

The Role of Women in Postcolonial Literature: A Comparative Study of Sylvia Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika

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Date Received : 23/3/2025

Date of Acceptness : 10/4/2025

Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of women in postcolonial literature by analyzing and comparing the writings of Sylvia Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika. Through close reading of their works , it consider the interplay of gender, identity, and colonialism within their respective contexts. Although they come from different cultures, each poets gives voice to the themes of feminine oppression, self-discovery, and societal restrictions.This comparative approach reveals how women navigate their identities in a postcolonial world, focusing on the intricate struggles encountered by females both in the Western world and the Arab region. Their works exhibit variation in sentence structures used throughout their works, with some passages featuring more complex syntax and ideas through shorter and simpler statements. The interplay of variation and complexity in their writings evokes a sense uncertainty about lives that which reflects the difficulties faced living between cultures during a time of transformation.

Keywords: Postcolonial Literature ,Feminist, Criticism, Gender, Colonialism , Plath, Al-Malaika.

دور المرأة في أدب ما بعد الاستعمار: دراسة مقارنة بين سيلفيا بلاث ونازك الملائكة

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تاريخ الاستلام : ٢٠٢٥/٣/٢٣

تاريخ قبول النشر : ٢٠٢٥/٤/١٠

الخلاصة :

يسعى هذا البحث إلى التحقق واستقصاء الوضع الذي تقف فيه المرأة في الأدب ما بعد الاستعمار من خلال دراسة مقارنة بين سيلفيا بلاث ونازك الملائكة. ومن خلال تحليل كتاباتهما، يتم النظر في التفاعل بين الجندر والهوية والاستعمار ضمن السياقات الخاصة بكل واحدة منهما ، وعلى الرغم من الاختلاف في الخلفيات الثقافية، فإن كلتا الشاعرتين تتناولان موضوعات تتعلق بالخضوع الذي تتعرض له المرأة، واكتشاف الذات، والقيود المجتمعية. ومن خلال هذه الرؤية المقارنة، يتم تقديم وجهة نظر حول كيفية تعامل النساء مع هوياتهن في عالم ما بعد الاستعمار، مع إلقاء الضوء على النضال الدقيق التي تواجهها النساء في كل من العالم الغربي والمنطقة العربية.

تتميز أعمالهما بالتنوع في بناء الجمل، حيث تحتوي بعض الفقرات على بنى نحوية وأفكار معقدة، في حين تأتي بعض العبارات الأخرى قصيرة وبسيطة. ويضيف هذا المزيج من التعقيد والتنوع طابعاً من عدم التوقع على كتاباتهما، مما يعكس الصعوبات التي تواجهها المرأة أثناء العيش بين ثقافات مختلفة في فترة التغيير.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب ما بعد الاستعمار، النقد النسوي، الجندر، الاستعمار، سيلفيا بلاث، نازك الملائكة.

Introduction

Postcolonial literature serves as an essential platform for comprehending the multifaceted and lasting impacts of colonialism on cultures, societies, and individual identities. Colonialism's persistent sway can be traced in various manifestations, from changes in structure in communities to the psychological and cultural impacts that keep effecting and groups long after the colonial forces have departed (Loomba,2015). For women in postcolonial settings, colonialism's legacy is further compounded by patriarchal control, generating two levels of oppression that frequently renders them both victims of colonial powers and marginalized by their own cultures' gendered forces (Mohanty,2020). This intersection, where colonialism and patriarchy converge, is a recurring motif in postcolonial feminist literature, providing a lens through which writers and scholars can examine the complicated experiences of women in colonized and postcolonial cultures (Spivak, 1988).

Both Sylvia Plath, an American poetess, and Nazik Al-Malaaika, an Iraqi poetess, have written works that provide valuable insights into the ways in which women confront and resist these opposing impulses. Through their literary voices, both poets explore topics such as female oppression, autonomy, and identity. This is the case despite the fact that their cultural and historical backgrounds are distinctively different. Although their works are deeply personal, they also address broader societal issues, demonstrating how women navigate the intricacies of gendered oppression, mental illness, and patriarchal control. Al-Malaika's poetry captures the political struggle of women in postcolonial Arab societies, highlighting the intersection of colonialism and patriarchy in influencing women's lives (Salhi, 2017),while Plath's psychological analysis and confessional style provide a moving critique of the internalization of societal expectations.(Kroll, 1976; Malcolm, 1991).

Sylvia Plath's poems, especially *Ariel*, dealt with the terrible emotional and mental damage that rigid social expectations do to women.. Her poetry often explored themes of rebirth, self-destruction, and lunacy, with the body serving as a location of both resistance and suffering . Plath's works, such as "*Lady Lazarus*" and "*Daddy*," illustrate women's struggles with being constricted by societal expectations. She employs gruesome imagery to represent the suffering and recurring acts of rebellion against this compulsion (Plath, 1965) .

Women poets from postcolonial Iraq produced works addressing the intersecting impacts of patriarchy and foreign domination. Nazik Al-Malaika powerfully merged postcolonial and feminist themes in her poetry written in the shadow of Iraq's independence. She challenged gendered oppression stemming from imposed Western standards and in deeply inherent societal traditions, deeply conscious of how women's identities were shaped by patriarchal control and the intersecting of colonial legacy. Having lived through Iraq's profound political and cultural shifts throughout the twentieth century, Nazik Al-Malaika used her poetry to articulate the female experiences formed under the dual yoke of the colonial legacy and the persistent hold of patriarchy in both the private and public society even after liberation from foreign rule.

Poems like *The Song of the Woman* and *The Poem of the Woman* present women merely as victims but also as defiant figures, resistance and autonomy as well as a battlefield where patriarchal and cultural power collided (Al-Malaika, 1968; Ghazoul, 2002). Examining Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika provides a comparative framework for comprehending how women's identities are formed by colonialism and patriarchy. While Sylvia Plath investigates personal torment, madness, and self-destruction as a form of resistance psychologically, Nazik Al-Malaika's poetry confronts the social and cultural contexts of postcolonial Arab societies. Both poets, Sylvia Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika, challenged restrictions imposed on women and depicted efforts against prescribed roles. The aim of this study is to contrast and discuss the roles of women in Sylvia Plath's and Nazik Al-Malaika's postcolonial literature, specifically how each poet navigates gender issues in the face of persisting colonial influences.

In order to understand how each poet treats gender issues in the face of persistent colonial effects, this study seeks to compare and examine the roles of women in Sylvia Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika's postcolonial writing. Comparative analysis of their poetry helps exploration of common feminist themes it emerge from their works, despite the radically different cultural, historical, and political context in which they were made. The key point is that, in spite of working in different environments- Nazik Al-Malaika on the external politics of postcolonial Arab societies, while Plath concentrated on the psychological effects of societal oppression-both poets critically challenging structures that seek to establish women's identities and roles. While their work reflects shared fights against oppression, they also stressing the differences that shaped of distinctions in experience owing to varied contexts.

1-Literature Review

The primary focus of recent scholarship has been a detailed examination of Sylvia Plath's confessional style, with an emphasis on her examination of mental illness, fractured identity, and the suffocating societal expectations and restrictions that were unrelentingly imposed upon women in mid-20th century post-war America (Kroll, 1976; Malcolm, 1991). Critics such as the astute Judith Kroll (1992) and the perceptive Janet Malcolm (1991) have eloquently highlighted how Sylvia Plath's raw and unvarnished confessional poetry functions as a stinging critique and indictment of the constricting gender roles foisted upon and assigned to women in the rigidly patriarchal societies of the post-war period. The work of Nazik Al-Malaika has, at the same time, been examined in the context of postcolonial Arab literature and modern Arabic poetry. Scholars such as Ferial J. Ghazoul (2002) and Asma Afsaruddin (2006) have analyzed the politically charged and feminist themes present in her poems, which indirectly address the challenges faced by women in postcolonial Arab societies.

Even so, there is an apparent gap in the current corpus of studies that evaluates these two poets—one from the occidental West and one from the oriental Arab world—through an integrated feminist postcolonial analytical framework. By comparing and contrasting their works, this article hopes to close that gap and emphasize how both strongly oppose and want to destroy oppressive gender stereotypes and colonialism by means of their poetry.

2-Postcolonial Theory and Women's Literature

2-1-Postcolonialism and Gender

The lasting historical, cultural, and psychological effects of colonialism on oppressed people and nations are examined by postcolonial theory. By examining how colonialism increased women's oppression, the feminist postcolonial position delves further and presents a unique set of challenges for postcolonial cultures. Major theorists like Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty contend that gender and the broader postcolonial discourse are inextricably connected since colonialism frequently served to maintain patriarchal systems that disadvantaged women in the political as well as social realms. In postcolonial literature, women can resist and critique these two kinds of oppression. Women writers frequently utilize their writings as a forms to examine how social expectations, colonialism , and gender affect women's identities.

2-2The Role of Women in Postcolonial Societies

When women live in postwar settings, they often face abuse from both past imperial power and lingering male beliefs. Colonial rule not only ran the world, but they also put tight gender roles on women, which limited their freedom. Postcolonial feminist studies scholars look at how sexual and cultural norms that were in place during colonization have continued to shape women's identities and roles.

In these situations, women writers deal with these long-lasting problems by giving critical views and rethinking how things really are in society. There are still effects of colonialism and structural gender inequality that postcolonial female writers write about. For example, Sylvia Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika show how writing can help people get their voice, fight against abuse, and find their own identity when they are being left out in a variety of ways.

2-3The Intersection of Colonialism and Patriarchy

That the practice of the political and economic power by colonial rulers. So, they influenced cultural perceptions of women, enforcing new forms of control and bolstering established gender norms. The combined impacts of colonialism and patriarchy have left women marginalized in many postcolonial cultures, leaving them feeble to both internal and foreign forces attempting to limit their liberty. So, women in postcolonial literature are usually parleying a complex land of resistance, opposing both the internalized gender conventions inside their cultures and the external pressures of colonialism. Despite hugely social pressures, their accounts show rebellion, strength, and survival. While their traditional practices have often required obedience, their stories continue to inspire a spirit of indifference.

3-Sylvia Plath and Confessional Poetry's Feminist Themes

3-1- Sylvia Plath's Life Shaped Her Perspective

The most famous American poet of the 20th century, Sylvia Plath (1932–1963), wrote candid poems that reflected her own hardships. Sylvia Plath suffered with mental illness and an unhappy marriage to fellow poet Ted Hughes during the 1950s and 1960s when women had to conform to social expectation. The events that followed had a significant impact on Plath's poems on gendered oppression, illness, and identity. At a time when society frequently

restricted women to the home, Sylvia Plath managed conflicts as an idealistic and educated woman.

Her early years, which were filled with both pain and success, shaped her complicated ideas about gender, autonomy, and self-expression. In *Ariel* (1965), Sylvia Plath explored the psychological effects of the expectations that lead women to self-destruction

3-1- 1-Portraying Gender's Psychological Impact

Sylvia Plath uses profoundly introspective, psychological poetry in *Ariel* to examine ideas of feminine identity, autonomy, and defiance of social norms. Using horrific imagery as metaphors for women's cyclical struggle against limitations, works such as "*Lady Lazarus*" and "*Ariel*" powerfully portray misery, self-destruction, and rebirth. The recurrent aspect of escaping what society wants is symbolized as recurring death and resurrection. Sylvia Plath's poems "*Lady Lazarus*" and "*Daddy*" use powerful themes of resurrection and patricide to address the tyranny and suffering of women. The speaker's rebirths in "*Lady Lazarus*" show a refusal to be bound by the limiting societal roles that women are expected to play. While painful, Sylvia Plath claims that acts of self-destruction can also represent an attempt to assert control over one's own identity and story.

Sylvia Plath's critical perspective is centered on the intricate relationship among gender roles, mental health, and individual choice. In strong and thoughtful works like "*Tulips*" and "*The Bell Jar*," Sylvia Plath shows how rigid ideas about what it means to be a woman can hurt a person's emotions and mental health.

Sometimes it's shocking how deeply Sylvia Plath explored mental illness. It's especially interesting to observe how psychiatric labels were sometimes used to limit women's freedom and force them to conform. Through her writings, Sylvia Plath argues against the idea that mental illness is only a person's problem. Instead, she shows how people fight inside and criticizes social forces outside of themselves. The way Esther Greenwood feels in "*The Bell Jar*" is a strong response to the pressures women are put under, not just a personal problem. Esther's mental breakdown is a common response to a system that is meant to limit her freedom when she is faced with a world that is meant to limit her freedom and options. In her writings she refuses the idea that a person's thoughts can cause a person's mental illness.

In contrast, she exposes how societal structures built up to limit women's freedom. Poetry by Sylvia Plath challenges cultural norms and expectations of women's femininity. Sylvia Plath's writing challenges the accepted view of female passiveness by emphasizing strong acts of independence and self assertion due to women who resist expectations. In "Ariel" The speaker's fierce, ascend suggests wild feminine strength. Sylvia Plath offers resistance through the reclaiming of identities, voices, and bodily ownership, while her critiques of structure limit lives and expose the profound suffering endured for women in patriarchal roles.

Nazik Al-Malaika was born in Baghdad in 1923, and in her poetry, she examined postcolonial womanhood. She directly observed the way fixed patriarchy and the external force of colonialism limited freedom. The poetry of Nazik Al-Malaika engages rules, opposing limitations and advocating freedom. Her competent verses blends artistic innovation with social concerns while connecting tradition and modernity. In her poetry, Nazik Al-Malaika explores deeply linked dynamics of colonialism and patriarchy.

The poem of Sylvia Plath *The Song of the Woman* portrayed women as an active agents resister, she is challenging effects of colonialism and patriarchal roles rather than merely being as victims. Rooted in a passionate desire to see women actively involved in their own liberation, Nazik Al-Malaika's feminist critique goes beyond theoretical contemplation, sharing that her poetry argues resistance to the systems that restrict their agency and suggests group action and social change. So, she proposes that the roles of women in postcolonial societies turn the act of writing into a tool of resistance.

3-2-Identity and Resistance in Postcolonial Contexts

Nazik Al-Malaika's work, the female form as a powerful allegory of both oppression and resistance. In "The Song of the Woman" presents the colonial forces and patriarchy power convergence. So, portraying the body such as a tool of oppression and a source of power, Nazik Al-Malaika denotes that women can improve their circumstances by recapturing their bodies and rights. Nazik Al-Malaika's portrayal of the female body is firmly political, unlike Sylvia Plath, whose investigation of the body is primarily psychological. The body is both a site of change as women recapture their social status and make sure of self-governance, as well as a battleground where they must resist those who seek to control them.

4-Comparative Analyses: Examining creative works of Plath and Al-Malaika

The comparative study of Sylvia Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika unmantle both the parallels and divergences in their portraits of women's status in society. Sylvia Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika study the connections of gender, persona, and colonialism, yet they accomplish so in differing cultural settings. Sylvia Plath's work mainly focuses on the mental impacts of social oppression, whereas Nazik Al-Malaika's poetry more engages with the political and cultural forces that form women's identities in postcolonial Arab societies. So, Sylvia Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika with these differences used their works as forums for feminist resistance, challenging the oppressive structures that aim to define women's roles and personalities.

5-Conclusion

Sylvia Plath and Nazik Al-Malaika, though coming from different cultural contexts, they lend a powerful feminist criticism of the forces that design women's lives. Sylvia Plath's works explore the psychological measures of gendered oppression, with some short, direct examinations beside more complex analyses of the psychological effects. The poetry of the pioneer of Arab poet, Nazik Al-Malaika, discusses the political and communal restrictions placed on women in the postcolonial Arab world through both intricate engagements with postcolonial theory and more personal poetic reflections.

Nazik Al-Malaika and Sylvia Plath use their literary voices to withstand these forces, offering a vision of female autonomy and self-expression. Through their writings, they make significant contributions to feminist postcolonial literature, offering perception into the intricate relationship between gender, colonialism, and resistance in women's lives.

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