

Islamic Nations and Female Narrations

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Abstract:- This paper explores the Muslim females' vision in two narratives, namely the *Girls of Riyadh* (2005) by Rajaa Al Sanea and the *Persian Girls* (2006) by Nahid Rachlin. The former represents the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia while the latter stands for Iran. In these novels, both nations claim their adherence to the Islamic rituals and rules. Also, both female writers portray the social, political, religious and cultural dimensions in such nations. In other words, both Muslim women represent the everyday reality of their nations. However, due to the different national and cultural perspectives of the two writers, the novels are narrated differently. They attempt to tackle the hidden features of the two Islamic nations. They focus on the patriarchal domination over females despite the claim of both countries of adhering to Islam, albeit in two different ways. The findings revealed the female sufferings as well as the patriarchal domination under the pretext of preserving the Islamic rules and cultural traditions. As a result, the female intended to resist such patriarchal domination practiced upon them in the name of religion and social conventions.

Keywords:- *female, nation, narration, Islamic, Persian, Riyadh, Patriarchal, domination*

I. INTRODUCTION

Women certainly suffer in communities that do not bother about women in general and female participation in particular. This paper highlights the female situations in two Islamic countries, namely Saudi Arabia Kingdom and Iran, as portrayed in the two narratives under study, where adherence to the Islamic rules and rituals by such countries is foregrounded. The matter is not simply connected with an individual or a group of people in a community that claims respect and appreciation of Islam, but it is a matter that concerns different communal segments. Such communities believe in domination over females as a sign of manliness and power without claiming it as such. In such communities, women also find themselves powerless to change their fate. The narratives under study provide a deep insight into such communities that attempt to hide weaknesses and shortcomings under various claims among which is the religious which is, in fact, not the case. They are also a memoir of two women writers who narrate the concerns of female lives. Further, they open the gate of cultural communal taboos in which females are viewed as inferior to males. In short, such communities seem to live under the power and protection of patriarchal domination. Generally speaking, women find themselves oppressed and males are in no position to narrate their stories: sufferings and struggles. Therefore, they initiate narrating their stories which are charged with pains and miseries. For instance, Virginia Woolf, a 19th century British female novelist, was one of those who wrote early about her evaluation of women's issues and woman's right to have a better life far away of man's domination and control. It is now normal to see females who dedicate their efforts to defending women's rights and demands of equality with men, whether in jobs or other life affairs. Homi Bhabha, an Indian postcolonial critic, points out that:

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation—or narration—might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. (p.12)

Female Empowerment

Western women began pressing toward getting respect and equality earlier than other women in other parts of the world. Virginia Woolf, for example, founded feminist criticism in her work *A Room of One's Own* in which she criticizes men's treatment of women as inferiors. The second woman interested in empowering women is Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* in which she highlights the patriarchal domination of European communities over females where the latter were epitomized as the 'other' whose worth is insignificant. The western ongoing controversy about the patriarchal domination over women attracts women worldwide and

encourages them to struggle for their rights and equality. In western literature, women are presented as angels in their best image and whores in their worst one. Active feminists debate the role and position of women in community. The feminists intend to demolish patriarchal domination and the inferior attitude at females.

In the Arab world, women struggle to liberate themselves from social and cultural restrictions started late compared to the western one. In Egypt, particularly, the feminist movement began early compared to other Arab countries. Mass media development, such as TV channels, radio, telecommunication devices, has sped up changes in the world of the Arab women, imitating the changes in western social life contexts. The Arab women have revolted against inequality and oppression practiced in the name of Islam and social conventions. They struggle to unfetter themselves from social and cultural restrictions. It is no surprise to find some Arab writers and feminists inspire the feminist uprising, portray the oppression of women and call for women emancipation to catch up with their western counterparts. Qasim Amin, an Egyptian writer and feminist, calls for women emancipation in his two books: *Woman Emancipation* (1899) and *The New Woman* (1901). Amin's ideas were met by liberals' encouragement who viewed traditions a source of backwardness and ignorance. They spread very fast and were widely translated into English. However, the conservatives stood against his liberal ideas.

The first Arab feminist who declared belief in liberation from the social and religious traditions is the Egyptian Huda Sha'rawi (1878-1947). She participated in one of the conferences in Room in 1923 and came back to declare her rejection to the Arab social and religious traditions. She publically unveiled herself in one of the Cairo's railway stations (Rashad 2014: 74). As usual with such liberal situations, her movement was met by liberals' encouragement and callers of women emancipation. The Arab women became more open to the western civilization during the 1970s and 1980s.

Rajaa Al Sanea's novel *Girls of Riyadh* takes the Saudi Arabia Kingdom, an Arab country, as the locale of the story. The Saudi Arabia Kingdom has granted the females an opportunity for education, whether basic or tertiary. The early attempt by which females were given an opportunity for education was Effat's efforts, the late King Faisal's wife, who established a university for girls in 1999. Further, there was Dar Al Hekmah College which was established as a contribution by the private sector to further girls' education in a way that harmonizes with the Islamic values as well as conventions and traditions of a conservative society as Saudi Arabia. Though such a college was meant to be as such, its curricula followed the American model of education. The early efforts were culminated by establishing the Princess Nora bint Abdelrahman University in 2011. The latter is the largest university for females in the Kingdom. Such efforts of establishing separate universities for females have encouraged the conservative families of the Saudi community to send their daughters to pursue their higher education. However, the Saudi liberals are of the view that this sort of separate education does not give equal opportunities for girls as is the case with boys. To them, in the male universities, the opportunities are better in the sense that there are better academicians than in the female universities. However, Doumato (2000) argues that "Girls were taught enough to buy into an assigned role, a role in which they were subordinate to men, but not enough to challenge it" (93).

In Iran, women participated and supported the Iranian revolution of the 1979 in one way or another. Earlier in 1928, the Shah's wife, Reza Khan, and his daughters were the first in supporting women liberation of the Islamic and social traditions. They unveiled themselves publicly. Such behavior aroused the anger of the Iranian clergy (Ulama) who saw in it a sort of violation of the Islamic sacred values.

To some extent, the Shah wife's action has successfully influenced a lot of Iranian females. The ruling family with its males and females worked lastingly to obliterate the Islamic creed from the Iranian public life, particularly the females, giving a larger space for western style to reshape the female identity. However, such practices were cut short by the Islamic revolution of the 1979 which was contrary in its principles to those practices. As such, the revolution granted the clergy men confidence and power over females. The chador was encouraged by the Khomeini, the revolution leader who was the most significant figure in the Shiite theology. The Khomeini stressed the importance of female standing against the western life style and praised the females' participation in demonstrations and strikes leading to the revolution success. "We must not forget the activities which woman performed, particularly direct confrontations. Iranian women were able to turn into a revolutionary, political, conscious fighting element through their conscious faith," he said (Demirci 41). As a result, many females initiated wearing the veil.

In the Saudi Arabia, many liberals and feminists do not feel satisfied with the Islamic restrictions which they consider limiting women's mobility and restricting their freedom in public life. They view the jobs allowed for women limiting the latter's interaction with their fellow females in public jobs and in the educational institutions. Contrastively, immediately after the Iranian revolution, the Iranian females were excluded from some public fields, such as education and legal courts. However, the post revolutionary era has marked a transformation in the lives of the Iranian women and given them a larger space of freedom and participation in the political and social activities. Many Iranian women have adopted the western life style. In her article entitled "Iran after Twenty Five of Revolution: A Retrospective and Look Ahead," Moghdam, an Iranian woman writer,

states that “women were encouraged to major in gynecology, pharmacology, midwifery and laboratory work. Further, in the 1990s, this government opened the law field to women” (3).

Comparatively, the transformations occurred to female lives are faster and more tangible in the daily lives of the Iranian females than their counterparts in the Saudi females’ lives. Such disparity may be due to the different societies of both the Iranian and Saudi females, the former being open while the latter conservative. The liberals consider the separation of the Saudi females in universities; schools and public institutions restricting the female mobility. They also view the necessity of females traveling with some guardians a kind of restriction. Unlike the Saudi women, the Iranian women become more satisfied with their political and social participation in public life.

Historical and Political Transformations in the Two Islamic Countries: Brief Background

In the two novels under study, the two countries are considered Islamic and claim to deploy the Islamic Shari’a, albeit in two different ways.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The land in which the Saudi Arabia Kingdom is located represents the cradle of Islam and is the land of the last Prophet, Muhammad (PBUH). It is the land of the Holy House in Mekka city toward which Muslims direct their faces five times a day in their prayers. Each year, millions of Muslims head toward the two Holy Mosques in Mekka and Madinah cities to perform both Umrah and Hajj, that is, Islamic rituals. The majority of the Saudi population embraces the Sunni doctrine. The Modern history of Saudi Arabia Kingdom has been made by the Al Saud family, who came to control the situation in Saudi Arabia in 1932. The King Abdel Aziz Al Saud is considered the founder of the modern Saudi Kingdom. The relationship between the political authority of the first Saudi state in the 18th century Mohammad bin Su’ud and the religious authority Mohammed bin Abdel Wahab was intimate deepened by mutual interest. Al Amiri (2002) points out the significance of such a relationship saying: "they both agreed to support each other by giving the religious power to Mohammad bin Abdel Wahab while the family of the Al Su’ud will be in charge of the secular power (government). They shook hands saying: (blood for blood and destruction for destruction)" (186). Abdel Aziz struggled in the first two decades of the 20th century to establish the second state of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through launching many wars. He carried out many wars against the local tribes to finally declare the establishment of the Kingdom in 1932. After the death of the King Abdel Aziz in 1953, his son Saud succeeded him into the throne. But he was soon replaced by his brother King Faisal in 1964 due to a family military coup, who, in turn, was later murdered by one of his relatives in 1975. The period of the King Faisal's Rule witnessed a remarkable development and modernization, particularly in the area of oil which made the Saudi Arabia a destination for many workers from different countries. King Khalid came to the throne after the murder of his brother King Faisal. His era witnessed the failed attempt of some Islamic extremists to control the Holy Mosque in Mekka in 1977. His brother King Fahd succeeded him in 1982. King Fahd’s era made the Saudi Arabia the most significant producer of oil in the world. After his death in 2005, King Abdullah inherited the throne. King Abdullah developed the infrastructures of the country. There were many transformations in politics during King Fahd’s era who realized the significance of giving more political freedom, particularly when seeing neighboring countries adopting braver steps on the road of reforms and democracy. For instance, a consultative council was formed including one hundred and fifty persons grouped into many committees supervising different sectors of the Kingdom. Further, many province councils were also formed in all the Kingdom provinces to participate in shaping out local authority. This era culminated such political reforms by issuing a governance law that determined the royal family relationship with the public.

Islamic Republic of Iran

Ayatallah Khomeini, the Iranian spiritual authority, was influenced by his teacher Ayatallah Abdulkarim Hai’ri, the pioneering teacher of Shiite theology. He received his theological education in Qum and was appointed as a demonstrator in the same school. He was one of the prominent figures who struggled against the corruption and violation of the human rights of the Reza Shah's rule. He considered the Shah’s rule to have undermined the Islamic principles and to have succumbed to the American imperialism. He published a book entitled *Wilayat al faqih' (Government of the Islamic Jurist)* in which he supports the Ulama leadership whose religious education was based upon the twelve Imams the Shiites believed in.

Khomeini released a clarion call for establishing an Islamic republic and demolishing the Shah's monarchy which, to him, brought corruption and economic deterioration. Then strikes and demonstrations caused riots throughout the country resulting in toppling the Shah's regime. Khomeini’s call for a state that respects individual freedom and social justice gained him many supporters. Simultaneously, he stirred the public by highlighting the Shah’s allegiance with the west, which implied the Shah’s submission to the western imperialism that was depicted to go against the Iranian interests. It is worth mentioning that the Shah established

a secret police Agency known as SAVAK with the assistance of the United States of America, whose mission was to be a tool of torture and murder for the opponents of the Shah's rule as well as a tool of recognition and merit for the exponents. In 1960, the growing demonstrations, unrest and riots continued to shake the Shah's regime. By 1979, the Iranian revolution was launched to enforce the Shah to flee to Egypt and then to France. Lee states that: As much as this famous revolution drastically remade Iran's government and society around the concept of Islamic Theocratic republic, it utterly transformed Iran's foreign policy and international standing. Particularly in the United States, the sudden and profound change in Iran's official attitude toward the rest of the world is the most memorable and seemingly enduring effect of the revolution. (45) Khomeini managed to topple the Shah's regime and took over. He was overambitious to go beyond the Iranian borders by exporting the Iranian revolution to the other Islamic neighboring states. In this regard, Lee states that: Iran often deals with factions or political organizations instead of local governments; nevertheless, Iran's support of these groups is sometimes translated into indirect influence over entire nations. (50) However, when Khomeini's plans did not succeed, he began to back up the Shiite minority groups to revolt against their rulers. Besides, he has established what is called "The Revolutionary Guards", an army unit whose job is to train soldiers to carry out many tasks in other countries. At present, their support to spread their Shiite doctrine in the region such as Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and other countries is remarkable in their back up to the Shiite religious groups in those states.

Rajaa Al Sanea's *The Girls of Riyadh (Banat al- Riyadh)*

This novel was published in 2005. It is about four girls, namely Jamrah, Sadeem, Michele and Lamis, representing the upper class in Riyadh, the capital of the Saudi Arabia Kingdom. It is written in the form of emails among the narrator's friends. The four friends find an outlet in their friendship to narrate their motives and miseries to each other. The narrator is unnamed so as to detach herself from the entire situation and from the issues discussed in this narrative. The writer discusses in one of her interviews with *The Arab News* magazine, March 11, 2006, that this narrative is a work of fiction. She goes on saying: "I hate to disappoint you but the characters in the book are not my friends". Further, she states that "The novel is based on events I've heard about; they have added authenticity to the novel". Rajaa Al Sanea, the novelist, detaches herself from the story of her friends and she acts as an eye witness to the miserable lives of these girls who live in a community dominated by patriarchal system, traditional and religious conventions regardless of the individuals' misunderstanding of the Islamic shari'a and the Prophetic teaching. Allen (2008) states that "I pointed out that *Banat al- Riyadh* [i.e. *The Girls of Riyadh*] had been roundly criticized by the British Press, and that this work seemed to be part of a wider phenomenon in publishing, one that poses interesting challenges to existing norms of evaluation, particularly in the inter-cultural realms of translation and its publication" (9). In this paper, the focus is on the themes and issues discussed in the narrative regardless of the appropriateness of the narrative style and structure.

The narrative highlights the lives of those girls and their wish to unfetter from the shackles of social and religious conventions which the girls see as a restriction to their liberty and liberation. The narrative comes to draw attention to the Saudi community that claims its adherence to the Islamic rules and the social conventions in particular. In the novel, the Islamic rules are violated as they are seen as a curb to girls' passions. The narrative gives deep insight into the females' world in which the patriarchal male domination is not denied. In such an Islamic and conservative community, addressing such issues is socially considered a taboo, particularly if it touches the girls' and family's private lives. As a result, the government banned this literary work under the pretext of its being a dangerous threat to the community's privacy. It always attempts to manifest itself as a pioneering Islamic country in which the rules of the Islamic Shari'a are applied in the people's daily lives. In the novel, the girls represent the upper rich Saudi class. They are more open and would like to cope up with the modernization movement. In a conference on Arabic Fiction in Sharja, UAE, May 2008, Allen points out that when he was asked about *Banat al Riyadh* novel which brought a big controversy in Arabic literature, he said "this novel seemed to be symptomatic of 'lid-off' category of writing by Middle Eastern women (e.g. a novel that western publishers were eager to snap up in order to cater for a market that is particularly interested in such apparent 'insights' into what is widely viewed as a closed world" (9).

Marriage and Social Relationships

As has been stated above, the narrative focuses on the lives of four girls representing the elite in the community of Riyadh. The image of a woman has been made clear by exploring the social relationship between husband and wife, parents and daughters, females and their friends in a closed community. What kind of relationship controls the relationship between a woman and her husband and between parents and their daughters? The novel shows that Sadeem is supposed to marry her fiancé, Waleed, who both consent to such marriage. Being in a hurry to seek his affection and wishing to strengthen their love, Sadeem responds to her fiancé's sexual instincts and has sex with him. However, succumbing to the social and religious conventions, he

leaves her. This is so because, to those conventions, the woman should not give her body to a man before marriage even if he is her fiancé. For having sex with her fiancé before getting married would bring dishonor and bad reputation to her. In this case, a man looks at girl as bad and in no point deserving to get engaged with in marriage. As a result of such conventions, Sadeem is left by her fiancé to face shame and dishonor in a merciless community. Moreover, when Sadeem travels to London in a way to forget her misery, she meets Fras and falls in love with him. However, he does not marry her. Instead, he marries one of his relatives because his family and community do not approve his marriage from a divorced woman. Despite such complications, he wants to continue his relationship with Sadeem, but she refuses his attempts. She then agrees to marry her cousin.

Gamarah gets divorced as soon as she recognizes her husband's illegal affair with another woman. In Islam, such an illegal relationship, that is, out of the institution of marriage, is prohibited. Her husband, Rashed, travels with her to America to pursue his studies and asks her to unveil herself as a mark of living in a modern community. He finds her ugly and may cause embarrassment to him; therefore he changes his mind and asks her to wear her *hijab* again. How do males give themselves the right to such illegal behavior while they claim their commitment to the rules of Islam as a religion of the Saudi community? "Saudi Arabia was the only country ruled solely and completely by the Quranic and Prophetic teachings applying the shari'ah in all spheres of life" (*The Girls of Riyadh*: p. 238). Islam brings justice and honorable life to females but males misunderstand this honorable fact. Males view a woman as inferior or just a sex body. Gamrah knows the tyranny of the society and feels envious of her friend, Michele, who seems to be in a better situation than hers: "Even Michele, after Faisal dropped her, was luckier than I was. Gamrah thought Michele's family had let her to study in America while she herself wasn't allowed to leave the house by herself" (p. 187). Out of such words, a reader realizes the misery the females find themselves in under the name of the social traditions and conservative community.

The third girl is Michele who is a hybrid of an American mother and a Saudi father. She tastes the life of freedom in America, the world of openness where freedom is limitless. She feels as a stranger when she comes to a conservative community as Saudi Arabia. She falls in love with Faisal who is Saudi and is supposed to share with her some common grounds. She adores Faisal. They are supposed to marry, however his family stands against the marriage because Michele's mother is American. Faisal surrenders to his mother's wishes without attempting to go beyond the community's restrictions. Michele cannot accept such unfair traditions that do not allow the youth a space of freedom to choose the life they like: "why doesn't this society respect the difference between my family and the other Saudi families? Everyone considers me a bad girl just because my mother is American? How can I live in such an unjust society?" (p.100). Faisal seems an oppressed man who has no power to go beyond the social traditions of the conservative family. Michele finds herself a stranger in a community that she belongs to and that which represents a part of her life. She does not imagine for a moment that such social chains could deprive her from her love and that Faisal would stand powerless, helpless, and hopeless to change the traditions and the community's view of a girl raised in a different country or even of her mother having a different identity: "was this the Faisal who had dazzled her with his open minded? Was he seriously letting go of her as easily as this just because his mother wanted to marry him to a girl from his own social circles?" (p. 121). She severely criticizes this community and points out the pains in her heart: "it was a society riddled with hypocrisy, dragged by contradictions, and her only choice was to either accept those contradictions and bow to them, or leave her country to live in freedom" (p.122).

Michele's family travels to Dubai to escape the conservative community's restrictions which deprives them of peaceful living. Michele manages to work in a TV Channel. She asks her father to allow her to appear on the TV; however he refuses because her appearance would cause her and her family problems in society. The community curse still follows them in that open city. The Saudi community's conservative traditions haunt Michele wherever she goes.

The fourth girl is Lamis who acts as a fortune teller telling the future of the friend's romantic relationships. She is a Sunni and as a result she rejects her relationship with Fatima who is Shiite. She develops a relationship with Fatima's brother, but this romantic relationship ends when they are caught by an authority named "the authority of promotion of virtue and prevention of vice". Such an authority is endowed with the power to fight illegal connections and meetings. Lamis is helpful. She always helps her friends to bear life miseries. She helps Gamrah to overcome her boredom after her divorce and to start using the internet and chat rooms to find a space of freedom for her boring life behind house walls as she is not allowed to leave the house. In the *Girls of Riyadh*, females appear to be under males' domination whether males were husbands and/or parents. The social and religious traditions are still the controller of the girls' lives. Strict traditions, in fact, are not imposed by Islam. It is the extremists who understand the verses of the Holy Quran in a way that makes the world view Islam and Muslims with suspicion and fear. In treating females, the males do not abide by the Islamic teachings. They make use of the social and religious thought to dominate females in a way that conforms with the social traditions regardless of adhering to the tenets of Islam. Rashed gives himself the freedom to go against Islam by making illegal affairs with a woman beyond the legitimate relationship, far away

of the eyes of his community in a foreign country. He indulges in his whims in such an illegal relationship. Fras does not want to engage formally with Sadeem as a divorced woman. It is the inferior look of the community to the divorced woman. However, he gets married with one of his relatives and has no objection to continue in such a romantic relationship with Sadeem.

In one of her interviews, the novelist, Rajaa Al Sanea, attempts to deny narrating her friend's stories so as not to disrepute the family's name of those girls. She may also be afraid of the repercussion of the conservative community upon the future of those girls. Further, she does not deeply uncover the sexual relationships between a husband and a wife. However, a reader realizes the connotations meant by using the poems of woman's poet, Nizar Qibbani, who is known with his obscene description of such relationships. Nizar does not leave any privacy with regard to the map of a woman's body in his descriptions. Al Sana'a does not hesitate to bring up such obscene descriptions for the sexual relationships among Arab couples. To prepare a reader for the coming events, in most of her emails, Al Sana'a starts her narration with a verse from the Holy Quran, one of the Prophet's Hadiths, or at times with wise words of famous and experienced people. At the beginning, she starts to explicate that if the people could not change their behavior, Allah would not help them to change their misery and conditions of their lives. This goes along with a Quranic verse which says: "Verily, never will Allah change the conditions of a people until they change what is in themselves" (Surah Al Ra'd: 11).

To address some verses of Nizar, the woman poet, she praises him because, in his verses, she finds a support to a woman vulnerable situation in a conservative world in which the rights of the woman are denied or missing. In the poetry of Nizar, she finds a condolence to the miserable conditions in which girls live. Nizar depicts the oppression imposed on the Arab woman in general even on the bed; consider what he says: "our culture is bubbles of soap and swamp/ still inside us deposits of Abu Jahl/ still live in the logic of the key and the locker/ enfold our females with cotton and bury them in the sand/ own them as owning carpets/ cows in the garden/ we come back at the end of the night practicing our marriage right as bulls and horses/practice it in five minutes without longing or tasting or learning/practice it as a machine work for the work/ then sleep dead/and leave them in the mid of the course/ killed without killing/in the mid of the course left/oh! What the cruelty of the horses? (101) Bringing up such verses, the novelist expresses the oppression enforced over women even in bed, ignoring their feelings and sexual needs. When Sadeem meets one of her people in London, she does not want to contact him. But because she finds herself trapped, she could not avoid contacting him. If girls travel abroad, they find more freedom, away of their community's social and religious restrictions. The novelist expresses herself saying that: "I don't write something weird or unusual. What I talk about is something much known in our community or in our neighborhood. The evidence is this: even when one of the Saudi females reads my emails every week and says: this is me. I write to express those girls. I don't want the people to pock their nose in something that is not their own business" (78).

Nahid Rachlin's *Persian Girls*

By comparing the females' narrations in both Saudi Arabia and Iran, the narration of *Persian Girls* is more open and comprehensive in addressing the thorny issues in the Iranian females' lives as well as the social, cultural, political and religious obstacles impeding their progress. In the *Girls of Riyadh*, Rajaa Al Sanea does not uncover enough factors hindering females' progress such as political power. She does not even dare to openly narrate the sexual and social oppression imposed upon females, fearing the reaction of her closed and very conservative community. However, at times, the two narrations meet at some points that may be considered a common ground in both narratives.

Female Lives and Leanings in Iran

At the start of the two narratives, the countries are explicated. Both countries have put strict regulations for female areas of study. As the narratives show, some areas are not accessible to females such scientific majors as law, pharmacology, judiciary. However, later on, in both countries, the governments allowed such majors for females. In Saudi Arabia, coeducation is still inexistent. Female education is totally staffed with female teachers. If female staff is insufficient, strict conditions are imposed upon employing male teachers who teach girls, for instance, certain ages, preferably old age, and teaching via electrical circuits. In Iran after the revolution, the education became more liberal, and therefore girls had the freedom to travel to accomplish their studies abroad in any area of interest they choose. In both countries, parents would instruct their kids not to mingle with each other nor would they show admiration to each other in public. That is to say that family and community role as well as that of religious men is to preach girls to avoid mingling with the males. In the narrative, Rachlin points out how her parents believe in such religious rules. She says: But parents believed boys and girls should not mingle with the opposite sex until they religiously and lawfully get married. Marriage should be arranged by parents and that unmarried girls shouldn't draw boys' attention to themselves by wearing make-up or suggestive bright colored clothes. Moreover, a girl's education should be arranged as soon as a suitable man came along (27). Rachlin categorizes the Iranian community before revolution into two categories:

the first is represented by her aunt Maryam who adopts Nahid in her first years of childhood. Maryam seems more committed to the Islamic rules. She always prays on time and gives special concern to the Muzan who calls for prayers. However, when Rachlin moves to her real mother Mohtaram, the house is a mess: "my new house is a mess, full of confusion and conflict, traditional Islamic /Iranian values and western traditions. No one prays, wears *hijab* or fasts. However, my parents believe in keeping boys and girls separated" (52). People are liberal and are thus oblivious to religion. The problem is that the family neglects the basics of Islam such as prayers and fasting. Maryam's house is in an old neighborhood that is not spoilt with modernization. The stamp of Islamic architecture is still viewed in such an area. In this area, Maryam lives. She is not influenced by the Shah's modernization and westernization movement.

The patriarchal domination over children and members of family is clear as the following excerpt shows: I was afraid of my father after I learned from Maryam. Having adopted me informally, Maryam didn't have legal right to me, even if she did, my father would be able to claim me. In Iran, parents were given full control of their children, no matter what circumstances were. There was no way to fight if he wanted me back. What it makes the matter worse is that my father was also a judge (16).

The relationship between Maryam and her sister, Mohtaram, is not bad. Muhtaram's family is influenced by the modernization movement. They live in an open city as Alhvaz. Father's and husband's control over females manifested itself in many situations: consider this: "the two sisters remained closed to each other despite their marriage that led them to different directions. Maryam remained committed to the Islamic teachings but Mohtaram became a modern woman" (20). Despite the Shah's allegation, he gave more space for women who could not feel such changes in the real life. For this reason, women were the first to participate in demonstrations and strikes to topple Shah's regime. "I don't realize the troubles suffered by women. Only in public baths and in big steam rooms, women, who enfold their bodies with red towels, talk about regime's tyranny which gives them less authority than that given to men. The Shah's allegations of ensuring equality between women and men are just heresies" (28).

The Iranian females consider themselves inferior to males by social conventions and religious restrictions. The domination of males over females is evident through the roles of husbands, fathers or community. As a narrator, Nahid argues the superiority of males in many matters: Don't males inherit double than what females do? Aren't males allowed to marry more than a woman? Don't fathers get the custody of their sons spontaneously if divorce occurs? Isn't a woman's divorce easy for men? When a woman wants to get divorced, doesn't she have to renounce her financial rights and children?...Shah does not change anything for women except the freedom of wearing chodre. What is the benefit of such freedom *if husbands decide if wives wear chodre or not* (the writer's emphasis)? (52) Here, a reader may observe Iranian females' rejection of Islamic rules and social traditions which, they think, belittle their position in society. In fact, Islamic rules maintain women rights and urge males to respect women's position as mothers, sisters, daughters, or wives. Social traditions make a picture blurred and restrictions are unlimited to giving women pessimistic look towards social restrictions. Such restrictions do not distinguish between Islamic rules and social conventions which sometimes exceed legitimate limits. Pari's father refuses that his daughter acts in one musical play "My Fair Lady". This is so because he does not want to see her on stage acting a woman's role desired by a man" (84). Family and community look at actresses as whores: "Pari told me, not only my father thinks actresses are whores, it seems that people who work in the studio share the same view. One of them asked me to take off my clothes. I ran out of the studio" (83). One observes the patriarchal domination in Pari's father refusal in marrying her, Majeed, the man she loves. However, he enforces her to marry a man, Tahiri, who is one of the richest businessmen in Alvhes and tempts the family with the huge amount of dowry. The father insists to marry Pari to this man without paying attention to his daughter feelings: "you try to sell me" (91). "Don't be silly, Pari". The Tahiri's selfishness makes him insist to marry Pari despite his knowledge about her refusal. Here, males manifest themselves to be more dominating.

The Iranian and Saudi females appear subjugated to the parents' dominating power, particularly, the fathers. Faisal, in *Girls of Riyadh* finds himself helpless and powerless to change the family's situation. He could not break the traditional barriers, but he responds to his parent's request of not marrying Michelle whose mother is an American. Here, Pari, in *The Persian Girls*, by the end succumbs to her father's determination to marry her to Tahiri. The father does not recognize anything about the man except that he is a businessman and one of the richest people in the area. Islamic manners are ignored. The father does not even bother himself to think over the non-Islamic ethics and values of the man. Pari's discovery and concern about Islamic values is a sort of hypocrisy: "I'm confident that Tahiri gets out with whores despite his concern to keep me with him. I smell different aromas on his clothes. I could not curb my feelings and I talked to him. He denied strongly. As usual, he attempted to please me with expensive gifts" (176).

After a year, Pari's marriage proves to be a failure. She leaves her husband's house to return to her father's. Her father, who only thinks in dowry and money, forces her to go back to her husband's house: "do you want to lose your dowry . . . what people will say about us if they know that you come back to your father's

house? Do you want to bring bad reputation and shame to the family? Why do you hate the man who loves you too much?" (119). Nahid is more courageous to argue the transformation and its influence on the Iranian community, particularly, the females, whereas Rajaa, in the *Girls of Riyadh*, does not give better details for the Saudi community's situation. The latter does not delve deeply and openly into the political and social restrictions. Nahid Rachlin addresses the political developments and social situations before revolution and post-revolution. She does not hesitate to address the SAVAK (the secret police) who supported the Shah and his family to get rid of all the Shah's opponents by murdering them or tormenting the people who supported the rebellion against the royal family. Shah made use of SAVAK to silence his opponents' voices. SAVAK attempted to silence the books that had liberal ideas as well as the writers who wrote for the revolution or against Shah's regime.

Rechlin is clearer in her memoir. She does not hide her personal connection in the female attitudinal development, be it social, religious or cultural. She does not hide her first relationship with the English man in her country and her romantic adventures in America before her marriage. She was more stubborn to respond to her father's request to stay in Iran. Her determination assists her to change her entire life by moving to America. Rachlin does not allow society and religion to block her personal life. Her father house is a plausibly Islamically ritual house, full of slogans lacking deep faith: "no one of us prays, wears *hijab* or fasts". For this reason, Rachlin does not hesitate to marry someone different in culture, identity, religion and social tradition. She marries an American Jew, in response to a romantic love that invades her heart: "what strange to find this man who was born in a different culture and religion falling in love with me, an Iranian female Muslim" (204). However, Rajaa Al Sanea does not bring herself to the story's events. She makes the narrator unknown. Her writing style is not comprehensive and well written as that is used by Rachlin.

II. CONCLUSION

Rajaa Al Sanea's *The Girls of Riyadh* and Nahid Rachlin's *The Persian Girls* represent two communities with their varied cultures. However, the common ground between the two communities is Islam in its different versions adopted by both countries. The two females' narratives express how Islamic communities control females' lives by extremist social and religious conventions leading females to release a clarion cry to liberate themselves from such patriarchal domination marked by the claim of unfair Islamic rules or strict social conventions.

The article finds that the male dominating community is not dedicated to the religious teachings or social traditions. Male and females behave in different ways if they are far away of their communities which are marked by plausible Islamic laws. *The Girls of Riyadh* adopts the verses of Holy Quran, Prophet's sayings, wise men words, and feminists' words of both males and females such as Nizar Qibbani "Women Poet" to reveal the connotations that express sexual, social, religious and cultural oppression imposed upon females by a male dominated community in Saudi Arabia. The male dominated attitude is a result of misunderstanding reality of Islamic rules or exaggeration in its application. However, *The Persian Girls* is more comprehensive and open to reveal social, political, religious and sexual issues influencing the Iranian females' lives. The Iranian females manifest themselves courageously in a way to change their lives for better by calling for equity and equality. They do not pay attention to social, religious and cultural norms. *The Girls of Riyadh* portrays the Saudi males as submissive and responsive to traditional rules. In contrast, the Iranian females attempt to free themselves from the chains of social, religious and cultural conventions.

III. AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

The Author's name is Rashad M. Al Areqi. He was born in 1970, Taiz, Yemen. He got his PhD. Degree in English Literature in 2008, Putra University, Malaysia. He studied an intensive course in Contemporary American Literature, University of Louisville, Kentucky, USA, from June 17 to July 30, 2011. He got promoted to Associate Professor in English Literature in 2015, Albaha University, Saudi Arabia. The author works for Sana'a Community College. However, as part of his sabbatical leave, he is now the Head of English Department, Faculty of Sciences and Arts, Al Mandaq, Albaha University. He is also a member of editorial board of different international journals as well as a reviewer for many international journals. He has published many articles in varied international journals. His research interest areas are: English Lit., American Lit., Postcolonial Lit., Comparative Lit. Literary Criticism and Theories, Identity and Gender, Race and Racism, etc.

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