

Women Authors Problems in British and Iraqi Society: A Comparative Study
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مشاكل الكتاب (النساء) في المجتمع البريطاني والعراقي: دراسة مقارنة

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المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة دور المرأة في مجتمعين مختلفين: المجتمع البريطاني والعراقي. إنها ناقشت أوجه التشابه والاختلاف الموجود بين المجتمعين. نسبياً، وتبين أن كلا المجتمعين يحمل ميزات مشابهة والتي يمكن اعتبارها مجتمع ذكوري التي تكون فيها المرأة تابعة للرجل في كل مجالات الحياة. كسمة مختلفة، ان المجتمع البريطاني كان مجتمع ذكوري، ولكن لم يعد كما هو مجتمع ذكوري، بل في الوقت الحاضر مجتمع عادل الذي يعطي المرأة حقها في أن تكون من الكتاب، الممثلة أو ما يريدون. على العكس من ذلك، لا يزال يعتبر المجتمع العراقي باعتباره منظومة أبوية أو ذكورية إلى حد ما.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأنوثة، الكاتبة، الذكورية، المشاكل، المرأة العربية، المرأة البريطانية.

Abstract

The present study deals with the role of women in two different societies: British and Iraqi. It is argued that there are similarities and differences between the two societies. Comparatively, it is found out that both societies carry similar features which can be considered as patriarchal in which women are subordinate to men in all fields of life. As a different feature, the British society had been a patriarchal society, but no longer as it is a fair society, nowadays that gives women their right to be authors, actress or whatever they want. On the contrary, the Iraqi society is still considered as patriarchal to some extent.

key words: 'feminism', women writer, male dominant , problems, subordination' Arab women, British women.

A Comparative Study

The words 'feminist' or 'feminism' are generally political labels indicating support for the goals of the women's movement which emerged in the late of 1960s. 'Feminist criticism', after that, is a specific type of political discourse: a kind of theoretical practice committed to the struggle mainly against patriarchy and sexism in society, not only a concern for gender in literature, in any case not if the later is presented as no more than another interesting critical approach on a par with a concern for sea-imagery or metaphors of war in medieval poetry.(Catherine,1989:12)

The feminist literary criticism accurately began in the aftermath of 'second wave' feminism, the term typically given to the emergence of women's movements in the United States and Europe throughout the Civil Rights campaigns of the 1960s. Obviously, though, a feminist literary criticism did not emerge completely formed from this moment. Rather, its ultimate self-conscious expression was the peak of centuries of women's writing, of women writing about women writing, and of women and even men who were writing about women's minds, bodies, and ideas, Women such as Virginia Woolf. (Ibid: 27).

The increasing number of women writers creates a rich history upon which the second-wave feminism might be built. From the beginning the feminist literary criticism was eager to uncover its origins, looking for establishing traditions of writing of women and early 'feminist' thought to counter the obedient acceptance of man and male -dominant as the norm.

It is clear that the boundaries between literature and politics, and activism are fluid and, as a result, it is difficult to determine. Even though, these blurred boundaries are regularly productive.

Feminist literary criticism can be differentiated from feminist political activism and social theory. Most noticeably, the differences lay in the dimension of textuality. Throughout centuries woman has been the subject of countless reconfigurations, and with each inscription , it becomes necessary to reread. According to the text, women are capable of being both defamed and defended, and it is possible that the most influential possibilities could be found in imagining the future of the female subject.(Gill, 2007:23)

Concerning the number of women writers, it is not possible to give the exact number of women writers that published their works because there were so many of women writers. Some of them are known worldwide, some only to the experts in the world of literary, and concerning many others whose works are records of their life and their literary works simply did not survive. In the 18th century, the female novelists began to rise, but their writings did not emerge on the literary market until the mid of the 19th century. In fact, the nineteenth century was really the Age of the Female Novelist (Showalter, 1977: pp. 3-4).

With the appearance of the novelists Jane Austen, Charlotte Brönte, and George Eliot, Showalter believes that the question of women's aptitude for action had been answered . It was a very difficult situation for women writers because they almost have no formal educational background and little job opportunities; they , in fact, had no other choices but to throw themselves into writing novels as a way to escape the dominant patriarchal society. Significantly, in doing this, some of the women writers would ironically appropriate another masculine genre .It is very important to take into consideration that writing, particularly the novel genre, was for many of them the only way to criticize some of the social ills, including women's oppression. (Ibid).

Women writers considered novel as a very powerful tool in order to raise people's awareness about restrictions that were used and that affected women in the 19th century. Logically, they used a veil of different literary devices for the sake of conveying the messages they wanted to convey. They tried to show their resistance by manifesting on the level of plot, characterization or style. On the contrary, all the positions concerned with the writing were held by men as novelists, editors, publishers and in some way they felt threatened by the appearance of women in the world of literature.

This is very clear as Gilbert points out that according to many of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century men, women were to be agents of an alien world that could evoke anger and anguish, on the other hand and according to women of the same time, men seemed as distressed defenders of an undefended order. Therefore both male and female writers progressively represented women's unprecedented invasion of the public sphere and it became as a battle of the sexes. (Gilbert and Gubar,1988: p. 4).

The sort of society in which women authors or writers in the 19th century lived was like a constant box. There were new towns emerging, people began to move from the country to the cities in order to get new jobs; because there were building factories , networks and railways building all around the country. The massive British Empire was growing because of the appearance of new colonies. Education was exclusively in the men's area but some schools started to open particularly for girls who previously had only access to books throughout circulating library or they may have library in at their own homes. Even though, they were educated , the job market for them was almost inexistent. Since they could not get a job, the only option women had was either to be a governess or a writer. But in fact the 19th century literary world was fully dominated by men in society. woman's roles in art specifically were very different before the Victorian period. A woman was either men's muse as his inspiration, or she would help him in his composing , but in spite of all the difficulties , a few women dared to write.

The great literary works by Victorian women were considered in prose fiction such as Jane Eyre (Charlotte Bronte) and Wuthering Heights (Emily Bronte) ,and the sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett Browning . The best era for women writers was born when they began to publish their works. Writing was thought of as unworthy for women, and only if woman had a good reason for that which is, if she

was the breadwinner of the family. They started to write about various topics such as novel and other different genres like the governess, detective, sentimental, religious, , children's literature, etc. Additionally, women novelists became encouraged to write, to publish, to publicly admit their authorship of works . As a result, their writing, their struggle, their courage, their opposition opened the doors for new generations of women novelists .(Ivana, 2014: 7)

The term 'patriarchy' means the rule of the father , and it was initially used in order to describe a specific kind of 'male-dominated family' . The huge household of the patriarch that included women, junior men, children, slaves and domestic servants all are under the rule of this dominant male. Nowadays, the term is used more generally "to refer to male domination, or to the power relationships by which men dominate women, as well as to characterize a system by which women are kept subordinate to men in a number of ways" (Bhasin, 2006:3).

Patriarchy is the main obstacle to women's advancement and development in society. In spite of the differences in levels of domination, the large principles remain the same, for example , men are in control. There may be a kind of difference between the nature of this control . So it is essential to be aware of the system, that keeps women dominated and subordinate to men, and to loosen its workings so as to work for women's improvement in a systematic way. While women go ahead by their merit in the modern world, patriarchy creates many obstacles for women to go forward in society for the reason that patriarchal institutions and social relations are mainly responsible for the inferior of women. Patriarchal society, as it is known, gives complete priority to men . Patriarchy usually refers to the male domination in public and private spheres. Like this, feminist uses the word 'patriarchy' in order to describe the power relationship between men and women and to discover the root cause of women's subordination.(Sultana, 2010:2)

Patriarchy is the natural superiority of men over women and being subordination to men in all spheres of life. As a result, both power and authority within the family, and the society remain totally in the hands of men. Consequently women were disadvantaged of their legal rights and opportunities as the patriarchal values restrict women's mobility, and even their freedom over themselves and their property.

In the dictionary "subordination" means:

"someone else is less important than the other one" (Cobuild 2010:1559).

According to *Advanced Learners' Dictionary* it means:

"having less power or authority than somebody else in a group or an organization"

(Hornby 2003:1296).

The term 'women's subordination' means the inferior position of women, being decision maker , and their lack of access to resources . According to the patriarchal domination of male , women are considered as subjected to in most societies. So, women's subordination refers to the inferior position of women to men in the society. So many things such as the feeling of powerlessness, discrimination, experience of limited self- esteem as well as self-confidence equally contribute to case of subordination of women. Therefore, women's subordination is a state, where there is a power relationship exists and men dominate women. This subordination of women is considered as a central feature of all structures of interpersonal domination in society, but feminists prefer different locations and causes of it. Simone de Beauvoir shows a contemporary theory which begins with his argument that because of men view of women as primarily different from themselves, women are reduced to the status of the succeeding sex and hence subordinate (Beauviour 1974). Another theory is that of Kate Millet which argues that women are considered dependent sex class under patriarchal domination. (Millet 1977)

The feminist view of women in all the Arab world is that as in other areas of the world, has during history experienced discrimination and being subject to restrictions of their freedoms and rights. Some of these practices are usually based on religious beliefs, but many of those limitations are cultural and emanate from tradition as well as religion. These main constraints in societies which create

obstacles towards women's rights and liberties are reflected in laws dealing with criminal justice, education and healthcare.

Concerning literature, the current generation of Arab women writers faces so many problems that are the same problems of reception the last one faced, and will be better off reflecting on the historical factors beyond this type of reception than elevating themselves at the expense of a predecessor. (Aaron,2006:13)

In general, Arab women writers face problems, it is needed to have a look at the long and complex history of their reception in the Arab society. The number of Arab women writers has increased significantly in all parts of the Arab world since the 1960s, and among all social classes, women writers have reached out to hold broader social and political issues. During the late of 1950s and early of 1960s, novels and short stories by Arab women entered a more feminist phase.(Ibid)

During this new phase, feminist visions, and aspirations were expressed in the works of many women writers such as Kulayt Khuri and Ghada Saaman from Syria, Nawal Saadawi from Egypt, Khanata Banuna from Morocco, Assia Djebar from Algeria, Sahar Khalifa and Samira Azzam from Palestine, Layla Othman from Kuwait.

In their literary works, Arab women writers have highlighted bravely the ills of political systems that, by being harmful to women, have ,as a result, operated to the detriment of men and of society in general. An example of that, Ghada Saaman , in her novel *Beirut 75*, portrays the alienation visited upon both men and women by the social and political systems in Lebanon as an Arab country . The message she reveals, nevertheless, is such immeasurable chaos women are. They suffer , especially in Arab countries, from the double subjection of society and of men. (Doreen,1983, 87)

In fact, this new generation of women writers has illuminated women's strengths in general and dispelled deeply entrenched taboos about their weaknesses too. The new woman that appears in the works of Sahar Khalifa's *Al Saabar and Abad Al-Shams* in which she defies and dissociates herself completely from traditional concepts of women existed in her society. The first concept is that women are weak and unable to maintain a family when the male provider disappears . The second concept is the deep-rooted view of women's honor. (*Al-Jawaheri,2008:37*)

It is obvious that literature is straightforwardly linked to culture, in Iraq, women writers are just coming to the field. There are many reasons for this, particularly how men think about writing as well as how they think about women as human beings. It is clear that, cultures usually distinguish the literary works of men from the literary works of women, and Angela Davis ,the American feminist, has her view of that as she saw this as just another form of discrimination. But there is something that should not be forgotten that an individual's writing comes from their exact time and place, and writings with a feminine flavor come from a feminine place. (Shirzad, 2013, 79)

In Iraq , gender discrimination begins from young childhood with the images that in childhood literature, for example, a girl is often seen as she plays with dolls and on the contrary side a boy is seen as he plays with electronic games. A girl often runs while a boy rides a bicycle, this can be taken as a symbol that women, in general, are not allowed to ride bicycles. It is obvious that when the moment an Iraqi woman opens her eyes in the very morning, she has to keep in mind that she is female. Women , especially in Iraq, are continuously reminded that they are less and weaker than men. This feeling is very difficult to challenge and has a very negative effect on the psychology of the writer and the way and style she may write since she is a woman.

In Iraq, some people may believe that literature and creativity could not be gendered at any case because most recently many women are involved in building their communities, working , raising children and solving their own problems, not only at home but also outside, for example in businesses and offices. They really have experiences and work harder than men. Nonetheless, women's literature, an indubitable reality in Iraq, remains the writings of women about the problems of women themselves . If it happened to delete the author's name , it can still be easily guessed that the author is a female. The world of women is a kind of rich and important world to talk about. In fact, those women write

especially about the needs of the female spiritually, in spite of the limitations of discrimination in Iraq. Women writers and the power of their words as novelists or poetess should not be underestimated. Iraqi men have had a lot to say in their literary works about women but they , in fact, do not express “Woman” as she knows herself.

Since the woman’s world is hidden from men ,it would be very difficult that man could describe the women’s world. Female writers are capable of revealing the world of women in a very talented way. (Sarhan,2010)

The poet is being interviewed with is Mithaq Kareem who is an ambitious and talented girl from Nasiriyah in southern Iraq, an heiress civilization of Sumer. She writes (free verse) for talent, and language and words are able to convert the image to action and celluloid.

Mithaq is very fluent in the use of virtual and esoteric symbols and symbols of mysticism and metaphor grand epics symbols (such as the Epic of Gilgamesh). Because of social injustice and tribal nature of reality and patriarchal authoritarian Iraqi society , her family prevent her to complete her university studies and employment in government departments. She tries to catch up with the world of literature while she is seated at home reading poetry and literature and the novel. Her father’s death left a deep impression on her psychologically, the thing that she cannot forget.

The thing that no one knows about Mithaq, unlike writing poems, is that she is committed to religious habits as she fasts , prays and she visits the tombs of Shiite Imams constantly and sometimes walk on foot. The recent large catastrophe in her life was when her mother died, she became an orphan and felt destroyed.

The great misfortune happened when her brother discovered her posts on Facebook . He severely beats her and smashed her mobile phone and confiscated her computer as well as her note books and novels . As a result she thought of suicide.

Mithaq has done a favor by making an interview despite her difficult circumstances to answer the questions presented in this paper. Here are the questions and Mithaq’s answers:

1. Is it possible to give us a brief summary of your career as a poetess?

Mithaq: Since my childhood, I was fond of drawing and I was fond of van Gogh. ... I was interested in his simplicity and I try to make him a model for me ... but the writing took me far away and my diary became my close friend. I write notes and tear them quickly fearing that someone, from my family, would see them ... my family is a very, very strict family . As a result , I take it as a challenge to improve my talent by reading every book I come across. After fifteen years of suffering, I began to write professionally starting as a novelist. I am encouraged by the researcher Professors Yasir Jasim Qasim , Abdul- Khaliq Kaream and Abbas Al_husany, all are from Basra .

I communicated with them by phone and through letters ... this happened in 2004 and I continued writing poetry under the supervision of Prof. Abbas Hassani from that point until I become professional.

2. What are the first and most important difficulties that you encounter as a poetess at the beginning of your writing?

Mithaq: Certainly, the most important difficulties are customary and religious restricts especially from my mother when she saw me reading or typing, she began to comment acerbic comments which make my enthusiasm fade , so I wrote when I was alone ...

3. Is the problem of writers in Iraq often social or religious? And how?

Mithaq: Both... unfortunately, the society interprets religion as they like or they want it to fit their desires. The great disaster is that religion gives women their freedom to some extent but the customs have another opinion.

4. Throughout your own personal experience how can a woman writer in Iraq get her fame and literary character in the light of the possible risks obstacles?

Mithaq: A woman writer who lacks ambition and determination to reach fame will be broken quickly so she needs to have enough insistence because this path is very tiring and needs a lot precipitant and requires patience, forbearance and wisdom.

5. Do you think that Iraqi society is a male dominant society? What is the impact on Iraqi women writers?

Mithaq: Yes, 100%. In addition to that, it is duplicitous. I can describe it as the plague that is visiting the country safe.

6. Do you think that the problems faced by the woman writer can be a reason for creativity or reason to blur the seed of creativity?

Mithaq: The real spirit of the writer is spirit which converts to a machine in which he puts his pain and takes it to a broad imagination and a sense of velvety and high culture made it the most beautiful texts ... the pain is a better inspiration, this is what I felt I do not know about the rest.

7. Throughout your personal experience how to overcome all the obstacles and be talented and famous as you are?

Mithaq: First, my faith is that I have not committed the sin of writing poetry and secondly I am faithful of my talent of writing poetry. The most important thing is that I make my dream true because I was dreaming of being famous. I should be grateful to my friends who become loyal to me and support me morally and financially in order not to stop writing which is another incentive to continue.

8. Do you think that the number of Iraqi women writers in the literary field now is a convincing number? Few? And what's the reason?

Mithaq: I do not care about the quantity but quality. The problem of Iraqi women writers is their limitations and dreaming of getting famous locally which I refuse and I will settle for universal . I know that it is very difficult but I will do it because of my big ambition

9. What is your advice for the novice women writer who wants to show talent and how to go beyond the problems and difficulties?

Mithaq: I advise them to read over and over as they will do nothing without reading . the real writer will stick to her dream no matter what her circumstances are.

10. How do you see the future of Iraqi women writers?

Mithaq: I know nothing about the future but what I know is that I'm trying to work hard and do my best .

Conclusions

As a conclusion, women writers , in all societies, face many obstacles that may prevent them from writing perfectly or even writing. British women and Iraqi women writers encounter, so many problems when they start to write literary works.

There are differences and similarities between the two societies. Concerning similarities, both societies suffer from the male dominant society , class discrimination ,and bad treatment of women. The main difference between British and Iraqi societies is that the British suffered from these problems in the 18th century and past time , then they try to get rid of these obstacles while the Iraqi society suffers from these problems in the past and even in the present time as the case with Mithaq.

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