



Woman in Development and Politics

The conflict between tradition and feminism in Oman (Case study: Al-Tawaf Haith Al-Jamar)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 20 October 2023 Received in revised form: 17 March 2024 Accepted: 29 May 2024 Published online: 5 July 2024</p> <p>Keywords: <i>Al-Tawaf Haith Al-Jamar,</i> <i>Badria Al-Shihhi,</i> <i>Feminist Criticism,</i> <i>Feminine identity.</i></p>	<p>Introduction The emergence of female criticism parallels the emancipation from the linear preconceptions that have characterized the annals of men's literature. Feminist literary criticism does not seek to eradicate the disparities between male and female writing styles, nor does it render gender distinctions devoid of significance; rather, its objective is to comprehend women's writing with the intention of attaining a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and realities of women. Novel writing was regarded as an exclusively masculine endeavor during the 19th century; therefore, any reference to a female novelist elicited contempt, disgrace, astonishment, or misogyny towards the author. In less than two centuries, the intellectual pursuits of women have introduced fresh insights into the realm of human knowledge and sparked numerous significant inquiries. However, the profound diversity and inherent contradiction of ideas have emerged as an impediment to comprehending their origins and causes. Feminist criticism investigates the position of women along two axes: the authorial persona (the woman as the writer) and the created persona (the woman as the visage in the authors' works). The process of composing a novel is regarded as a contemporary literary phenomenon in the Sultanate of Oman, with a brief history spanning only a few decades. The protagonist of Al-Tawaf Haith Al-Jamar, which is regarded as the first women's novel in Oman, is a victim of patriarchy. The inaugural foray of women into the realm of Omani novel writing occurred in 1999 with Badria Al-Shihhi's Al-Tawaf Hayat al-Jamar.</p> <p>Methodology The authors endeavor to analyze the story's characters through the lens of feminism and descriptive analysis in this study. They categorize their actions in accordance with the attributes of the stages of protest, self-discovery, imitation, and protest within the framework of feminist criticism and its development. Identify and analyze them while attempting to answer the following questions at each of these stages: Which feminist elements are most conspicuous in the novel by Al-Tawaf Haith Al-Jamar?</p> <p>Results In her novel "Al-Tawaf Hayat al-Jamar," Omani author Badria Al Sh^hhhi illuminates a significant period in her nation's history marked by the Omani occupation of Zanzibar, Africa. During this time, rebellious movements were active in various hotspots throughout the region, and Al Sh^hhhi foretold impending catastrophes that would ultimately lead to historical tragedies. Simultaneously, it chronicles several social, commercial, and economic changes that converged and erupted in manners that were not without cruelty and barbarism; this is reflected in the contradictory and inconsistent nature of its characters. It follows the ebbs and flows of the scene with its perplexity, peculiarity, and insanity, without delving deeply into philosophical contemplation regarding the transformative processes that transpire. Ironically, Badria Al-Shihhi is the inaugural Omani female novelist, and her debut novel is a feminist work that defies convention by entering the literary world to protest and shout rather than imitate males, forty years after her entry into the field. Youngly widowed, Zahra is coerced into an untimely matrimonial union with her cousin. Having been socialized and conditioned by her family and community to perpetually submit to the dictates of society, it appears nearly impossible for her to determine her own fate. Her audacious choice to do so propels her to an expedition of exploration spanning from a mountaintop Omani village to the coast of East Africa. However, what holds greater significance than her</p>

celestial voyage is her internal conflict: the extent to which Zahra must travel to liberate herself from prejudice and ultimately discover her place in the world, as well as the consequences that this quest for autonomy may bring. Components such as self-expression, violence, the repression of feminine instinct, and taboo-breaking contribute the most to this novel and establish it as a feminist work, according to the research findings. While elements of self-awareness are evident in this literary work, the author's decision to isolate the protagonist prevents him from attaining the critical juncture of introspection and self-exploration, which is essential for the formation of a unique identity and separation from imitation and opposition.

Conclusion

Al-Tawaf Haith Al-Jamar exemplifies the resolve of a woman to attain independence and reject antiquated patriarchal customs. This woman's revolt against patriarchal society coincided with the African people's revolt against the Arab invasion that ravaged their land and seized their possessions. The author portrays the challenges faced by the protagonist during her pursuit of personal growth, in addition to the economic and human losses incurred by the African people in their quest for independence. This serves to demonstrate that every freedom is accompanied by an associated expense. The novel's content is also alluded to in its title, as tawaf signifies an infinite cycle and sequence that represents the ongoing nature of this conflict. Written as a protest against male-dominated writing conventions and the portrayal of women in a stereotypical manner, this novel placed women's ideals and the protection of women's rights at the forefront. Badria al-Shihhi demonstrates how a woman named Zohra develops a tendency toward self-hiding after three decades of enduring the afflictions that have been imposed upon her. A woman whose existence has been characterized as one of ceaseless service. As Badria al-Shihhi searches for a realm where she can be observed, heard, and discovered, she adopts this persona as an exemplar of an improved and ideal being. In the novel, a small community embarks on a ship where the destination and boundaries remain ambiguous, with the sole female passenger being male. The novel's male-dominated composition signifies the preponderance of their determining influence in real society. The presence of a single woman among the male characters establishes a direct and fitting correlation with the minority status of women in reality, while also encapsulating society's demeaning perception of women. Badria al-Shihhi, in contrast with the prevailing societal stance of silence and environment-appropriate description, employed literary works as a vehicle to portray the subjugation and punishment of women. By luring his protagonist into isolation and transsexuality at the conclusion of the novel, he prevents him from reaching the stage of introspection and self-discovery, where he would have discovered an individual identity free from imitation and opposition.

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