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CONTRIBUTION OF THE FEMINIST WRITERS OF TWO DIFFERENT CULTURES, EMINE SEMIYE AND VIRGINIA WOOLF, TO WOMEN RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION¹

İKİ FARKLI KÜLTÜRÜN FEMİNİST YAZARLARI, EMİNE SEMİYE VE VİRGİNİA WOOLF'UN KADIN HAKLARI VE KADINLARIN EĞİTİMİNE KATKISI

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ABSTRACT

When the the histories of the societies are analysed, it is seen that the women played important roles in the societies they lived in. However, patriarchal social structure confined the women at home by keeping them away from the social life. When Ottoman Empire and England are analysed, it is apparent that there is no name of women in education and work life. In both countries, women movement began in the late of 1800. The Pioneer of Women movement in Ottoman Empire is Emine Semiye (1866-1944) and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) in England. Both of these women writers are the daughters of educated fathers. Semiye's father, Ahmet Cevdet Pasha was a statesman in the reform period of Ottoman Empire and Woolf was the daughter of Leslie Stephen, who was a writer and critic. Both women writers made use of the luck of being a daughter of an intellectual father by reading and studying hard. They drew the attention of the society to economic freedom for women, the education of women, inequality between women and men in the society and the importance of education for the women by giving conferences. They strongly emphasize that there must be equity and equality between men and women. They also remark that it is necessary for the women to be in the social sphere to have their own economic independence and to actualize themselves. To them, a woman must be in the subject position in the society. In this study, it is aimed to expound Emine Semiye and Virginia Woolf's contributions to women's liberty, their education, their rights, and equality.

Key words: Emine Semiye, Virginia Woolf, Patriarchy, Feminism, Ottoman Empire, England

ÖZET

Toplumların tarihi incelendiğinde, kadınların içinde buldukları toplumun gelişmesinde önemli roller oynadığı görülmektedir. Fakat erkek egemen toplumsal yapı, kadını sosyal hayattan uzak tutup ev hayatına hapsedmiştir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve İngiltere ele alındığında görülüyor ki kadının eğitim ve çalışma hayatında adı yoktur. Kadın hareketleri 1800 yılların sonlarında başlamıştır. Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda, kadın hareketinin öncüsü, Emine Semiye (1866-1944), İngiltere'de ise Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) olmuştur. Bu kadın yazarların ikisi de, eğitilmiş babaların kızlarıdır. Semiye'nin babası, Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, Osmanlı Devleti'nin reform döneminde devlet memuruydu. Woolf ise yazar ve eleştirmen Leslie Stephen'in kızıydı. Her iki kadın yazar da, entelektüel bir babanın kızı olma şansını sıkı çalışıp okuyarak kullandılar. Konferanslar vererek, toplumun dikkatini, kadınlar için ekonomik özgürlüğe, kadınların eğitimi, toplumdaki kadın ve erkekler arasındaki eşitsizliğe ve kadınların eğitiminin önemi üzerinde yoğunlaştırdılar. Woolf ve Semiye, erkekler ve kadınlar arasında eşitlik olması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadırlar. Ayrıca, kadınların sosyal alanda olmalarının, kendi ekonomik bağımsızlığına sahip olmalarının ve kendilerini gerçekleştirmelerinin gerekli olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Onlara göre, bir kadının toplumda özne konumunda olması gerekir. Bu çalışmada, Emine Semiye ve Virginia Woolf'un kadınların özgürlüğüne, eğitimlerine, haklarına ve eşitliğine katkılarını ortaya koymak amaçlanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Emine Semiye, Virginia Woolf, Ataerkillik, Feminizm, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, İngiltere

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1. INTRODUCTION

In different parts of the world, women have experienced the same hardships and challenges towards their lives throughout the history. These difficulties were seen and expressed by some women scholars, such as Emine Semiye and Virginia Woolf. They were distinguished women writers and thinkers and pioneers of feminist movement in Ottoman empire and England. Emine Semiye was a forgotten feminist writer in Turkish literature in the past 50 years. Even though she made a great effort for women's gaining place in Ottoman empire, her efforts and novels weren't given importance as much as Virginia Woolf, who was given value by her society. With her literary identity, she began to attract attention of men and women of letters. In the occidentalization process of Ottoman Empire, she took an active role in woman movement. It was so difficult for a woman to take roles in society in those times. But, with the proclamation of constitutional monarchy in 1908, women began to find chance to write novels, write for magazines and newspapers. They expressed their views about the problems of women in media organizations and tried to bring solutions. Main aim was to develop a common womanhood consciousness and a woman idealism. Semiye and Woolf were the pioneers of the intellectual women. They gave a lot of conferences and wrote articles in various magazines for women rights.

Emine Semiye was not only a writer but also an educator, a politician, and a journalist. She was the head of woman branch of Ittihat and Terakki party in Salonika. She tried to make the conditions of women better in her society. Ottoman Empire was a closed society in those times. Turkish women weren't given opportunities to work in state, private sector or do her own business. They were 'angels in the houses'. (Patmore, 1863: 1) Likewise, England did not provide women with opportunities, social positions, social rights, economic independence that men have. Even though England underwent a rapid industrialization and economic growth in 19th and 20th century, that was still a time of depression for women, in particular. They could find works in factories. However, they worked for more than 16 hours a day and were paid low wages. Woolf saw all these dramatic, political social and economic changes in her society. She struggled for women's freedom in all areas.

2. GENDER EQUALITY

Both Emine Semiye and Virginia Woolf always gave importance to the point that women should have been given equal rights in social and work life and education. In one of her articles, Emine Semiye thinks that men aren't superior to women and says, "there is no difference between men and women regarding brain. There is a research in America that signifies there is no difference between the girls and boys in their schools in terms of their abilities and intelligence. I had been given information regarding that research. It is also stated that girls' intelligence, spirituality and affection are higher than boys. (Semiye, no date: 5) Likewise, Woolf has same views with Semiye. She thinks that patriarchy has oppression on women by giving her no chance to get education in state schools, even in libraries. However, she never falls into despair and she challenges the dominant power which doesn't let women to enter the libraries. She states;

"Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind." (Martin, 1994: 127)

3. WOMEN'S EDUCATION

In 19th century, Victorian England and Ottoman Empire had undergone some positive changes in mentality towards women. In Ottoman Empire and England, conservatives thought that women's domestic duties should be developed and bettered. Dominant ideology had an understanding that women should have been educated to be a "goods mothers and good wives" to please their husbands and look after their children well. That is, patriarchal system would go on as it wanted. However, Emine Semiye opposed that view and stated that the chains of patriarchal system would be broken with education of women and they would begin to struggle for their rights and freedom. Sahika Karaca quotes Emine Semiye;

"Men deceived themselves for they thought that they were deceiving women by saying flattering lullabies to them. That could happen in the conditions of those times. Because the women could have been deceived easily in those conditions. But, the women who came together under the light of

civilization would save themselves from the chains of bigotry as long as they became enlightened with science and knowledge.” (Karaca, 2012: 272)

As we understand, it is a manifesto to patriarchy. Emine Semiye mentions about the male-dominated social system. She declares that she is the opponent of that system. Patriarchal system wants passive women who won't question the male supremacy when women become conscious of themselves and their rights, male-dominated system will collapse.

Likewise, Virginia Woolf is against male dominated society and male supremacy in all areas of life. She questions why men are interested in women.

“Why are women so much more interesting to men than men are to women?” (Woolf, 2015)

Women were leading their lives in a vicious circle in England and Ottoman Empire. They had no social rights. The only freedom they had is the life in their houses. Semiye and Woolf saw this reality and rejected to be confined to the house.

“As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.” (Woolf, cited in Brown, 2015)

Emine Semiye and Woolf always thought over the importance of women's education for it would help women reach the place they deserved in society. Both of these significant writers made use of their opportunities by writing and giving conferences to women to enlighten them about their identity and rights.

4. TURKISH WOMEN AND WORK LIFE

Women changed their attitudes and refused to be ‘an angel in the house’ (Patmore, 1863: 1) with the modernization project of Ottoman Empire. They began to have occupations in state and private sectors. Educated women had more chance to find jobs, such as teaching, nursing. As in other parts of the world, like America, England, Ottoman Empire lost its men in wars mostly. So, women had to work and do what men did. That made them join the social life. As mentioned above, Emine Semiye as an intellectual woman, she worked as a teacher in different cities of Turkey. According to Semiye, education is a door which opens to economic freedom. Sahika Karaca quotes Semiye;

“ Dear women! They will learn better if they read a lot thanks to their sharper intelligence compared to men. They will comprehend better what was given to them by our God. They will make money by dealing with trade and art and they will not yield to material and spiritual beats of men.” (Karaca, 2012: 273)

Emine Semiye stresses that the only way for women to save themselves from the isolated life and dependence on their husbands is to have an education and a job. Thanks to education, they are taken into account by the society. According to her, men always disregard and humiliate their wives and are sure that their wives will never leave them. She states; “ Some husbands make their wives cry not because they dont love them, but they know that their wives won't leave them for their women don't have any jobs.” (Karaca, 2012: 273)

What Emine Semiye tries to do is to create an awareness among women about their individuality. To her, literacy and having a profession are two crucial factors to help them have their own individuality.

5. FEMINISM

Feminism comes out in different ways in different countries of the world. We shouldn't have a view that there is only one type of feminism in the world. Feminism means gender equality and humanism. Women thinkers are always concerned about not only women but also men who are exploited and ill treated by dominant system. For instance, Virginia Woolf, who is a prominent woman writer of England, argues that men also faced the oppression of patriarchal system. However, men are not aware of this fact. Woolf (2017) states:

‘There are men who have triumphed over difficulties of their very lopsided education, of their very specialized and arduous careers, men of generous and wide humanity, of civilisation, not only of

education, men with whom a woman can live in a perfect freedom without any fear. Men too can be emancipated.’

She implies that men are manipulated by patriarchal system. They are also tied with the chains of patriarchal system. So they should be aware of that fact and unbind themselves.

Emine Semiye as a feminist, Muslim and Turkish woman writer saw the capacity, skill and intelligence of Turkish women and wanted them to take roles in social sphere of life. She was not radical feminist. She had an understanding that women shouldn’t imitate European way of life with all its aspects, especially wear style. They shouldn’t leave custom and usage so easily and lead the life without any border. She is against extreme freedom in life. Endless freedom or limitless freedom in life can cause deterioration of life. On the other hand, she maintains that women shouldn’t be isolated from social life. According to her, feminism is not endless freedom for women; “Some women’s behaving in an bad mannered way has nothing to do with feminism. That is ignorance.” (Karaca, 2012: 275)

6. CONCLUSION

We can conclude that the first Turkish feminist woman thinker and writer, Emine Semiye and English feminist thinker, Virginia Woolf believed that patriarchy could be devastated with only education of women and women could be active rather than being passive in life and women could choose their husbands by themselves. Both of them tried to create awareness towards women’s rights in their societies by writing novels, articles and giving conferences. They had respectable places in history about the gender equality struggle and their sharp discourses about women rights.

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