

Methodology of Literary Criticism Based on the Theory of Feminism

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is an organized movement to defend women's rights, whose roots go back to the Periods of European Enlightenment (Renaissance). Throughout its long history, this movement wanted to overthrow the patriarchal system and eliminate the rule of gender discrimination. Feminism officially began its activity at the end of the 18th century and has gone through a period full of ups and downs since then. The three important waves of this movement are considered to be one of its most important activities, whose basic goals are "preserving the right to vote for women, and emphasizing protest against gender, social and economic differences and inequalities." After the feminism movement, feminist criticism emerged followed the reflection of women's voices and their experiences in literature and started its activities from the second half of the 20th century. The works of famous writers such as "Virginia Woolf" and "Simon de Boir" are eminent examples of this movement. In this article, we have reviewed the methods that can be used to study literary works from the perspective of feminist criticism, as well as the things that a literary critic can do to write a good and interesting critique of a work based on the theory of feminism. The result showcased that Critics who take a feminist approach in criticizing literary texts do not deny the existence of differences between male and female characters in the works. It may be said that the view that women are different from men basically corresponds to patriarchal ideology, but it must be said that the third wave feminists do not deny the existence of a difference between men and women, and in their opinion, the difference between women and men can even be seen in the readiness or potential ability of women to establish interpersonal communication and recognize it as a symbol of compassion, empathy and kindness. In addition, we have also stated that it can be a good guide in the field of writing feminist criticism on literary and artistic works.

KEYWORDS

literature; woman; feminist criticism; criticism methodology

INTRODUCTION

Feminism in the western culture means criticizing and questioning the division of labor in the world, which has put men in charge of the public sphere (work, sports, education, economy, politics, war and governance), while women are responsible for their lives and work at home. They bear all the pressure and burden of family life (Watkins, 2010: 5). Feminism, in its broadest sense, is generally concerned with women's issues, the opinions expressed in texts (literary and non-literary) about women or patriarchy, women's language and the explanation of differences and alignments between women's and men's writings,

the expression of women's thoughts and feelings in Their own case includes their role in culture and society, motherhood and their relationship with their children and such issues. Feminists distinguish between "natural sex", which defines its physical (biological) characteristics, and "gender", which brings about its cultural and social structure.

Feminist criticism, which spread in literature since the late 1960s, is considered one of the most prominent developments in literary studies after the World War. Feminist criticism is an effective perspective and tool that can be used to conduct extensive and valuable studies in Persian literature and the field of literary criticism. Cixous, Irgare Loes, Showalter and Julia Kristeva are among the famous theorists of this school (Shamisa, 2013: 329).

Although this approach is rapidly growing and welcomed in literary criticism both in the rereading of classical works and in the field of contemporary literature, it has provided an opportunity to analyze many cultural, social, economic and historical issues of women in the world of literature. Answers to questions related to what methods we can use to do feminist criticism on literary and artistic works, and what steps a critic should go through to write feminist criticism on literary and artistic works, are the main issues and subject of this article, which will open a way for readers in the field of methodology and important points for writing feminist criticism in literature (especially Persian literature) by intensively examining those cases.

RESEARCH METHODS

Methodology of literary criticism from the perspective of feminism

In the daily life of people, every activity is performed based on reasonable methods and techniques that meet its needs, this methodology includes various aspects of life that can be extended to the scientific and cultural fields as well. Criticism can be a part of human activities in scientific fields, which is done on literary and artistic works based on different theories and methods. According to this introduction, it can be said that feminist criticism of literary and artistic texts can be done in the following ways:

Text analysis based on the methodology of "gynocriticism"

The term "women-centered criticism" was proposed by the American theorist Elaine Showalter in her book entitled "Literature of its own". In this influential book, she divides the history of women's literature into three periods (Feminine), (Feminist) and women (Female). According to her belief, women writers in the first period, (women's writing) followed the literary traditions founded by men, and all their efforts were to be able to achieve the same achievements as men.

At this stage, women have not yet invented their own way of creating literary works, and their characterization of women is the same as men's characterization of women, that is, female writers wrote stories under the names of men, and in order for their works to be sold, many Sometimes they even used male nicknames for themselves. Like Jane Austen, the English writer who published her novels under the pseudonym of a woman, or the famous Frankenstein novel by the English writer Mary Shelley, who for about twelve years, everyone thought that the novel was written by her husband. This thing has also happened to the authors of Persian novels, as Samin Daneshwar, at the beginning of his writing, published his works under the name of "Anonymous Shirazi".

The second period is parallel to the growth of the feminism movement, it is called the "feminist" period, when female writers protested against discrimination against women and tried to expose the distortion of female identity in men's works, and also replaced their own values and standards with male ways in Do feminine works. The third stage of the history

of women's literature (the female-based course) that continues to this day, women writers have turned their attention to completely female experiences, so that with this idea, regardless of the patriarchal expectations of the literary society, they pursue their own concerns in literature. Therefore, the subject of most of the works of women writers, also in this period, is the life of women themselves.

Critics who criticize based on Showalter's idea have focused their attention more on the works that remained silent and unknown throughout history due to patriarchal ideas and could not get their necessary and right place in the history of literature. They also analyze these works from the point of view of women, not from the point of view of the standards favored by men. In the article she published titled "Toward a Feminist Theory in Literature", Showalter has put forward the following point of view about women-centered criticism: "Woman as a producer of the meaning of the text, with the history, genres and structures of literature written by women. The topics of this type of criticism will be: investigation of the mental state of creativity in women, linguistics and the problem of women's language, the difficult path of writing for women, the history of literature, and of course, research about writers and specific works" (Showalter, 1986: 128).

Examining the text based on the representation of women in literary works

This method, which is called "image of women" in criticism, is mostly used in the criticism of literary works by male writers. However, it can be said that texts written by women but with a patriarchal perspective can be used with the same value as men's works. This method of feminist criticism attempts to show how literature, especially when written by endorsing an ideology of male superiority over women, reproduces and promotes popular notions or generalized beliefs about women. Female characters in the works of male writers are often weak, unwilling, mistaken, without analysis, having an unpleasant fate and even causing misery and death. Feminist critics who adopt this way of examining the text believe that such an image of women reinforces patriarchal gender ideas that try to make women appear weak and powerless by creating a "two-part opposition" between men and women. Therefore, in this approach of criticism (criticism of women's images), it is still possible to show how in a small number of literary works, different images of women are presented, which reverses our stereotypical ideas about them. A critical examination of the representation of women in literary works can also be done in a comparative manner between men's works and women's works, in order to show how women are represented in the works of female authors and how they are represented in the works of male authors (Payandeh, 2017: 95).

Reviewing the text based on Marxist feminist criticism

Criticism based on Marxist theory is another method of criticizing literary texts that emerged from the theory of combining feminism with Marxism. The purpose of this method is to investigate the mechanism of men's dominance over women, but to achieve this goal, they are based on the capitalist system and its role in consolidating men's sexual dominance over women. Marxist feminists also consider femininity as a category and explain it in the framework of exploitation in the capitalist system. Based on what has been said, it can be concluded that the focus of attention of Marxist feminists in literary criticism is the relationship between men and women based on the social power of each of them (Gayatri, 2012: 360). According to these critics, literature is both one of the manifestations in which the social system of this power is revealed, and also for confronting and opposing this system. As the prominent feminist critic, "Magi Ham" has said, Marxism has teachings for literary criticism regarding the material conditions of women's products and cultural

behaviors. Accepting this assumption enables feminists to examine the representation of women's experiences in literature in terms of social causes (Mousavi, 2013: 13).

Examining the literary text from the perspective of "feminist writing" approach of Ellen Cixous

Alain Cixous is a French post-constructivist writer and theorist who coined the term "feminist writing" to distinguish between the writing styles of women and men. It is usually said that people express their thoughts through language, while Cixous believes in reversing this relationship between the speaker and the essence of language and says that language is the foundation and result of the speaker's thinking, not just a medium to express what the speaker has thought about it. According to him, the multitude of derogatory interpretations towards women in popular culture originates from the ideology of patriarchy that has permeated the everyday language of society. The first step in changing the gender structure of society is to change this language, which is based on gender orientation and is discriminatory.

Cixous's view on the gender functions of language still observes that the language style and context in women's works is different from the language style and context in men's works. In his opinion, female writing in literary works written by women can be distinguished from male writing style with these features:

- Feminine style has unfinished sentences.
- Interruptions and breaks are often seen in it.
- Desire for silence in its narration is an obvious feature.
- Emotional expression in it is more and more prominent than men's writing.
- The flow of expression takes place with a softer grammatical structure.
- Use of literary figures; Such as: puns that induce multiple meanings and the use of metaphors is seen in abundance.
- It has a fluid quality (transformable and changeable).

Relying on these features, women's writing tends more towards time-lapse (intersection of time) and periodical construction. Contrary to male writing styles, which often have an intellectual structure and follow logic. These differences make male writers prefer prose genres and realism style more. However, female writers are more inclined to lyrical writing. In women's writing, the main character of the woman is more focused on her own self than on the outside world and female passion overcomes male wisdom. In this way, female language is completely closer to speech than to writing, and unlike male writing, it does not tend towards logical analysis or presenting argumentative statements.

Cixous believes that this way of writing is caused by the characteristics of women's bodies and believes that women should write through their bodies, they should invent an unconquerable language that crushes separations, classes, rhetoric, rules and regulations... The ability of women is such that they do not pay attention to syntax in language. Therefore, it can be said that according to Cixous, women's writing style is so special, exclusive or unique that it seems to be limited to the physiological characteristics of women. Feminist writing must overcome exactly the same limitations that patriarchal ideology has imposed on women, that is, a set of discriminatory customs and limiting norms (Zare Bormi, 2017: 99). From what we have stated in the description of Cixous's point of view, we should not conclude that the characteristics of female writing can be seen in the works of all female writers, because many of them are female writers who are influenced by the dominant patriarchal social culture and have a completely masculine style and context, and we have many male writers who have distanced themselves from the gender position defined for them by the dominant culture, and their works display all the

components of female writing. Therefore, feminism should be understood as a socio-cultural concept, not a biological concept. In this way, one of the methods that can be widely used in feminist literary criticism is to examine and explain examples of female writing in literary works (Emami, 2013: 287).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stages of writing literary criticism from the perspective of feminism

When we review a work or works from the perspective of feminism, important strategies are suggested so that we can get the best results from reading the text we are examining with this approach. A literary critic, in order to write a good and responsive review for a text, should do the following:

- 1- In the first step, he should choose a text that, due to the prominence of women's issues in it, he can more easily use this method of criticism in explaining its meanings. There is no limitation in choosing the text to be studied in terms of literary type (genre), because feminist criticism can be applied to various types of literary and cultural texts, both written and unwritten (poems, short stories, novels, plays, series, movies, etc.). But the important thing is that the text you are studying is somehow related to the world of women (Shamisa, 2004).
- 2- Literary critic, for example, if the text under review is a story, he should carefully read the text in order to get general information about the events and characters involved in the text, then read the story a second time and this time think about the ways of characterization in it and also Write notes about the same topic in the margins of your text, for example, do the characters follow the gender roles that have been assigned to them, or do they doubt the correctness of those roles, the way male characters talk about women can be another subject of the critic's attention in this stage, because in men's speech, women are often humiliated with all kinds of jokes, proverbs and quotes. But the most important issue that should be examined in the second reading of the text is the image that the text gives of the balance of gender power. Before the third reading, the critic should consider the questions that are answered in Feminism Criticism and then read the text a third time, using those questions as thought triggers to get answers to them. This time, he should rethink what he has already noted in the margin about (the position of women in the text), in response to the questions raised, and select specific aspects of the text to analyze those parts (Payandeh, 2017: 115).
- 3- One of the aspects of the text that allows the critic to criticize from a feminist point of view is its relationship with the myth of women, as Simone de Beauvoir discussed the fate of women, so if the text under your review is male-oriented, it allows the critic Advance your analysis in the direction of how the text in question creates a relationship by attributing positive characteristics to men and negative characteristics to women in order to perpetuate gender stereotypes and express it along this path of destiny (Payandeh, 1397: 116).
- 4- In the third time of reading the text, the critic must specify the topics of his criticism. He can also think about the role of male and female characters in the plot of the story, it is not unlikely that the text under review, like other literary and cultural productions, has characterized men as subjects and women as objects. In this case, the text can be analyzed from the perspective of which gender differences in this case (male activism and female activism) are represented by which mechanism and system, as inherent tendencies, if there is evidence in the text, make it clear (Payandeh, 1397: 116).
- 5- The notes may be about women's own submission to patriarchal beliefs common in the society, so the feminist critic does not seek to describe or condemn it, but the critic

should try to show what exactly are the social contexts of women's submission to discrimination against them? A question that can be a result of the unquestioning subordination of women due to the acceptance of the model of femininity in the text (Payandeh, 2017: 117).

- 6- After the critic knows which aspects of the text will be analyzed by the subject of his feminist criticism, he should write an outline of the discussion he wants to present in one page and present the entire general direction of the criticism. For example, let's assume that he takes a Marxist approach to criticizing a novel and after reading it three times, writing notes, posing questions, etc., he reaches a point where the main purpose of the discussion is capitalist issues, so the critic tries to find out that based on the capitalist system, the work of Workers create benefits for employers, but work is not only done in industrial production centers, but also in homes, women are engaged in childcare and housework. In fact, women's work is complementary to men's work, because if women do not work at home, then men must spend part of their time on home activities, and it is obvious, that this reduces the profits of capitalists. However, the critic should consider the cases where women's work at home and their activities in advancing the economic cycle are reflected or follow the aspect of exploitative expression in the text (Gayathri, 2012: 360).
- 7- By explaining and expanding each of the topics identified in the previous stage, the critic should turn the outline of the review into a complete article. That is, by bringing evidence from the examined text, and referring to the concepts of feminist theory and criticism, he should propose separate arguments one by one and in detail in order to reach an accepted conclusion, because the criticism convinces the reader when it is written in a systematic and coherent manner. (Payandeh, 1397: 118).
- 8- In order to write the final content, the critic must refer to the outline of his review again and discuss each of the points in the form of paragraphs in a reasoned and documented manner. So, according to the methodology of criticism, it should be made clear that the method of examining this text is based on what? For example, if it is said in the introduction that the criticism with the method of Cixous theory examines the feminine style and context of women in the story (feminine writing), it should quote parts of the text exactly and then show examples of female writing in it (Payandeh, 2017: 118).
- 9- At the end of the work, the critic must write a detailed and clear report about his findings from criticism, so that he has clearly reported and concluded all the foundations and findings of his work, for example: if he has written a criticism from the perspective of Marxist feminists on a movie or a novel, at the end it should be noted how this novel or movie validates their view on women's work at home. Or if the critique is based on the reflection of "images of women", it should be noted how the images analyzed reinforce or undermine common stereotypes about women. So by mentioning these general results, the critic can claim that his criticism has achieved the goals he set in the introduction (Payandeh, 2017: 119).

CONCLUSION

The formation of women's liberation movements was not limited to European countries, but with the expansion of communication and exchange of scientific and cultural information, the scope of this movement penetrated into literature as well, as we now see the most obvious examples in the fields of stories, poems, biographies, letters and memories and tens another types of literature with this approach.

Critics who take a feminist approach in criticizing literary texts do not deny the existence of differences between male and female characters in the works. It may be said

that the view that women are different from men basically corresponds to patriarchal ideology, but it must be said that the third wave feminists do not deny the existence of a difference between men and women, and in their opinion, the difference between women and men can even be seen in the readiness or potential ability of women to establish interpersonal communication and recognize it as a symbol of compassion, empathy and kindness.

Criticism of texts based on feminist theory has a special place in literature, and with all the public acceptance of this approach, there are different methods for examining works based on feminist theory, which can be called Alain Cixous's method, the method of Marxist criticism, as the most important. Likewise, in the way of writing a feminist critique on a work, there are important things that literary critics, considering them, can easily reach the goals they have set for themselves in criticizing the work.

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