

IMAGES OF IRAQIAN WOMEN IN *THE DAY I BECAME A WOMAN* BY MARZIEH MESHKINI

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Abstract

Feminist writings were of crucial interest to the Post-colonial discourse for two major reasons. First, both patriarchy and imperialism could be seen to exert different forms of domination over those subordinate to them. Because of this, it was important for the experiences of women under the patriarchal influence to come out to the forefront and expose the undue cruelty be held on them by men. It was necessary for the women to oppose this male dominance over them. We observe that women continued to define the borders of the community, class and race. They tried to exert feminism through their works.

However, the Feminist writers tried to stamp their authority in a male dominated environment as best as it is possible to them. It was a very difficult path, as the women had to break through years of male dominance, taboos and beliefs that had heavily impregnated the society. In addition, critics argued that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men. This was so because women were subjected to both general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women addressed as 'double colonization.

This paper focuses on the most important issue faced by Iranian Women. Directed by a woman, it rightly voices the pathetic condition of women in the Middle East.

Keywords: *Male dominated society, discrimination, harassed, feminism, and status of woman*

Introduction

Marzieh Meshkini is an Iranian cinematographer, film director and writer. She was born in 1969 in Tehran, studied film at Makhmalbaf film school from 1996-2001. She was married to film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf, who wrote the script for her debut film *The Day I Became a Woman* (Roozi ke zan shodam). The film won many awards. It attended the Critics Week Category in the 2000 Venice Film Festival. Her second film *Stray Dogs* (sag-haye velgard) competed in the best film category at Venice film festival in 2003 and received two awards from the festival. She has worked as the assistant director in 'The Apple', 'The Blackboards', 'At Five in the Afternoon' and 'Two Legged Horse' with her daughter Samira Makhmalbaf. She has also collaborated with her husband in several recent films. She is also the script writer of the award winning film *Buddha Collapsed out of Shame* by Hana Makhmalbaf.

Images of Women

The Day I Became a Woman (Roozi Khe Zan Shodam) is a 2000 award winning Iranian movie directed by Marzieh Meshkini. The movie grew out of a small film school started by her husband, the acclaimed Iranian film maker Mohsen Makhmalbaf. The movie has won a raft of awards from various film festivals. The film is very neatly and tidily presented, it has got no overt violence or sex. Yet it deals with the most important issue faced by Iranian women.

The film which is episodic in nature deals with woman's struggle for identity in Iran. Three stories are told each depicting different stages in the lives of Iranian women; from young to the elderly. The first part takes us to the morning of Havva's ninth birthday. In the first part of the film, the mother and the grandmother of the nine year old Havva keeps her from playing with her childhood play mate Hassan. The girl is told that she is a woman from now on. In traditional communities in accordance with the Islamic law, a girl will become a woman once she turns nine years old.

Playing with boys in the street is considered a sin from that day on. From now onwards she should veil herself under the chador. But because it is only 11 am and Havva was born around noon she pleads to her mother and grandmother to allow her play till noontime. Havva, literally the Eve, is going to be expelled from the paradise for no sin of her own. She requests one more hour so that she can drink her free life to the lees. This plea was granted on one condition that she will return home at the appropriate time. She is given a stick by which she could measure time and return when the stick no more has shadow. She is also reminded of the fact that if she does not come back at the correct time she will not be forgiven by God.

This story of Havva tells us about the end of innocence of a girl child in an Iranian society. The mother and grandmother entering with chador in their hands symbolize the farewell to all childhood plays and transition to womanhood.

The second tale revolves around a young woman Ahoo who decides to participate in a bicycle race by the seashore and who is all the way pursued by her angry husband on a horse back. The film shows lots of women clad in burqas speeding on the bicycle, peddling on and on towards their goal. The bicycle race can also be taken as a travel towards freedom which is unattainable for women in their real life. Her husband, in-laws, local religious leaders and the village elders follow her demanding her to give up her profane behavior and to stop the race. If she does not obey she will be divorced then and there. When every woman in the competition is racing she is flying as if it is an escape from her own life to a new world of freedom, and selfhood. The threatening words of her husband and all other people are ignored by her; as she, an embodiment of the new woman, moves on and on.

The third part shows us an old woman Hoorah who has some money and who is adamant on purchasing all the material

comforts that she has desired in her good salad days. Now she has become a free woman and spends wads of money and is also free to do what she wishes. She has bought many things ranging from teapots to refrigerator. She enlists the help of a young boy and his friends to carry her appliances. They follow her with the new appliances to the beach. As she floats out on a waiting ship, free from the bonds of womanhood, she is watched by both Havva and Ahoo. Both of them may be looking at their own possible future.

Meshkini's thesis film *The Day I Became a Woman*, which was set on the island of Kish, is a scathing indictment of the harsh and stifling treatment of women in Islamic Iran. It is a three part allegory which was once banned in Iran. The three stories tell us about the impossibility for a woman to escape from the male clutches of the society. How far they try to flee, the sea is always the limit beyond which she cannot pass.

Conclusion

Thus, the feminist Criticism was the direct product of the Women's movement of 1916. Because Feminism has become a vital aspect in literature in contemporary society and the female perspective, expressed through women's writing of all kinds is considered to be more than a valuable connective to an all male view of the universe. In exploring the question what is it to be woman lie the history of mankind: "History of mankind is the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man towards woman having indirect object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her." (Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions of the First Women's Rights Convention In America, Seneca Falls, 1848). It is perceived that the very subjection of women is consolidated by religion. The Holy Bible holds such observations and perceptions: "Wives submit yourselves to your husbands as to the Lord. (Ephesians, 5:22) The Holy Bible). This concept of women consolidated by Christianity affected their status

for centuries. Gradually women lost the right to control their lives and as a result, they were deprived not only of human rights but also of humanity.

Literacy spread rapidly and women began to utilize the power of the pen. Betty Friedan, the mother of Modern Feminism with the publication of *Feminine Mystique* (1963) initiated this new change. The new women's movement expanded into a commanding political force. "Women are an oppressed class.

We are exploited as sex objects". Undoubtedly, it is understood that they have perceived a good job in exposing the fallacies of

the male-dominated society and letting the public beware of the various atrocities heaped upon women who dared to cross the various rigid boundaries that were laid on them by society.

References

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