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FEMINISM IN PAKISTAN: A Critical Analysis of Women's Paintings in Punjab

Abstract

Feminism in Pakistan reflects personal recounts, psychological and emotional states, and mystical preferences of the individuals. It represents diversity of experience reflected through a diversity of imagery, medium and scale; it is more of a trend rather than a style. To study and to comprehend Feminism, the research methodology employed in this paper is derived from qualitative and theoretical research. In order to achieve this goal the research is mainly focused on contextual and formal analysis. This research will particularly explain the history of Feminism in order to understand the origin of the term in the world and then its development in art. When it actually started in Pakistan in its true sense? What factors led the emergence of feminism in Pakistan? Does it really exist here? How successful the artists are in showing the true essence of Feminism? These are the main queries this paper is going to deal with. The work of Pakistani Feminist artists especially of Punjab has been studied and a comparative study with other areas and the West has been done. It has been concluded that Feminism in Pakistan has shown varied individualized trends mostly using strong symbolism, showing complexities women are inherently born and faced with in this male dominating society. They are talking about different style than the style of 'Feminism' taken in the West but principles are almost same. Their work is more personal rather than general, thus being used according to choice

rather than in a broader perspective of the term or as a movement.

Key words: Feminism, diverse imagery, socio-political, discrimination, patriarchal, self-realization, progressive.

Introduction

The term Feminism and Feminism in art has its foundations in West, in late nineteenth and twentieth century. The term Feminism first appeared in France and the Netherlands in 1872 (as Les Feminintes), Great Britain in 1890 and United States in 1910. A broad spectrum of Feminism includes the acting, speaking, writing, and campaigning on behalf of women issues and rights and identifying prejudice to females in the society.¹

In aesthetics Feminist viewpoints first arose in the 1970s from a combination of political activism in the contemporary art world and analysis of the historical conventions of philosophy and of the arts. They have developed in combination with the postmodern debates about culture and society that have taken place in many fields in the social sciences and humanities.²

It had no direct ancestry in Pakistan. In Pakistan the scenario was entirely different. Art was a subject of luxury, for elite class women. It aimed at making them more artistic and stylish, to be better housewives, with a more developed taste for home décor. So Feminism was only present there in the sense that art was considered a feminine thing. Fine Arts as a subject started in Punjab University in 1940 by, the then Vice Chancellor, Mian Akhtar Hussain as a recreational subject only for women who according to him should not study sciences as it is a waste of time as they ultimately had to get married so Fine Arts is a better option for them making, them not ‘artist’ but ‘artistic. It was an indirect attack on women rights and was highly discriminately but was even accepted by women then because of the social norms. Ana Molka Ahmad though strongly resisted this thought but continued the department with only female students. These were the earliest

¹ *History of feminism* - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_feminism

² *Feminist Aesthetics* (Stanford Encyclopedia of *Philosophy*)
plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/ (accessed on 14.05.2013)

motivations that led to true Feminism later in Pakistan. It led the women to stand for their identity for themselves as artist and their art.

Lahore was the main center of artistic activities and women were a vital part of it. The culture of Punjab influenced the art and artists representing the norms of the Punjabi society with social and political implications. Art as craft was already there for men at Mayo School of Arts who worked under the apprenticeship of skilled masters and had complete hold on craft art with no place for women. In fifties and sixties there were many known male artists like Shakir Ali, A.J. Shemza, Ahmad Parvaiz, Sadequain, Murtaza Bashir etc. but for serious female contenders to the title of artist, access was blocked because of the social standards and conventions.³ They were only accepted as teachers. Due to Ana Molka's strict adherence to the academic style, Abstract art could not flourish in the University. But on the other hand she trained her students to fight for their rights and must know their worth. Because of her strong personality they were aware of their rights long before Feminism actually started here in Pakistan.

Women artists had to struggle many times more than men to get recognition as an 'artist'. Later in 70s and 80s the socio-political conditions not only led activist, poets and literary people but female artist also to react and resist in their own way against these situations, fighting for the rights of the individual. Especially the artist of Karachi, some of them trained by Ana Molka, worked for the women rights in their highly individualistic style showing strong feminist trend.

Names of eminent feminists of Lahore and Karachi are Salima Hashmi, Lalarukh, Hajira Mansur, Qudsia Nisar, Laila Shahzada, Lubna Agha, Naheed Reza, Mehr Afroz, Sumbal Nazir, Nighat Idrees, Rahat Naveed Masud, Iqbal Hussain and Kishwar Naheed, Fehmida Riaz, (writer), Asma Jehangir (activist).

Literature Review

1. Salima Hashmi, in her book, *Unveiling the Visible* has given a comprehensive study of the development of women art in Pakistan, and the factors leading to Feminism have also been explained stressing on political and social discrepancies, and explaining the role of women in this art scenario.

³ Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Life and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* (Lahore: ActionAid, 2002),8.

2. Ijazul Hassan in his book *Painting in Pakistan* gives a good history of South Asian art. In an objective manner he has discussed various phases of Pakistani art and a formal analysis of artists work both male and female.
3. Marcella Nesom Sirhandi in her *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan* has well documented the history of Pakistani art helped in writing the history of women art.
4. Akbar Naqvi in his *Image and Identity* has done a good critical analysis of Pakistani Art. His chapter on Feminine Space is an insight of feminism in Pakistan, and an understanding of the developing phases of Feminism and work of various artists.
5. Salima Hashmi's *Memories, Metaphors, Mutations*, explains the political situations that led the women to stand for their rights, during the 80s.
6. The study of Feminist Aesthetics from *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, gives an insight of Plato's philosophy regarding gender discrimination in the Western history.

History

In West from the very beginning history shows that the gender discrimination has its roots and women have always been looked upon as a commodity instead of a human. From Ancient times to the Classical world there is no mention of any female as a philosopher, scientist, artist or literary person. From mother goddesses with their symbolic forms, to Venuses with their ideal beauty, women are represented for some physical reason and not for their intellect. Man had the monopoly as proved by Plato's philosophy. In his *Republic* the Greek tradition of art is being depicted. He regarded mimesis as dangerous. According to him Socrates and his friends had a vision of an ideal society that has full control on art forms such as drama, music, painting and sculpture. Although his condemnation of mimesis does not seem to have any direct link with gender issues, but his influential system has important indirect connotations common with gendered significance.

To attain the knowledge of Forms over indulgence in the pleasures of mimesis, the eternal, abstract, intellectual world of ideal forms had more value over the temporary, particular, sensuous world of physical objects. It shows the conflict between mind and body which is deeply related to gender asymmetry which was strongly criticized by the Feminist philosophers. The dual combination , mind- body; universal-

particular; reason- emotion; sense-appetite and male-female, were not merely correlative pairs but they are placed particularly according to ranks, the first taken to be naturally superior to the second, like universality is superior to particularity, reason is superior to emotions, similarly male and female are also root members of the opposites that has been present in Western Philosophy since Pythagoras,⁴ confirming the presence of discrimination of male over female in Western thought since the start.

The situation in the historical philosophy of China was also not very different. Chinese philosophy tends to focus on the relationship between the various elements of nature. According to Daoist beliefs people should maintain a close relationship with nature for optimal moral and physical health. Within this structure, each part of the Universe is made up of complimentary aspects known as *Yin* and *Yang*. *Yin* can be described as passive, dark, secretive, negative, weak, feminine and cool, and *Yang*, which is active, bright, revealed, positive, masculine and hot, constantly interact and shift from one extreme to the other, giving rise to the rhythm of nature and unending change. So this concept clearly shows the stature of women in the society only reflecting the dark side of nature. Similarly from South Asia to Arab world before Islam women had no respect and rights. So the history of the World confirms that irrespective of cast, creed and country the women were denied of their basic human rights. All these factors led to the development of a thought that took shape of a movement, The Feminism.

This movement had different causes and goal according to time, culture and country. Western Feminist movement is divided into three waves. The first wave started in nineteenth and early twentieth century and its main focus was to gain legal rights, political supremacy and suffrage for women. The second wave in 1960s and 1970s persuaded women to understand facets of their own personal lives and was largely concerned with the issues of equality, ending the discrimination in society, education, and in the work place. The third wave rose in the early 1990s as a reaction to the perceived failures of the second wave,

⁴ *Feminist Aesthetics* (Stanford Encyclopedia of *Philosophy*)

plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/

Feminist Aesthetics, First published Fri May 7, 2004; substantive revision Wed Nov 7, 2012 (accessed on 16.05.2013)

and a response to the repercussion against initiatives and movements created by the second-wave.⁵

The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists 1894 for the first appearance of "feminist" and 1895 for "feminism". The UK *Daily News* first introduced "feminist" to the English language, importing it from France.

In Fine Arts women were categorized and were restricted to traditional domestic art which was not considered as art proper. This is one of the reason there is no suggestion of any great female painter so women contribution in visual art contracted fundamentally.

Feminist Art Movement stressed that women should express their experiences through art where they were trivialized. This was also a reaction against how women artist were treated. Women were not allowed to take proper art training, or exhibit their art work or selling it through the galleries.

Women had created art for centuries.⁶ Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Are There No Great Female Artists?" was published in 1971. Of course, there had been some awareness of female artists before the Feminist Art Movement. In early twentieth century artist like Georgia O'Keeffe and Frida Kahlo, Mexican artists, became icons of women painting. Georgia recognized as the Mother of American Modernism. 1970s feminists celebrated O'Keeffe as the originator of "female iconography". Her themes included women reproductive parts compared with flowers in shape and symbolic of women vulnerability in the society.⁷

Frida Kahlo was also an important early feminist artist, born in Mexico, worked in Surrealist style. Her paintings depicted feminine qualities of endurance of truth, reality, cruelty, and suffering. Never before had a woman put such agonized poetry on canvas as Frida did. Chadwick states: "...Kahlo's *The Broken Column* (1944)... reinforces the woman artist's use of the mirror to assert the duality of being, the self as

⁵ Feminism - New World Encyclopedia
www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Feminism (accessed on 16.05.2013)

⁶ Linda Napikoski, *The Feminist Movement in Art: New and Evolving Perspectives*, About.com, women history. (accessed on 20.04.2013)

⁷ Georgia O'Keeffe en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_O'Keeffe (accessed on 05.06.2013)

observer and observed. ... Kahlo used painting as a mean of exploring her body as her consciousness of its vulnerability; in many cases the reality dissolves into a duality, exterior evidence versus interior perception of that reality." (Chadwick, 2007)⁸.

Feminism in art started in its true sense in the active phase of second wave, from later 1960s to 1980s. Feminist artists have been particularly interested in what makes them different from males. Feminist thought was against the strong patriarchal heritage of art by males that not only dejected the female artist, taking them inferior, and at times even misbehaving with them. Men maintained their studios eliminating them from art training, they were not allowed to exhibit or sell their works. In 1985 a large exhibition was arranged in New York and out of 169 artists only 13 were female, in resistance to which a group of females was formed the Guerilla Group, to counter sexism and racism in art world.⁹ They symbolized a group without individual names. Their work is very bold and direct, with posters having strong captions.

Feminism in Pakistan

In the history of South Asian art there are a few exception in women painter who made their presence felt, mostly belonging to Punjab, one such is Amrita Sher Gill (1913-1941), she was very progressive self aware and modern in her thought. Amrita, who had been trained and painted in western academic style, when came back to India, her painting underwent a great change not only in subject but also in expression that became more local. She once said, “ I realized my real artistic mission then : to interpret the life of Indians and particularly, to paint those silent images of infinite submission and patience... ,the impression their sad eyes created on me , to interpret them into a new technique”.¹⁰ She mostly depicted poor class females, showing their misery which was a new dimension in modern painting and made her the earliest feminist of Pakistan before partition e.g. Vina Player.¹¹

⁸ Women and Art: Frida Kahlo -

Feminist Artist, philandfem.blogspot.com/2010/04/frida-kahlo-feminist-artist.html, (accessed on 06.06.2013)

⁹ Guerrilla Girls - Page - Interview Magazine, www.interviewmagazine.com/art/guerrilla-girls, (accessed on 06.06.2013)

¹⁰ Ijazul Hassan, *Painting in Pakistan* (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1996), 45.

¹¹ Ijazul Hassan, 47.

Painting in Pakistan especially in Lahore has a rich past with an active group of well established painters and art institutions. There was Mayo School of Arts, Fine Arts Department in University of the Punjab and several societies that actively organized exhibitions, like the Punjab Art Society.¹² In the first phase of visual arts of Pakistan covers two and a half decade in which the role of women painter was as an art educationist. Fine arts in the beginning was not distinguished from craft at the official level, and artists were seeking for their role in the society. Before and even after partition The Fine Arts Department followed the colonial academic tradition. Chughtai's new style and Ana Molka's ambition to achieve a more 'Pakistani Art' were like breath of fresh air but mostly Western genres were followed.

The artist of Lahore Art Circle like A.J.Shemza, Moyene Najmi and Ahmad Parvaiz were seeking new things, looking for new meaning, followed international Cubist trend introduced by Shakir Ali. Women were not part of such activity as a practitioner rather than they were always supposed to be teachers.¹³

In this art scenario dominated by male artist Zubaida Agha was a towering presence. Although she was not in any way a feminist, the recognition and appreciation she earned by fellow painters was a great achievement. So was the decisive role of Ana Molka Ahmad, these both women were honored by their male counterparts. If Shakir Ali and Ahmad Parvez were self-consciously male artist then Ana Molka was even more self aware of her as their female counterpart.¹⁴

Another problem faced by women painters was their social and domestic responsibilities to their families and homes. But a decade later this situation changed leading to the second phase of women artistic development. The social uplift of Bhutto's rule changed the populist view on art and folk art and music were patronized by the government.¹⁵

Zia's military regime when took over Bhutto's democratic rule, the role of the artist changed. They were expected to reinforce the state image. Calligraphy as Islamic identity and landscape as portrayal of land's glory were the most famous genres. There were no women who

¹² Ijazul Hassan, 45.

¹³ Salima Hashmi, *Unveiling the Visible: Life and Works of Women Artists of Pakistan* (Lahore: ActionAid, 2002),7,8.

¹⁴ Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Painting and sculpture in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998),649.

¹⁵ Salima Hashmi 8.

became part of this state policy, although they were winning awards in National exhibition of 1977, 80, 82, 85, discriminatory laws were being imposed against their gender, on them. Some works were removed from 1981 exhibition for political contents like that of Salima Hashmi's.¹⁶

These women artist, whose number also increased after 1977 Martial law, followed their intuition rather than adopting the official style. This marks the beginning of Feminism in Pakistan, having its own individuality and the circumstances that initiated the movement were entirely different from world feminism. Probably unaware of the feminist maxim of the seventies –‘the personal is the political’- women artists intuitively disengaged themselves from the prevalent ideology.¹⁷ They chose their own subject and used new painting media. The painting size also decreased which was not accepted in the beginning but this changed with the revival of miniature. These feminist kept on working using their own personal style of imagery and were practicing what was being debated by the feminist in the world.¹⁸

In 1982 a group exhibition at Indus Gallery Karachi was held and it was the first all-women art exhibition in the country. Laila Shahzada, Nighat Idrees, Lubna Agha, Hajra Mansur, Sumbal Nazir, Mehr Afroz, Nahid Reza, all participated with their prints, paintings and sculpture. Herald observed that “Some of the most promising painters at work in Pakistan today are women and not men”. This indicate the creative ability and victory of women painter, glorifying the feminine art and in turn feminism.¹⁹

In 1983 fifteen women artists signed a women artist's manifesto.

We, the women artists of Pakistan, having noted with concern the decline in the status and condition of life of Pakistani women, and having noted the effects of the anti-reason, anti-arts environment on the quality of life in our homeland- Having noted the significant contribution the pioneering women artists have made to the course of arts and art education in Pakistan. Believing as we do in the basic rights of all men, women and children to a

¹⁶ Salima Hashmi, 9.

¹⁷ Salima Hashmi, 9.

¹⁸ Salima Hashmi, 9.

¹⁹ Akbar Naqvi, *Image and Identity: Painting and sculpture in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 647, 648.

life free from want and enriched by the joys of fruitful labor and cultural self-realization and our commitment, as practitioners and teachers of the arts, to the noblest ideals of a free, rational and civilized existence.

This affirms the following principles to guide us in their struggle for the cultural

development of the people to serve as the manifesto of the women artists of Pakistan.²⁰

These activities and discussions accelerated the process of development. Their main subjects were their own lives, personal narratives, psychological and spiritual preferences. These diversified subjects were expressed through a diversity of symbols and mediums which was the essence of Pakistani Feminist art. Another important theme was *Chaadar* or veil imposed on women in the name of Islam for political benefits. They have frequently shown nudes but with a changed concept. Nude was no more an object but symbolically uncovering the duplicity and hypocrisy of the society.²¹

Pakistani Feminist Artists

The work of Pakistani feminist artist is mostly based on their personal experiences and dilemmas expressed through a diversity of symbolic or representative styles but in turn they explore the psychological and political landscape of women in Pakistani culture as a whole. There are a large number of Pakistani painters whose work involves feminist thought either partially or wholly. In this paper the works of some of the eminent feminist artist will be analyzed contextually and most important thing is the role of personal experiences that triggered their art towards feminism. Various Western modern art theories also played an important role in shaping up the style of Modern Feminist artists who adopted them according to their own choice transforming them in a way to represent their own ideas considering their culture and society. Surrealist thought of unconscious desires of the mind inspired some of these feminist but this adaptation was in accordance to their cultural and moral norms. Their emphasis, like the Surrealists, was on the subjective and the inner world of the mind, on emotions and feelings over reasons and on experimentation in styles. Thus the artists

²⁰ Yashodhara Dalmia, Salima Hashmi, *Memory, Metaphor, Mutations: Contemporary Art of India and Pakistan*(New Delhi: Oxford University Press,2007),44.

²¹ Salima Hashmi,11.

were painting highly abstract scenes, created strange imagery from surrounding objects and developed painting techniques that let the unconscious to express itself. They used bright colors and rejected the smooth, realistic forms of the academic style.

Another important inspiration was from the constructivism theory according to which the picture imitate nothing rather it represents the idea in the abstraction of forms and color. Cubist thought also inspired their work. Picasso once said, “I want nothing but emotions to be given off by the painting”. However he also said, “There is no abstract art. You must start with something. Afterwards you can remove all traces of reality.”²² So all these theories in one way or the other influenced the art of these Feminists in forming their style for self expression.

Akbar Naqvi in his book *Image and Identity* expressed beautifully that influence from West does not means that the artist are copying their style but more important is that if they had taken freedom with the correct grammar of their models. Western modern artist have also taken influences from East like Matisse from Persia and Picasso from Africa so this is rather a healthy phenomenon of influences transported from one culture to the other.²³ This justifies the influences used by the Feminist as they retained their identity in spite of adopting these foreign ideas and theories.

Esmat Rahim (1904-1963, Karachi, Sindh))

Her art and life were strongly linked together. She married to an Indian J.A.Rahim, moved from Germany to India. Later in life her family had many divides because of volatile natures as she had serious differences with her daughter. All these effected her art as her painting *Mother Earth* in which she is symbolically portraying her own self burdened with thorns bushes and skulls all reflecting the suffering mother earth in turn the artist herself. A mother who nurtures a child with her own milk endures a lot. Her art reflects her own suffering and the suffering of a mother, a wife and a woman in general that makes her a feminist. There are influences of Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher Gill in her art in the bold choice of subjects. The main motivation for acquiring feminist themes came from her own life and her psyche played the most important role in the formation of her style.

²² J.M.Nash, *Cubism, Futurism, and Constructivism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), 45-47.

²³ Akbar Naqvi, ×××.

Lubna Agha (1949, Karachi, Sindh))

She had a strong family background. Her grandmother was a writer and a champion of women rights that influenced her. After formal art training she struggled to seek her own individual path. With an urge to find a new and modern expression Lubna minimalized her forms with occasional hints of a landscape or a figure with very peaceful and spiritual effects. Later after Zia’s policies towards women made her react strongly through her art. Her work again showed figurative imagery of distressed women in that suffocated situation.²⁴ Her painting Night and Day has a dramatic profusion of color and figurative imagery. She is commenting on the state of the country in general and women in particular. Intermingling of frightened and confused faces, her typical hand emblem and symbolic figures all depicts how she felt and reacted to the social restraints and the disturbing changes of the 80s. Symbolism has prime importance in her art, representing her inner thoughts and her reaction to the socio political conditions.

Nahid Reza (1947, Karachi, Sindh))

She is one of the eminent Feminist. Nahid’s work is richly textured and culturally resonant. She has protested the exploitation of women, but on the other hand she has also celebrated womanhood. Brought up under traditionally conservative Pakistani mother, she could not bear different behavior parameters for boys. Due to her artist uncle, Ali Imam’s support she was allowed to study art which really changed her life. When she moved in Karachi art circles she realized the dominated male chauvinism which affected her thoughts.²⁵ Her failed marriage and responsibilities of bringing up her children alone made her even stronger and all these life experiences and difficult memories made her a champion of feminism. After her experience in art at Detroit, America her expression became even more abstract. Her art was heavily conceptualized with intense understanding and her compositions are rich in texture and content. Due to her personal life experiences she takes the female form as the main image, glorifying the courage and determination

²⁴ Salima Hashmi, 77- 79.

²⁵ Salima Hashmi, 86, 87.

with which she survives against all odds. She herself said that art has sustained her through the toughest times in life.²⁶

In her painting ‘Shared Miseries’ there is an agitated textured surface with rich use of primary colors she has presented female body’s fragility. Figures are composed, like many of her paintings, in a system of frame that takes the viewer into the inner space, into the depth of her thought. Color that are red and yellow symbolizes warmth and passion and optimism that portrays artist personality. Her painting ‘Hidden Faces’ (figure 8), is part of her women series, showing different surfaces with multi faceted, figures of women without faces meaning without identity. She here depicts the women in general looking for their identity in a male dominating society. Her female nudes uncovers symbolically the duality and hypocrisy of the society.

Her painting ‘Symbol of Sorrow’, (figure 9), portrays abstract female figures in three compartments in different postures that are vulnerable and sensual. Life of a women is divided in different roles and she has no individuality of her own as she keep on struggling to prove herself in every role yet she is recognized in none. Another painting of the women series ‘A Mother’ (figure 10) all in blue tones symbolizes the purity of the love between mother and child, who nurtures and protect the child with her compassionate love. It also reflects her own image as a single parent taking care and loving her children.

Nahid has also taken some social problem regarding the people of interior Sindh like ‘Karo Kari Series’. In her work see the depth of texture and you will see the depth of life. She said once, “In my paintings career I have explored a women place in the world around me. My relationship to art is linked to my own feelings in a male dominated society. As an artist I view women as the strongest element in the Universe, fertile, nurturing and playing many roles... ”²⁷

Meher Afroz (1948, Karachi, Sindh))

She also belonged to a middle class educated family with typical restrictions for the girls. In painting Meher believed that every surface and every mark can be a historical motif. Her stress was on mystery which must with hold as much as it express. Her small size of painting are also symbolic of women’s work confirming the feminist observation

²⁶ Marjorie Husain, *Nahid Raza: Art is My Life* (Karachi: Pakistan Post Foundation, 2012), 27, 45.

²⁷ Marjorie Husain, 57.

that men paintings are ‘work’ but women don’t have the mean to spread their work around the house and are forced to work on small scale. They have to be inconspicuous.²⁸

Her painting from Niche Series, has minimal use of form and color. In a Trinity like setting she has used the sacred symbol of an arch within which stands the lady of the house with stretched arms protecting all under her. Like the constructivist her ideas are expressed in abstract use of form and color but the mystery lies in its interpretation that varies according to the thought of the onlooker. Surrounded by dark and gloomy colors the arch symbolizes as the place of peace, the red symbolizes the warmth, and compassion as well as expressionist’s agitation, showing both extremes in one place, expressing artist approach to her subject displaying diverse emotions. All these reflect the reactions towards the dual standards of society affecting not only her personality but her art directly.

Hajira Mansur (1946, Lahore, Punjab)

She used flat areas of color washes with indication of figures. She removes all the ugliness of the reality, violence, conflicts and problems. Her themes became iconic with wide eyed women, architectural backgrounds, flowers, ornaments, patterns, birds, all creating a world in her work. In her painting ‘Reclining Figure’ she has used layers of color washes with transparencies reminding some affinity with Chughtai. Intermingling of colors portrays the complexities of the artist mind, and layers of thin washes, basically symbolizes the various faces of society and people, the reality hidden under these layers.

In her ‘Eastern Girl in white’, Chughtai’s style is prominent but in a modern way. Her thought of an ideal beauty without any ugliness reveals her yearning for such a life. She is looking for an ideal world for her ideal woman so here surrealist idea of subconscious where dreams are more real than reality, is prominent but expressed in artist’s personal style and medium of her own choice.

Sumayya Durrani (1963, Karachi, Sindh)

She had an early influence from her mother who chose to make her career as a designer and succeeded. Sumayya spent seven years in Michigan University, America for art studies. Her feminism is seen in her ‘Faceless Nude Series’ using collage she has shown faultless female nude images. His work is about male female manipulation, she is

²⁸ Salima Hashmi, 72-76.

showing how men look at women. The color vanished leaving layers of rich tonal black.²⁹ The Nudes shown in various angles, reflects artists thought that women are exposed to men in every angle, nudity is symbolic of this exposure.

Rahat Naveed Masud (1953, Lahore, Punjab)

Rahat was brought up in a liberal atmosphere which she thinks might be because they had no brother. She had a difficult experience teaching at Punjab University because of *Jamaat- e Islami*'s political interference in the academic programme. She made many self portraits that symbolizes the women in general sometimes tied to a *dupatta* that snagged her freedom to express herself without restraints. This *dupatta* is also symbolic of the imposed restrictions due to the political pressures. She has always chosen 'man-woman' themes and portraits, sensitively handling them in oil or in pastels, revealing her inner feelings about the subject in an effective way.³⁰ Her painting, portrays her wish for serenity of an ideal place where no birds are caged and no one to disturb, the things that are not present in a women life as she is abounded with moral and social restrictions. In her 'Deam Land' she expresses the calmness of sleep in which one can be in the dreamland of her own for some time away from the harsh realities of the real world where there are unequal standards for men and women.

Naiza Khan (1968, Karachi, Sindh)

Grown up in the West, she came back after marriage with her husband to Pakistan. Her interest was in printmaking and figurative art specially nudes, though it terrified her because of the moral and social pressures here, but it soon became central to her imagery. Her thought was affected by the political intrusion in art and in every social aspect. Naiza Khan penetrates women's life and then relates it to her own that reflects her feminism. Strongly influenced by an incident of self immolation of two women on not getting justice, she used the symbols of *henna* and hair that showed lyricism and determination both. In her solo show 'Voice Merge', whole body of the figures are decorated with *henna* patterns, the figures move across the wall are an extension of the wall or in turn the wall becomes an extension of the art works. There is an underlined feeling for women and their sufferings.³¹

²⁹ Salima Hashmi, 110,111.

³⁰ Salima Hashmi, 135-137.

³¹ Salima Hashmi, 159-161.

Shahzia Sikander (1969, Lahore Punjab)

Shahzia is the world famous miniature artist. She celebrated her brought up in a joint family system, with a strong figure of her grandfather that became personal and spiritual for her. After graduating from NCA, she went to study Design at Rhode Island School in Providence and then to Huston, Texas, America, where she did her residency. In her installation (figure 19) she has expressed her thought about gender issues, problems of marriage, dowry and other related social pressures on women. The hanging, suicidal bride symbolizes the dreams, of a girl who either because of dowry or because of overage, and average appearance cannot get married and after becoming victim of these circumstances is forced to commit suicide sometimes or lives a life of a living dead. Similarly in her ‘Ready to Leave’ an unidentified face represents women as whole, various symbols like circle showing life cycle, goat with wings as the bride groom, shows the complexities women faces during the course of her life.

Salima Hashmi (1942, Lahore, Punjab)

Salima hashmi is a socially conscious painter, stimulated to reunite personal apprehensions and sensibilities with universal injustices. She was born in an artistic household that upheld strong political and social dedications as the famous political activist, poet, Faiz Ahmad Faiz was her father.³² His influence on her work and thought has been pivotal. Her work focuses on the suffering of women in a highly patriarchal society specially under Zia’s regime. Her work usually include abstract figures of women portraying their struggles. They are an expression of Salima's thoughts and feelings concerning the political and social uncertainties under which people of Pakistan have lived. In her painting ‘Poem for Zainab’,(depicts, in a totally abstract setting, three similar realistic self portraits whose mouth is shown sealed criticizing symbolically the situation during the martial law where there was no freedom of expression especially for women. In her ‘In Spite of Wrath 2’, with an suggestion of female in *Chaadar* shows her criticism on imposed *pardah* on women that curtailed her way of success, while men face no such restrictions, thus enhancing the dual standards in the society.

³² Marcella Nesom Sirhandi, *Contemporary Painting in Pakistan* (Lahore: Ferozesons, 1992), 121,122.

Iqbal Hussain (1950, Lahore, Punjab)

Although a male artist yet his work shows strong feminist discourse. Iqbal Hussain's works show his insights into the darkness, shadows, despair and desolation and no-exit life situations of the life of prostitutes. He was born to a prostitute and as being part of that society he truly understands the difficulties of their life. They are destined to live a life like that, having no hope for respect and acceptance in the society. His painting like, 'Portrait of a Prostitute' (figure 26), shows the ironic situation of a prostitute's life doing her business with all the glamour and beauty, while on the other hand at her back her children are waiting. In his paintings 'Portraits of prostitutes', Abandonment 'Portrait of a Prostitute' all signifies the isolation, depression and abandonment of a prostitute's life. His painting, shows influence of the Red Mosque siege, At first glance, the women in burqas seem to have a grasping presence, but the hand on the woman in red's shoulder is at ease and their eyes are relaxed, not enraged. Interestingly, the facial expression of the woman in red is one of either anguish or hope. The situation painted is intentionally left ambiguous.³³

Conclusion

The beauty of the development of art was that, just like nature, it was found to be vast, wide enough to facilitate both male and female artists without prejudice. But when women was not given the breathing space and her due right, women artists took necessary action and fought effectively without compromise and proved their identity in different phases of Pakistani art. In this struggle of self identity the female artists were accompanied by progressive poets like Fehmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed whose poetry also demonstrated the new feminism awareness which had already emerged in the West, but the similarity was in principal not in style.³⁴

Feminism in Pakistan has very diminutive similarity with the Western Feminism. Feminist artists in the West were rejecting female nudes as one of the obvious repositories of male-dominated art principles. For the Pakistani woman artist, the uncovering of the female body became a rallying call to the barriers. We can see the work of most of the Feminist like Nahid Raza, Durayya Qzi, Naiza Khan, Jamil Naqsh and many others who have been frequently using female nudes in their

³³ boingboing.net/2009/09/23/iqbal-hussains-women.html

³⁴ Akbar Naqvi, 648.

work either in abstraction or in realistic forms. But their representation has always been symbolic, even the most erotic ones have some thought or feeling behind them. Comparing them with the Western feminist art there is marked difference in execution and in their thought altogether. They have a very direct style of using images rather blunt in some cases as in Georgia O’keeffes work. Gorilla Group posters are too direct to be aesthetic. Though the work of Pakistani Feminist is also bold but the major difference lies in obligations regarding social and religious factors.

Feminism is basically the radical notion that women are people. It is the brain child of Islam. When Islam opposed child infanticide, when the preaching of Islam was initially funded by the business profit of a woman, Hazrat Khadija, when Islam defended the right of women in inheritance, when Islam made men responsible for the women they married, when Islam curtailed polygamy etc., it was basically treating women as humans, like people.³⁵ So Islam is the only religion that safeguards the rights of a woman in its true sense in different capacities as daughter, mother, wife etc. Pakistan, although a Muslim state, with all the rights of women present in the law and system in theory, unfortunately never came out of the dominion of regional socio-cultural influences. The laws are violated according to choice in this male chauvinist society. While in contrast if the old Western law is studied there used to be no rights given to women, they could not vote, neither they could do jobs, were not allowed to get education, no place was there for women artist.

The work of the Feminists in Pakistan is therefore a reaction to this inequality in general but the most important motivations comes from their own lives prompting them to resist in their own style, medium and technique to those circumstances that caused this disparity. This proves that Feminism in Pakistan is successful on personal level but as a national movement it has no clear shape as it has no direct effect on the eighty percent of the society because of lack of interaction with the art works. Although there are many female activists including writers, poets, lawyers and NGOs in Punjab holding the banner of feminism yet only small percentage can benefit from them as there is no awareness about the women rights in their true sense among the masses. The common

³⁵ Momina Wahab, “The Reality of Feminism in Pakistan: Three Things to Know and Ponder, *Word Press* (May, 14,2011)wordpress.com/.../the-reality-of-feminism-in-pakistan-3.

man in Pakistan is not aware of the role of art in the society which is another reason, along with lack of education and training to know and appreciate art, for the lack of recognition of the feminist thought on national level. So the problem lies in the thought process of the whole society in general and the authorities in particular. Thus it validates that Feminism in Pakistan is more an expression of the artist's personal experience along with an important role of social, political and religious factors.

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