

# A Comparative Analysis of Simin Behbahani and Souad al-Sabah's Poetry from the Perspective of Feminist Criticism

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## Abstract

In the early twentieth century, with the rise of women's issues in the continuation of the world's feminist movements, women's literature was formed in Iran and the Arab world. Women's issues in Persian and Arabic poetry first appeared in the poems of Forough Farrokhzad and Ghada al-Samman. Later, Simin Behbahani in Persian literature and Souad al-Sabah in Arabic became famous poets in the framework of liberal feminism and gave a new interpretation of women's desires and problems. Challenging gender discrimination, they have raised the issue of human equality in a reformist and principled manner. This article has analyzed and compared the components of feminist criticism in the poetry of two poets with a descriptive-analytical method and a comparative approach. Discrimination due to misconceptions about love, marriage, and the emphasis on awareness, freedom, individual and identity independence, and changing attitudes are among the most important themes of two poets. Because of their social commonalities, beliefs, lived experiences, traditions, and similar circumstances, they have described the status and position of women with highly realistic conceptions of common themes. The critical point of view and the style of expression of both poets are non-iconoclastic and in accordance with liberal feminism.

## Keywords

comparative literature, contemporary poetry, feminist criticism, Simin Behbahani, Souad al-Sabah.

## 1. Introduction

Comparative research is a kind that content and related styles of literary works are described, compared and analysed in a deductive manner. In fact, comparative studies examine the similarities and differences of human thought beyond linguistic, cultural, and geographical boundaries. One of the common approaches in comparative research is to compare the content of common themes in the literary works of two different cultures and languages. Comparative research in literature includes the study of the literature of nations with each other and is done with two approaches: the

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study of historical influence according to the French school or the study of similarities and differences according to the American school. The French school has been raised since the second half of the nineteenth century, with researchers like Abel François, Villemain, and Jean Jacques Ampère (Jost 38). In this approach, "the analysis of one nation's literature is done through its historical relationship with the literature of other nations, in terms of how they relate with and influence each other" (Nada 20). In the twentieth century, a group of American scholars including René Wellek and Henry H. H. Remak, in reaction to the historical dimension and the issue of influence in the French school, broadened the sphere of comparative literature and let the literary works be compared without the matter of historical influence just based on similarities and differences, furthermore they compared literary works with other areas of knowledge and belief. Remak Writes: "Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and the study of the relationship between literature on one hand and other areas of knowledgw and belief, such as the (fine) arts, philosophy, history, the social sciences, religion, etc. on the other" (Dominguez, Saussy and Villanueva 5).

Feminism is the name of a movement to demand the rights and claims of women and was first used by Charles Fourier, a nineteenth-century socialist sociologist. This school of thought "considers the subordination of women debatable and opposable; An opposition that requires a critical examination of the present and past status of women and a challenge to patriarchal ideologies that make subordination natural, general, and inevitable" (Abu Mahboub 31). In the twentieth century, the ideas of the feminist school entered various fields, including art and literature, and in the middle of the twentieth century, it became a kind of epistemological tool and one of the codified and methodical approaches in the critique and analysis of literary works. It is difficult to summarize the impact of these ideas on and in literary works, but the common feature of all works attributed to feminism is the representation and analysis of feminist ideas in literary works. This is revealed in many feminist works including: Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Wolstonecraft, Nawal El Saadawi, Ghada al-Samman, Souad al-Sabah, and Simin Behbahani. Because literary works do not have a closed and inclusive existence and are influenced by the society and individuality of the creator of the work, women have expressed their views in literature and in addition to the novel, which is the predominant type of women's writing, they have also used poetry.

In Iran, with the Constitutional Revolution, society's attitude towards women changed and their presence in various fields and, consequently, in literature was introduced in a new way. Jaleh Ghaem Maghami is one of the first pioneering feminist poets in constitutional Iran. After her, Parvin Etesami, Simin Behbahani and Forough Farrokhzad are avant-garde women in poetry. "In 1301, a group called "the Patriotic Women's Society" was formed by Moluk Eskandari and another group, including Simin's mother to protect women's rights (Abbott and Wallace 53-55). In the Arab world, from the end of the nineteenth century and after the growth of intellectual currents in the movement era, the need to pay attention to women's

social issues began in the works of Seyyed Jamal al-Din Asadabadi, Khair al-Din al-Tunisi, Rafa'a Rafi al-Tahtawi and Qasim Amin. Mariana Marash, Wardeh Eliazji, Malik Hafni Naseef, Zeinab Fawaz, Hoda Sha'rawi, Nawal El Saadawi, Fatemeh Mernisi, Sahar Khalifa, Ghada al-Samman and Souad al-Sabah in expressing women's issues, defending their identity and eliminating discrimination and conflict with some traditions of Patriarchy through literary works are vanguards in this field. In poetry, women entered an arena that already had a masculine language and intellectual style, while they needed their own style and language to express their thoughts. Due to this, women's literature was formed with a different style and attitude, not as a second sex, but as a different one to seek their own literary identity and status (Robbins); (Armstrong); (Braidotti). This research with a comparative approach and based on the school of feminism to recognize the thoughts and ideas of women in Iran and the Arab world, is to study the poetry of Simin Behbahani and Souad al-Sabah as representatives of women of that period. The reason of this choice is that both are female outstanding poets, most of their poetry is composed in the same realm of time, they encountered same social and political circumstances after political reforms and revolutions, and last but not least their literary themes are similar in expressing women issues and problems. Therefore, analyzing the most important issues of their poetry and the factors affecting it, this manuscript tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the feminist approach of Souad al-Sabah and Simin Behbahani in the context of their poetry?
2. What factors did influence the views of both poets on women's issues and the critique of ideas and social structures in this field?

## 2. Literature Review

Examining various sources, it was found that separate researches have been done regarding the works of Simin Behbahani and Souad al-Sabah. Fazel Khalaf (1992) in *Souad al-Sabah Poetry and the Poet* has studied poetic features and innovations of Souad based on the structure of modern poetry. Fawzi Isa (2002) in *Reading in the Poetry of Souad al-Sabah* has re-read some of the themes of Souad's poetry such as homeland, society and women's issues. Mohsen Seifi, Ali Asadipour and Sajjad Esmaili (2014) in an article entitled "Comparative Critique of Women's Freedom in the Poems of Souad al-Sabah and Simin Behbahani" have analyzed the common themes of the poetry of both poets only on the issue of women's freedom.

Mehri Afkhami (2008) in her master's thesis entitled *Feminism in the Poems of Simin Behbahani, Forough Farrokhzad and Ahmad Shamloo* has studied feminist themes in the poetry of these three poets. Reyhaneh Emadi (2013) in her book *Feminist Thoughts in Simin Behbahani's Poems* has studied the most important issues of women in Simin's poetry. Mokhtar Ebrahimi (2013) in an article entitled "Feminist Tendency in Simin Behbahani's

Ghazal" has analyzed some of Behbahani's views on women. Lida Namdar (2013) in an article entitled "Philogyny and Misogyny in Contemporary Iranian and Arab Poetry" has brought the views of some contemporary Arab and Iranian poets about women. The difference between the present study and the works above is that with a comparative approach, it comprehensively analyzes and compares all the themes of two poets and tries to make a comparison between them.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The method of the present study is descriptive-analytical with a comparative approach and based on feminist criticism. Simin's poems are selected from her book: *The First Volume of Collected Poems* (2015), which is her largest collection and contains mostly women's issues and contains the following poems: Broken Sitar (1951), Footprint (1954), Chandelier (1955), Marble (1961), Resurrection (1971), Line of Speed and Fire (1980), Arjan Plain (1983). While Souad's poems are selected from her works: *Pieces of a Woman* (1997), *Desire* (1971), *Took Me to the Limits of the Sun* (2005), *Poems of Love* (2005), *The roses Know Anger* (2005), *A Woman without Coasts* (2005), *Messages from a Beautiful Time* (2006), *In the Beginning There Was a Female* (2000).

### **4. Theoretical framework**

#### **4.1. Feminism**

According to Hooks, "feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (Hooks viii). This term can be also applied to a system of thinking that focuses on equality between men and women. There are three waves to be mentioned according to a historically perspective. "First-wave feminism is usually dated from the mid1850s to the beginning of World War II and was characterized by its liberalist stance through political activism, the full citizenship rights of universal suffrage, self-determination, access to higher education, and ownership of property" (Malti-Douglas 539). "Second-wave feminism, often considered synonymous with the women's liberation movement, refers to the reemergence of feminist activity in the aftermath of the World War II until the 1990s (ibid). The second wave was as the first wave built on a liberal thought and it demanded for "equal pay; interventions in the spheres of reproduction, sexuality, and cultural representation; and the more substantial theorization of patriarchy" (ibid 540). The third wave feminism emerged in the 1990s "as a result of an explosion of theoretical perspectives informed by post-structural, postcolonial, and queer theory" (ibid). "The state of economic, political and technological flux which characterizes modernity presents opportunities and dangers for women which the feminists of the first and second wave could not have imagined" (Gamble 44).

## 4.2. Liberal Feminism

According to the critiques there is diversity in feminist thought as follows: Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist and Socialist Feminism, Psychoanalytic Feminism, Care-Focused Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Ecofeminism, Postmodern and Third-Wave Feminism (see Tong 1). We only here concentrate on the definition of Liberal Feminism, for our research is based on a liberal perspective of it. "Liberal feminism aims at achieving equality of opportunity to all. That is changing the criteria of femininity and masculinity according to sexual divisions of labour only; so, this mainstream feminism pours its energy into changing institutional and governmental levels" (S. Saleh & S. Mahmood 72). "The liberal feminist tradition goes back to feminism's earliest days: John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft both argued for the necessity of social reform in order to give women the same status and opportunities as men" (Gamble 239). "The American Betty Friedan is considered to be the leading liberal feminist of the second wave, arguing in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that the way out of the confines of the home lay in increased access to education and the world of work" (ibid).

## 5. Analysis: Reading Behbahani and Al-Sabah's Poetry

In their subconscious, women can only consider themselves as actors, free speakers, or creators of literary works when they suspend their gender, without asking who or what they are talking about. From this perspective, if women ignore their femininity and appear with a different identity, their performance will be validated. The following verse from the Andalusian poet Nazhun al-Gharnatiyya shows the existence of this belief throughout history:

Although I am a female in creation, but my poetry is masculine (Al-Maqarri al-Tlemsani 161).

By analyzing the poetry of Souad and Simin, we will see that the words in the generality of their poems constitute a fundamental principle, ie the negation of superiority, which can help us in interpretation of their text and thought, and this is the starting point of distinguishing their poetry from the men of their time. Their poetry explains and challenges inequalities with regard to the world, relationships, identities, culture, power and ideology and representations derived from these elements, to reform theoretical and practical approaches within an intellectual and religious system based on principles.

### 5.1. The Need to Achieve Awareness

One of the goals of feminists is to create an equal arena for women and men to acquire knowledge (Justice of Education). This opinion is reflected in the works of many feminist critics such as: Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Naomi Wolf, Dorothy Smith, Valerie Walkerdine, and Ruth Robbins. In this regard, "challenging some conditions and

ideas is one of the important factors in women's tendency to write" (Gamble 195). Writing in the theory of feminism is both a kind of struggle and expression of subjectivity, and it causes awareness and, consequently, power. The poet wants to express her mental identity by writing poetry, but in some cases the culture of a patriarchal society does not allow freedom of expression for women; Because, as other feminists believe, "freedom of speech leads to freedom of thought, and freedom of thought leads to freedom of action" (Saadawi 254), and this is not acceptable for such a society. In the process of gaining awareness, Souad sees the importance of writing as a tool and considers writing poetry as a way to enter the realm of reason and remove the walls between women and repressed femininity so that the best women are no longer the most masculine of them. And the common value that "masculinity is a virtue enjoyed by virtuous women" (Zeidan 13) is replaced by the human value that femininity is another virtue. She sings in the Divan of "Odes of Love":

I want to write  
To defend every inch of my femininity  
It was occupied by colonialism  
And did not leave it yet  
Writing is my method  
To break what I cannot break  
From the castles of Middle Ages (Al-Sabah, *In the Beginning There Was Female* 21).

With the same approach of liberal feminism, Simin considers inequality in rights and educational opportunities as a cause of inequality and believes that the situation will improve with reforms. She calls on women to get out of ignorance in order to find their identity and to open the way to society by entering the field of science:

Go to pencil and book,  
And while crying sing an ode (Behbahani, *The First Chapter of Collected Poems* 539).

She writes somewhere else:

On cheap straw paper  
Write about oppression and destruction  
Until the flame of the wrath of the oppressor  
Bring out smoke of your straw,  
When you have a pen  
You squeeze its throat then (Behbahani, *The First Chapter of Collected Poems* 987).

Souad al-Sabah, in her invitation to gain awareness, uses first person pronoun and verb to emphasize on the individual's factor, but Simin uses the second person pronoun to address

all women around. This could be regarded as a major standpoint of addressing in the works of both authors.

### 5.2. Breaking the Taboo on Love

Souad and Simin broke the monopoly on love and considered themselves worthy of participation in lovemaking. Love is a part of happiness for both poets, and despite knowing that making love by a woman can still be considered a scandal, they both sing it bravely. By expressing her feelings about her lover, Souad challenges the part of the culture that neglects woman's feelings and considers her in love rebellious. She does not shy away from being killed in expressing symbolic and not personal love:

Sir!  
 My feelings for you are like a sea without coast  
 My position in love is not accepted by tribes  
 Sir!  
 You are the one I want  
 Not what Taghleab and Wa'el want,  
 You are the one that I love  
 It does not matter at all  
 If they want to shed my blood  
 And consider me a woman,  
 Beyond the old traditions (Al-Sabah, *Take Me to the Sun's Boundaries* 97).

Considering the psychological characteristics of women, some feminists believe: "A woman in love feels that she has risen to the side of her god. If she has a place in a highly orderly world forever, it does not matter to her to be second" (De Beauvoir 583). Souad considers love as a source of liberation and power:

When I am in love  
 I feel like I've become a featherweight  
 I am walking over the clouds  
 And steal the sun's light  
 And hunt moons (Al-Sabah, *In the Beginning There Was Female* 38).

But Simin, in her love poems in first collections like "Jaye Pa" and "Chelcheragh", tends to the style of traditional lyric poetry and has not yet reached her own initiative. The beloved in these poems is the same as traditional lyric poems; she is feminine and has no masculine identity. Allegories and interpretations are also stereotypes and the love of a woman and of a man are inseparable. "Simin appears as if she is not composing poetry at this time, but is repeating the lyric of classical lyricists, and the atmosphere of the lyric does not indicate a new relationship between the poet and the beloved" (Dehbashi 52).

Where is your braided hair to untie it?

And kiss its curls and caress with my cheeks (Dehbashi 295).

The language and norms of established culture, made a masculine domination on women and made them think, write and describe in such a way that the language is not freed from the bondage of gender and can not have a distinct or neutral expression.

By analyzing Simin's poetry, we see that her sonnets take on a different nature in an evolutionary process. By capturing the foundation of sonnet, she gave a new meaning to the beloved and changed the traditional relationship between woman and sonnet. In her poems, the woman in love acquires the right to choose the beloved and express her feeling. In the matter of love, Simin does not give superiority to either man or woman; rather, she considers love itself superior; "I do not accept any superiority of female or male, my ruler is love" (Abbott and Wallace 61). One of Simin's achievements in her poetic experience is breaking the norm in expressing love:

There is a river of love wine in every vein,  
As I am drunk on you, what a place of consciousness,  
I jump like sparkle and join to the death happily,  
How beautiful is the madness of love, even though it is a disease (Behbahani,  
*The First Chapter of Collected Poems* 419).

Considering the meaning and the way of combining the words, it can be said that the issue of love has been boldly expressed in the poetry of both poets. The imagination and understanding of both poets transcend the love beyond the boundaries of material and sensory affairs. But individuality, freedom and endurance are more evident in Simin's poetry.

### **5.3. Freedom of Action and Identified Individualism**

Influenced by existentialists, liberal feminists believe that human beings have rights solely on the basis of their human nature, and nothing prevents them from enjoying these rights. From this point of view, Souad is dissatisfied with the stillness and distance from society and wants to be free in what she wants, and to express her opinion without fear:

I want to live under the overcoat of death,  
I want to live in the earthquake circle,  
Not in the circle of stillness,  
I want to live in the eyes of people,  
Not in my own eyes (Al-Sabah, *And Roses Know Anger* 229).

Like feminists, Souad considers writing to be a factor of ability to express one's existence and experiences in the pursuit of security and power and to rid oneself of injustice, so she sings in her collection "Love Poems":



The writing creates,  
 Artificial paradises for me  
 I cannot enter them  
 And it gives me freedom  
 I cannot practice it  
 And I cannot travel to it,  
 Writing to you  
 Is the safety valve saving me from exploding.  
 It is the only boat I get on,  
 When the storm chews me (Al-Sabah, *Odes of Love* 20).

The poet writes in order to fight against obstacles in the way of freedom, such as that made by superstition:

I am a woman from the Gulf,  
 Whose half is a fish,  
 And another half is a woman  
 I am the flute and the harp and the bitter coffee  
 I am the wandering pony  
 Who writes the hymn of freedom with her hooves.  
 I am the blue sea dagger  
 Who will not rest,  
 Until it kills the superstition (Al-Sabah, *Pieces of a Woman* 53).

Explaining the current situation, the poet believes that some do not consider writing and poetry not suitable for women, and look at feminine writers with inferiority and consider their literature less than men's:

They say: femininity is a weakness  
 They say: literature is a strange kind  
 Of grass ... that desert rejects it  
 The one who writes poetry  
 Is nothing but a bar dancer (19).

According to feminists, gender discrimination has become a culture to consider "women imperfect compared to men, and this belief is also evident in the writings of great figures such as Socrates, Plato, Darwin, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, al-Ma'ari and al-Aqad and others" (Korsmeyer 16). Here the poet breaks her silence by repeating the protesting verb "hear" and says:

Hear this blossoming sound from my spring body:  
 Every bud, tells you that listen to me.  
 Each bud became a ritual Parvin blossom.

If I say I'm a drunken eglantine branch, listen.

Listen to the pity of opponents when I am released (Behbahani, *The First Chapter of Collected Poems* 702).

In her collection named "Gypsylike Women", she encourages women to change their circumstances and free themselves from the bondage of gender ideology. Freedom is the most important feature of Gypsy in Simin's poetry, which symbolizes the freedom of the Iranian woman to teach her stability:

Like desert deers  
You are not a prisoner to your lord,  
The life of the deer  
Is not familiar with fence (653).

The poet hopes to be someday free from discrimination barriers:

O complicated package,  
Which surrounded me like wall,  
I will be free one day  
From this onionlike prison (Behbahani, *The First Chapter of Collected Poems* 524).

#### 5.4. Challenging Gender-based Ideas

In the past, women have been exposed to the inhumane policies of social and economic systems more than any other group in society. They were defined as second, weak, or inferior by an attitude in which the man was considered normal and desirable. "The definition of a woman and her identity is constantly formed from her relationship with a man, so the woman becomes another who has negative characteristics" (Ruwaily and Bazeghi 223). The theory of feminism aims to eliminate repression and domination by trying to decentralize gender from the realm of humanity and free itself from the shackles of old patriarchal relations. The basic belief of equal rights activists for the two sexes is that women have been oppressed and discriminated because of their gender, and that this oppression is not intrinsic and must be eliminated (Zarwandi 79). With poetic discourse, Simin and Souad have also challenged some gender-centric rather than human-centered thoughts that are the result of false belief and teaching, ignorance and superstition. In the following verses, Souad challenges the attitude of society, which has become a norm or standard:

They say: The best woman is the satisfied one,  
Liberation is a big sin,  
The sweetest woman is the slave girl (Al-Sabah, *Pieces of a Woman* 19).

In the following poem, Souad is protesting against a society in which misconceptions about gender have created two different and contrasting worlds for a type of creature called man:

O nerve-relaxed you are steady,  
 And I turn around myself,  
 And turn around,  
 The earth under me is always scorched,  
 And the earth beneath you is silky and velvety,  
 A big difference between us, sir  
 I am conservative and you are brave (Al-Sabah, *A Woman without Coasts* 125).

In this case, Souad al-Sabah, understanding the dimensions of discrimination, considers the way she interacts with women in some societies, despite human progress, as a kind of developed burying of live girls. Due to her religious beliefs, she belongs to the group of liberal feminists, but sometimes in the face of the very harsh intellectual conditions of society, her view became radical. In this direction, the poet, while inviting the audience to reflect and change, starts a practical effort to not accept the unfavorable conditions and to break the obstacles. For this reason, most of the verbs in her poems are in the singular form:

They say:  
 I broke the wall of virtue with my poems  
 And men are poets  
 How will a female poet be born in the tribe?  
 I laugh at all this nonsense  
 And I mock those who want in the age of star war,  
 Bury women under the ground  
 I ask myself:  
 Why is male's song permissible?  
 And the voice of women becomes immoral (Al-Sabah, *Pieces of a Woman* 16).

The poet protests by asking questions to those men who, following their own desires, think that women's intellect and thought are inferior to themselves. As a poet of "feminism, she wants them to change their materialistic view of woman and not just look at her body; Because this kind of attitude is ignoring the thought and personality of the woman and ignoring her humanity" (Hussein al-Afif 197).

O Eastern man why you care about my appearance?  
 Why do you see kohl with my eyes?  
 And do not see my mind? (Al-Sabah, *In the Beginning There Was Female* 8,12)

In contemporary Iranian literature, poets realized that the age of occasional poetry was over and that they should choose the subject of poetry from the realities of society. In these circumstances, Simin's poetry reflects the realities of society. The patriarchy and misogyny of the poet's age in most strata of society, led to themes related to women's issues and freedom and human values in her poems. According to her: "an artist is a mirror to which the conditions of society are radiated and its reflection returns to the surrounding environment" (Behbahani, "The Effect of Society and Social Situations on Poetry" 74). In this regard, Simin's approach is based on the theoretical principles of liberal feminists. "Simin is a feminist who is aware of history and patriarchy and is fair in her judgments. In her poetry, Zohreh is the symbol of submission, Gypsy is the symbol of protest, and Ilkhan is the symbol of patriarchy" (Dehbashi 268).

When you accomplished your desire from her, changed your manner,  
And you made a new relationship with another star,  
Venus played her harp sadly and moaned fierily.  
You got angry and did something bad to her:  
You broke the harp and tore its strings,  
And buried its bones under rocks,  
Zohreh shouted: "Long live the Ilkhan!  
it was the strings of my life that you tore" (Behbahani, *The First Chapter of Collected Poems* 932).

According to Simin "gender does not or should not play a decisive role in social rights. She accepts the inequality of art between men and women and considers it as a result of differences in natures, but does not consider it as a factor of superiority" (Abu Mahboub 62). In the following poem, she protests to anti-feminine culture:

I do not regret why my life  
Is not drunken by winelike look, [...]  
But I suffer of why someone like me,  
Is condemned by such a system,  
The strap that I have on my neck,  
is connected on the other side to their neck (Behbahani, *The First Chapter of Collected Poems* 88).

The poet expresses the same motif in the words of a dancing girl:

She cried: O oppressive group  
You broke my back under the burden of pain  
I am thirsty for your blood, yes, I am,  
So don't scatter flowers and do not send kisses (58).

### 5.5. Criticizing Polygyny and Its Impact on Children

Polygyny is a phenomenon that has a long history in human history. Feminists consider this phenomenon to be a social tradition in which the woman is considered a commodity and a property of the man. Souad al-Sabah says in her divan "and roses know anger":

I want to escape from the ugliness of merchants in the bazaar  
 And from the color and races auction,  
 And the hips and buttocks,  
 I want to escape from my skin  
 And from the skin of Bani Manaf (Al-Sabah, *And Roses Know Anger* 233).

The poet says elsewhere:

I will cry out in the name of the virgins whom you,  
 Married and divorced,  
 Like horses which are bought and sold (Al-Sabah, *A Woman without Coasts* 149).

Souad also addresses men in the divan "In the beginning, there was female":

You change women  
 As you are changing your shirts  
 And your ties  
 And you make love  
 As you take off your shoes (Al-Sabah, *In the Beginning There Was Female* 135).

In some of her poems, Simin Behbahani also considers polygamy and divorce as a result of considering women as tools:

Shame on the palace where  
 I have neither freedom nor independence  
 The woman of the aristocrats is also a property and this property  
 Should be beautiful and charming and humorous (Behbahani, *The First Chapter of Collected Poems* 91).

In the poem "co-wife", she considers the consequences of the phenomenon of polygamy unfortunate:

Ah! This man who sleeps warmly  
 Next to this riotous woman,  
 He would hold me in his arms  
 Someday warmer and more emotional  
 My child was sick; but father

bought confectionery and sweets for this woman.  
I lived a hard life with him in order to buy her  
bracelets, clothes and skirts (256).

One of the topics that is repeated many times in Simin's poems is her early marriage. This bitter memory, which has remained in the poet's mind forever, is a subject that has made other women's lives miserable.

There sits a youthful girl  
With cheeks like flower  
Nearer sits a nice bride;  
But alas! Not happy and talkative  
Annoyed and sad in front of me,  
Depressed and regretful that this is not her (103).

### 5.6. Grasping Women's Concerns

An invitation to a polyphonic strategy to portray the various logics, desires, needs, and mental states of the two sexes based on the acceptance of differences as difference and not as a superior or inferior factor, is seen in the poetry of both poets. Souad al-Sabah encourages women to acquire knowledge. In this way, she sees writing as providing a private space and a "room" for women. She fights against the unipolarity of society and symbolic violence:

Inside me are long women's marches  
It starts at Tangiers  
And it ends in Hadramout  
And slogans written with lipstick  
And flags made  
From the strings of an old sock  
Protests against one-party system (Al-Sabah, *A Woman without Coasts* 89).

Souad, sometimes unlike Simin, does not take the moderate method. Her way of getting rid of unequal conditions is through severe discourse and symbolic revenge:

I retaliated against you,  
For all women of your clan  
I stabbed you  
Twice  
Three times  
Four times  
And I buried you under the sand

And I will not back down from what I say (Al-Sabah, *A Woman without Coasts* 148).

As a liberal feminist, Simin takes a moderate and sometimes peaceful approach to the attainment of women's rights, and sees men and women together as agents of development and progress:

We are both on the same path  
Leave selfishness and stubbornness  
Take my hand as your companion  
And tolerate me for being your fellow-traveler (Behbahani, *The First Chapter of Collected Poems* 94).

Simin considers the promotion of women's academic position and skills highly significant so that they achieve their true status in social practices. This emphasis is consistent with the beliefs of liberal feminists; she thus encourages women to acquire knowledge and awareness in the following way:

The adornment of the society today,  
Everywhere is a woman famous for her wisdom (95).

## 6. Conclusion

One of the most important issues of feminist literature and critique is the defense of women's rights and the protest against a discriminatory culture based on gender. This subject is mentioned in detail in the collected poems of Simin and Souad. They explicitly or symbolically have expressed their views on women's issues, including legal equality, freedom, individuality, identity independence, and working in various fields. Both poets emphasize the need to acquire knowledge, education and the importance of women's literacy and they believe that women need knowledge and awareness in order to achieve equal rights and eliminate discrimination. In the poetry of both poets, writing as a powerful tool is a way to gain awareness, and a sign of freedom and expression. Both poets have shown in their poems that they are in favor of an intellectual current in which, knowing the natural differences between men and women, demands the realization of the social and natural rights of women. They, without showing opposition to men, are dissatisfied with the existence of a man-centered society with an emphasis on the middle and affluent classes. In this process, the tone of Souad's poems is sharper than Simin's one and her diction is more colored with verbal revenge than Simin's. Both poets resist the unification of individuality with the prevailing ideology in society on emotional issues; but the emphasis on individuality and freedom and enduring hardship is more obvious in Simin's love poems. Both poets are liberal feminists due to their religious beliefs and balanced and moderate approach, but

Souad al-Sabah approaches radical feminists in some cases due to the ruling patriarchal system in the Arab world and she has a more striking tone. According to the social and cultural conditions of Iran and the Arab world, both poets' themes are mostly around basic demands such as education, and correcting customary wrong attitudes toward women, and these themes lay strictly within the framework of liberal feminism. Simin Behbahani and Souad Al-Sabah have not only expressed the problems and concerns of women, but with a correct understanding of women's issues, they have proposed solutions to eliminate discrimination and construct the true identity of women.





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