

Woman Character in the Book of Amir Hassan Cheheltan "The Mandrake"

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ABSTRACT

The book "The Mandrake" is written by Amir Hassan Cheheltan that is one of the authors of sixty decay. In this work the main characters are women and the author could show the spiritual characteristics and major problems of them among the daily events of Iranian women condition. In this article, it is tried to investigate the basic issues that are dominant over the woman's life with the problems that have affected most of the women, the idea of the author about each one of them is analyzed and it is shown that patriarchy and divorce are the basic problems of the women. And the result is that the women whether from poor and illiterate class or from rich and literate class have in common problems that even with their different insights have affected their life.

KEYWORDS: Cheheltan, Woman, The Mandrake, Women problems, Patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

In fictions on the woman, the women's personality has been studied in an article entitled "Savushun and the women's gentry stance" by Fatemeh Sarmashghi. Also, in an article called "gender in Iranian women novelists' works" by Vahid Valizadeh the traditional and the modern women images have been compared in six Persian novels. Tazhamir Fakhra'ee in an article "the women's depiction in publically liked Iranian novels" has dealt with the survey of the women's images in twenty one novels. But, there is yet an independent research to be conducted by the same writer on the story of "The Mandrake" [1].

The necessity to do research:

Storytelling literature and particularly the post-Islamic revolution Iranian stories has become a branch in the Persian literature which has been less attended to. According to the fact that Amir Hassan Cheheltan is one of the successful authors of the present time which has less dealt with offering an analysis of his works, the current research paper can be a step taken towards gaining a fuller realization of the author [2]. On the other hand, the women-related issues both as a subject matter for conducting a literary research and from sociological point of view has been found to be of a particular importance and a reflection of the cultural issues and the mindset foundations of a great many of the women's problems can be traced into the literary works, especially in novels which are the true mirrors of the social realities [3].

Introducing the story writer:

Amir Hassan Cheheltan was born on the 9th of October in 1956 and he is a member of the Iranian writers' center. His literary works have been frequently nominated to receive various literary prizes including "Hushang Golshiri Prize" and the bestseller of the Islamic Republic. Among his collection of short stories, one can point to the following ones: "Concubine" [Siqeh] (1976); "seeking refuge in the Iron Steel window" [Dakhil

Bar PanjerehFoolad] (1978), “no one called me story since...” [Digar Kasi Sedayam Dastan Nazad] (1989); “not much time is left to tomorrow” [Chizi Be FardaNamandehAst] (1998); “it is late to die at 5:00 o’clock” [Sa’atPanjBarayeMordan Dir Ast] and among his unpublished collection of literary works, one can point out the following one “the sun in the small copper bowl” (Khorshid Dar KaseyeKuchakMesin”. His novels are “elegy for Qasem” (1991), “outside the country”, “Mirror hall” (1991), “The Mandrake” (1998), Tehran trilogy including three novels “Tehran, the city with no skies” (2001), “Tehran, Enghelab Avenue, killing Americans in Tehran”, “Love and the imperfect lady” (2002) and “the Iranian dawn” [4,5,6] .

Introducing the book:

In the book “The Mandrake” [Mehr-e-Giah] the reader is faced with an obstetrician called Shams Al-Zoha who finds her patients wishful to give birth to boys. In this book, themes such as Shams Al-Zoha’s visage as a female physician and her female patients and the reasons why these patients are so wishful for delivering boy children can be investigated. In this article the women’s stance in contrast to the men’s and in respect to the society, family system and the politics can be studied and, in the meantime, according to the main characters in the study being women, the woman characterization can also be surveyed from the perspective of another woman.

1. The woman stance in contrast to the men standpoint in the book “The Mandrake”:

Patriarchy:

The women in “The Mandrake” are all miserable. They behave in such a manner that they are men’s slaves; they are obedient and submitted and under the domination of the patriarchy governing the society and they are continuously enduring an internal fear which makes them more obedient. Shams Al-Zoha’s father treats her with coldness when the daughter tries to eagerly show him her marks. Although the father’s method of treating the daughter is manifested in a much trivial level of the father’s domination over the daughter, “that day she had come earlier from school, the children’s report card had been distributed. She dashed towards the father’s room drowned in immaculate emotions. On her way, she hit something and she trampled another thing... She flew like a pigeon, she did not hear. The door was locked from inside... She waited in front of the door... Shams Al-Zoha resisted: I have something to tell him, she was trembling in all her body. Shams Al-Zoha fainted. Her tongue stammered. The good feeling of showing the remarkable marks in the report card was diminished all of a sudden. She opened her mouth and before the door was shut hastily a shadow passed right behind the glass-worked pairs of doors and she could smell the odor” [1].

In some of the cases, Shams Al-Zoha example in adulthood reveals itself in the form of men’s hatred and avoiding from getting married and in a great many of the other cases there is given birth to women like “Raf’at” who are not self-confident in their adulthood and they even have come to the realization that they owe their growth to the patriarchy. In fact, such women do not know any growth or progress as being stemmed from their own selves unless it is determined for them by patriarchy and even if any sort of progress and development can be imagined for them it has to be defined for them within the areas determined by the society of men and the community.

Women’s physical torment and anguish:

The men usually have a greater physical strength and power than the women. When the men are vested with a far greater authority by the society, if they are not deterred by the religious principles or ethical norms, their power can be a factor behind their use of cruel measures against women. Women’s being hit by their spouses and/or their fathers in family quarrels and fights is clearly observable: “In some of the environments the women happened to be severely hit by their husbands; in some of the other environments, the man prevents from any sort of cruelty against himself for the exact reason that he is more powerful and his fists are effective tools” [2].

In the course of story when Raf’at accompanied by her husband, Jahangir, and her son come to Iran to live in Tehran, Jahangir begins annoying and hurting his wife, quite despite his behavior in Beirut she shows his wife his other side. It seems as if he has got far enough from his wife’s family and therefore he can do anything he wishes for, that is it has been through finding his wife as weaker as a result of staying away from her family that the men finds himself as more powerful and takes advantage of such a power in irritating the woman [1].

Women’s psychological torment:

Annoying and tormenting the women cannot be always physical. In the course of the story, from the very beginning of their married life, Jahangir tries to weaken his wife by any means and one such methods of weakening his wife is through psychologically and mentally disturbing his wife which starts with demonstrating the letters sent to him by the other girls in order for the women to become loss of her self-confidence. When Raf’at engages and marries Jahangir, she finds out there have been a great many of the other girls who wished to marry Jahangir: “After marriage, [Jahangir] handed a suitcase full of letters and photos to Raf’at. All of them had been sent by the women. It had been the case that all the letters and photos were to be burnt by the hands of

the woman who would become his wife. The suitcase was handed over to Raf'at. He rose up his head with pride. He said: "these are yours. I can show them all to you in street. It is enough for me to look at them. That's all!" Such a behavior can deprive the woman from their psychological security and this way the power scale in the family will become heavier in favor of the man [7].

Women humiliation:

Women's humiliation can be underlined among the other torments and irritations by the men and this not only can be taking place by the spouse but it can also be carried out by the society. In the course of the story a husband hurts his pregnant wife because she has been a little late in bringing him his lunch. The sick woman answers in a conversation with the obstetrician (Shams Al-Zoha) who wants her to go to the police station in case that her husband hurt her that "the police station? I did it once. What do you think happened? You know, he had smashed the chowder cruse on the crown of my head ... [The physician:] why? Had he been out of his mind? Out of his mind? He told me to get him the cruse. I was washing the clothes in the tub. I said "okay, right away; please wait. And he came to the yard, picked up the cruse and hit me on my head with it. It burnt my whole back".

Humiliating the women because of their giving birth to baby girls:

The mothers seek their dreams and their interests in the existence of the opposite sex and try to divide their love between the father and the son: "the situation differs a lot depending on the infant being a girl or a boy; and the mothers are more willing to have baby boys even if the boys are more demanding. Due to the credit given by the woman to the men and also due to the privileges that the men usually have, many of the women wish to have baby boys. They say "giving birth to a man is astonishing and wonderful! We have seen that the women dream about creating hero and superhero and this championing hero is definitely made of the male sex" (Beauvoir, 2003).

Deceiving the women:

Among the women who imagine that with their getting married and being with old men they can become wealthy but they found that they have been deceived after a short while is Raf'at in "The Mandrake" story. Purdavood deceives Raf'at and asks her to encourage Behruz to write a fake letter because he is a spy and a supporter of the German government. With the advancing of the Russian army in Iran and their getting close to Tehran, Purdavood escapes and Raf'at alone finds herself in so much trouble. In conversation with Shams Al-Zoha: "where is Purdavood now in such a mess? (Raf'at) He has gone to visit his father's grave. He has put me into such a big trouble and he has escaped. If the Russians catch him, they will mince him." Raf'at also finds Jahangir at the early beginning of their life as a lover but after marriage she notices that she has been completely wrong. "(Raf'at): Did you know that I used to practice violin in Beirut".

Considering women as cunning:

In the story of "The Mandrake", the boy who has come to Raf'at's house, talks about himself and his mother and reminds of the point that his father abandoned them before his being born. Due to the reason that as if another woman has been involved: "[Behruz:] my mother is the only thing left for me. This is my whole family. My father abandoned my mother before I was born". When he is asked about the reason why his father abandoned his mother, he replies: "one can never exactly understand the reason for such things. Some people say that there has been another woman involved in their story". And the reason for doing such things is described as the cunning nature of the women: "women's artfulness! One should never ignore it".

Women's regret in getting married:

In the book, there are two types of families introduced. In the first family in which Shams Al-Zoha has been fostered and brought up, no such thing as positive idea regarding marriage exists. Shams Al-Zoha decides to continue studying, and then find a job and never get married. This decision made by her can be for the reason that she has seen the way her father treated her mother, a father who is in a relationship with another woman besides being married to her mother. Shams Al-Zoha's mother is described as such that "nut, she had a womanly sense and knew that there was another woman involved. Later on, he found out that it is true. It has always been like this. (Shams Al-Zoha's mother): "why did you bring me here while spending your time up to the midnight with that bitch in Kentan Café? I would like to know who on earth had told you to get married? Did I send anyone after you?" What is more underlined here in all such cases is the reason behind the women's remorsefulness of their act of getting married [1].

Woman's life after divorcement:

Besides financial problems, the divorced women had to experience other pressures at home and in the society which brings about a situation for the suppression of their feelings: "the divorced women besides the

financial pressures also have to endure pressures in other areas and there is a negative attitude towards the divorced women. Such individuals are less stable, have lesser degree of confidence and are more dissatisfied in comparison to the married individuals and in fact the divorced women undergo a state of affective turbulence in the months before getting divorced and also during the whole years of their lives after divorcement. Such women have been found reporting feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, abandonment, and insufficiency” (Sheibali Hide, 2005)”. In the book “The Mandrake”, after Raf’at gets divorced and thus separated from Jahangir, she is found spending a period of her life in deep sorrow and sadness. Although she is very beautiful in all respects and her father is also a wealthy man, at the beginning of the divorcement life she is completely depressed and frustrated and it took quite a long time before her friend encouraged her to gain self-confidence and she could give a new value and importance to her life via finding a job and working and it continued this way until she recovers herself by the assistance of her friend Shams Al-Zoha and she finds her way into the German embassy and the ceremonial celebrations [8, 9].

2. The women standpoint from the perspective of the social classes in “The Mandrake”:

Class differences bring about a situation for the emergence of problems and discrepancies in various grounds and such conflicts are of a great importance in the society: “the differences among women-in terms of class, race, gender preferences, nationality and ethnicity, and among the mothers and non-mothers, are all important as regarding the feministic theories and acts, but such differences are of a tangible nature and they can be analyzed based on certain classifications” [3]. In the book “The Mandrake”, in the early stages of the story narration, along with offering a description of Shams Al-Zoha’s office, she is introduced as a literate woman and an obstetrician who has been brought up in Russia but the woman who refer to her are all ruled by their husbands and they have delivered babies for several times, or they are working in the other people’s houses or as they themselves put it, their joint life is nothing more than living a servant or maid’s life who working in the other people’s houses. The sick woman in conversing with the physician and in her response to the question that why her neighbor’s little girl has been brought to the office with her, states that “their mother leaves the home early in the morning and she leaves the children with me. They do not have a father; that’s all! Does she go to work outside? Yeah Ma’am! She works outside. What does she do? What is her job? She works for the people...” [1], and the patient talks about herself and she says: “the girls become the servants working for the people, like my own miserable self”. In “The Mandrake”, Cheheltan takes two types of women into consideration: the poor class women and the rich class women, but the intermediate social class of women is what is lacking here [10].

Women’s stance in the family system:

Although the man and the woman play a supplementary role in the marriage in the majority of the cases the woman becomes the man’s subordinate after marriage and in their joint life the woman is seen as an individual who belongs to the male gender. Marriage is the beginning of her most important life incident: “the woman receives the tiniest part of the world in the form of a fief in her getting married to a man; the legal mandates defend her against the man’s capriciousness; but the woman becomes the man’s vassal. Economically speaking, the man becomes the headmaster of the marital life and therefore it is the man who is socially representing this joint life. The woman takes the man’s name and she is called after her husband’s name; the woman becomes the partner of the man in his religion and faith; she becomes part of his intermediate social class and a section of the man’s environment; she is seen as being belonged to the man’s family, she turns into half of the man’s life. She is incumbently to move to wherever her husband’s job calls them...” [2, 11].

3. Woman and politics:

In “The Mandrake”, there is a period of time that Shams Al-Zoha has to inhabit Isaac and MehrArafa’ to pass the lessons related to obstetrics. Isaac is connected to a political formation but no woman is allowed to participate in these meetings. Shams Al-Zoha makes objections in this regard: “Shams Al-Zoha smiled: there is no woman in your meetings. Isaac was startled. He said: there are women in our meetings and, by the way, what does it have to do with you? I will later on tell you in what way it is related to me. But, I have never seen these women in your meetings.”

Conclusion:

Cheheltan has allegedly and substantially attempted to posit talks of the women’s stance in the families and in the society in his book. The same concentration on the topic of the women has made him to pick up as the main character of the story a female obstetrician in order to be able to showcase numerous women from various social classes and different family types within the context of the conversations and also in order to provide for considering the women not only as part of the society but also as a human being with its specific mental and physical features. One might be able to claim that the author has created a specific atmosphere in the story through his inducement and dictation of a female sense.

The fact that the women have been selected from the two social classes of poor and illiterate and rich and literate by the author may have been for the reason that he has willed to demonstrate one problem from two perspectives or one identical problem in two types of lives. That is the common problems that are experienced by both of the classes: the problem of patriarchy. It seems, however, that Shams Al-Zoha personality represents a feministic mindset and she evaluates the issues from another outlook. For instance, many of the men's despotic behaviors are highlighted here by her as somehow a tool for concealing their weaknesses. She does not see the women so much in need of the men and the women are by no means deprived of their normal life without the men. She does not recommend the women to grin and bear. She tries to make the women aware of their real values. She is not as dependent on the men's consideration and attention as the woman to whom she is confronted and she criticizes the men explicitly. This is while the other women whether be it the intellectual Raf'at or be it the other poor female patients do not seem to be possessing such thoughts and ideas and if they are found hateful of the men that is because of their personal experiences not as a result of the way they think or believe.

It seems that Shams Al-Zoha is a personality through whom Cheheltan has managed to introduce the feministic thoughts and mindsets. However, such types of women are also not found felicitous and fortunate. That means while they are seen as not being relying and depending on the men, feeling a sense of self-value and not authenticating the men's right to behave tyrannically and based on patriarchal standards, do not consider men as identical to women. In the end, being a woman has to be characterized by its specific needs and requirements and hoping to be a mother, beginning a favorable and pleasant marital life and living a proud womanly life is even found residing in such type of personality as Shams Al-Zoha and if she is seen refraining from enjoying such needs despite her nature has to be tracked into the fact that the patriarchy system is so much rooted into the steepest depth of the society that she finds the fulfillment of such wants as something somehow impossible and she knows if she gets married she will voluntarily make herself the prisoner of patriarchy despotism. The price which is paid by her, however, is not by any means a small one. Trampling of one's own womanish identity is the price that has been paid for getting rid of the man's captivity.

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