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POST COLONIAL IRAN: A STUDY OF SIMIN DANESHVAR'S *SUVASHUN*

FATEMEH MOZAFFARI

Assistant Professor, Department of General Courses, University of Shahrood, Iran
Email: mozafari.f@shahroodut.ac.ir



FATEMEH MOZAFFARI

ABSTRACT

Edward Said, an outstanding figure in post-colonial area points out that the West and the East are always in a kind of battle. European powers regard themselves as a model having knowledge and strength to manage and run the Eastern societies, the others. Europeans see the others as people or community that they can shape and impose their own language, values and culture on. As an Iranian author and translator, Simin Daneshvar illustrated vividly the impact of British colonialism on the tribal life in Shiraz during the Second World War. Moreover she depicted Iranian women and their lives in the patriarchal Iran, in her novel *Suvashun*. Lack of freedom of speech and inferiority of the colonized and cultural blend under the domain of colonizer power are issues discussed in *Suvashun* by Simin Daneshvar. Postcolonial study of this book represents communities and the people affected by the imposition of different cultures, religions and belief which were imposed on them by the dominating powers.

Key words: Post Colonialism, Patriarchy, Exploitation

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INTRODUCTION

Post colonial study defines a cultural relation between the colonizer and the colonized. It's better to say that it is a battle between the colonizer and the colonized in order to impose or to inject the newly arrived culture in which the colonizer is almost the winner of this battle and is more likely to become the dominator. Throughout the history, we have seen the West as the colonizer and many African or Asian countries as the colonized. Theories and approaches concentrate on the writings of colonized cultures in different parts of the world. As Bressler says that postcolonial "theories investigate what happens when two cultures clash and when one of them, with its accessory ideology, empowers and deems itself superior to the other" (Bressler, 236).

In a colony, when the colonizer culture dominates the native culture, the colonized people feel the lack of culture, and consequently after a while they will face lack of identity. The colonizer culture prevail the native culture, they see native people as subhuman or savages and this leads to their inferiority, so they must be excluded from position of power. This is possible only through destroying the identity of the colonized people. Those without identity are most likely to become what the colonizer desires.

Daneshvar published *Suvashun*, the first novel from a woman's perspective written by an Iranian woman in 1969. Her masterpiece novel *Suvashun* is considered the climax of Persian novel writing, narrating the sufferings of Iranian people during World War II. It shows how Iran was exploited during the period. It talks

about the imposition of western culture, language and products on Iranians. Exploitation of resources is mentioned widely in the novel. Furthermore, Simin Daneshvar as a first Persian female novelist demonstrates the condition of women in the patriarchal society of her time.

Historical Background

Almost at the beginning of the World War II, Iran declared its impartiality in the war. But the allied army entered Iranian territory, in order to access the country's oil resources and roads to assist the Soviet Union, under the pretext of expelling German experts and spies from Iran. The invasion of foreign forces violated the territorial integrity and resulted in long time exploitation. It was difficult for Iranians to save themselves from the constraint of dominant powers. Economically, the country engaged with many problems, especially the inability to afford basic necessities and facilities. People faced a severe famine and many died due to starvation. Moreover, thousands of civilians were killed following the bombing of cities.

Suvashun is set in Shiraz, in the last years of World War II, after the invasion by the Allied armies. The novel deals with middle class landowning family when Iran was occupied from the South by the British army and from the North by Russian. The turmoil and the pressure on everyday life are narrated through the eyes of Zari, a female character who struggles to protect her family.

Post colonial study

In postcolonial study the essential issue is the conflict between races and the racial discrimination. It focus on race relations, the effect of racism and the binary operation or opposition, a term introduced into literary theories by Jacques Derrida to represent the conceptual oppositions on which he believes Western metaphysics is based Such as the opposition of black/white, British/non British and the West/the other. (A Glossary of Literary Terms)

In *Suvashun*, Yusof fights against colonialism, the conflict is between Yusof and British people who are trying to control the city. In this situation, Yusof is the symbol of the country, Iran who thinks about cultural and national independence, while Zinger, the British sergeant, who is the symbol of the colonizer, thinks about colonization in order to strength the power of Britain. It makes a conflict which results in Yusof's martyrdom.

Economically, Iran engaged with many problems and conflicts; the inability to afford basic necessities of people such as bread and food. The allied army sent crops and food from Iran to Russia to support them in the war against Germans. Thus it resulted in famine and inflation of expenses in Iran. The Oil resources were looted and food crisis reached its peak. Zari was surprised with the big size of bread at the wedding celebration of the Governor's daughter. Even the groups of guests were coming into the wedding room to see the bread. "What a waste! And at a time like this..." Yusof said when his eyes caught sight of the bread. (Daneshvar, 21) The colonizer not only tries to exploit the colonized country, but also they find the occupied country as a big market for their own products. Mr. Zinger was selling sewing machine to Persian women. He was educating them how to use it.

The vastness of the area of the dominant country is compared to the dominated one. Since the dominant countries are usually smaller than the colonized, they humiliate the colonized people as incapable and foolish people. "Zinger lifted his glass and said, 'to Iran, much greatest than France. And Tehran'...Yusof lifted his eyes from the map, looked at him, and said, 'but unfortunately, we didn't fight!' Khan Kaka blinked and said, 'but as for the Vichy mineral water for indigestion...' Zinger interrupted and asked Yusof, 'why unfortunate you said? 'Because we suffer the consequences without having tasted heroism or honorable defeat' Yusof replied.

As Bressler points out that "colonizers assume themselves as the superior race and consequently this assumption affects the ways which they treat the colonized" (236). Zinger said harshly, 'if you able fight... We ripped it had no blood. Instead of blood, it was filled with straw.' Yusof laughed involuntarily, placed his hand on Zinger's shoulder, and said, 'my dear Zinger, you knew yourself it had no blood, and that was precisely what made it hideous and banal. We didn't even know we should not fight, so that if we were defeated we would have a proud defeat.' Zinger held his hand...signaling him to stop" (Daneshvar, 49).

As Bressler suggests the message sent to the 'others' by the dominant culture has been clear-cut and consistent which is conform and be quiet, deny your identity, your whole entity and all will be well (234). The colonizers can do whatever they want, because they have won the power and law. In the colonized culture, some people could be seen who has denied their culture, their identity and turned into what the colonizers want. "Abdolqasem Khan poured wine in three glasses. He gave one of them to Hormoz and said, 'to your health!' and addressing Hormoz, he said, drink from now on and try to enjoy this world. I hope you won't turn out to be like your uncle, who has ruined his own life and that of others around him by worrying about the people and the country" (Daneshvar, 136).

The imposition of language and culture is also a remarkable influence in the process of colonialism. The West impose their language and culture as the superior ones on the East. "MacMahon came on stage... He speaks in English". Zari who was educated in an English school has a good knowledge of English didn't understand many of his jokes. "Laughter of the officers and most of the soldiers rose to the sky. Even the Governor and the Commander laughed... Probably some laughed out of hospitality to the foreign guests." (Daneshvar, 52) Race superiority is the first point that matters in racial discrimination studies.

In order to make extreme use and achieve their goal, the colonizers humiliate and disregard the colonized people as the inferior race. The colonized culture and identity are destroyed. Yusof criticized the MacMahon whose culture is dominating the native culture of Shiraz. "I told MacMahon, 'yes, friend, the people of this city are born poets, but you have stifled their poetry.' I said, 'you have emasculated their heroes. You haven't even left them with the possibility of struggle so that they can write an epic and sing a battle cry.' I said, 'you have made a land devoid of heroes.' I said, 'you have turned the city into a graveyard; the most thriving part of the city is the Mordestan District..." (Daneshvar, 33).

The inferiority of the colonized people has been vividly portrayed in *Suvashun* as the British officers ask the women for dance while their husbands were sitting and watching them. It seems they have accepted their inferiority and they are not able to protest against what is against their will, culture and lifestyle. The novel begins with the description of a wedding celebration of the daughter of the ruler; "First the bride and groom danced...The bride danced once with the British colonel and then with sergeant Zinger, in whose arms, she looked like a vulnerable little creature...Then the foreign officers approached the other ladies. The women, in their colorful dresses, were dancing in the arms of strangers, the officers, while their husbands sat on the sofas and watched... the men looked like they were on pins and needles...or maybe they were mad as hell" (Daneshvar, 27).

By being suppressed and due to the present condition of the society, the colonized have to accept their inferiority. They try to get used to discrimination, humiliation and racial violence.

Inequality on Human Rights is an explicit issue in colonial concepts. Colonized people were always victim of this equality. Yusof, Zari's husband, frustrated by the impudence of the occupying army and the local opportunists, refuses to sell his farm crops. He stands in front of the foreign invaders and the leaders of the tribes, Malek Rostam and Malek Sohrab. They tried to make him to sell his products to the foreign troops despite the severe starvation and the death of many local people due to famine. A series of intrigues were created against him and he was killed. His wife, Zari, was forced to bury him quietly to avoid formation of any rebellion.

Revenge is another significant issue in the post colonial literature. Colonized people were always looking for a moment to take revenge. Yusof's son, Khosrow, at the end of novel vows to follow his father's path, and avenge his death. They want to make other nations aware from their miseries and feelings. Similarly Daneshvar conveyed her nation's message and sufferings through her novel, *Suvashun*. The fact is represented in the poem read by an Irish poet, who was Yusof's friend. He tells Zari that 'In your home, a tree shall grow, and others in your city and many throughout your country. And the wind shall carry the message from tree to tree and the trees shall ask the wind, Did you see the dawn on your way?"

Patriarchy in the Eastern Culture

Patriarchy is an authoritative system which assigns male as the superior gender and defines a subordinate role for the female. By reading the novel, a sense of patriarchy arises in each and every reader.

Man is the superior who owns power and dominance. In the same way feminist criticism describes patriarchy as the power relationship between men and women, as a system in which social structures and practices define men as the dominator, ruler and the exploiter of women. In fact “feminists define a patriarchal culture, as a culture organized in the favor of men with the silencing and marginalization of women” (Guerin, 222).

In a wider definition patriarchy means the construction of male dominance over women and children in the family and the expansion of male control over female in society by men holding power in all the important social conditions and depriving women to have and own such power. According to Walby, “there are two kinds of patriarchy: public and private. Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women’s oppression and public patriarchy is principally based on public sites such as employment and state” (24). Private patriarchy introduces women as being housekeepers, cook, house cleaners, and child caring and being always available for the sexual satisfaction of their husbands with the probability of being beaten by the husbands in case of dissatisfaction. Public patriarchy treats women differently in a number of ways.

The first feature of patriarchy is the male domination and the subordination of women in many different ways. In *Suvashun*, Ezzatoddowleh, a female character, who despite her husband’s betrayal has to obey him. “May God not forgive you, man! He wasn’t worthy of a distinguished lady like myself. When we had a fight, he would say, ‘You’re cross-eyed, and they forced me to marry you.’ He said ‘I don’t love you, but I don’t want my son to be insulted by people saying that his mother is a divorcee.’ And I, unfortunate fool that I was, head over heels in love with him” (Daneshvar, 104).

Wife beating is one of the most dominant aspects of violence used against women within home in order to be submissive and accept it as a normal process. In such a society, men are allowed to treat women and children as their slaves, as something which belongs to them, as their property, who should be controlled. As Sultana mentions “in a patriarchal system, different kinds of violence may be used to control and subjugate women, such violence may even be considered legitimate. Violence such as rape, other forms of sexual abuse and wife beating has created a sense of insecurity in women and keeps them bound to the home.” Sometimes the violence used by men for controlling women leads them to experience a sense of anti-violence, man-hatred and anti-patriarchy. Violence is an inseparable part of the patriarchal culture and also it’s embarrassing for a man who never has beaten his wife.

In masculine discussion, women aren’t allowed to participate as they shouldn’t hear what they are saying and men dismiss women for this reason. “Turning to Zari, he said ‘Khanom, don’t make so much noise.’ ‘All right,’ she replied realizing that she was being asked to leave” (Daneshvar, 206).

Since the early 20th century, feminist writers have used the term patriarchy as a concept for defining the social system of masculine domination. In a patriarchal society, women have to struggle for their basic rights such as education and controlling their own property. In these kinds of societies, men usually don’t care about women’s feelings. In *Suvashun*; the father of the family brings so much misery to his wife by having an affair with another woman. “Sudabeh didn’t become my father’s wife, even to the end. She would say things were easier the way they were. Of course, she was the one who made my mother Bibi homeless and broke her heart” (Daneshvar, 84).

Regarding colonial notions, patriarchal societies make certain that men always are the dominant tribe and women are always the subordinate. In such a society, women cannot protest, they’re incapable of expressing themselves. “What gift? They borrowed it...but not a sound came out of her mouth. In her heart, she cursed herself for being such a coward” (Daneshvar, 50).

In contrast to an ideal woman, defined by the norms of the society, Zinn et al explains that despite different limitations for females in a patriarchal society, there are some women who have shaped their lives and their families. Their actions have included revolt and rebellion, creative conflict, social change, adaptation and accommodation. Miss Fotuhi is an outstanding character who is the pioneer in modernity. “Miss Fotuhi was not at all one to have been ignored. She was the first woman in the city to wear a blue, bell-shaped *chador*

and abandon the black shroud, as she called it. The unveiling law had still not been officially announced when she even let go of the blue bell-shaped *chador*" (Daneshvar, 120).

An important element of patriarchy is its material base which is the male's control over female's labor power. This means that by having control over women's lives, men can benefit materially from patriarchy and they can achieve economic gains from women's subordination. Zari has to obey her husband, Yusof. "On Yusof's instructions, she set the lunch on the parlor table...at lunch, Yusof asked for wine and Zari brought out two bottles of red wine from the cupboard. She poured wine for everybody" (Daneshvar, 206).

MacMahon recites a humiliating poem complete with gesture "about a soldier abroad who traps a foreign girl and gets as much out of her as he can... shoes, hat, money on top of that... but when the girl says "I'm pregnant, marry me," he confess that he has a wife and kids... the audience laughed." (Daneshvar, 52)

In patriarchal societies, women's sexuality is controlled through their dress and behavior which are carefully monitored by the family in accord with social, cultural and religious codes of behavior. They are annoyed because of their sexuality, because they are assumed as the inferior sex. There is no security for women and girls in a patriarchal society because of their femininity. "To make a long story short, sister, within a week's time, either the father or the son got the little girl in trouble. I thought that they would at least leave a little village girl alone. I never found out which of them was responsible" (Daneshvar, 105).

In these societies, the original contradiction is between sexes. It is a gender conflict over the power, over the dominant and the dominator. Miss Fotuhi in *Suvashun* is the one who fights against all the discrimination. "In her better days, she would complain to Zari. 'Alas, no one appreciated me. Men were not ready to accept a woman like me. First, they thought I was honey and they wanted to dip their fingers in it, and when I told them to get their paws off, they either ridicule me or ignored me.' And suddenly she would shout: they drove me crazy! They drove me crazy! I told them, I will not give it to you, I will not give you what you want from me...it will be a long time before they realize who I was and what I did" (Daneshvar, 120).

In a patriarchal society, in the perspective of colonialism, women face double oppression or dual oppression which contains first, gender discrimination and then the racial discrimination. In such a condition women are suppressed because of their femaleness by patriarchy and then they're humiliated because of their inferiority by the superior race.

Conclusion

Postcolonialism is the cultural, racial and gender relationship between colonized and the colonizer in East and West. Postcolonial theories came to existence due to the dissatisfaction and oppression of the colonized people. Their personal culture clashes with the conquering culture; their fears, hopes and dreams about future and their identities, matters of education, race differences, economic issues, morals, ethics and other concerns become the context for the evolving theories and practice of postcolonialism.

Suvashun is one of most noteworthy novels in Persian literature. It stands for the social, political and patriarchal condition of the Iranian society during the Second World War. It is a valuable work of the postcolonial literature in Iran which in the first phase struggles the tyranny and in the second phase it challenges and fights against the British colonialism.

Patriarchy in its wider definition is referred to a social system that assumes women as dependent and subordinate beings who should be controlled by the superior gender. For this means patriarchy restricts women's mobility, it rejects their freedom and consequently all the power and authority within the family, the society and the state remain entirely in the hands of men. Women are the colonies in the hands of men, the colonizers. Women's inferior position in all aspects of their lives, the widespread feelings of powerlessness, discrimination, lack of self-esteem and self confidence, all contribute to women exploitation. They are assumed as men properties that should be ruled and controlled by men. In such a society, men and women think and behave differently, because they've been taught to think of masculinity and femininity.

Simin Daneshvar represented all theses notions throughout her novel *Suvashun*. By clarifying these notions through some examples, The researcher tried to portray a vivid image of the effects of post colonialism on the colonized people and the colonized culture, women's suppress and subordination, male's authority, gender discrimination, racial discrimination and racial contradiction in specific time span in the

world's history. It revealed the destructive consequence of Post colonialism on Iranian economy, culture and identity.

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