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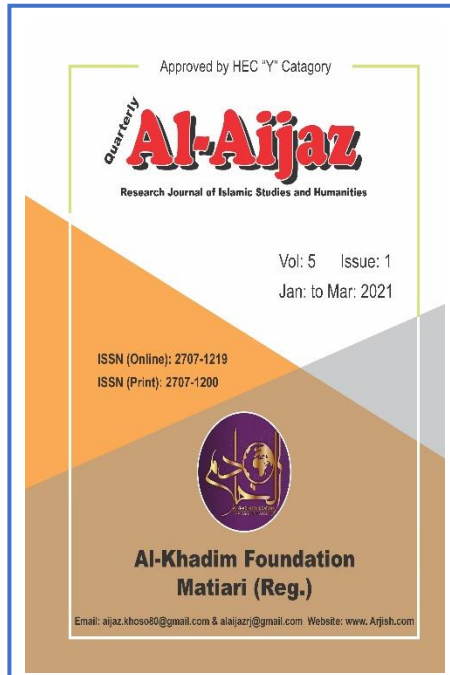
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TOPIC:

Feminism and Sufism

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Feminism and Sufism

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Abstract

The concept of feminism has been represented in different forms and criticized especially in the Muslim world. This study argues that Sufism encourages the concept of feminism in Islam and discourages the theological status of women. The Sufi trends for women are more supportive and relevant to the concept of feminism. In particular, this study looks at deific concept of feminism with Sufi preachings and practices; on the other hand it has also examined the western feminism under the shadow of human security concept. The main argument of feminist school of thought is to create equal social, political, economic, employment and educational rights for women. This argument reasserts that there is deep-rooted gender discrimination in all walks of life. Whereas, Sufism challenges Islamic fundamentalists and provides true recognition to the feminism as a quality of activity, authority, strength, greatness and power. Sufis believe that humans may find themselves in different types but eventually there is no female or male, only being. Sufism provides constructive pathways to safeguarding women in all means.

Keywords: Feminism, Sufism, Islamic Feminism, Mystical Feminism, Islamic Fundamentalism.

1. Introduction

In polarized world, where human beings seem to be moving passively towards chaos and violence, misfortune and disaster seem unavoidable. The human race is separated on the basis of caste, color, race, creed, faith, language, gender and several other differences. The intolerance and abhorrence have become the predominant factors of daily life. Precariousness controls the human beings. Even educated men and women are doubtful and disappointed, this confused state of mind making them indecisive, inactive, and helpless. This situation has created a sensation of distrust and despair amongst the masses. In such a situation, either religion offers shelter to several forms of diversions in order to forget and obscure gloomy truths.

Religion(s) always proposes or assumes to offer sense of security and relief, but it has become a trivial practice without spirit. At the same time, religion with its increasing emphasis on formalism and rights by the religious fundamentalists has created silent indifference among many devoted believers, intellectuals and youth. In order to understand this situation, it has opened numerous challenges of the modern age like increasing tendency of violence, gender inequality, instability, insecurity, terrorism and extremism in many societies. It has ruined the prosperity of social tendency like larger rights and larger freedoms within societies. Hence, it is heading for devastating future which can easily produce deleterious effects for any normal society.

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In any civilized society, gender symbolizes the general characters of public with the recognition of men and women, rather to physical and biological features. The role of gender varies according to cultural, political and socio-economic settings, and is affected by many elements like, class, race, age, religion, and ethnicity. The gender role always remains in learning position with having changeable approach. Gender equality always remains a purpose to safeguard equal opportunities, responsibilities, and universal rights of men and women, and boys and girls. It has been officially recognized by international organizations and governments, which is even protected in international commitments and agreements (United Nations, 2001).

International security studies established very close linkages with critical security studies in the 1980s. Critical security studies got the strong roots in academia and remarkably produced new concepts and principles including feminist security studies and human security studies (Huysmans, 2004: 122). The feminist orientation is marked with devotion to the study of discovering the outcomes of material structures and discursive representations of gender by diverse ontological lenses applications. Maria Stern (2006: 189) believes that, most of the literature focuses on critical security studies which 'address the threats mark down by elites of state security', however there is very tiny efforts have been done to 'marginalized' the actual position of critical and feminist security studies.

Sufism (also called as 'mystical Islam') sees feminism in different angle and believes in 'divine feminine'. Sufism has a diverse understanding to deal the issues of gender from the other traditional proceedings of the formal religion – especially Islam. This diversity is available in the work of many renowned Sufi scholars (Kim, 2009: 22). Many intellectuals have coined the term "Islamic feminism" under the Islamic jurisprudence and prophetic tradition followed by orthodox and rigid proceedings (Ashraf, 2013). This study argues that Sufism discourages the theological status of women in Islam and Sufi trends and traditions are more relevant and endorsed to the concept of feminism which provides constructive pathways to safeguarding women by all means. It also seeks to illustrate why and how feminist security matters for our understanding with Sufi (mystical) approach.

2. Scholarship of Feminism

Feminist activism elaborates that women should be equal to men in all domains of life. Mostly, men and women are considered as equal but in many cultures men are having more privileges. Consequently, societal arrangements are essential to reach inflexible equivalence between women and men. It also considers that gender always joins with other social orders (Freedman, 2003: 133-135). Advocates of feminism believe in social pecking order in which race, class, and gender pass through the social order (Eichhorn, 2014: 61).

A feminist viewpoint on the issue of safety is fundamentally unsafe because it divulges dealings of influence that are usually covered as of opinion. It offers a technique of examining the customs that such dealings are related to the protection of the people. Precisely, it not only permits to identify why record objects and sets of people are not merely "sovereign" (like well-off businessmen) or "disposed" (like females and kids in income-under-developed states) but also to understand how "autonomy" and "vulnerability" are created through the co-constitution of community dealings and non-recessive standards and sermons. Glimpse of overhaul permits us to see categories of interactive themes and

intimidations to their social safety that is usually concealed from assessment. For example feeble elders in dark-deserted Africa trying their level best to share the load of attention for their mature children suffering from AIDS as their mothers are not around them. The same mothers unfortunately are victim of corporeal exploitation wherever they have to perform jobs for the survival of their own and kids' lives.

Religion, sect and creed have always been used to keep the females away from getting their fundamental rights. Women have always participated at all levels to achieve prosperity and happiness because they are not only performing jobs as households but also creating networks among the communities. These females are susceptible to the laissez-faire (the non-involvement of the government in economic sector) economic policies under the strange circles of integration and globalization. But they are also substitutions of those who are taking maximum benefits from their skills at the cost of giving security to their houses, kids and land. Such a situation doesn't elaborate the misery of a specific group of women but germinates the issue of feminism across the globe.

Hominid safe keeping protects basics sustenance, existential shield and confidence in the firmness of described fundamental backers of well-being by searching severe and universal fears to persons beyond gender and competition lines. This idea gained a massive attention especially after the demise of bi-polarity, when on one hand, Francis Fukuyama (1992: 237) was writing about "End of history", while on the other hand, Samuel Huntington (1996: 1-2) was writing "clash of civilizations". It was a time when the prospects of traditional security were vanishing while the problems of "daily-routine insecurities" were replacing the old one. This was actually the start of a very crucial stage of globalization where integration of economies and integration of societies became the absolute but précised definition of globalization. Integration of economies and societies are the first step of human security study. The human security study however, gave a dynamic approach and conclusion to the threats faced by the individuals and their long-term ends towards the betterment of human kind.

Feminist critics and advocates have always emphasized on human security over national security. The argument that "hard power" under the philosophies of "Realists" has created a gigantic gap between the security of the state and much needed security of the individuals has really damaged the position of feminism. Males are seen as "the guards" while females are demoted to the place of "the dwindling". If male is always preferred to female, balance is always disrupted. If females are not treated well, it does mean that you are not providing them good food as well. If it is, it does mean that you are going to produce the next generation feeble and frail, since only healthy mother can produce a healthy child.

The model of human security has always been criticized by calling it as "idea of dreams", or utopianism (Christie, 2010: 170). Those who have been criticizing human security are very large in number. The opponents declare it vague, hazy and nontraditional in terms of massive economic expenses (Christie, 2010: 174). They also argue that such approach would introduce new one rather strange sort of peace in the society. Such debate is just like a critical debate on liberalism, as from realistic point of view, it is damaging the cynosure of traditional warfare mechanism. At the same time, if this phenomenon is considered for even a while to be implemented, the debate still remains there as it shadows down in economic growth and geopolitical manner.

3. Scholarship of Sufism

'Sufism' simply means, "The condition of being a Sufi". Sufis are usually recognized or known by their fundamental appearance, i.e., dress. Sufis usually use wool garments that make their appearance differentiated from the other world. Simple it can be quoted that the term "Sufism" sophomorically means "poor" (Sandano, 2012: 2-3). A specific school of thought believes that "Sufi" word is extracted from Arabic word "*Safwe*", which means "selected", or "*Suffa*", mean "purified" (Sandano, 2012: 4). Sufism is known as the internal mystical or psycho-spiritual domain of Islamic religion, wherein the followers try to find out the spiritual love and care by "God". In this contemporary and phenomenal era, so many Muslims and people belong to other religions despite the globalized life believe in Sufism.

Sufism actually focuses on the purification of the central part of the human body; i.e., heart. Followed by the purification of heart, a Sufi clears his heart from the obnoxious presence of 'ego' 'pride' and any other evil. Those people who consider its authenticity, do believe that it is just a philosophy, whose origin is from old traditional Islam, but those who don't believe it current sophisticated, progressed and developed epoch, are of the view that it had lost long ago especially after the demise of great Sufis. Without indulging in this debate, it is clear to say that Sufism still exists even in this contemporary society with its all colors and norms. Yes, Sufism is really a difficult task in the way that you have to purify your heart from ego and pride to get closer to God, but it is never impossible. So criticism is only justified if one doesn't try wholeheartedly to fulfill the demands and fundamental assumptions of Sufism (Sirriyeh, 1998: 23-27).

There is no gender discrimination in Sufism, both male and female are equal. It discourages gender discrimination and emphasizes on equality, care, love, affection, peace, unity and harmony. It demands tolerance and dignity of others, a heart without ego, and understanding of spiritualization. Sufism advocates the mysticism in Islam. It has main two factions, first called Sufis, who do not care more about the Islamic jurisdictions and preachings of religious leader/clerics. They love music and find their own way to fell and catch Him. They believe in soul, not in gender. The second faction called progressive liberal Muslims (also call themselves Sufis) who strictly follow the Quran, the life of the prophet and Hadith. They are divided into different orders like, Chishti, Qadiri, Suhrawardi and Naqshbandi and further suborders. They strongly support the philosophy of Islamic feminism within the teachings of Quran and Hadith.

Feminism and Sufism have common objective for women. Feminism advocates equality, authority, democracy, greatness and the strength of women. While Sufism also supports that same objectives (see Figure 1). The scholarship of feminism works on the social, political and security perspective while Sufism supports feminisms in all its' means with spiritual approach. These both approaches have the same common objective to discourage the set trends and traditions of gender discrimination within and outside of religion.

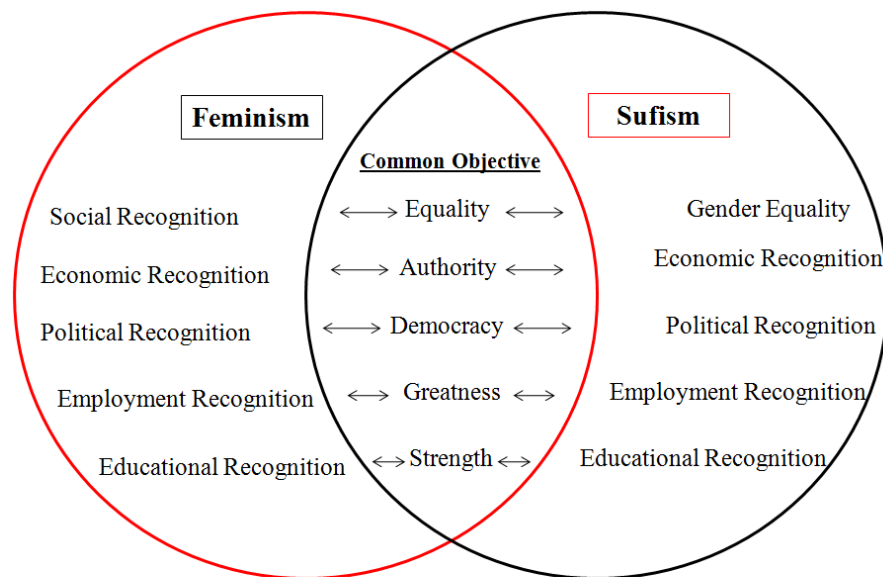


Figure 1. Shows the common objectives and resemblance between Feminism and Sufism

4. Islamic Feminism

Islamic feminism as a subject has been under much debate since its emergence as a terminology. On one hand, the debate covers the topic of women rights in Islam and their actual position in an Islamic society while on the other hand, it also casts glance on those who impede the way of giving them the equal right under the same umbrella. They usually raise the question; is there really any existence of the term “Islamic feminism”? Does feminism keep any place in Islam? The opponents however declare it a false rather tricky term as society is male dominant, so feminism is opposite to the Islamic norms (Faruqi, 2011). Another reason of their opposition is that they are fearful that Islamic feminism may not mix up with the Western feminism.

The progressive liberal Muslims are the main supporters of Islamic feminism on their terms and conditions. Some scholars have made efforts to dexterity a feminist theology and reinterpretation of Islamic typescripts. Nayereh Tohidi is an Iranian female who advocates feminism rights in all spheres of life. Tohidi has promoted the egalitarian ethics of Islam and has incorporated (Quranic) verses that support women’s access to education (Bodman and Tohidi, 1998: 94-97). Now it is clear that Islamic feminism has its own realities and deeds, neither it is affecting the societies of West nor Africa. It has its own Islamic version which purely refers Quran and the preachings of Prophet Muhammad in the true sense.

The purpose to flourish Islamic feminism is to introduce justice, equality and peace for the women as desired and ordered by God through reveal book. Such justice should be based on the true internal desires of female for the best of her satisfaction and peace. For decades, Muslim ladies have been deprived and kept silent against their desired rights. It was the era of male-dominated society, which unfortunately presented women as deprived. Literacy, awareness, knowledge of fundamental rights and strength hence are the fundamental rudiments of Islamic feminism.

The holy Quran gives rights to women as: "A male shall inherit twice as much as a female" (Quran: 4:11), "Call in two male witnesses from among you, but if two men cannot be found, then one man and two women whom you judge fit to act as witnesses..." (Quran: 2:282) and "Women shall with justice have rights similar to those exercised against them, although men have a status above women" (Quran: 2:228). These declarations have created division between different factions of Muslims. However progressive liberal Muslims who called themselves as Sufis under the different orders strictly follow the Quran, the life of the prophet and Hadith. While their leaders (*sheikhs*) emanated their orders or chains of lineages (*Silsila*), transforming Sufism into an organized religious movement on a firm basis. Under feminist outlook, the major drawback of this scheme is the broadcast of spiritual information learnt by the initiators of the guidelines to consecutive leaders (*peers*) of Sufis by male heirs.

5. Sufism Challenges Islamic Fundamentalists

Conservativeness is defined as indiscrimination towards mankind. They always try to find the conclusion in their own way; i.e., hardline and static approach. Islamic fundamentalism is basically a non-dynamic approach where one follows the hard and fast rules, no matter how much is he wrong in the nature. A conservative person bounds his ideas to a limit where after, the wisdom makes no place. They always evince dark face of the religion: violent, intolerant, and inhuman. It is, therefore, vital for one to differentiate between Islam as a religion and belief and Islam as a political creed which is used for objectives that has nothing to do with religion. Fundamentalism, because of its basic tenets that are against Islam's basic mission, is, in Tibi's term, 'a horse of another color'; it can be challenged and encountered by Sufism which based on tolerance and love, peace and humanity.

World has experienced the propagation of Islamic fundamentalism all over world during the last three decades. If we stick to basics of Islam like equality, justice and tolerance then it would be positive step. Islamic fundamentalism is streamlined by qualities like inflexible, impractical, despotic, totalitarian, and utopian; all of these are against the rudimentary general teaching of Islam and, therefore, is to be opposed. Enactment of Islamic jurisprudence is an illustration of how Islam can be implemented as a political weapon.

Politicization of religion has influenced states; communities and societies. Women have obviously appeared to be influenced the most from the above one. Let us learn from history. Take a preview of Iranian Revolution under Khomeini in 1979, Sudan under Numairi, Taliban in Afghanistan, Wahhabis in Kingdom Saudi Arabia. Religious and political authorities in said countries have displayed their 'hatred,' or most probably 'fear,' of feminine, as if women were the source of humiliations and destruction and therefore have to be firmly controlled.

Many cases of humiliation of women have been recorded from these countries. In Iran, women were passionately supporting revolution but only two weeks after overthrowing the Shah, Khomeini issued religious decree to limit women, forcing them to wear veil, relinquishing the Family Protection Law, and banning women to work with men. The stories of Taliban's cruelties specifically in Afghanistan and most parts of Taliban-controlled Pakistani areas committed in the name of Islamic jurisprudence are widely renowned. Women were barred from acquiring any profession like doctor, lawyer and teacher. Women

are even now being forced to wear veil in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Such bags in contradiction of females are most perhaps connected to the orthodoxy's mania to elevate communal beliefs, which they fix at the price of females.

Sufism emphasizes on the unworldly empirical sideways of Islam. As the title repeats us, Sufis are the spokespersons of Quran emotionally, so Sufi doctrine is full of representation. Sufis do not appreciate a term rendering to its verbatim denotation, somewhat they effort to pursue for an inward import. In stripe with this explanatory tool, 'woman' seems as a character of a thirst depth. Zulaikh, the female of Potiphar, is an example of this habit of arguments and hunt for denotation by Sufis. They see their desire for Spirit as a digit in Zulaikh's excited craving for Yusuf (Joseph in the Bible). The Sufis have reinterpreted the principal melodies, and enhanced to the story the content nuptial of Yusuf and Zulaikha. Zulaikha characterizes the Sufis and their craving for Deity. Zulaikha has converted for Sufis the figure for 'the soul at peace', where peace is the complete willingness of divine.

The chief characters of Sufism are lamentation, abstaining, deficiency and misery; but only for the sake of God. The above mentioned characters are equal to give up ego and pride only to please God. This shows that how much Zulaikha's story helped the Sufis finding in their ways. "Zulaikhaism" has given a new depth and classification to the Sufism. Sufis see themselves as the spouses of God how long to be with the cherished partner (Schimmel, 1999: 44-45). But conservatives and orthodox fully decline the perception of Sufism and feminism. They trust that Islamic feminists and Sufi supporters are western subsidized mediators with precise board of escapist Islam from actual trail of Islamic jurisprudence and prophetic traditions.

According to Prof Sayed Hussain Nasirthat (2007) Sufism is the powerful antidote to the religious radicalism and has termed it the most important source in addressing the challenges posed by modernism. Perhaps, that's why attacks on Sufis, Sufi sites and feminist activists have become routine, not just in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya, Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Mali but throughout the Islamic world.

6. Sufism: A Path to Feminism

Since the dawn of human awareness, both male and female, have accompanied the path of junction with the 'source of being'. However in this world of duality people may find themselves in diverse forms, but in the long run there is no female or male, only Being. The Sufi trends are recognizing this truth and encouraging the divine growth of women that seems impossible in other societies or religions.

It is very hard to deny the progressive role of women in the expansion of Sufism. The empirical evidence and classical understanding have started with the Prophet Muhammad. He preached the message of integration of matter and spirit, everyday life and essence, recognition of the masculine as well as the feminine. However culture has manifested and covered over some of the genuine virtue of intention, the holy Quran clearly conveys that the equality of men and women before the eyes of God. During the goddess-worshipping period, Arabian tribes were very barbarous; they used to bury infant girls alive in favour of male successor. Later the Abrahamic tradition raised the voice to reestablish the recognition of the 'unity of being' (Nurbakhsh, 1990). It tried to develop the balances, instructing to honour and respect for the feminine.

In the early period of Prophet Muhammad's revelation, his wife Khadija played a great role. It was her personality who sustained and supported him against his own bewilderment and doubt. She always supported and stood beside him in all difficult times to preach new faith. Later, it was Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad and Khadija, who flourished the deeper mystical (Sufi) understanding of Islam, and indeed she is often recognized as the first Muslim mystic. Fatima's marriage with Ali developed new exemplification of Sufism into this world.

As the Sufism developed, Rabia Basri (717-801 A.D) was first women who expressed the connectivity with God in divine or Sufic language. Her realistic language of Sufism was not that much easy to understand. She experienced many difficulties in her early years, but later her challengeable attitude and love of God made her strong. According to her, 'one could find God by turning within oneself' (Smith, 1977). As Muhammad said, "He who knows himself knows his Lord" (Jamal, 2007).

Sufism has always privileged the feminism. While, divine feminism has always remained as integral part of it. As God has both feminine and masculine qualities, but for Sufis, God has always been the beloved and they (Sufis) have always been the lover. The holy Quran also refers that at the final day of judgment this teaching perhaps disclosed: "And there is manifest to them of God what they had not expected to see" (Quran: 39:47) It may be amazing for those who believe that Sufism is a patriarchal faction of Islam. The reason of this misunderstanding could be the very nature of feminism in Islam and its different factions. The philosophy of feminism was being judged as this famous quote of Sufi scholar Jalaluddin Rumi (1207 - 1273) who writes that: "Woman is the radiance of God; she is not your beloved. She is the creator—you could say that she is not created" (Rumi, 2002: 6-7).

In Sufism, women can reach the highest rank of spirituality and religiosity. It's true that the participation of women in Sufism challenged by dominant Muslim men and the observation of religious scholars which has influenced society that woman is a source of sexual desire (Chittick, 2003: 24). Actually, Sufis perceive and search their own way to experience spirituality rather than following the teachings of religious scholars. Sufi believes that, whosoever emphasizing on individual spiritual freedom, he/she can achieve the final level of spirituality despite of gender, social and economic status. As Al-Hajwiri quoted that: "It was the development of Sufism within Islam which gave women their great opportunity to attain the rank of sainthood" (Smith, 1994: 130).

Sufis refuse to separate humans into men and women; they believe that souls are the essence of all human beings. The path of Sufism leads Sufis to unity with their God. As Shabistari quoted that "In God there is no duality. In that presence 'I' and 'we' and 'thou' do not exist, 'I' and 'we' and 'thou' and 'he' become one.... Since in the Unity there is no distinction... the quest and the way and the seeker become one" (Smith, 1994: 1-2).

The scholarship of Sufism provides a wider pathway for women to expand their social, economic, political and spiritual activities. It preaches sisterhood, brotherhood, inclusiveness and tolerance. These trends are support eschew revenge and social healing. It advocates supportive economic base love, cooperation, and sacrifice –supporting communal and individual self-reliance, an impartial distribution of the limited natural resources. It also offers a foundation of redefined democracy in mystical terms, and enclosing it as a global reorganizing or process of political understanding.

7. Conclusion

Islamic scripture has never paved the way for the fair treatment of woman; instead, it is the misinterpretations of Islamic jurisprudence and prophetic traditions that have created anti-women biasness. The holy Quran which states both the rights and the responsibilities of women. Even the Quranic verses which are in favor or advocate rights of women were treated as mere recommendations. On the contrary, things which prohibit, confine or restrict women were accepted and obeyed as strict rules. The laws are customized according to customs and have deep rooted patriarchal mentality which are discriminative and against women, thus it has dominated the conceptualizations of woman in Islamic jurisprudence. The moral instructions have been eschewed and compromised to set the rules for the people. The one-sided interpretations of Quran have led to the unfair treatment for women in Islamic jurisprudence and later this bias against women was seen as reasonable and lawful interpretation.

Feminism, Islamic feminism, divine feminism or human security offers a different interpretation of the place of women in society. The theme is to ensure basic sustenance, existential protection and confidence in the stability of these basic guarantors of well-being to individuals across gender, race and class lines. However, Sufism seeks a spirituality that must take account of the spiritual state of a person. Physical gender is merely an external appearance. In Sufism the spirit and soul are above all things regardless of gender appearance. The 'Woman' is used as a symbol for all those who sincerely seek God regardless of their gender. In addition, Sufis have tried to include the feminine aspect of God, not all-male or strong, but to understand Him better.

The history of Sufism is adorned by few prominent female Sufis, and female masters of famous Sufis like Rabia Basri (Ahmad, 1984) and Lella Manoubia (Belghith, 2018). So we can conclude that in Sufism, women have their some share and can enjoy greater rights. This suggests that Sufism opens more doors for women than orthodox Islam (Helminski, 2003: 82). The concept of woman in Sufism enlightens the role of women and is attentive toward women. It is much evident that, Sufism can create more space in the conservative societies by providing a fair place where men and women can meet together and thrive in balance and harmony.

Feminism is the light of Sufism; it is a need of time to stand together in the light. It opens the ways for greater consciousness of equal partnership. It is actually a learning process, male and female need to learn from each other. Their mutual recognition can create balance within them and apparently in the world. The male is a symbol of determination and strength also belongs to women; the female is a symbol of beauty and receptivity and also belong to man. As we learn to witness the vision of creation, a time comes when "wheresoever you look, there is the Face of God; everything is perishing except the One Face."

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