

The Gender Problem and the Woman Factor in the Turkish Novel

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The 19th century is a period of changes in the whole world. On the context of increasing nationalism movements, collapses of empires, radical changes in people's mind, such concepts as freedom and equality were observed.

These changes observed in the whole world, of course, were not passing by the Ottoman Empire living its last years. In this article the activity of a woman writer, who wrote in prose, especially genre novel of the new era Turkish literature is researched. Having first published woman rights and problems, that women faced, women writers of the mentioned era are founders of a brand new literature. The period when a woman came forward as a personality in Turkish society and literary life has started after Tanzimat (1839). Since this period, as one of the works done for bringing up a generation with a new mind, rendering exclusive rights to women and the mother factor, playing an irreplaceable role in bringing up a new generation has started. The role of a woman in the society was growing. So, this period is characterized with special preference given to education of girls and the start of publication of first newspapers and magazines for women. It was the time when people understood that education of a boy meant only one educated person, while education of a girl meant an educated generation. In the above-mentioned period, negative cases in regard to the status of women in the society, their social welfare and daily life were widespread. Undesirable cases as illiteracy of women, early marriages and violence against women can still be seen. In such a society, paying attention to the basis of the problem, one can observe that violence in daily life and within the family, oppression against women in the society and weak participation of

women in various spheres of the social life were all related to the low level of the number of educated women. The intelligentsia of the period linked it mainly to illiteracy of women, among which, first of all, were supporters of Turkism. Beginning with the declaration of the 2nd constitution, women became clearly more distinct and had more influence in the society and already in the period of the National Struggle, they joined the struggle for the motherland and had equal rights with men (İ.Enginün, 1979; 288- 289).

Being the period of social transformation, political crises, scientific-technical revolution and development all over the world, the 20th century is also the age of emergence of a new phenomenon named “revolution of women”. As known in the history of the world, women have sometimes been pioneers and even leaders of social movements during social-economic crises, when they not only just followed the men, but also influenced them in terms of morality, worldview and etc. Adapting to the conditions of the period women created their own flexible self-organization forms (official and non-official ones), where women with common interests could get together for short or long periods of time. Even, categories as the “woman problem”, “women’s movement” and “matter of women” occurred in this period.

Increasing sensitivity in the woman problem became the driving force for feminist movements in Europe. Feminism states that having their dignity and rights for education ignored by the society, women live in more difficult conditions than men. So, it is a social movement that gives priority to the struggle of women for their rights in the society (Aytaç İ.A. 2006, 25-43). Representatives of this movement expressed their protest in their deeds. Especially, artists, women writers and poets were able to present their opinion and perspective to the society in their works of art. From this viewpoint, Turkish women writers of the 19th century adopted feminism as a movement that protected women’s rights. These writers especially focused on several matters as education of women, social and material freedom for women, successful carrier and family life, end of violence against women, gender equality in the society and etc.

In general, several research works assume that Turkish women stayed aside in literature and generally in other spheres, because of Islam, which is a lamentable idea, if to take into consideration the fact that Islam didn’t decrease women’s role in the society, but on the contrary, it increased it as a whole. Arabs in the period before Islam

were used to bury new-born girls, which was later inhibited by Muhammad in accordance with Islam, which recognized equal rights of women, a matter that became subject of discussions in the West only in the last two centuries.

In fact, emphasis on women writers and heroes in the Turkish literature, topics drawing women's thoughts and sufferings forth, bringing their status in family and society forward were not a result of feminist ideas in Europe, but late expansion of high spiritual value given to the Turkish women in the Turkish society during previous ages, which was, beyond any doubt, supported and promoted by Islam. One of the main factors promoting the notion of women in the literature in the period was emergence of women writers. Explicitly, women became not only main characters of literary works, but also their authors, which was an obvious achievement in regard to attaining a better status in the society.

The first woman novel writer in the Turkish literature is Ms. Zafar with her novel "Eshgi-Vatan" (Love for Motherland) published in 1877. However, artlessness of the novel, low number of characters in it, simplicity of its topic and small volume imposes on us to say that the work is closer to the story genre. Unfortunately, Ms. Zafar didn't continue to write new works, because of which some researches do not accept her as a writer at all and consider Fatma Aliyah Topuz, who wrote five novels, as the first novel writer in Turkey and in the Islamic world in general. From 1908 and until declaration of the 2nd constitution, Fatma Aliyah virtually was the only woman writer in Turkey. She was one of the prominent women representatives of the Turkish society with her high cultural level, which enabled her to create literary works with remarkably rich content. She contributed to the Turkish literature and culture with high morality and valuable works. She was born to an enlightened family in 1862 in Istanbul, where she grew up. Her father was the historian Jevdet Pasha and her mother was Ms. Adviyah. Fatma Aliyah adopted the surname *Topuz* according to the new Surname Law. Her father didn't charge private teachers for her daughter, but she was able to learn much from her elder brother Ali Sadat's teachers. Later, she had a strong desire for French, which she learned it well. Having learnt French, she began her literary activity with translations from French, as many other writers of her period. Firstly, she translated *Volente* by George Ohnet as *Meram*, which was published with the nickname

BirHanım (A Lady). At that time, she had already been accepted as a writer, enjoyed her father's support and conducted with him scientific discussions and exchange of views on literature. With her significant works, Mr. Fatma could draw the attention of the prominent novel writer Ahmet Mithat Efendi. He praised her in the newspaper "Tercuman-iHakikat", adopted her as a fosterling and supported her throughout her literary activity, which created in Fatma Aliyah great interest to writership. In 1891, they became co-authors of the novel *HayalveHakikat* (Imagination and Reality). The part in the novel narrated by the woman was written by Fatma Aliyah, the other part belonging to Ahmet Mithat Efendi. It was published with the signature 'A woman and Ahmet Mithat'. It was not their only co-authorship. Later, they corresponded in the newspaper "Tercuman-iHakikat" for a long period.

Following translations Fatma Aliyah published under the nickname *MütercimeyiMeram* (Translator of Meram). Her first novel was '*Muhadarat*', published in 1891 with her true name. Researches argue about the name of the novel. Paying attention to the lexical meaning of the word, one can trace its root in Arabic, which is plural form of *Muhadarah* – a literary of scientific discussion between two authors/scientists or collected works published as a book. It refers to a genre that includes religious, literary and cultural topics. There are many similar works in the Eastern literature. For example, the first author of *Muhadarat* in the history of literature was Abu Ubaida Mamar bin Musannah with his *Al-Muhadarat wa Al Muhawarat*. Another example can be Abu Ali Tanuhi – the author of *Nishwarul Muhadarat wa Abharul Muzakarat*.

Fatma Aliyah's *Muhadarat* has been published in Turkey many times. The historian TunçYaşar wrote the name of the work in the 3. issue of the *Dem Journal* as '*Muhedderat*' – with double *d*, which he explained as '*honored, covered woman*' in translation from Arabic. (https://media.dem.org.tr/dir/dem/dem/yayin/goruntuleme/20181207204305_0.pdf)

Fatma Aliyah's *Muhadarat* was published by several publishing houses, one of which is Paraf Publishing House, which published the work in 2010, which we hold. Unfortunately, it was several times published not under the original name, but under the name of Fazile – the main character of the novel, who underwent unbelievable troubles. Several sources explain it as adaptation of the

language of the novel to modern Turkish. However, in our opinion, it is unjust in regard to both literature and the author by publishing houses that may think they would have better profit in such a way. Translation and transliteration of works should not violate copyrights and should pay attention to originality.

Another point drawing attention is that, in general, there is no novel in the Turkish literature with the name *Fazile*. It enables us to assume that beginning to write her novel in 1891, Fatma Aliyah named in precisely *Muhadarat*. As mentioned above, in the conditions of the 19th century Ottoman Empire, where non-adequate approach towards women were prevailing, Fatma Aliyah preferred to hide her name, thus choosing the nickname *Birhanım* (A Lady) for her first novel.

Fazile is an honorable woman of virtue, who is ready to sacrifice herself for chastity and good name. Taking into consideration that Fatma Aliyah links Fazile's notion on chastity to her inner morality solely, we can assume that the name of the work can be accepted as *Muhedderat* in accordance to the notion of chastity.

The main character of the novel – Fazile can really be considered as a woman with high value of chastity and modesty. However, the author doesn't link the character of Fazile to the notion of chastity and modesty in Islam. According to the author, her chastity and modesty is the reflection of her inner world and morality. Fazile is Madame Bovary in spirit. We can find religious elements in the novel only in the presence of the heavenly power and in the end of the novel, when divine justice finds its level.

Muhadarat is one of the most important novels written by the first Turkish woman novel writer Fatma Aliyah and is among 'the 100 basic novels' suggested by the Ministry of Education of Turkey. In the novel, decision making independence for marriage, negative approach of step-mothers to their children, child education, disturbance caused by relatives' intervention into family's internal problems are subject to discussion, where an educated woman reacts to such cases in her own way. Another attention grabbing point in the novel is detailed information on life conditions of servants and their social insurance problems, which were essential matters at that time. Being among the 100 basic literary works, *Muhadarat* is important also because it talks about the Ottoman family and daily life for the first time at the eye of a woman.

The life in mansions – an aristocratic life style in the 19th century Ottoman society has been described in the novel in details. Social topics as unsuccessful marriages made as a result of pressure, love and second marriage of women are mainstream topics in the novel.

The events revolve around Sai Efendi, a wealthy man and widow with two young children, his family members and people close to the family. Positive characters such as Sai Efendi, his children Fazila and Shefig, Munavvarkhanum and her son Mugaddam are at one pole, while negative characters such as Jaliba, her cousin and his beloved Suha are at the opposite pole. The main events begin after the marriage of one of the wealthiest men in Istanbul Sai Efendi, who lost his wife too early due to severe illness, with Jaliba, a daughter of a family which once used to be wealthy. The better Jaliba treats her husband and earns his love, the more cruel mother she is with Fazila and Shefig. One of the most impressive scenes in the novel is the fact that two children have a fondness for each other, and that Fazila shows a mother's tenderness to Shafiq. Whereas Sai bay does not see what his young and immoral new wife Jaliba does, and believes in all her dirty lies. As in one Turcic proverbs, when mother is alive father's one eye is blind, when mother is dead, his two eyes become blind. In order to keep peace at home, with insistence of Jaliba, the father wants her daughter to marry at an early age, with Ramyibey who she never loved. At this point, Fatmakhanum made a delicate touch on the unpleasant incident she had experienced in her life. Just like her, Fatmakhanum was also forced to marry Faigbey who she didn't love by her father Jevdetbey. With this point that solves the theme and idea line of the novel, Fatmakhanum in the example of Fazila, raised both her protest voice of and voices of other women whose marital rights were violated. In these difficult times, the children were supported by both neighbors and Munavvarkhanim, who took care of them just like a mother after their own mother died. There was also a pure love between the young and clever daughter of the family Fazila and Munavvarkhanum's son Mugaddam. But the cruel step mother Jaliba, envies this relationship this and makes Sai Efendi confront this marriage. She did not want Mununvarkhanum to be closer to the family. Otherwise, her dishonest behavior and her betrayal towards her husband would be exposed. Because after establishing a relationship with Sai effendi, Jaliba did not end her relationship with

her cousin and former lover Suha. Thus, the course of events changes completely while awaiting the marriage of Fazila and Mugaddam which was the result of pure love. Even though she doesn't love him, Fazila becomes the wife of Ramzi. But she is patient, and her honor and dignity are above all. She does not do anything that might discredit the honor and dignity of the family she linked her life with, and bends over her unfortunate fate. She even rubs her first love out of her heart, and comforts herself with the thoughts of loving Ramzi, since he is now her husband. However the more Fayila tries to protect her family, the more Ramzi does the contrary, he tries his best to destroy this family. He wastes all his family's fortune, and finally trying to get married to an immoral woman who betrayed his wife with. Fazila does not endure so much suffering and gives up finally.

Events such as trying to commit suicide not tolerating all the injustice, staying away from her family for some time, and her family assuming she is dead, her desire to reunite with Mugaddam, however disagreeing as both of them are married, Sai efendi finding out all the truth during this time, follow each other in the novel. While reading the novel, the confrontation of Positive with the Negative, as well as how heroes overcome the trials they experience, increase the interest of the reader in the work. Once again we see the professionalism of the writer.

The novel «Muhadarat» reflects the efforts to change the discrimination within the society, to have equal rights with men, struggles to oppose oppression, humiliation and gain economic freedom through the character of Fazila who was a literal symbol of the Muslim-Turkish woman's self-awareness in the feminine sense around subjects like creating a family through marriage, slavery, love, betrayal and acquaintanceship.

Let's take a look at the fragment of the image of the women of that time in the face of Fazila: "Although Fazila thought that the only thing left was to go to her father's house the next day, she immediately remembered that her father's house wasn't the same as others'. Even though she was trying the escape from the difficulties she faced in her husband's house, she predicted that she wouldn't find comfort in her father's house, on the contrary they would torture her more for not getting on well with her husband and returning home. The poor woman, after a long thought, agreed to endure the

harassment of her husband rather than endure the suffering of the tortures from her stepmother... (Fatma Aliya Khanum, 2011; 219)

“Muhadarat” apart from being the first Turkish female-signed novel, was also the signal of the upcoming masterpiece EshghiMemnu, written eight years later by Kh.Z.Ushagligil who was considered the father of Turkish novel. True, it would be unfair to consider such a novel as “EshgiMemnu” by a genius writer Khalid Ziya as "repetitive" or similar to Fatma Aliya's novel "Muhadarat. But the inevitable fact is that Khalid Ziya has read "Muhadarat ". Impressed by this novel, which is interesting in plot and subject matter, he created his work “EshgiMemnu” with great professionalism. Comparing the two novels, we can clearly see in the novel "Muhadarat" the discrepancies caused by the novelty of novel experience in the Turkish literature. Tiring repetitive, puzzled sentences that are not typical of the artistic style are followed throughout the novel. If this is the case, why is this work of particular importance in Turkish literature? The novel "Muhadarat" is a model novel both in terms of being written by the first female novelist, and in terms of creating a kind of prototype of her own in the face of Fatma Aliya, the hero persistently emphasizing that she did not just come to the world to suffer.

Another novel “Ud player” by Fatmakhanum after being partly published in the newspaper called “Ikdam” was also published as a book by the “Ikdam” publishing house in 1899. Fatma Aliya, in her novel “Ud Player”, speaks about the miserable destiny of Badiya, an Udin woman, who struggles with her art against life. The protagonist of the work is the prototype of an Udin woman who the author meets in Aleppo where she goes for work purposes. The life of Badiyya, who had a miserable family life, was described in a rather nude language for that time. A popular Turkish novelist Rashad Nuri Guntekin notes in his memories, that among the reasons that fueled his interest in literature the second place belongs to “Ud Player” by Fatma Aliya, after novels he heard from his nanny in his childhood. Fatma Aliya Khanum also has written the novels "Refet", "Enin", "Levayihi Hayat", where she highlights such important issues as marriage in the eyes of women, the concept of harmony between the parties, love and mutual respect, the advantages of getting to know each other before getting married. In her novels the writer creates

female characters who fight for proving themselves, who work and earn money, and who are not dependent on men financially.

Conclusion

In addition to her literary activity, Fatma Aliya khanum has written socially styled articles on the woman's position in society. She published her articles in the "women's newspaper" (KadınlarAmahsus newspaper). Here she used to address issues mainly such as women living under more difficult conditions than men, women's education, employment, career development and having a certain position in society. She expressed the ways to help women get rid of material dependence without getting any support for their own work, in rich artistic colors at the expense of wide opportunities provided by the novel genre. In addition to all this, she never forgot to present the woman as a loving wife and caring mother. Fatma Aliya khanum fulfilled the mission of a woman's rights activist in the community. Writing both in the genre of the novel and in touching social issues drew Fatma Alia closer to the Western writers of her time. So that, writing in the genre of novel opened new horizons in front of the writer. If to look at the experience of modern gender equality, although Fatma Aliya khanum is not exactly a feminist writer, the fact that she brought the female spirit to the Turkish novel is undeniable. She was an innovator who made a great contribution to the ideological foundations of Turkish women's rights, both in articles and in writings published in various newspapers and magazines. Fatma Aliya khanum in the novel was not just a woman's signature, she also meant women's voice, women's rights. The fact that his first novel, "Muhadarat," reflects the idea that a woman, who has been molded in the minds of men, must always remain faithful to her first love, is a striking example of this. Such Issues regarding women's rights that concerned them, have been the subject of many novels in Turkish literature up to the present time. These novels and the research work conducted on them have been able to draw attention to and even address a range of problems faced by women over a period of almost 115 years. Literary researcher InjiEnginun has noted this as a problem of education (I. Enginun 2001, 295).

One of the social and public activities of Fatma Aliya khanum was her close cooperation with aid societies. In 1897, she published a

series of articles in the Tarjumani-Hagigat newspaper in order to help the families of soldiers wounded during the Ottoman-Greek War, and founded the Nisvani-Osmaniyya Aid Society. It was one of the first official female societies established in Turkey. At the same time, Fatma Aliya was the first woman to be represented in the "Hilali-Ahmar" society.

As the first Turkish female novelist, Fatma Aliya khanum is one of the authors whose name is mentioned not only in Turkey but also in Europe and America. Thus, the writer's work "Nisvani-Islam" was translated into French and Arabic, and the novel "Udi" into French.

His latest work, written in 1914, is "Ahmed Cevdet Pasha and Time." Fatma Aliya khanum died on 13 July 1936 in Istanbul and was buried in the Ferikoy cemetery. The name of Fatma Aliya khanim, who has always lived in the hearts of the Turkish people, is engraved on a 50-lira coin to be perpetuated.

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