

The Activities of Arab Women in the Field of Literature

MamanLesmana

Faculty of Humanities, UniversitasIndonesia

ABSTRACT: *Until the end of the 20th century, there were still many people outside of Arabia who did not yet know or even believed in the activities of Arab women in the field of literature. This may be due to the image in the minds of people outside of Arabia who think that because of tradition and customs, Arab women's activities are still limited. This article discusses the history and role of Arab women in the field of literature with the aim of providing knowledge to people outside of Arabia about the work of Arab women in the field of literature. The method used in this research is the library method by collecting data from the latest sources, both in the form of books, articles or websites, on this subject, then submitted in the form of descriptive analysis. From the analysis of the data collected, it was found that it was true that Arab women had played a role in the literature for a long time, but because there was no support from the authorities in disseminating this information, not many Arabs and people outside of Arabia who knows it.*

Keywords: *Literature, Arabic, women, history*

Date of Submission: 17-08-2019

Date of acceptance: 31-08-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

In a Modern Language Association congress, BouthainaShaban, a professor of English literature and women's studies from Damascus University, introduced herself to an American colleague that she was a scholar from Syria and worked as a novelist. Hearing those words, the American colleague raised his eyebrows and laughed, then exclaimed. "Arabic Novelist? Are there novelist women in Arabic? What did she write? Based on that question, then BouthainaShaban wrote an article published in "Washington Report on Middle East Affair", the February 1993 issue. In the article, she explained that in her latest research, he found that the first novel in Arabic literature was actually written by a woman, not by a man, as previously thought. Although it has become a general consensus in the Arab world that the first novel in Arabic literature is *Zaenab*, by HussaynHaykal, from Egypt, in 1914, it can be said to be ignorant, if the female writer is not taken into account. Because AfifahKaram, a woman from Lebanon, wrote the first novel in Arabic in 1906, entitled "*Badi'awaFuad*", published by Koran Al-Huda, New York, since then, many Arab novelist women have written novels and short stories, although they have not been of much concern to people, compared to those written by men. The active participation of Arab women in the field of literature has actually been around since the 6th century, starting from al-Khansa (575-664) who was not only a female poet, but also a literary critic. She is active in the Arabic poetry festival held at Ukaz Market, Saudi Arabia. In addition to making poetry, she also gave an assessment of the work of fellow poets, showing the strengths and weaknesses of their poetry. Then, starting from the 6th century until now, many Arab women wrote poetry and prose, and established literary discussion forums. In the forum, they held regular meetings to read their latest essays, and those who hosted them, and at the same time became judges were always women. Even before the tradition of writing on Arabic literature, many women shared stories with oral traditions from one generation to another. (1993: 36)

What BouthainaShaban said was true. Joseph T. Zeidan from Beirut wrote several books on the role of women in literature in Arabia. In 1995, he wrote a book entitled *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond*, which contained literary studies and the history of Arab women's novelists. Then, in 1996, he wrote a book entitled *al-'a'mal al-majhula li Mayy Ziyada* which was a study of MayyZiyada's works that had not been published and was unknown to anyone. After that, in 1999, he wrote a bibliography as thick as 783 pages. Bibliography which is considered the most comprehensive is about Arab female writers between 1800-1996. The title is *Masadira`adab al-Nisa 'fi al-'alam al-'arabi al-hadith, 1800-1996 (Bibliography of Women's Literature in the Modern Arabic World 1800-1996)* published in Beirut by al-Mu'asasa al-Arabiyya li ad-dirasatwa an-nasr. This book is very important to be used as a reference for scholars who are interested in this field in the future. There are 1271 entries in it, which are arranged alphabetically. Each entry displays an Arabic writer with his works that have been published in the last two centuries. Some of the entries contain Arabic writers from the 19th to 20th centuries. All Arab countries are featured in the book, except North Africa which is only shown a little, because there is not much contribution. Perhaps, this is due to the length of the period of European colonization in the country, and it is not permissible for people in that country to use Arabic. Each entry is divided into three parts. The first contains a brief explanation of the woman's life, the second contains a

list of her writings and the third contains the source from which the information was obtained. In some cases, there are several entries that are not divided into three parts, because the information is incomplete. Regarding the lives of these women writers, most are presented based on written sources, but in some contemporary cases, there is also information obtained through correspondence. Their writings are identified according to the literary genre, complete with publication data, unless it is not known with certainty. The source of each woman's writer is taken from books, chapters in books and articles in the encyclopedia, journals and sometimes newspapers. The source of the book is listed alphabetically in the last 50 pages, without separating between articles and books. There are 534 sources that speak Arabic and 91 in Western languages. Arabic magazines are used as much as 132 and 32 in the West (Zeidan, 1999).

In addition, Dalya Cohen-Mor, an independent scholar who received education in the Middle East, Europe and the United States, also collected, translated and gave an introduction to the works of Arab female writers in a book which he named: Arab Women Writers, An Anthology of Short Stories. This book consists of 60 short stories written by 40 female journalists from all over the Arab world. Through this book, readers can see an overview of Arab culture and society, as well as deep insights into what is in the feelings and thoughts of Arab women. The stories not only deal with feminist issues, but also social, cultural and political topics, with different styles and ways of writing, diverse techniques and creative approaches. The author presents many points of view and various ways to solve problems and deal with situations in everyday life. These stories need to be read for anyone interested in the Arab world. (Cohen-Mor, 2005).

Other evidence about the activity of Arab women in the literary world can be seen from the success of Saudi Arabian writer Omaira al-Khamees, who won the literary award in Jeddah. Al-Khamees with her work *The Leafy Tree*, received an award from the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) in 2010. She said that Saudi women's participation in literary forums must be supported. At the event, he criticized the lack of new books written by women writers from Saudi Arabia. Before al-Khamees, in Saudi Arabia there was also a famous female writer who had stirred up the international world, Rajaa al-Shania, with her book "Girls of Riyadh" which was published in Arabic in 2005 and in English in 2007, then, Seba al-Herz in her work "The Others" written in English and Samar al-Muqrin with her work "Immoral Women" which is famous for the way that incorporates sexual elements into her works. As a result of the emergence of themes about sex in novels written by Saudi Arabian novelists, Kuwaiti female writer, Laila Othman said in a seminar that the tendency to incorporate sexual elements into literary works, in addition to seeking fame, was also due to many publishers are competing to find new female writers. In fact, female writers in Saudi Arabia are not a new phenomenon. In the Jahiliyyah era, there was Tumadirbinti Amr, known as al-Khansa (575-664), a poet woman and literary critic. But, now, Saudi women writers have difficulty being able to perform together with male writers, because Saudi Arabian writers have omitted book exhibitions in Saudi Arabia, such as what happened to Abdo Khal, the 2009 IPAF winner, who arrested at a book fair in Riyadh, for asking for an autograph from a female writer. (www.arablit.wordpress.com)

With the data as mentioned above, it seems that there is no need to question the Arab women in the field of literature. Since thousands of years ago, female Arabic writers have never been released from activities in the Arabic literature scene. Then, what causes their existence to be doubted?

II. FEMALE WRITER IN ARAB WORLD

The term "female writer" does not have a strong influence in the Arab world, even among women writers themselves. This is due to differences in understanding between the women of Arab writers about the social injustices they exposed in their works. Therefore, writers throughout the Arab world for decades did not want to be classified as "female writers". They prefer to be referred to as "writers" with the hope that, as they are called, they can be more serious and objective in their works. There are a number of literary critics who are concerned that literary works written by Arab women writers are biographical, showing only themes about love, marriage and children, not addressing problems such as those written by men, as if women are unable to write like men. To avoid these worries, some women writers who replaced female characters in their works became male figures, so that the story was deeper and wider. This attitude is actually a very fatal mistake, because by doing such a thing, indirectly, they have surrendered their reputation to men and placed themselves in a low position.

Every critic woman who talks about literary and women's relations, both in forums at universities and in centers of Arab culture, still questions what is called "women's literature"? Their question is whether literature can be dichotomized with "female literature" and "male literature". What is included in "women's literature" is literature that is fanatical about women's issues and only for women? The women in Arabia are increasingly horrified and afraid to publish their works using the label "female literature". Likewise, the current publishers, it seems, are still shy to publish literary works that contain women's freedom, except for only one, in Egypt in 1996, namely Dar al-Syuruq. This is different from what was done in the West. The major task carried out by publishers in the West over the past four decades has been to search for women writers, encourage the

dissemination of their literary works and incorporate their works into curricula in schools and universities. (Shabaan, 2010).

What is meant by "women's literature" in Arabic literature, according to Yumna, is the attention and rehabilitation of women's literary products in Arabia, not the binner concept, feminine-masculine, which contrasts the literary works of women and men. This term, in fact, has existed in the history of literature long ago, before the arrival of Islam, as was done by a poet woman, Salma bint Malik bin Hudazifa, but her contribution has been ignored, because it is bound by the existence of moral criteria for art, literature and culture, the strength of the tribal system, and the strong male authority who tends to control women. Therefore, themes that boast, praise, and satire are preferred over poems with lamentations. Poems that express the power and devotion to the ruler are preferred over poems that express weakness and the weak. In the social value system, women are considered weak, so their poetry is also ignored. Though there are 242 female poets in Arabic literature, ranging from al-Khansa to the appearance of Bint al-Mustakfi. Likewise, women's art, such as the art of lulling children, which mothers often sing to their children, has disappeared, because the art is not related to power, except that al-Khansa is more prominent among other female poets, such as Laila al-Akhiliyya, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyya (Sufi women), Fari'abintiTarif and `A'ishabint Mahdi, Zubaidah bin Jabar (wife of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, mother of al-Amin), Dananir and Mahbubah.

It can be said, the use of the term "women's literature" in the Arab world, returned to the revival phase in which there was an awareness of the importance of the role of women in the advancement of society, namely requiring women to receive education, participate in social, cultural activities and produce literature. At this stage of revival, many vocabulary words in Arabic are related to women's activities, such as "women's education", where in 1881, there were two women, namely Emily Sarsaq and LabibaJahshan founded the first educational institutions for women, "women's organizations" in 1880, several women in Beirut established Zahrat al-Ihsan organization and Yaqzat al-Fatat al-Arabiyyat organization in 1914, "the women's magazine", in 1892, Hindun Novel published al-Fatat magazine in Alexandria, in 1893, Madiha al-Shabuni published the magazine Fatat al-Syarq, in 1911, Afifah Karan published the magazine al-Mar`at al-Suriyat, "Women's Literature Forum, founded by MariyanaMarash in Aleppo, AmiratNaziliFadhil and May Ziyada in Cairo.

Activities that use the word "woman" like this, are not only done by women, but also by men, such as Tahtawi (1801-1873) who established schools for women, then Qasim Amin (1864-1980) who wrote the book Tahrir al-Mar`at (Liberation of Women) and al-Mar`at al-Jadidat (New Women) whose basic ideas are about the presence and active participation of women in social, cultural and literary life. both in lectures and research on "women's literature" in Arabic, it seems that what is being discussed, is not an issue of equality between women and men, because in the Lisan al-Arab book, what is meant by equality can mean "doing something contrary to it", " hatch ", or " make the same thing ", as used by IbnSayyidah. Apart from that, it can also mean "opposing the opposite and the same as him", as used by al-Akhfas and can also mean "to oppose the same thing and oppose something different from it."

In Ana Ahya's novel, LailaBa'albaki's work, which was published in 1956, in Lebanon, Lina, the female character in the novel rebelled against men in terms of their position of power in society, such as being a father, company director, university professor .Because, because of that position, many men oppress women.Lina, which stands for the author, wants to fight oppression, not against the people she loves.In his novel, Hajar ad-Dahak, published in 1990, in Lebanon, Huda Barakat, through Khalil, the character in the novel wants to overcome violence in the civil war in Lebanon, with aspects of social and cultural awareness, not with a woman's body and corset. Huda rejects the opinion that women's bodies and corsets can relieve violence perpetrated by men.

When writing about relations between women and men, women writers do not oppose men as human beings, but oppose the ideology held by men and women who are unconscious. Smith, a character in the Bab al-Sahat novel, by SaharKhalifa, published in 1990 in Palestine, said that freedom would not be obtained if the community only allowed men to reach it. Women write to express their lost confidence.Meanwhile, Mada, a figure in the Sajarat al-Hubb novel Ghabat al-Ahzan, published in 2000, by Asimah Dervish, a Saudi Arabian writer from Syria tells of his alienation in his homeland which was dominated by men, about his habit of living in a foreign country in which there is science, love and freedom.Here, it seems clear that what is written in this literary work is about women's resistance to the injustices they have experienced so far.Likewise, written by AliyahMamduh, an Iraqi novelist, in her book titled al-Wali, published in 1995, and al-Mahbub published in 2003 which opposes male tyranny which limits the world of women. (Al-Ied, 2010)

The portrayal of women in Arabic literature serves as a barometer for measuring the status and role of women in Arab society. Some people might argue that literature and real life are two different things. Arabic literature tells us something about literature and not about conditions in Arab society. However, values in literature, of course, can be used to perfect change, regeneration and transformation in the structure of society that cannot be underestimated

The literature of the Arabs contained in various works from the seventh century to the present is so vast, therefore, to obtain a definite view of women in Arabic literature is a monumental task. Poets and writers, both men and women, talk to us about their deepest disclosures. Both in theory and practice, women have and will continue to be an inspiration, as well as a part of an instrument that will bring about vital changes. Literature is an underground movement, because it investigates the deepest level of soul and imagination that cannot be done by the government. Arabic writers, both male and female, are heroes, in search of their true selves continuously in an effort to understand their reality and, more crucially, redefine the meaning of their lives. Arab emotion, in fact and fiction has become a factor dynamic and changing. Feminism for them is not only a demand for new hope for themselves, but also a hope for a new type of male and female world (Mikhallis, 2011).

Most women Arab writers began to explore the complexity of their lives as women, from their families and relatives. Until the fifties, the concept of "women's literature", as expressed by Syrian novelist Widad Sakkakini, was literature in which there were deep and subtle feelings from the female environment which could not be reached by men. "Women's literature" describes the habits and ways of thinking of women that are not present in men, except with the help of their talents. Since the sixties, a number of Arab female writers have increased dramatically in several parts of the Arab world in all social classes. They have reached out to embrace broader political and social issues. At the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, novels and short stories written by women Arabic writers reached a more feminine phase. During this new phase, feminist visions, aspirations and opinions were expressed in the works of Callet Khoury and Ghada Saaman in Syria, Nawa el-Sa'dawi in Egypt, Khanata Banuna in Morocco, Assia Jabbar in Algeria, Sahar Khalifah and Samira Azzam in Palestine, Layla Usman in Kuwait and other writers. In their works, Arab women writers highlight frankly the crime of political systems that harm women and as a result also harm men and society at large. The writers of this feminist generation have brought enlightenment into the power of women and have expelled bans — prohibitions that have been rooted in weak women (Sabbagh, 1996: 236-237).

Arab novelist women not only wrote novels as a publication that resisted oppression and a kind of rebellion against patriarchal culture, novels by Arab women exceeded this task. The novel does not only shout at protests about not being allowed to be educated or working, or an invitation to rebel against traditional patriarchal values. As in the past, when words in certain stories are capable, they are able to save women from death, throw away fear from slavery and exploitation. The word, especially in novels, is a theme of the emancipation of women in the early modern period in Arabic literature, after centuries of dependence on men, except for some famous writers, such as the birth of Bint al-Mustakfa in Andalusia in the eleventh century. (Nashaar, 2010)

With the data as mentioned above, perhaps there is no need to doubt the work of Arab female writers in the Arabic literature scene. Although there is still a difference in understanding of the term "feminine literature", the role of Arab women in Arabic literature is not as imagined, the genre chosen, the style of writing used, the theme presented, no less great than that of men, sometimes even - sometimes more than what men do.

III. CONCLUSION

Arabic "female literary" work in the last decade of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, took place after the Arab writers came out of a closed house environment and entered into a community environment, starting with the entry of women into schools, and then to universities, which is the first step in the emergence of women writers. The female pioneers of writers were supplied from Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, then followed by Iraq and Palestine, after which Jordan, Arab countries in North Africa, Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula. This phenomenon emerged in the last two decades of the nineteenth century until World War I, when women's organizations were established, such as Bakurat Suriya which was founded by Maryam Nimr Makariyus in Beirut in 1880 and Zahrat al-Ihsan which was founded the same year. Then, the emergence of literary discussion forums, which were started by Maryana Marrash in Aleppo, Nazli Fadil in Cairo and Alexandra Khuri Averino in Alexandria. After that, followed by the publication of newspapers and magazines. In 1892, Hind Nawfal published al-Fatah in Alexandria. A year later in Aleppo circulated al-Mar'at's monthly women's magazine published by Madiha al-Sabuni. In the four decades, from 1892 to 1939, there were 24 newspapers and magazines published regularly in the cities of the East of Arabia. In addition to Cairo, Damascus, Beirut and Baghdad, there are also periodical women's publications in Alexandria, namely Mansur and Egypt, Fayyum, in Lebanon Tripoli and in Syria, Hums, Hama and Aleppo. Some women from the Maronite Christian sect who lived in Egypt played an important role in publishing these media. During this period, encyclopedias were published about the lives of famous writers. The famous encyclopaedia was al-Durr al-Mansur fi al-tabaqat rabbat al-khudur, published in 1894. Fifteen years earlier, in 1879, Maryam Nashrullah al-Nahhas, a Syrian from Aleppo, wrote Mawrid al-hasna fi tarajim al-nisa, published by al-Misr Newspaper Press in Alexandria. From 1892-1939, in Egypt alone, there were 571 biographies of female writers, both written by men

and women in 18 regular media, this Biography is a product of a combination of two traditions, namely the tradition of biography and autobiography writing in Arabic and in Europe (Ashour, 2008: 4)

The texts produced from 1940-1960 are links between the older and younger generations throughout the Arab world, ranging from Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia in the West to the Gulf States in the East, and from Sudan and Yemen in the South to Iraq and the Levant in the North. At the end of the twentieth century, the activities of women in Arabia began to differ. While women from the older generation continued to write, young women were busy spending their time, place and experience developing their writing skills. In the genre of poetry, they have abandoned the form of classical poetry (qasida), and use free poetry or prose poetry. In contrast to the situation that occurred in the first half of the twentieth century where short stories and novels were the center of attention of the women writers. Since 1970, Arab women writers have begun to write about war, disappointment, erosion of various prejudices, which aspects of reality are stronger than their fictional aspects. In writing texts, female Arab writers began to try to capture difficult and complicated realities filled with contradictions. In addition to writing about national struggle, civil war, political and social pressure, and corruption, they also wrote about their relationship with men and their position in society dominated by men. They tried to reveal about him, both as a woman and as a citizen. In expressing their experiences, they chose various forms of writing, such as realistic novels. They acted as omniscient narrators by arranging their events chronologically which depicted aspects of the lives of Arabs in Beirut, Cairo, Tunisia, Baghdad, or who lived in small villages. The women of Arabic writers began writing modern texts which undermined all assumptions, division of time and individual separation together, with the intention that the form of their novel was different from the others. They write historical novels that contain the reality that happened to previous centuries. In autobiography, they document the stories of their lives or some parts of their lives, such as experience in childhood, when they become political prisoners or stories when they are traveling in Western countries. In these texts, sometimes they use figure "I" whose events are sorted chronologically and at other times, they use a special style that suits their needs. However, even though they write in various themes and styles, not many of them write in drama. Maybe, because there are not many theater stages in Arab countries. Now, many of them also write about global issues (Ashour, 2008: 4).

The development of texts written by Arab women in the last century has changed the face of Arabic literature. Arab female writers played an important role in the rise of modern and post-modern literacy in the Arab world. The diversity of styles and themes displayed opens the way for discussion in social, political and cultural circles. Meanwhile, at the previous time, there were only a few writings of Arab women available abroad. In recent years, many Arabic women's literary works, although in the form of English translations and are often published with mass media channels. As a result, many texts written by the authors of Arabic women were used in literature and women's subjects. Likewise, with increasing interest in Arab women's literature, many scholars wrote about these works. Western interest in texts written by Arab women grew in recent decades, not only the emergence of translations of Arabic women's literature, but also the existence of anthropological and social research on the lives of Arab women. (Majaj, 2002: xvii)

Thus the roles and actions of Arab women in Arabic literature that I get from your most available sources, both from writing books, articles or websites. This record may be used as material in further and more in-depth research on women in Arabic literature.

REFERENCES

Books

- [1]. Ashour, Radwaa, Ferial Jabouri, and HasnaRedaMekdashy, 2008, Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999, Cairo: American University Press
- [2]. Majaj, Lisa Suhair, Paula W. Sunderman and Therese Saliha, 2002, Intercourse: Gender, Nation and Community in Arab Womens's Novels, New York: Syracuse University Press.
- [3]. Sabbagh, Suha, 1996, Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint, Massachusetts: InterlinkBooks
- [4]. Shaban, Bouthaina, 1993, "Women's Forum: What are Arab Women Authors Writing About? Arab Women Writers Any?" in Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, February 1993, pp.36
- [5]. Zeidan, Joseph T. 1999, Masadir al-Adab al-Nisa'i fi al-'Alam al-'Arabiyy al-Hadith 1800-1996, Beirut: al-Mu'asasa al-Arabiyya li ad-dirasatwa an-nasr.

Websites

- [6]. Al-Ied, 2010, AdabNisa'i fi al-'Alam al-'Arabi, 11 Juni 2010, www.aleflam.netwww.arablit.wordpress.com, "Should there be Quotas for Women in Saudi Book Clubs?", 30 December 2010
- [7]. Mikhallis, Mona, 2011, The Role of Women in Arabic Literature", 3 February 2011, www.library.cornell.edu
- [8]. Nashaar, Iyad, 2010, al-riwayat al-nisaa' iyyat, Isykaliyyat al-tamarudwa al-wa'ywanazharat al-akhir, 24 January, 2010, www.shamssine78.maktoobblog.com
- [9]. Shaban, Bouthaina, 2010, "100 'am min al-Riwaya an-nisa' iyya al-'arabiyya 1899-1999", 8 September 2010, www.mlathat.net