



Women and Literature



The «gift of the tongue» has been generally acknowledged as one of women's chief aptitudes. In world mythology and history, women performed several roles requiring eloquence and fluency: those of priestess, prophetess, mourner, poetess, sorceress, soothsayer, singer, mourner and story-teller (for ex. Scheherazade). We read that Maysoun, wife of the first Omayyad Caliph, Mu'awia, longed to return to her Bedouin tent in the desert, which she preferred to the sumptuous Damascene Palace. She expressed her longing in a famous poem which so moved the Caliph that he decided to grant her wish. Another woman poet from Andalusia was immortalized by a verse which she improvised as a complement to an improvised one by King Al-Mutamid of Sevilla. The King was so delighted by her witty response that he decided to marry her.

A well - known saying warns against indulgence in speech, by quoting a fable attributed to Esop, which says that the tongue is the source of all evils; but those who quote it forget that part of the fable which affirms that the tongue is equally the source of all blessings.

Women of to-day, like those of the past, have been using their literary skills for self - expression and self - assertion, but on a much wider scale. In Third World, as in First and Second World, countries, women have distinguished themselves as poets, novelists, journalists, lawyers, educators, lectures, actresses, politicians and other professionals who depend on language and literature for handling their arts. The literary field offers women of today unprecedented opportunities for work. It also gives

them a unique means for claiming their rights and expounding their demands and their needs. Literary production has the possibility of travelling, of spreading far and wide and reaching every corner of the world. Through literature women are able to emerge as a world power, as a «global sisterhood». In this respect, they may strive for improvement and reform in every field and claim the instauration of justice and the elimination of exploitation not only in their own spheres but also in those of men. After all, those who commit or permit injustice toward women also do it in their dealings with men. It is commonly accepted now that a really developed country is one which has a single, not a double, standard of justice.

As a conclusion, I find it convenient to quote from Robin Morgan, a dedicated feminist, poet, and journalist, the following paragraph which ends the preface of her masterly compilation: «Sisterhood is Global»^(☆)

«Male-led revolutions, so often and so tragically mere power exchange in a basically unaltered structure, have left dramatic accounts of their crises and heroism.... If such revolutions sometimes seem to have been based on the concept of dying for a cause, woman-conceived transformation seems more about daring to **live** for a cause, a heroism more difficult because it is daily and ostensibly **less** dramatic».

Rose Ghurayyib

☆ R. Morgan (ed), Sisterhood is Global, Anchor Books, N.Y. 1984.