

AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN AND THEIR PROBLEMS IN TANZIMAT (REFORM) ERA BASED ON THE NOVEL “ESCAPADE” (SERGÜZEŞT)

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Abstract. The Imperial Edict of Gulhane, which was proclaimed in 1839, marked a breakthrough in the civilization understanding which was in domination for centuries. After that year Turkish society adopted rapid cultural changes in almost every field and tried to renovate itself in many areas by seeing an example in the West and especially in France. Literary works are the most important sources that we can refer to in order to understand this change and some problems that it led to. It is clear that careful and detailed reading of such novels will reveal many points that are left between the lines or somehow went unnoticed until today (Nazoktabar & Tohidi, 2014; Muyambiri & Chabaefe, 2018). Based on these premises, an attempt has been made to analyze in detail from the viewpoint of problems between men and women the “Sergüzeşt” novel which is considered an important work of Tanzimat Era by representing the transition from romanticism to realism in Turkish literature. Departing from the main character of the novel, Dilber, the authors tried to display the cariye (female slaves) character portrayed in Tanzimat novels and some problems related to women which developed within the female slavery understanding of that period.

Keywords: Woman, Slavery, Freedom, Education, Love.

1. Introduction

It is beyond doubt that women were the most influenced segment of society by the change in Westernization period which has been experienced since Tanzimat. For example, in Fatih-Harbiye novel, negative emphasis was made on the civilization understanding of women which was merely visual and it was stated that women were affected by the change so dramatically that they even lost their personality (Karadeniz 2015: 72). With their status in society and place in the family, women almost became the measure, indicator and symbol of social change in Westernization process (Irvani & ShekarchiZade, 2014; Hassan et al., 2019).

In Turkish novels, women as an element have always claimed an essential place. Depending on the event of the book, women appear in all novels in different roles. As a result of the westernization process which began in several fields in Tanzimat era, women and their problems came to the forefront and these problems were covered in detail in the novels of that period. Such novels as Escapade (Sergüzeşt) and the Love of Talat and Fitnat (Taaşuk-ı Tâl’at ve Fitnat) which were written in these years, featured women and covered such problems as family, marriage, education and slavery. In Tanzimat Era authors usually covered such topics as the legal rights of women, education of women, the right to choose their spouse, arranged marriages, heritage, marriage etc. and the place of women in society. They also tried to educate the readers for ensuring social justice and eliminating inequality. In this context, Orhan Okay commented that “the emergence of woman as a problem in Ottoman society began with Tanzimat” (Okay 1989: 159) and pronounced the time of change in the view towards Turkish woman.

Before Tanzimat years women always remained in the background in Turkish society and were deprived of several rights just because they were women. In Tanzimat era authors began to focus on women’s rights, initiated discussions on such progressive ideas as the education right of women, their place in the family etc. and made contribution to more advanced debates on the problem and especially its solution finally in Republican years. After Tanzimat era, the role of women in society began to change slowly: “The socio-cultural change that Tanzimat tried to realise facilitates the entrance of middle and higher class women in life.” (Turan 2005: 124). Especially the arrival and settlement of Egyptian pashas, lords and ladies in Istanbul increased the eagerness of people living here for European life styles (Tanpınar 1988: 133).

1.1 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to display the woman type existing in Tanzimat era and problems of women based on the novel titled Escapade written by Sami Paşazade Sezai. For this purpose answers were sought to the following questions: 1. What kind of a woman type was portrayed by the author in his novel Escapade? 2. What are the problems of women and their causes covered in Escapade novel?

2. Method

2.1 Model of the Study

In our data study, qualitative research was used as research method and document analysis was used in order to collect data.

2.2 Sample of the Study

The sample of the study is provided by novel titled “Escapade” written by Sami Paşazade Sezai. Convenience sampling, which is a type of purposive sampling, was taken as the basis of this study. As a result, the novel titled “Escapade”, which includes important clues about the problems of women in its time, was preferred which was examined by the researchers in advance to gain knowledge.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis Method

Data of the study were collected from the novel titled "Escapade" written by Sami Paşazade Sezai. The novel was analyzed with descriptive analysis method.

3. Findings

The novel titled "Escapade", written by Samipaşazade Sezai, which narrates the injustice that a slave girl suffered from, deals with the wrongs in marriage institution, education problems and class differences on the axis of East-West conflict. In the novel, the life of Dilber which began in Istanbul at the age of 8-9 and ended in the waters of the River Nile at 17 was covered. Considering the structure of the novel which consists of 19 sections in different lengths, the book can be evaluated under four main headings. The first section begins with the entrance of Dilber in the novel as a slave and the days that she spent until she was sold to Asaf Pasha's mansion are discussed. In the second section, the events that she went through in Asaf Pasha's mansion are narrated. In this section, the author called attention to the love between Dilber and Celal Bey. In the third section, the plight of Celal Bey when Dilber was forced to leave the mansion is portrayed. In the final section Dilber's days in Egypt are described.

The basic topic covered in the novel is slavery. Among the principles of Imperial Edict of Gulhane which was proclaimed on November 3rd, 1839, there were such concepts as human rights, freedom and equality: "The most important development in Ottoman Empire in Tanzimat Era in terms of fundamental rights and freedoms was, without doubt, Imperial Edict of Gulhane which was proclaimed on November 3rd, 1839, and after which the era was named. This edict, which was labeled as the first fundamental rights charter, introduced safety of life, safety of property and honor, personal security, no crime and punishment without trial and, most importantly, the validity of these rights for everyone living in the empire regardless of their religion." (Konan 2011: 271). Its reflections are naturally seen in literature.

Slavery

Slavery is one of the most widely covered topics in Tanzimat era novels. In his novel titled "Escapade", Sezai resisted the sales of people in markets just like commodities and displayed the grave consequences of this practice and voiced his reaction. In this period, slavery as a topic was handled with a romantic viewpoint in both Sezai's book and other novels with the purpose of urging the reader to think about this concept: "Accepted as a social problem, slavery was generally used as a romantic element in novels. When we look at the slave characters in novels and the treatments they face, we can say that the people who treat slaves badly are criticized, and the people who try to educate them and integrate them with the society are portrayed as ideal types. As a result, slave characters are given thematic strength with their positive features." (Burcu 2002: 51).

In Escapade, the female character, Dilber, was a Circassian female slave who was sold repeatedly. Being suppressed in all of her homes, Dilber found peace in Arif Pasha's mansion; but this time she was sold because she fell in love with the son of the family, Celal Bey. In the end of the novel, she ended her life by throwing herself into the waters of the River Nile. Dilber is just one of the many female slaves in the Ottoman society in that era. The author approached events with a realist viewpoint in addition to romantic philosophy and provided a successful example of social criticism in this novel. The novel is an important example of the transition from romanticism to realism and displayed slave trade, social inequality and value judgements of the time in Dilber character with success. In addition, with a romantic viewpoint, Sezai evokes the feeling that he is on the side of the suppressed and wants to stimulate the feeling of pity in the readers: "Poor children! Your tiny hands are not for breaking the chains of slavery that the old Asian barbarism has been exploiting and making the entire humanity groan bitterly under its domination for so many centuries; they are, at the utmost, for caressing small birds and fragrant flowers like yourself..." (Sezai 2005: 31).

The event in Escapade is the product of observation and the author attracted attention to the women slaves who lived in that era. In the novel Dilber is portrayed as an innocent, characterful, submissive and honourable woman.

In the novel, the atrocity of human trade is constantly emphasised and the attention of the reader is attracted to the negative aspects of slavery-female slavery institution. In the novel, Dilber was sold to the house of Mustafa Efendi for forty liras. The lady of that house and Arabian odalisk Taravet forced the girl to do heavy work; most of the time they reprimanded and beat her. The lady of the house and Taravet did not let Dilber play with Atiye, the daughter of the family. "One morning, while she was sweeping upstairs, she saw that Miss Atiye was playing with her toys; she unavoidably left her broom and sat beside little lady. She was looking at the toys, astonished, when she heard the Lady calling in her terrible and ugly voice: "Dilber! Dilber!" Her heart was in her mouth and she was paralysed. When the lady came inside and saw that this piece of odalisk wanted to play with her daughter, she went as red as a beetroot with fury; held Dilber at her ear and took her to where she had left her broom. With a rather severe voice, she said: "You are a piece of a odalisk...Why do you abandon your work?...What good is playing for you?" and gave a sore slap in her face" (Sezai 2005: 20).

Another remarkable point in the novel is that especially in the parts which describe slavery, such words as death, paw and weak are frequently used to successfully portray Dilber's psychology: "Helpless child...For the second time in her short life, she felt how she was weakened in the paw of slavery which was stronger than iron, colder than death...When she came at the door of this dungeon of torment from which she escaped at midnight looking in the eye of death in streets, she hesitated for a few seconds. This life of hell, from which she tried to escape with the utmost power and courage of her body and soul, was about to begin again. The misery of a galley slave, who escaped as he could not stand the torturing and insults, but was caught soon after and taken back, could not be more terrible...She got her foot in

the door of the house by chilling of fear” (Sezai 2005: 36).

In *Escapade*, the fallacy of human trade, thus slavery, was discussed with its negative aspects, and necessary messages were given to the reader in this sense. In the novel, the slavery life of Dilber who was kidnapped from Caucasus to Istanbul and her longing for freedom was portrayed successfully. In the writer’s words, Dilber, who was as weak and helpless as a bird, longed for freedom just like a bird (Sezai 2005: 19). In *Escapade*, bird is closely related to freedom and philanthropy in particular. In the end of the novel, Dilber’s closing her eyes to choose death and saying goodbye to life can be considered as a rebellion against slavery.

Love and Marriage:

One of the topics covered in the novel is love and marriage. In the novel, the love between Dilber and Celal Bey develops in time which is suitable to the realism school. Having educated in Paris, Celal Bey uses Dilber as a model for his drawings in the beginning. However, this togetherness turns into love. “After they understand that they are in love with each other; at the first secret meeting in the garden, birds join in their happiness. Here birds are also symbols of joy.” (Kerman 1998: 54). On one hand, Dilber experiences the troubles of being a slave; on the other hand, her love for Celal Bey causes bigger troubles for her. She cries very often although she is in comfort in the mansion: “Celal now put aside his brush and paints, put his elbow on his knees; he was playing with his hair with his fingers, and watching the divine beauty of this young girl in miserable clothes who was crying silently...He stayed like that for quite some moments...Dilber was still crying” (Sezai 2005: 64).

Another love which is mentioned in *Escapade* is the unanswered love of Cevher, the Egyptian eunuch, for Dilber. Cevher loved Dilber so much that he risked death for her. However this was an unanswered love and Cevher, being aware of this, continued to love her until she died.

In the novel, the problems of marriage institution in that era were given a wide coverage. The inter-generational divergence is especially underlined in this topic. Asaf Pasha and Lady Zehra do not allow their son to marry with a slave due to class differences. In the novel, Celal Bey cannot marry with Dilber due to the conditions of that era although he does not agree with his parents. From a romantic viewpoint, the author tried to give in the novel the message that people belonging to lower classes also had the right to love and be loved.

His uncle said “the young people should leave their marriage decisions to their parents” (Sezai, 2005: 97) while Celal argued that young people should marry to the person they desire. Thus, arranged marriages are criticized in the novel and it is underlined that the young people should have the freedom to choose their spouses.

Education:

Education is one of the most frequently mentioned topics in *Escapade* and other works of that era. In the book, class differences in terms of education remain in the background compared to other issues. Celal Bey is portrayed as a young person who stayed for five-six years in Paris and received education on painting. Although he received a good education, Celal Bey gives a very passive image in the novel, which is attributable to the fact that he is dependent on his parents economically: “In the novel titled *Escapade* written by Sezai, the negative effects of European-style but suppressive parents on young people is displayed in one aspect. Asaf Pasha’s son, Celal Bey, receives drawing education in Paris for five years and returns to Turkey. He is a skilled painter. However, there is a gap between his world of thinking and the lifestyle of his family. Despite having completed his education in Europe, Celal Bey is unable to give decisions about his own future although he is twenty-three years old. In addition, he also lacks economic freedom. His wealthy parents give severe reaction when they notice his love for Dilber” (Yılmaz 2016: 519).

A general look at the novels written in this era shows that young people such as Ali Bey and Celal Bey make several mistakes throughout their lives although they receive good education. This is another indicator of the inadequacy of the education understanding of that era.

One of the basic conditions of being a Westerner in Tanzimat years was learning a language. Based on reforms, it can be seen that the young people of those years spoke French or were educated in French. One of the most important points in *Escapade* was that although she was a slave (female slave) Dilber paid effort to receive education but she was not allowed to. However, a general look at Tanzimat novels indicates that especially girls did not receive too much education. The education of women does not aim to earn them a certain status, which is the case for men; it is more related to ensure that they perform their domestic duties successfully. Therefore, it is observed that men pay attention to the education level of girls when they are about to marry.

4. Conclusion

With the proclamation of Imperial Edict of Gulhane and beginning of modernization of Ottoman Empire, relations between men and women, privacy, and the status of women in the society took their place in literary works as centrally discussed topics. The authors who produced works in this era approached the events with different ideologies; however, most of these authors imagined woman as a figure that will increase the welfare level of the society and gave particular importance to the education of women. Due to the abundance of problems during Tanzimat years which is characterised with intense Westernization efforts, women and their problems could not come to the forefront; however, an examination of the entire literature of the era shows that almost all literary works mentioned problems of women directly or indirectly.

In his novel titled *Escapade*, Samipaşazade Sezai covered the topic of female slavery in the personality of Dilber. Based on that novel, it is learned that little girls brought from Caucasus in those years were traded like commodities and that these girls did not have any right to say. As can be seen in the novel, Dilber’s life is entirely in the

hands of others until she dies; even her name was given not by her parents but by the people who purchased her.

Another problem covered in the novel is love and marriage. As a slave girl, Dilber has no right to choose the person she will marry. Even Celal Bey, who received a good education, is unable to choose the girl he will marry. Families assumed determinant role in this area.

Shortly after the proclamation of Tanzimat, education of women became a popular topic, and new education opportunities and the doors of professional life began to open for women. However, as can be seen in the novels of that era, women were accepted only if they acted in accordance with their gender roles determined in a male-dominated society. In *Escapade*, Celal Bey received a good education in Paris parallel to the understanding of the era. Nevertheless, it is seen that Dilber, being deprived of almost every right, also received education from time to time. This can be explained by the Ottoman intellectual thinking of the era that the country can recover from its contempt with education only. The author portrayed the drama of a slave girl in *Escapade*, and underlined that slave trade is sheer barbarity and that all human beings should be equal. After this criticism of Sezai criticism grew and slavery was abolished.

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