

Factors and Reasons Behind Disappearance of Arab Women in Arabic Literature From the Classical Era to the Modern One

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Abstract

This article is about the reasons and the factors that mainly led to many terrible effects on Arab women diminution in Arabic literature, such as the tribal conflicts, Umayyad caliphate and its battle against Abbasids caliphate after death of Muhammad, marrying women for pleasure and treating them as a sexual tool, in the Arabian Peninsula beginning from the pre-Islamic era to the modern era of Arabic literature. Furthermore, it also clarifies many women situations during those eras and their participations in many different events in battles by healing the injured people, helping their husbands in order to stop Muhammad's teachings and his tradition regardless paying attention to pursue education and learn poetry due these chippy reasons, resulting in many bad education and increasing level of analphabetism quickly in addition to their situations during the great engagement which happened between Umayyad dynasty and Abbasids dynasty. It also elucidates how technology and revolution of information in the twentieth century, as well as after the second world war, led to many great results on Arab women's appearance, lately, especially in Saudi Arabia in media, press, drama, journalism and their involutions on developing Arabic literature including all its literary forms as well as their contributions of children literature appearance during the twentieth century.

Key words: Elegy (*marthiyah*); Free verses and poems (*qasida*); Hija (a poem for criticising someone); Pre-Islamic epoch (*Jahiliyah*)

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INTRODUCTION

Each nation has its own identity and culture; every country consists of many cultural and literary elements that, valuably and respectfully, form and depict its civilization throughout history all over the world. Literature can be canonic part to render cultures and civilizations; many lands have wonderful kinds of literature, which is composed of poetry, drama, and fiction, such as English literature, Persian literature, and Arabic literature. One of those large nations is Arabic nation that has its huge legacy and glory which gave Arabic literature its peachy identity. Arabic literature is affected by the geological features of the Arabian Peninsula, that "[were consisting] of two Arab peoples, the nomadic Bedouin tribes, who subsisted through a wandering shepherding and goatherding existence, and the settled Hejazi caravans traveled across the Middle East" (T. Barnstone & W. Barnstone, 2003, p.227); and described its people there as

the nomads of Arabs, owners of great flocks and herds, have wandered to and fro upon this territory [the Arabian Peninsula]" and "moving their camps of black camel's hair cloth tents withersoever the grass grows or a ting rill of water tinkles (Huart, 1902, p.2);

this explicates how hard and ambitious area of land that even puts its mark on its people, which lately affected Arabic literature. After "overthrowing [and spifflicating] the great Persian Empire of the Sasanians" (Ibid.), many Arab poets, including Imru' Al-Qais, Samaw'al Ibn

‘Adiya, Al-Nabigha, Tarafa, Zuhayr, and Antar, wrote poems on epic battles, love, and courage; besides, Jewish and Christian poets made an outstanding contribution in Arabic poetry by writing poems about bravery. So, Huart described “the Arab of the Desert is a man of courage, at all events.... The Arab tribes [furthermore] associated themselves with them [the Jewish and Christian poets], they began to chant verses, and the greatest of their poets was Samuel” (p.3, 29). Over and above drawing wars against the Persian Empire as apocalyptic ones, there were many great tribal wars between the Arab tribes only for typifying braveness and for retaliation as well, resulting in many gore and massacres and creating many great social turbulences between many different tribes and clans in the Arabia. What is more, many Arab tribes were important, for raising Arabic poetry by saying verses of a poem in an oral way, and illustrious for contending men who betrayed or robbed them; as Huart stated that, “Thamudites, an Arab tribe, numbered fighting men who brandished lances and rode that pachyderm whose conquest was held by Buffon to be a noble thing.... The Bedouin was a robber too, a bandit, a brigand” (p.3). Arabic literature passed over many eras; setting out from classical Arabic literature, also christened pre- Islamic period, to modern Arabic literature, including poetry which “was from the Desert; for the towns were too much preoccupied with commercial matters to give literature any chance of growth” and “fragments of poems relating to *Hija*” is considered “the most remnants of this primitive Arabic poetry” (Ibid., p.7), epic literature, fiction literature, and non- fiction literature. As antecedently cleared that, Arabic literature plays a critical office in performing the Arabic civilization throughout history and allowing many poets to say poetry and participating in many literary occasions except women which their role was limited on writing and stating elegies (*marthiyah*), which is the usance of mourning and praising over the dead by female lamenters, beginning the elegiacal poem with a proclamation and ending it with words of advice for the tribe (Allen, 2000, p.94). Consequently, Arab women generally were barely seen in the pre- Islamic era, especially in the Arabian Peninsula, and played a weak role in Arabic literature, beginning from the classical era to the modern one, due to many factors and reasons behind their little continuous disappearance in Arabic literature and other occasions all over its epochs.

ANALYSIS

During the pre- Islamic era, the Arabian Peninsula had hard, difficult climate, ensuing in desert culture and civilization, which affected behavior of its people—men, women, children, and elders—largely; aside from “the other primary [the Red Sea and sand on its beaches are the basic geographical features of the Arabian Peninsula] geographical feature of the region is mountains” (Ibid.,

p.9) which gave its dwellers many hard and harsh qualities influencing even their language, culture, and dealing with each other toughly. On the other hand, Huart described the geographical features of the Arabian Peninsula as a

range after range of grey serrated mountain peaks; southward, again, huge plains, stretching to endless horizon, and strewn with blackish pebbles; and, last of all, the sandy desert, tingled with all... which made it for so long a time a land of mystery. (Ibid., p.1)

Therefore, power in dealing with other was created because of their desert environment that made them to grapple with each other in a herculean situation. Moreover, their desert environment obligated Arab men to give orders to their wives in misbehaved ways, accordingly, preventing them to act freely due to their “geographical factors and sheer distances... to create real and psychological barriers” (Ibid., p.9). Therefore, they suffered psychologically and their participations were limited on saying elegies (*marthiyah*) about one’s death. For example, Al- Khansa, also called Tumadir bint Amr, was noted for her elegies on her brother mourning his decease in a conflict, and beginning her poem with a promulgation of the tragedy and the dead hero name: “When night draws on, remembering keeps me wakeful / And hinders my rest with grief upon returning / For Sakhr...” (Ibid., pp.1-3) as well as there were other female poets such as Mahd al- Aadiyya, Afira bint Abbad, Laila bint Lukaiz, Jalila bint Murra, Umama bint Kulaib, and Juhaifa Addibabiyya . If any Arab woman at that time participated in another situation, she might be humiliated and “suffered great injustice, unfair treatment and were exposed to humiliation of all kinds.... More humiliation was even applied to women, in that she herself could be Women were treated like material items of this world” (Mousa, 2012, pp.153-54). In conclusion, the environment of the Arabian Peninsula, considered as a primary reason and cause resulting in many societal and psychological barriers that limited the appearance of the Arab women only in poems of elegies, bore on its dwellers to treat their wives unjustly and unequally increasing a higher level of literacy and education, too; not like the other Arab poets their “ extent... during the earlier centuries of the Arabic heritage – at least those whose works have come down to us – is overwhelmingly male” (Allen, 2009, p.70).

Women, in the pre- Islamic period, were

forbidden to remarry if a husband divorce them. Women had no right then to choose, or even consent, to their marriage. Man, on the other hand, had the freedom to acquire as many wives as so desired, with no set limit. (Mousa, 2012, p.154)

They were used, after their divorce or if her husband died, as moveable goods for bartering. Even they

were not entitled to inherit from their parents, husband or other relatives [even a low percent] because Arabs believe inheritance should only be granted to those who could ride a horse, fight, gain war booties and help protect the tribe and territory. (Ibid., p.153).

So, there was no fiat of equality and justice between them which led to many horrible effects that prevented women to have its rights and freeness. Women also weren't

welcomed the birth of a female baby into their family. They hated such a birth, and considered it an evil and bad omen. A father who received the news of the birth of a female baby was usually extremely sad, disappointed and depressed. (Ibid., p.154)

In the pre- Islamic epoch, Allah – the Arabic name of god- gave a description and elaboration, after revelation of Quran to Muhammad, of the father's position when he had the news regarding a daughter birth in the ménage:

When the news of (the birth of) a female (baby) is brought to any of them, his face becomes dark, and he is filled with inward grief! He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that whereof he has been informed. Shall he keep her with dishonor or bury her in the Earth? Certainly, evil is the decision. (Ibid., p.154)

Additionally, one of the greatest men who buried his daughter ignominiously was Omar ibn- Khattab before his conversion to Islam; after his conversion, he was crying as soon as remembering what he did to his daughter. Moreover, in Mousa's article "The Image of the Woman in Arabic Literature", he stated that, "women weren't allowed to have some or exercise some of their natural rights, such as having specific kinds of foods owing to some special types of them were only allowed for men and boys" (p.154). Consequently, this explicates the hard conditions and the difficult circumstances which Al-Hijaz society encountered before advent of Islam. This reason kept them away from seeking knowledge or even giving their women a chance to speak about her feelings as well as expressing her emotions. As a matter of fact, bar of women not to marry again, after demise of her husband or splitting up, made her life very challenging and hard towards those difficult days; imagine if there was a woman, tried to appear in Arabic classical poetry by writing poems, rather than elegiac ones, regarding love, romance, emotions, sensations, and sadness? There might be a great turn in changing many cultural elements to the best. In addition to proverbs which are "abound on the humility that befits the poor man," (Cachia, 2011, p.164) forming many mortifications of lower class people; finally, lack of remarrying women in the pre- Islamic period, kept them far of having and acquiring the sense of natural and innate feelings which might be an influential element to discover their creativity of saying romantic poetry in lieu of scorning them.

The other factor, which kiboshed developing women's appearance in literature and others in the pre- Islamic period, is lack of incest regulations and her contempt as a sexual tool, only treating and describing her like an intimate object, which doesn't have feelings and sensation. On one hand, the most shocking thing, which could be a strange factor that influenced the psychological

life of women on being far of education and literature, is marriage for pleasure only (*zawaj al- mut'a*); a one can marry a woman, regardless her approval, just for pleasure without thinking or having children from her. The worst thing, on the other hand, they used to practice "was to be married to two sisters at the same time, or to succeed one's deceased father as husband to his wife. They used to call someone who did this *dayzan*," as well as "if a man died, leaving a wife, or divorced his wife, his eldest son would stand up and throw his cloak over her if he wanted her. If he didn't want her, one of his brothers would marry her, with a new bride prize (Gelder, 2005, p.79). Those, who married their fathers' wives, are Manzur ibn Zabban, who married Mulayka bint kharija; Tamim ibn-Ubayy ibn Muqbil, who married Dahma; and Muhsin ibn Abi Qays ibn al- Aslat, who married Kubaysha bint Ma'n", consequently, some women had children by both father and son, such as Amina bint Aban ibn Kulayb, who married Umayya ibn Abd Shams; after his death, she married his son Abu Amr (Ibid., p.79), though some of them disliked the notion of marrying their stepmothers "describing it a hateful marriage" (Ibid., p.85). Genetically, these ways affect the family line if

the widow, together with having a sexual relationship with this new union, continues to suckle a child engendered by the ex-husband, the substance of the deceased could be found in the milk of his own son.... The inheritor- husband, half-brother, [accordingly] becomes the adoptive father [the nursing father] of the suckled child. (Ibid., p.87)

To boot, they used bad names and nicknames while calling their women which were containing a description of contempt, disgrace, abjectness, abasement, and antipathy; such names could be destructive to their feelings, their personality, and their heart. One of the most recognizable nickname is *dayzan*, "which is a name of contempt" (Ibid., p.80). These kinds of customs were banned strongly during the Islamic period which may cause, break, and ruin – socially, religiously, and biologically-- the family line in addition to its heritage and honor, too. Their actions, as well, played an important role on the Arabic culture at that time, and many of them didn't know even their ancestors because of some mysterious ancestors he/she didn't know, resulting in affecting of women behavior and her phratry. Due to these acts on women in the pre-Islamic period, she wasn't able to participate or say any poem rather than elegies, but unfortunately, she stayed under authority and having orders by her tribe's customs rather than her family's ones. Lastly, using women as a tool for just fulfilling desire and instinct acted upon their characters in Arabic literature as well as influencing her life and lives of her children.

Women, single and married, appeared shortly after revelation of the Quran to Muhammad, his birth was in Mecca in 570 CE, to encounter many teachings brought to them by him, that "changed ... the existing customs in pre- Islamic Arabia" (Ibid., p.78). Therefore, many

opponents from Meccan tribes—like Abu-Jahil and Abu-Lahb—arose against Muhammad, giving the opportunity to their wives and their daughters to appear, and pretending that, all his teachings and sayings were lies. This action made chances for many women follow other women whom insult the prophet with their husbands. Consequently, the offset of the Islamic era, from 622-661 CE, had many engagements resulting in participation of women, such as Umm- Jamil, in many hard and offensive meetings against Muhammad. What is more, acts against Muhammad encouraged and reinforced those women socially, psychologically, and mentally to make them feel and get out of thralldom they were in before; the Islamic period hostilities, gradually when Muhammad was spreading his message and tradition, enlightened the big changes of women to take part in many events, such as in battles, meetings, and having the bravery to barter goods. For instance, Muhammad commenced his life by “travelling with caravans from Mecca into Syria, [and] had acquired a fortune by his marriage with Khadija” (Huart, 1903, p.33); and she was “the first person in the Arab world who believed in the message of Muhammad the prophet such becoming the first [female] Moslem converted to the new belief” (Nicolau, 2014, p.711). Moreover, this cleared the big circle in forming life of the society there, upgrading women to have freedom from being under control or influence of another or others, but they didn’t take advantages or concern to expand their knowledge to express their feelings toward these big changes, throughout writing poems about freedom, bravery, peace, or even getting education to reduce level of analphabetism. These improvements were having “a range of philosophical, political and social issues such as emancipation of women,” (Starkey, 2006, p.52) and were considered great, but they didn’t promote women to level of saying poetry, rather than elegies, or writing drama which “were evening tales (*samar*) told under the nomads tents, stories which were already being carried from town to town by the professional story- tellers, such as Nadir ibn Harith, of Mecca” (Huart, 1903, p.32). Furthermore, these literary forms were almost absent of their life due to propagating hadith literature which has a group of religious literature genres (*tafsir*) explaining revelation of the Quran. As a matter of fact, the only female poet during the Islamic era until demise of Muhammad was his daughter Fatima “which is given respectful attention everywhere in the Islamic world, for she is the daughter of the first and much loved wife of the prophet, Khadija, and she had lived in his household (Gunther, 2005, p.181). Her poems were only regarding elegies, sometimes mixed with some laudation, of her father’s death. Conclusively, women, during the Islamic era and after revelation of the Quran to Muhammad by the Holy Spirit, didn’t appear or made a developmental factors for themselves in their literature.

Women in Umayyad Caliphate, which established after the death of Muhammad and became very influential part in the Arabia, didn’t appear a little bit during the (inter) cultural elements which they took over while migrating to Syria. Firstly, Umayyad Caliphate was centered in Medina and established by Othman ibn Afan, the third caliph of Muslims after Omar ibn Khattab’s assassination and

the period 661- 760 CE was a crucial one for the history of Islam [to emerge as a religion and culture] and the Middle East. The territories conquered by the Muslims in the Middle East, North Africa and Spain were ruled from Syria by a succession of caliphs belonging to the Umayyad family. (Hawting, 2000, p.i)

After assassinating of Othman ibn Afan, Muawiyah ibn Sufyan established it again, 661- 684 CE, in Syria which led to many civilizational changes in women poetry throughout migration, resulting in a different environment and an intercultural adoption of some cultural elements, such as freedom of speech and in “the Umayyad period itself consists of some literature produced by non- Arabs in languages such as Syriac and Armenian, coins, inscriptions, buildings and other artifacts, and administrative documents on papyrus which have survived” (Ibid., p.122). During the conflicts between Umayyad Caliphate, supported by Sunni Muslims, and Abbasids Caliphate (supported by Shiite Muslims), ultimately the Umayyads were overthrown by Shiite Muslims establishing the new Abbasids Caliphate in Baghdad. Due to these battles, there was a complete disappearance of women in most fields, like literature, mathematics and philosophy although “the reign of Abbasids, particularly that of Harun al-Rashid, is considered the Golden Age of Islam, a time of extraordinary advances in medicine, philosophy, literature, and mathematics, it... became a brilliant center of artistry, poetry [for men only] and scholarship, and the location of many of the tales of monumental Arabic prose romance” (T. Barnstone & W. Barnstone, 2003, p.229). In addition to women in the Arabian Peninsula, they generally didn’t take into considerations this expansion of the Islamic state to pursue education; they remained in Mecca and Madinah only for practicing prayers of the Islam religion and worshipping Allah.

The most significant rise of women in the Arabian Peninsula, called Saudi Arabia today, is throughout advancement of technology and education. A Few Saudi female actresses made great influences on Saudi drama, acting in many comic programs, T.V shows, writing literary articles in magazines and newspapers. This appearance is due to the press, “where women first began publishing shortly in the 1950s,” and “in the 1960s, the Saudi press began publishing women’s writings with some regularity. Each paper had a page devoted to women, and they sometimes carried women’s literary writings as well. Women wrote short stories, poetry, and literary essays...” (Ashour et al., p.255); speaking in general, a

one can take the 1950s and early 1960s as the beginning line for literature of women in the Arabian Peninsula. During the early years of the twentieth century, there was a huge gradual emergence in Arabic Romanticism from neo-classicism; Some female poets wrote great poems and novels like Sultana al- Sudayri's (named Nida as well) poems of "Abir al- Sabra" (the desert perfume) and Samira Khashuqi's novel *I Bid My Hopes Farwell*. "Abir al- Sabra" is expressing feelings and largely described as a romantic poem. On the other hand, Ashjan al- Hindi's long poem "Crescent Wars" has great many themes regarding love, romantic life, sins of men and women, their desires, and it additionally explains the compassionate relationship between a man and a woman that may lead to true love between them. Therefore, education is greatly essential and critical according to Ashour's saying that, "the appearance of women's creative writing in the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf area is linked with the rise of girls' education," (p.254) like writings of the Hijazi Khadija al- Shanqitiya. Also, many women devoted themselves for writing works of children's literature of all types, including stories, plays, poetry, and tales. This great movement or renaissance shifted many cultural elements to be adopted by the Arab people in the Arabian Peninsula, raising the higher level of education and civilization among others. Today the image of Women in the Arabian Peninsula, Saudi Arabia, modified to an extraordinary extent. They can write poetry in assorted forms, including the old style of poetry *qasida*, prose poem and free verse that many forms of this type came into Arabic literature after the Second World War. Furthermore, what an interesting thing that women in the Arabian Peninsula nowadays are different from those who were in pre-Islamic era because of having power to write poems which rebel "against the stereotypical image of women as a seductress and temptress of man, but it doesn't refute the charge. Rather, it makes men source of this temptation," and consequently, "if Eve came from Adam then men are the source of this temptation, and if men do injustice to women, it is no wonder that women seek revenge by turning the evil of [this] temptation against them" (Ashour et al., 2008, p.260). Finally these great enhancements made a corporative power, between men and women, to have their culture and civilization developed critically throughout teaching education, and learning literature which is a main pillar of any culture which any identity of a society could be represented by as well as understanding the religious, political, social, and ethnic conditions in the Arabia.

CONCLUSION

Arabic literature in the pre-Islamic period was just transferred orally between its people in the Arabian Peninsula. Many conflicts and battles happened there

that prevented and made barriers against the appearance of the Arab women in many different areas in literature and education, resulting in higher levels of uneducated people which later on adopting many unusual customs such as marriage for pleasure, marriage a son to his father's wife after his death and preventing women to eat specific type of foods that only for males. At the early offset of the Islamic era, all of these customs were banned and considered illegal practices that caused oppression to the Arab Women at that time, so many Meccan tribes were displeased and becoming aggressive towards Muhammad criticizing his teachings. Accordingly, many women helped their husbands and her tribe to defend against Muhammad's teachings, but they failed and this great movement changed gradually the hard situations of Arab women there until she got out of bondage. After decease of Muhammad, the Islamic Caliphate, beginning from Umayyad dynasties in Damascus to Abbasids dynasties in Baghdad, started to spread all Muhammad's teachings to the world, but unexpectedly many conflicts took place between Umayyad and Abbasids dynasty to whom deserves the caliphate, resulting in many battles and bloodshed. Arabic literature was developed by men in these two dynasties only regardless disappearance of women because of their using her to heal injured people in many battles and not allowing for them to pursue education. Nowadays, through furtherance of technology and education, many Arab women in the Arabian Peninsula appeared gradually in literature, developing its literary elements by writing romantic poems, free verses, *qasida*, short stories, narratives and children literature. In point of fact, many women made a great job in developing Arabic literature in the Arabian Peninsula like Sultana al-Sudyari, Samira Khashuqi, Ashjan al- Hindi, and Khadija al- Shanqitiya. Moreover, there are many Saudi actresses who appeared on TV series such as Reem Abdullah, Shirin Ba'wzir, Shirin Hattab, and Amina al- Ali. They played a significant role for developing Saudi drama throughout performing many plays on stage for audience to come and see. Finally, there will be a great change on Arabic literature, including all its literary elements like poetry, prose, drama, short stories, and Arabic children literature, in the nearest future. So, the Arab World and poets are believed the vision persons and prophecy in the twentieth century (Abdul-Malek & Hallaq, 2000, p.223).

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