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The Role of women in Middle-East Literature

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Women's Rights

- Despite great strides made by the International Women's Rights movement over many years, women and girls around the world are still married as children or trafficked into forced labor and sex slavery. They are refused access to education and political participation, and some are trapped in conflicts where rape is perpetrated as a weapon of war. Around the world, deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth are needlessly high, and women are prevented from making deeply personal choices in their private lives.
- [Human Rights Watch](#) is working toward the realization of women's empowerment and gender equality—protecting the rights and improving the lives of women and girls all over the world. “We must come out and fight for our rights,” Dr Temsula said in the conference in Kohima in December 2015, because she thinks that women have still to learn to assert their rights.

Women's position in the Western world

- During the Industrial Revolution women were paid much less than men, anyway they started to work.
- Men still abused them and used to lock up their wives in the asylum to get free of them.
- The 18th century promoted education among women (The Bluestockings opened schools for girls).
- Hanna More (1745-1833) was the only woman accepted in Johnson's literary association, a circle attended by men only.
- Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. She promoted education in every field, even in medicine.
- Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was the first nurse.
- Elisabeth Blackwell (1821-1910) was first doctor in the United States.

Women position in the Eastern world

- The library in Montecassino reveals important notion about the Middle-East medical practices as described by Ibn Sīnā in his *Cānūn*, soon applied in the Medical School of Salerno (the first in Europe). In there we find that in the Middle-East, women occupied a relevant role in the hospitals.
- Rūfaidah bint Sa'ād was a mid-wife specialized in obstetrics, and was a nurse and a surgeon. Rufaidah's father was a physician, and she learned medical care by working as his assistant. She had also a social role, in fact she shared her clinical skills with other nurses who she trained and worked with. She went out of her community (Bani Aslam tribe of the khazraj tribal confederation in Madinah) and tried to solve the social problems that lead disease.
- Once the Salerno medical school was established Abella and Rotula followed Rūfaidah bint Sa'ād's example.

Literature in the Middle East

- Eastern literature is still an unknown field in both Western and Eastern world (Saccone C.), because in the West we have many taboos about Muslim world.
- Most of the writers are women emigrated because of ideological or political reasons. They denounce the women social, moral and intellectual position in their countries. Some of them prefer to write their books in the new foreign language (either to divulgate their ideas, or because of a sense of shiness), others in their mother tongue (to reinforce their role both linguistically and emotionally). They are many, and I suggest to read their books, so we can better understand the islamic world: K. Shamsie, M. Satrapi, N. Ghulam and A. Rotger, B. Nakhjavani, N. Diallo, G. b: Nahai, M. BÂ, F. Mernissi, M. Satrapi, Hanan al-Shaykh and many

Shirin Ebadi Nobel Peace Prize 2003 Iranian

- She was Iran's first female judge. After Khomeini's revolution in 1979 she was dismissed. Ebadi opened a legal practice and began defending people who were being persecuted by the authorities. In the year 2000 she was imprisoned for having criticized her country's hierarchy. Shirin Ebadi took up the struggle for fundamental human rights and especially the rights of women and children. She took part in the establishment of organizations that placed these issues on the agenda, and wrote books proposing amendments to Iran's succession and divorce laws. She also wanted to withdraw political power from the clergy and advocated the separation of religion and state. She defended various [child abuse](#) cases, including the case of Arian Golshani, a child who was abused for years and then beaten to death by her father and stepbrother. This case gained international attention and caused controversy in Iran. Ebadi used this case to highlight Iran's problematic child custody laws, whereby custody of children in divorce is usually given to the father, even in the case of Arian, where her mother had told the court that the father was abusive and had begged for custody of her daughter. Ebadi also handled the case of Leila, a teenage girl who was gang-raped and murdered. In her books she always denounces the terrible conditions applied in Iran. For this reason she has been persecuted and lives abroad.

The language in Shirin Ebadi's literary works

- In her books her language reveals a deep sorrow and a deep anguish. She writes in English but she enforces her linguistic style by using many words in Iranian, as a way to establish a link with her mother tongue and land. She loves Iran very much, and that is the reason of her anguish. She wants a country respecting the Human Rights in every field. She was able to attract other Iranian writers who are near her with the hope to improve freedom and legacy in Iran (Farxonde Āqā, Faribā Vafi, Zuyā Pirzād, Azar Nafisi, Nahid Rachlin, and many others). While she was in prison, she never accepted extortions and preferred to tell the truth at any cost, by denouncing all the abuses of the government .
- The main theme of her books is to defend the people of her country, those people who have suffered political injustices because of a corrupted government, a government which had betrayed the young people's hopes. She says, that she aims to build up a better Iran for her daughters much better than that of her youth.

Quotations from *Untill you are free*

- «I am compelled to share my story on behalf of the many faceless Iranians, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, who sit today in the prison of Iran, an Iran that has become one of the world's largest prisons for journalists, lawyers, women's rights activists, and students, who instead of studying are languishing in cellblocks, yet another generation whose talent and dreams are squandered.» Author's note
- «The story of Iran is the story of my life. Sometimes I wonder why I am so attached to my country, why the outline of Tehran's Alborz Mountains is as intimate and precious to me as the curve of my daughter's face, and why I feel a duty to my nation that overwhelms everything else. I remember when so many of my friends and relatives began leaving the country in the 1980s, disheartened by the bombs raining down from the war with Iraq and by the morality police checkpoints set up by the still new Islamic government. While I did not judge anyone for wanting to leave, I could not fathom the impulse. ... For me, this was unthinkable. ... If we all packed ... what would be left of our country? The Iranian state did everything it could do to suppress the news of my award (Nobel Prize). They said «This isn't such an important prize. It's only the Nobel in literature that really matters.»

Bibliography

- Shirin Ebadi is a very active woman, so she has written many books and gives interviews all around the world, with the only aim to improve her much loved country.
- «One day we'll wake up and realize we can never exist in each other's world ...», she writes in *Iran Awakening*.
- *The Rights of the Child*. 1994.
- *History and Documentation of Human Rights in Iran* 1999.
- *Democracy, human rights, and Islam in modern Iran*, 2003.
- *Until we are free* (2016)
- *Refugee Rights in Iran*, 2008
- *Iran Awakening: One Woman's Journey to Reclaim Her Life and Country* (2007)
- *Refugee Rights in Iran* (2008)
- *The Golden Cage: Three brothers, Three choices, One destiny* (2011)
- M.R. D'Acerno, *Il velo che svela – La donna tra Oriente e Occidente*, Aracne, 2019.

Thank you very much

Hope to meet you all very soon

