

Feminist study of Princess and Princess Sultana's Daughters by Jean Sasson

Abstract

Through her novels, Sasson shows the feministic aspects and discloses the problematic contentions of society which were being faced by women in the middle-east. Jean Sasson paints a horrifying reality for women of the desert kingdom. It is a haunting look at the danger of Saudi male dominance and the desperate lives of the women they rule. Feminism is the main approach which advocates women in regard of equal treatment in male dominated society. The main aim of feminism is to deconstruct the relationship of power between men and women. In order to maintain equal status in society, both the genders have great importance.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Inferior Status.

Introduction

Princess is biography of a Saudi princess written by Jean Sasson. Sasson mostly writes about the terrible condition of women in the middle-east. While working as an administrative coordinator in the King Faisal specialist hospital in Riyadh she came face to face with the plight of Saudi women. Her first book was *The Rape of Kuwait*. It was about the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and was published before the war broke out in 1991. *Princess* is Sasson's second book and it is based on facts told to her by Saudi princess. *Princess* recounts the life of a Saudi princess, Sultana. Her identity is concealed in order to ensure her safety. In the book princess's name is Sultana. The books revolves around the life of Sultana, she is the mouth piece for all the women of Saudi Arabia. It's through her the world came to know the ill-treatment that women suffer at the hand of patriarchy in spite being a royalty. The women in Saudi Arabia have no right to vote, no control and no value. The most important role of a woman is to produce sons. Sultana lifts the veil and shows the real Saudi Arabia where girls are forced into marriage, sex slavery, honour killing and other outrages against women both of royal and common families.

In her sequel *Princess Sultana's daughters*, Jean Sasson talks about the second generation of the royal family and the impact of the restrictive lifestyle that is imposed upon them. Princess Sultana In spite of her immense wealth cannot buy freedom for her daughters, Maha and Amani. Sultana's passion to provide her two daughters with a better life changed her fear into her strength. The second book shows Sultana's struggle as a mother as well as a woman who is desperate to bring a change in the society for a better tomorrow.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this paper is to address the issue of women's low or inferior status in the society of middle-east. The novels show the serious conditions of women in male dominated society. This paper show how female characters are subjugated to gender stereotypes of being the nurture and the homemaker. The aim of this paper is to highlight the treatment of women by majority of men as nothing more than a sex object can be considered as one of the reasons for the inferior status of women in Islam. Jean Sasson exposed the problems of women and represents them in prime position. She made the whole world aware of the plight of Saudi women, whose real life was hidden behind the glitz and glamour.

Review of Literature

It was during the seventeenth century that feminism rose as an ideology. Early feminist like Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart were amongst that first people to contribute significantly against the flight for women equality. Wollstonecraft emphasized on the importance of women



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education. According to her it is the social environment that creates the difference between a man and a woman, if there are no discrepancies in the upbringing and the social environment the women would not have to face the unjust treatment that they are subjected too. In both the books the women have to fight at very stage for the basic rights that every individual should have.

When speaking of Islamic feminism, one must take into account the meaning of the two words that make up this term: Islam and feminism. Islam is not the problem the differences in the belief and practice of Islam, particularly among the Shiites and the Sunnis, introduce a level of complexity that has to be taken into account. Moreover, geographically and historically, Islam was and is practiced around the globe in diverse cultural setting.

Feminists argue that generally the problems faced by women are the result of misguided male interpretations of the principles of Islam. They believe that if Islam's holy sources are read from women centred view it can become a powerful source of gender justice. In keeping with this, in the recent years, Islamic feminists have read the religious texts and traditions and reinterpret them from a woman-friendly position. Feminists argue that the verse in the Quran that gives importance to men does so by stating that men are the maintainers of women. While this was true of an earlier era where motherhood was a woman's most important role and that made her a dependent on men but today, where not only do women have control over their reproductive choices but are also often self-reliant, this understanding can definitely change.

Islamic feminists also focus the undisputed rights that women can claim within the structure of Islam but have become obscure because of cultural norms of honour and shame. For instance, nikah, or marriage, is a contract between two consenting parties with both sides entitled to lay down certain conditions which, after mutual agreement, would be binding upon them. The rights of women to lay down conditions regarding polygamy, custody of children in the event of divorce and other important matters, can give them a significant degree of control over their lives. Unfortunately, due to cultural norms, it is often considered shameful, particularly in South Asia, for a prospective bride to talk openly about issues that could impact her marital future.

Theory Application

Sultana is a Saudi Arabian princess who is born to fabulous and uncountable wealth. But in reality she has no freedom in her life. She has no control over her own life. She is seen only as a bearer of sons. She lives in a cage in her own house. She is jailed by her father, her husband, her sons, and her country. Sultana belongs to the Saudi royal family. She has decided to take the risk of speaking out about the life of women in her country. She had to hide her identity so that the religious leaders in her country would call for her death to punish her. Sultana reveals of her own life, from her childhood days to her arranged marriage, a happy one until her husband decided to displace her by taking a second wife and of

the lives of her sisters, her friends and her servants. These women share a history of oppression's. Feminism is a concept that talks about the rights and position of women in the patriarchal society. It started as a movement which progressed and developed into the first, the second and the third wave, covering the various topics of the women's rights. The feminists in the first wave talked about the social and the moral equality of men and women. In the second wave, the feminist were of the view that women should not be differentiated on the bases of gender and sex. The third wave was a modernistic approach to secure the equal rights for women and to eradicate social and political inequality. In this study the focus would be laid on different types of feminism represented by the characters in these two novels. The feminism discussed in these novels can be categorized into all the three waves as the characters are dealings with varied kinds of issue.

Sasson highlights the incidences where the inferior status of the women comes into the light. In both the books women are the victims of the rules laid down by the Saudi society. Saudi Arabia is the heart of Islam and the members of the royal family of Saudi Arabia consider it their duty to set example for the rest of the community. But the treatment of women by majority of men as nothing more than a sex object can be considered as one of the reasons for the inferior status of women in Islam. Female genital mutilation, arranged child marriages, polygamy and honour killings are the horrors that the females have to go through in the books *Princess* and *Princess Sultana's Daughter*. The conditioning of the woman is done from the childhood so that they learn to be submissive and the son is treated as god.

Sultana's five elder sisters were not given any education. They were just taught to read the Koran. Sultana's mother along with her aunt Iffat fought for her girl's rights to be educated. Her aunt is the reason girls are allowed to study in Saudi Arabia, she fought against the system and made the men realize the importance of education and ultimately they were allowed but education was never a priority.

Conclusion

By speaking out, Sultana risks bringing the wrath of the Saudi establishment upon her head and the heads of her children. But by telling her story to Jean Sasson, Sultana has allowed us to see beyond the veils of this secret society, to the heart of a nation where sex, money, and power reign supreme. In the west the status of women has changed drastically but the woman of the third world countries are still struggling for the basic rights. In the books *Princess* and *Princess Sultana's Daughters* the female characters are subjugated to gender stereotypes of being the nurturer and the homemaker. They have to face inequality and oppression and are denied financial, political, and sexual autonomy. This inequality is derived from the biological differences between men and women.

After the first book was published she was threatened and warned by all the males in her family not to repeat this mistake but she decided to tell her story again knowing all the repercussions "I will

continue to reveal the true happenings behind the secrecy of the black veil. This is my destiny” (Sasson, *Princess Sultana’s Daughters* 21). Koran does not state that woman is secondary to men. The men who came after Prophet Muhammad have chosen to follow the customs and traditions of the dark ages rather.

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