



Woman in Culture and Arts

Arab Feminism in the Orbit of Tradition and Modernity With a Reflection on the Views of Aisha Taymur and May Ziadeh

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acquire knowledge in various fields within the framework of Sharia and tradition and as far as reason and logic dictate. Aisha Taymur and May Ziadeh were among the trailblazers of this movement. The primary concern evident in the perspectives of both authors is the necessity for moderation and rationality. Both Aisha and May Ziadeh consistently adhered to the principles of moderation in their efforts to promote the enlightenment and empowerment of women during their era. This is despite the fact that the policy of both is different; Aisha grew up from a noble, literate family, with power and social status, which was dependent on the government of the time and adhered to traditional Arab traditions and heritage. Conversely, May Ziadeh was a peripatetic spirit throughout the Arab nations. He, being a Christian, was well-acquainted with the customs and cultures of European nations and frequently engaged in social interactions with their inhabitants. He was more in favor of modernity and innovation. This divergence in perspective—often characterized as a conflict between traditionalism and modernism—becomes particularly pronounced when addressing women's issues and challenges within Arab society, as well as their advocacy for heightened awareness and rectification of the prevailing adverse conditions. It diminishes and transforms into a voice that endangers the rights of women that have been suppressed. The development and advancement of these two writers in the realms of poetry and literature, their acquisition of multiple languages, and their publication of poetry collections, alongside their sustained and dignified involvement in exclusive poetic and literary gatherings—such as the monthly meetings of poets and writers within May Ziadeh's poetry circle, which persisted for several years—serve as a tangible illustration of the significant role played by women in the Arab world during that period.

Conclusion

Feminism in the Arab world commenced with the tension between traditional values and modernity. The traditionalists vehemently opposed any alterations to women's socio-cultural existence, whereas the modernists perceived the sole resolution to this issue as the renunciation of traditions and an unwavering commitment to Western culture and civilization. Amidst this tumultuous challenge, a moderate approach arose, endeavoring to reconcile tradition and modernity in a manner that is appropriate for the traditional Arab society. Two distinguished poets and authors, the traditionalist Aisha Taymur and the modernist May Ziadeh, emerged as the foremost figures of this movement. While one of them was grounded in tradition and the other was influenced by contemporary global currents, both were acutely aware of the challenges and demands faced by women in the Arab world during their era. They approached the issues associated with this socio-cultural transformation through the lens of social reformers. The writings of these two authors are incisive and replete with sophistication, as they elucidate a potential resolution to the impasse surrounding aberrant behavior towards women within the context of the contemporary world, while simultaneously honoring the traditions and customs of the East. Both individuals were staunch advocates for women's rights, seeking to promote their autonomy. Their intellectual rigor and pragmatic approach were central tenets of their thinking, and they possessed a profound comprehension of the women's movement. They pursued the advancement and empowerment of girls and women, emphasizing the importance of attaining scientific knowledge, maintaining chastity, and fulfilling a constructive socio-cultural role.

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