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Women Issues from the Point of View of Simin Behbahani, an Iranian Poet

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Abstract

Schematization of women's issues and atypical psychic and psychological situation are significant issues that are manifested in Simin Behbahani's poetries. In this contemporary poet's thought, women's issues have been expressed in a way that can reveal some kinds of feminist attitudes and trends. In other words, psychic and psychological situations of women, even their physical situation, are known as results of men's atypical behaviors. In terms of plotting of women issues and the solution of their psychic and spiritual problem, she expresses the issue of men's behavioral reformation. Although she does not recommend directly how men should behave, she portrays false behaviors of men in order to focus on the reverse of those behaviors. Therefore, Simin Behbahani's feminism wants a temperate (moderate) style for social reformation of both men and women.

Keywords: Feminism, Men, Simin behbahani, Temperate Style, Women issues.

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Introduction

Simin Behbahani is one of the two great contemporary female poets in Iran. She owns her own style and thought in contemporary Iranian literature, and is known as "Nima of sonnet" (Hagh Shenas, 1992: 163). Social themes and issues especially women issues get her attention. Behbahani is a poet who does concentrate on women issues along with Forough Farokhzad; therefore, Behbahani is a social poet who represents a different thought in exploiting especial symbols; thus, her way of thinking and poesy are located under "Realism School" (Mohammadi, 2001: 61). Because she has especial attention towards social and cultural issues, whether in international events and evolutions or in local ground of her own society, she is a poet who gathers realism with symbolism.

From the outset, Simin's poetries "had realistic coloring, and she regards dull, sad, and even horrific realities of society" (Hossein pur Jafi, 2006: 103). She tries to make the language of her poetry the language of collective identity; therefore, the coloring of various range of people especially low class of society are clearly portrayed and depicted in her poetry.

Simin's realistic-symbolistic poetry has two important functions from the view of universality circle; on the one hand, it mentions realities which exist in society, on the other hand, with regard to the symbolic aspect of its narrative elements, it goes beyond the poet's local scenes and society, and includes the whole community of human being.

Simin is a woman who is completely familiar with the particular problems of women. She herself says: "I was born in my grandfather's house, because, before my birth, my mother left her husband with his businesses, and returned to her father's house" (Behbahani, 1993: 9). Simin's poetry reveals her humanistic, deep, delight, and dull experiences which are rare among Iranian female poets (except Forough and Tahereh Safarzadeh). Thus, the style of Simin's poetry is fresh and particular, "her personal fingerprint is clearly seen on them" (Ahmadi, 2006: 33).

Some parts of Simin's poetry criticize the patriarchal society. Actually, these poems are feministic criticism, and have a different approach towards male literature especially traditional literature:

When we look from this point, we can say that Simin's approach toward literature has been a different evaluation of women and the story of the history of "woman type's" life, and this statement can be typically true about the whole literary history. Feministic criticisms try to show that in a way the patriarchal literature restricts the character of woman, and inevitably, this leads her to passive behaviors (Ebrahimi, 2011: 154).

1. Feminisms

Feminisms is a social and cultural movement of women who intend to seize a worthy position based on their own talents and wisdom. Feminist authors believe that the concept "woman" (female) is not a natural concept, and this concept has been counterfeit and constructed by social civilization throughout history:

As Simone de Beauvoir put it, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman"... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature ... which is described as feminine.' By this cultural process, the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative; the feminine, by systematic opposition to such traits, has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional (Abrams, 2005: 94).

The main reason of inequality of women is the abnormal male behaviors in the modern humanistic civilization. These behaviors have been repetitive throughout the history; therefore, their appropriateness have been considered obvious from feminist perspective.

The issue of woman and man, or according to some researchers of anthropology "unfair binary rule" (Reed, 2009: 45), has an old story as long as human life, and it has not been a new problem only for one particular community. Therefore, planning of this issue is only possible when it is revealed as a dilemma in all communities. It is necessary to mention that in primitive and mythological communities, women have allocated a worthy status and acted her role next to men. Thus, the creation of both is from one origin, and "one is related to the other, the very same and conformal" (Lahiji, 2009: 327).

Feminism, as a universal movement, can be traced in the path of definition and determination of social status of women from different viewpoints; it also can be criticized from the viewpoint of economic, political, and religious issues. Thus, one of the main approaches has been to project this subject from the viewpoint of poets. Feminism has been one of the poets and author's concerns in global literature; in a similar way, it has been declared in contemporary Persian literature. Woman issue has obtained an important place in contemporary poets' poetry especially female poets, because female poets themselves can better show their own social and cultural problems and concerns.

1.2. Simin and Woman Poetry

In addition to important social and cultural issues which Simin blazons in her poetry; "woman" and her concerns become significant. Therefore, it can be said that one of the

important themes of Simin's poetry is planning of temperate feminism in terms of defending women's rights. This issue invites Simin to attend in social fields. She does not like unkindness against women, and she whines against this abnormality. In her poetry, she warns women's oppressed shriek and ignorance of their high value in human society. With declaring these issues, she desires global equality and justice.

2. Seeking a Remedy and Pains

In addition to her explicit and snide criticisms, Simin concentrates on woman and her capabilities in order to show ways and remedies. It is the presence of this woman who gives existence to the presence of man, becomes vivid, and falls in love with daily works. A poet says:

Only with you, I can

Be so which I recognize

My tired self (Salehi, 2005: 53)

2.1. Woman and Social Mobility

Based on Simin's view, the concept of society results from social attempt of all individuals, both woman and man. With this viewpoint, the poet believes that woman not only should have a principal role in home, but also should act her own social role in society. Based on this ground, Simin deals with criticizing the realities of human society, and exhibits its abnormalities for reformation; woman is the victim of these abnormalities. This kind of her idea is more depicted in the poem "O woman"; she is recalled to participate in social grounds.

Like a melodious lyre, singing

In man's ear, a syncretism song

You said: I am your pair and sweetheart, but

Not for being in love and fascination

I see in your brow in such a way

You are the seater of the council

You are the lord of your destiny

In your work, you are ware and wise (Behbahani, 2007: 94-95)

"O man" is also one of Simin's romantic-social poetries which reveals the poet's trend towards temperate feminism. In this poem, she expresses the participation of women in social works.

Simin excavates different angles of women's life. She remembers that women's life is not only restricted in home, but also for men, she is a wise comrade in thought and steadfast in social works.

You have been one hand and one hand is silent

I became another hand for your reputed body

Outside the house, I became a firm comrade and friend

At home, your companion and caressing (Behbahani, 2007: 386)

It recalls an important point here for man which the role of men in social activities will be incomplete and ineffective without women.

2.2. Passive Behaviors

Women's lives of Simin's poetry is full of life's distress and grief. They are propelled to destructive and sudden passive behaviors by current situation of human community; nevertheless, they are themselves the victim of these queer behaviors. Thus, Simin does not believe in individualists, and invites both man and woman to friendly and complementary cooperation. In poetry "Rival Wife", Simin discusses polygamy, one of the social complicated problems, and considers it in opposition with her own social-ethical attitude. Based on the poet's vision, polygamy, which is interpreted despicably, is portrayed with its consequences in this poetry. Simin advocates women's rights; those women who were met with ingratitude and unkindness by their husbands. Her temperate feminism is shown itself in this poetry with a tragic theme.

Alas! This man who sleeps deeply like that.."

Next to this agitator woman,

Place me in his arms

Before warmer and more exciting

His shaky hand goes through water

He pours a colorless dust into the cup

... I have to tonight, unsparing and without wavering

Finish the work of one of these two.

Or for me the spouse remains without rival

Or the rival becomes without a spouse.

... She sees her spouse sleeping with her rival!

But her child drinks the cup! (Behbahani, 2007: 255-258)

Poet's partiality for women does not result in not criticizing women's behavior. This behavior not only has not made a success, but also has led to a tragic disaster. Because if one side does not perform one's own role correctly, the whole life falls in the valley of disaster.

2.3. Divorce

Simin considers realistic aspects of social issues in all cases. Therefore, her poetry keeps out of poetical subtlety in this situation, and approaches a tragic violence. In the abyss of such circumstance, she displays her own tragic hero or woman. In this show, everything is out of the control of woman, and she moves towards the destiny. Whatever scratches the female soul in such issues is the contradiction between pure female nature and customs of society. In other words, with her pure nature, "woman" understands that some ways have been accepted and custom which their ugliness is obvious from a woman's view with a pure nature, but irresponsible men do not understand this. The temperate feminism towards which Simin tends, has been shown in the poem "Letter". She criticizes the dilemma of divorce, and warns its inauspicious consequences; because "she herself experiences this problem" (Behbahani, 1993: 9).

Alas! O messenger, breezy messenger!

You bring a letter from my spouse

What? What is in this letter? Behold! What is this?

Oops ... it is the command of my dissociation

The seal of disorient, the line of invalidity

On my being and me, it's my divorce (Behbahani, 2007: 380-382)

Simin's feminism in poem "Without Fate" displays the tragedy of a woman's life in another form. She defends women and criticizes one of their problems that is the issue of dowry. In addition to her internal pain, Simin's understanding which was accompanied with her experience was transferred to the reader in a perceptible way. In these kinds of poems, she tries to find a haven to eliminate and reduce these kinds of pains; these agonies pain the body of her society.

O legal widow of a wealthy man

Standing before the blind eye of law

From the funds and rich named "dowry"

Law gives a penny onto her hand (Behbahani, 2007: 496-499)

2.4. Woman and Traditional Tissue of Society

"Ilkhaniha" is a collection of Simin's poetry in which she reveals oppression of women in a totally traditional tissue; a woman who has been oppressed in various forms throughout the social history. This collection has two characters; one is Ilkhan and the other one is Zohreh. Ilkhan symbolizes patriarchy and oppression and Zohreh symbolizes woman's tolerance in history, "Some of these songs expresses historical tyranny anecdotally; it bitterly and regretfully represents incarceration of women and the story of misery of mothers" (Abedi, 2001: 104-112).

The word of Ilkhan, which turns to become a symbol in the poem, actually is the representation of a man's behavior who is the head (Khan) of the tribe. The poet refers to the traditional texture of the society (tribe) and this traditional society is summarized in the word of khan. This khan inspires negative emotional.

Zohreh becomes couple of Ilkhan

She becomes sweetheart of home

From two tear drop, you made

Her dowry, a pair of earrings

When you enjoy fruition with her

You seek another wish

You decide to have a fresh vow

With another star (Behbahani, 2007: 931-932)

Thus, woman's complaint voice is projected in a tragic-comedy presentation.

Ilkhan, beautiful

Is not few, your sadness becomes few!

Every time put

On the lap of a star

.... Zohreh is in bedchamber

Stays like strangers

Scatter the remaining

Although it is Zamzam water (Behbahani, 2007: 933-934)

In Ilkhaniha, Simin shows woman's tools such as oppression and patience.

The poem "A Call Came Praisely from the Chamber (Khan)" reminds the reflection of both Ilkhan's oppressed treatments and female tolerances.

A call came praisely from the chamber

Which what I did and what things I did

What a beautiful Tazarv [bird]

I hunted on air! (Behbahani, 2007: 939-940)

In poem "Ilkhan, They Brought Present" also criticizes the domination of a man who "wants everything". For highlighting these realities, Simin represents such content in a variety of ways. In these types of poems, she shows the oppressed voice of women whose high value is ignored.

Ilkhan, they brought present

Under visual brocade

On two soft flowers of her ears

There is a valuable gem

Ilkhan stretches his hand

Catches one gem of those gems

There is also jealousy for jewelries

No gems on the ears (Behbahani, 2007: 941-942)

It is necessary to mention that atmosphere of Simin's poem apparently shows a traditional society. But this traditional society with all its symbols can be conform to the global modern community, because symbolistic poems pass spatio-temporal borders and enter the scene of global community from all periods.

2.5. Physical and Spiritual Homelessness

In the poems "Dasht Arzhan", Simin composes poetries which can be named gypsy-like. These gypsy-like poetries are the result of successful poetic experiences of Simin. In relations between Simin's "social and romantic", gypsy is the symbol of woman-kind throughout the

history. This kind of mentality causes the poet to express a particular and temperate feminism in this part of her poetry. Thus, she produces an opportunity to address this symbolic hero, explain women's problems in the language of poem throughout the male history, and portrays the oppression of women for the reader.

Simin is not a woman who involves in extremist cynical view towards men because of defending women's rights, "she knows well that extremist feminism does not solve problems, and even can make everything worse" (Dehbashi, 2005: 389-390).

Simin analyzes the depth of her society and culture, finds, and revives a tangible content. Her "gypsy-like" are an apparent example of this unique traits:

I think if I actually become a gypsy, I am a thousand-year old gypsy who experiences and gathers all pains of the ages which have been imposed on women. And this leads me to make my gyps-like. It intimately reveals my inside that is, inside of a woman with all her coercions, releases, impatience, patience, conflict, and contradictions (Dehbashi, 2005: 98-99).

Gypsy is the goddess of colorful love in Persian literature. A colorful love which carries all happy and sad scenes of life in order to scare and hope or warns and gladden. "She is the symbol of Iranian women's displacement and vagabondage. She has no home for herself. She continuously wanders. She is a wanderer" (Dehbashi, 2005: 197).

The other side of gypsy's coin is her mental wanderings, because this kind of woman is mentally shelterless, although she lives in a place (like home). These internal and mental vagabondage finds no way to show itself. She never hurts others, and brings her internal happiness for others.

That cavalier went, gypsy!

He did not take you with himself

Night remains and with night

A compressed darkness

Gypsy! Next to the fire

Where is your overnight dance? (Behbahani, 1984: 643-644)

Simin's feminism and her continuous defense of woman in the work of gypsy-like refers to the reality of woman's wandering soul. She directly and indirectly hammers this subject like a spike into the reader's brain in order to awakens him. Simin herself says:

Patriarchy is old in my country. Look at women in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. Wherever is a story about women, it is a totally painful story: story of Tahmineh, Manizheh, Farangis, Kataiun. Gordafarid covers her hair and body in male garment and helmet. And she is ashamed and escaped, when her female face is revealed. When there are no men to become king, Purandokht and Azarmidokht come to the throne (Dehbashi, 2005: 197)

Simin forgets the temporal and mythological atmosphere of women in *Shahnameh*, and irrelevantly compares it to modern era. Actually, as expressed by Ebrahimi;

In such comparisons, historical conditions of each period should be considered. Incorrect judgments should not be made towards various periods. In other words, extra-textual elements (society and conditions) and intra-textual elements (literary techniques) do differently in producing each texts. Therefore, two different texts from two very different periods cannot be evaluated by contemporary measures and criteria (Ebrahimi, 2011: 233).

2.6. Global Gypsy

Migratory gypsy is an eternal homeless. She is from both west and east, from nowhere and everywhere. Gypsies "are some tribes of Indian bard who came to Iran on Bahram Gur period" (Amid, 1985: 993). Whether this narrative is true or not, it is not empty of realities, and it will not change the global gypsy. Whatever remains is gypsy's perpetual pains and toils. Gypsy's land is the whole world, and she loves both eternal evolution of existence, and remains faithful to colorless color. In Simin's poetry, gypsy is the symbol of a free soul who does not accept any limitation, as Simin puts it:

Although my gypsy is from east, she travels to west. In the heart of Europe, gypsy's soul rides on a Hungarian swift horses, and the mane of her horse combs the wind; in Spain, she sings and dances. She puts grief of her old roam on the torn heart of time with plectrum of her guitar. And on the land of my ancestors –Iran— she drags her feet on the far away margins of deserts. She knows desert snakes, retains their beads and poisons for friendship and enmity, knows plants and their features, and sees my present and future in a mirror. She does not forget her own language, message, old signs (Behbahani, 1984: 10).

Gypsy has mental independence. Although this soul is represented as a homeless, she has a magic power. She is a palmist, soothsayer, troubleshooting, prayer-writer, knows past, and also predicts what will happen. She opens a way for herself among social severities. She does not tighten the life of others, and does not produce sadness. She removes sadness from the

people's heart with her games and laughs. She is a friend for all instead of vengeance, a false custom. She loves her own job, and helps others in their happiness.

Gypsy soothsays; there are promises with her divination:

“Thirty days ...

Thirty weeks...

Thirty months...”

Gypsy! Do you have any plant to extricate me from pain of love?

From herbs, for growing, gypsies have many medicines

Gypsy! Any prayer? Maybe unlock the spell

Talisman of troubleshooting

With gypsies (dry-nurse said) there are (Behbahani, 1984: 639)

Simin is quiet fond of the transformational character of gypsy who faces the future. A character who maintains the values of tradition, and also causes to leave it; thus, grace is going through freshness and innovativeness. "She does not attach to the house. She does not stay in a restricted room. She is not limited to the interior of the house and ideal meanings. She does not insist on the traditional privacy between men and women, and does not hide behind the veil. Gypsy is active, and this action gives her presence" (Dehbashi, 2005: 199).

With gypsy's steps

Awakened the plain

By her clear glance

The lake is overflowed

She opens her lips

And galaxy starts shining (Behbahani, 1984: 641)

Sometimes Simin describes gypsy, or addresses her. She often composes tragic images or melodies for readers.

Homeless gypsy is alone

With fog and rust, without you ...

Until what to do with heart

With whom become friend, without you ...

Greenery of gypsy's skirt

Is not without flowers and tulip

Tears on her, drops drop

Weeps a lot without you (Behbahani, 1984: 645-6)

Simin looks at gypsy from the view of aware woman. Despite the observers who watch the game of gypsy, and do not know the depth of gypsy's life, Simin sees her internal life. She lives the gypsy in her own poetic scenery. Instead of just watching the appearance of funny scene of gypsy's game like a passive observer, she feels the tragic scene of gypsy's life (woman), and from the formal aspect, she transforms the poems to a catastrophic drama for aware audiences. Because she knows "the word gypsy is ingrained with a noisy presence. A voice which traditionally have negative charge, are subordinated to the same limitations which her body has (Dehbashi, 2005: 201-202).

When she remembers her own memories, evokes her own gypsy in mind, and recalls earache of her childhood, and writes: doctor interpreted that shouts of my childhood are similar to a gypsy and said to my mother: this girl will wreak vengeance on periods. "My gypsy-like behavior" turns out to be "gypsy-like poems" (Degbashi, 2005: 201).

Simin sympathizes with gypsies and says: "Wonder! I have recently found a middleman between myself and that years ago "I", that is a gypsy who is constructed and begun by imagery. And when I want to remember myself, she (gypsy) comes: she is the symbol of my soul's eternal homelessness and tramp. It was good that she managed to extricate me from "I" and "without I"! and it is easy to compose through her existence" (Behbahani, 1984: 9).

I am gypsy, Ah! Here is nobody except me

Gypsy's image is obvious, until my face is in the mirror ... (Behbahani, 1984: 640)

Gypsy's trip continues to exist in Simin's body and soul until she identifies herself through gypsy. This identification leads her to go through gypsy's hidden rooms of body and soul, excavate, and compose it. This work "actually brings into question many traditions about femininity. Gypsy overthrows common traditions and goes beyond the borders. As the image of an individual who dominates over her destiny, gypsy can recreate herself and her myth in a culture which do not respect autonomous individuality especially among women. Either her continuous travels from a village to another village, from a city to another city, or her travel from some feminine meanings to some fresh ones in a symbolic ground overthrow the whole laws against woman. Gypsy is present in society, is active, and has voice" (Dehbashi, 2005: 662-663).

Gypsy! Enthusiast of freedom

Dance and with its strike

Send a message and a messenger

To receive an answer

... Ancient dark ages

Presses your body in itself

Comes out, not remain

In fossil like an image (Behbahani, 1984: 662-663)

Gypsy's character is ambivalent Simin's poetry. On the one hand she is the preserver of good humanistic tradition, on the other hand she tries to free from everything that make her a fossil. Thus, gypsy's soul is the collection of paradoxes, and contradictories gather in it. She performs tradition very well, and reveals freedom from the heart of that tradition. Thus, gypsy is a tree that can never separate from her root, and endows the enthusiast fruits of freedom and toleration. Here the creator of gypsy says: "it is true that gypsy has a victimized identity. She is homeless, wanderer, and vagrant, however, she also has a resistant, strong, and familiar character. She is both an ideal and an anti-ideal. She is both a heroine and an anti-heroine. She is both a resistant woman and a flexible one" (Dehbashi, 2005: 202).

The considerable point is this that gypsy of Simin's poetry is fundamentally different from its real and earthly version. Actually, real and earthly gypsy is only a context for gypsy of Simin's poetry whose symbolic face represents the changed world of woman. In other words, in Simin's poetry, gypsy (woman kind), maintaining her own accepted rituals, can give her life social mobility. Therefore, in addition to maintaining her own unique existence, in every time and place, she can also prove her own transformative and flowing capacities. Gypsy of Simin's poetry is not only a sentimental woman (similar to real gypsy) but also has redeeming emotions of human, in both cases, Simin does artistically and efficiently highlight these contradictory emotions in gypsy's character. Thus;

She throws the previous interpretations about her into question, and protects a kind of radical changes. She revives, rereads and reconstructs myths of familiar and native culture. With a new narrative of gypsy, she shows her strength, not her oppression, her independency, not her displacement; thus, she represents an independent and triumphant image of a familiar woman. A familiar image with unfamiliar interpretations (Dehbashi, 2005: 202-203).

In Simin's poetry, woman has various faces; sometimes she is a shelterless woman who has no remedy except reacts passively, and sometimes she is the victim of wanted and unwanted divorce. This woman, who has an unbelievable tolerance, is represented as the symbolic character of gypsy. She creates a transformative character from all her weaknesses and strengths, and brings happiness and hopes for human society.

Various forms of woman have the same feature. This common trait exists in life; they do continuously try to live it next to their own man wisely and firmly in the path of life. Although they face with many problems in this difficult path, women maintain her pure emotions in every form and identity, and concentrate on a bright future.

Conclusion

Simin is a poet who ponders over social and cultural themes especially the issue of women in her poetries. Her viewpoint towards the issue of women shows her feministic trend. Her view is a temperate feminism and is far from extremism. Her feministic view is not about a particular society, but it criticizes the whole human society. With this expression, she approaches women of the community; she sympathizes with them and tries to solve these dilemmas. She wants the equality of all human beings, whether women or men. She enters the lives of women of various classes whose men are ungrateful in order to notify their lives' realities to the readers.

Simin tries to make woman interfere in her own life and enters different grounds of life in order to receive social independence. She is the fond of evolution in women's lives; a revolution which gives more mobility in community to women. She writes particular poems to represent imageries of women; a woman who should perform her role independently and complementarily next to her man.

The aim of this poet is the real mobility of society from social activities of woman. When all women and men participate in social activities and perform their own social and humanistic roles based on ipso facto and potential powers, society gains its real mobility. Therefore, evolution of women's lives is beneficial for society, and man and woman are complementary; this supplement is incomplete when one side has no ware and active presence.

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