

Role of Women in Saudi Ruling Family

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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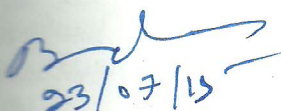
DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "Role of Women in Saudi Ruling Family" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Master of Philosophy is my own work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.



PRIYANKA MITTAL

CERTIFICATE

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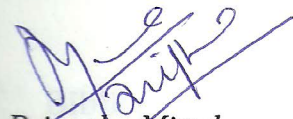


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For any error or inadequacies, the responsibility is entirely my own.



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Abbreviations

A.H.	After Hjra
ACPRA	Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association
AKBK	Alsayedah Khadijah bint Khwailed Businesswomen’s Center
ALESCO	Arab League Educational cultural and Scientific Organisation
AMARCO	Arabian American Oil Company
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against
DSCA	Down Syndrome Charitable Association
GDI	General Directorate of Investigation
GII	gender inequality index
GPGE	General Presidency of Girls’ Education
HDI	human development index
HRFS	Human Rights First Society
HRW	Human Rights Watch
KACST	King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology
KASP	King Abdullah Scholarship Programme
KAUST	King Abdullah University of Science and Technology
KSA	kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MIRA	Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPOs	Non Profit Organisations

RAN	Rights Activists Network
SAMA	Saudi Arabia Monetary Agency
SAWA	Saudi Arabia women association
SIGMA	Saudi Investment Group and Marketing
SIGMA	Saudi Investment Group and Marketing
SMEs	small and medium scale Enterprises
SR	Saudi Riyal
UN	United nation
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nation Children's Emergency Fund

Chapter-One

Introduction

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) came into being in 1932 following a series of military victories and political manoeuvres of its founder Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman al-Saud, commonly known as Ibn-Saud and since then it has been ruled by his sons. The ruling al-Saud family comprises of about 8,000-20,000 members but the power and wealth is concentrated in a smaller group comprising of about 2,000 princes. The ruling family draws its legitimacy through the ‘mutual support pact’ of 1744 between Mohammed bin Abdul Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism, and Mohammed Ibn-Saud, the great-grandfather of Ibn-Saud and the founder of the first Saudi state in the 18th century.

According to the 1744 accord, al-Saud recognized and accepted the authority of Wahhabism on all religious matters and committed to upholding and propagating its doctrine. In return, the latter bestowed legitimacy upon the political rule of the al-Saud. This power-sharing arrangement has been the basis of the al-Saud rule, especially since the formation of the third al-Saud rule in 1932. The al-Saud-Wahhab arrangement is not only mutually legitimizing but also forms the backbone of the ruling establishment and hence is deeply institutionalized. Thus, religion plays a dominant and decisive role in framing the Saudi policies. Besides the monarchic-Wahhab alliance, the tribal nature of the society carries significant influence in the country.

The Saudi political dynamics can be categorized into three important areas, namely the political culture, ideology and decision-making process. The last one has been dominated by the core group of princes whose number has expanded due to the creation and expansion of formal structures. The formation of Allegiance Council and *Majlis al-Shura* has broadened the decision-making power of the King. Indeed, due to the lack of formal political institutions and groupings since the early days, the Saudi al-Saud government has been obliged to create institutions both to contain perceived threats and also to co-opt dissent that threaten the stability of the country. This has made the states’ operation smooth while at the same time changing the political system as *Ijma* (consensus) and *shura* (consultation) are performed under heavy pressure.

Early Saudi States

The modern state of Saudi Arabia established in 1932, created a stable and durable realm that successfully incorporated Hijaz, Asir and Hasa and Najd areas there by bringing diverse tribes and vast territories under its authority. The claim of Ibn-Saud over the land rests on the idea of the ancestral rule over the region which draws inspiration from 18th century claim that the first Saudi-Wahhabi emirate (1744-1818) ruled this region with Diriyyah as its capital. Al-Saud is considered a sedentary group that founded the settlement of Diriyyah that accepted him as Amir (leader). The political fortunes of al-Saud began to change after the adoption of Wahhabism (al-Rasheed 2002: 16).

Wahhabism is an Islamic reform movement that emerged in Arabia in the 1740s and is a puritanical movement named after its founder, Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1702-1792). He hailed from a small town in eastern Arabia, near the modern city of Riyadh. He gained attention upon the publication of a theological tract in 1740 in which he condemned many the then prevailing Islamic practices, calling them *bidaa* (innovations) (Vassiliev 2013). According to him, innovations or adaptations to conform to modernity were deviations from the true faith and he declared all sects to be heathen, which justified subjecting them to a *jihad*. Common practices such as erecting shrines to honour saints, according to Wahhab, were comparable to idolatry, as was the custom of visiting shrines to seek the intercession of saints (Wynbrandt 2010: 135). Abdul Wahhab was a strict Unitarian, preaching that no one should be worshipped but God. Incensed by his radical teachings and interpretations, Wahhab was expelled from Uyaynah and he settled down in Diriyyah then under the control of al-Saud. This eventually mutated into signing a mutual support agreement in 1744.

Under the agreement, al-Saud agreed to support the reformer's demand for *jihad* and in return the latter acknowledged al-Saud as the political leader of Muslim community. In the process, Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab secured control over religious interpretation. Thus, without Wahhabism legitimacy (in terms of wealth and power), Diriyyah and Saudi leadership, would not have flourished. The religious-political centralisation and building of Saudi tribal confederation resulted in subjugation of Najd. By 1797, under the leadership of Abd al-Aziz (1765-1803), son of Mohammed Ibn-Saud, military leadership expanded to Riyadh, Kharj, Qasim, and Qatif as well as to present day Oman, Qatar and Bahrain whose residents accepted

either political suzerainty of al-Saud or paid *Zakat*. With the help of Wahhabi influence and legitimacy by 1803 al-Saud spread their control beyond the Diriyyah to as far as Mesopotamia.

The first Saudi State was established in 1744, in the area around Riyadh and controlling most of the present-day territory of Saudi Arabia through conquests made between 1786 and 1816, including Mecca and Medina. Concerned at the growing power of the Saudi-Wahhabi challenge, the Ottoman Sultan Mustafa IV instructed his viceroy in Egypt Mohammed Ali Pasha to reconquer Arabia. In war with Ottoman forces, Saud ibn Abd al-Aziz died in 1814 leaving his son Abdullah (1814-18) to face Egyptian troops. The Ottoman forces were eventually successful in routing the al-Saud forces in 1818 and destroyed the power of the al-Saud which marked the end of the first Saudi-Wahhabi State (Wynbrandt 2010:301).

After Egyptian forces partially withdrew from Arabia in 1824, Turki bin Abdullah (1824-34) tried to establish his authority in Riyadh and Hasa region by 1830. After him his son Faisal (1834-65) became the amir of second Saudi State and was followed by his son Abdullah (1865-71) (Vassiliev 2013). The al-Saud rule in Najd was contested by Rashidis of Hail. For the rest of the 19th century, the al-Saud and al-Rashid fought for control of the interior of what was to become Saudi Arabia. By 1891, the Abdul al-Rahman al-Saud, son of Faisal and half-brother of Abdullah, was conclusively defeated by the al-Rashid, who drove al-Sauds into exile in Kuwait. It was only in 1902, Abd al-Rahman's son Abd al-Aziz, popularly known as Ibn-Saud, returned from exile in Kuwait, killed al-Rashidis and established present state of Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, in Hijaz, the Egyptians continued to occupy the area until 1840. After they left, the Sharifs of Mecca re-asserted their authority by paying tributes to the Ottoman Empire, albeit with the presence of an Ottoman governor and garrison. The prolonged conflict with Rashidis and al-Husseinis eventually ended with their conclusive defeats by Ibn-Saud; the Rashidis were overthrown in 1921 and Husseinis four years later. The prolonged intertribal conflict came to an end in 1932 when Ibn Saud consolidated his military gains and unified much of the Arabian Peninsula under his leadership (al-Rasheed 2002).

Meanwhile the religious zealot tribesmen of the Saudis and their allies became known as *Ikhwan* (Brothers) helped Ibn-Saud in consolidating kingdom. They marched across Arabia, proceeding to the Red Sea coast over a period of a century. Eventually, the Sauds consolidated their rule

over all of Arabia, except for a few eastern sheikhdoms and the Yemen in the south with the help of these sedentary people of the Najd Oasis. The *Ikhwan* grew more committed to Wahhabi Idealism than their allegiance to Ibn-Saud (Jordan 2011:42). They revolted against the religious-tolerant practices and modernisation plans of the Ibn-Saud. By 1926, meeting of *Ikhwan* leaders faulted Ibn-Saud for his deviations from Wahhabism and in 1929 at Battle of Sabilla *Ikhwan* rebellion against both Ibn-Saud and the British, who were backing him, was suppressed (al-Rasheed 2002) and Ibn-Saud firmly established his control.

The Saudi State

As per the Basic Law introduced in 1992 in the wake of the Kuwait crisis, the kingdom claims Qur'an as the country's constitution and recognizes *sharia* as the sole foundation of its jurisprudence. As the birth place of Islam and home to Islam's two most holy cities, Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia seeks a unique Islamic identity for itself and its society. This has a decisive impact upon the Saudi women, especially those belonging to the ruling al-Saud family.

The discovery of the oil in 1937 and its commercial production led to dramatic changes in the country with the regime pursuing rapid development programmes. The oil boom of the 1960s and 1970s was accompanied by a slow openness of the society and Saudi citizens found greater employment opportunities in the thriving public and private sectors of the country. The oil boom also witnessed a large-scale influx of expatriate labourers involved in massive construction and infra-structure development programmes. The introduction of new technologies to the predominantly tribal society, such as communication networks, transportation routes, and rapid urbanization slowly moved Saudi Arabia towards economic modernization. These developments opened new education opportunities and women were allowed into the education systems. A major push in this direction came in 1960 when education for girls was introduced and was expanded during the reign of King Faisal (1964-75). Girls' education however still, remained under the strict religious supervision. In 1963 strong opposition from conservatives in Buraydah region against women education was militarily crushed.

At the same time, oil wealth and large-scale improvement of living conditions, technological development and economic progress have not been accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the role and status of the Saudi women. According to the United Nations, *Human Development Index (HDI)* for Saudi Arabia stood at 0.782 in 2012 and the country is

ranked at 57 out of 187 countries and territories (UNDP 2013). In terms of *Gender Inequality Index* (GII), gender-based inequalities exist in Saudi Arabia in reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity. Furthermore, in terms of GII, Saudi Arabia is ranked 145 out of 148 countries (UNDP 2013). This trend is also reflected by the limited public role played by women belonging to the ruling family. Unlike the wives of rulers of Jordan, Morocco or Qatar, wives of Saudi kings are not designated as queens or consorts. They have never made public appearances even within Saudi Arabia.

This situation of the al-Saud women has been primarily due to the patriarchal and conservative nature of the society and the overwhelming influence of its tribal basis as well as the Wahhabi Islam (Doumato 1992). Both to legitimize the al-Saud role and to ward off internal threats (for example, *Ikhwan* rebelling in 1929, the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979 and frequent unrest in Shia-dominated Eastern Province) and regional tensions (Islamic revolution in Iran), the Saudi rulers have prevented any liberalizing trends. The state proscribes practices which are considered un-Islamic such as consumption of alcohol or violation of fasting during Ramadan. Through the intrusive and effective use of *mutawwa* or moral police, the al-Saud have imposed severe limitations upon women over issues such as dress code, public socializing with men and enforcement of *mahram* (which prevents unaccompanied females from travelling abroad).

Religion severely impacts the conduct of woman and her behaviour not only in public arena but also in her personal and private spaces as well. The dress code such as *pardah* (Veil), *hijab* (Headcover) and *abayas* (long robe or cloak), gender segregation and personal laws are some of the areas where Wahhabi code of conduct has been pervasive. This is compounded by the tribal nature of the society where tribal affiliations, linkages and marital alliance play an important role in the consolidation of the al-Saud rule (Bayet 2010). Even women belonging to the ruling family do not escape from this social order and do not get any 'exclusive' relief. There were instances of public hanging of a princess for adultery, princess being held captive to prevent them from escaping the country, etc (*Observer* 1978). Recent months witnessed controversies over King Abdullah's former wife and their daughters being kept in impoverished and inhumane conditions (Brown 2014).

At the same time, there are also instances where women belong to al-Saud family are slowly emerging out of the veil and testing the limits of the conservative tribal and religious order. It is possible to identify a number of such princesses, principally the wives and daughters of the kings, who have been playing or seeking a significant and even visible role within and outside the ruling family. One could notice the influence of women through their marriages to al-Saud family. Women have been strong-keepers of culture, traditions and familial-bondage in the al-Saud; but at the same time, whenever opportunities were available they also push for reforms and disseminate popular demand for change. The House of Saud comprises of thousands of princesses as result of polygamy involving various clans and tribes. In addition to Wahhabism, Ibn-Saud (and also his successors) used 'political marriages' with various tribes and local leaders to consolidate the modern Saudi state. The prominent among these marriage-based social bonds was the one with the al-Sudairi tribe when Ibn-Saud married Hassa bint Ahmad al-Sudairi in 1913. This marriage resulted in 11 children, including seven sons who later came to be known as the 'Sudairi Seven'; out of them, four became king or crown prince. Similarly, Effat Mounira al-Thunayan, wife of King Faisal, played a crucial role in the introduction of girl education.

In recent years, especially since the 'petition fever' following the Kuwait crisis, there were growing demands for social and political reforms (al-Rasheed 2007). The revival of the nominated consultative council or *Majlis al-Shura* in 2000 by King Fahd included two female members. The introduction of local elections (2005) was followed by King Abdullah promising female franchise (2011) and the appointment of 30 women to the *Majlis al-Shura* (2013). The introduction of slow phase of reforms since the 11 September terror attacks have also witnessed increased public role for the al-Saud women such as King Abdullah's daughter Adila. As a result, in recent years, women belonging to the ruling family are beginning to play a significant role in various fields including education, philanthropic activities, business, fashion, administration and even public diplomacy (al-Rasheed 2013a). Therefore the proposed research seeks to examine the role and influence of women belonging to the ruling family and analyse the underlying reasons and influence of their role.

Literature survey

The survey of the literature has been divided under three major sections, namely, Society in Saudi Arabia, House of Saud and Role of Women in the House of Saud.

Society in Saudi Arabia

By its own admission and practices Saudi Arabia is a religious state (Basic Law 1992; Department of State 2012). The founding of the modern Saudi state can be traced to the 1744 agreement between Mohammed ibn Saud and the founder of Wahhabi Islam Mohammed ibn Abd-al Wahhab. Under the agreement formally sealed in Medina, the reformer promised that if the ruler held fast to the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, he would swear allegiance to al-Saud. For his part, the latter pledged his readiness to undertake the *jihad* and rule according to the tenets of Islam (DeLong-Bas 2004; Wiktorowicz 2004; Goldstein 2010). This arrangement cemented the alliance between the political and religious forces of the early 18th century and took a more concrete form following the formation of the third and modern Saudi State in 1932 under Ibn-Saud (Wynbrandt 2004; Hefner 2009). Thus, the destinies of the House of Saud and House of Shaikh (successors of Abdul Wahhab) are intrinsically tied through mutual legitimization and were gradually consolidated through marital alliances and political patronage (Gurule 2008; Goldstein 2010).

This arrangement enshrined and ensured a pre-eminent role for religion in Saudi Arabia and manifested through the introduction of various laws, provisions and other measures that demand a strict adherence to the oneness of Islam as interpreted by Wahhab (Burns 2011). According to Laurent Bonnefoy (2013), religion works to legitimize domestic as well as foreign policy actions of the ruling family. As a result, the legal order in Saudi Arabia and the state control over its citizens and their personal and public roles can be understood only through the prism of pre-modern Hanbali Islamic jurisprudence (Joseph 2000; Freedom House 2014).

‘*Sharia*’ meaning "path" in Arabic, guides all aspects of Muslim life, including daily routines, familial and religious obligations and financial dealings. It is derived primarily from Qur’an and the Sunna, the sayings, practices, and teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. Hadith, compilation of Prophet Mohammed’s life and ways, grew and developed into four distinct Sunni schools of Islamic thought, namely, *Hanbali*, *Maliki*, *Shafi’I* and *Hanafi* and the Shia school of *Ja’fari* (al-Jaziri 2009). The *Hanbali* School, known for its extreme orthodoxy, formed the basis for Wahhabism and is embraced in Saudi Arabia (Tucker 2008).

In most Muslim-majority societies *Sharia* enjoys a predominant position in jurisprudence (Tucker 2008; Hefner 2011) and almost all of them employ *Sharia* to govern personal laws

pertaining to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody. *Sharia*, thus, provides the framework for the adjudication of all legal matters. In the Saudi context, both the political order and the religious establishment need and thrive on one another (Vogel 2000). The monarchy needs the clerics to control the population and exercise and impose some of the very repressive laws (Hassner 2009). Though the king appoints judicial and fatwa-issuing officials, the power of appointment does not translate into control over the substance of the law which continues to rest with the clergy (Vogel 2011).

The Basic Law introduced by King Fahd in March 1992, declares Qur'an as the constitution of Saudi Arabia (Article 1) and establishes *Sharia* as the jurisprudence (Article 8). Indeed, *Sharia* appears as many as 11 times in the Basic Laws comprising of 83 Articles (Basic Law 1992). The constitution thus, profoundly shapes the political as well as social life of the country. *Sharia* has a specific connotation in Saudi Arabia, given its close to three centuries' of adherence to Wahhabi and *Salafi* tradition. The latter holds that true Islam is what was practiced by the earliest generations (*salaf*), disregarding later accretions which it regards to be human interpretation, practices or tradition that violated sanctity and finality of the divine text. According to George Rentz (1973), Wahhabist scholars call their movement *-al-da'wah ila al tauhid (the call to the doctrine of the Oneness of God)*, a return to the original principles of Islam and a repudiation of all innovations contrary to the practice of the Prophet Mohammed and the early generations of the pious Muslims.

Furthermore the tribal character of the Saudi society plays dominant role in politics and society (Blanchard 2014). A tribal structure is a patriarchal one, and operates within the framework of a patrilineal structure (Makki 2011). Citizens of Saudi Arabia trace their roots through bloodlines and significance is given to tribal nature of society (Hafez and Slyomovics 2013). Tribalism in state owes its adherence back to the pre-state formation era. The consolidation of the all the three Saudi states was cemented through rulers entering into political marriages with prominent tribes in Arabia (al-Rasheed 2002). Hence, king pays allegiance to tribes of various provinces to maintain harmonious relations in state. Conflicts among various clans and tribes have often been resolved through the intervention of the ruler (al-Rasheed 2002). Saudi Arabia's unification process under Ibn-Saud depended heavily upon two sources of support that brought legitimacy to the regime, namely, tribal allegiance and religion endorsement (Makki 2011).

The House of Saud

According to Madawi al-Rasheed, apart from his various political conquests and military endeavours, Ibn-Saud built a network of strong family alliances among his rival tribes and clans such as Ara'if, al-Juluwi and Sudairi clans and as well as with the descendents of Abdul Wahhab, the al-ash-Sheikh family (2002). Before he died in 1953, Ibn-Saud was able to build a strong and long line of descents through an active strategy of polygamy and concubinage (Wynbrandt 2010; Bray and Darlow 2012). There are no official or accurate figures concerning the number of individuals who could be regarded as members of the ruling family. It would be about 2,000 (BBC 2011), if the number is restricted to the Ibn-Saud's sons, daughters, and grandchildren but if it is expanded to include the founder's sons and daughters-in-law as well as his great-grandchildren, then one would be looking at 20,000 princes and princesses (Herb 1999; Sabri 2001; Abukhalil 2004).

The principle of neo-patrimonialism and neo-patriarchalism which is a patron-client network focuses around *asabiyya* that is tribal tradition and group loyalty, namely family, tribe and/or sect (Thompson 2014). Over the years these traditions and kinship solidarity has improved the socio-political and cultural environment. Another factor implicating the Saudi state is the 'large-state' society concept (Hertog 2010:7). This means that a traditional system now considers 'neo-traditionalist' nature of politics according to socio-political environment of society (Nonneman 2006). It entails reforming the authoritarian policies for creation of new spaces where citizens can be absorbed in state governing. However, as Mark Thompson argues the character of Saudi Arabia's functioning of the state is based on the idea of 'arch-distributor' where the function of the government is to monitor ties between the dominant core elites, major patron-client networks and subaltern classes (Thompson 2014:15).

Saudi State based on the oil-rents, and oil rents sole recipients being the al-Sauds have developed society into 'clientelising' the Saudi population, thus manifesting Saudi social contract (Champion 2003:78). Iris Glosemeyer says that role and functions of these policy circles can be illustrated through a model of three concentric circles of influence (Glosemeyer 2004 141); first First or Principle Circle comprises of most powerful and influential members of the ruling al-Saud family; second Circle includes less powerful members of the ruling family, leading members of the religious establishment, influential and mobile academic and bureaucratic

technicians; and the third Circle comprises all the elite groups who wield little power but are not in position of decision-making. Thus, the ‘Corporatist’ nature of the Saudi politics offers a top-down approach as this concept illustrated the limiting and orchestrating of the state-society participants and segmentation of the group representation through state actors (Hertog 2005:3). As a result, Mark Thompson argues that “Gramscian understanding of the concept of Hegemony best defines the ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approach of societal understanding in context of Saudi Arabia” (Thompson 2014:17). Therefore, the concentric circles of power, often sideline many aspirants for power leading to dissent in the state.

Demands for structural changes within the ruling family have been surfacing periodically but only with limited success. Initiating the debate in 1960, Prince Talal bin Abdul Aziz, a brother of King Fahd and twentieth son of the founder, called for passing of the “monarchy to the next generation, or face a power struggle after the era of old royals passes” (Kechichian 2001; Taheri 2012). The “Free Princes” movement led by Prince Talal drew the ire of senior member of al-Saud in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Kechichian 2001; Taheri 2012). The family feud over possible line of succession led to the removal of King Saud in November 1964. In recent years, succession became an issue in the light of the aging nature of the Saudi monarchs (Henderson 2009; Kechichian 2001). The health concerns over the rulers and other senior princes have raised doubts over the long-term stability of House of Saudi (Reed 2007; Kechichian 2013).

The patriarchal nature of the Saudi society is manifested in its tribal nature and the exclusive focus upon male rulers. Hence, scholars have focused exclusive on successful rulers such as Ibn-Saud (Ameen 1928; Howarth 1964; McLoughlin 1993; Wynbrandt 2004; Bary and Darlow 2012), Faisal (Gerald 1967; Vincent 1975; Sarah 1997; Samore 1983) or Abdullah (al-Rasheed 2002; Reed 2007; Henderson 2009). Because of al-Saud’s deeply rooted endogamous traditions, the marriage of one cousin to another could produce a shift in the balance of power within the family. The Sudairi-Seven, for example, used marriage to forge close blood ties with almost all influential princes as well as with the rulers, namely, Saud, Faisal, and Khalid.

Writing on the ‘political marriages’ of al-Sauds, al-Rasheed observed: “Easy divorce militates against a marriage being a vehicle for long term political agenda. A marriage of a short duration cannot be a pillar upon which loyalty between wife-receivers and wife-givers is established” (2002:74). This formulation, however, is problematic. It is essential to recognize that divorces

did not delegitimize the sons of the ‘former’ wives of Ibn-Saud. Ibn-Saud for example had at least 22 wives and innumerable concubines but as demanded by Islam he never had more than four wives at one time. These wives bore him at least 43 sons and over 50 daughters (al-Rasheed 2002). More than seven decades after his death, none of his sons were disenfranchised merely because Ibn-Saud divorced their mothers. Indeed, despite row over his mother belonging to the lesser ranked Shammar tribe, Abdullah became the second crown prince in 1975 (Second Deputy Prime Minister), crown prince in 1982 and king in 2005.

The dearth of focus on the al-Saud women reflects the nature of the female identity or its absence in the country. In recent years, a number of women writers in Saudi Arabia have been expressing and explaining their family and social status through novels and fictionalized accounts. The trilogy by Jean Sasson, namely *Princess*, *Daughters of Arabia* and *Desert Royal* offer a closer insight into the Saudi society from a princess’ viewpoint.

Role of Women in Saudi Ruling Family

According to the World Bank, women made up 44.78 percent of the Saudi population in 2011. This demographic imbalance is accompanied by socio-cultural norms, and laws directed against women who face a number of restrictions in their public life and endure limitations even in their private lives (Tucker 2008; Fernea 2010; Delong-Bas 2014). Although in general Qur’an deals with women in an egalitarian and non-discriminatory fashion, there are verses that have provided the basis or are used to justify gender hierarchies. Out of the total of 6,660 verses in the Qur’an, only six establish some kind of male authority and domination over women (Tucker 2008; Fernea 2010).

Literature regarding women often draws a line between “informal power” and “formal power”, and between “private sphere” and “public sphere” when gender relations in West Asia are described and analysed (Stenslie 2011). The Arab-Muslim tradition heavily associates women with intrigue and *Fitna* (Stenslie 2011) and some even suggest that House of Saud, the world’s most powerful family dynasty, remains united and stable because of, not despite, its women (Herb 1999; Stenslie 2011; Taheri 2012). The limited role of the Saudi women is reflected in the marginal role occupied by them within the ruling family. The political marriages pursued by Ibn-Saud and his successors have not enhanced the role of women within the al-Saud. Occasionally al-Saud women were given the credit for some of the progressive measures taken by the monarch

such as female education (Kechichian 2001, 2008c; Younes 2012) or the pre-eminence of some sons of the founder (Taheri 2012).

The 11 September terror attacks and anti-Saudi and anti-Islamic sentiments in the West resulted in the rulers reforming the educational system and moving towards an increased role for women, especially with the ruling family (al-Rasheed 2002). This is manifested in the official mobilisation of women to defend their country as reflected in the number of Saudi princesses, academics and businesswomen who have been allowed to travel abroad as part of official delegations to the US, Europe as well as to Third World countries, including India under the 'Charm Offensive Campaign' (al-Rasheed, 2013).

Indeed, despite the tribal conservative and patriarchal nature of the society one could identify a number of women within the ruling family who have drawn attention both inside and outside the country (Makki, 2011). The daughter of late King Faisal, Princess Loluwa, made several appearances in Western capitals, together with Saudi academics and businesswomen (al-Rasheed, 2013). Princess Adila, the daughter of King Abdullah, issued statements to the media, an unusual move for a Saudi woman Arabia and in 2012 led an official delegation to India. Similarly, the daughter of Prince Talal ibn Abd al-Aziz issued public statements in support of her father's claim to the throne (al-Rasheed, 2013).

Al-Saud women also have been expanding frontiers of education and cultural activities. Under the patronage of Princess Fadwa bint Khalid, a Britain based forum called The Saudi Arabian Women's Association (SAWA), was launched in 2010 for the welfare of the students studying at British universities and other professionals. Since then, it has been active in trying to change Western public opinion regarding the status of women in Saudi State. The increasing number of women who receive such scholarships allows the state to use them as a cohort of 'ambassadors' whose mission is to change outside perceptions about Saudi women (al-Rasheed 2013a).

Al-Saud women like Princess Reema daughter of Bandar bin Sultan, is an entrepreneur of corporations like ALFA international, Al HAMA and Yibree Salon (Armstrong 2014). Princess Madawi (daughter of Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf) chairs the Board of Partners that set-up the Luthan Trading Company. Princess Ameerah (wife of Prince al-Waleed Bin Talal) is active in various humanitarian and philanthropic activities and is the Vice Chair-women of the al-Waleed

bin Talal Foundation (Forbes Magazine 2014). Al-Saud women also showed their presence in the cultural exchanges and social and events. Those who influence developments in women-related areas such as education, employment and health, include Adila (daughter of King Abdullah) who has been active in promoting women's health awareness and legal rights, and public and job opportunities for women, and is the patron of many charitable foundations (Stenslie 2011).

Wives of a number of senior officials have been involved in various cultural and civil society activities such as, Sultana, the wife of King Salman (Siasat Daily 2011). Princess Sara, the daughter of Bandar Bin Sultan established al-Nahda and human rights organisation (Echague and Burke 2009). Another Princess Sara, daughter of Prince Musaid, appealed to the *ulema* against the practice of child marriages. Many of these influential and activists women met with strong opposition from religious establishment but they are seeking a more active role in the society.

The existing literature, does not give adequate treatment of the women within the ruling family and the role and position that they occupy. Even the repeated references to Sudairi Seven were not accompanied by an informed discussion on their mother, her role and influence. While discussing political marriages, some scholars tended to exaggerate the negative consequences of frequent divorces within the al-Saud. Indeed, none of the sons of the founder was ever removed from the line of succession because Ibn-Saud divorced their mother but this crucial difference has not received adequate academic attention.

Definition, Rationale and Scope of Study

Education, social reforms and technological changes have resulted in al-Saud women playing an important role. Women within the ruling family have taken an active part in the society and have ushered various movements for masses. They are emerging as an intermediary in communicating the voices of masses to the higher authorities. The proposed study aims to study the role of the al-Saud women since the founding the third Saudi kingdom in 1932 and focuses on four major areas, namely, education, culture, business and entrepreneurial development and civil society and religious arenas.

Research questions

- What is the status of women within the ruling Saudi family?
- What is the role played by the al-Saud women in the society?

- What are the factors responsible for the growing visibility of al-Saud women?

Hypothesis

- Increased educational opportunities have enabled al-Saud women to emerge out of the veil imposed by tribal and religious conservatism.
- The practice of multiple marriages has not diminished the role of women within the House of Saud.

Methodology

The proposed study will be analytical in its content and approach and will largely rely on the available secondary sources such as books, articles from journals, online materials and newspaper reports. Besides it will also study the role of women within the ruling family in cultural, social and religious affairs. Thus the study will be an attempt to develop an analytical framework for studying the role played the women belonging to the ruling al-Saud family.

This dissertation has five chapters. The second chapter on *Women in the House of Saud* focuses on role and importance of prices in the kingdom and tries to locate debate regarding women rights within the context of Islam. It then tried to sketch the position of women in Wahhabi Islam and consequently women position in Saudi society. Within this broad context it identifies powerful and influential women within Saudi ruling family and provides a detailed account of some of the prominent women.

The Third Chapter on *Education and Culture* locates issues that confront women in Saudi Arabia in terms of inheritance, education, rights and public sphere. Since Saudi Arabia is considered a closed society because of influence of Wahhabi Islam in all walks of life, it assesses how Islam and women education are perceived. It also looks into the Wahhabi influence in school curriculum, education and the changes since the introduction of women education in in 1960. It examines the role of al-Saud women in various educational reforms and their involvement in public diplomacy and cultural activities.

The fourth chapter on *Civil Society and Religion* looks into women's role as civil society activists and philanthropist. Since Islam rests on the ideals of *zakat* and piety, women have been seen agents of change and have been involved in health issues, domestic violence, tribal relation managers and important contributors to economy. This chapter examines the role of al-Saud

women in various civil society, philanthropic organisations, group activism and businesses. The chapter tries to highlight their role in civil society actions and informal sector of NGOs and how women have played a role in family stability. The findings of this research are summarised in the fifth chapter.

Chapter-Two

Women within House of Saud

The al-Saud family's claim to legitimacy rests on several pillars: tribal, historical, and religious—of which religious legitimacy is both the most fundamental and problematic. The al-Saud rule is under the Islamic criteria of *Wali al-Ahd* (rightful leadership) with the support of the *Ulema* (religious scholars). However, this relationship between the regime and the *Ulema* is a double-edged sword, as a loss of legitimacy in one can shake the other (Nolan 2011: 1).

Ibn-Saud (Bligh 1984: 27)¹ established the third state of Saudi Arabia after a series of military victories and political manoeuvres that resulted in the making up the ruling family of the Kingdom. This established a ruling structure with about 8,000-20,000 members (Kechichian 2008b: 245; Taheri 2012: 141). Ibn-Saud married into various tribes of region to thwart the process of rivalry and enmity and increase his political base in the kingdom (al-Rasheed 2013a: 74). Some of the Ibn-Saud marital unions were with the daughters of famous Arabian tribes (Banu-Khalid, Aniza, Ajman and Shammar), tribal nobility (al-Shalan, al-Rashid), sedentary families of religious learning (al-Shaykh), sedentary Najdi families (al-Sudairi) and of other branches of al-Saud (al-Thunayan and al-Juluwi). This complex political marriage arrangement was a result of a carefully crafted alliance of marriages and political administration between various princes and princesses of the family. There were efforts by Nora, sister of Ibn-Saud who agreed for a marriage alliance further strengthening the process of political consolidation of Saudi Arabia. Women like Noura and King Ibn-Saud's aunt, al-Johara Bint-Faisal were influential in consolidation of the Kingdom (Stenslie 2011: 72).

King Saud fathered about 110 children, from about 22 legally wedded marriages. Successive kings and decision-makers had multiple wives and practiced polygamy resulting in a large

¹ On 18 September 1932 Abd al-Aziz issued Royal Decree Number 2716, changing the country's name to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Article 6 of the decree called on the Council of Deputies to propose a succession procedure for his approval.

number of members of the al-Saud family. After the setting up of AMARCO in 1944², Saudi Arabia ushered on the path of development (Kechichian 2008b: 41). Infrastructural development and manpower resource building capacity has set motive of Saudi monarchy. This led to opening up new education avenues and demand for more women representation. However, during his tenure King Faisal (1964-75) made various attempts to open-up society and push in this direction came from his wife, Queen Effat who was seen as the pioneer of women education in Saudi Arabia.

After King Faisal, women growth process slowed down but never got off the road. The Mecca siege incident of 1979 reversed the limited progress of women development and representation in Saudi Arabia. It was due to efforts of Abdullah (2005-15) who ushered new set of reforms which are pro-women thus balancing both religion and reforms. He complemented reforms development level with traditional Islamic heat, thus setting up a standard of liberalization project of society (Alhussein 2014: 3). This sets a major task for the third and successive generations of rulers in Kingdom.

The al-Saud is the largest ruling family in the world. Abd al-Saud had fathered many sons until his death in 1953 but by then many achieved adulthood strong enough to contest in the race for succession though not every son had equal prospects of being on throne. Seniority was an important traditional criterion as was the personal relationship of each son with his father. According to Alexander Bligh “a son’s chances also largely depended on his mother: her own family background, her legal relationship with Abd al-Aziz (whether wife or concubine) and the strength of her personal ties with the King all affected her offspring’s chances” (Bligh 1984: 40). Therefore succession issues have often been problematic in such a big tribal hereditary monarchical family because of power skirmishes that determine ruling family (Kechichian 2001: 10).

In Arabian dynasties and in Saudi Arabia particularly, religious and tribal traditions has not enabled development of primogeniture and under *Sharia* all sons of a man are equal and legitimate, even if they were born out of illegitimate marriages (Kechichian 2001: 11; Bligh

² AMARCO is acronym of Arabian-American Oil Company, now officially known as Saudi Arabian Oil Company. It was started in 1950s by American.

1984: 40). This traditional Saudi political system has tended to foster succession struggles. Every mother of a son of Ibn-Saud lived at palace even if divorced, thus all the sons of the King represented an extended clan and developed mechanisms for creating a sense of *'asabiyah* (tribal solidarity) of their own. This helped a particular son in gaining edge over other sons, since it also depended on King's relationship with their mother, especially if King grew fond of a particular wife and concubine.

Succession of the fittest in practice has been extremely destructive and could have blown open the Kingdom to a number of internal and external foes. During the political strife between King Saud (1953-64) and the then crown prince Faisal several short ambivalent decisions and policy fractures was uncovered. 'Free officers' movement (1958-64) under the political agenda of President Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, impacted Saudi monarchy when Prince Talal bin Abdul Aziz demanded changes in the political structure and power set-up. He demanded more transparency in government functioning and various liberal and democratic changes in country with regard to its citizens. However, the movement lost its charisma when Prince Talal was deported from country. Soon people realized the need of changes in administrative set-up and demand for reforms was initiated. Realising the atmosphere upon becoming king, Faisal initiated reforms with regard to women education, administrative reforms, 'five-year based' developmental plans and abolition of slavery. Another significant example to quote was the succession debate over King Abdullah owing to his mother being belonging to the Shammar tribe of Yemen (Kechichian 2001: 11).

Succession problems are political which have least involvement of women. Women do not form part of policy forming and governance but often influence decisions in informal manner. In formal power structure, Islamic reading comes in conflict with women's involvement in politics. Thus succession issues only involve religious heads, tribal chiefs and key cabinet ministers, who often belong to al-Saud family (Stenslie 2011:7). Therefore when dispute arose between Prince Faisal and King Saud in the early 1960s, former engineered 'palace coup' against his brother which showed that changes in the dynastic hierarchy could be imposed by force even at the highest level with minimal women involvement (Taheri 2012: 139). Similar in a second setback came when in the 1960s some princes played a dissident role by advocating pan-Arabism, the fashionable ideology of that time in the Arab World. These princes were not the senior members

of the al-Saud family and they imitated the 'Free Officers' (*Zabat al-Ahrar*), a front created by Nasser that overthrew the Egyptian monarchy in a military coup in 1952. Dissident Saudi princes called themselves "Free Princes" (*Umara al-Ahrar*) and called for the union of Saudi Arabia with Egypt and Syria to create the nucleus of a united Arab Empire stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in North Africa to the Gulf (Taheri 2012: 139). The movement quickly fizzled out since Nasser's rise was seen as a threat to Saudi Monarchy. The most important figure of the movement was Prince Talal bin Abdul-Aziz, the twentieth son of the Kingdom's founder who called for democratic changes in the early 1960s. In 1999 he revived this by calling for Riyadh "to find a smooth way to pass the monarchy to the next generation, or face a power struggle after the era of the old royal passes" (Kechichian 2001:1). Movement died out and today Talal remain just a prince with vast business empire.

Another major problem encountered by Saudi rulers is the management of the balance of power relation within the dynasty among the blocs of "full brothers" and "half brothers" (Taheri 2012: 143). Full-Brothers are ones who are born by a single mother as 'Sudairi Seven' whereas half-brothers are brothers born out of different mothers, but same father; for example Kings Abdullah and Salman. In a move to curb dissent, secure ruling house but at the same time democratise the ruling family, after securing his position King Faisal tried to re-arrange the balance of power within the family by promoting a number of non-Sudairi princes to important positions; for example, Khalid was named Crown Prince, and thus positioned him as a future king. Khalid was from al-Jalawi branch of tribe. Prince Mish'al born out of an Armenian mother became Governor of Mecca, a prestigious and lucrative position. Abdullah, the future Crown Prince and King, was confirmed as Commander of the National Guard (*Haras al-Watani*), a parallel army with the explicit mission of protecting the monarchy. However, these changes resulted in backsliding since King Abdullah, had overlooked other princes to name Nayef, a Sudairi, as Crown prince (Taheri 2012: 140).

Another issue is of the royal titles and stipends among the family of Ibn-Saud (Stenslie 2011: 74). If restricting the number to King Ibn-Saud's sons, daughters, and grand children, one could put the number at about 3000. Adding his sons-in-law and daughters-in-laws as well as his great-grandchildren (called as "cadet branches" and sometimes known as "collateral branches") one

would be looking at the figure of about 10,000 (TaHERI 2012: 138-143; Henderson 1994: 7).³ As far as Saudi protocol is concerned no more than 200 individuals bear the title of Royal Highness. This is not the only indicator of royalness as being a recipient of stipends from an unofficial fund fed by grants from the King could also designate an individual as “royal”. Based on the official estimates and confirmation, one puts the lower number of members at ‘5000’(TaHERI 2012: 141) That number, however, may include individuals from families of tribal and religious leaders who helped King Ibn-Saud crush his enemies and establish the Kingdom.

To deal with the problems of royalty, dissent and succession issues, in 2006 ailing King Fahd created an ad-hoc body known as ‘The Descendants’ Council (*Majlis al-Uthra*) or sometimes called Family Council with his younger full-brother Salman as chairman. This body is made up of 18 princes, half of whom are sons of kingdom’s founder and the other half are descendants. It arbitrates any dispute that may arise among the descendants of Ibn Saud (al-Bakr 2015). To further reform decision making, King Abdullah broadened the base of decision-making, at least within the family, by creating of an Assembly of Fealty (*Majlis al-Bay’ah*) or Allegiance Council (*Hayat al-Bayah*) in 2007, which had the potential to play a major role in deciding the future Kings of the country (TaHERI 2012: 142; Kechichian 2015). This consists of all the surviving sons of the founder of the Kingdom. Those sons who have already passed away would be represented by their eldest sons. Thus, the assembly would have a total membership of 36. As of 2012, its members included 18 sons of Abdul-Aziz and the remaining 18 his grandsons (TaHERI 2012: 142).

Barely three months into his reign, in 2015 King Salman dismissed Prince Muqrin from his post as Crown Prince. Prince Mohammed was automatically promoted and Prince Mohammed bin Salman was declared Deputy Crown Prince. The Council met to ratify the decision, which it did by 28 to 4 votes, with 2 abstentions (*al-Arabiya* 2015). In other words, for the first time the new generation of princes or the Third generation of the future king wields equal power with the so-called “senior princes” in choosing the future Crown Prince (Kechichian 2009). It is important to note that, while Sudairi’s have concentrated power in their hands, non-involvement of women

³ However here again there arises a contradiction in the total number of royal family household members, as According to Samuel Henderson, in mid-1970’s only the figure was estimated to be 20,000.

in this decision-making was observed, partly because women are kept outside political councils and partly no women representation exists in the Allegiance Council.

However time and again, these issues have been mitigated with force and demonstrated the ability of the ruler to crisis management. The stable and absolute monarchy is a reflection of the importance of blood ties and marriage. As according to Wayne Bowen “Loyalties diminish the farther one gets away from the family. In decreasing order of loyalty, Saudis owe their allegiance to their family, clan, tribe, and nation” (Bowen 2008: 1). The same principle applies to women where loyalty to one’s family is of critical important and in case of Royal females, it is intrinsically linked to al-Saud family (Okruhlik 2005:154). Therefore, women’s position in the family is not only seen through prism of single nuclear unit but also as a consolidated large ruling family. As a result, women are expected to be up-keepers of faith, tradition, culture and religion.

Kingdom has been stable despite the lack of an institutionalized state structure and this tends to complicate succession problems. The power of a ruler on the Arabian Peninsula often stems from complicated, but highly effective, personal loyalties from relatives and advisers (Kechichian 2001: 11). The Kingdom can be understood as the world’s most powerful family-run company. The al-Saud family “owns” the state —which even carries the name of its royal dynasty — and its rich resources (Stenslie 2011: 70). All disputes are subsided but the family as single unit gains its strength mainly because of its women who according to some scholars have been mostly attributed to women’s knowledge, influential positions, strength-financial and matrimonial and lastly by casting a sphere of informal power structure which they hold in Saudi domestic politics.

According to Simon Henderson, women of the House of Saud play a role in succession in at least distinct three ways. First, they are the “masters” of their own homes and behind the privacy of the walls they let their husbands and sons known their views. Second, intermarriage within the house of Saud means that the alliances can be built up between different branches, depending on the degree to which a wife has maintained strong links to her original family and is liked within her new family. Third, King Fahd is said to conduct a *Majlis* (meeting) with the women of the al-Saud on a regular basis both to explain his views and to elicit their views. This illustrates the extent to which consensus-building is considered important with women views being incorporated in the power structure of the kingdom (Henderson 1994: 17).

Theoretical Debates

The status and right of women in Islam are subjected to interpretation of Qur'an and *Sunnah*. The advent of Islam in Arabia saved women from oppression and subjugation as earlier women were considered property and not better as slaves (Ishiaku 2014). According to Islam, Qur'an was perfectly preserved in Oral form from the beginning and was written down during Mohammed's lifetime or shortly thereafter, when it was "collected" and arranged for the first time by his Companions (Keddie and Baron 1991: 63). The Qur'an was written in a context of different levels of sexual inequality that prevailed among Arab tribes and in adjacent non-Arab empires. Classical Muslim view is that pre-Islamic Arabs lived in ignorance and barbarism or in the state of *jahiliya* and that divinely revealed Qur'an is a great step forward for all problems (Keddie and Baron 1991: 4). Oral culture of debates and discussions during Prophet's time emerges in contrast to contemporary Muslim society's culture. In contrast to Prophet's period which places heavy stress on women's generative capacity in both private and public realm, contemporary societies undermine women's position. The status of women was raised in Islam by granting her the legal right to enter into contracts, manage property (al-Hibri 1998: 22; Jawad 1998: 7)⁴, to run a business, and to possess property independently (al-Hibri 1998: 22; Jawad 1998: 10;)⁵ from her husband or any kinsmen (Jawad 1998: 6; Nasir 2009).

It is within this context that Islam has granted women broad social, political (Jawad 1998: 9-11; Esposito and Delong Bas 2001; Nasir 2009)⁶ and economic rights, education (al-Hibri 1998: 34; Jawad 1998: 8-9; Esposito and Delong Bas 2001:85)⁷ and training rights and work opportunity

⁴ The right of independent ownership means that she is at liberty to buy, sell, mortgage, lease, borrow or lend, and sign contracts and legal documents. Also, she can donate her money, act as a trustee and setup a business or company. This right has been considered particularly beneficial for women in Saudi Arabia who have used their rights to set-up and run business and becoming financially independent.

⁵ The Qur'an has allotted a share for the woman in the inheritance of her parents and kinsmen. Her share is guaranteed by law and it is completely hers.

⁶ Islam encourages women to be active politically and to be involved in decision-making. In early Islam women were given every opportunity to express themselves, to argue, and to speak their mind in public. They led delegations, mediated and granted refuge and protection. Their judgements on political matters were highly valued and respected and they exercised great influence in shaping their own societies. Aisha and Umm Salama (the wives of the Prophet) are clear cases in point.

⁷ The right to education-both the Qur'an and the Sunnah advocate the rights of women and men equally to seek knowledge. The Qur'an commands all Muslims to exert effort in the pursuit of knowledge irrespective of their sex. It constantly encourages Muslims to read, think, contemplate and learn from the signs of Allah in nature. The

rights. There are clear set of rights that are entitled to women with regard to her freedom (Jawad 1998: 7-8; Esposito and Delong Bas 2001)⁸ for emotional, (Jawad 1998: 11)⁹ psychological, sexual (Jawad 1998: 9; Abiad 2008:11)¹⁰ behavior and liberal lifestyle. To protect these rights from being abused by men, Islam provided firm legal safeguards.

Thus, Islam has returned women's right by raising their status in mankind (Qur'an 49:13) as the position of women was radically redefined. To rehabilitate the status of women in the society, Islam denounced the old myth of Eve as temptress and source of evil and hence the cause of original sin and the fall of humankind (Wadud 1992; Jawad 1998: 6). The text also mentioned about the condemnation of female infanticide as barbaric, inhuman and a grievous sin that to be questioned on the judgment day (Qur'an 81:8-9, Qur'an 4:19, Qur'an 16:58-59). As a result, it prohibited the practice of 'female infanticide' and restored birth rights of women. Islam thus elevated women to the status of being as worthy of human dignity as were men earlier. Both men and women were henceforth to be regarded as equal in humanity.

prophet moreover encouraged education for both males and females and even ordered that slave girls should be educated.

⁸ Islam regards marriage as a meritorious institution and attaches great importance to its well-being. Marriage in Islam is a union between two consenting adults. The Qur'an says 'And of his signs is that he created you from dust and behold: you became men and multiplied throughout the earth. And of his signs is that he gave you wives from among yourselves, that you might live in tranquillity with them, and put love and kindness in your hearts. Surely there are signs in this for thinking people'. Also, the prophet is reported to have said 'women are the twin halves of the men'. Therefore, the consent of the two partners is essential to start a happy and stable family. Hence Islam is against the idea of forcing women to marry against their wishes. On the contrary, it encourages women to choose their spouses. The prophet emphasised that although parents were to be consulted and obeyed, the fact remained that the woman's individuality and independence had to be recognized and respected. As a woman has the right to have a right to say on issues concerning her own marriage, equally she has the right to initiate divorce if the partnership proves to be unsuccessful. If the marriage contract states that she has the right to divorce her husband, she could divorce him instantly; otherwise, she would have to resort to the court to dissolve the marital relationship.

⁹ Islam regards women to be equal to men as human beings; hence it emphasizes mutual understanding and respect between the two sexes. From the Islamic viewpoint, women as human beings and as half of the society should be treated with care, tenderness and affection. Indeed, the Prophet insisted on kind and gentle treatment of women and demonstrated this not only through the attitude towards his wives but also in his teachings to his followers. He constantly encouraged them to be kind, civil and considerate when dealing with women. So, from the authentic Islamic perspective, a woman is 'an individual worthy of dignity and respect, an independent human being, a social person, a legal person, a responsible agent, a free citizen, a servant of God, and a tented person, endowed, like a male person, with heart, soul and intellect; and has a fundamental equal right to exercise her abilities in all areas of human activities'.

¹⁰ In Islam lawful sex (that is, within the context of a married relationship) has been held in high esteem and regarded as act of religious devotion for which rewards are acknowledged. It is meant to lead a healthy way of human reproduction, release tensions, meet natural and psychological needs and strengthen the marriage ties between spouses.

At the same time however, Islamic jurists have interpreted *Sura an-Nisa* Verse 1, which talks about the creation of women from the Adam's rib or simple from Adam, and Eve's secondary creation thus giving a secondary colour to Eve's Origin. This interpretation goes directly into the conflict of the Malik ibn Anas, or popularly known as Imam Anas born in 93A.H.(After Hijra), who opined that Eve was created from the same sort of race and material, from which Adam was created, hence she is no less than him (Adnan 2004:76). According to Haaifaa Jawad, Qur'an says '*Allah* created you from a single soul, and from the same soul created his mate.' It also says 'O mankind, we created you all from a male and female, and made you into races and tribes, that you know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God fearing of you' (Jawad 1998: 4-5).

Another area of conflict is with regard to women education under Islam. Women have regained their right of education and have received equal treatment with their male counterparts to the extent that the excellence of one over the other is on the basis of piety and good deeds (Qur'an 33:35). However, scholars have accepted that women education should be important but it should be decided on the basis of the roles to be performed by them (Safiyan 2014). As a result, most religious interpretation see women role as only of –Homemaker, wife, sister, daughter and mother. Her public and professional life has been side-lined by patriarchal scholars who allege women public role to be illegitimate according to Islamic jurisprudence principles (Barlas 2002; Tucker 2008).

It is considered that Women's position as partners of men has replaced their status as chattels in marriage, which saved the lives of women that suffered injustice and inequality and returned their proper status in mankind (Qur'an 4:19, Qur'an 16:97, Qur'an 33:73). Islam returned to women their right to *Mahr or* Marital gift (Qur'an 4:4), consent in marriage and inheritance (Qur'an 4:7, Qur'an 4:11, Qur'an 4:19), freedom of expression and right of divorce and ownership (Qur'an 3:195). However, these verses form the Qur'an, have been interpreted by various Muslim personal law boards and religious institutions according to their convenience. The explanation and understanding ranges differently among Muslim countries in Africa to Arab countries in Arabian Peninsula to South-Asia and South-East Asia (Hefner 2011). Each country or community follow a particular school of thought of Islamic *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence) which is subjected to *ijtihad* (interpretation). Thus laws pertaining to marriage, divorce, child-custody or

property-inheritance are subjected to diverse *Sharia* laws and interpretations. The more rigid the interpretation and laws, the more severe and precarious is the position of women (Marranci 2008: 129).

According to Ishiaku Safiyan “Islam recognizes the biological and psychological differences in the nature and areas of activities and functions between males and females, it also allows women to enjoy same capacity and freedom as men.” This thought has been widely contested among western secular feminist who do not see position of women in light of its history and cultural set-up (Safiyan 2014:3). Women in Muslim countries need to be placed in respective context unlike other western countries. Women’s reference needs to be seen in the light of nation’s history, the rights of women in Islam, legal rights, education, employment and business. Thus, according to Mona Almunajjed who writes about Saudi women and says that Islam is not opposed to the emancipation of women but that “a strict interpretation of Islam, together with traditional social beliefs, rigid local customs, severe norms and patriarchal values, remain obstacles to the development of Saudi women’s” (Almunajjed 2006:33).

The difference in sex between male and female is neither a credit nor a drawback for any non-religious society. As Islam preaches, men and women are the most divinely honoured (Qur’an 17:70) social beings on earth, who are naturally created from the same source (Qur’an 49:13), with equal rights over each other (Qur’an 2:228), and as equal beings that complement and support each other in good deeds (Qur’an 9:71) (Ishiaku 2014:82). It is not easily preached as against all these argument verses 3 and 34, *Sura an-Nisa* are quoted which talk about men liberating women from oppression by marrying four women at one time and secondly women being the domestic makers and men being protectors and financial supporters. Nonetheless there are verses of the *Hadith* in chapter 22 and verse 81, which talks about societal dominance by women will lead that particular society in ignorance and dark. This debate is often encapsulated with word ‘*fitna*’ means disorder. It originates from the word *Fatin* meaning beautiful women; thus causing dissension in society due to women’s engagement. Hence the question of women being equal to men really subjects the idea to detestation. As a result, women are advised to avoid the political sphere lest leaving to chaos and disorder.

It is also considered easy and normal that Islam placed men as the head of the household does not mean women are inferior because the former supports and provides maintenance to the latter

from their means (Qur'an 2:228). Often the household work is not clearly interpreted and thus subjected to mis-management of ideas. Women are often only related to protection and responsibility of men, thus in relation as wife, mother and sister. As a result, it is considered utmost prerogative of men to decide things for her women, with or without her concern or consideration. This has led to the 'principle of dependence' in many Islamic societies, which has been legalised and criminalised in due course of history (Wadud 1999: 65; Mir Hosseini 2000: 132). Thus, in countries like Saudi Arabia and post-Soviet Afghanistan, women are supposed get their male kin's permission before doing any daily work. This includes permission to attend school, obtain a passport, attend university, work, get married, be admitted to hospital, obtain an official/government identity card, buy property or a car as well as permission to travel abroad (Thompson 2014:176-77).

Arabic culture has made peculiar understanding towards women's ability to reproduce, which was economically to women's advantage as for slaves, as it was a passport to freedom and for wives it bound up the husband's emotional, sexual and monetary resources and thus lessened his ability to take on more women. Arguably, Prophet's oral culture expressed women's interest just as the law expressed men's (Keddie and Baron 1991: 63). However, over the years owing to jurists interpretation of Qur'an and *Hadiths*, this has enmeshed patriarchal power with tradition and culture, where wives numbers have been extrapolated to adultery, concubinage or political and matrimonial alliances. Conservative Hanbali School has upheld men rights against women rights in interpretation and law formation (Hibri 1982:176). In relation to the absolute power study, woman is equal to man in all essential rights and duties. God makes no distinction between man and woman, for regard to punishment or reward, moral responsibility or for adultery (Jawad 1998: 5-6, Nasir 2009). However, this understanding does not confirm with the behaviour of orthodox Muslim countries which uphold men societal prestige against women's life. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran and Taliban have been confirmed with the notoriety of lashing to death cases for adultery of women sometimes without put them to trail.

Marriages and nature of marriages are often debated in Islam since it involves a deep historical insight ranging from Uxorilocal marriages to Judaic and Zoroastrian marriages (Bosworth 1991:

92; Talhami 2012: 221).¹¹ Erosion of the matrilineal system was the result of the growing urbanization and settled habits of the trading tribes of Arabia (Khoury and Kostiner 1990; Talhami 2012: 221).¹² Since the establishment and spread of Islam, marriage has evolved as a written contract, not as a sacrament as in Christianity, which should be conducted by a judge and witnessed by two male witnesses along with bride's representative only to be ratified in the court. The contract must specify the rights and obligations of each party, particularly the amount of dowry (*Mahr*) to be paid to the women and a larger amount to be paid to her as a back dowry, or alimony, in the eventuality of divorce. Eventually polygamy gained predominance but Mohammed restricted this practice to marrying four wives only. The relevant passage in the Qur'an clearly states that a man may marry once, twice, three, and four times if he can be fair to all of his wives, adding "and you shall never be fair" (Qur'an Sura an-Nisa 4:3). However, polygamous marriages have severely declined since the rise of modern feminist movements at the beginning of the 20th century and as a result of a mixture of female education and empowerment, as well as changing economic conditions which involve family planning and huge-child bearing cost. Countries like Tunisia and Turkey have legally proscribed polygamy.

Divorce was denounced by Prophet Mohammed but under *Sharia* which allows granting women the right to seek a divorce if this was stipulated in the marriage contract. This right, known as *Ismah*, (Haqq-al-Ismah or Right to Divorce) is usually sought by the high-borne women who marry below their social status (Talhami 2012: 80). But over the years, women have gained the right to divorce by repudiation, known as *Khulu*, of which a more common form of divorce, which always existed as *Tafriq* (separation) which permits women to initiate divorce proceedings according to a set of limited conditions. These include mental illness or abandonment on the part of the husband, as well as, lack of economic support.

¹¹ There were several types of marriage practices by the Arabs before Islam. The most common was matrilineal marriage which was uxorilocal, where in the wife remained with her own tribe and the husband had the option of residing with her permanently or paying frequent visits. In this type of marriage the children belonged to the woman's tribe. There were also polygamous marriages, in which the husband acquired numerous wives, and polyandrous marriages, in which the women acquired several husbands. The Prophet Mohammed was familiar with the multi-farious marriage types that existed in Mecca when he was growing up there. Anthropologists state that all these marriages were experiencing a gradual shift toward a patrilineal system, which Islam, accelerated.

¹² All of these changes were legislated during the medinian period of divine revelation, beginning in 622. Under the second caliph, Ummar-ibn-al-khattab (ca.634-644), temporary marriage, which was widely practiced by Zoroastrian Persians and pre-Islamic Arabs, was abolished. Hence urbanisation led to development of settled lifestyles and thus establishment of an authoritarian role for men in marriage and eliminated matrilineal and polyandrous marriages.

Under this bill of rights during the leadership of Mohammed, women enjoyed freedom to develop their individuality and personality and to take part in shaping their own society. Moreover, women took advantage of the liberty offered to them and participated effectively in public life as Prophet's wife Khadijah was a well-established business women. They took part in prayers at the mosque together with the men as mentioned in Verses 7: 29, 7:31, 2:114; acted as imams for women (and sometimes for both sexes in their household) like Umm Waraqah, who on Prophets command, had collected the Qur'an, to lead the people of her area in prayer and she had her own *mu'adhdhin* (person who performs the call to prayers). Woman have joined their colleagues in military expeditions; granted protection in war and asylum to fugitives like Rufaida al-Aslamia; devoted themselves to the study of theology, Qur'an and the traditions; travelled widely and moved freely and mixed with men with self-respect and dignity (Jawad 1998: 14; Tabasi 1998; Mernissi 1991; Ifri 2005; Reda 2013: 78).

Thus, Islam remains a double-edged sword for the al-Saud. It grants its members legitimacy as protectors of the faith, yet it constrains their behaviour to be compatible with religious law (Okruhlik 2002). Taking his inspiration from thirteenth-century jurist Ibn Taymiyya, Abdal-Wahhab argued that the basis for knowing God's laws and for knowing the model for emulation was the Qur'an and Hadith which should be read literally, without reference to historical context, without interpretation, and without reference to commentaries after the first three centuries of Islam's judicial heritage (Doumato 2003: 241). Thus Wahhabi presumption that scriptures provides clear guidance runs afoul of the complexities of interpretation of language and the presence of contradictory passages in the canonized collections of *Hadith* narrations and Qur'anic verses. Analysing the other modern fundamentalist ideas which run parallel to Wahhabi ideology, Eleanor Doumato observed that "Wahhabism avoids these uncertainties by employing scripture selectively, and by interpreting the meaning of scriptural passages based on what is already thought to be known and presumed to be true as if the meaning of the text were obvious. In doing so, Wahhabi scholars are as much engaged in scriptural exegesis as a scholars of the past whose interpretative readings Wahhabism denies" (Doumato 2003: 241). Therefore in Saudi Arabia religious scriptures following Wahhabi ideology are selectively read in particular historical time-frame without allowing any room for interpretation which might lead to change in societal setup. As a result, ideas become rigid and are not subjected to question; any debate on verses is seen as an attack on the religion itself.

The problem of interpretation of the biases and assumptions that a particular age brought to Qur'an readings and renderings of a text is significant beyond the founding texts of Islamic legal thought (Barlas 2002). With respect to the central texts at the core of the edifice of orthodox Islam, interpretation again played a vital but more hidden role; therefore, interpretation is of necessity part of every act of reading or of inscribing a text (Keddie and Baron 1991: 64). In Saudi Arabia the '*Sharia Law*', a Hanbali School of legal jurisprudence under Wahhabi protégé, guides every-day affairs. The strict Wahhabi code enumerates codes of conduct for both men and women regarding their personal and public lives, which acts as a role model for societal conduct of men and women in every other Muslim country in the world.

Women in Saudi Arabia particularly face significant restrictions regarding their lives, limitations that stems from Arab history as well as a fundamentalist interpretation of the Qur'an and other early Islamic writings. This conservatism about the role of women has its origins in both religion and local customary practices (Doumato 2003: 241; Commins 2006). The Qur'an gives men control of the wives, which leads to physical torture and harassment for disobedience and adultery. Islamic law and tradition changed this to the far more severe punishment to stoning to death inciting the concept of honour killing (Keddie and Baron 1991: 5). Islamic law and traditions tended to stress and rigidify gender distinctions, seen as crucial to an ordered world and went to great lengths to avoid gender ambiguities which often come in conflicting position to the rights women are endowed in Islam (Keddie and Baron 1991: 6).

Thus, the Wahhabi doctrine gives unequal power to men against women, who have been made either dependents or weak, inferiors, owing to legal framework mixed with governability. The regime draws legitimacy from the 1744 agreement, prolonged interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence based on Hanbali School and the tribal-cultural predominance. Men became women's guardians irrespective of ages and the upholders of women's honour and family tradition. If the spheres of men and women intersected, they were also established in a clear hierarchy that placed men above women. Although women were considered to be the equals of men before God, this spiritual egalitarianism did not imply a similar treatment in the social world. This was the social context in which Qur'anic verses which state that "men are a degree above women" and that "men are the managers of the affairs of the women" were to be understood (Keddie and Baron 1991: 75).

Both to legitimize the al-Saud rule and to ward off internal threats (*Ikhwan* rebelling in 1929, seizure of the Grand Mosque in 1979 and unrest in *Shia*-dominated Eastern Province) and regional tensions (Islamic revolution in Iran), the Saudi rulers have prevented any liberalizing trends in the society. Scholars like Madawi al-Rasheed (2015), Joseph Kechichian (2013) and David Commins (2006) have argued that liberalisation for men was not similar as liberalisation for women as latter preceded at a much sluggish pace. Globalisation and modernisation of economy made men more outgoing at the same time a reverse trend was initiated for women. State proscribes practices which are considered un-Islamic such as consumption of alcohol or violation of fasting during Ramadan (Metz 1992; Commins 2006). Through the intrusive and effective use of *mutawwa* or moral police, the al-Saud have imposed severe limitations upon women over issues such as dress code, public socializing with men and enforcement of *mahram* (which prevents unaccompanied females from travelling abroad) (Zuhur 2011;Thompson 2014). The dress code such as *purdah*, *hijab* and *abayas*, gender segregation and personal laws (adoption laws, divorce laws, inheritance laws) are some of the areas where Wahhabi code of conduct has been pervasive (Yamani 2004:14-15). Religion severely impacts the conduct of woman and her behaviour not only in public arena but also in her personal and private spaces as well (al-Farsy 1994; Tucker 2008).

Women Rights in Saudi Arabia

The Basic Law of Saudi Arabia does not guarantee gender equality. Gender ideologies that can be attributed to traditional and socio-economic values gained legal force in the Saudi society by being associated with Islamic teaching. Women's inequality is traditionally structured in the society and governmental structures, which comes from state supporting Islam and derived from a literal reading of the Qur'an and *Sunna*.¹³ State supports the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam which dominantly undermines the women position in social sphere and it considers women to be inferior to and dependent upon men. It states that it is the prerogative of men to protect the honour of women and this understanding comes from literary reading of Islamic text, largely Hanbali School of jurisprudence.

¹³ Qur'an is the Holy book of Muslim and Sunna is the tradition of the Prophet Mohammed.

The Wahhabi interpretation of Islam in Saudi Arabia gains its legitimacy from 1744 agreement between Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism and Mohammed Ibn-Saud, the grandfather of Ibn-Saud. This accord upholds Wahhabi authority on all religious, social, political and economic matters of Saudi Arabia. In return, the agreement gives legitimacy to al-Saud rule in country. Therefore, strict adherence to this interpretation has placed women in a subservient position to men and so traditional inequality creeps deep down into government and social structures. According to Eleanor A. Doumato, “A healthy majority of Saudi citizens agree with the social agenda of the *Ulema* (of about controlling women behaviour), and would not view the inequalities between men and women as discrimination, but as equivalence—a balance between the rights and duties of men and women as prescribed in Islam and necessary to uphold honour and family values.” (Doumato 2010: 425)

Sharia which refers to the body of Islamic law serves as a guideline for all legal matters in Saudi Arabia. Muslims derive *Sharia* law primarily from Qur’an and secondarily from the *Sunnah*, the practices and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed during his lifetime. The third source is *Ijma*, the consensus of opinion among Muslim scholars on the principles involved in a specific case occurring after the death of the Prophet. *Qias*, analogy, is the fourth source of law. Thus Saudi judicial system is jurist law based on consensus and opinion building on particular issue as there are no written laws, judges and legal scholars tend to perform *ijtihad* (interpretation) by interpreting the texts in the way they find suitable. Those who oppose codification insist on maintaining the *ijtihad* tradition are generally the clerical class and *ulemas*, who fear power base going away from their hands and fear of changes in Islamic tradition. Thus, referring to legislation, the term “regulation” (*nizam*) is used rather than “law” (*qanun*) to avoid creating lexical tensions. Those who call for the codification of the *sharia* (*taqnin al-Sharia*) typically use the word *tadwin* (to record) rather than *taqnin* (to codify) (Alhussein 2014:1). Consequently, lack of written penal code result in individual interpretation for different cases and no written code brings in bias in justice delivery (Human Rights Report 2013). Men and women are subject to arbitrary arrest and detention, and convicted persons are punished in accordance with *Sharia* as interpreted by individual judges. In the absence of a written penal code, judges may determine the quantum of punishments arbitrarily for crimes both real and imaginary and this impacts woman, as they are especially targeted for *khulwa* (the illegal mixing of unrelated men and women) (Doumato 2010: 427). Same laws gains different interpretation for men and for women;

for example adultery (lashing and reprimanding), citizenship rights (transferable by men through marriage but non-transferable by women), marriage laws (to Saudi citizen and non-Saudi person), children custody (if divorced child custody particularly of male child rests with man), women can have access to only civil identity cards and not legal cards again which have to be granted by the permission of male guardian (Doumato 2010: 421-425). Against theory, practical application of law is extremely different from what is written and preached in Islam.

Judicial system of a society is a reflection of its character of treatment of law to its subjects. *Sharia* law based countries have evolved a different character from secular law both in practice and theory. According to *International Religious Freedom Report 2013*, in Saudi Arabia freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under the law and the government severely restricted it in practice (Department of State 2012). Women are virtually discriminated against men and are considered minor to them as per *Equality Now Report of 2012* (Equality Now 2012). Eleanor Doumato writes,

In practice, women in Saudi Arabia lack equal access to courts because they must rely on a male relative or lawyer to represent them. Many judges arbitrarily require that before a woman may represent herself in court, a Guardian must be present to verify her identity and grant her permission to do so. Identification by a male Guardian is necessary because women's faces must be covered and judges do not accept the ID card as proof of a woman's identity. This is particularly detrimental in divorce and child custody cases in which the Guardian is also likely to be the husband, who is also the woman's legal adversary. Women are at a further disadvantage in the courts in that the testimony of one man is taken to be equal to that of two women, and for the purpose of compensation for accidental death or injury, a woman's worth is calculated at half that of a man (Doumato 2010: 428).

Therefore, it can be inferred that Islam which is deeply incorporated in the Saudi judicial system and governance impacts the gender relations and has discriminatory effects on women and minorities. Article 8 of the Basic Laws states that "Government in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is based on the premise of justice, consultation, and equality in accordance with the Islamic *Sharia*." The Basic Law requires that the government be premised on justice, consultation, and equality in accordance with *Sharia*, or Islamic law. However, *Sharia* in Saudi Arabia does not

offer equality to women, particularly regarding family law. Instead, women are considered legal minors under the control of their *mahram* (closest male relative) and are subject to legal restrictions on their personal behaviour that do not apply to men. As a result, women's appearance in public places and immobility due to male-guardianship remains a salient point of contention which is coinciding with the legal constraints and social-religious controls.

Women are not allowed to drive a car, travel on airplanes, work, or be outside their own home without a male guardian's permission (*Mahram*)¹⁴. Women are prohibited from most ministry buildings and discouraged from walking along public streets or attending mosques except at pilgrimage. According to Wayne Bowen

Women throughout her life, a Saudi woman is subject to a man. Until she marries, her father retains absolute authority. After marriage, her husband takes this authority. In the absence of her father or husband, her brothers, uncles, and other male relatives can restrict her behaviour, work, education, and other living conditions. In case of divorce, a woman must return to her father's house, or that of another male relative. Although these rules are in place ostensibly to protect women and preserve their familial honour and sexual purity, in practice they confine women to a very small world of family and friends (Bowen 2008: 11-15).

Women have at times been at the guardian-ship of their minor sons (al-Manee 2015). The religious police, known as the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (*al-Hay'at al-Amr bil Ma'ruf wa al-Nahia 'an al-Munkar*) are responsible for overseeing public moral behavior, including proper dress and public interactions between men and women.¹⁵ Saudi laws and policies do not generally protect women from gender-based discrimination. Numerous enforcement authorities, including the regular, religious, and *mubahith* (secret police)¹⁶, have the power to accuse and detain suspects, and each may apply the laws arbitrarily.

¹⁴ The mahram's permission is legally required for women to travel internationally, and in practice, it is also required for them to travel domestically despite there being no such official requirement. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), women who do not present proof of their mahram's permission may be prevented from boarding domestic flights as well. See "Perpetual Minors: Human Rights Abuses Stemming from Male Guardianship and Sex Segregation in Saudi Arabia" (HRW, April 2008), section II, www.hrw.org/reports/2008/saudiArabia0408/.

¹⁵ Members of the religious/ moral police force are known as mutawwa'in (literally "obedience causers")

¹⁶ The police security forces were divided into regular police and special investigative police of the General Directorate of Investigation (GDI), commonly called the *mubahith* (secret police)

In 2000, Saudi Arabia ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), with reservations stating that the kingdom is under no obligation to observe terms of the treaty that contradict Islamic law (Abiad 2008: 70). This implies that though ratified the personal status laws of Saudi Arabia can only be determined by the *Sharia* which will be favourable to men in matters of marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance (Herzberg and Steinberg 2013: 18). In case of divorce, men will receive custody of all children—boys at the age of seven and girls at the age of nine until then they remain with their mother. A woman’s testimony is worth half that of a man’s in legal proceedings, and daughters inherit only half the amount of their brothers from their father’s bequest (Bowen 2008: 11).

In practice of marriage and divorce contradiction appears of what is written in Islam and how jurist explain legal texts of *Sharia* and the way it is executed. The formal contract does not take the bride as a signatory. She is merely the legal confirmation of decisions which is taken jointly by two families. The degree to which a woman participates in decisions regarding her own marriage depends on her family’s predilections and her own professional or social situation and age (Kelly and Breslin 2010:433). This stands in clear contradiction to Haifaa Jawad claim of women independence in choosing her partner and that her wishes are taken well into consideration (Jawad 1998: 7-8).

Similarly in case of divorce, the woman has to prove in courts that husband has deserted her, is impotent, or has a loathsome disease. These are humiliating or difficult to present in front of male judges. Alternatively, she may also buy her way out of her marriage by forgoing her maintenance rights and *mahr*, a practice known as *Khula*. By contrast, a Saudi husband is entitled to a divorce without explanation simply by registering his intent to divorce with a court and repeating his intent (or *Talaq*) three times. Even provision of maintenance of wife as the period entitled is subjected to either courts discretion or man’s financial capability (Doumato 2010: 10). It is important to note that even though Ibn-Saud divorced his wives, he always bore the cost of their maintenance, a practice which has receded over the years among the public.

Women’s position in tribal society is linked to ideals of family “honour” and resultant guardianship laws make lives of battered wives miserable as they are unable to draw support, safe havens and domestic shelters from government. Women often face unwillingness of police

and judiciary to intervene in domestic situations thus making them vulnerable to suppression and oppression and sometimes they die because of domestic violence (Doumato 2010). Their financial inclusion in society is limited as women they have limited professional choices. In Saudi Arabia women are permitted to work only if three conditions are fulfilled: the primary care of the women's husband and children is met; women work only within specific conditions that do not conflict with existing customs; and women's work is restricted to employment suitable for the female nature (Almunajjed 2006: 33). Their work choices are confined to all-female environments, generally schools, individual business and medical facilities. Their educational degrees are often not compatible with employment opportunities as it does not conform to official views of honour (Bowen 2008: 11). Their presence in the administrative and civic arenas is limited or ambiguous in nature.

Over the years monarchical authority has tried to open the public sphere for women, but opposition of religious clergy has impeded progress. Only the passage of time and inclusion of successive generations in decision-making can probably determine the course of reform of issues like voting rights, contesting elections, driving, citizenship rights and guardianship laws. During his reign King Abdullah (2005-2015) for the first time appointed women to the Consultative Council but their appointment remain inconclusive as their duties and work plan remain unspecified. It is important to note that after the death of Abdullah in 2015, King Salman did not appoint any female minister to his cabinet unlike former who appointed Norah al-Faiz as deputy minister of education in charge of women's affairs in February 2009. In that capacity and with the active support from Abdullah, she introduced sports programmes for girls in state-run schools, a move that was opposed by religious conservatives (BBC 2015). Therefore it becomes important to note that how King Salman would pursue political and social sphere for women. to Simon Henderson who noted that 'some caution is necessary' when King Abdullah included women in *Majlis al-Shura* and promised voting and election rights in municipal election to women. Writing in 2011 when Abdullah was alive Hunderson feared that a future king (in this case Salman), might hold socially conservative views which could have a different attitude to female socio-political participation (Henderson 2011).

Law and reforms

In 2004, a National Dialogue Conference on Women, initiated by the then Crown Prince Abdullah, recommended that women be allowed to sit as judges in family courts and that family laws be standardized so that decisions are not left to the arbitrary opinions of individual male judges (Thompson 2014:185). As a result, gradually women are now able to participate in civic life than ever before as high-profile women, mostly wives and daughters of the kings and governors, in search of a new 'Cosmopolitan Identity' have recently been appointed to elite ministry posts, university deanships, and directorships in quasi-governmental civic organizations (al-Rasheed 2013a: 134). A member of the royal family, Princess al-Jawhara Fahad bin Mohammed bin Abdel Rahman al-Saud, was appointed as undersecretary of the Ministry of Education (Doumato 2010: 445). In February 2009, a step that garnered international attention, Nora bint Abdullah al-Fayez was named the deputy minister of education in charge of girls' education (Borger 2009), marking the highest appointed of a woman in Saudi history. Two women from royal family, Princess Sara al-Faisal and Princess Moudhi Bint Khalid were appointed as female members to Consultative Assembly in 2013 along with twenty eight other women to the council.

Princess Loluwah bint Faisal, Princess Haifa bint Faisal, Princess Basmah bint Saud and Princess Fahda Bint Saud hold important senior positions in universities and they have been poignant in deciding the curriculum and management of schools in country. Princess Adila bint Abdullah, Princess Noura bint Muhmmad, Princess Jawahr bint Nayef and Princess Husa bint Salman have their own charity organisations while Princess Reema, Princess Ameera, Princess Madhawi own business entrepreneurs (Stenslie 2011; al-Rasheed 2013).

Women of the region are learning to use the so-called, 'legitimate language' that is, religiously legalised language which can be inferred after having studied law and religious scriptures of the country, a language that cannot be challenged by their male peers to attain their goals. Saudi women are also directed towards studying Islamic law as in 2007, three Saudi institutions allowed women to study law and as a result they can speak in the name of Islam. According to Amani Hamdan learning 'Legitimate language' act in a powerful way to confront the status quo (Hamdan 2005: 43). Women issues are easily connected to Islamic teachings and the gender inequalities colour and are institutionalised in education system. Saudi women have devised their

own strategies to challenge gender inequality and achieve social justice not only in education but in all life matters, especially given the complexity of women's issues and concerns in what is so called "Third World" Islamic patriarchal societies (Hamdan 2005:43). Women demand for reforms by legitimate means (discussion and debates in National Forums, petitions, poetry, education directed philanthropic activities, investment and portfolio building exercises in economy, business activities) have brought the 'need to change' in lime-light (Thompson 2014; al-Rasheed 2015).

It is quite phenomenal that women lives are easily manipulated owing to countries facing any crisis or backlash of any international incident. In case of Saudi Arabia, women faced three major incidents that changed the course of development of public sphere and reforms with regard to economic, social and political sphere. The first incident was setting up of ARAMCO, Saudi-American Oil Company which brought vast reserves oil at country's disposal. This initiated modern development and technological advancement of Arabia leading to changes in law regarding women like education, liberal dress codes and easy public appearance. The second incident both at international and domestic level, reversed the position of women to conservatism and unorthodoxy; at international level it was the political turmoils in Iran and Afghanistan and domestically it was siege of Mecca mosque in 1979.

On 20 November 1979 Juhayman al-Otaybi and his 250 armed extremist supporters swarmed into the Grand Mosque of Mecca, al-Masjid al-Haram and took it over, during annual Hajj pilgrimage. The group demanded the deposing of "infidel Saudi" government and wanted it to be replaced by a "truly pious" Islamic leadership that followed the strictest form of *sharia*. He declared his brother-in-law Mohammad Abdullah al-Qahtani to be the Mahdi (the "redeemer of Islam") who arrives on earth several years before the Judgement Day. Five days after the siege began King Khalid who got the *Ulema* to assert that under these grave circumstances, Islamic law permitted sending in troops to retake the mosque. It took 2,000 strong Saudi troops and a small number of French elite troops more than nine days to overcome the rebels and retake the mosque. At least 255 people were killed in the operation and hundreds more were injured. More than 60 surviving Sunni fundamentalists were tried (secretly) and beheaded publicly in cities throughout the country (Goldstein 2010: 114).

Externally, Saudi Arabia was confronted by the toppling of US-supported Shah in Iran leading to revival of Islamism, Russia intervening in Afghanistan and Sunni fundamentalist opposing American intervention in Saudi politics. The criticism by religious authorities of Muslim's government in Iran, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia about allowing infidels to intervene in holy land struck like lightning on social set-up. These three incidents within a span of a year decried freedom and relaxation given to women. Both the Iranian revolution and Mecca siege challenged the legitimacy of the al-Saud regime and the country was swept with a wave of conservatism (Hegghammer 2010: 24). The tribal understandings that women are essential unit to family structure made men behave more protective of their women. Women turned more orthodox, society started segregating into groups of men and women, religious fervour coloured all aspects of society and innumerable fatwas against societal conduct were issued (Hefner 2005:195; Geel 2012:61).

In words of Madawi al-Rasheed

Under the shock of the 1979 mosque siege, women in Saudi Arabia adopted a view that this was a punishment for opening up society, allowing development to go too far, and being lax in their religious practices. Those who had not worn the veil diligently adopted it as a religious obligation, and began to lecture others about adhering to it. Women who were illiterate started giving 'sermons' whenever an opportunity presented itself. They constantly repeated Qur'anic verses and *Hadiths*, instructing other women about the danger of laxity in religion and immoral mixing with men. These women had not attended schools, and most of their knowledge in matters related to religion had been acquired through constant watching of Saudi television, especially religious programmes. Also, a new generation of literate women began to appear. As a result of mass education in which several hours were dedicated to religious subjects, young women had become more conversant with matters related to religious education. They emerged as authority figures on religious subjects in all women's circles. Despite their youth, they were able to establish their religious credentials on the basis of their literacy and ability to confront any situation with religious solutions. Their religious education gave them a new authority over their mothers, especially those who had missed out on the opportunity to acquire formal religious knowledge (al-Rasheed 2013a:110).

Eleanor Doumato summarises the consequence of incident the seizure of Mecca on Saudi women saying “This conservatism often targeted women as ‘culture bearers’ of the family, community and nation, preserving and passing on cultural and religious practices to the next generation. As a consequence, women’s access to public spaces was curtailed. Women started to dress more conservatively, donning ‘*abayas* and the *niqab* (all Saudi women now wear at least the ‘abaya and headscarf when in Saudi Arabia), female presenters disappeared from Saudi television screens, and women were barred access to swimming pools” (Doumato 2009:23-24).

A host of developments such as the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, Mecca Seziure of 1979, Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), Kuwait Crisis (1990-1991), the US-led War Against Terrorism (initiated after 11 September terror attacks) affected the position of women and challenged Saudi society’s openness. These crises generated debates over the ruling monarchs aligning with *kafirs* and infidels. *Jihad* gained roots in country and discontentment speeded in society and the regime’s policies came in conflict with its religious agenda. The last blow came during second gulf war, when the Saudi territory was used by the US-led forces to launch a war against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. This led to question the legitimacy of the al-Saud regime: cannot Saudi Arabia protect itself against a foreign attack? *Jihadi* revival and rise of Osama Bin Laden changed the dynamics of the Saudi Arabia-US relation. Fifteen out of 19 who carried out the 11 September terror attacks against the World Trade Center and Pentagon were Saudi nationals. This soured the relations between two countries. The Saudi export of Wahhabi religious ideology which emphasised on *jihad*, extremism, monotheism, women suppression and subjugation brought severe political criticisms at country’s door-step (al-Rasheed 2007:163-65). Saudi-Wahhabism relation and its outcomes were questioned, contested and challenged at domestic and international levels.

However, ironically the 11 September terror attacks also resulted in women reforms as educated women were being called upon to serve the state’s economic, social, and ideological needs. Educated women gave the regime a soft, sophisticated modern face which reflected a break from rigid tradition and constituted a combination of traditional and contemporary socio-economic forces (Thompson 2014:178). According to Madawi al-Rasheed this new development of state using women to promote its ‘new-image’ had impacted women reforms to great extent. She says “While invisible Saudi women had previously been visible signs of state piety, their recent

orchestrated and well-managed appearance in the public sphere is a reflection of the state's quest for a cosmopolitan modernity" (al-Rasheed 2013a: 134).

Responding to popular demands for reforms, Abdullah initiated National Dialogue in King Abul Aziz Centre for National Dialogue to discuss and detail problems of society. Various issues like modernity, education, employment, women, minorities, *sharia* laws etc were taken up. The dialogue resulted in state gradually replacing religious scholars in defining gender roles and the status of women in the country. In 2009, Abdullah replaced the country's most senior judge Sheikh Saleh Al Lihedan with Saleh bin Humaid as well as the head of the religious police and top official of the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA). He named a woman, Norah al-Faiz as a deputy minister. He ordered a reorganisation of the Grand *Ulema* Council, the nation's top religious body, so that its scholars represent different branches of Sunni Islam aimed at increasing religious tolerance in society (*The National* 2009). Abdullah as discussed above accepted gender as a new criterion for new modernity which made state inculcate the habits of celebrating achievements of women in the society.

Saudi state endorsed only those religious scholars who provide the basis for a new 'pious cosmopolitan modernity' that is, a modernity in line with the new economic and social conditions while still being compatible with the old tradition (al-Rasheed 2013a: 135). The masculine state with members from the provinces of Qasim, Hasa, and the Hijaz, where huge merchant families have currently mobilised their women (Lubna Olayan, Princess Ameera al-Otaibi), engages in gender reform, introduces new legislation to allow greater economic participation, and silences radical religious scholars whose fatwas do not reflect an understanding of social and economic change (al-Rasheed 2013a: 135). Changes among senior *Ulema* such as those of removal of Sheikh Lihedan's however, had much more to do with his refusal for more than a year to allow implementation of judicial reforms advocated by King Abdullah (*The National* 2009).

The provinces of Saudi Arabia exhibit different character from each other; Qasim is known for its many religious families and its conservatism, Riyadh and its environs have recently produced women who are members of these emerging educated elite. The Hijaz, in contrast, has had a longer history of women's education and training, and women are now found in professions in both the private and public sectors of the economy. But the only common factor binding these

various sub-units of state are women. Women according to Caroline Montagu act as bridging unit between various tribal factions and state, thus compounding as civil society elements working for benefit of the masses (Montagu 2012). Even dissent groups believe in the power of women as binding elements and initiating reforms in society. Therefore women of royal family are given due share of importance in any walk of life in country. They are seen as dependable communicators and dispute arbitrators between state and religious authority. Both liberals and Islamists consider state as saviour from strict religious control and a protector against conservative social tradition. The first would like to see the state curbing radical religious opinions, while the second expects the state to limit cultural and social influences that maintain the subordination of women (al-Rasheed 2013a: 137). They are seen as bridge between state-led modernity and westernisation and religion-pushed Arab culture and tradition. Women according to Mona Almunajjed are 'strategic reserves in terms of skill and social development' (Almunajjed 2006: 3-4).

High-achieving professional women who work in hospitals as scientists and doctors, together with very successful businesswomen, are beginning to enjoy regular exposure to both international and local media, which praised their achievements in a society that saved state from serious international criticism after 11 September attacks (al-Rasheed 2013a: 138). Polar Images of women (Sufferers versus achievers) in media contribute to 'demystifying' and 'normalising' the lives of Saudi women, who were earlier silenced and victimised (al-Rasheed 2013a: 140). However, the trend continued of bringing more women in centre so that Saudi monarchy can balance reforms with religion. Educational exposure has made women realise their positions in Islam and thus could question religious enforcing authorities to redress laws with regard to women.

Women in al-Saud

Major push for these changes came from princess of al-Saud family who owing to their seniority and position could influence decisions of kings at various points of time. As discussed, Ibn-Saud was exceptionally influenced from his elder sister Nourah and his aunt, al-Jawahr. Ibn-Saud has innumerable marriages and most scholars agree that he had 22 legally wedded wives (Bowen 2008: 101). Some of the wives were chosen on a whim but others owed their position to King's political calculations about forging a blood links with powerful tribes and religious families.

These women has limited role within the ruling family. The political marriages pursued by Ibn-Saud and his successors have not enhanced the role of women. Occasionally al-Saud women were given the credit for some of the progressive measures taken by the monarch such as female education (Kechichian 2001, 2008c; Younes 2012).

It is estimated that Ibn-Saud ‘married’ about 135 females including daughter of tribes, slaves, concubines (al-Rasheed 2010: 75; Talhami 2012: 70). However, as per Islamic law, no man can have more than four wives as one point of time and consensus is that Ibn-Saud had 22 legally wedded wives¹⁷ who bore him estimated about 34-43 sons (TaHERi 2012: 139; Bligh 1984: 39; al-Rasheed 2010: 72; Kechichian 2008a: 245-272)¹⁸. Each wife bore Ibn-Saud one to three sons. Ibn-Saud’s sons also followed the same principle of polygamy.¹⁹ These sons and daughters were again strategically married into various family cousins and tribes to keep the kingdom consolidated and royal-loyalty intact. One of the main tactics adopted by Ibn-Saud, was his practice of intermarriage, taking wives from every major tribe and region, although he never had more than four at one time (Bowen 2008). He continued to provide financial support to the women he divorced and maintained ties to their regions and tribes, and accepted children out of these marriages into his royal family. These sons would comprise the ruling class of the Kingdom and some of them future heirs to the throne, many as cabinet ministers, and other held high official positions.

In the Arab culture, the most valued wife is one who bores the largest number of sons. For example, in addition to her beauty, charm and strong personality, Hassa bint-Sudairi, the most beloved wife of Ibn-Saud had the additional advantage of being a “Mother of Boys” as she bore

¹⁷ There is discrepancy about the numbers of wives Ibn-Saud had as Madawi al-Rasheed claims that he had about 134 wives, whereas Dilip Hiro numbers 17, Joseph Kostiner says he had about 184 wives. While generally agreed number stays at 22.

¹⁸ But According to Alexander Bligh, Abd al-Aziz was left with 35 sons. This stands in contrast to Madawi al-Rasheed as she claims that Abd al-Aziz was survived by 43 sons and over 50 daughters. According to J. Kechichian, he fathered at least 36 sons and perhaps an equal number of daughters whereas Dilip Hiro puts the figure down at 52 sons and 53 Daughters. According to Sharaf Sabri it is 34 sons. Joseph Kostiner claims 29 sons but Wayne Bowen puts down figure saying in all 100 children. So clearly, no significant scholar has exact number of sons and daughter borne by Ibn-Saud.

¹⁹ Saud children range differently according to different authors. According to Dilip Hiro who says he fathered 45 sons and 215 daughters. Madawi al-Rasheed puts down number at 53 sons and 54 daughter. Joseph Kechichian says 53 sons while Sharaf Sabri it is 52 sons and 43 daughters.

Ibn-Saud seven sons namely Fahd (b.1921-2005), Sultan (b.1929-2011), Abdul Rahman (b.1931), Nayef (b.1943-2012), Turki (b.1934), Salman (b.1935) and Ahmed (b.1942) (Taheri 2012: 140). These seven full brothers (sharing same parents) held various important and influential positions in kingdom administration. Within the royal family there existed a 'core-group' of about 10 sons (full-brothers and half-brothers of first generation) as policy makers and decision holders²⁰ in Ibn-Saud cabinet and most of them sons from his wife Hassa Bint Ahmed al-Sudairi (Kechichian 2008b: 251-252). Hence, it is often said that, since Hassa bore him maximum sons, she turned to be most beloved wife of the king. Furthermore, four of her sons became King or crown prince. Although sons of the other wives also held prestigious positions in the administration, 'Sudairi Seven' commanded higher and respectable posts and hence wielded greater influence.

The al-Saud's deeply rooted endogamous traditions and marriages among cousins have produced a shift in the balance of power within the family. The Sudairi Seven, for example, used marriage with the military precision and strategy and ended up having close blood ties with almost all influential princes (Taheri 2012: 140). Consequently, personal attributes, seniority, paternal, tribal and maternal lineages, and full brother subgroups all helped create an internal hierarchy of power that was simultaneously complex and fluid (Kechichian 2008b; al-Rasheed 2013a: 252).

Women belong to al-Saud family are slowly emerging out of the veil and testing the limits of the conservative tribal and religious order. It is possible to identify a number of such princesses, principally the wives and daughters of the Kings, who have been playing and seeking a significant role within and outside the ruling family. One could notice the influence of women through their marriages to al-Saud family. Women have been strong-keepers of culture, traditions and familial-bondage but at the same time, whenever opportunities were available they also pushed for reforms and disseminate popular demand for change (Stenslie 2011). The House of Saud comprises of thousands of princesses as result of carefully crafted political marriages involving various clans and tribes.

²⁰ This goes in reference to every King in succession. Thus King Ibn-Saud had Saud had Prince Saud as crown prince, Prince Faisal as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Mohammed was given the responsibility of *Ikhwan*, Prince Fahd was made a member of the royal advisory board, Prince Khalid-Viceroy of Hejaz, Prince Nasser as Governor of Riyadh, Prince Mansour-minister of Defence, Prince Sultan assisted King Abdul Aziz's attempts to establish a national administrative system based on the Islamic *Sharia* law during this period and then he was appointed as the Kingdom's first minister of agriculture in 1953 and minister of transport in 1955.

After its establishment ARAMCO was the first to provide a limited version of modern education for its employees' dependents. The first public school for girls was opened in 1961 and girl's education was accelerated when King Faisal took over the rein in 1964. During his tenure, which lasted until 1974, there was an increase in the number of educational opportunities for women at all levels. Significantly due his wife Effat was also engaged in starting girls schools and universities (Bowen 2014:16).

Princess Nourah bint Abd al-Rahman ibn Faisal al-Saud, (1875-1950), the elder sister of the founder, is often identified as the main motivating forces behind Ibn-Saud's determination to recapture the Arabia. She said to have casted strong impact on him. There are also mention about daughters of Kings Faisal and Saud, Princess Loluwa and Haifa, Princess Hessah bint Khalid who made several appearances in Western capitals, together with Saudi academics and businesswomen and were handling women education part in the country (al-Rasheed 2013a: 139). Women of royal family like Princess Sara bint Faisal and Princess Moudhi run al-Nahda philanthropic society.

The 11 September terror attacks and anti-Saudi and anti-Islamic sentiments in the West resulted in Saudi rulers reforming the educational system and seeking an increased role for women, especially within the ruling family (al-Rasheed 2010: 242). This is manifested in the official mobilisation of women to defend their country as reflected in the number of Saudi princesses, academics and businesswomen who have been allowed to travel abroad as part of official delegations to the US, Europe as well as to Third World countries, including India under what designed by the state as 'Charm Offensive Campaign' (al-Rasheed 2013a: 151).

Indeed, despite the tribal, conservative and patriarchal nature of the Saudi society one could identify a number of women within the ruling family who have drawn attention both inside and outside the country (Makki 2011: 456; al-Rasheed 2013a: 140). Al-Saud women have been expanding frontiers of education and cultural activities and are active in influencing and changing Western public opinion regarding the status of women in Saudi State. The increasing number of women who receive such scholarships allows the state to use them as a cohort of 'ambassadors' whose mission is to change outside perceptions about the Saudi women (al-Rasheed 2013a: 151). Women who influence developments in women-related areas such as education, employment and health, include Princess Adila (daughter of King Abdullah). She is

actively promoting women's health awareness and legal rights, and public and job opportunities for women, and is the patron of many charitable foundations (Stenslie 2011: 74). Many of these influential and activists women met with strong opposition from religious establishment but they are seeking a more active role in the society.

In a limited sense, women in the Royal Family have emerged as engines of social change. It is important to note that their non-involvement in the political sphere restricts their influence in decision-making process. Therefore in House of Saud, pressures for women reform through representation have come from influential male elite who emerge as their voice. Quoting Hassan al-Husseini, a former administrator at the King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Echague observed, "when something is established by royal edict, then that same thing can be reversed by another royal edict. It's not like you have legal protection for such things in Saudi Arabia." Reformers and conservatives have their champions within the royal house and thus depending on the successions to the throne, the initiatives can swing either way which highlights inability of local population to affect policy (Echague 2009: 2).

Conclusion

The prevailing Wahhabi discourse has shadowed the Saudi policy conduct in all spheres of life. Although many ideas preached by Wahhabi scholars do not align with the ideals preached by Islam the al-Saud family pursue the monotheistic religion. However after the twin-tower attacks, the situation in Saudi Arabia changed gradually where women who were earlier seen inferiors and vulnerable, began to cast new image world over. Al-Sauds want reforms in the country but not at the cost of side lining the Wahhabi doctrine, as it would have cost them their survival. Hence they manage to break an alliance between religion and reform for women and minorities, whenever required. Women in the kingdom are hopeful for new changes but they know that changes do not come easily. In case of Saudi Arabia only major incidents have jolted monarch to bring in reforms. The recent case is the Arab Uprising, which has been sweeping West Asia since late 2011. Even Arabian Peninsula has witnessed popular protests in Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Owing to the fear political unrest, Abdullah announced US\$130 Billion reform package to satiate masses requirement of employment and poverty (al-Rasheed 2013b).

Women of the royal family have been kept in front position and project a fresh and new image of their country. It is important to note that while females in royal family are subjected to strict

control and adherence to Islam, situation remains different for local women as they are not projected as face of Saudi Arabia at international level. But this does not gives an easy escape to other women as they also do not get the privileges a princess can enjoy for example driving. Driving reforms for many local Saudi women is necessity unlike that of Saudi royals and therefore protests are stronger from society. Only the interplay of religion and state will decide the fate of these pending women issues and their social and economic demands.

Chapter-Three

Education and Culture

The role of gender in Islam has always been at conflict with each other. Post-Modernist and critical theorists have criticised the role of power induced in the sacred text. In the words of Michel Foucault “knowledge is power over others, the power to define others” and hence, sacred texts are manipulated for reasons of power (Sarup 1988; Dreyfus and Rabinow 2014). In Muslim societies, manipulation of scriptures is a structural characteristic in the practice of power. In Muslim societies Qur’an and Sunnah are considered as the two powerful tools guiding every aspect of the society. *Bidaa* (innovation) of Qur’an is prohibited in Islam but law based on *Ijtihad* (interpretation) of the divine text is not which enables the application of jurist law in such societies. Hence, over the centuries Muslim societies have interpreted Islamic texts to suit their legal and societal requirements.

Like many Islamic countries, *Sharia* forms the core of the Basic Laws of Saudi Arabia and profoundly shapes all aspects of the social life of the country. It has specific connotation in the light of close to three centuries of adherence to Wahabbi and Salafi tradition. Wahhabism disregards later accretions of human interpretation, practices or traditions that are seen as a violation of the sanctity and finality of the Divine text. Hence, *Sharia* practiced in Saudi Arabia is drawn from Hanbali Jurisprudence and works to regulate social, professional, personal and political life of the citizens (Commins 2006). In terms of implementation *Sharia* or Islamic law reveals various shades of grey in different Islamic countries but position of women remains subservient to law and men.

Traditionally conservative Islamic scholars have tried to rationalise the debate with their deconstruction of Hadith and religious textual language and prominent among them are Sahih al-Bukhari (Shaikh 2004). At the same time, many Islamic feminist scholars are trying to deconstruct the understanding regarding the gendered roles of women in Muslim societies based on Qur’anic hermeneutics (Shaikh 2004:100; Barlas 2009). Most texts of Hanbali School of jurisprudence adhered to by the Sunni Muslims consider women unequal to men and thus most

conservative Islamic scholars who adhere to this school disapprove any superior role for women as compared to men. Citing Aisha, Prophet's wife and her involvement in the Battle of Camel, scholars like Said al-Afghani consider women to be root cause of problems and conflicts if they are involved in power politics (Mernissi 1991:6).

In her work, *The Veil and the Elite Male*, Fatima Mernissi highlights that women's rights come into conflict with the interest of modern Muslim male elites, since Qur'an, the life of the Prophet or Islamic tradition come in accordance with the such an understanding (Mernissi 1991). According to Judith Tucker, who understands Qur'an's treatment of women in egalitarian and non-discriminatory manner cites that there are only six out of 6,660 verses have established some kind of male authority over women which are verses 2:221, 2:228, 2:282, 4:3, 4:34 and 24:30 (Tucker 2008:24). Following are the suras:

Sura 2:221-Surat al-Baqarah (The Cow)

And do not marry polytheistic women until they believe. And a believing slave woman is better than a polytheist, even though she might please you. And do not marry polytheistic men [to your women] until they believe. And a believing slave is better than a polytheist, even though he might please you. Those invite [you] to the Fire, but Allah invites to Paradise and to forgiveness, by His permission. And He makes clear His verses to the people that perhaps they may remember.

Sura 2:228 Surat al-Baqarah (The Cow)

Divorced women remain in waiting for three periods, and it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period] if they want reconciliation. And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable. But the men have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.

Sura 2:282 Surat al-Baqarah (The Cow)

O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down. And let a scribe write [it] between you in justice. Let no scribe refuse to write as Allah has taught him. So let him write and let the one who has the obligation dictate. And let

him fear Allah, his Lord, and not leave anything out of it. But if the one who has the obligation is of limited understanding or weak or unable to dictate himself, then let his Guardian dictate in justice. And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men [available], then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses -so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her. And let not the witnesses refuse when they are called upon. And do not be [too] weary to write it, whether it is small or large, for its [specified] term. That is more just in the sight of Allah and stronger as evidence and more likely to prevent doubt between you, except when it is an immediate transaction which you conduct among yourselves. For [then] there is no blame upon you if you do not write it. And take witnesses when you conclude a contract. Let no scribe be harmed or any witness. For if you do so, indeed, it is [grave] disobedience in you. And fear Allah. And Allah teaches you. And Allah is Knowing of all things.

Sura 4:3-Surat An-Nisā' (The Women)

And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].

Sura 4:34 Surat An-Nisā' (The Women)

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance -[first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.

Sura 24:30 Surat An-Nūr (The Light)

Tell the believing men to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is acquainted with what they do.

Hence, these suras have created patriarchal domination over females in areas of societal conduct, body parts, public appearance, divorce and child custody, marriage and social justice and hence have made women dependent on males in all spheres of life. These verses have been interpreted by male clergies who regard women to be their subjects. Further writing on sexuality in Muslim societies Sami Zubaida, says Qur'an is very positive about the sexual activity of men since it says "Your women are a tillage for you; so come unto tillage as you wish and forward for your souls" (Zubaida 2011:55).

Problem arises when traditional scholars' interpretation of these Qur'anic verses clashes with the understanding of the feminist scholars. Critical re-reading followed by interpretation (or re-interpretation) of religious texts by scholars have given rise to the emergence of Islamic Feminism (Barlas 2002). The scholars adhering to this school generally come from the North African region since women rights are increasingly liberalised there as compared to the Arabian Peninsula. There appears contradiction at two levels; first a personal status code of law or *Sharia* is applied differently in these Muslim countries, especially Iran, Kuwait, Jordan, Pakistan and Indonesia.

Secondly, the struggle for women rights liberation by the Islamic feminists and liberal ideologists is often considered as cultural clash against Islamic principles, who quote this phenomenon as impact of western-secular religious credentials on country and Muslim subjects (al-Rasheed 2007). Following different stands of Islam with different Jurisprudence schools have diversified the understanding of Islamic principles. As a result contrasting variations occur in social and public policies as followed by these Muslim countries

Therefore, in Saudi Arabia the debates regarding women rights generally revolve around six main aspects:

1. Position of women in public and personal spaces
2. The issue of property inheritance
3. Women's position in family structure and leadership issues
4. The question of Polygamy
5. Women's right to education
6. Slow and steady education and resultant reforms and demand for social, civil and political rights in Saudi society

The first four issues are the direct and immediate fallout of androcentric interpretation of Qur'anic verses with respect to women. Among 176 verses of *Sura an-Nisa* [section 4], there are 24 verses dealing with women's issues and they are found in verses 1, 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 15, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 32, 34, 35, 36, 75, 124, 127, 128, 129, 130 and 176 (Adnan 2004: 75). While other verses also pertain to women's issues, they are less specific than those identified above. Among them, verse 34 deals with women position with regard to men and her position in the family structure which says,

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance -[first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.

According to this sura, the roles played by men and women in the society have been demarcated but there persists confusion in the interpretation. Often religious scriptures and texts have been exposed to critical re-reading and re-interpretation after the onset of post-structuralism and de-constructivists debates.¹ These scholars like Roland Barthes have proposed that in this age the phenomenon "Death of the Author and Birth of the text" should be the focal point of scholars to study any power relations in any society. Therefore scriptures and religious text needs re-reading in order to question the power relations that exist in the Muslim societies especially with regard to women (Wadud 1992; Marancci 2008).

Since the time of Prophet Mohammed, the family structure is assumed to be unchangeable as it is considered divine and hence there is a detailed codification of regulations under which sex has also been dealt with. The link in the Muslim mind between sexuality and *Sharia* has shaped the legal and ideological history of Muslim family structure (Schacht 1964:161).

Traditional scholars have dealt with the verse differently depending on the school of Hadith and sect they belong. To understand this better, it will be useful to study the various interpretations of

¹ Post structuralism and de-constructivism scholars like Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Judith Butler, Jacques Lacan, and Jean Baudrillard

Verse 34 of *Sura an Nisa*, verse that deals with men-women relations in the Muslim society. According to Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamath, who follow the preaching of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani (founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam), interpret this verse as

Men are Guardians over women because Allah has made some of them excel others, and because they (men) spend of their wealth. So virtuous women are those who are obedient, and guard the secrets of their husbands with Allah's protection. And as for those on whose part you fear disobedience, admonish them and leave them alone in their beds, and chastise them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely, Allah is High, Great (Aliislam 1995).

This differs with the interpretation of Sahih International, which follows Sahih al-Bukhari which is one of the *Kutub al-Sittah* (six major Hadith collections) of Sunni Islam. These prophetic traditions or *hadith*, were collected by the Muslim scholar Mohammed al-Bukhari, after being transmitted orally for generations. It is important to note that all other school of thoughts, Hanafi, Dawud, Maliki, at-Tirmidhi, Ibn-Majhaa and al-Sughra are in agreement with Bukhari school of thought. Sunni Muslims view this as one of the three most trusted collections of Hadith. It says

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance -[first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand (Quran.com).

Further Ahmad Shafaat who is a modern scholar says the following:

Men are (meant to be righteous and kind) Guardians of women because God has favoured some more than others and because they (i.e. men) spend out of their wealth. (In their turn) righteous women are (meant to be) devoted and to guard what God has (willed to be) guarded even though out of sight (of the husband). As for those (women) on whose part you fear ill-will and nasty conduct, admonish them (first), (next) leave them alone in beds (and last) beat or separate them (from you). But if they obey you, then seek nothing against them. Behold, God is most high and great (Islamicperspectives 2003; Islamsearch 2007).

The verse as translated by Mohammed Tahir-ul-Qadri, a Pakistani politician and scholar of Sufism says:

Men are Guardians of women, because Allah has made one superior to the other, and (also) because men spend their wealth (on them). So the pious wives are obedient. They guard (their chastity) in the absence of their husbands with the protection of Allah. But those women whom you fear will disobey and defy, admonish them; and (if they do not amend) separate them (from yourselves) in beds; and (if they still do not improve) turn away from them, striking a temporary parting. Then if they become cooperative with you, do not seek any way against them. Surely, Allah is Most High, Most Great (Minhaj Internet Bureau 2013).

The sheer number of translations of the Qur'an and this verse in particular, demonstrates that there is no one exact, literal translation of this text. Scholars debate in this particular verse argue over the word '*Qawwamuna*' and its literal translation. As the region changed, language also changed but scholarly arguments did not change. According to Gunawan Adnan, existing conflict regarding the position of women in public and private sphere in Muslim societies emerges over the issue of leadership and women's role in family structure based mainly on the from interpretation of Sura 34 (Adnan 2004:123). She studied and quoted the understandings of Sheikh Mohammed Mutawali ash-Shawari, an Egyptian religious preacher who is a contemporary of Hassan al-Banna and supporter of anti-female rights and Sheikh Mohammed Hasbi as-Siddiqi, an Indonesian and descendant of Abu-Bakr, two prominent Islamic scholars of the nineteenth century. Both the scholars are important since they have written extensively on Islamic Jurisprudence.

Shawari is of the opinion that the phrase "*ar-rijalu qawwamuna al ana-Nisa*" (men as guardian/protector of women) in the sura could be interpreted that men are the protectors and leaders of women. He, however, adds that to hold the position or status as leaders or protector of women, men must be able to protect and to give security for women and otherwise men do not deserve this position. Men earn this status, according to Sharawi, because the word *al-Qawwam* is identical with tiredness and struggle, which is associated with men. In addition, men must also be able to provide financial support (basic necessity of life) for their women and dependents, that

is wives and children and if not, they should not occupy the position of leader. This, according to him, is in accordance with God's revelation, that is, "*wabimanfaqu min amwalihim*", (because they spend (to support them) from their means) (Adnan 2004: 124). Likewise, Siddiqi is of the opinion that the phrase "*ar-rijaliqawwamunaala an-Nisa*" indicates that, men are the managers of women and as such, they have to protect and provide a secure state for women, because according to Siddiqi, such obligations are part of men's duties and responsibilities (Adnan 2004:125).

Issues 5 and 6 are the fallouts or consequences the other issue identified earlier. There is no direct co-relation between women's right to education and work rights in public sphere. But conservative traditional scholars profess and spread non-religious ideas claiming that women involvement in public places will cause dissent and *fitna*; to be avoided so that public decorum can be maintained. This dominant perception comes from the interpretation of sura 4:34 listed above.

Women's liberation, according to Fatima Mernissi, is directly linked to political and economic conflicts that affect modern Muslim societies (Mernissi1985:19). Further she says "every political setback inflicted by infidels generates an antithetical necessity to reaffirm the traditional Islamic nature of these societies. The forces of both modernity and tradition are unleashed in a single stroke and confront each other with dramatic consequences for relation between the sexes" (Mernissi1985:19). Such experiences are faced by women in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Iran after these countries witnessed increasing Islamisation and fundamentalism and hence women were asked to revert to the position of being invisible elements in public appearances through the forceful introduction of veil and their limited involvement in workforce (Najmabadi 1994; Das 2006; al-Rasheed 2007: 164).

As a result, the Islamic position regarding women's education remains debatable in some Muslim countries and at some places as women education is considered a 'secondary' prerogative. This can be seen from the study of the literacy rates among women in Muslim countries particularly as compared to men. Tunis-based Arab League Educational Cultural and Scientific Organisation (Alecso) observed that three-quarters of the 100 million people were unable to read or write in the 21 Arab countries are aged between 15 and 45 years (*al-Arabiya*

2008). At the same time, Qur'an emphasises the importance of the pursuit of knowledge and Prophet himself emphasised the importance of knowledge and education. As highlighted by Azizah al-Hibri the Prophet says, "Scholars are the heirs of Prophets" and "pursuit of knowledge is the duty of every Muslim" but at the same time, support for women education does not enjoy universal adherence (Rafeda 1987; al-Hibri1997:41).

Scholars have debated over the kind of education to be imparted to women and if so, then up to what level. Some have cited the example of *Jahiliyah*, the pre-Islamic 'age of ignorance' and warned that Muslims should be adequately educated so that they do not return to same age (Khatab 2006: 105; Calvert 2010; Ishiaku 2014:2). Al-Ghazali, the eleventh century Islamic scholar divided knowledge into two categories, namely *fardhayn*² and *fardhkifayah*³ (al-Hibri1997: 41). The first type contained kinds of knowledge that every Muslim must acquire, that is, knowledge Muslims need in order to properly discharge all their duties in the society in which they live and in light of their own relevant circumstances. In the second category, knowledge which is based on the community wellbeing but it can be satisfied by some not by all the members. Therefore, it is possible to argue that *Fardhayn* is to be fulfilled by women citizens of Muslim societies whereas the latter kinds are the zone of men accomplishment (Alkanderi 2001:158; Badamasiuy 2012: 136). Due to modernization and technological advancement and opportunities, the boundaries between the two continuously pushed by female reformers and activists who try to educate and liberalise themselves in those forbidden areas of knowledge and education. The entry of women into those fields such engineering, aerospace, retail sector, law, administration can be cited examples for breach of traditional boundaries.

The misinterpretation of such text made education the prerogative of male because knowledge itself has a manifestation of power. The patriarchal and androcentric reading of the *Hadiths* and *Sunnahs* made women vulnerable of being less or uneducated. These *hadiths* reflect a central aspect of the evolving Muslim cultural and religious imagination which acts as norm-providing authority for women in Islam and assume critical importance in gender politics (Sadiyya 2004). Hence, it establishes a linkage between patriarchy and women education where patriarchy is seen

² It is the Fard, that if performed by some (a sufficient number), the obligation falls from the rest

³ It is the Fard that is a compulsory duty on every single Muslim to perform, [just] like praying and fasting.

as rooted character in Islam. According to Jamal Ahmad Nasir, Prophet wished for the proper education of women so that they can actively participate in Muslim community (Nasir 2009:17). According to him Prophet also intended that women themselves should become teachers not only for women but also for men as well.

At the same time, women acquiring knowledge and role they play in policy making have been associated with causing chaos or disruption of the socio-political order and is encapsulated in Arabic term *Fitna*. Since it involves the active participation of word, or it derived from the root word *fatn*, meaning a beautiful woman, it implies that she causes dissension by her beauty (Douglas 1991:51). According to *Book of Knowledge* in Bukhari's collection, arguably the most authoritative text for Sunni Islam after the Qur'an, certain *hadiths* like in chapter 22 (Verse 81, Society based on Women's Knowledge), chapter 32 (men as women educators and spiritual elevation), chapter 37 (on Aisha's role as informed and intelligent women) and chapter 51 (rejection of female stereotypes and women assertive behaviour) and require re-reading and application of female hermeneutics in Islamic anthropology (Sadiyya 2004).

Thus, there exists a general agreement among Muslim scholars that educating women is a duty and not just an option or a luxury but a consequence of the equality in religious duties and obligation's incumbent upon male and female. At the same time, regarding the *nature, scope and mode* of women's rightful education there are concerns and differences concern among scholars and policy makers. Here the patriarchal views of a hierarchical societal order and role and status of women intersect and as a result, women education curriculum is advocated to be free of poetry, literature and humanities (Alkanderi 2001:104; al-Hariri 1987: 51-53). This leads to the question of protecting the morality of Muslim women or alternatively for the protection of the morality of Muslim men from the women's *fitna*. Thus, according to al-Hibri the debate on proper education of women in Islam has shifted to cultural debate on the status and role of women in society (al-Hibri1997:34).

Views of scholars on Muslim's life including woman's education and her family role depend on the medieval Islamic Jurisprudence which has two inter-related components, namely, religion and cultural (al-Hibri1997:7; Aquil 2011:27; Baumann and Contractor 2011). The cultural component gave rise to certain fundamental social and political assumption which becomes the dominant basis of common model of state and family relationships best described by

authoritarian and patriarchal nature of society. As a result, these patriarchal forces reduced the status of women into being inactive immature dependent beings that are neither full-fledged citizens of the state nor are capable of being in full control of their own destiny.⁴ The co-relation of factors like culture and religion has dogmatically impacted women's demand for liberation through education and work. There is an increasing realization that the power of women education requires reforms in cultural-religious spheres and civil society. However the core question persists: does civil society has an impact women liberalisation in Saudi Women?

Women Education in Saudi Arabia

Certainly women have been constantly struggling in Islamic societies to assert their identities and dreams more strongly ever since modern education has been made available to them. In 1959 King Saud issued the royal degree that guaranteed right to education to all male and female citizens (al-Rasheed 2013a:91). This was evidential for the introduction of the education for women as it was supported by the Ulemas. It made the girls' education compatible with the traditional role of women at that time but it also took care of not ruling out other areas of study for that small group of parents who aspired for equality of opportunity for their daughters.

Education in Saudi Arabia is provided by the government to all Saudis and children of Arabic-speaking residents who want it, from kindergarten up to and including secondary school. Elementary school caters for children from 6-12 years, intermediate school from 12-15 and secondary, or high school, from 15-18. An elementary school certificate is necessary in order to enter intermediate school and an intermediate school certificate is required to enter secondary school (Rawaf and Simmons 1991: 287).

Education, to be imparted free of charge without any discrimination to children between ages of 6-15, has been made mandatory. This provision was subsequently incorporated in Article 30 of the Basic Law of Governance promulgated in 1990 and reads "The state provides public education and pledges to combat illiteracy." According to Article 13 "education will aim at instilling the Islamic faith in the younger generation, providing its members with knowledge and

⁴Saudi Arabia citizen states and work force reports, citizenship cards in which they have Guardian and not individual identity cards (al-Hibri 1997:5).

skills and preparing them to become useful members in the building of their society, members who love their homeland and are proud of its history.”

Over the years, the Saudi education policy has undergone drastic changes and improvements. Although there was considerable resistance when the General Directorate of Girls' Education (GPGE) was created, such opposition gradually abated. In 1963–64, for example, there were only 26 schools for girls at primary, intermediate and secondary levels, and they were mainly confined to the Hejaz region (Quamar 2013: 9). The Committee which the King set up was named the General Presidency of Girls' Education (GPGE) which till today is responsible for girls' education at all levels with the exception of the women's programmes in the universities founded for men. The GPGE is independent of the Ministry of Education and has a separate budget but is not a ministry and its head does not sit on the Council of Ministers while the Minister of Education (for boys) does (Rawaf and Simmons 1991:289).

By 1970–71, the number had increased to 432, and during the course of the next two decades rose considerably to reach 6,734 during 1990–91. As a result, the enrolment of female students in higher-educational institutions also experienced growth. In 1980–81, a total of 16,079 female students graduated from universities across the Kingdom while the number of female students studying in various colleges and universities reached 56,905 during 1990–91, and grew to 66,978 in 2000–01(Quamar 2013:10).

In intermediate and secondary school, where the curriculum for girls in many areas is the same as that for boys but the main differences between the two curricula is that for girls physical education and sport are replaced by home economics and embroidery (wes 2001). In Riyadh and Dammam, Colleges of Arts and Education and Science and Education were established and in Madina, Tabuk, Abha, Buraida and Jeddah, colleges of education were opened which offered both arts and science subjects. Arts subjects included religion, education, Arabic, geography, history, English, psychology, home economics and, in Riyadh they include librarianship and science subjects comprised all or some of mathematics, physics, biology, botany and chemistry (Rawaf and Simmons 1991: 292). Thus the Centre for Girls' Studies at King Saud University opened in 1976 with courses in Arabic, history, geography and English, and eventually all the colleges of King Saud University built centres for women except the College of Engineering and the College of Architecture and Planning. Thus women are studying public administration,

medicine, dentistry, nursing and education at King Saud University although they do not enjoy the same level of facilities in terms of libraries and laboratories as the men (Rawaf and Simmons 1991: 292-293).

There exists discrepancy between the type of skill provided in the curricula of public education for girls and those needed in the labour market. Since many women are getting education and degree are not relevant to the market requirements which need huge-influx of labour in areas of technology, law and administration. These areas are already a zone of accomplishment for men and as a result women do not find suitable environment to work and develop. Females are mostly confined to personal business which are usually based on crafts and clothing. For the same they even require a wakil or male-guardianship who can facilitate communication in ministry and market areas (Rajkhan and Dana 2014: 22-23). Thus it is required that public education should promote employability, productivity and social inclusion for women.

According to Saudi Arabia's Millennium Development Goal for 2000-2015, it hopes to achieve universal primary education whereby boys and girls will be able to complete primary education. It also seeks to achieve gender equality and eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015. So as of 2013, Saudi Arabia ranks at 34 in terms of Human Development Index and ranks 56 at Gender Inequality Index ranking as per Gender Inequality Index report of 2013. According to UNICEF, women literacy rate in 2012 increased to 97 percent of age group 15-24 years (UNICEF 2013). Thus it can be said that Saudi Arabia achieved satisfactory level for male-female education parity.

Official figures show that the net enrolment of children in primary education has increased significantly from 84.5 percent in 1990 to 93.0 percent in 2007. According to The World Bank, in 2008, the female literacy rate for those between 15-24 age was 97 percent which is expected to increase since new universities and colleges are being established up in country (Qureshi 2014: 149). The Saudi commitment to girls education has resulted in an increase in the number of girls' schools faster than those for boys. Women represent more than 58 percent of the total number of Saudi university students. Government statistics indicate that the total number of female students enrolled at the university level, seeking a bachelor's degree, more than tripled from 93,486 in 1995-96 to 340,857 in 2005-06 (al-Munajjed 2009:6). At the same time, they are paid lower than men when it comes to competence and skill (UNDP 2014).The same is reflected

in the Saudi budget allocation for improvement girl/female education; it stood at SR 150 billion in 2011 and rose to SR 204 in 2013 (al-Assaf 2013).

The King Abdullah Project for General Education Development (*Tatwir*) introduced in 2009 with a budget of SR9 billion included exorbitant infrastructure development of educational process and the development of intellectual, creative and communicative skills for students (al-Munajjed 2009). The plan focussed on the knowledge building of women in areas of medicine, business administration, computer sciences and agriculture, until then not available to them. It also includes a one-year course covering English, mathematics, computers sciences and communication, in addition to courses related to health awareness, civic education and self-learning (al-Munajjed 2009: 20). At the same time, it is pertinent to note that higher education did not include literature and social sciences as part of mandatory learning for female students.

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) is a graduate-level research university aimed at realizing the promotion of advancement of science and technology (Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) 2010). The university was opened on 23 September 2009 with a US\$10 Billion endowment and financial commitments from most major Saudi corporations. This is the first co-educational university campus in the country and women are allowed to mix freely with men and to drive on campus. They are not required to wear veils in coeducational classes (*BBC* 2011). The authorities are hopeful that this mixed-gender centre would help modernize the Kingdom's deeply conservative society. This university provides curriculum in inter-disciplinary boundaries, across three academic divisions, namely chemical and life sciences and engineering; mathematical and computer sciences and engineering; and physical sciences and engineering (*BBC* 2009).

The ninth (2010-14) and tenth (2014-19) five-year development plans pay specific attention to women education. The Ninth development plan aims to spend about SR(Saudi Riyal) 731.5 billion on human resources development, including education, science and technology and training. The amount allocated to this sector in the Ninth Plan exceed those allocated under the Eighth Development Plan by 52.4 percent, and account for about 50.6 percent of total allocations for development sectors, which importance the Kingdom attaches to human resources development programmes. Due to government's commitment to girl's education, the number of

girls school increased faster than boys' schools. According to the World Bank, in 2013 the literacy rate for female ages 15-24 was 99 percent (The World Bank 2013).

Globally Saudi Arabia has become eighth largest spender on education with its declaration of US\$ 3.1 Billion in educational system. In 2009, it ushered in a 25-year high-technology research initiative called 'Aafaq' or Horizon which intends to improve higher education opportunities for women, boost scientific research and tackle the country's shortage of scientists in critical fields (Sawahel 2009; Islam 2014:1).

As of 2010, King Abdullah Scholarship Programme (KASP) introduced in late 2004 allowed more than 70,000 students to study and acquire the knowledge and skills abroad they serve as "cultural representative" of Saudi Arabia to more than 25 countries (MOHE 2012). According to Samira Islam, women have been particularly taking strong interest in science and during 2008-2010, women graduates out-numbered men in all major fields of study except agriculture and engineering (Islam 2014:6). In 2010, 63.42 percent of all graduates were women (MOHE 2012). It is remarkable that in 2011, women enrolment in areas of humanities and social science, law and business was 78 percent and 65 percent respectively, which stood at 58 percent and 55 percent respectively in 2008. Humanities saw sharp decline where the sciences growth was almost same (Islam 2014:74) and areas like agriculture and engineering also showed growth figures.

Despite the remarkable achievements in female education during the reign of King Abdullah, there exist certain loopholes and cleavages in the education policy and employment market. As a response to the growing number of women graduates, in 2007 the government announced that one-third of the government jobs would be reserved for women (Qureshi 2014:150). Fields such as architect, science and technology, engineering and agriculture are continued to be dominated by men. Employing women in small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) showed a remarkable growth; as compared to 50,000 who were employed in SME in 2009, about 454,000 were employed in 2014 (Qureshi 2014:150). In recent years, the judiciary has started hiring women on a large scale. Their job titles range from document-controllers to clerks, secretaries, case researchers, legal researchers and *Sharia* researchers. Saudi women have started working as customs officers (Qureshi 2014:151). About 50,000 women are registered as students in Princess Noura University, thus on obtaining their graduation degrees they might find it difficult to get

employment. This is attributed to two reasons: firstly, markets are ill-equipped to include them and secondly women inclusion in work sphere would require changes in law and societal policies.

In recent years, pace of reforms has granted women the right to own a property, run their own business and have independent status. In 2011, King Abdullah promised that the women would be allowed to vote in the next local elections (*The Guardian* 2011). At the same time, the issue of or need for male escort (*Mahram*) still lingers (Islam 2014:77). This becomes a major challenge when 130,000 female students upon completing their studies in various liberal western countries would return to the country and try to re-adjust themselves with the restrictive and traditional Saudi society (Islam 2014:77). Under such circumstances, a cultural clash would be inevitable.

Majority of women are employed in areas like teaching, education, health care, civil services and entrepreneurs. Areas that are not opened to women are technical expertise (engineering and architecture) and administrative and judicial posts. In 2013 the unemployment rate for women was 34 percent as against 6.2 percent for men as according to Central Department of Statistics and Information (Ghafour 2015). However, in the same year according to the Civil Affairs Ministry, there are 1.2 million were Saudis working in the public sector with women accounting for 38.3 percent of which education sector currently encompasses the highest percentage of Saudi women workforce, estimated at 87.4 percent (Ghafour 2015).

Today women just occupy only 13 percent of private and public positions occupied by nationals despite accounting for 51 percent of Saudi graduates, according to the Central Department of Statistics and Information (CDSI 2014). Private sector is emerging as highest employer of women as employment rate rose to 84 percent in 2013 with around 400,000 employees (Oakden 2015). Saudi women are now employed across 20 sectors in the country; of this total, 71 percent work in education, 13 percent in human health and social services, and 5 percent in public administration, defence and social security. According to Department of General Statistics, women are also employed in production, manufacturing, mining, agriculture, forestry and fishing (*Arab News* 2015). Thus women prefer to work in public sector with education per say for the simple reason of comfort, social sector and easy access and availability of jobs.

Presently, women make up only 13 percent of the total workforce in the country (2013-14) which is of the lowest in the region; for example, the female participation in the workforce is 59 percent in the UAE; 42.49 percent in Kuwait; 36.4 percent in Qatar and 34.3 percent in Bahrain (Bashraheel 2013). In addition, in 2013 unemployment rate among Saudi women stood at 34 percent, which was almost five times higher than that of Saudi males (Bashraheel 2013). Clearly much needs to be done to remove barriers faced by educated Saudi women in terms of professional opportunities.

In 2004, King Abdullah issued a decree encouraging women to seek jobs in fields that were the exclusive prerogative of men such as law and business. That was one of many signals he has sent suggesting that Saudi Arabia cannot progress economically or socially without giving more power to women (Mills 2009). Women were given voice with the creation of Alsayedah Khadijah bint Khwailed Business women's Center (AKBK), where they could debate and discuss their problems related to business and commerce. It was assured that soon changes in law would be made with regard to male-guardianship system for women. Since then more than 22,000 commercial licenses have been issued to women, many of whom run their own beauty, furniture and fashion businesses. Women are also beginning to realize the importance of investments; women now own nearly 20 percent of mutual funds. It is believed that about SR15 billion in cash assets are owned by women and stored in current accounts (al-Jassem 2010). Women also have a strong presence in medical fields and about 40 percent of Saudi doctors are women (Sawahel 2011).

Thirdly, the course curriculum for women and men differ. There are 26 higher technical institutes for women offering a post-secondary diploma and important fields of specialization are accounting; computers; technical support; cosmetology; clothes production and design (MOHE 2013). Saudi government aims at imparting education to women in these areas, so that they do not get deviated by the lure of literature, history and poetry, which induces existential questions among citizens. Sidelining of such subjects have exposed women demanding reforms in others ways based on similar patterns.

The involvement of a number of its citizens in the 11 September terror attacks in the US brought about policy changes in Saudi Arabia. The government increasingly adopted measure to reform the Kingdom's images in the West by co-opting and reversing social discourses on religious

texts. Saudi sponsored conferences were held in Washington, London and Paris to improve the standing of the country and its Wahhabi tradition. The government adopted an image-building exercise towards western researchers, graduates students, journalists and civil society activists. Earlier such texts were available only in Arabic but are increasingly published in English and other languages showcasing, *Wahhabiyya* as a peaceful tradition that encourages dialogue with other religions and societies and for respect for women and minorities rights (al-Rasheed 2007:10).

Because terrorism has become the root problem in the West-Saudi relations, resolutions and measures to DE radicalise perception of Saudis were adopted. The government was blamed for exporting hatred and *jihadist* literature through its religious missionary activities and embassies. After 11 September attacks, Saudi government changed the literature character and exhibited tolerant attitude towards women and minorities representation (al-Rasheed 2007). Saudi student studying in western countries especially in the UK and US, were given scholarships and they act as agents of positive cultural promotion in western societies (al-Rasheed 2013a). Royal Women were used as agents of cultural promotion in diplomatic missions; for example Princess Loluwah al-Faisal became the face of liberation of women in global media along with Princess Ameera al-Taweel al-Otaibi. Details about such activities have been discussed later. Many Saudi activists have stressed the need for educational reforms, ranging from teaching tolerance in schools and sports to self-defence for girls (Human Rights Watch 2012). Advocating extensive reforms Samar Fatany suggests that law college curriculum should not be confined to Islamic jurisprudence. According to columnist Halima Muzaffar, the spreading culture of fear and death in girls' school could lead to extremist ideas like martyrdom. Given a national curriculum focused on rote learning even at the tertiary level, and religious distaste for critical thinking and interpretation Hayna Nasser laments that the society's progress is hindered (Lichter 2009:283).

It is within this broad context one has to examine the role played by al-Saud women in education and cultural life of Saudi Arabia.

Education and al-Saud Princess

In the early years of the state education for women in Saudi Arabia was a private affair and rich and affluent families provided private education for their daughters at home and then sent them to either Egypt or Lebanon for further education. The first private formal school for girls, the

Madrasat AlBanat al-Ahliyah was established in 1941 by immigrants from Indonesia and Malawi who came to Mecca as pilgrims but decided to stay. The inception of girls' education in Saudi Arabia by non-Saudis implies that the people of Mecca were not much interested in the education of their daughters (Rawaf and Simmons 1991: 288).

The first state initiative came from the then Crown Prince Saud bin Abdul Aziz, who in 1951 opened the first school for girls, the Riyadh-based al-Karimat School and sent his own daughters thereto hoping to encourage other parents to educate their daughters. The Mabarrat al-Karimat (Foundation) of King Saud in Riyadh, established in 1955 and supervised by three of King Saud's daughters, offered to girls for the first time the curriculum for girls; indeed, it was boys' curriculum with the addition of home economics, embroidery, English and sports (Rawaf and Simmons 1991: 288).

Subsequently, first girls' school in the country was started in 1964. In parallel schools in Mecca (1947) ["Princesses' Institute" school for Princess and Commoners], then in Jeddah (1956) ["al-Nasifiyah"] and Riyadh (1955) were opened (al-Hayat 2008; Rawaf and Simmons 1991: 292). They were bold moves at a time when society regarded women's education with suspicion and scorn (Thahran 2007; Foley 2010:178). By 1960, Faisal and his wife Effat created various levels of state-funded primary and technical schools for girls and allowed women to produce programmes for the state-run radio network. This granted women the opportunities to pursue secondary and post-secondary education. The first college for girls within the King Abdul-Aziz University where education is not mixed was started in 1975. In 1970 Al-Karimat School became the first secondary institution in the Kingdom. In addition, in 1956 Prince Talal bin Abdul Aziz established King Abdul Aziz Mabarrat (al-Hayat 2008). The work done by Queen Effat (1916-2000) and later on by her daughters towards women education and reforms often goes unnoticed. The princess not only generously funded the school but also used her prestige to protect its reputation and autonomy. These efforts, however, failed to absorb more girls. Rich rich parents who preferred to send their daughters to Egypt urged King Saud to open more schools for girls with better facilities.

To ward-off criticisms from conservative Saudis, King Faisal nominated conservative cleric Shaikh Mohammed ibn Ibrahim as the administrator of General Presidency of the School of Girls, a new agency that was responsible for girls' schools. Later he opened many branches

across the Kingdom despite objections and in 1962, Riyadh University for the first time admitted four women students. An ARAMCO report on the status of the Saudi Women remarked that in 1962 women who worked earned in the oil corporation got “pay equal to that received by men for equal qualifications and services” (Foley 2011:179).

Since then, conditions started to change for women who began studying and working in various fields in tune with society's perception of their work and role. Likewise, many Saudi women embraced teaching, a profession previously restricted to women from Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. When the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was established in 1960 under King Saud, it undertook, in cooperation with the Ministries of health, education, and agriculture, a huge project, namely, Urban and Rural Local Community Development Centre. Under this project 16 centres were set up in 1960, where women worked towards eradicating illiteracy, disseminating girl education, cementing respect for handcrafts, and pinpointing the importance of social development (Dar al-Hayat 2007). Since 1957, when the modern education university education began with King Saud University in Riyadh, it has grown into a vast structure of free-education providing medium (Saleh 1986:21). In March 2002, the General Presidency (GPGE) was fully merged into the Ministry of Education. Within this ministry, the GP is also responsible for girls' junior colleges, for female-teacher colleges throughout the Kingdom and for nurseries and kindergartens where children of both sexes are taught together.

The women within the al-Saud family having being in the forefront of education and have created certain benchmarks. Women within royal house hold belong to various age groups and therefore there can be no clear demarcation of women in terms of the time frame and age group when discussing their role. Al-Saud women have been playing an important role in reforming the country in whatever capacity (under religious and cultural limitations) they could. Therefore for reasons of clarity, the Saudi Princesses are classified and segregated into the following generalization.

- First Generation: Mother, sisters and Wives of founder King Ibn-Saud
- Second Generation: Daughters and Daughter in laws of Ibn-Saud
- Third Generation: Grand-Daughters, Wives of grand-sons of Ibn-Saud
- Fourth: Generation: Daughters, wives and others important females married outside royal lineage into the royal family (depending on marital status-divorced or widow)

Regarding the first and second generations of al-Saud woman, the material is rather sparse. Their strength and capacities date back to Princess Nora (1875-1950) and Princess al-Jawahar, the sister and aunt respectively of Ibn-Saud. Queen Effat played major role towards the introduction of women education and in pushing the boundaries laid down by orthodox religious clerics. Daughters of Kings Saud (r.1953-1964) and Fahd (r.1982-2005) have played prominent role in women education and in spreading social activism.

Women education saw new dawn with the arduous efforts of Queen Effat, wife of King Faisal. Her full name was Effat bint Ahmad al-Thunayan al-Saud. The biographical sketch of Effat mentions that she grew up in Turkey and became an enthusiastic supporter of girls' education. Her grandfather (Abdullah Basha) and her father (Mohammed bin Saud al-Thunayan) were taken prisoner by the Ottoman authorities following the collapse of the first Saudi State. Her father died in war sometime during 1918-1923 and her uncle Ahmad Al Thunayan (1889-1921) returned later as an advisor to the Kingdom's founder King Ibn-Saud, during the First World War. Effat's mother, Asia was a Circassian (Kechichian 2012).

Effat is credited with encouraging her husband, King Faisal to open the first girls' school in the country. She often referred to the Qur'an to argue that the fulfilment of religious duties was impossible without education. She was instrumental in founding the Taif Model School and the Girls College in Riyadh, which granted teaching certificates (Talhami 2013:97) Effat married Faisal in 1932 when he was just a prince. She quickly became involved in the Saudi renaissance movement, becoming the honorary president of the Saudi Arabian Renaissance society, which taught poor women arts and crafts in the capital of Riyadh. The same society branched off and sponsored literacy classes and free clinics for women. In the 1960s, Effat, now Queen Effat established the first social welfare agencies in the Kingdom, such as the women's welfare association in the Jeddah and later in Riyadh. In 1955, she opened Dar al-Hanan, a private women's school in Jeddah. Interestingly, Queen Effat was never photographed in public and was never seen on television after it was introduced in 1964. She died in 2000 and was buried in Riyadh (Talhami 2013: 290).

There are more prominent ones in the third generation of princess. Continuing the efforts of their parents, daughters of Faisal and Effat, namely, Princess Latifa, Princess Sara Princess Loluwah (b. 1948) and Princess Haifa (b. 1950) played important roles in spreading the women education.

Under their leadership, Jeddah-based Effat University was established in 1999 and till date this is the only university in the Kingdom named after a woman. As of 2015 the university has the following as its patrons:

- Princess Sara, Chair of Effat University Board of Founders and Board of Trustees
- Princess Latifa,– member of Effat University Board of Founders and Board of Trustees
- Princess Loluwah, Vice Chair of Effat University of Board of Founders and Board of Trustees and General Supervisor of the University
- Princess Haifa, Member of Effat University Board of Founders and Board of trustees

In addition, Princess Noura bint Turki al-Faisal, daughter of Prince Turki bin Faisal al-Saud serves as member of Effat University Board of Founders and Board of Trustees. She is also the Assistant to the Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees (Effat University 2015)

Princess Loluwah (born 1948), daughter of Faisal and Effat, is a prominent activist for women's education and other social issues. She was educated abroad and attended high school in Lausanne (Jardine 2005) and has been working pro-actively towards improving the conditions of women in the field of education. She married one of her cousins, Prince Saud bin Abdul Muhsin, son of Prince Abdul Muhsin al-Saud but they divorced after ten years (Jardine 2005). Since 1970 she has been an active member of the Riyadh-based al-Nahda Philanthropic Society for women and during 1990-99, she supervised Dar al-Hanan School in Jeddah which was first private high school for girls in Saudi Arabia that was opened by Queen Effat in 1955 (Susris 2005). Later on she became one of the founding members of the Effat University, where presently she holds senior positions in the management and trustees. Since 1994, she has been the President and the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Jeddah-based al-Maharat Cognitive and Skill Development Centre (Susris 2005).

From 1997 to 1999, Princess Loluwah served as the Assistant to Queen Effat and Head of the Planning Committee for Effat College Project. In 1991, she became the Head of the Higher Women Committee for support of Kuwaiti families after the Iraqi invasion and subsequent US-led military campaign (Susris 2005). She is among the few Saudi royal women, who allowed herself to be photographed by western media. Gradually she became the face of emerging Saudi

women when she led an official delegate to world economic forum in Davos in 2007 (Buzbee 2007).

Princess Loluwah is among the strongest critics of the driving ban imposed upon the Saudi women and has commented about rights of Muslim women (Buzbee 2007). She observed that western countries have misconceptions about status women in Saudi Arabia as Muslim women are accorded equal rights but those rights are not necessarily same as that of men (Jardine 2005). In 2005, for nine days she was a delegate with the Saudi Trade Mission that helped in building strong trade and investment ties with the United States (Susris 2005). Some observers refer such mission as ‘Charm-Offensive Campaigns’ to overcome negative stereotypes both against Islam and Saudi Arabia in the wake of the 11 September terror attacks (Jardine 2005).

Princess Loluwah represented her country as a member of the Committee of International Trade of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industries and in 2006 she led a delegation of Saudi businesswomen to Hong Kong (Buzbee 2007). She is was also a member of summit agenda of the World Economic Forum and participated in the forum’s sessions. During the 2008 World Economic Forum in Davos, she delivered a speech on “*What Kind of Education for What Kind of World?*” that focused on the philosophy of education. In 2003 she was the keynote speaker at the Middle East Institute Conference held in School of Oriental and African Studies, London. At home, she is a board member of the King Faisal Foundation (Susris 2005). She participated in the ninth annual model school conferences organized by the International Center for Leadership in Education, Washington, DC (Susris 2005). In addition to her native Arabic, Princess Loluwah speaks fluent English and French. In 2009, Princess Loluwah received an honorary degree from Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts. Mount Holyoke College played a consultative role in the founding of Effat University (Mount Holyoke 2009)

Royal women like Princess al-Jawhara (daughter of Prince Mohammed, grandson of Ibn-Saud, was appointed assistant undersecretary for education affairs in 2000 (*Khaleej Times* 2005). Princess al-Jawhara (daughter of King Fahd, was appointed as president of Riyadh University for women in April 2007 (al-Mohamed 2008).

The daughters of King Saud (1953-1964), namely, Princess Norah, Princess Mudhi and Princess Hessah are associated with *Mabarrat al-Karimat*, a charitable organization which was opened by

Saud in 1956 to promote education among women. Interestingly, they were the first women from the royal family to take up any job. While Norah was the President and Mudhi the vice president Hessah served as the director of the organization and looked after the day-to-day affairs (Thahran 2007). Princess Hessah, became the first Saudi woman to was become principal of a school when she assumed that role.

Princess Jauhara (daughter of King Saud) holds doctorate and is an assistant professor at the Social Sciences Department of King Saud University. Princess Naifah, a member of the al-Faisaliah Society headed by Fahdah bint Saud. Princess Latifah (daughter of King Saud), holds a graduate degree in sociology from King Saud University and another daughter Princess Fahdah works for the upliftment of the women in education areas. Princess Dr. Bazzah bint Saud, who has a degree in psychotherapy from London University and Princess Najla bint Saud, who is doing a doctorate in microbiology and Princess Rima bint Saud, who is currently the media supervisor of an ongoing exhibition on King Saud are some of the al-Saud women who are prominent in education and women empowerment in country (Thahran 2007)

Al-Saud women and Cultural Exchanges

Among the first generation, King Ibn-Saud was said to be very close to his aunt, al-Jowhara bint Faisal. She was a key motivation for him and persuaded him to return to the Najd from Kuwait and regain the land of his family. Ibn-Saud eventually followed her counsel and this paved way for the establishment of the third Saudi Kingdom in 1932. She was well versed in Islam and was among the King's most trusted advisors. From her, Ibn-Saud learnt about the experiences of past rulers and historical allegiance and role of tribes and individuals. Al-Jowhara was deeply respected by the King's children. Ibn-Saud used to visit her daily until she died around 1930 (Stenslie 2011:72).

Second notable princess is Noura bint Abdul Rahman al-Saud (1875 – 1950), was the elder sister of King Ibn-Saud. She was born in Riyadh and spent her early years travelling with her family as Ibn-Saud continued his conquest of the Arabian Peninsula. Beginning in 1891, her family sought refuge in Kuwait as guests of the Sabah ruling house, where Noura is known to have exercised great influence over her brother. She was said to be the main force behind the decision to recapture Riyadh from the Rashid family after an earlier failed attempt. Princess Noura was not only a qualified counsel she was also a top class political and strategic thinker (al-Mulhim 2012).

During the course of time, Noura became the leader of royal women and settled family disputes, thereby shielding her brother from palace intrigues and tensions.

Princess Noura also took the role of “first lady” of the Kingdom, receiving the wives of foreign dignitaries, whom she would permit to tour and have access to forbidden cities. Her assumption of this role to the exclusion of the King’s wives was due to the difficulty of assigning precedence to any one of them over the others. Ibn-Saud famed British adviser, Harry St. John Philby (1885-1960), was one of the first people who referred Noura as “the First Lady in her country.” It was said that the King paid her a visit every day seeking her advice on matters of state, because the political system was still informal and was based on personal relationships. As evidence of the close relationship between the King and the Noura, royal anecdotes relate that when telephones were first introduced in the Kingdom in the 1930s, the first line connected the royal palace to her residence. The King followed the custom of Najd, the central province where Riyadh is located, by proudly invoking her name, saying “I am the brother of Noura” (Talhami 2013:290-91)

Princess Noura was reported to have the “minds of 40 men” and great wisdom (al-Dhibyani 2011). Additionally, she was one of the few women of her times who learnt reading and writing. She was also known to be quite progressive and outspoken. In addition, she was a pioneer in charity activities and the founder of the first charity programme for the poor and orphans in the country. Dame Violet Dickson, who was the wife of British colonial administrator H. R. P. Dickson met Noura in 1937 and stated that she was the most charismatic and important personality in Arabian Peninsula at that period. Princess Alice, a British royal, who visited Saudi Arabia in 1938, also met Noura and described her as follows: “Noura, is about sixty and said to be his (Ibn-Saud) chief adviser, a fine, handsome woman” (al-Dhibyani 2011).

Noura accepted a family-arranged match with the head of a recalcitrant al-Saud faction (al-Kabir), Saud ibn Abd al-Aziz Ibn-Saud ibn Faisal ibn Turki, also known as Saud, the great. This marriage brought unity to her brother’s faction and that of his al-Saud cousins, and is presumed to have taken place in 1904. The match also reconciled the al-Ajman tribe to her brother’s line, since they belong to the family of her mother-in-law. Her marriage, thus, continued the tradition of constructing tribal alliances through family-arranged matches, which her brother, Ibn-Saud practiced to great advantage (Talhami 2013:290-291). Noura gave birth to Mohammad, Hassa, and al-Jawhara. Her daughter, al-Jawhara, later became the first spouse of King Faisal (r. 1964-

75) and they had a daughter, Munira. Princess Noura's grandson, Sultan bin Mohammad bin Saudal-Kabir, is a businessman and in 2013 was identified as the 12th wealthiest billionaire in the Arab world (Forbes 2013).

Another woman of great significance to Ibn-Saud and Saudi royal family is Hassa Bint Ahmad Sudairi (1900-1969), wife of Ibn-Saud and the mother of several sons, all of whom succeeded to the throne (either as King or Crown prince). In political parlance they are commonly identified as the “Sudairi Brothers” or ‘Sudairi Seven’. Interestingly she was one of countless number women with whom King Ibn-Saud married or entered into a relationship at one point or another (Morrison and Conaway 2006:429). She was a descendant of a noble Dawasir tribe that settled near the empty quarter of the Arabian Peninsula in the 1400s.

Ibn-Saud’s mother, Sara, was the daughter of Ahmad al-Kabir and his granddaughter Hassa became King Ibn-Saud’s wife. He was also married to Haya and Jawhara, two of Ahmad’s nieces. As a result he was married to his cousins, a tradition practiced family and tribes of Arabia, where women of a clan are married into their own group. This practice is still prevalent in royal family, in order to preserve blood lineages and maintain strong hold over dynasty. Jawhara bint al-Sudairi was deceased widow of Ibn-Saud’s full brother Sa’ad, whom he married after latter’s death in battle field (al-Rasheed 2002:70). Thus, 24 of Ibn-Saud’s sons and grandsons were descendants from their Sudairi mothers.

Princes Hassa had several full siblings and half-siblings, male and female. She was married to Ibn-Saud in 1913 when she was 13 years old and nearly two decades before the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia emerged as a unified state. Her first son, Saad, died at age of five as a result of the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1919. Hassa was divorced by Ibn-Saud for a while, when married his brother Mohammed but Ibn-Saud remarried her in 1921.

Hassa remained in favour long enough to come as close as any woman would become to the position of a queen within the Saudi system. She bore Ibn-Saud seven daughters and seven sons, including Fahd (King), Sultan (Crown Prince), Abd al-Rahman, Turki (Crown Prince), Nayef (Crown Prince), Salman (King), and Ahmad (Minister of Interior, 2012). For much of her life, Hassa remained the favourite wife of Ibn-Saud. Her children ate lunch in her quarters daily and she also arranged marriages of some of her sons. Like her husband, the reigning King, she kept

her doors open to Saudi citizens, who came beseeching her for help and to intercede with the King (Stenslie 2011: 73). “The Sudairi Seven” was the title given in the West to King Fahd and his six full brothers. The term was not used in Saudi Arabia, where the Sudairi princes were known as the Fahd group. It is the largest group of full-blooded brothers among the descendants of Ibn-Saud (Talhami 2013:313).

Among other wives of Ibn-Saud, al-Jawhara bint Musaedal-Jiluwi (died 1919) was interesting. She was the mother of King Khalid who was the fourth ruler during 1975-82, succeeding Faisal. She was the daughter of Musaed, a nephew of Faisal bin Turkial-Saud. Her mother was Husa bint Abdallah bin Turkial-Turki and her paternal grandmother, Noura bint Ahmed al-Sudairi, was also from another powerful family, al-Sudairi. Both families, al-Jiluwi and al-Sudairi, were strong supporters of the al-Saud in the early years of state formation.

Al-Jawhara was fourth spouse of the Ibn-Saud and among favourite wives and was married to him in 1908. It was the only marriage of Ibn-Saud to one of the al-Saud or to a close relative. Their marriage bore them three children, namely, Prince Mohammad, King Khalid and Princess al-Anoud. Her daughter, al-Anoud, married to Saud bin Saad, son of Saad bin Abdul Rahman bin Faisal al-Saud, only full brother of King Ibn-Saud. After Saud died, she married Fahd bin Saad, brother of the deceased.

Princess Fahda bint al-Asi al-Shuraim was the eighth of the Ibn-Saud’s wives and mother of King Abdullah. She belonged to powerful Shammer tribe and was earlier married to tenth Rashidi Emir, Saud bin Abdulaziz, who was killed in 1920 when Rashidis’ power was on decline. Following her husband’s killing, Fahda married Ibn-Saud. This marriage built a truce between al-Saud and Rashidi and made the latter loyal elements in the country (al-Rasheed 2002:75).

Second Generation

Princess Loluwah (1928–2008) and Princess al-Jawhara were the daughters of Ibn-Saud and Hassa bint Ahmad al-Sudairi and full sisters of Sudairi brothers. Princess Sultana (ca. 1928 – 2008) was the daughter of Ibn-Saud and his twelfth wife, Mudhi. Haya was the second oldest of their four children. She had two other full brothers and one sister: an older sister, late Princess Sultana, and two younger brothers, Prince Majid, who was the Governor of Mecca province during 1980-1999 and Prince Sattam, who was the Governor of Riyadh Province during 1979-

2011. Haya became the patron of the Saudi Cricket Centre in 2001, which is the governing body of cricket in Saudi Arabia.

Princess al-Jawhara was one of the spouses of Fahd and she divorced her first husband to wed King Fahd (Coll 2008). Her father Shaikh Ebrahim bin Abdulaziz al-Berahir, was worked in Governate of Baha. She received her school education in Mecca and received an honorary doctorate from the College of Education for Girls in Riyadh in 2003, in recognition of her role in developing women's education. She is an honorary member of the Women's Renaissance Charity Society and was honoured for her support for education and scientific research during the Silver Jubilee celebration of King Saud University in Riyadh in the year 2006. She was honoured at the Arabian Gulf University under the patronage of King Hamid bin Isa al-Khalifa for her grants to develop the university and for building and establishing the al-Jawhara Center for Molecular Medicine and Inherited Disorders in Bahrain. She helped in establishing Princess al-Jawhara laboratory in the College of Education, Riyadh and other such auditoriums, library and lecture halls in colleges and schools in Jeddah, Qaseem and Mecca. She also set-up Princess al-Jawhara al-Berahir Center for Distinguished Research in Genetic Diseases, Oncology Treatment Center and the Dialysis center in King Abdulaziz University hospital in Jeddah. Her involvement in social realms includes the building of a Woman's Charity Society in Qaseem area and building of Alberr society in Al'Rass governate ladies' branch. She was also instrumental in setting up Princess al-Jawhara Grand Mosque in Bosnia and Herzegovina and al-Jawhara Children's Games Hall in the Entertainment Center in King Abdulaziz hospital in the city of Jeddah (al-jawahara center).

Princess Jawhara is the mother of Prince Abdul Aziz bin Fahd, and the sister of Dr. Sheikh Fahad al-Ibrahim, Adviser at the Royal Court, Sheikh Waleed al-Brahim's group MBC (mbc) Arab TV Sheikh Khalid al-Ibrahim of the most important and largest business. Princess has supported Saudi women in different fields of social, educational and charitable. After the death of Fahd in August 2005, al-Jawhara has remained as an influential and respected member of the family, and had close relations with senior royals, especially King Fahd's other full brothers. In January 2007 she travelled with King Abdullah to Kuwait to pay family's respects upon the death of the Amir Jabir al-Ahmad al-Sabah and this is considered to be a sign of her continuing influence (Hhaljawaharacenter).

Princess Seeta bint Abdulaziz (1930–2011) daughter of Ibn-Saud and Fahda bint Asial-Shuraim, is the younger full-sister of King Abdullah. She was very active in charitable efforts (*Arab News* 2015) and in forming women groups such as the Princesses' Council (Stenslie 2011:38). The first and second Saudi Women's Forums were carried out under her patronage in 2009 and 2010, respectively. INJAZ-Saudi Arabia's Business Leaders Campaign (BLC) was also an initiative in which Princess Seeta participated actively towards promoting dialogue between Saudi entrepreneurs and students (Albawaba 2010). In May 2011, a conference entitled *Saudi Women of Tomorrow* was organized under her patronage (Khan 2011). She sponsored many charities within the Kingdom and made donations to many research programmes and family welfare projects. Under her patronage, career days were organized towards female employment (*Saudi Gazette* 2011)

In 2003, Princess Seeta initiated the Princesses' Council designed to involve one member of each of the royal family's sub-branches. It was the first family council for female royals in Saudi Arabia. All members of the council were asked to be active in social work such as health-care, children, women, and business. The council became an important body in the House of Saud. Instead of focusing on charity work, it functions as a think tank and lobbying body (Stenslie 2012:38). The council is designed to meet at a regular period and societal issues focusing on women-related topics are being discussed in the meetings. The outcomes of these meetings are mostly non-binding suggestions for solving certain issues, and petitions to relevant governmental institutions. At the initial phase, the number of the council members was 22 later on swelled to 30 royal women (Stenslie 2012:38). Not much highlighted is the role of Princess Abta bint Hamoud al Rashid who is married to Crown Prince Muqrin. She was president of the Women's Council when Prince Muqrin was Madinah governor (Raphaeli 2003).

In the Third Generation, women from the royal family have emerged as entrepreneurs and business women. A few have become cultural associates of the government and marketing models for country. Princess like Princess Latifa, a daughter of Fahd and Princess Anoud heads the Princess Anoud Bint Musaed Bin Jalawi Charity Foundation that extends help to distressed sick people. Another remarkable woman is Princess Nouf (daughter of Prince Muqrin) and is a fashion exhibiter and show organiser. She organised the second exhibition of heritage and traditional products under the themed "*Originality of the Past and Present of Ramadan*". This

four-day exhibition was held in 2008 with the participation of with the participation of 100 women designers. (*Saudi Gazette* 2008).

Role of women in the House of Saud has been evolving with the time. Some of the princess belonging to the first and second generations were politically active in decision making process but this has diluted in later years. Women belonging to third and fourth generations have been more active in cultural and educational fronts. Princess the earlier generations were powerful enough to open educational institutions named after them, but that trend later on disappears. For example, Saudi Arabia has two major universities named after Princess Noura and Princess Effat and none since then. It can be said that while women of the earlier generations were decision makers subsequently they emerged only as decision executers. Therefore with the passage of time role of women in the House of Saud has either condensed or shrink owing to political turmoil and power changes.

Multiple marriages and divorces do not appear to have an impact on the role and influence of the al-Saud women. Ibn-Saud, for example, married many women but he always kept four wives at one time, as stipulated in Islam. Thus he often divorced his wives to maintain stipulation of having only four wives. At the same time, none of the sons of Ibn-Saud, were denied a chance of succession to throne, merely because he divorced their mothers. Indeed, the welfare of the former wives maintained by him and this helped in the consolidation of kingdom and to maintain the family unity. This practice was adhered to by his sons. For example King Saud had more than 100 children (Hiro 2013) which indicates the prevalence of numerous wives and multiple marriages. Similarly King Faisal married four women all from powerful tribal families and King Khalid also had four wives. King Fahd married about twelve women but as per rule kept four at any point of time. King Abdullah about 30 wives and companions (al-Rasheed 2009) while King Salman married three times.

One cannot rule out the internal tensions and rivalry among the multiple wives of the Saudi ruler or prince due to jealousy and power politics. The material currently available in public domain, indicates that polygamy does not appear to have undermined the role of al-Saud women. There is an interesting pattern in the multiple marriages. As stipulated by Islam, Saudi princes restricted themselves to having four wives at any given point of time. Due to modernization and education, the number of multiple wives is declining, For Example Prince Waleed is married twice while

Crown Prince Muhammad bin Nayef about married only once. The second and third generation of princes do not maintain multiple wives like their father and grandfathers. Hence, one could tentatively observe that polygamy among the al-Saud family is on the decline. One can attribute two interrelated reasons for this trend. The level of education among the Saudi women, especially among the al-Saud women has increased and hence they are less inclined to be part of the larger harem of wives. One could also attribute this trend to the abolition of slavery during the tenure of King Faisal which ended the practice of keeping concubines (Kechichian 2009).

Given the limited information currently available in public domain, the actual number of wives and children of various kings, crown princes and other key princes is an impossible task. Despite this limitation one could infer that among the in power circles and hierarchical positions of the royal family, women with the minimal space, are trying to make their mark. While divorce is a societal hindrance it does not appear to be an economic or professional concern for educated al-Saud women. Even for women of first and second generations multiple marriages and divorces did not prevent them from marking their influence. For example, Ibn-Saud married Fahda bint Asi Al-Shuraim, who was earlier wife of Rashidi amir whom he defeated and killed. This marriage provided to a political and strengthened his position in consolidating kingdom. Abdullah was the first son born out of their wedlock who later went to become sixth king of Saudi Arabia.

Similarly in successive generation Princess like Ameera Al-Otaibi, Princess Basmah bint Saud and Princess Al-Jawahara bint Ebrahim are divorced women but they proved to be equally influential women. Divorce does not appear to impact their position or position within the royal household. Despite of being divorced, these women have an influential standing in the royal house old. These women are well maintained and the children they bore from the prince have an influential standing in the family.

For example Prince Hassa, wife of Ibn-Saud was divorced by him, but was again married by him. Her sons 'Sudairi Seven' have held important positions in Saudi Government as kings, crown prince and cabinet ministers. Princess Loluwah, daughter of Faisal and Effat, is also a divorcee but she is a strong personality when comes to women education reforms in country. She was never disappeared because of her divorce, rather much more enthusiastically she worked for improving women education curriculum in schools and universities.

There is also Princess Al-Jawahara, spouse of Fahd, who was earlier divorced by her first husband and then married to Fahd. Divorce did not influence her position as she was politically active even after the death of Fahd. She marked her presence felt in societal affairs by opening various health and research organisations in both Saudi Arabia and Abroad. Princess Basmah, daughter of King Saud, was divorced by her husband in 2007. She was married in al-Sharif family and her position did not weaken after divorce but rather she became an influential personality domestically and abroad. She became a strong entrepreneur and journalist, supporting women right's and reforms.

Princess Adila, daughter of Abdullah, whose mother, Aida Fustuq was divorced by her father, did not affect her position in house. She became the face of reform for Royal Family, promoting Saudi Arabia both home and abroad. She bolstered for women right's cause for domestic violence, health and charity cause. Likewise, Princess Ameera Al-Otaibi, was divorced by her Prince Al-Waleed in 2013. Her mother was also a divorcee, but this did not impact Ameer's position and her work as entrepreneur and charity worker. She is also a staunch supporter of women rights in Kingdom. Princess Ameera herself made public statements regarding the driving ban for women of Saudi Arabia in media and is extensively interviewed by well-known media personalities like Christiane Amanpour for CNN and Charlie Rose for CBS Corporation. Therefore one could that multiples marriages and divorces among princes do not appear to undermine the position of women in royal house hold. Divorced women are looked down upon in Arab societies but that is not the case with royal women. They maintained their positions and continue to work diligently for society.

Some of the princesses identified in this study were educated in western schools and universities. However, there is hardly information about their educational life, subjects studies, curricular and non-curricular activities, socio-cultural engagement when they were pursuing education in the West. They do not seem to be accessible to general public as was expected. This comes in stark contrast to present (Third and Fourth) generation princesses than to their predecessors (First and Second) ones. Princess Noura and Effat were more accessible to masses and were much more grounded. This leads to the question: Does third and fourth generations of princesses attended schools and colleges as normal students or as princess?

Royal women have not been active supporters of petitions in Kingdom. Neither have they initiated anyone such or played an active role in the process. Hence, they can be seen as supporters and not as ‘activists’ let alone ‘reformers.’

Conclusion

Women in Saudi Kingdom are marginalised in political and administrative sphere, but through other channels they have emerged as influential. They have formed support channels and networks with in their capacity to strengthen both the ruling family and also pacify the dissent and oppressed women of the Kingdom. These women have used education as a means to garner support and strength from the liberals and moderates. Education has liberated and made women aware about their rights and duties and made them demand changes from the monarchy and religious establishment. Women of royal family have used ancillary occupations like teaching, photography and exhibitions to express their emotions and feeling which otherwise is curbed in society. Only few limited ones have emerged as winners. It is also important to note that social inhibitions like divorces, dress code, physical abuses, and fatwas have not been detrimental to the growth and empowerment of women. Fatwas and Divorces are considered major obstacles for women development as they make them dependent or inhibit their means of progression. Upon their divorce, women in royal family have not stopped but have gained strong momentum for further embattling their aims and aspirations.

Women of royal family have used their familial lineages and positions to influence decisions. Their marriages are pre-arranged based on political calculations which are largely driven by the idea of preserving the royal succession and curbing dissension. This comes as strong factor making the visibility of women in public sphere in society. Royal women have used the positions of their father, brother or husband to make gains, but the argument in support of education is invincible.

Promotion of education enabled al-Saud women to make it a philanthropic and cultural tool of political agenda promotion. They walk on tight rope balancing reforms on one hand and identity based religious considerations of society on the other. Women-initiated education in country worked for its development and upliftment. This enables educated women like Princess Loluwah bint Faisal, Princess Sara bint Faisal, Princess Sara bint Talal, Princess al-Jawahara Fahad bin

Mohammad and many more to question power structure and limitations imposed on them. This also enabled these women of calibre to work as cultural promoters for their country and work in cultural exchanges. Thus education and cultural exchanges have been dramatic areas where royal women have used to impact their influence culturally and socially thus making their influence in politics also indispensable.

Chapter- Four

Women in Civil Society

Reforms, especially with respect to women, do not come easily in Saudi Arabia. This has been the result of gradual and constant efforts by monarchy, civil society protestors and voluntary associations that have eventually led some openings. Small unnoticed and lesser noticed efforts by monarch and cabinet ministers opened some space for women. The kingdom has no formal democratic process but it has some traditional consultation mechanisms, chiefly through traditional meetings, the consultative *majalis* and social sector work through legally protected unions and associations (Montagu 2015:1). To a great extent, the interplay between the royal family and the Wahhabi religious establishment has determined the pace as well as the scope of the reform process (Hamzawy 2006: 4).

Civil society organizations as understood in the West were established only in 1962, the period that coincided with the foundation of Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 1999). The voluntary sector in Saudi Arabia is broad and deep and comprises of charities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), not-for-profit organizations (NPOs), chambers of commerce, and professional and informal associations and groupings (Montagu 2015:6). The charitable sector has expanded considerably in recent years. Around 2008 there were some 200 NPOs and 10 *madrassahs* and in 2013, 600 associations were licensed to operate and currently there are about 950 NPOs, including around 600 charities and 70 *madrassahs*; in other words, there is one NPO for every 39,000 Saudi citizens (Matic and al-Faisal 2012:12, Fride 2013, Montagu 2015:17).

A major thrust came after 11 September terror attacks in the US, when the Saudi civil society started to question about 'Muslim Other' and demanded new reforms and 'compromises' (Meijer and Aarts 2012: 80). Questions were raised as to what Islam allows women to do and what social norms dictate and the fallout of which was the acceptance by King Abdullah that women driving is an issue of mere social hindrance rather than a religious one (al-Rasheed 2007: 16, Montagu 2015:33). Another important demand for reforms came from young generation which is

unemployed¹ resulting in NPOs seeking answer for the masses to find their means while the state-directed *Nitaqat* policy that sought to impose limits on employing expatriate workers (Matic-Al Faisal 2012: 14, Montagu 2015: 12). Thus debates also started to question the rational of religious principles and interpretation of the heritage of Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, whose ideas remains hegemonic for almost 250 years.

Saudi Arabia does not conform to standard concepts of West Asian power systems and civil society.² Caroline Montagu defines by saying that civil society exists in Saudi Arabia at every level since it exists in relation to ‘voluntary sector’ which actively works towards areas where government and administration cannot penetrate and work effectively for development (Montagu 2010: 68-69). Scholars like Mamoun Fandy observed that:

The royal family exists within both civil society and the state simultaneously. The Saudis may be hated as bureaucrats, regional governors, or heads of particular government

¹ According to World Economic Forum in its report *Rethinking Arab Employment 2014* published that unemployment in the kingdom, emphasizing the high number of unemployed males: some 261,000 were jobless in 2013, compared with 217,000 in 2012. Among women, unemployment reached 361,000 in 2013, up from 358,000 in 2012. The average unemployment rate for 2013 was 11.7 per cent, with rates of 6.1 per cent for men and 33.2 per cent for women (World Economic Forum 2014:6).

² According to the standard definitions of Western conception of Civil Society-relationship described between the state and society that in Western terms includes formal voluntary organizations, the rule the law and critically enabling political and state structure. Hence Western scholars have ignored Arab civil society that develops differently in the formal and informal sector. Another important mention comes about Augustus Norton who in his Volumes on *Civil Society in the Middle East* has defined civil society as: “If democracy — as it is known in the west — has a home, it is in civil society, where a mélange of associations, clubs, guilds, syndicates, federations, unions, parties and groups come together to provide a buffer between state and citizen. Although the concept of civil society is resistant to analytical precision, the functioning of civil society is literally and plainly at the heart of participant political systems”(Norton 1995)

Such hard edged definitions do not conform with the kind of civil society and voluntary sector behavior prevalent in Saudi Arabia. As a result, there lacks a deeper study on the working of Civil society and voluntary sector in Saudi Arabia. Therefore a deeper study about the informal civil society structure in the Arab-peripheral states to Kingdom revealed a different and broader definition of Civil Society which fulfills the basic criteria of discussed concept above. According to Walid Kazzuha, Enid Hill and Keiko Sakai in *Civil Society and the Middle East* who comments that “If civil society is viewed in terms of the existence of formal and informal initiatives in society which have a direct bearing on the political level then we might be getting closer to a more focused definition of our subject” (Montagu 69: 2012). Also works by Sheila Carapico in *Civil Society in Yemen*, she states that “Civil society is not a binomial element, either there or not, but a variable that assumes different forms under different circumstances. Rates of activism -of joining, building, publishing, and meeting in the civic realm expand and contract” (Carapico 12:1998). Hence scholars have tried to re-visit the definitions and subject study on issue of Civil Society and Voluntary Sector in Arab States particularly Authoritarian regimes. For deeper insights into the Civil Society development and its structural implications refer to the works of Sami Zubaida in ‘Islam, the State and Democracy: Contrary conceptions in Egypt’ *MERIP Middle East Reports* no 179, Nov—Dec 1992. Also consider the work of Fred Halliday (2005) ‘The Middle East in International Relations’, Cambridge University Press, who looks at the role of NGOs and Civil Society role developing as Transnational Character in such regimes.

agencies, yet they are loved as a magnanimous family at the level of civil society. It is that liminal nature of the royal family that makes it inside government and civil society at the same time (Fandy 1999: 35).

Thus, the royal family is both *al-dawla* (state) and *al-hukuma* (government) and according to Steven Heydemann, a state like Saudi Arabia incorporates and re-shapes civil society to 'upgrade' its rule over the state by assuming the role of a 'performative power' in order to maintain the status quo (Heydemann 2007: 5).

In Saudi Arabia, power resides within the state; civil society functions within and across all boundaries with the state and as a result dividing lines are either blurred or undefined. The NGOs, charitable sector and associations have been major agents for socio-political dialogue and social reform since there is an interactive integrated exchange among the state, the al-Saud and civil society. This provides an essential arena for discussion and dissent among the governing al-Saud family, religious authorities and state subjects (Montagu 2010: 68). Thus, the role of women in state functioning comes as bridging the gap between polarized political and tribal groups on one hand and government on the other. Women come as best candidates to bring people together and to open up the rules and regulations thereby earning to themselves a status of 'social capital'³ (Afif 2010: 9). For example, efforts have been made by al-Nahda, an umbrella women's charity opened by Princess Sara al-Faisal in 1962. It looks for ways to create employment and empowerment of women in Riyadh (al-Mukhtar 2011). Hence, the NGOs and al-Saud are locked together in this process of donations and power consolidation; neither of them can do without the other (Club de Madrid 2009: 144).

In Saudi Arabia "voluntary sector"⁴ means any service-providing non-profit organizations and many of them are pioneers in the areas of social services, social reform, and community welfare. The need for civil society and voluntary organizations is deeply entrenched as they provide multi-purpose services in accordance with social needs (Afif 2010: 5, Matic-Alfaisal 2012: 14-

³ Social capital is defined by James S. Coleman as "being the networks and norms that form connections among members of a society ", and Robert Putnam as being "features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitates coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit". Hence women in Saudi Arabia co-relate the trio-civil society, volunteerism and social capital, where they act themselves as social tool to amass people and work for society development (Afif 9: 2010).

⁴ Volunteering is defined as "any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organization" as according to John Wilson in his article *Volunteerism*.

15). As Stig Stenslie, observed liberal and elites are still not organized in opposition formation as the Islamist and this was witnessed during the municipal elections of 2005 when Islamists exhibited major influence. The al-Saud support to these grass-root organisations comes handy and unquestionable lest the latter fear of power disruption (Stenslie 2012: 15 and 43). Thus, these informal sectors emerge as important link between these factions and ruling monarchy. Women working in voluntary sector have organized themselves systematically and structurally to press their demands such as domestic violence, oppression, health problems,⁵ unemployment and poverty⁶ before state apparatus and to raise their discontent against the prevailing law and conditions (Ali Rida 2003).⁷

Association, membership and involvement of royal members in these voluntary sectors, guilds, clubs, associations, philanthropic organizations and NGOs give strong character to these informal structures. They give recognition, protection, redress, financial support and definite character to civil society efforts.⁸ However, it is important to address the power nexus established among the client-patron relationship within the voluntary sector. Boundaries have become blurred as they depend on types of organization and their objectives (Montagu 2010:76). Hence, the role played by women of royal family comes into picture.

Power is divided in this sector between activists and political patron, who work symbiotically in state development. Patronage without activists and professional expertise would be ineffective and activism without al-Saud patronage would be powerless. Hence the process of reverse

⁵ Organisations like Zem Zem (2005) in Jeddah, Bin Baz project (2007) in Riyadh.

⁶ Special organisations like The Charitable Project for Assisting Youth to Get Married in Jeddah, Um al-Hamam Charity Association in Eastern Province.

⁷ Cases like-Women's Campaign for Refuge against Domestic Violence, which started as shadow group to create statistics and studies and then later on placed itself under, Crown Prince Abdullah's National Guard Hospital, Riyadh. Another case of Council of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the central Riyadh got its patronage from Abdullah, that every ministry and *Majlis-al-Shura* has to consult the council including all government tenders. It acts as pressure group, which has women's section which effectively works towards the inclusion of women in economy running.

⁸ Exemplary efforts of organisations like: al-Rajhi Banking, Prince Walid bin Talal or Abdul Latif Jameel Foundations, al-Birr, have worked and have become service providers of Housing, health, education, social and housing benefits and disability provisions. These organisations have strong royal political support base which manifests its support from al-Saud patronage. An important mention of Royal patronage to business-women in Council of the Saudi Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Riyadh, comes from Princess Adila bint Abdullah bin Abdul al-Aziz, who in 2007, organized a nation-wide conference "Saudi Women's Forum".

Patrimonialism exists to achieve reforms (Montagu 2010:76). Clear examples are of Princess Sara bint Talal bin Abd al-Aziz, the active patron of Down's syndrome Riyadh Charity DSCA which still needs skilled expertise and professional management to run the organization.

Montagu observes that "using the members of the al-Saud to 'get things happening' in an NGO and 'as a route to change' is politically interesting" (2010:76). At the same time, patronage is not always a sure way of getting things done since many charity organizations like *Sanad* (Princess Adila bint Abdullah), *The Mothers of Riyadh* and *al-Eman* have either joined other government umbrella organizations or are in process of getting due legitimization. Above all, changing power equations following successions and marriages also impede and undermine the influence of the royal patrons.

Educated women are now devising newer methods and models for initiating charity and voluntary work. They are joining labour and service sector and are participating in development of society (al-Munajjed 2006:18). Majority of women in royal family have strong financial basis irrespective of their position within the family set-up (housewife or working). Effectiveness comes when these women use their financial positions to either start-up business ventures or use their position in the family to get things done socially and culturally. Younger royal women being imparted with Western education have modulated the native-Islamic culture to 'effectualise' their presence. Being educated and having means and access, the royal women have invested in business-models like 'family run therapy based charity institutions'. They have smartly opted for NPOs which receive high degree of royal patronage and investment.⁹ At times,

⁹ NPOs like Effet University and College (education), King Faisal Foundation (culture), King Khalid Foundation (social affairs), Prince Sultan City (disability) are functional in Saudi Arabia. These organizations were started by royal prince and princess to streamline their charity and philanthropic works. But there are two important things to mention: most of these organizations receive patronage from royal (high degree) members who have huge business investments like in Tabuk Cement and al-Faisaliyah Group etc. and strong business portfolios of CEO's and majority share-holders. Another important point worth considering is that most of these organizations also receive charity from strong business families like al-Oalayan and al-Thunayyan branches from various parts of Kingdom. Integration of such business groups in charity work gives latter opportunity to maneuver funds and stocks.

Women in most of these organizations have either been working as dummy candidates or representatives of strong business men. Most of these organisations have either dissolved or wound up. But in what so ever limited capacity, women at-least get due registrations of their names and identities in such affiliations, which is unlike the case three decades back when women were seen as 'invisible or black' elements of society. Minimal representation at least ensures their listing as citizens of country.

these societies have been caught up in political embroils where they have been alleged to be linked to terrorism or illegal activities (Unger 2004:286).

Thus, increasingly al-Sauds have monitored such modern charity-based societies through governmental means and NGOs and charities are either set up through licenses issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MSA) through royal decrees. Unlike some 320 charities licensed by MSA and six through royal decrees, the National Dialogue was al-Saud Initiative which swept cross-section of citizens. A more detailed account is provided by Suad Afif, who categorized civil society organisations in the country depending on their type, nature and place of registration and identified 872 such civil society organisations baring political outfits (Afif 2010:3).

Scholars have divided the civil society into major categories, namely, non-political, semi-political and political (Kanie 2012:43). The voluntary sector works at four levels as enunciated by Caroline Montagu; first, in the development of associational life using quasi-professional organisations like National Dialogue etc. Second, use charities given by big business families mainly concerned with mental and physical challenges and disabilities like *Abdul Latif Jameel Charity*, SANAD, DSCA (Down Syndrome Charitable Association) etc. These organisations are either run by women for women, or by women for both sexes and in small cases run by both and for both (Afif 2010:5). Third, by developing traditional charities like Department of Zakat and income tax, into a wider range of activities; for example, al-Birr which started as independent organisations and later came under the government working and *al-Nahda*, *al-Wafa* and *al-Khairiyya*. *Al-Nahda* supports women factories in south Riyadh and others have been helping the setting up small artisans and industries for women in Qassaim.

Lastly, independent initiatives at micro-level by local Saudi men and women who form small clubs and associations are characterized as political association until they are legalized or licensed by MSA. Organisations like Saudi Civil and Political Rights Association(ACPRA), Human Rights Monitor–Saudi Arabia, Human Rights First Society (HRFS), Rights Activists Network (RAN) and the Association for the Protection and Defence of Women's Rights in Saudi Arabia come under this category (Kanie 2012: 53-54). Demands for political and human rights reforms come from activists and associations while such pressures for social reforms emanate from activists involved in specialized charities (Montagu 2010:80).

These voluntary organisations have moved from traditional handouts to sustainability and self-reliance. Women NGOs are on the whole sophisticated and well managed, scientific, systematic and understand sustainable development as compared to other NGOs (Afif 2010). It is only through continued women perseverance that re-writing of social and legal laws under Islam has been initiated. According to Kanie, “civil society in Saudi Arabia has a top-down approach nature; it is mainly administrated and controlled from above” and thus “opportunities to establish an association without the support of a member of the royal family is impossible”(Kanie 2012:54). Thus, state has to deal with the dilemma: how to modernize without losing its Islamic identity and creating political dissent?

Due to fears over the Arab Spring, al-Sauds have banned opposition groups and public demonstration of dissent like marches, trade unions and political groups (Meijer and Aarts 2012: 38). Although strong volunteering and volunteerism culture has developed in and around schools and universities (Afif 2010:3) in the form of clubs, trade unions, internet groups and chatting and Whatsapp groups, the country is yet to develop regulations regarding civil society. A Civil Society Law¹⁰ regulating civil society was drafted in 2006 but has still not been passed (Echague 2009:1).

Petition Fever

Tradition of public petition writing to the King started at the beginning of the 1990s due to concerns among activists over issues pertaining to women and human rights. The development of civil society faced a setback after the 1979 Mecca siege, when a group of dissenters under the leadership of Juhayman al-Otaybi captured Mosque which led to widespread unrest and demand in governmental reforms in the country. As a result of this incident, Saudi Arabia rolled back to conservatism and fundamentalism which constrained women freedom and rights. Wahhabi theology gained political momentum along with social restrictions, where growth and development was seen through prism of religion and scriptures.

The 11 September terror attacks jolted Saudi regime, as terrorism in the form of *salafi* ideology was harnessing its support from state *ulemas*. As a result, authorities realized the need to reverse

¹⁰ Civil Society Law-This particular law was intended to regulate the operations not just of charities but also of all associations, such as the country’s cultural or professional associations.

damages done and to fasten reform programmes through civil societies and women-based organisation. In a span of a decade (2000-2010), Saudi Arabia managed to dilute, if not change its image and face to the outside world. In 2003 and 2004, the modernizers drew up new petitions asking for widening civil and human rights, freedom of speech, greater roles for women and a fundamental reform in the educational system (Kaye et al. 2008:105-107). King Fahd slowly initiated the process of reforms but these gained momentum during Abdullah's reign (Hefner 2005: 201).

Two significant petitions in 2003, illustrated the gulf that existed between the Saudi intelligence and the pace of responses emanating from the al-Saud. In January, the so-called *Vision for the Present and Future of the Nation* petition was signed by 104 professors, writers, business and retired officials, including both liberals and conservatives. This was followed in September 2003, with an equally powerful petition, under the title *In Defense of the Nation* (Kechichian 2013:174). These petitions began and ended with pledges of loyalty to the ruling family and subsequently disappeared with time under the threat and pressure from the Minister of Interior Princes Nayef. The then Crown Prince Abdullah shared a different vision and was more concerned about the reforms in country. Eventually after death of King Fahd in August 2005, Abdullah came to power and responded to these demands for reforms. Joshua Craze and Mark Huband observed that “political activism in Saudi Arabia manifests itself in the form of petitions,” even if “the Saudi state is a post-modern pastiche in which several princes compete and co-operate and in which politics is dependent upon the subjective whims of princes who are at the center of patronage networks that in recent years have spread across the globe” (quoted in Kechichian 2013:177).

Since 2011 there have been several petitions that demand social and political reforms. Abdullah's reign witnessed more petitions seeking women's emancipation and adoption of a constitutional monarchy. Among the significant petitions were '*Towards the State of Rights and Institutions* (from Dawlaty)'¹¹, the *Free Youths Coalition*¹², the '*Hunayn Revolution (March*

¹¹ It attracted 1,554 signatures on the internet before the authorities blocked access to it inside the kingdom (*Guardian* 2011). It called on the Saudi Consultative Council to be a fully elected body vested with complete authority to enact regulations and monitor executive authorities. The petition also calls for reform of the judicial system by granting it full independence. Hundreds of notable figures have signed the petition and forwarded it to the king. When the text was posted online, it gained thousands of followers. Among the signatories were notable moderate clerics, as well as Islamo-liberals such as Said Tayeb. Salman Alouda was one of the main signatories of

11)¹³ the *Saudi Revolution (March 20)*, the *Jeddah YouTube Letter to the King*, the *Islamic National Party*, *Saudi Women Revolution*¹⁴, and from the Islamist standpoint, the *Statement of a Call for Reform*.¹⁵ These demanded respect for human rights, freedom of expression, constitutional monarchy, transparent elections, social justice, an end to discrimination, an independent judiciary and ending of corruption, and the granting of full rights to women as citizens.

Besides the central authority, criticisms of the Wahhabi discourse started coming from the liberal prince and princess who owned newspapers like *al-hayat* and *al-Wasat*. The government became tolerant of the diversity as it established King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue that organized series of lectures on national unity (2003), extremism and moderation (2003) and role of women (2004). Thus, activism by and about women started appearing among political religious discourses which led to debates over issues such as health, driving and empowerment.

Petitions concerning women's right to drive surfaced again. For most Saudi woman driving is not a luxury, rather a necessity because the non-availability of public transport. In 2003, for the first time, the Second Dialogue on Women urged monarch to assign a body to study the public transport system for women towards facilitating their mobility (Kechichian 2013:73). Driving issue was seen through a newer prism with the onset of urbanization and women entering the work force. Driving was seen necessity with higher education, family duties and business

the petition entitled "Towards a State of Rights and Institutions." Following his signature, his weekly live programme on the Saudi-owned MBC network was shut down and he was banned from travelling outside Saudi Arabia (mpec 2011).

¹² In early March 2011, youth groups across the country formed a cross-sectarian movement called the 'Free Youth Coalition,' which issued a lengthy list of political and economic demands (reallycoolblog 2011).

¹³ Hunayn revolution-Saudi Arabia in March 2011, was caught up into bloody-revolution in its north-eastern Shia Muslim provinces, clogging the highways into Damman and other cities with busloads of troops in fear of next week's "day of rage" by what is now called the "Hunayn Revolution".

¹⁴ Women demand for reforms took momentum in 2011; it was the first public acts of the newly-formed "Saudi Women Revolution," a movement set up to campaign for the end of Saudi Arabia's discriminatory laws. Their chief aim is ending male guardianship, which means Saudi women often need permission from their husband, father, brother or even son to work, travel, study, marry, or access health care, according to Human Rights Watch. They also want to be allowed to drive, which is forbidden for women in the Kingdom. The Saudi Women Revolution was started as a Facebook page and a discussion topic, or hash tag, on Twitter in February, by Nuha Al Sulaiman (CNN 2011).

¹⁵"A call for reform," signed by Nasir al-Umar and an array of Sahwa clerics (*The Washington Post* 2014).

responsibilities and these imposed an economic cost of employing foreign drivers that the Saudi middle class could not afford (Montagu 2015: 32-33). Until then driving was only seen within social and religious prism, which prohibited monarchy and reformists to work in this direction. There have been various justifications and religious scholars cited the principle of *sad al-dhara'i* (blocking the means), which means blocking anything that may lead to 'evil' (Frank Vogel 2011:63)

On 23 September 2007, over 1,100 activists, both men and women, petitioned King Abdullah to lift the ban on driving for women. The petition, the brainchild of four activists-Fawziyyah al-Ayouni, Wajihah al Huwaydar, Ibhihal Mubarak and Hayfah Usra-called for the establishment of a committee for women's rights to drive. This petition marked major effort by women to break the driving ban and came long after the 6 November 1990 effort by a group of 47 educated women (Kechichian 2013:179).

Women as Entrepreneurs

The role of women in boosting the Kingdom's economy is commendable. Their active participation in trade and commerce are displaying remarkable progress. It is worth noting that the percentage of women engaged in business is growing progressively. As per a report published by the Oxford Strategic Consulting, at the end of year 2003, 20 percent of the businesses in Saudi Arabia were owned by women. Two years later, this rose to 30 percent (Qureshi 2014: 149).

The Ministry of Economy and Planning, under the *Millennium Development Goals-2011 programme of the United Nations*, declared that at the end of 2010, over 47,000 commercial enterprises were owned by women (Qureshi 2014: 149). In its *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World*, the UN Development Programme observes between 20,000 to 40,000 females have independent business ventures in the country (UNDP 2005). Hence, it can be argued that women emerging as entrepreneurs have given empowerment to local women to raise their standard in society. According to Annemarie van

Geel “Saudi women have to articulate their ideas about a Saudi ‘local modernity’ which seem to lead them to an ‘enchanted’ interpretation of modernity” (Geel 2012:75).¹⁶

According to Simone Chambers and Jeffery Kopstein civil society organisations include economy and economic relations as they include associational life, for example, professional associations such as chambers of commerce and trade unions (Chambers and Kopstein 2011:371-372). Asef Bayat includes trade unions and community activism under the category of civil society (Bayat 2010: 8). As a result, the Saudi state has given a corporatist character to these civil society organisations either by supporting them, coming in partnership with them or by incorporating them into the ruling structures (Kanie 2012:38). These organisations have inherited a corporate social responsibility feature which gives legitimacy to social contract character of rentier-based ruling family (Hefner 2005:208, Kanie 2012:45). For example, cooperation between Nasma Holding Company Ltd. and the al-Birr Association assist orphan children in Jeddah.

Active participation in economy by women has resulted in the formation of chamber of commerce in Jeddah, where assertive and entrepreneurial women, through the medium of debate and discussions have formed associations to fight for their rights in the business industry. The Alsayedah Khadijah bint Khwailed Businesswomen’s Center (AKBK) is an illustration of this kind of business engagement.¹⁷ The organization promotes the empowerment of women by making them active participants in national development. King Abdullah made strong efforts for AKBK to break down obstacles that hindered to promote women’s emancipation.¹⁸ Women are

¹⁶ According to her, Max Weber says that ‘enchanted modernity’ being one that is not necessarily secular, dislodging the idea that Islam and modernity are incompatible.

¹⁷ AKBK is part of the Chamber of Commerce in Jeddah, and was established in 2004. Khadijah is the name of the first wife of the prophet Mohammed. According to the AKBK, she was ‘a first-class merchant with a wide network that allowed her to plan and implement her strategies’. She is seen as the greatest role model for all contemporary businesswomen and their source of inspiration, determination and ambition (Montagu 2015:33).

This sense of empowerment comes from education and awareness among women when they relate their present position with women condition in Islamic History, which was side-lined or modified by orthodox clergies of Islam, who wanted to consolidate power by curbing freedom, public appearances and financial independence of women.

¹⁸ It succeeded in changing article 114 of the Labour Regulatory Laws, which stated that the mixing of genders in the workplace is forbidden, and replaced it with a new article for both men and women requiring them to abide by shari‘a law in the workplace, with no further mention of forbidding the mixing of genders. They also succeeded in abolishing those obstacles that prevented a businesswoman from investing in certain business sectors and from holding leadership positions in the private sector (Kanie 2012:46). In 2011, Ministry of Commerce, issued a circular

now allowed access to all businesses without exception, including contracting, real estate and general services. Women have also become board members in private companies; some of the prominent one are like Lubna Olayan (CEO and Chair of Olayan Financial Group), Dr. Nahed Taher (chief Executive of Saudi Arabia Gulf One), Suad al-Husayni Juffali (informal head of Juffali Group), Princess Madwai bint Mohammed bin Abdullah (Luthan Trading Company), Princess Ameera al-Waleed (chairperson of al-Waleed Foundation for Philanthropic works) etc. Lately another key issue discussed among the policy makers is the difference between *ikhtilat* (men and women together in an open space as permissible) and *Khilwa* (man and woman together in an enclosed space as not permissible) as they come as an obstacle to empowerment and growth of women in public spaces (Montagu 2015:8).

This shows that women have been accelerating the growth of the economy as more women chambers of commerce have sprung up in other parts of Saudi Arabia. In the eastern part of the kingdom there is the Eastern Province Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Even in Riyadh, which is relatively rigid and socially conservative than the rest of the country, women have developed their own section in the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It is interesting to note that women-only public spaces like hotels, education sector, labour market, leisure and consumption, heavily demand women as labour force.

Innovations with regard to women-only 'businesses' demand newer technologies, ideas and implementation. Hence, through charities and associations, playgrounds, stadiums, e-learning centers etc. government has been implementing reforms which would have otherwise been opposed by the religious establishment (Geel 2012: 63). Practice of *zakat* and charity dilutes some of the criticisms of the clerics. To ensure reliable communication, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Ministry of Health have segregated divisions for Women (al-Munajjed 1997:87). In order to impart smooth religious communication among females, authorities have opened up religious faculties for women, where they can teach Islamic studies and become *Daiyyas*.

across the kingdom stating that women's business no longer needs a *Wakil* (male power of attorney or business manager) unlike before, but women have to face the compulsion of *mahram* (male- guardianship). Among other problem faced by women impacting their financial independence and social empowerment are: family laws, gender segregation, violence and Civil Society Law (*Saudi gazette* 2009).

Women as ‘balancers’ between Religion and State

Political activism and violence progressed hand-in-hand in Saudi Arabia after 11 September. The intensity of political activism that gathered momentum in 2003 was dubbed the ‘Riyadh Spring’; yet it precipitated a round of arrests and restrictions on political activism (al-Rasheed 2007: 231). The euphoria of the 2003 gave way to disappointment and demoralisation in 2004. The common theme of all calls for reform was a serious quest for unmediated history, theology and politics. However, the outbreak of the wider Arab Uprising garnered US\$130 billion economic package from monarchy, which also included some reforms for women in civil and administrative areas (Haykel 2011).

The society’s opinion on reforms can be divided into four main groups that are contesting for power namely, liberals or modernisers, the Sahwas,¹⁹ Islamists and Shiite Intellectuals and conservative religious leaders (Kanie 2012:40). In terms their attitudes towards gender one could divide them into three main categories, namely, traditionalists, liberal modernists and ultraconservative salafists (Yamani 2000: 117 and 130).²⁰ Scholars have interpreted gender-based reforms quoting *Hadiths* and schools of jurisprudence. The conservative preachers and their followers who make up about 60-70 percent of country’s 20 million population, are oldest, rooted, largest and best-organised groups (Montagu 2015:34). Often liberals and modernity school of thought comes in conflict with reforms since they are seen as a propaganda of Westernisation (*taghreeb*) (Kanie 2012:40). Hence, *Tahrir al-Mara* (liberation of women), either

¹⁹ The Sahwa islamiyya (Islamic awakening or sahwa) in Saudi Arabia first emerged in the 1960s and gripped Saudi universities in the 1970s and 1980s, while it rose to prominence in the 1980s. Sahwis are the group which follow Muslim Brotherhood ideals of political matters and also adhere to traditional Salafi theology of conservative Islam in Saudi Arabia. They have focused their defiance mainly on areas of women and minority rights. The social and political emancipation of Saudi Women became the contested arena between the government and opposition groups. Having lost their political clout they pursued conservative interpretation of the status of women. They represented women as weak and born to be mother and house-wives doing household jobs. Education of women is not a necessity for them. They appropriated gender relations and positioned themselves as ‘guardians’ of the values and rights of women, a position they share with *Jihadis* (International Crisis Group 2004:10).

²⁰ According to traditionalist who is in majority, believe that segregation of women, the veil and polygyny are basic to political and religious obedience and fear that Islamic traditions are threatened by Westerners, modernizing influences. Liberal modernists, who promote engagement with the west and relaxation of the government –enforced Islam, believe women can have careers, providing they do not sacrifice parental responsibilities. The ultra-conservatives Salafists, who adhere to the principle of the first three generation of Islam, believe Saudi women should not work and that any reform must take place within Islam. A small group of radical Salafists believe there is “war” between the West and Islam, and blame the ruling elite for moral degeneration and lack of protection from a rapacious United State (International Crisis Group 2004:12).

mentioned literally or described as such, is associated with *taghrib* (Westernisation) (Kanie 2012:52, Geel 2012:76). Therefore advancement towards human rights and women-based issues inclusive of modernity has to be seen in dissociation with West-based ideals.²¹

According to Asma Barlas theologian like Ulamah Shaykhs Qays bin Mohammed bin Ábdullatif Al Mubarak believe that men and women should intermingle in scholarly meeting because “at the time of the Prophet women and men were permitted to listen and discuss issues together,” and hence it is was not controversial issues then and ought not be one today (Barlas 2002). But the debate did not stop there since, Saudi members of the Board of *Imamah Al Kubrah* (The Highest Imamate), suggested that women cannot be possibly included in the councils and meetings because Prophet Mohammed declared that “no people shall succeed if ruled by a woman.” This from a widely quoted Hadith attributed to three separate sources: al-Bukharih, al-Tirmidhih and al-Nassaíh and has been used by scholars who not only claim that it was prohibited for women to take part in general guardianship and public affairs, but they also beleived in its literal interpretation The circumstances under which this *Hadith* was attributed were political and not necessarily related to gender. Hence, over the years, gender segregation and protection of female honour have become corner stones of Saudi’s Interpretation of Islam (Doumato 2009:25).

The debate between liberals and conservatives extended to the question the office grand mufti, considering it an invention, a *bi’da* (innovation), circumscribing religious interpretation and creating *kahanut* (clergy). It also debated the benefits of the state-appointed Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice, *hayat al-amr bil-maruf wal-nahy an al-munkar*. This debate made status of women and gender issues an integral part. A distinction began to emerge between the *Sharia* position on gender issues and what is referred to as *tarasubat wa tarakumat ijtimá íyya* (social norms) (al-Rasheed 2007:16).

Over the years, the salafists and conservative scholars have extrapolated a general policy that prohibits women from taking charge of political affairs from a prophecy that was consummated

²¹ Organisations such as National Intercommunications Committee, the Committee for Women Driving, the Family Law Initiative, and the Committee against Minor Marriages, which contemporized the social problems of Saudi Society dissociating reforms from Westernization. They demanded reforms where Islam was seen in adherence to modernity. This understanding gradually developed since women were imparted education and religious learning and understanding.

in a specific event often blaming liberals to be infidels and kafirs (Kechichian 2013: 50). But after the National Dialogue of 2003, society gained awareness and hence through congregations and discussions about social and economic issues which made social awareness, leading to question the monarchy about prevalent problems. In recent years, through cyberspace, organisation of lectures and meetings in the *diwaniyat*²², publishing (poetry, articles, pamphlets) and writing petitions and books that activism gradually gained momentum. According to Caroline Montagu, reversal of tribalism is leading to growth of *Diwaniyyat*, since dissent and dissatisfied people are finding these group discussions to be more focused and result oriented (Montagu 2015:16). Under the *islahiyyat* (female reformer) programme on Radio Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA) the debate on gender issues have raised important concern, which was actively broadcasted despite strong religious protest (Niblock 2006; al-Rasheed 2007: 249). Women *Daiyyas* have enabled local women to challenge religious actors, as they have started speaking in congregations, universities and mosques (Jamjoom 2009:555). But Saudi women still await the appointment of female judges in courts as until now they can only practice as lawyers (Geel 2012:71).

Women novelists and poetry writers have focused on religious views and morality in the society to promote awareness and activism. The most prominent ones are Qamasha al-Aliyan, Raja al-Sani', Saba al-Hazar, Warda Abdul Malik, Zainab Hanafi and Miral al-Tahawi (Geel 2012; al-Rasheed 2015). Social oppression, problems relating to women's sexuality and abuse and discrimination of women in the parental house, marriage and in society as a whole are dealt with by these novelists. Marriage is often presented as a prison, with the husband or a male member of the family as the guardian of that prison with religion being the law regulating that prison life (Geel 2012). These writers have break taboos by targeting and heavily criticizing the religious elite. However, negative reactions from the ulema to such postings forced King Abdullah to issue a royal degree imposing a ban on some of these publication.²³

²² Diwaniyat is specific form of civil society in Saudi Arabia like private cultural forums or salons in which weekly lectures are organized like Sunday Group (al-Multaqa al-Ahadi), Tuesday Club (*Thulathah*) etc. These are informal groupings that are mainly based on family, tribal, intellectual or business ties. Several women based Diwaniyyat exist which have encouraged women issues discussion and even encouraged women to stand in 2005 election (Geel 2012:71).

²³ Banned literature includes book on the women empowerment and historical role of Arabic women in self-liberation for eg. Amin's book *Tahrir al-mar'a* and Abu Shuqqah's book *Tahrir al-mar'a fi asr al-risala* (The

Another means of promoting networked and group-led associations is through internet and virtual civil society platforms. Youth politicization and activism had made consequential impact on the Saudi volunteered network and civil society reforms (Yamani 2010: 12-14). The youth have congregated irrespective gender and hence ‘a new political culture’ has been emerging which is uncontrolled and un-negotiable by Saudi authorities (Yamani 2010: 33-34, Montagu 2015: 19-20). As of 2013 there are about 2.8 million active Saudi twitter users, which account for 40 percent of all active Twitter users in the Arab World. Social media like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Youtube-make about 60 percent of Saudi online activities (Masry 2015: 36, Arab Social Media Report 2014). Thus, in the wake of the protest calls for ‘Ban on Drive’, women from different parts of the kingdom have uploaded their videos on You-tube showing themselves driving. It is interesting to note that in their media interviews Princess Ameera, Princess Loluwah bint Faisal, Princess Reema bint Mohammed etc, have demanded removal of ban on driving. Often these royal women have been supported by male members of the family (al-Rasheed 2015:303).

Saudi Arabia has been distributing and exporting vast religious literature that fall into four categories: first, the *ibadat* literature, whose main objective is the codification of the practice of Islamic rituals according to Wahhabi interpretations; second, literature that denounces the practices of other Muslims (including those who perform rituals differently or believe in other interpretations); third, literature dealing with Muslim women; and fourth, literature defining relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Any Saudi-sponsored religious center abroad had sample literature covering all these areas (al-Rasheed 2007: 127).

The literature and discourse on women exported by authorities abroad reflect the position and image of women in country. Vast amount of these texts depict the Saudi regime as the guardian of women’s honour (extension of domestic social policy) and reflects Muslim women as being elevated creatures, who have rights and obligations. It often sets native women in an honourable space above *jahili* and Western women²⁴ and Muslim women are depicted as enjoying more

Liberation of Women in the Age of the Prophet’s Mission) which are useful for reclaiming Islamic history and the role of women therein.

²⁴ The Period of *Jahiliyya* and western civilization, both are considered by Wahhabis, Salafists and Sahwis as period of ignorance, oppression and abuse where women have no rights and were considered secondary to men. It is interesting to note that Sayyid Qutb, member of Muslim Brotherhood (which has been banned in Saudi Arabia) has

rights and respect but as potentially weak elements (*daif*) susceptible to corruption by West. Literature concerns more about women's her lifestyle, dress, etiquets and personal hygienic rather than her rights enshrined in Islam which is character of general political culture in Arabia.²⁵ Obsession with the female body and exclusion of other relevant educational material has gained a pejorative name. Their opponents, both Islamist and liberals, secretly refer to them as *mashaykh al-haydh* ('the sheikhs of menstruation') (al-Rasheed 2007:131). According to Madawi al-Rasheed (2007) "Saudi Wahhabi discourse creates the illusion of empowerment, an empowerment that is achieved by complying with rigid rules and fatwas that regulate almost every aspect of one's life, body and relations with others. It is the new 'science' of young Muslims" (al-Rasheed 2007: 132).

The terms 'empowerment' (*tamkin al-mar'a*), 'the rise of women' (*nuhud al-mar'a*) and 'liberation of women' (*tahrir al-mar'a*) are used interchangeably in Saudi political discourse (Geel 2012:70). As a result, it results in problems and confusion for policy makers and invites religious wrath. Empowerment has direct bearing on the question of 'being empowered' wherein question of *mahram* (guardianship system) which involved male supervision and clashes with women empowerment.

denoted same position and understanding of women role in society. He confirms with the view that 'women in west 'are shameless and uncivilized and oppressed, since men of the society are not able to take proper care of them. Therefore, he demands that pious men should uptake their attributed roles in Islamic societies so that women can perform their only roles as house-wives, mothers and daughters. More similarity is drawn when one compares the education pattern in Saudi Arabia three decades back and education professed by him for women in Egypt (Calvert 2009).

Therefore the similarity in Sayyid Qutb views and Wahhabis views shows women distressed position in Islamic societies like Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

²⁵ Issues relevant to Muslim women's education involve *ahkam* (rules) concerning the body. The focus is on biological functions (menstruation, other types of bleeding and birth), dress and the veil, worship (prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage), marriage and relations with men. No educational material on women's general rights in Islam is included. al-Fawzan's contribution to Muslim women's education is concerned with the biological female life cycle (birth, marriage and death), purity and ablution, and covering the body in order not to cause chaos or lead men astray. Women potentially undermine state piety and virtue; therefore they need to be controlled. Controlling women is thus an extension of the religio-political orientation of the Wahhabi tradition. The discourse that is directed towards women produces not only acquiescent females but also dependent women, whose biological functions cannot be handled without consulting a male religious scholar. Women's dependence on continuous fatwas dealing with the minute details of their bodily functions and worship ensures control in this life and salvation in the after-life (al-Rasheed 2007:130).

Madawi al-Rasheed quotes MIRA director, Saad al-Faqih who says that “gender quality in country cannot be understood as what exists in west but promotes gender complimentary” (al-Rasheed 2007: 247). According to him men and women play complementary roles as specified and defined by *Sharia*²⁶ and hence, social reforms have to come from three levels of society: tribal-patrilineal structure, religious establishment and monarchy. Confusion arises when *Sharia* is confused with the social tradition, which makes religion and social change inseparable. Therefore, education and economic empowerment leading to social changes cannot be seen separately as one leads to the other. Thus, women have emerged as balancers between-state and religious establishment; civil society and state; public and personal spaces and at last veils and ‘un-veils’. They have imparted reforms undertaking national development character which balanced changes in ‘Saudi Way’ (Cordesman 2003:156).

Al-Saud Princess: Role and Contribution

Hierarchy shadows the al-Saud princes and likewise is rooted on the principles of age and seniority. The most influential women are the few surviving daughters of Abd al-Aziz such as Princess Loluwah, Princess al-Johara and Princess Latifa. Because of the patrimonial origin and age, these princesses enjoy the greatest respect and honour in the family. The women within the al-Saud family having being in the forefront of civil society works and reforms have created certain benchmarks for other women in the Kingdom. Women within royal house hold belong to various age groups and therefore there can be no clear demarcation in terms of the time frame and age group when discussing their role. Al-Saud women have been playing an important role in reforming the country in whatever capacity (under religious and cultural limitations) they could. Following section gives a detailed account about these women, their position, role and their entrepreneur interests. As discussed in the third chapter, the women are classified and segregated into the four generations.

²⁶ The official ulama use restrictions on women in an attempt to increase their legitimacy, but in fact they are not capable of separating social practice from the Islamic tradition. According to him reforming gender relations invokes a paternalistic and protective approach. Women are seen as *al-unsor al-daif* (the weak element), who need protection from men and the unjust state. Neither men nor women decide on women’s rights. The final judgement is the Qur’an and the tradition of the prophet (al-Rasheed 2007:247).

First and Second Generations

Princess Loluwah bint Abdul Aziz al-Saud (1928–2008) was a daughter of Ibn-Saud and Hassa bint Ahmad al-Sudairi. She was also full sister of Sudairi brothers and was the eldest sister of King Fahd. Married to Prince Faisal bin Turki al-Abdullah in 1951, she had invested in al-Khaleej Vegetable Oil and Ghee Company (Nabati), Dammam, National Agricultural Marketing Company (Thimar), Riyadh, al-Mudun Travel Services Company, Riyadh Rana Investment Company and in Saudi Cables Company, Jeddah, a stock company. She established the al-Zezphone Establishment Company in 1979 with its initial capital of SR 16.75 million. In 1994, it recorded sales of SR 229 million and its assets stood at SR 74 million (Sabri 2001: 161-62).

Princess Madhawi bint Abdul Aziz al-Saud (1939) is a full-sister of Princess Nawwaf and Talal and is married to Prince Saad bin Mohammed bin Abdul Aziz (Mohammed Branch). She owns Princess Madhawi bint Abdul Aziz Petroleum Marketing Company and prime stakes in al-Saad Company in Riyadh with her son, Saud. She also holds half a million stake in Saudi al-Baraka Projects Company in Jeddah and has investments in other companies (Sabri 2001: 162).

Princess al-Anood Bint Abd al-Aziz bin Musaed bin Jawali al-Saud was the wife of King Fahd and a staunch philanthropist. Her Princess al-Anood Bint Abd al-Aziz bin Musaed bin Jawali al-Saud Charitable Foundation was established through a Royal Decree in 2000 and it has a strong presence of women of royal household including her daughter Latifah who heads the women committee (Huzaim 2014: 28).

Princess Sultana bint Turki al-Sudairi who was first wife of King Salman who had supported the Prince Fahd bin Salman Charitable Society for the Care of Kidney Patients and other charitable organizations in the country. She was known for her noble qualities and support for the poor and needy (*The Siasat Daily* 2011). She received support from Salman (then Crown Prince) to create a women's section at Riyadh *Daily* Arabic newspaper, a dream she realized with Hiya al-Munai and Khairiyah al-Saqqaf (Journalist and academicians) (*Arab News* 2015).

A National Awareness Campaign to Combat Breast Cancer was inaugurated in 2009 in Riyadh. This was led by Princess Hessah bint Trad al-Shaalan wife of King Abdullah with their daughter Princess Rima served as president for Zahra Breast Cancer Association which led this campaign (Saudi Embassy 2009). Princess Samira Mokhtar al-Sadaawi (1944) (CDDNI 2012) was the first

woman to hold the position of a director of a company and she heads the British-based Sussex Gardens Limited since 1991. She is wife of Prince Mansour and also holds stakes in Saudi International Military Services Company (SEEMS) (Sabri 2001: 81). She held directorship of Independent Military Sales (I.M.S.) Limited and Saudi Oil Services (S.O.S.) Limited (Companydirectorcheck 2015; Duedil 2009).

Third Generation

Princess Moudi is a philanthropist and a daughter of King Khalid and Sita bint Fahd Al Damir. She received basic education in Riyadh and studied French and is married to Abdul Rahman, son of King Faisal. They have three children and two daughters and a son, Saud. She is among the first female members of the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia since January 2013 (Friedman 2013:1). Moreover, she is the general secretary the King Khalid Foundation and the chair of its investment committee (Kkfeng 2013). She is the general secretary of the Al Nahda Foundation²⁷ and a board member of the Saut, agency of the down syndrome foundation in the country (Saut 2012). In 2011, she began to provide fellowships under the Legatum Center to Saudi students attending Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Legatum 2012). In January 2013, along with Sara bint Faisal, daughter of King Faisal, Princess Moudi was among the first 30 women appointed to the Saudi consultative assembly (Friedman 2013:1).

Princess Sara Saud is daughter of King Faisal and Effat al-Thunayan and is an activist for women and children welfare. She is married to prince Mohammed bin Saud bin Abdul Aziz, who was Governor of al-Baha province (1987-2010), and has invested in al-Tadhamun Development and Real Estate Investment (Jeddah), Golden Threads Co (Riyadh) and Alfa Universal Company (Jeddah) (Sabri 2001:72). She established one of the first charitable organisations in the country, al-Nahda, which was awarded the first Chaillot prize for Human rights organization in the Gulf in 2009 (Cross Border Information 2013). She also established the private al-Tarbeya Al Islamiya Schools in 1964 and is the chair of Effat University's board of founders (Effat University 2015) and board of trustees (Gulf States Newsletter 946: 2013). She

²⁷ Al-Nahda Philanthropic society was founded in 1961. It provides extensive assistance to poor families, with financial help for housing and provision in kind of donations, food, equipment and school supplies. The association has launched a number of pioneer projects such as the provision of housing to underprivileged families, the establishment of Down's syndrome school and the development of projects for the employment of women in factories.

serves as a member of the various organisations including Maharat Center. Along with Princess Moudi bint Khalid, she was the first female members of the Consultative *Majlis al-Shura* since January 2013 (Friedman 2013:1). For her outstanding contribution to the welfare of woman, she was awarded King Abdulaziz Medal of First Class in May 2013.

Princess Haifa, who is also daughter of King Faisal and Effat is the chairperson of Zahra Breast Cancer Association (*Arab News* 2013) and serves as the board member of Effat University. In 2013, Princess Haifa launched the *Life Awaits You* national breast cancer awareness campaign to mark the international breast cancer awareness. Princess Hafia is married to Prince Bandar bin Sultan, who served as the Saudi ambassador in Washington during 1983-2005. She holds stakes in al-Tadhamun Development and Real Estate Investment Company, Ana'am al-Jazeera Trading Company (Riyadh), al-Hama Development and Commercial Agencies Company and Alfa Universal Company (Sabri 2001:74).

Princess Hussa (b.1974) is a daughter of King Salman and Princess Sultana and her social and humanitarian character comes from her mother who herself was a staunch philanthropist. According to her, her mother contributed to cultural, charity and social projects, and supported Saudi women in all areas (*Arab News* 2015). She is a researcher and associate professor of law at Prince Sultan University and actively works to improve the standing of women within society and family (Maktoob 2014). She recently launched the Makkah charitable investment project, comprising of two hotels, to be named after father, King Salman, and her late uncle Prince Sultan, former crown prince and defense minister (*Arab News* 2015).

Prince Hussa has marked her presence by organizing events like career day at Prince Sultan University in 2014, making donations at colleges, attending the Creativity Awards 2015 and charity fair in Makkah organized by the Disabled Children's Association (DCA) (Maktoob 2014; *Arab News* 2015; *Arab News* 2015). Under her patronage, job exhibition in 2014 was organized, in which, King Salman Institute for Studies and Consulting Services provided services to women job seekers (PSISCS 2013). She believes that Saudi policies are supportive of female empowerment in general (Maktoob 2014). In her speech at the inauguration of the seventh career day exhibition at the Girls College at Prince Sultan University, she explained that the family is the core of society and whether a family, educational institution, or charitable society, Saudi women and men work for the sake of society, the country and God (Maktoob 2014).

Princess Basmah bint Saud bin Abdul Aziz (b. 1964) is a Saudi businesswoman living currently in London (Basmahbint Saud 2013) and is the 115th and youngest of King Saud's children (*The Independent* 2012). Her mother was a Syrian-born woman, Jamila Merhi (Basmahbint Saud 2013), who was chosen for her future husband when she visited Mecca on the hajj (Milmo 2012). Basmah had minimal interaction with her father as she saw him only twice when she was five (Mendick 2013) and was brought-up in Lebanon and Britain (Basmahbint Saud 2013; Milmo 2012). In 2003, in Beirut she attended a French school, where she studied medicine, psychology and English literature at the Beirut Arab University and in Britain, she attended a Hertfordshire girls' school and a College in London, before spending two years studying in Switzerland (Milmo 2012; Basmahbint Saud 2013).

Princess Basmah was married to a member of the Al-Sharif family in 1988 but the couple divorced in 2007 (Basmahbint Saud 2013). She is a mother with five children (three daughters and two sons), (Milmo 2012) and she wrote for various Arab media outlets including *al-Medina Weekly Newspaper*, *al-Hayat*, *al-Ahram*, *Nisf al-Dunya* and *Sayidaty* English magazine (Basmahbint Saud 2013). Basmah launched a chain of restaurants in Saudi Arabia and she plans to expand them into Britain (Milmo 2012). In 2008, she founded a media firm, Media Ecco (Basmahbint Saud 2013) and heads Inseed Company which specialized in restaurants, entertainment and marketing, Head of the Board of "Invireo Company" for environment solutions, and Head of the Board of International Saudi Life Echo Centre. In 2008, she launched a number of food-brands popularizing Arab cuisine to the British public and launched *The Lanterns United Global*, a network of people and organisations working towards a more egalitarian world (Basmahbint Saud 2013). She established the Basmah Comprehensive Centre for Women Security Training and plans to establish "Basmah international school centre for children" which will carry out a Canadian curriculum (UCLA 2015).

Princess Basmah advocates reforms in Saudi Arabia and is an active participant of different social institutions and human rights organizations (MEMRI 2012). She openly expresses her views in Arab and international media highlighting life conditions of Saudis, particularly of women (MEMRI 2012). However, her criticisms are not directed at the royal family but the Saudi governors and other middle-level administrators (Milmo 2012). Her journalism and blogging focuses on women issues pertaining to dresses, divorce laws, educational system,

constitution, reforms of social services, changes in the role of the *mahram* and about bans on mixed gatherings of men and women. These ideas have drawn criticisms from Saudi officials who begun censoring her articles (BBC 2012; Milmo 2012). She argues that religious establishment needs to be reformed so that such organisation cannot misuse Islamic *fiqh* but can play a constructive role in modernising society (MEMRI 2011). On 8 April 2012, Basmah told BBC that she wished to see many changes in Saudi Arabia but believed that it was not the right time for women to be allowed to drive since the country is not well-equipped with harassment and women public appearance laws (BBC 2012).

Apart from her media presence, Basmah is often embroiled in allegations and controversies. In April 2010, she wrote in *al-Madina* saying that she could not find any Qur'anic or Islamic historical basis for a state institution to promote virtue and prevent vice, and argued that the arrests and beatings by religious police lead to an incorrect impression about Islam (*al-Madina* 2010). In 2013, she vehemently opposed the peculiar punishment of paralyzing of a Saudi national by a Saudi court and observed that it was not acceptable on humanitarian or religious grounds (BBC 2013). In February 2013, she was caught up by media when she clarified about 'fake' visuals showing her smoking and blowing a kiss in front of a PC camera without a veil (Mendick 2015). Princess Basmah is clearly an example of empowered women who have moved out of their comfort zones of homes and made their identity. She owns a website which gives a biographical account of her life and her role in society.

Princess Fahda a Saudi artist born in 1953 is the daughter of King Saud. She received primary education in al-Karimat School, Riyadh until 1964 and then attended English boarding school in Beirut. In 1969, she completed her high school education at the Beirut Evangelical School for girls, an American school. She received her bachelor's degree in political sciences from Beirut College for Women (now the Lebanese American University) in 1974 and a Master of Arts degree in political sciences from the American University of Beirut in 1976. Then she pursued studied in the School of Oriental and African Studies, London for one year and moved to Paris to study art and participated in courses on Islamic geometric patterns. Fahda participated in some exhibitions that have feminist focus through her watercolours (Greenboxmuseum 2013). Such exhibitions were organized by the Royal Society of Fine Arts in Jordan and the Pan-Mediterranean Women Artists Network of Greece aimed at eliminating negative stereotypes

concerning women across the Islamic world (AltMuslimah 2010). Another was held in Australia in January-March 2008 under the organization of the Interfaith Centre of Melbourne (Sameera 2010). Her watercolour work in this exhibition entitled *Three Women* is a visual representation of the Japanese Golden Rule “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” so dominant in the Islamic world (AltMuslimah 2010; Greenboxmuseum 2013). In addition, Princess Fahda supported the exhibitions of other women artists in Saudi Arabia; for instance that of Farha Sayeed, an Indian artist, who focuses on decoration of eggs (Eggdeco 2014).

In 2009, Fahda expressed strong anti-Zionist views in her newspaper columns and wrote several articles on similar political topics in leading Saudi newspapers such as *Okaz* and *Arab News* (MEMRI 2009). Like her sister, Basma bint Saud, she is also concerned with women's problems. In February 2007, her article on “Saudi women’s concerns” was published in *al-Hayat* wherein she observed that continuing debate about the rights of women in Saudi society has been “pivotal to the nation's renaissance”. She is described as a traditionalist and she supports reform towards women, but largely depending on the country’s own values, including religious values (Xrdarabia 2008). Princess Fahda painted pictures of a book dedicated to her father published by King Saud foundation and is also the president of the Jeddah-based al-Faisaliyah women’s welfare society that provided assistance to more than 6,000 families or 48,000 individuals, mostly women. She also founded the first Center for Autism in the Arab world (Xrdarabia 2008).

Princess Latifa is the daughter of King Fahd and Princess Anoud bint Abdul Aziz bin Musaed al-Saud. She heads the Women’s Council at Princess Anoud Bint Musaed Bin Jalawi Charity Foundation which aims to extend help to distressed sick people. Princess Latifa is married to Prince Khalid bin Saud bin Mohammed (Arab Royal family) and her Princess Latifa Bint Fahd Center in Riyadh has been instrumental in supporting poor patients through humanitarian and charitable services. The center provides shelter to sick people who came from outside to receive treatment at King Fahd Medical City and extends moral and material support. The center also extends psychological and social rehabilitation services and seeks to address problems faced by outpatients visiting the medical city (al-Otaibi 2013). In late 2013, she was in media after she bought a historical Geneva estate that once belonged to a former Swiss president for 57.5 million Swiss francs (US\$62 million).

Princess Adila is another influential member of the royal family and is the daughter of King Abdullah and his Lebanese wife, Aida Fustuq. Her parents divorced later. She is one of the kingdom's few princesses who could influence the political development in women-related areas such as education, employment and health. Princess Adila was married to her cousin Faisal bin Abdullah (Henderson 2009) who served as the education minister from February 2009 to December 2013, which gave Adila support to forward her opinion and ideas more strongly among public.

Princess Adila was born in Beirut, Lebanon and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from King Saud University (Stenslie 2011:74). She is one of the few Saudi princesses who enjoyed a semi-public role (Dickey 2009) and acted as the public face of her father, King Abdullah (Henderson 2009). She says that her father does not believe women are inferior to men and he would like to see their greater involvement in society (Lichter 2009:283). She is a known advocate of women's right to drive (Henderson 2009), women's health awareness and their legal rights (*APS Review Oil Market Trends* 2005). She spoke out against domestic violence and supported women's groups and organization (Murphy 2010). In March 2008 Saudi Arabia had its first public debate on domestic abuse with Princess Adila as the keynote speaker. She serves as a vice chair for National Family Safety Programme, an agency created by royal decree with the mandate to develop a national strategy for preventing family violence (Murphy 2010).

Princess Adila is the patron of many charitable foundations including National Home Health Care Foundation; consultative committee of the Saudi Heritage Preservation Society and National Museum, Sanad Children's Cancer Support Society; and National Family Safety Programme (Montagu 2012: 75). She headed a delegation that visited India in 2012 (*Deccan Herald* 2012). She supported the business women of the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry and is a patron of "Saudi Women's Forum", a women's conference held in Jeddah in 2007 (Montagu 2012:75).

Adila started social work after becoming president of the National Organization for Home Health Care in the Western Region in 1997. In an interview with *Arab News* in 2006 she said:

My experience with voluntary work gradually widened to head the Sanad Charity Society for the Care of Children Suffering from Cancer, the advisory committee for the National

Museum in Riyadh, the Friends of Health in Taif and the Committee for Businesswomen at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I am also involved with the Khadijah Bint Khowailed Center and the women's advisory committee for the King Abdul Aziz and his Companions Foundation for the Gifted in addition to several other activities in the area of culture and health for the promotion of women's empowerment (Badr 2006).

In an interview to Mona al-Munajjed published in 2011 she: "I am only one part of this whole society and I am presenting my point of view. However, we cannot go back. We need to become more liberal and we need to change." She strongly states that Western media stereotypes Arab Women and overlooks their significant ambitions and progress, but she believes that the greater transparency since 11 September attacks will help remove these distortions. She believes that wearing the niqab is a tradition and the scarf is a better alternative.

Princess Madhawi bint Musaid is the daughter of Prince Musaid and is associated with the Riyadh-based al-Wafa Women's Welfare society. She holds interests in Décor Corner (Style) Company, and Saudi Jewellery and Precious Items Company, both based in Riyadh. In her effort to increase women employment she signed an agreement with King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST), on behalf of her al-Manahil Recreational Centres and according to her the agreement would bolster cooperation between "Deem al-Manahil"²⁸ and Bader Programme through training and financial support to projects presented by Saudi women (Rasooldeen 2013).

Princess Noura bint Mohammed Abdul wife of Prince Faisal bin Bandar, governor of al-Qassim province from May 1992 and January 2015. Her involvement in the activities of the King Abdul Aziz Women's Charity Committee has afforded it a degree of protection from religious conservatives who oppose women working outside the home. In her capacity she is meeting with women of various professions, including teachers, social workers, physicians, nurses. The progressive-minded princess who is helping women in Buraida has acquired a devoted band of supports over her 17 years' of service.

²⁸ Princess Madawi bint Musaid bin Abdul-Aziz Fund for the Development of Women (Deem al-Manahan) is the organisation which aims at providing assistance to Saudi female entrepreneurs.

In her early 40s, Noura was born in Riyadh and majored in Arabic at King Saud University. A mother of four, she has three grandchildren. She has a special interest in programmes that protect women and children from violence, promote early childhood development and preserve Saudi cultural heritage. She holds an 'open house' for visitors who wish to come and discuss their problems and require her help. Princess Noura said she has never had problems with religious conservatives because "all what I do is real Islam. I didn't do anything against Islam. I speak with you heart to heart. I work on all these projects and I didn't have a problem" (Murphy 2008). She does not get involved in the debate of 'veiling' since she considers it as 'controversial.' Thus unlike other princess, she prefers to remain 'traditional' in her lifestyle and outlook but her work speaks a lot about her modern outlook towards life.

Princess Jawahir bint Nayef was brought up by Princess Jawahir bint Abdul Aziz, her paternal aunt. She is the only daughter of Noura bint Saad al-Farraj, who was divorced by his father, Prince Nayef (Crown Prince during 27 October 2011- 16 June 2012). Jawahir's mother died in August 1994 and she is married to Prince Mohammed bin Fahd who was earlier governor of the eastern province. She has stakes in National Agricultural Marketing Company (Sabri 2001:137) and holds strong position in the Women Committee of Princess al-Anood Bint Abd al-Aziz bin MUSAED bin Jawali al-Saud Charitable Foundation (Huzaim 2014: 28).

Princess Sara bint Nayef bin Abdul Aziz is daughter of Princess Al Johara and Prince Nayef. She is the owner of Saks Fifth Avenue, jewellery departmental store chain and is also associated with Al Nahda Women's Society Center for Rehabilitation and Training, which is the training and skill development center for young women. (al-Rakan 2004).

Princess Basma bint Majid is the daughter of Prince Majid and the wife of Prince Saud bint Abdullah bin Faisal. She holds stake in Riyadh-based United Advanced Preventive System Company and is also important shareholder in Alfa Universal Company (Sabri 2001:60). She opened the new, stand-alone boutique for the popular Bsat ar Reeh Ramadan bazaar (Mossalli 2011). Basma opines that Arab people have an old, peculiar and strong cultural civilization unlike the Americans and is reported to have served as the head of the cultural and heritage committee at al-Nahda Women's Charitable Society (Abunasr 2000).

Princess Jawaher bint Majid, the daughter of Prince Majid bint Abdul Aziz, is the first Saudi woman to have been granted the title of the patron of arts (*The Daily Star* 2014). She has been active in encouraging and inspiring art works (al-Mansouria 2012) and helped in the establishment of al-Mansouria Foundation and making its global presence (Saudiartguide 2012; Dailystar 2014). In 2014, she chaired the competition *My Country in My Eyes* organized by the Saudi Art Council. This competition was held to commemorate the 84th anniversary of the establishment of the Kingdom thus celebrating the National Day (*Saudi Gazette* 2014).

Having born and brought-up in Riyadh, in progressive and liberal environment, Princess Sara bint Talal, the daughter of Prince Talal, is often been associated with ‘Free Officers Movement.’ and Nicknamed “Little Barbie” (because of her beauty and material well being). Sara is one royal often caught up about questions of women rights and freedom. Born in 1973, she studied in King Saud University, Riyadh and was under continuous guidance of an English nanny. This imparted liberal, free values and often in her interviews she mentioned about celebrating Christmas and watching movies (Miles and Mendick 2012). She ran a local charity organization in Saudi Arabia in mid-2000s and she came to spotlight in August 2005, when she demanded transparency and clear mechanism for Saudi succession (Khalil 2005). She was in news when she experienced an inheritance dispute with his brother, Prince Turki bint Talal, over their late mother’s £325 million fortune (*Daily Mail* 2012).

Princess Reema bint Bandar is an active entrepreneur born to Prince Bandar bin Sultan and Princess Haifa bint Faisal. She spent her formative years in the US, where her father was the ambassador from 1983 to 2005 (Hubbard 2013). She attended the Mount Vernon College of George Washington University and, after graduation, returned to Riyadh in 2005 (Armstrong 2014). While she was studying for her degree in museum studies, Princess Reema interned at L’Institut du Monde Arab in Paris and at the Sackler Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (Armstrong 2014). She also collaborated with a curator at the Field Museum in Chicago, while her mother's *Haifa Faisal Collection* of art was displayed there (Armstrong 2014).

After returning to Saudi Arabia, Princess Reema assumed the role of CEO at Al Hama LLC, a luxury retail corporation that managed brands including DNKY and Donna Karan in West Asia (Zafar 2012; Riyadhconnect 2013). She is currently CEO of Alfa International, a leading luxury retail corporation that, among other pursuits, operates the Harvey Nichols store in Riyadh where

she was responsible for hiring women and introducing services such as childcare to employees with young children, providing an opportunity for mothers to continue working and providing for their children during the workday (Hubbard 2013). She is also founder and creative director of Baraboux, a luxury handbag brand that she launched in 2013 (Minthe 2013). She is the founder of the private equity fund Reemiyah and a co-founder of Yibreen, a women's day spa (SaudiDesignWeek 2015). She was placed in the list of Top 20 Arab Businesswomen in 2008 for her success with Yibreen, an exclusive women's day spa, in 2008.

In 2014, Reema was recognized as the Most Creative Person of the year in 2014 by *Fast Company* for “Inviting Women into the Workforce” and she featured on the *Forbes* lists of the *200 Most Powerful Arab Women* and *Most Powerful Arab Women in Saudi Arabia* lists for 2014 (Armstrong 2014; Forbes 2014). She was also recognized by *Foreign Policy Magazine* as a Leading Global Thinker of 2014 for her work in helping women to “integrate their personal and professional lives” by creating hospitable opportunities like newer transportation methods to reach workplace for easy inclusive participation of women in the economy (Hubbard 2013; globalthinker.foreignpolicy 2014). These efforts, coupled with the lowering the barriers for women to enter the workforce, have led to the store employing dozens of women (Hubbard 2013).

Reema has observed that engaging women as active participants in the working economy is “evolution, not Westernization,” and empowering a woman with financial responsibility will encourage her to “explore more of the world for herself and become less dependent” (Hubbard 2013). Similar line of thought has been expressed by Princess Ameera al-Taweel, who is chair person of al-Tawleel Foundation. Reema has also stated that Saudi Arabia “cannot have half of the population not working, which shows the recognition of royal family on issue of women empowerment” (Hubbard 2013). She is the co-owner of Luthan Trading Company where all the members are females (Stenslie 2012: 59). She also founded Alf Khair,²⁹ a corporate social responsibility initiative, which is building an active and vocal community of creative talent and promoting their work internationally. Her work in this realm also includes her role as an Advisory Board Member of the Saudi National Creative Initiative (*Arab News* 2015).

²⁹ Alf Chair is also currently developing a retail academy, which will provide training for Saudi women who want to join the workforce.

Princess Reema is a founding member of the Riyadh-based Zahra Breast Cancer Awareness Association³⁰ and her work includes organizing the world's largest human pink ribbon in 2010 (Zafar 2015). This effort was recognized as the winner of the Holmes Report Golden Sabre Award for the Best Publicity Stunt Category and the Platinum Sabre Award for Best PR Programme. In May 2012, in conjunction with the Zahra Breast Cancer Association, Reema led a group of Saudi women to the Base Camp of Mount Everest, to raise breast cancer awareness and in the campaign called '*A Woman's Journey: Destination Mount Everest*' 11 climbers began their trek to Base Camp located 5,364 meters above sea level on 7 May, completing their trek in 12 days (Mayen 2012). For this effort she was listed in Guinness World Record in 2010 for the World's Largest Human Awareness chain in a campaign to raise awareness about breast cancer (Riyadhconnect 2013). In 2015 Reema was honoured by the World Economic Forum as a Young Global Leader (Thnk 2015).

Princess Reema holds a strong line of descent both from Prince Bandar and Faisal branch of families and emerges as a strong and responsible manager to al-fa international (a group part of al-Faisaliyah International), which has integrated various other princess other princess into the organization working. She has emerged as a strong Leader in Business Innovation and Inclusive Employment Advocacy especially for women in Saudi Arabia and global initiatives. She gained attention on the international stage as a leader in business innovation, specifically as a champion for women in the workplace and Breast Cancer Advocacy (Hubbard 2013). For her breast campaigning movement in Mt. Everest is remarkable when women participation in sports is not encouraged in Saudi Arabia. Women like her, come as inspiring role model for other women to push themselves towards stronger leadership roles in society.

Few other females from King Khalid line of descent work for society and hold positions in King Khaled Foundation as members of trust and they include Princess al-Johara, Princess Nouf, Princess al-Bandary (Investment Committee Member), Princess Mishael. Princess Banderi, daughter of Prince Abdul Rahman and grand daughter of King Faisal is director general of the organization (Kkfeng 2013).

³⁰ The mission of the organization is to "increase and spread awareness among women across the country for early detection, prevention and treatment of the disease, and cooperate with women diagnosed with breast cancer on a step-by-step basis for treatment and ultimate recovery".

Fourth: Generation

Princess Madawi bint Mohammed bin Abdullah bin Abdul Rahman chairs Luthan Trading Company where all 20 members are women (Stenslie 2012:59). In 2014, *Forbes Magazine* listed her at 37th in Middle East in the list of *200 Most Powerful Arab Women-2014: Family Business* category (*Forbes* 2014). Her chain of Luthan Hotels and Spa are first hotels which are opened for women only, with no men being allowed on the site (Hazell 2008). She is also vice president of the Saudi Alzheimer's Disease Association (Stenslie 2012:59) and has worked with women caught in the web of trafficking in Abu Dhabi and has established the Ibtissam Foundation (*Human beings are not for trafficking*) (*Anglicannews*2014). She is researching and working for her doctoral thesis on the subject (Cypgulf 2014). She believes that the private and public sectors need to play important role in providing education and training to women who wish to work and get independent and embrace Saudization of the labour force (Hawari 2010).

Princess Ameera bint Aidan bin Nayef al-Taweel al-Otaibi (b. 1983) often called Princess Ameera al-Taweel, is a humanitarian worker and philanthropist (*The Huffington Post* 2012). She is raised by her divorced mother and her grandparents in Riyadh. She is a graduate of the University of New Heaven with a degree in Business Administration. At age 18 she met Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal when conducting an interview for a school paper and they were married nine months later (Roth 2014) and divorced in November 2013 (Johnson 2013).

Ameera assumed the role of Vice Chairperson and head of the executive committee of al-Waleed bin Talal Foundation in Saudi Arabia and Alwaleed bin Talal Foundation.³¹ She is also a member of the board of trustees at Silatech³² and Co-Founder of Tasamy (Steamfeed 2012) a foundation which employs jobless Saudi people. She is founder and CEO chair-person of Times Entertainment (*Mail Online* 2014) and an honorary member of the Disabled Children's Association (Zawya 2012) and board member of the Saudi Volunteering Society (Lydiamiller 2014; Steamfeed 2012). She is the chairperson of Kingdom Holding Company, travels

³¹The Foundation is an international, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting programmes and projects aimed at poverty alleviation, disaster relief, interfaith dialogue and, perhaps most importantly women's empowerment.

³²An international youth employment organization with a focus on youth empowerment in the Arab world through the creation of jobs and greater economic opportunities, and by working to find new and innovative approaches to the challenge of unemployment in the region.

extensively on behalf of the Alwaleed bin Talal Foundations to understand the most pressing challenges facing.

As a representative of these Foundations, Ameera visits NGOs and other aid and development organizations thereby promoting and improving the image of Saudi women. Her service field trips took her to more than 71 countries and she inaugurated the “Alwaleed Bin Talal Village” orphanage in Burkina Faso in March 2011 (*The Middle East Times* 2007; *Arab News* 2011). Her support to Pakistan to provide aid and relief charity during flood is remarkable and she and her husband oversaw the distribution of Foundation-sponsored aid-relief mission to Somalia.

Together with Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, Princess Ameera opened the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies at the University of Cambridge (CIS 2011), where she accepted from Prince Philip an 800th Anniversary Medal for Outstanding Philanthropy. In 2011, Princess Ameera received the ITP Special “Humanitarian Award” on behalf of the Alwaleed Bin Talal Foundation at the Arabian Business Achievement Awards ceremony (*Arabian Business* 2010). She was the most high-profile newcomer to the *Most Powerful Arab Women 2012* list, securing the fourth place. She also received the “Woman Personality of the Year Award” from the Middle East Excellence Award Institute.

Ameera has strong media presence and been interviewed by NBC's *Today*, CNN International (Burke and Milstein 2012) and NPR, as well as in *Time* magazine and *Foreign Policy* and spoke in support of women's right to drive in Saudi Arabia and women's overall empowerment to contribute fully in Saudi society (Npr 2011). She has featured in *Newsweek*, *The Daily Beast*, and *The Huffington Post*, and spoke at the 2011 Clinton Global Initiative on “*Voices for Change in the Middle East & North Africa*,” (Newhaven 2012) in which she discussed her views on the current movements for change in the region (Clinton Foundation 2011).

It was reported that Ameera opts out of wearing a burka since she feels “Islam is something you carry within.” But she did say publicly, “I would love to be a person who clarifies the image of women in Saudi Arabia. We are not women who are covered head to toe in black walking behind men. We are not suppressed in our home crying every day. That’s not us, believe me that’s not us” (Lafayette: 220-222). Her self-described approach to reform is one of “evolution, not revolution,” and it is this positive and determined perspective that defines her view of the future

of her country. She also says she wants to be first to drive on Saudi roads. It is because of her openness and deterministic attitude, she received repeated threats and there are suggestions that Prince al-Waleed was warned by his brother Prince Khalid to control Ameerah's media appearances or next time they would be punished without prior warning (Daijiworld 2012).

Princess Sultana bint Abdullah, granddaughter of King Faisal (b. 1974), has her investments in following business concerns: Arabian Freight and Cargo Services Company, Saudi Travel and Tourism Bureau, Arabian Establishment for Trade and Shipping, Saudi Travel Company, Saudi Investment group and Marketing Company, Arabian Survey and Inspection Company, Jeddah, Universal Operation and Maintenance Company and al-Adliya Tourism and Travel Company (Sabri 2001: 62-63).

There are other al-Saud women who are active in a host of areas. Princess Samira bint Abdullah al-Faisal al-Saud, who is Prince Abdullah al-Faisal's daughter, serves as Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the society for Autistic Families Association of Saudi Arabia (Atouz 2013) and President of Saudi Autistic Society (Mir 2012).

Alfa Universal Company deals in textiles, garments, household items, perfumes, watches, beauty gadgets and commercial agencies and was founded in 1999 with a capital of SR 39.80 million. A majority of its 41 shareholders are the descendants of late King Faisal. Prince Abdullah bin Faisal was the founder of al-Faisaliah Group in 1970 and Saudi Investment Group and Marketing (SIGMA) 1979 and later on the shares of the company were divided among the family. presently following princess holds stakes in Alfa Universal Company:

1. Princess Nouf bint Saud bin Abdullah bin Faisal graduated from the College of Administrative Sciences of King Saud University in 1995. Princess Noura and Princess Sara, both sisters, also are share holders in the company (Sabri 2001:60-61).
2. Princess Haifa bint Sultan bin Abdullah bin Faisal (Sabri 2001:62).
3. Princess Maha bint Mohammed (Sabri 2001:66).
4. Princess Mashail, Princess Moudhi and Princess Noura who are daughters of Turki bin Faisal hold stake in company together in with their holdings in Arabian Mining and

Manufacturing Company (Sabri 2001:72). Princess Muneera bint Turki also holds share in Aba'ad al-Jazeera International Contracting Company (Sabri 2001:72).

5. Princess Lulua and Reema, daughters of Prince Bandar bin Sultan are shareholders (Sabri 2001:105).
6. Princess Noura bint Saud bin Abdul Mohsin bin Abdul Aziz (Sabri 2001:108).
7. Princess Haala bint Mishari (Sabri 2001:124).

The Riyadh based Dar al-Funoon and Noon Trading Company deals in photographic equipment, publicity items, and commercial agencies and its partners are Princess Maha, (daughter of Prince Mohammed al-Faisal), Princess Hafía (daughter of Prince Saud al-Faisal) and Princess Bandari (daughter of Abdul Rahman al-Faisal). Princess Maha and Princess Reem, both granddaughters of Faisal, hold shares in al-Wadi Trading Company. (Sabri 2001:66-69).

Princess Nouf who is wife of Prince Abdul Rahman bin Abdullah bint Faisal holds stake in National Agricultural Marketing Company Philanthropic (Sabri 2001:57). She is also the Chairwoman, Nayara Group of Companies and of al-Nahda Society for Women, Enjaz Company and Louzan Company. Princess Nouf is a member of several women and civil society associations in the Gulf region in addition to being active in several conferences related to women in many countries (Lafayette :345). Their children also have strong presence in economic affairs of Saudi economy and Princess Noura, Princess Sara and Princess Latifa own equity in National Agricultural Marketing Company (Sabri 2001:57).

Women of Royal household have to do balancing by walking on thin line of 'religion reservations' and supporting the cause of reforms. This stands in contrast to women of royal household of the first and second generations, who were strong personalities when it came to taking decisions making on political and social issues.. Women of third and fourth generations have shown their influence in business and economic front. Earlier generation women did charity work as prescribed in religion but today's women have rerouted their charity and philanthropic activities to gain political and business leverages. These women are smart and educated thus have been utilizing their western education in trying to bridge liberalisation and conservatism.

Conclusion

King Abdullah during his rule shared his public's repulsion at misinterpretation of Islam against oppressed sections of masses and vowed to rectify perceived short-comings, aware that only serious legal reforms would prevent future repetitions. As a result he made changes in the religious clerical positions and in the senior judicial positions. This was in his long-sighted vision to entail a smooth transition process of reforms. Throughout his tenure Abdullah made successful attempt at bringing and thrusting reform with regard to women.

Education has helped women in Saudi Arabia to understand their rights and duties as enshrined in Islam and enabled them to raise questions on the positions of religious authorities over women issues such as like public appearance, guardian laws and civil rights. They have emerged as 'Social Capital' for the government of Saudi Arabia. They have local charity based organisation which help them in efficient networking on causes like education, health issues, domestic violence and employment.

Al-Saud women's role is important for government since it helps them in reducing and condensing the dissent in society. They integrate various tribal groups as they serve as link between tribal political candidates on one hand and government on the other hand. Hence working as voluntary associations based on 'family run therapy based charity institutions' which working on strengthening Al-Saud position in society. It is important to note that divorce does not restricts women from pursuing her goals; for example, in 2003, Princess Ameera al-Taweel was divorced from Prince Al-Waleed bin Talal. This did not limit her from doing any of her charity and philanthropic works. She still supports women rights and driving cause in Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, Al-Saud remains as a patrimonial government as women reform are superficial in nature. It is unable to resolve contentious issues such as guardianship and driving laws. The government has accepted that the driving is a social prohibition and not a religious one but it are unable to take any positive step in this direction. Sometimes the laws are contradictory as they depict women to be inferior despite equality being enshrined in constitution. Considering a male infant as the legal guardian of his mother underscores the seriousness of the problem.

Thus it is important to see how social media and globalisation impacts Saudi civil society as newer technologies of social networking are integration likeminded and caused based individuals to come together and demand for rights. The pattern of dissent address by new government will further define the course of women role in society.

Chapter-Five

Conclusion

This research began with a few questions. What is the status of women within the ruling Saudi family? What is the role played by the Al-al-Saud women in the society? What are the factors responsible for the growing visibility of al-Saud women? After analysing the historical background, the research concludes that the status of women of the Saudi royal family is evolving and progressive. The political, social, cultural and educational factors are working as important determinants in changing the situation of al-Saud women. Hence, the conclusion can be drawn that political upheavals along with increasing rate of literacy among women of royal family is important contributing factor for their growing presence in public sphere.

Saudi Arabia suffered backlash in 1979 following political upheavals in neighbouring Iran and Afghanistan. Political Islam started gaining its roots in Saudi Arabia, after the Mecca siege later that year. These incidents instead of creating grounds for the betterment and improvement for the status and rights of women reversed the situation. Things changed drastically for them as Saudi society became more restrictive in regulating the female sphere as women were asked to refrain from talking to strangers, have a dress code, assisted by male guardian etc., The oil-induced modernity led to greater restrictions on women and minorities. This continued till the end of century, until Saudi monarchy was forced to change its terrorist and oppressionist image after 11 September 2001. Hence King Fahd and later Abdullah initiated the political and social reform process, owing to demands from various civil society and women and minority groups.

Destruction of the World Trade Center and global denouncing of *jihadist* ambitions of Muslim youth from Saudi Arabia came as an eye-opener to al-Saud regime. It began initiating moves to reverse the position of women who were seen through new prism of 'Islam induced modernity' and therefore reforms like opening up of work spaces for women, relaxation of orthodox clerical positions and administration, judicial and political reforms and commercial dealing and business development opportunities for women.

But this was not sufficient for Saudi citizens as Arab Uprising of 2011, drastically impacted the region. Educated youth without employment, continuous state oppression of women, minorities and state activists, centralised corrupt administration and poverty were sufficient reason for revolt in country. Some of them are pertinent for Saudi Arabia also. Hence again petitions and demands for reforms rose. Here role of women in Saudi Ruling Family emerged as influential and indispensable. They came as binding force between fractured civil society groups and monarchy.

The al-Saud women are entrusted with the dual responsibility of preserving Saudi traditions and cementing their position in society while being the front runners for changes in the civil society. They women have been facing these limitations in quite 'Islamised' way which emerges as a counter narrative to the western understanding of women-upliftment and development.

Impact of royal women in the amelioration of women cause can be noticed through their activities as philanthropy groups, Princess Councils, conferences, networking, organizing support groups in areas such as education, employment, diseases, health, women rights and social issues like domestic violence and right to divorce. These have created a wide spread support for them among masses. The princesses also act as a strong representative of their particular tribal factions and identities. As a result, women of the royal family work as intersecting elements both horizontally among masses and vertically among various levels of governance and administration. Both government and governance have strong rationale to keep al-Saud women in circles, if former has to succeed in the latter.

In the early 20th century Ibn-Saud consolidated the areas towards establishing a unified country called the Kingdom Of Saudi Arabia. In that struggle, women played only a role and remained only as mothers, wives or daughters. There were exceptions. Some like Princess Nora and Princess al-Jawahar who were sister and aunt respectively of Ibn-Saud have left their imprints. Moreover, women played a significant role in solidifying a political and matrimonial alliance which resulted in unifying warring tribal factions and the formation of the third al-Saud state.

Until the 1960s Saudi women played a marginal role in society. They largely remained invisible and were confined to their homes. It was only after introduction of education that one could notice women assuming some though less visible role outside the confines of their homes.

Though female education was introduced by King Saud, but its ideation and initiation came from Queen Effat, wife of the then crown prince Faisal. She and then her daughters-Princess Loluwah and Princess Haifa have worked continuously towards improving women condition through education. In later years, Princess Loluwah emerged as ‘Saudi Ambassador’ of official Trade Mission to the US in 2005.

Similarly Princess Reema bint Bandar, Princess Ameerah al Taweel, Princess Madawi bint Mohammed and Princess Basmah bint Saud have emerged as strong entrepreneurs. They represent the new generation of Saudi women who balance their religious commitments with professional-public life. These women are more open because of strong education imparted to them either in business management or entrepreneurship. Education enabled them to assert their roles more positively and independently thus making them successful in pushing social reforms. Saudi monarchs realised the need of educating their females as it did not question the Islamic principle but what should be taught to Saudi women still remains a contentious issue and managing the tussle between orthodox clerics and demands of modernization has been a major challenge.

Over the years al-Saud women have become role models for the Saudi women, who wished to reform and modernize themselves and society. They have used their position and influence within in royal house hold to purse a host of less controversial social issues. Women, including those belonging to al-Saud are not allowed to get involved in the political sphere and decision making but still they hold wield influence. King Abdullah used al-Saud women as an effective means of promoting ‘Charm-Offensive Campaign’ for an image make-over of Saudi Arabia as a terrorist and *jihadist* nation. Since the September 2001 terror attacks and subsequent backlash against Islam and Saudi Arabia in the US, Princess Adila bint Abdullah, Princess Loluwah bint Faisal and Princess Fadwa bint Khalid were part of that campaign. Though their unprecedentedly appearance in the media and other social footprints, they have tried changing global, especially Western, perception about Saudi women and state.

Slowly but continuously during the last eight decades royal women have opened up spaces which were earlier limited or closed for them. The aim and purpose of this research was to assess if *increased educational opportunities have enabled al-Saud women to emerge out of the veil imposed by tribal and religious conservatism.* Women like Princess Effat, Princess Al-Jawahara

bint Ebrahim, Princess Sara bint Faisal and Princess Latifa bint Saud have contributed for advancement of women education in Saudi Arabia. They have drawn their source of inspiration from Islamic history and the role of Prophet's wives Khadijah and Aisha. The mothers and aunts of these princesses have also been a strong support for their upliftment. Women like Princess Basma bint Saud and Princess Sara bint Talal have made their public appearance but with veils.

Princess Moudhi bint Khalid and Princess Hussa bint Salman have contributed in cultural exchanges and philanthropic works. It would be interesting to note that, while women in second generation are more concerned and focused towards education and social upliftment of their own and other women, women of in third and fourth generations are more oriented towards entrepreneurship and business. They have realised that Saudi Arabia cannot stay as a rentier economy forever and need to find alternatives to its wealthy lives. Other princesses have developed companies and commercial establishment that employs or caters 'only' to women.

Women reforms do not come easily in Saudi Arabia. It is only through an intensive battle and struggle supported if not initiated by royal women that reforms such as education for women, driving movement, election campaigning, issue of lawyer for doing business were possible or getting wider attention within the Saudi society.. While the progress can be said to induce from top and percolates down bottom the role of the civil society cannot be side-lined. The civil society and voluntary sector has been a bidding force for reforms . The presence of al-Saud women in education, cultural exchanges, art, photography, business, media, and corporate sector has diversified women involvement and a chain structure pattern emerges, with one pulling and moving forward.

Second hypothesis *The practice of multiple marriages has not diminished the role of women within the House of Saud* is partly proved due to the limitations of information currently available in public domain. The study finds that divorces do not impede al-Saud women from making a mark. For example, even after their divorces Princess al-Jawhara bint Ibrahim al-Ibrahim, Princess Hassa al-Sudairi, Princess Basmah bint Saud and Princess Ameera al Taweel continue to play a prominent role in public and promote and propagate various social welfare and philanthropic activities. Even if they are not a part of core group decision making they are impacting tis its course from outside.

Women in the House of Saud have emerged as supporters of royal family both at domestic and at international front. But even despite their 'considered' influence, they seem to have limited presence and impact in the society. Only five women of royal family have been photographed or have allowed to be photographed, out of them only one appeared without the headscarf. This conforms to the heightened influence of religion in Saudi society, where women are considered inferior to men.

Another limitation of this study the absence of any details concerning financial status of and benefits from various charitable activities carried out by al-Saud women. Various civil society organizations patronized, supported or run by the princess do not provide detail of people or individuals who benefitted. Neither the quantum of charity donated nor source of funding are available and these leads to the question if the donations use for these activities were a political bribe to influence dissent groups. Is there an actual philanthropic work undertaken by princesses or they were mere dummy candidates used for propaganda vis-à-vis their western-counterparts? What is the nature of these charity and voluntary based organisation? These issues need further scrutiny.

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