

READING KHALIL GIBRAN'S NOVEL *BROKEN WINGS* AS A NOVEL AGAINST SOCIAL TABOO

***WASEEM AKRAM**

**Lerow, Kulgam, J&k, India. Email: waseemzargar125@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT:

The present paper attempts to study the novel Broken Wings as a novel against social inhibitions which curtails freedom of an individual. Selma Keramy main character in the novel desires to be free in her life and struggles for freedom. She suffers from male domination and restrictions of society. She is forced to marry a man whom she didn't love and due to male domination her individual freedom is captured by her father and husband. The plot of the novel reflects the situation of Selma Keramy and the orthodoxy of Muslim culture and arabian society. The main focus of the study is to highlight the condition of middle east women during late 19th and 20th century when there was large debates in europe and other countries over subjugation of women and inequality of women in society. It is because of her father's materialistic values and male domination Selma Keramy marries a man who considers her as a mere object of sexual satisfaction, and she lives a miserable life full of sorrows and griefs.

Key words: *Freedom, Orthodoxy, Male domination, Subjugation, Inequality.*

Khalil Gibran wrote this book in 1912 and dedicated this book to Mary Elizabeth Haskell, a woman he had fallen in love with. The broken wings is considered the first Arabic novel written in modern time, and it came two years earlier than other novels written by other Arab writers at that time. It is a kind of autobiography; in fact it is a philosophical love story. The writer is the leading character of the story and narrates his first and last love of the speaker (writer himself), the great philosopher who met a girl named Selma keramy at Beirut, Lebanon. This was love at first sight, selma keramy is a young beautiful girl of Beirut who is as still as a pond, as deep as an ocean, as lively as life. The story starts when Khalil Gibran is just eighteen and finishes when he is twenty three, Khalil Gibran goes to Lebanon for an outing and meets his father's old friend Farris Effandi. Farris Effandi is quite old

and gentle and has lost his wife when Selma Keramy was in her adolescent age, and he invites Khalil Gibran to his house and then introduces him to Selma Keramy (daughter) in these words ‘Fate has brought back to me a dear old friend of mine in the person of his son’(p-5). Selma Keramy stared at me for a moment as if she has met me somewhere and her hand was so soft like a white lily. The writer was mesmerised by her beauty and he didn’t exchange a word with her. We all sat silent as if Selma Keramy had brought into the room her heavenly spirit worthy of respect and when she felt the silence she smiled at me and said these words “Many a times my father has repeated to me the stories of his youth and of the old days he and your father spent together. If your father spoke to you in the same way, then this meeting is not the first one between us”(p-5).

It was love at first sight as I have not seen such a beautiful girl and a strange type of emotion as very difficult to describe. Her voice was so soft and sweet as Khalil Gibran says, “words fell from her lips like drops of dew falling from the petals of flowers, when they are disturbed by the wind.(p-6) That one hour meeting with Selma Keramy invigorated me with love and with the will of heaven unchained me from the burden of youth and loneliness and allowed me to walk in the procession of love as the writer himself has described as “Love is the only freedom in the world because it so elevates the spirit that the laws of humanity and the phenomenon of nature do not alter its course”(p-5). Khalil Gibran went occasionally to Selma’s house to meet her, gazing at her beauty and marvelling at her intelligence and he felt an invisible hand drawing near to her. Every visit gave the writer new meaning to her beauty and she became a book and Khalil Gibran became a voracious reader, but he believes he could never finish reading. God had bestowed her bodily and spiritual beauty, and the writer has described her beauty in these words.

Can a dead man remember the singing of a nightingale and the fragrance of a rose and the sigh of a brook? Can a prisoner who is heavily loaded with shackles follow the breeze of the dawn? Is not silence more painful than death? Does pride prevent me from describing Selma in plain words since I cannot draw her truthfully with luminous colours? A hungry man in a desert will not refuse to eat dry bread if Heaven does not shower him with manna and quails (Gibran 6).

Khalil Gibran often visits her home and both started sharing their joys and their love went on smoothly till one night all of a sudden when her father arrived and asked her daughter in a choking voice ‘My beloved Selma, very soon you will be taken away from the arms of your father to the arms of another man’(p-10). Selma Keramy was the only child of the rich Farris Effandi, and the Bishop demanded Selma’s hand for his nephew and her father was dumbfounded because he hated to lose his child but he couldn’t resist the Bishop’s wishes. Farris Effandi knew the Bishop’s nephew very well, he is dangerous, full of hate, materialistic, wicked and to resist his wishes will ruin

her character and fame, besides it will be very difficult to live in Lebanon having confrontation with bishop who is a powerful person and father ultimately yields, although reluctantly. Both Bishop and his nephew Mansour Bey were materialistic persons and their choice fell on Selma not on account of her beauty and noble spirit, but her father was a wealthy person with enough money and which will inherit his son-in-law and not her daughter because girls were deprived of such rights as per custom and traditions of Lebanon in those days.

Mansour Bey and Selma Keramy were married, and her husband was a materialistic person who loves wealth and other luxuries of life. After marrying Selma Keramy, he neglects her father and prays for his death so that he could inherit his wealth and money. Mansour Bey's character was like his uncle, but the only difference was that bishop seeks everything secretly under the ecclesiastical robe and the golden cross he wore but his nephew seeks publicly. He neglects his wife also and was forced to confine her dreams within four walls. Selma Keramy feels as a confined bird in a cage cutting its wings in the bishop's house. She fears, because she will not talk free, travel free and do work free whatever she likes and she regrets being a woman. Khalil Gibran projected the world of Selma Keramy which is not different from male dominated society and female voices are rarely heard. She is treated in her husband's house as a second class family member.

Selma Keramy is conscious for her freedom so she meets time again with the speaker (lover) and shares her feelings. She is presented as an entire female race who suffers in the hands of males. By breaking of the existing social rule she challenges to the male dominated society. She says about her secret meeting "No one knows about our secret meeting except God and the flock of birds which flew over the temple."(p-22) Her husband who is identified as an evil character imposes his maleness to her and Selma Keramy accepts Mansour Bey as her bridegroom outwardly, however she revolts against the existing social rules that are made to rule over females. When her husband considers her a mere object, did not care her and neglects her, she then she sought someone who will love her, care her, and it was her old friend. She once told her friend about her husband's negligence in these words "My husband does not care about me, neither does he know how I spend my time, for he is busy with those girls whom poverty has driven into the house of ill fame; those girls who sell their bodies for bread, kneaded with blood and tears."(p-23)

While depicting the grief and condition of Selma Keramy, Khalil Gibran has an appeal for women's freedom because she suffers from male domination. She didn't choose her life partner; rather she was forced to marry someone whom she never met him. She ultimately bows before society's shackles and ruined her life. She confined her dreams within her heart and even her freedom was curtailed. Selma Keramy compares herself with a caged bird that cannot enjoy freedom because she is confined in a manmade cage. She yearns for freedom but it did

not come easily, it needs rebellious heart and she is willing to take steps in order to cast away social barriers and inhibitions and the speaker also encourages Selma Keramy to break the chain and cage which has confined your dreams and desires and he expresses it in these words:

Come, Selma, come and let us be as strong towers before the tempest. Let us stand like brave soldiers before the enemy and face his weapons. If we are killed, we shall die as martyrs; and if we win, we shall live as heroes. Braving obstacles and hardships is nobler than retreat to tranquility. The butterfly that hovers around the lamp until it dies is more admirable than the mole that lives in dark tunnel (Gibran 19).

Throughout the story Khalil Gibran angrily depicts the plight of Arab women in his time. It is the tender story of love that beats desperately against the taboos of oriental tradition. The love between Selma and speaker is doomed by a social convention, which forces Selma into marriage with another man. The broken wings tells a love, doomed by the restrictions of a cruel society especially male dominated society of Arab. Selma's life is ruined and she has no hope of life after marriage. She says to her beloved "But you my beloved, are still in the prime of life. You can walk freely upon life's spacious path, carpeted with flowers. You are free to traverse the world, making of your heart a torch to light your way. You can think, talk, and act freely; You can write your name on the face of life because you are a man."(p-14). She criticises herself for being a female, which forces her to confine her dreams within four walls of husbands house. She cannot choose her life partner freely as males choose besides society frames laws for women while males enjoy impunity in male dominated society.

The novel has remarkably advocated the freedom of expression as means of attack to the cruel male dominated society. Women's suffer around the globe by one way or the other way and in some parts they are considered as a commodity and an object of sexual satisfaction. The speaker says her husband detests her when she is unable to give birth to a child who will be his heir. The speaker says:

The substantial man considers his childless wife as an enemy; he detests her and deserts her and wishes her death. Mansour Bey Galib was that kind of man, materially he was like earth, and hard like steel and greedy like a grave. His desire of having a child to carry on his name and reputation made him hate Selma inspite of her beauty and sweetness (Gibran 26).

She ultimately leaves her husband's house because he is not her choice. Whether people call it good or bad but she has her own choice and we cannot force her besides she cannot crush her own choice. Freedom is every

body's right and why a cruel society will snatch her freedom and imposes laws. She feels disgusted with Mansour Bey because he is not her choice, additionally he was female seducer who always looks for an opportunity and seduced so many orphan and poor girls. Selma shows courageous spirit when she left her husband's home in order to start a new life with unbounded freedom. She revolted against the existing social customs and her action is a sudden attack against male dominated society. The speaker says that those who think her decision of leaving her husband's house and meet her friend secretly in the temple as evil are actually dwellers of dark cave and do not know the reality as speaker has put it in these words "Those who think evil of Selma Keramy because she left her husband's home and met me in the temple are the diseased and weak minded, kind who look upon the healthy and sound as rebels."(p-23)

Selma had chosen the path of love to free her from the society and she imagines of west where there is freedom to her and imagines a boat that takes her to the freedom of world. Khalil Gibran urges Selma to liberate herself from the chains of social norms. She loves to run away from a world of suppression and ignorance to a world (presumably) the west where real freedom and personal independence can be found. Khalil Gibran was a supporter of liberty and human values. He is of the view that one should raise voice against injustice and suppression, and those who bear injustice are committing crime themselves. Khalil Gibran was conscious about the equality between males and females. By projecting the overall situation of Selma and her surrounding, Gibran portrays the situation of world early 20th century where women were dominated by patriarchy without any reason and their individual freedom are captured by using male dominated norms and values that selma tries to cut and become free in her life.

While seeking freedom from bondage Selma Keramy suffered from two ways, one from male dominated society and other that she didn't bear child. She was called a cursed women and impotent and she was least respected in the society and neighbourhood. But the writer has interpreted her barrenness in other way that is God does not bless her with child who too will suffer in this confined and choking world and has put it in these words:

A tree grown in a cave does not bear fruit; and Selma, who lived in the shade of life, does not bear children. The nightingale does not make his nest in a cage lest slavery be the lot of its chicks...Selma was a prisoner of misery and it was Heaven's will that she would not have another prisoner to share her life. The flowers of the field are the children of sun's affection and nature's love; and the children of men are the flowers of love and compassion (Gibran 26).

Selma was so desperate and pessimistic and she prayed before God for a child who will console her and whom she will seek comfort and Heaven at last blesses her with a child. Selma stretched her chained arms towards Heaven to receive God's precious gift and nothing in the world could have made her happier than becoming a potential mother. She waited anxiously counting days and looking forward to the time when Heaven's sweetest melody, the voice of her child, should ring in her ears. It was Heaven's will to bless her with a baby and when she delivers her baby, her whole family and even her neighbours became happy and her husband was drinking, when Heaven decided to take back child and her mother (Selma) to Heaven where they will be united and with a new life full of happiness and freedom. It was indeed an emotional scene to witness when doctor took the child away from Selma's arms and on his cheeks fell tears. The child passed away while her husband and neighbours are celebrating for their heir. Selma was alone at that time lying in a bed and she told doctor in an emotional tone, "Give me my child and let me embrace him."(p-27) The child was dead but her husband was bust with party and Selma never imagined that the baby was a momentarily pleasure for her. The writer has narrated the birth and death in these words.

He was born at dawn and died at sunrise. He was born like a thought and died like a sigh and disappeared like a shadow. He did not live to console and comfort his mother. His life began at the end of the night and ended at the beginning of the day, like a drop of dew poured by the eyes of the dark and dried by the torch of the day. A pearl brought by the tide to the coast and returned by the ebb into the depth of the sea. A lily that has just blossomed from the bud of life and is mashed under the feet of death. A dear guest whose appearance illuminated Selma's heart and whose departure killed her soul. This is the life of men, the life of nations, the life of sun, moons and stars (Gibran 27).

Lastly when Selma knew that her child is dead and she courageously asked the doctor 'Give me my child; bring him close to me and let me see him dead'(p-28) Selma embraced him and then addressed the dead infant lying in her lap "You have come to take me away my child; You have come to show me the way that leads to the coast. Here I am my child; lead me and let us leave this dark cave'(p-28) With these words she lies motionless in her bed as God has listened her last wish and both mother and son are dead and both were buried in one grave and people believe God has at last sent her child to her rescue from her pitiless husband. The speaker (Khalil Gibran) himself said to the gravedigger that in this ditch you have also buried my heart.

WORK CITED:

1. Bloom, Harold. *The Broken Wings – Modern Critical Interpretations*. Viva Books, 2006.
2. Bushrui, Suheil, and Joe Jenkins. *Khalil Gibran, Man and Poet: A New Biography*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998.
3. Gibran, Jean. *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World*. New York Avenel Book, 1981.
4. Gibran, Khalil. *The Broken wings*. trans. Ferris R. Anthony. Indian Paperback Publication, 1998.
5. Waterfield, Robin. *Prophet: The life and times of Khalil Gibran*. St. Martin's Press, 1998.
6. Sharma, Vivek. " Love, the source of eternal bliss and spirituality." retrieved 2 May, 2015 <
http://www.amazon.com/review/product/0140195513/ref=cm_cr_pr_link_next?%5Fencoding=UTF8&pageNumber=2>.