are established so both the sexes could get along together as an example of this we can see that women are blessed with Patience, sharp mind, critical evaluation, and strength therefore they give birth to a child. They have a tendency to observe any situation or speech more critically than men they are blessed with such mindsets that they



can easily trace the lie, frauds in oneself and that is the reason even in the militaries male officers when going to a secret mission are said to avoid female security guards.

Whereas, men are blessed with physical strength and focus but still unlike women they cannot control their emotions and maybe that's the reason why when they are emotional they lose their sense of thinking. An Arab scholar, Dr Mohammed Hassan Abdullah who has written one of the best books uses this quote of Imam and added that, It is clear that male lacks self-sufficiency and needs a woman, which means that it is a universally promoted rule that the one who is lacking something would try to take control over the one who is having it. The same thing that is happening with women as well now they are said to be imperfect because they lack a phallus but in reality they are complete because they are the one who give birth to another entity. This complexity of superiority could be summed up in Marry Wollstonecraft's words which she used in her novel Maria or the Wrongs of the Women that "women always had the worst of it, when law is to decide" (Wollstonecraft)

Also, with the people who are in the support of this discourse there are also many critics that are against it, like a Pakistani American scholar Asma Barlas, which rejects the un-taught patriarchy in Quran and rejects the concept of Islamic Feminism because according to her it rejects the concept of feminism. In an article about the Islamic Feminism by Mulki Al-Sharmani mentions that instead, Asma Barlas introduces her project as a discourse that will project the new gender sensitive religious educations as performing her duties. Her duty to God as a believing woman, not as engaging in feminism. Mulki Al-Sharmani a Finland based researcher in her article about Islamic feminism mentions about the history of women and gender issues, which says that both of the discourses are totally different things but having same motive which is the betterment of the women in society.

Through the above mentioned examples we can observe that critics and scholars are having their own mixed opinions based on the different dimensions of Islam Feminism. Though they meet at the same point but these two dimensions includes 1) The Interpretation; Quran, Sunnah, and Hadith are preserved in Arabic, it is considered as one of the vast languages where every word can be interpreted in various perspectives. 2) What is the role of women in literature, and what literature says about Muslim women what are its roots cannot



be traced?; Many of the critics say that Quran was the first literature in which women were mentioned as a free entity.

These dimensions can be traced through Amina Wadud's book *Quran And Woman*, in this book she talks about women salvation, from within the Islamic world view. The uniqueness of this book is in its analysis of Islamic worldview, based on the original source, which is the Qur'an, and not on the secondary sources which are the interpretations and different literatures. Mentioning women roles Wadud argues "Qur'an does not support a specific and stereotypical role for its characters, male or female" (Wadud). Based on cultural, social, historical or universally accepted female functions. Qur'an is a moral history which proposes moral values which are "extra-historical" and "transcendental" in nature" (Wadud). Through this line Wadud makes it clear that in Qur'an if there is a reason for a specific incident than the universal "extra-historical" element gets excluded and makes it just as an history book in a limited sense of a recorded event. Qur'an promotes the application of the precepts exemplified by the characters mentioned in the verse rather than merely giving a record. In the most simplified term we can say that Qur'an remains to the character and the issue stating in order to present a moral principle without overburdening the reader. Wadud adds, "Qur'an gives just enough-but not too much details in order to facilitate its purpose" (Wadud). Mentioning about the women in Qur'an Wadud stresses "Readers who interpret the significance of the women cited in Qur'an often come to the text with notions of appropriate functions for women. When these are supported on the surface of the Qur'anic portrayal, they do not look further at the examples. This has led to a great deal of oversimplifications and contradictions when the perspective of individual exegete is superimposed to the Qur'an itself." (Wadud).

In this discussion of women in the Qur'an and interpretation it is important to understand that difference between the women as an individual and women as the member of the society. For most part of the Qur'anic consideration it can be traced that women centers their relationship on earth with the social system. However Qur'an focuses on an individual, whether male or female, in exactly the same manner because Qur'an says that the relationship between Allah and the individual is not based on gender terms. It is evident to address an individual Qur'an uses the term *nafs*. "Allah does not tax a *nafs* beyond its scope. For it (is only) that which has earned and against it (is only) that which deserved" (The Holy Quran).



There is no distinction between male and female with regard to individual capacity with regard to their relationship with Allah. With regard to their personal aspiration they are also the same. This is important to understand because in every society, it's been centuries since people have assumed that both sexes are "different not merely on the basic anatomy but in elusive qualities of spirit, soul and ability. They are not supposed to do the same things, think the same, dream the same, and desire the same" (Wadud) this social difference determines the difference between men and women; they conclude these differences as an indication of different values as well.

However, there is no such indication that the Qur'an intends for us to understand that there is a primordial distinction between men and women. Such interpretations are the reason for men being treated as fully human and women as less human than a man. The most troubling is the tendency to attribute these interpretations to the Qur'an itself rather than to the author who hold them. These authors and their interpretation encourages the stereotypes about men and women, which also justify the restrictions placed on the woman's right to pursue personal happiness within the context of Islam. To revolt this false representation of Islam and Islamic law Muslim writers have decided raise their voices and show the true face of society. One of such works is *The Translator* by Laila Aboulela. In which she discusses the conflict between the rights given to women in Islam and cultural practices negating them through the character of Sammar, Nahla, Yasmin and Mahasen.

### III

Starting from the protagonist herself, Sammar is a strong headed woman. Her character has been used to trace some of the important hypocritical elements of society while introducing true spirits of Islam. She is a widow, her husband died in a car accident. Sammar was married to her maternal cousin Trarig. She apparently shared a beautiful bond with her mother-in-law based on respect and love but in reality this bond was based on compromises Sammar made to keep her relationship with Tarig healthy. She was a puppet in Mahasen's hand "An obedient niece, letting Mahasen how you (she) should dress, how you (she) should make your (her) hair. You were happy with that, content, waiting for the day you would take away her only son" (Leila Abuleila). It is said that marriage is a bond between two people who would start a new beginning of their life together but in our society it is more like a



contract where a woman is taken as an object to be exploited, who would neglect herself to please people around and taking care of the child she has been married with. However this is often taken as a polite act of love in order to attain acceptance but it is against Islamic teachings. A daughter-in-law has no need to obey anyone from her in-laws. In any matter major or minor unless they advise her to accomplish something which is required by or deny her to accomplish that is haraam. They do not have the privilege to drive her to do anything like how to cook, clean, dress etc. unless it is for her guidance “The best among you is the one who treats his daughter-in-law equivalent to their daughter indeed that place (house) is best among other” (at-Tirmidhī).

Similarly, After Tarig’s death, Mahasen showed the ugliest face of the society. She blamed Sammar of “you killed my son” (Leila Aboulela), which is a common practice in our society. Widows are subjugated to an extent where they lose their all ties with this world; they are labeled as unblessed and are forced to live a life of grief; without realizing that there is no power on earth that can plan death other than Allah. Sammar being able to understand her rights given to her by Allah Almighty wanted to marry again to Ahmed Ali Yaseen “he’s religious... And feels a duty towards widows” (Leila Aboulela). Sammar asks permission from Mahasen to get marry with Ahmed but she forbids her saying “Nine months have not yet passed, you want to get married again... and to whom? A semi- illiterate with two wives and children of your age. I’ll never give permission for something like this. From what sort of clay you have been made of? Explain to me? Explain what you think you’re going to do” (Leila Aboulela). Mahasen’s reaction and treatment towards Sammar is the perfect depiction of how women are subjugating women. Negotiating the fact that according to Islamic Law a widow can get re-marry without consulting anyone. Mahasen decided to suppress her voice and ignore the statement of Quran where Allah Almighty Himself mentions “And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind – they (the wives, shall) wait for four months and ten (days). And when they have fulfilled their terms, than there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable manner. And Allah is (fully) Acquainted with what you do” (The Holy Quran).

Similarly, the hypocrisy of the society about the re-marrying and about the equality is also shown by the characters of Rae and Tarig. Rae who is a Middle Eastern Islamic Scholar



in a Scottish University and is the boss of Sammar, is divorced and had two wives but throughout the novel not even once he was questioned on being divorced even of having a daughter, and even in the novel he also says to Sammar that “I was afraid you were married. I would have deserved that...” (Leila Aboulela) which mean that he wanted get married to her. For a man it was as easy as cake but for a woman it is way too difficult to put her thoughts and also her practicing of religion in front of someone. Whereas, Tarig who was also the cousin Sammar, shows the true practicing will of a man; as the one who is after each and every decision for himself and other members of his family. Sammar was always the puppet of Mahasen and Tarig, they were making decisions for her and she was just allowed to say yes.

This pressure was to an extent that Sammar wanted her child to die. Which unveils another aspect of our society where women are forced to have a child after her marriage. They are not even consulted whether they want to have a child or not and if they aren't having a child within a year they are labeled as nulliparous. To unfurl this essence of the society, imagery of “froth, ugly froth” (Leila Aboulela) has been used to portray the condition of women in the society. This froth is the representation of the pressure a woman face in her daily life, giving voice “that could be rise if she started to speak” (Leila Aboulela). This voice raising for rights has been used to portray that how often other women and men of the society subjugate the voices that are raising. This also portrays the misleading of Islamic law and teaching, along with religion being twisted with culture. As an example of this can be seen in our own culture and religion where the Pakistani's follow the culture of Indian's and not only the culture but even their concepts about both sexes.

Whereas, in Islam women are considered as the Crown of men and not equivalent to them. In many scenario's women are being preferred over men as an example of this we can see that in Islam women are having financial advantage, their share is though considered as less but when calculated through the amount of share's they get, it is way ahead to the share of men. Their fortune is just their fortune, which means that if you have gifted something to her that it belongs to her only, no one can even borrow it from her. Men are not even allowed to ask about how much she has or if he can have a share from her wealth.



Similarly, talking about the status of a good woman in our so called Islamic society. Yasmin's character has been used to shed light over an important issue of modesty. Yasmin is Rae's secretary "Her parents were from Pakistan but she was born and had lived all her life in different parts of Britain... she generalizes the Third world and its people in her statement using "'we', where, 'we'" (Leila Aboulela). In an episode where Sammar and Yasmin went to meet Rae at his place. Rae mentions about cultural sensitivity; being aware of cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them value--positive or negative. Mentioning about a case in High Court where an Asian woman was awarded with thousands of pounds damages, against her husband. He slandered her by suggesting that she was not virgin before marriage. "The grounds for the case were that the insult was very serious in her community" (Leila Aboulela). Yasmin adds "yes, we prize virginity" (Leila Aboulela). It represents the scale on which a woman's modesty is being measured in Pakistani society or in any other country which is related to their virginity rather than their character. Most importantly a man dragging a woman on such issues to the court screams about the harassment and suppression a woman goes through on daily bases on a mere hint of being so called culprit. Whenever modesty or virginity is being mentioned it is always related to women and their hijab in our society. But in Islam while addressing hijab or modesty it does not address women but men first. Islam places the primary responsibility on wearing a hijab on men not on women. This point is critical to understand. Hijab or headscarf is much more than covering your hair and men needs to realize this. At the genesis of the hijab discussion Quran commands men to not to stare at women and not to be promiscuous. Quran mentions "Tell the believing men to lower [some] their gaze (not look at women's beauty other than those who are legal for them) and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what they do." (Surah Nur, 30) this verse rebukes forced laws on women that claims women must cover themselves, they should not avoid provocative attires which can attract men's attention. It destroys rape culture because it exclusively commands men first to reform themselves. It demolishes men's complaints about women modesty. Similar scenario can be illustrated from the life of our beloved Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W) when He (S.A.W.W) rode with his companion Al Fadl bin Abbas. A woman strikingly beautiful approached the Prophet to seek guidance on a religious matter. Al Fadl begins to stare at her beauty. Noting this Prophet (S.A.W.W) did not



scold the woman for immodest dressing. Instead he (S.A.W.W) “reached his hand behind Al Fadl catching his chin and turned his face on the other side so he would not gaze at her” (at-Tirmidhī). Through this example we can see that Islam has demolished all these cultural made concepts of women being modest, where their modesty is being related to their virginity. If virginity would be celebrated then The Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W) would not have been married to a widow, who was 15 years elder than him and had children as well. Whereas we can also analysis that while mentioning about private parts both of the sexes are commanded to guard them. Aboulela while mentioning about society and girls reputation adds, “a girls reputation is fragile as a match stick, a woman’s honor is labeled by the idol people, what determined the giving holding back, is your own willingness... a girl’s honor... your father will kill you ... your brother will beat you up... ” (Leila Aboulela)

Above mentioned quote reveals, the solution of this and says that no one will remember who did what and what was the reputation of yours but a woman should know what she can do for herself. She must be willing enough to stand for herself and to use her own mind instead of letting people decide for her. We live in a world where the opposite this condition is and Rae pints out this as; “many of the men like Chekov says woman pines over man when she is deprived of the company, and when deprived over the company of woman, man becomes stupid” (Leila Aboulela), women are objectified and are labeled as a product and as a being which is longing for just love and wants a man who will complete her lacks, and men are born sensible and are rational till they meet a woman and lose their senses.

Secondly, Sammar’s love for Rae and also the soon realization that he has a loss of faith which Sammar holds sacred is basically the representation of the true spirit of Islam. Sammar having the right to live her life as she wants to also give her a right to choose her partner. Sammar still asks him to embrace Islam which he denies even though he also claims to love her “and do not know what kind of sickness it would be to be away from” (Leila Aboulela), and says that he has studied Islam for the sake of politics and to examine Middle Eastern world. He is not sure whether he would follow Islam as his religion although each and every person wants to know when he will be converting to Islam. Sammar who thinks according to the true teachings of Islam, realized that it is against Islamic teaching which states “And do not marry the idolatresses until they believe, and certainly a believing maid is



better than an idolatress woman, even though she should please you; and do not give (believing women) in marriage to idolaters until they believe, and certainly a believing servant is better than an idolater, even though he should please you; these invite to the fire, and Allah invites to the garden and to forgiveness by His will, and makes clear His communications to men, that they may be mindful.” (The Holy Quran), she cannot marry Rae until he converts. Instead of forcing him too she decides to leave him behind and move on. Even though it seems weird that why Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman but not vice versa. It is because Muslims are commanded to respect each other and spread kindness and love which includes all past prophets and their religion (Christianity and Jews). Similar is the relationship between a husband and wife should be. But when a non Muslim marries a Muslim woman, her faith can be a source of discomfort due to their different believes. And the teachings they had. Thus it is better for Muslim women to practice their religion and be with the believer.

Moreover, talking about marriage and women, another character mentioned in the novel with this aspect cannot be neglected. Nahla, she is the neighbor of Sammar in Khartoum. She is getting married and shares with Sammar that she has not informed her elders about her marriage being a love marriage, for them it is an arrange marriage. This shows another right of women being neglected in the society. According to Islamic teaching “when your daughter says that she want to get married from her choice. Accept it. Do not call her shameless or disobedient. She has asked for her right which Allah has given her.” (at-Tirmidhī). Whereas societies take it as an offence and their daughters as a rebel against their norms and culture, and force them to subjugate their voices. Subjugating women’s voice in many scenarios is haraam especially when it is related to her life. Women in Islam are given free will and they have a right to practice it.

#### IV

To sum put the idea I can say that the decisions Sammar took in her life showed that even though people judge Muslims through the lens of Islamophobia which is currently very popular due to the image of the Muslims in the world. Muslims are portrayed as conservative for their women and promotes gender biasness. World critically believes that Islam is a religion that confines womanhood, it is very commonly heard that it restricts them to cover themselves even if they do not want to, it gives them no right if they want to marry four men,



they are restricted to step out of the house, it is a conservative life style for women and not for men, they are not treated equally as men and are just for the sake of their men's pleasure.

Similarly, It is also said that Islamic women are the victim of the terrorism as well, but through the character of Sammar all these allegations are proved wrong and also that the women in the Western society are following the paths which was shown by the Holy Prophet (S.A.W.W) by the command of Allah Almighty Himself 1400 years ago. It leads towards the path of betterment and protection but it is due to His creation which had mixed the culture and has destroyed its pure essence now people rely on others tongues more than Quran, Sunnah and Hadith. It can be concluded that Leila Aboulela shows the true face of our society through her characters as it is the similar is the case that is with even our own society where the women cannot or demand to use shariya because the society mentions only one thing and that is Allah has command to command children to respect their elders no matter what even if they are wrong instead of correcting them just accept what they are saying, has damaged the soul of teachings for women rights. Neglecting all those rights Islam gives to women. The hypocritical face of the society has been unveiled since it can be seen that it is our culture that suppresses a woman not Islam.

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