

## **Representation of Muslim Women in Tariq Ali's *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree***

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses the representation of Muslim women by Tariq Ali in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* (2006). *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* is Ali's first novel of *Islam Quintet*, a series of five historical novels about Muslims and their interaction/clash with the Christians. The novel is set in Spain after the fall of Granada -- one of the greatest Islamic Empire -- reclaimed by the Spanish Catholic armies of Isabella and Ferdinand of Castile from the Muslims in 1492. As Ali is a harsh critic of both the Western Oriental discourse about the Muslim women and the restrictions (in Ali's view) that Islam imposed on the Muslim women, the study explores how Ali's portrayal of Muslim women is different from Orientalist depiction of Muslim women as exotic, veiled and oppressed. It discusses whether the Muslim women in the novel have been portrayed as active social and political agents who played an important role in Andalusia's rich and dynamic culture of learning and innovation or they have been depicted in traditional stereotyped gendered roles as passive, submissive agents who were confined to the domestic life. The related theoretical concepts of feminist Orientalism and post-colonial feminism have also been discussed that provide a theoretical background to the study. The text has been analysed in detail for the author's treatment and portrayal of the female characters in the novel.*

**Key Words:** Tariq Ali, Muslim women, representation, feminist Orientalism

### **Presentation of (Muslim) Women in Literature and Feminism**

The presentation of women in literature by the male writers has been mostly biased. Women have been presented inferior to men, weak in

nature e.g. 'Frailty thy name is woman' appears in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* (Act1, L. 146). Aristotle (1994) (translation by Edghill, E. M. as *Categories*) is of the view that, 'the female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities'. St. Thomas Aquinas (in Jenkins, 1999) believed that woman is an imperfect man.

As a result of feminist movement women got some basic rights as human beings. Some intellectual women began to pay attention to the projection of women in literature and literary criticism. They analyzed the texts of male writers which had played a great role in the marginalization of women. Resultantly, a feminist critical theory emerged in the field of criticism.

Feminist critics look at the way feminine consciousness had been portrayed in literature written by men and women. They have changed the nature of questions asked about literature that predominantly reflects the male nature of experience. They have challenged the way gender has been presented in literature. They feel that women have been pushed to the periphery by the male-dominated critical school which sanctifies the male author as an impregnable authority. His personal life and ideology are not relevant to the impersonal literary structures he constructs. Male critics have been interpreting female characters in a stereotyped role in relationship with men. In this way men have occupied a distinct position at the centre or of the 'One' and women were given that of the 'Other'.

Among many others Woolf (1998), Beauvoir (1953), Millet (1977) and Moi (1977) have pointed out the bias against women as presented in literature. Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) documented the way 'legislators, priests, philosophers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth' (Selden, 1989, p. 135). Such an attitude on the part of patriarchy makes women feel that they are inferior by nature.

Postcolonial feminists argue that the Western feminist scholarship is basically racist. They advocate for the rights of the white middle class women only, but they claim to be the apostle of the rights of women of the whole world. Postcolonial feminists claim that the experiences of women in the world can never be identical. Mohanty (1988) argues that what is felt by a black woman can never be felt by an American or a European woman. She believes that the idea of

global sisterhood is impracticable until the women of the third world get basic human rights; until they are recognized as equal women with the white ones and their issues are given the same importance in the international feminist agenda. Spivak (1985) says that women of the former colonies have been doubly colonized and marginalized.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979) analysed the historical construction of a Western discourse that persistently misrepresented Islam and the Muslims, especially within the Arab world. According to Said the West has, for centuries, shown lasting fascination with the harem and veil, as recurring tropes in orientalist literatures that symbolise Muslim women's oppression and eroticism. Said contends that Orientalism was purely a male-constructed discourse that "feminized" the East by attributing to its qualities typically associated with women herself- irrationality, licentiousness, exoticism (Weber 2001)

The representation of orientals in the orientalist discourse is as old as Orientalism itself and it was used as an indication of Muslim backwardness and barbarism. This approach served two purposes: on the one hand it justified in constructing the image of suppressive and cruel orientalist males and was considered even as a moral imperative to conquer Eastern territories. This according to Spivak is the case of "white men saving brown women from brown men". (Spivak, 1999, p.287) On the other hand, one of the recurring images of the Orientalist discourse is its association with freedom of licentious sex. In nineteenth century Europe, sex had been institutionalized with strict rules, which were the result of Christian church religious teachings about the issue. So the Orient was looked as a place where the Europeans could look for sexual experience that was unobtainable in Europe.

Parvin Paydar (1995) discusses three characteristics of feminist Orientalism. First, the assumption of binary opposition between the West and the East in which Muslim women are oppressed, while their Western counterparts enjoy full freedom in their society. The second characteristic is the conception that the Oriental women are only victims of a male chauvinistic society and have no agency or resistant role in their social transformations. This approach tends to marginalize the so-called Oriental women and therefore, Muslim women need

saviors, i.e., the Westerns, to emancipate them from Muslim men. The third aspect of feminist Orientalism is the construction of a monolithic entity of Muslims and therefore the belief that all Muslim women are living under the same condition and have no unique aspect or identity for themselves (Payar 1995: 5-7).

Since the beginning of the interaction between the West and the Islamic civilization, *harem* being the unfamiliar and exotic had stirred the Western imagination. To this the Western interest in the sexual mores of the non-Europeans was also added. For the essential Oriental characteristics of sensuality and violence and its political aspect in terms of the oppression of women, the harem served in the West as a metaphor for tyranny and arbitrary in the society. (Kidwi 2006: 71-2) Thus, the Orientalist's portrayal of the Oriental women was based on West's imagination and fascination about stereotyped images of exoticism and oppression of women in harem rather than an objective, firsthand study with an intention of understanding the cultural differences.

### **Religio-historical Perspective**

Before Islam, woman was considered as an object of entertainment. She had no freedom of thought or expression; rather she was dealt with harsh cruelty. She was burnt alive and buried alive. Overall she was a slave-like creature, who had no wish for her own. At a time when the rest of the world, from Greece and Rome to India and China, considered women as no better than slaves, with no rights what so ever, Islam acknowledged Women's equality with men in a great many respects. (Woman in Islam: 1)

Armstrong (2006) also shares the same view that in the pre-Islamic period generally women could not own property. They had no individual rights. Traditionally, women were considered part of a man's state. She argues that Muhammad (PBUH) had a pro-feminist agenda. He gave social and economic rights to the women in 7<sup>th</sup> century, something unimaginable at that time: "The Qur'an was attempting to give women a legal status that most Western women would not enjoy until the nineteenth century. The emancipation of women was a project dear to the Prophet's heart...." (Ibid. p.147)

The fact that Muhammad (PBUH) was opposed in this project by many men in the Ummah shows that he was centuries ahead than his age and his companions to whom his agenda for the empowerment of the women seemed revolutionary. He was fully supported by Allah in Quran. The Holy Quran states in Surah Al-Ahzab about the dignity and position of Woman:

Remember that society consists of both men and women, who have to go through life hand in hand. If one of them lags behind, it is bound to hamper the progress of the other. It should be well understood that there is no difference in the potentialities of men and women; except certain biological differences. (33:35)

This is how Islam has declared that a woman is equally capable and holds significant position in the family and the society. She has been assigned potentialities in all respects. Hence, it can be viewed, as Dr. Fahmida has pointed out that Islam is the first religion that brought drastic changes in the environment for women, who could now breathe the air of freedom. The burial of female child and ill treatment to her was strictly forbidden. She was given right to education and a right to express her opinion in marriage. She was given a share in inheritance. These were indeed revolutionary measures. (Hussain: 2001).

But, Tariq Ali disagrees with the idea that Islam gives women equality and freedom. For him: "The reality of women in Islam is a fabricated destiny" (Ali 2003: 60). Rather, he is of the view that Quran while recognizing the importance of women imposes severe social and political restrictions that determine their private and public conduct. (ibid) By presenting a number of examples from Quran and Hadith he contends that early Islam was incapable of imposing a universal oppression on women. He argues that the sexual anarchy that represented the Jahiliya continued to exist even during the early period of Islam: "During Muhammad's lifetime and for many decades after his death, women fought alongside men, despite supposed inferiority. They also fought to preserve their independence" (ibid p.62)

Tariq Ali was much influenced by the ideas of Edward Said and his *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* and the other four novels of the *Islam Quintet* is his artistic response to the Western view/

perception that the Muslims are a people without political culture. When the novel was read by Edward Said, he encouraged Ali to go ahead and tell the “whole story”. So Ali’s is the other side of the story.

Now, it is very interesting to note that the while Orientalists associate Muslim women with the images of veil and harem and present them as exotic, licentious, weak and oppressed whereas, Ali’s *Islam Quintet* is an intellectual response to the modern-day Western Oriental discourse to counter the Western view that ‘Muslims are a people without culture’. However, at the same time Ali also believes that Islam tries to impose certain restrictions on the Muslim women. In this interesting trajectory, it becomes very significant to study and analyse Ali’s presentation of the Muslim women. In this paper, our prime concern is Ali’s portrayal and treatment of the Muslim women in Spain that how Ali debunks and deconstructs Oriental images of the oriental/Muslim women as exotic, licentious, and veiled and oppressed creatures in Harem. Here, our argument is that the Muslim women that Ali portrays in the novel are neither veiled nor oppressed in harem; rather they lead a luxurious life with good degree of sexual and social liberty. However, the author seems to ignore or undermine their contribution in intellectual, professional and political sphere.

### **Ali’s Portrayal of the Muslim Women**

Ali’s *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* deals with the difficult times faced by an aristocratic Muslim family in *al-Hudayl*, a village near *Gharnata*, after the re-conquest of Muslim Spain in 1492. Most of the important female characters are upper-class women, the women of once ruling family except Amira, the senior family maid. Throughout the novel, it cannot, in any sense, be said that women are less dominant, for the novel has major concerns with politics, nonetheless; women characters in this novel have been given due place. There are mainly two types of women depicted in the novel: orthodox and unorthodox. The first category is represented by Amira, whereas the latter is represented by Hind, Zubaida, Zahra and Ama. It is pertinent to discuss each character in detail.

**Amira**

Amira is the elderly maidservant in the service of Umar's family. Her position is higher than just a servant and she exercises some degree of authority owing to her seniority and age. When young, she was appointed as a maidservant in Umar's house. She plays main role behind Zahra's (her master's daughter) tragic life. She brings calamity to Zahra's life by telling her father the secret of her love with Muhammad; she does it for getting Muhammad as her husband whom she could not win. Author has presented her as a pure domestic woman. When she was young, she had an element of jealousy with Zahra. She is presented as less concerned with troublesome political conditions in Granada except making few statements against the enemies. Author seems very much critical to this character. He satirizes her fingering of beads and gives superiority to game of chess over it. "Was not chess infinitely superior to the beads she was always fingering?" (Ali: 2006 p.1). This particular statement provides an adequate basis for understanding Ali's view towards Muslim women. If generalized, the author is satirizing the old Muslim women, who are always engaged in beating beads as a habit, ritual or to keep pretences than as a religious practice. Ama is presented as a traditional typical Muslim woman, ritualistic and fundamentalist, who is always busy with beads in hands and tries to be moralistic, but lacks a deeper understanding of religion. One may disagree with the author for she may have been portrayed as a unifying figure with more understanding about the dilemma of the Muslim community to handle the matter intellectually, as she is shown in the beginning, with great care for Garnada: "If things go on like this nothing would be left except memories." (ibid. p.1) She might have been assigned the same tone throughout the story of the novel, but the author has portrayed her as a stereotype, who in her youth ruins the life of her master's daughter, Zahra; and in her old age, is a woman with a moral agenda, who keeps telling the younger ones with dos and don'ts – to which nobody pays heed to.

**Zahra**

Zahra is one of the major female characters in the novel. Her story begins as she is a young loving family member -- loving her aunt

Maryam, who later becomes her mother and wife to her father, Ibn-e-Farid. But, when she comes across Asma, a Christian girl of almost her age, as the young wife of her father, who had been the center of her life she feels betrayed. She loses her temperament, becomes solitary and quiet for most of the time. It is the entry of young, good-looking and intelligent Muhammad Ibn-e-Zaydun, son of lady servant in her house that brings her out of this depression. She falls for him and in constant meetings with him she loses her virginity. But this could not continue for long. Her father comes to know by her rival Amira, who was betrothed to Muhammad. Thereafter, Ibn-e-Zaydun simply disappears and is never seen again in the village till Ibn-e-Farid was alive. She has been presented as an emotionally and morally weak character. When she leaves her home she could become a strong woman, as dejection from beloved or disapproval from father do not always lead to this type of irrationality and unusual psychological behaviour. Sometime it makes one stronger, but, opposed to this view she is presented as psychologically ill, who runs from home, presents her body to every man who just smiles at her.

I was burnt by love. It devoured my inside till there was nothing left at all and I began to open my legs to any caballero who wished to enter, not caring whether I disliked or enjoyed the experience. It was my way of destroying all that was sensitive in me. It was when they found me naked on the tracks outside Qurtuba that they decided to send me to the maristan in Gharnata (ibid. p.138).

Her father neither acknowledges her love nor pushes her back to home to live a normal life, on the contrary, he sends her to *Maristan*. Whereas, he himself brings a Christian girl of almost his daughter's age, who belongs to lower class – her mother was a maid. Yet, he brings her and marries her. This depicts the double standards of the patriarchal society. For Ibn-e-Farid, it is fine to bring a Christian girl from a lower class as his second wife. But, on the other hand, when his daughter falls in love with a family servant then it becomes a matter of honor and ego for the patriarchy. Instead of marrying his daughter according to her own will, her lover is forced out of the

village at the cost of Zahra's happiness and her sanity. Thus, a female member of even a noble family doesn't have a say in important decisions about her life. Her life is controlled by her father, who takes the decisions no matter what the consequences may be. Her action of destroying her respect at public places gives indeed a distorting picture of women. Annis Pratt (1971) suggests for the authors who deal with woman: "It would seem better to turn one's attention from attack to defense, from examples of distorted images of women to examples of healthier representation." As Feminist criticism looks for the better portrayal of women instead of degrading her stature, it seeks women's noble and intellectual representation but on the contrary, Ali has deviated from the ideals pointed out by Pratt.

Zahra is portrayed as not only morally corrupt and psychologically ill, but also religiously weak. She takes the religion merely as a traditional and emotional matter rather than a spiritual one. For the time being, she adopts Christianity to save her life. Had she been portrayed as a strong Muslim woman, she would have done no compromise on religion. Although she is the daughter of Ibn-e-Farid, the head of the governing aristocratic family, but her representation as completely subjective, engrossed and immersed in her own world, a single woman's world, in fact totally contrasts to that of what women of Spain were like at that time. Whereas, it is a historical fact that women enjoyed an equal freedom and position in intellectual pursuits in Muslim Spain.

Women in Moorish Spain enjoyed a full level of freedoms and educational pursuits: this was unique among Islamic nations (the wearing of the veil in public places was almost completely ignored.) Women shared in all of the intellectual, scientific and literary movements of the day. There were women poets, surgeons and doctors, historians, philosophers, business leaders, and in other disciplines and professions. Women operated educational institutes in some of the principal cities. (Edghill, 1994)

Hence, it can be said that Muslim women's active life in Spain is not hidden in the history. It is her equal share in its glory, which glorified Spain to this day. Thus, the historical fact that Spain witnessed equal contribution - intellectual and professional - from the Muslim women has been overlooked by the author.

## **Hind**

Hind is the young daughter of family head, Umar bin Abdullah. She enjoys many luxuries and liberties in her carefree life. Her marriage is the subject of discussion for all family members. She is not submissive as she rejects the offer of Miguel to marry his son, Jaun; and her parents do the same as they consider her decision wise. Her mother reports to Umar regarding her marriage. "She would rather be wed to a horse." (Ali 2006: p.20) He responds with laughter: "She always did have a good taste." (ibid) She is the one who takes initiatives in her relationship with her lover. She makes physical love with Ibn-e-Daud, friend of her father, who comes as a guest in their home. He, many a times, resists her not to have a sexual relationship before marriage: "I am your father's guest. Tomorrow, I will see him alone and request his permission to make you my wife. Any other course would be dishonorable." (ibid. p.166) At some other place, he says the same thing: "I am your father's guest. Please do not even suggest that I abuse his hospitality and betray his trust. It would be a disgrace." (ibid p.137) But, the author propagates the view that it is the woman, who is the leading agent to this passion. Hence, Hind is set on the threshold of despair after these words of Ibn-e-Daud. But, finally, she persuades him and they engage in physical relation before marriage. When talking about the moral analysis of novel, Babbit (1924) reminds us that literature must help us recognize the reality of evil and the necessity of controlling our impulses. (p.152, 175).

As compared to her brother, Zuhayr, Hind's canvass of life is very small: her whole character revolves around her personal life as a young woman and around the small world of the women of the family which she is also a part of. She fulfills the traditional role assigned to women as concerned with domestic and family matters. Whereas, Zuhayr has been portrayed as a young man embodying great zeal and valour, who tries to initiate a physical battle against the Christian forces to save his family and community. Even when compared to her to be husband, Ibn-e-Daud, she is more driven by emotions and sexual passion rather than by intellect. Whereas, Ibn-e-Daud uses reason and insists on not having sexual activity before marriage. In other words, Hind is weak who cannot control her passion; on the other hand, Ibn-e-Daud is not carried by his passion because he exercises good control

over them. Moreover, there is no mention of Hind's education or her intellectual pursuits at all. Whereas, Ibn-e-Daud is a young scholar, who has come from Fes in search of some rare books to complete his research in Spain. Over all, moral corruption in women in the novel demonstrates unfavorable attitude, which can never lead to positive engagement between East and the West. Moore (2008) is looking for this positive connection when she states: "I believe feminist criticism remains necessary because women everywhere are still disadvantageously positioned in the cultural canons and because reading other women can inspire effective, intellectual and political connection." (p.11)

### **Zubayda**

Zubayda is the wife of Umar. She is obedient to husband, loving to her children and lenient to the servants. "She is spirited lady and much respected." (Ali: 2006, p.34) She is the strongest female character depicted in the novel. She could be representative of an ideal woman of the times for the author. We learn from the text that her private tutor was a sceptic, who had told her the story of Ibn Hazm, an unorthodox poet, historian and biographer in al-Andalus. Moreover, when the village is attacked by the Catholic army, women of the village fight along with their men against the army. "Zubayda had insisted that they would fight" (ibid. p.261). The women had fought so courageously that the Christians were astonished:

"The women, to the great astonishment of the Christians, displayed a boundless courage. These were not the weak and pampered creatures of the Harem about whom they had been told so many fanciful stories. Once again it was the element of surprise which aided the women of al-Hudayl. They were responsible for decreasing the size of the captain's army by at least a hundred men. Ultimately they succumbed, but with swords and daggers in their heads" (ibid. p.265)

This description of women is totally anti-Orientalist. Even the Christian soldiers themselves are surprised at the valour and courage of the women and their (mis) conceptions about the Muslim women as

“weak and pampered creatures of the harem” prove false. But, it is only at the end of the novel –in their fatal encounter with the Christian army –that the author exhibits the extra-ordinary characteristics of al-Andalusian women. The author doesn't highlight these qualities during the course of the events. The author could have given more significance to these tenets of an-Andalusian women than focusing upon their secret lives motivated by sexual desire and passion.

Zubayda is the only female character, who does not exhibit moral corruption. However, she, in a way, endorses all the moral corruption in the family women by being lenient and tolerant to it. She knows everything that is going on between her daughter Hind and her lover. Yet, she remains quiet as if it is a routine or an ordinary affair for/in the women of the family. As far as religion is concerned, she is not much religious rather Amira considers her to be a blasphemer. She confesses this to her husband: “Nobody knows better than you that I am not a religious person.” (ibid. p.20) Her religious practices are just a formality to keep up the pretences and not intended to get Divine blessings. Her husband satirically comments: “But we all know that you fast and pray to preserve your figure.” (ibid. p.20) This critical judgment about Zubayda tells about the secular nature of the Muslim women of the time. The women of the time were not deeply religious. Even if they practiced religion, it was more of a formality and to keep pretences before the family servants and the children than to exhibit a real spiritual inclination. No any sign of reforming the family and taking it out of physical corruption is exhibited. When nothing of this kind is expected from Zubayda, no social reformation could be possible. But, opposite to this, Hoodfar (2012) is of the opinion: “Muslim Women like all other women are social actors, employing, reforming and changing existing social institutions, often creatively to their own ends.” (p. 5)

### **Discussion**

Amira represents the orthodox class of Muslim women. She has been portrayed as traditional, ritualistic, conservative and moralistic. She is representative or symbolical of the restrictions and moral limitations that Islam, in Ali's view, tried to impose on the powerful women of pre-Islamic Arabia. Amira is not happy with the way Zubayda is

bringing up her children: "She [Amira] regarded the lady of the house as over-indulgent to her daughters, over-generous to the peasants who worked on the state, over-lenient to the servants and their vices and indifferent to the practices of their faith". (Ali: 2006, p.13) She dislikes Zubayda for her liberal, secular and carefree attitude. Amira is criticized by the author, when she tells Yazid that Hind even wouldn't make it to the first heaven. She predicts that Hind will be overtaken by "something evil" and "will be exposed to wild passions" that will cause shame for the family. Thus, she has been made an embodiment of same fear which, according to Ali, has been a concern for the Prophet and Islam. Ali believes that it is because of this fear about Women's passion and their stronger sexuality that Islam imposes sexual restrictions on women. And Islam, comparatively, gives greater sexual freedom and carnal pleasures to men than women.

She also stands for religious orthodoxy with her traditional understanding of the Islam. She is the only person in the family, who prays five times a days and keeps fingering the beads of her rosary. She keeps moralizing and has her own way of looking at things. Once, she goes as far to say that she tells Umar that it was "weakness of this order [lack of moral order symbolized by Zubeyda] which had brought Islam to the sorry pass..... in al-Andalus". (ibid. p.13-14) But, all her attempts at moralising the family members go in vain as no one takes her seriously. Rather, her remarks serve as a source of entertainment and laughter. When Umar shares Amira's view about Zubeyda, she is "entertained by the thought that the frailties of al-Andalusian Islam were symbolised in her person". (ibid. p.14) It is quite evident from the tone of the author that he is very critical of Ama's rigid and orthodox views. Whereas, he seems to endorse and side with what Zubeyda, Hind and Zehra stand for.

On the other hand, the author's portrayal of Zubeyda, Hind and Zehra represents the type/class of Muslim women, who for their sexuality and passion are closer to the women of pre-Islamic Arabia. Their luxurious lifestyle is less affected by the restrictions imposed by the Islam on the women. Hind and Zehra are led by the strong sexuality and passion. Zehra's sexuality was so strong and powerful that after the frustration, she suffers in her love for her father as well as her lover that it takes a negative turn. She leaves her home and

welcomes every stranger, who wants to mount at her. It is her revenge from herself and from her father for the un-gratification of her physical and emotional desires.

As the paper attempts to look beyond the novel's thematic sphere hence, it can be analyzed that Ali in the novel presents the women with family based approaches, particularly while finding the causes of downfall of Muslim empire in Spain not with individual feminist approach, which certainly would have given enlightening view of the Muslim Women. Not a single Muslim woman has been delineated as a dignified figure by the author, who could give new identity and tendencies to view Muslim women with positive perception.

The women in the novel are led by their passion and emotions rather than reason or intellect. Zahra as a woman doesn't try to encourage her soul after betrayal to live a loving life, and participate in the social activities. On the contrary, the women have their own world, the world that is limited to the fore walls of the family home. This inner world is completely different from that of outer world in the novel. Their inner world has very little to do with the issue of survival that the Muslims of the day are facing. Their life is mostly indulged in the world of luxuries and pleasures of life, lavish food, massage, bath, matters relating to home, physical relations and love affairs. Whereas, historically, the Muslim women in Spain were dynamic and they participated in all the fields of society. Sertima (1991) after a deep research on the age of Moors in Spain declares: "Since Africa is a matriarchal Society, women were also encouraged to devote themselves to serious study, and it was only in Spain that one could find female doctors, lawyers and scientists (p.173)."

Indeed, women were part and parcel of golden age of Moorish Spain "which remained for some years a hub of intellectual activity and –what can hardly be described in any other way –sheer cultural glory." (Haq: 2013). This type of professional women could not get the author's attention as we don't find a single intellectual and professional Muslim Woman in the novel. What the author has associated with them is boldness, passion, moral corruption and a family-oriented life.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of the characters and the discussion focused on the representation of the Muslim women in *Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree* by Tariq Ali. The analysis proved that Ali presents two types of female characters, orthodox and unorthodox. Amira is ritualistic and moralistic. She is characterized by the tents of jealousy and hypocrisy. The author's satirical and critical attitude towards her clearly shows his dislike for the comparatively weaker and submissive women. In Ali's view (2003), Islam tried to suppress the powerful sexuality of the pre-Islamic Arabic women by imposing certain sexual restrictions and making them subservient to their males. These restrictions resulted in a society bathed in sexual repression and hypocrisy. So, Amira is certainly not the representative of the Andalusian Muslim women. On the contrary to Amira's character the characters of Zahra, Hind and Zubayda have been delineated in a more positive way. They exhibit the tolerant and secular spirit and culture of the Muslim Spain. They have been portrayed as bold and powerful women with strong sexuality, especially Hind. They are neither veiled nor oppressed rather they enjoy the luxurious life in an aristocratic family. Their personal life and relationships are not affected by the moral discipline or the sexual restrictions that Islam, in Ali's opinion, tried to impose on the Muslim women. Zahra had physical relationship with her lover in her youth; Hind initiates a physical relationship with her lover Ibn-e-Zaydun. Zahra and Hind have been depicted with such strong sexuality that they both seem morally corrupt. However, Zubayda seems to be more balanced woman, who doesn't exhibit any moral corruption. The author, however, has undermined or ignored the contribution of Andalusian women in the intellectual or political sphere. There is little or no mention about their education and / or their intellectual pursuits. Moreover, at a time when the Muslims face the very issue of survival in the peninsula, the women show little interest in the political matters rather they remain indulged in the luxuries – lavish foods, lavish baths and physical relations. Though in the end of the novel, the women of the family and the village courageously take part in the fight against their enemy, throughout the story their focus has been a life confined to food, talks and clandestine love relationships.

It can be concluded, that Ali's portrayal of the Muslim women is neither like the Orientalists nor does he present them as typically submissive and weaker creatures. His Muslim women are closer to pre-Islamic Arabian women with strong sexuality and lesser moral discipline. It seems that the point that the author wants to make is that despite its attempts at curbing their sexuality to make women submissive, a good segment of the Muslim women continued to play their part in the society.

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