

Literature Provides a Psychological Homeland for Aaliya Saleh in *An Unnecessary Woman* by Rabih Alameddine.

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Abstract

This paper depicts that literature provides a psychological homeland for Aaliya Saleh. Aaliya is a protagonist in the novel *An Unnecessary Woman* written by Rabih Alameddine, from first to end her apartment is only construction. She always lives in imagination. To avoid loneliness she used to read new books and translates that book in Arabic language. From childhood to her old age, she feels detached from family. She has a very little social contact. She always feels different from society and her neighbours. She engages herself in reading. Aaliya connects her life with literary scenes. Literature gives her a comfort zone. She finds pleasure in imaginary world. Actually Aaliya is departed from parents love, a divorcee, and childless woman. So she avoided to mix in people. She interacts with a few people those who come at her bookshop. She is kind-hearted and sensitive. She says that I am only translating books for the peace of mind.

Keywords: Lebanese, Palestinian, Feminism, Patriarchal.

INTRODUCTION

Aaliya Saleh is a protagonist of a novel, *An Unnecessary Women*. Aaliya lives alone in Beirut. Rabih Alameddine, the writer of the novel gives voice to isolated Aaliya. The novel is first-person narrative. She has a lot of war memories. The novel depicts past and present Beirut. The novel has psychological depth. The narrator creates an imaginary world around herself. Aaliya is always busy in reading and translating books. She translated thirty-seven books over her lifetime. But she never published her translations. She keeps all her work in boxes in 'maid's bathroom'. So no one can reach there. There is a question: why she is doing translations? Literature and work of translation delight her mind. Besides translation, she loves music. Aaliya has memories of the Lebanese Civil War. She experienced many horror incidents during the war. She sleeps with AK-47 for self-defence. Aaliya associates a relation between war moments and the literary texts which she reads. In 1977, one day when Aaliya was underground, a group of two Palestinians broke into the apartment; that was a horrific scene. From these events, it comes to know that war increases her loneliness.

Aaliya is far away physically and psychologically from her family. She has a few friends and a little society (or a micro-society). Three sisters live near Aaliya's apartment. Aaliya used to call them three witches. She does not share anything with

neighbours. But at the end when her written works get wet, they helped her a lot to dry papers. She felt guilty about it.

At the end Aaliya faced a disaster. Water pipe burst out in ‘maid’s-bathroom’. All crates which contain her translated books are wet. Her neighbours help her to dry those pages. At that time Aaliya completely broke down but her neighbours gives supports to her, who always gossips about Aaliya. Again Aaliya thinks about new translations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Simone de Beauvoir in her “*The Second Sex*” (1949) says, “One is not born, but rather become, a women.” When baby born it does not aware whether it is girl or boy. But family and society forces her to behave like a girl. They force girls to become a woman. For example, to talk softly, learn to cook, and play with doll. By gender she is a female, but society tells her you are a woman. The writer criticizes patriarchal system. The paper suggests that the novel, *An Unnecessary Woman* gives voice to womanhood. During war women become confident because mostly men were busy in fighting or absent. So women started to take decision, learned to taking care of self.

The Lebanese Civil War provides a strong plot to the novel. As per the information from *Britannica*, “the situation grew... Lebanon’s Palestinian refugee camp, which had attracted Israeli raids on Lebanon, most notably on the airport in Beirut in 1968.” These threatening moments leaves its deep impact on natives. They remain underground for long period. Survival is a primary need for them. Schools, job, and daily routines are disordered. It impacted human values. Everyone looks suspected to each other. To secure life people live isolated. It increases anxiety in them. Aaliya the narrator in this novel finds her own way for this situation.

The scholar, *Eissa Al Khotaba* in his paper says that, “*An unnecessary Woman* connects with real events in the world from. An abstract point-of-view and portrays them fictionally” writer presents during war indirectly. The narration is not like a history book. It has bonding with day today activities. It is written in thoughtful manner. Writer, Robin Alameddine connected the link between real war situation and the fictional story of Aaliya.

DISCUSSION

Background of the Novel

The Lebanese Civil War is the plot of the novel *An Unnecessary Woman* past and present Beirut is the background of the novel. Aaliya saleh is a main character. She memorises her own life and war moments. She rejects the traditional rules of society; she is different from other women. War from outer world increases her negativity. During those days society life is disturbed. Bombing and burning cities, death of innocent people, families are dispersed across refugee camps all it creates a fearful atmosphere. Aaliya brings AK-47 from Ahmad to protect herself.

One incident from the novel when Palestinians come into house of Aaliya and they left their shit this is not new for them but very disgusting, Aaliya cannot sleep for three days after that scene. In her own house she is undergrounded. Post war scenes also horrific. Aaliya is walking to the museum on the Green Line road of the city. Road of city. More battles happened there she irritates by the order of flesh. This event shows the intensity of destruction. That environment increases the emigration. Palestinians were forced out of the city in order to end the Israeli siege and the insane bombing.

The narrator adds her opinion about Beirut, in his book, “Arab nationalists who converted to socialism and socialists newly alert to mobilizing virtues of nationalism.” The novel presents the slowly progress Beirut. Native come out for shopping for the holiday. Traffic on a road indicates fear from people’s mind become decreases.

Life of Aaliya

The novel *An Unnecessary Woman* is a reflection of Aaliya’s whole life. There is a series of scenes of her biography. She lost her father before her second birthday. She recalls a little memory of her father. Her mother remarried. Including her step-brother she has five siblings. Her step-father pays a little attention to her. Her mother gives importance to boys in the family. So Aaliya feels unimportant from childhood. Aaliya’s marriage is a shocking for her. She was just sixteen years old at marriage. Her husband was not suitable to her. After four years of their unhappy marriage, they divorced. Society look’s at her as a divorced, childless woman, so she avoids mixing with society and friends. She feels alone. At the same the Civil War started. It impacts on Aaliya’s mind. To come out from frustration she devoted herself to literature. She started her new journey of translation with the Book *Anna Karenina* Aaliya translated work of *Leo Tolstoy, W.G. Sebald, Italo Calvino, Roberto Bolano, and Friedrich Neitzsche*.

Aaliya gives various references from books those she read, which are closely associated with her psychology. She is internally disturbed but her work gives pleasure to her. She translated over 37 books but yet not published. Done this work because no one else done it.

Three sisters live near Aaliya’s apartment. They always criticize her. She never entertains them. Not giving reply is also a power of mind. She does not need any one. She does not talk to anyone. She lives in the company of books. She never shows her work to anyone. She does not care about what will happen with her work after her. She is free-minded and very bold. She has a selected friend circle around her. Hannah is one of them. She shares everything with her. She knows about Hannah’s life. It depicts that she needs someone to share and take care of her though she is not social but extra-

sensitive. Her love for music shows her delicate emotions. Even she never met Abdallah, after listening about fadia and Abdallah.

Aaliya as a Translator

Aaliya was working in a book shop before War. To come out from the frustration she used to read book. She remains busy all day in translating book from foreign language to Arabic. She is not doing these things to earn money or to publish. She spends her time in that work and it gives her happiness.

Aaliya used all important quotations and references of writers for incidents and characters in her life. She remembers Black September, in those days Ahmed changes totally. Her, she used the reference of *Joseph Roth*. He says, after a long time men's faces changes. But Ahmed suddenly changes because of War. His changes shows how young generation destroyed by political violence.

The narrator is multilingual she know Arabic, Spanish, German, English, and French. She faces problem of pronunciation while using different languages. Involved in her work, when original text is translated in other languages it loses its value. But she gives best of her.

She says, "I am an Arab." This shows her uniqueness. She does not give importance to "Victorian energies." She translated classic work of *Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and Dante Alighieri*. She used Edwardian prose for Dostoyevsky is "adding milk to good tea."

From this phrase it proves that her nature is contrast. She suggests that translation can destroy the original tone. She does not translate word to word. When she translates *Cavafy's* poems into French, she skips some words and invents new words. To prove her opinion she gives example of *Water Benjamin* in "No translation of the Translator" he wrote: "No translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original." It means translation is not just copying of someone's work but it is renewal of the original work.

Symbolic Aspect

1. Blue hairs

Naturally the colours of hairs are black or white. The blue colour indicates sadness, and she rejects social norms and societal expectations. She cuts her hair indicates she wants to forget all bitter memories.

Her mother and fadia also asks her about her hair. She used to say by mistake she dyed her hair blue. She wishes to control her life. Blue hair becomes a poetic image.

2. Museum

Museum is a symbolic in the novel. Aaliya loves to visit museum. She lost herself in history. She feels that she is a part of that larger history. When she stands before

throne, she thinks “No, I am not a start, not a goddess May be a betyl.” It shows that museum preserve old things as same Aaliya preserves her work.

3. Apartment

Aaliya lives in her own apartment. During War she hides herself in that house. She imprisoned herself in apartment. She her apartment is her world. It is a deep feeling of isolation and reserved personality is like a hidden library which contains book, translation, her past memories, and deep sorrow. It keep away her from the whole world.

Aliya says, “My first act upon entering the apartment, after shutting the door behind me, is simples to drop on my sofa and rest my home.” It shows her love for apartment.

Feminist Perspective of the Novel

Aaliya narrates, “I am family’s appendix, its unnecessary appendage.” In the beginning of the novel she indicates her unimportance in family. Her childhood memories are not good. When her step-father was on death-bed, he called each of children to offer final wisdom. But he not called to daughters. It shows the gender discrimination. Her own mother ignores her. She does not stop her early marriage. After her husband’s death, her mother convinces her to leave the apartment. Because are brother’s families are large and living in small building. Mother curses her as selfish, insensitive and arrogant. It indicates how her own mother departed from her. Her county behaves like it is in 14th century. They expect women should follow the traditional rules. Women must have married, live with family and children. But Aaliya rejects all the traditional things. She is a rebellion from her society. She is not only live alone but also an

CONCLUSION

The novel, *An Unnecessary Woman* contains an imaginary story of Aaliya Saleh. She is 72 years old lady. She lives alone in Beirut. Because of rude behaviour of her mother and her unsuccessful marriage, she is apart her in-laws family. She has no children. So she considers herself an “Unnecessary appendage”. The story has a war background. War shakes the lives of ordinary people. The narrator memorises war events. She is independent and enjoys life with books. She tries to resolve her state of mind by using literature. Her house is a hidden library; no one knows what she is exactly doing. Aaliya says, “Of all the delicious pleasures my body has begun to refuse me, sleep is the most precious, the sacred gift I miss the most.” This shows her helpless life. She has a lot of burden. To escape from it, she takes the support of literature.

The paper argues that literature provides Aaliya with a symbolic sense of homeland and belonging. She tries to forget her sorrow by help of book. Literature creates a new world inside her. Her work gives an identity to her. It helps her to overcome from the instability of war. Literature gives a secure shelter to Aaliya. To conclude, the paper

proves it is a journey of Aaliya from unnecessary to necessary. It suggests that when real world is not giving you your own homes, literature will be a powerful house for you.

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