

# MUSLIM WOMEN'S FICTION LITERARY SALON

# FEMINISMS

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FEMINIST? HOW DO MUSLIM WOMEN  
AUTHORS WRITE ABOUT BEING A MUSLIM AND BEING A FEMINIST?

GENRE FOCUS:  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND  
COMICS/GRAPHIC NOVELS



## CRITICAL QUOTES

"Every time someone asked me, 'Are you a feminist?' and I replied, 'Yes, I am,' they would instantly question me: 'But how, aren't you a Muslim?' (Mariam Khan, pp. 107-8).

### PRIMARY TEXT – FROM *I AM MALALA* BY MALALA YOUSAFZAI WITH CHRISTINA LAMB (2013)

AUNT NAJMA WAS in tears. She had never seen the sea before. My family and I sat on the rocks, gazing across the water, breathing in the salt tang of the Arabian Sea. It was such a big expanse, surely no one could know where it ended. At that moment I was very happy. 'One day I want to cross this sea,' I said. 'What is she saying?' asked my aunt as if I were talking about something impossible. I was still trying to get my head round the fact that she had been living in the seaside city of Karachi for thirty years and yet had never actually laid eyes on the ocean. Her husband would not take her to the beach, and even if she had somehow slipped out of the house, she would not have been able to follow the signs to the sea because she could not read.

I sat on the rocks and thought about the fact that across the water were lands where women were free. In Pakistan we had had a woman prime minister and in Islamabad I had met those impressive working women, yet the fact was that we were a country where almost all the women depend entirely on men. My headmistress Maryam was a strong, educated woman but in our society she could not live on her own and come to work. She had to be living with a husband, brother or parents.

In Pakistan when women say they want independence, people think this means we don't want to obey our fathers, brothers or husbands. But it does not mean that. It means we want to make decisions for ourselves. We want to be free to go to school or to go to work. Nowhere is it written in the Quran that a woman should be dependent on a man. The word has not come down from the heavens to tell us that every woman should listen to a man.

'You are a million miles away, Jani,' said my father interrupting my thoughts. 'What are you dreaming about?'

'Just about crossing oceans, Aba', I replied.

'Forget all that!' shouted my brother Atal. 'We're at the beach and I want to go for a camel ride!' (pp. 183-184)

"little by little some of these women are beginning to carve out their own way – not the Western way, but one that keeps what is good about the values of our religion and culture, while allowing for reform" (Alsanea, 'Author's Note' to *Girls of Riyadh*, p. viii).

"Islamic feminism is: "a feminist discourse and practice that derives its understanding and mandate from the Qur'an and seeks rights and justice ... as part and parcel of the Qur'anic notion of equality of all human beings." (Margot Badran, quoted in Seedat, p. 411-12).