

Feminism in Poetry During the Abbasid Era: The Representation of Women in the Poem *Quluubu An-Nisaai Sakhurun* by Abbas bin Ahnaf

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze feminist values in literature during the Abbasid era, particularly in the representation of women in the poem "*Quluubu An-Nisaai Sakhurun*" by Abbas bin Ahnaf. The research employs a qualitative method with data collection techniques that include literature reviews and analysis of relevant documents. The study identifies that feminism in this work is evident through the depiction of women as objects of admiration while simultaneously portraying them as complex characters. Social and cultural factors, such as patriarchy, shape how women are represented in this poem, reflecting the norms prevailing during that period. This study contributes by highlighting the relevance of feminist perspectives in understanding classical literature and providing insights into the relationship between social structures and literary creation.

Keywords: feminism, Abbasid literature, patriarchy, representation of women, socio-cultural studies.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis nilai-nilai feminisme dalam karya sastra pada masa Abbasiyah, khususnya dalam representasi perempuan di syair "*Quluubu An-Nisaai Sakhurun*" karya Abbas bin Ahnaf. Metode

yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui kajian pustaka, termasuk analisis literatur dan dokumen terkait. Penelitian menemukan bahwa feminisme dalam karya ini dapat terlihat dari representasi perempuan sebagai objek yang dipuja sekaligus dinilai memiliki karakter yang kompleks. Faktor sosial budaya seperti patriarki turut membentuk cara perempuan digambarkan dalam syair ini, mencerminkan norma-norma yang berlaku pada masa itu. Kontribusi penelitian ini adalah menyoroti relevansi kajian feminisme dalam memahami karya sastra klasik, serta memberikan wawasan tentang hubungan antara struktur sosial dan penciptaan seni sastra.

Kata Kunci: feminisme, sastra Abbasiyah, patriarki, representasi perempuan, kajian sosial budaya.

INTRODUCTION

Women have often become a compelling subject in literary works, both as central figures and as specific symbols (Aggarwal & Johal, 2021). However, social realities across various periods reveal the existence of gender inequality rooted in patriarchal culture (Spacks, 2022). During the Abbasid era, despite its reputation as a period of intellectual progress, women remained under male domination in many aspects of life, including education, politics, and economics (Al Rudainy, 2014; Gordon, 2017). During the Abbasid era, despite its reputation as a period of intellectual progress, women remained under male domination in many aspects of life, including education, politics, and economics. This situation raises an important question: how were women represented in literary works of that period? Could these works reflect or even challenge the prevailing patriarchal norms?

The progress of Islamic civilization during the Abbasid era produced literary works of significant historical, social, and cultural value (Ali, 2023). Poetry, as one of the highest forms of art, became a medium for conveying ideas, including perspectives on women (Munir, 2005). One of the prominent figures in this field was Abbas bin Ahnaf, a renowned love poet whose works depicted the complexity of representing women. In his works, women were not only portrayed as objects of love but also as individuals with strong characters, challenging the stereotypes common during his time.

The patriarchal culture during the Abbasid era placed women in subordinate positions, influencing their roles and status within society. However, some instances show that women managed to gain recognition in the fields of art and science, indicating the existence of resistance to patriarchal norms (Al Rudainy, 2014). Examining the representation of women in literary works from the Abbasid era is essential because it reveals how patriarchal culture shaped perceptions of women. The central question that arises is whether this representation reinforced patriarchal norms or provided a space for resistance against them.

Studies on poetry from the Abbasid era focus on several tendencies. First, research by Stetkevych (2017) examined panegyrics and literary innovations during the Abbasid era, often related to the depiction of the Arab civilization's glory. Second, studies by Hamadameen, Husen, and Hasan (2024) explored the role of poetry in supporting military operations during the Abbasid era, emphasizing its strategic and political functions rather than its representation of gender. Third, Harb (2019) analyzed the integration of the Persian language into Arabic poetry as part of political dynamics and identity during that period.

Additionally, research by Al-Shudifat and Al-Harashsh (2024) examined the symbolism of silence in prison poetry during the Abbasid era, while Arslan (2023) explored the theme of wisdom in Abu Firas's works. Alebdha (2021) focused on performative panegyrics in the poetry of Ali ibn Jabala, whereas Al-Bahlal (2023) investigated the use of women's adornments in Abbasid poetry as social and cultural symbols. Borroni (2021) analyzed the impact of Abbasid fiscal reforms as reflected in poetry.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into various aspects of Abbasid poetry, few explicitly analyze the representation of women in literary works from the Abbasid era. Most previous research tends to focus on themes of politics, military affairs, and general symbolism, with little attention given to how patriarchal social norms shaped the representation of women in poetry.

Therefore, this study addresses the lack of analysis of the representation of women in poetry during the Abbasid era. Unlike previous studies, this research focuses on how social and cultural norms, particularly patriarchy, influenced the depiction of women in Abbas bin Ahnaf's works. Thus, this study offers novelty by incorporating feminist analysis into literary studies, enriching discussions on the relationship between literature, culture, and gender during the Abbasid era.

This research aims to analyze the feminist values in poetry during the Abbasid era, focusing on the representation of women in Abbas bin Ahnaf's works. Additionally, the research identifies the social and cultural factors that influenced how these works depicted women.

This study argues that literary works, especially the poem *Quluubu An-Nisaai Sakhurun*, not only reflect the social norms of the Abbasid era but also serve as a space to critique or reinforce patriarchal structures. The feminist values in this work help readers understand the representation of women in a complex socio-cultural context and highlight their relevance in contemporary gender equality discourse.

METHOD

This study focuses on the poem *Quluubu An-Nisaai Sakhurun* by Abbas bin Ahnaf, chosen for its representation of the complex perspectives on women during the Abbasid era (Wang, 2021). The work reflects the dominant socio-cultural values and patriarchal norms of that time. This poem was selected because it contains symbolism that mirrors the social structure and the potential resistance to gender norms of its era (Elam, 2023).

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at deeply understanding the representation of women in literary works (Cresswell, 2014; Lune & Berg, 2017; Setia & Rosele, 2024). Primary data was obtained from Abbas bin Ahnaf's poem, while secondary data included related literature, such as historical texts, *diwans*, scholarly journals, and works relevant to feminism during the Abbasid era.

The research process began with the identification and selection of primary and supporting literature relevant to the study. Researchers collected data through a literature review involving an examination of the poem *Quluubu An-Nisaai Sakhurun* and other supporting texts. Data collection techniques included reading, note-taking, translation, and organizing information aligned with the study's objectives (Hanauer, 2021; Jusslin & Höglund, 2021).

After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed it through the following steps: (1) reducing the data to extract essential information from various sources, (2) organizing the data into a thematic framework focusing on the representation of women and feminist values, and (3) interpreting the data through a feminist perspective. The researchers developed the processed data into a descriptive narrative that explains the relationship between social structures and the representation of women in Abbas bin Ahnaf's literary work (Miles & Huberman, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Poetry During the Abbasid Dynasty

At the dawn of Islam, poetry began to emerge and flourish among the Arabs, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, and the Euphrates region (Al-Muqaddam, 2019). Skilled language experts from these regions became pioneers in the development of poetry (Osti, 2022). When Arab governance extended to Iraq and Andalusia, Baghdad and Cordoba became centers of culture and literature. Islam did not oppose or reject poetry; instead, it valued poetry as a medium for gaining valuable wisdom, proverbs, and interpretative evidence contained within it (Gordon, 2017).

The Abbasid Dynasty marked an indisputable golden age in the history of Islamic civilization (Voll, 1983). This era represented the height of Islamic power and the expansion of its civilization. During this time, Arabs assimilated with other nations. The transcription, transliteration, and translation of scientific books progressed rapidly (Ali, 1922). Scientific and literary forums flourished, particularly during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, regarded as the pinnacle of the Abbasid golden age. This prosperity positioned Baghdad as the world's trade hub and the epicenter of knowledge and literature (Al-Bahlal, 2023).

Poetry during the Abbasid Dynasty had unique characteristics, combining the eloquence of the Bedouin language with the refinement of urban society (Bray, 2017). Poets of this era continued to study and develop the Arabic language, elevating poetry to a prominent position in society. The development of poetry was influenced by cultural interactions and various other factors, reaching an unprecedented peak of excellence.

At the dawn of Islam, the fundamental purpose of poetry began to shift. Poetry focused on moral improvement, strengthening principles and values, and spreading the message of monotheism. It also encouraged jihad in the path of Allah, promoted asceticism towards worldly life, gave advice for sacrifices for religion, and criticized Islam's adversaries. During the Abbasid Dynasty, poetry underwent renewal in three

main aspects: refined expressions, diverse artistic meanings, and exceptional linguistic beauty (Al-Shudifat & Al-Harabsheh, 2024).

Every era of poetry reflects certain truths, as poetry serves as an expression of emotions stemming from the conscience. Poets were known for their sensitivity and profound sense of empathy. During the Abbasid Dynasty, being a poet was a highly rewarding profession. Some poets even held prestigious positions, such as Muslim bin Walid and Abu Tamam, who secured high-ranking roles like ministers—this motivated poets to compete in producing their best works (Al-Faraj, 2017).

The advancements of life during the Abbasid period also gave rise to new forms of poetry, such as educational poetry. Poets began to compose storybooks, scientific texts, biographies, and news. Additionally, poets created humorous and anecdotal poems that audiences often sang in entertainment venues. One form of poetry that flourished portrayed the temporality of worldly life and the permanence of the afterlife through ascetic themes (Borroni, 2021).

Abbasid poets also innovated in the realm of elegiac poetry (Al-Shudifat & Al-Harabsheh, 2024). They refined themes related to death and instilled the idea that those who have passed away continue to live on in cherished memories held in the heart. Thus, poetry during the Abbasid period served not only as an artistic expression but also as a medium for education, morality, and spirituality, enriching Islamic civilization.

The Life of Abbas bin Ahnaf

Abbas bin Ahnaf, whose full name is Ahnaf bin Abbas bin Aswad bin Thalhah bin Jordan bin Qoladah bin Khorim bin Syihab bin Salim bin Hayah bin Kalib bin Abdillah bin Adi bin Hanifah bin Lajim al-Hanafi al-Yamami, was born around the year 133 AH in Yamamah, a city in the Hijaz region. He lived in Baghdad until he died in 192 AH. According to Sholeh bin Abdul Wahhab, Abbas bin Ahnaf was an Arab from Khurasan residing in Baghdad. His family was known for their noble character, generosity, and honor, earning him the title Abu al-Fadl (Asy-Siq'ah, 1997).

Abbas bin Ahnaf stood out among poets of the Abbasid era. The challenging and competitive environment of the time led poets to explore various genres, such as *madah* (praise), *ritha* (elegy), *ghazal* (love poetry), and *wasf* (description) (Al-Hani, 1950). However, Abbas bin Ahnaf remained committed to the *ghazal* genre and avoided other forms of poetry. This specialization distinguished him from other poets who often explored a wide range of poetic forms.

Numerous literary and historical texts describe Abbas bin Ahnaf as a figure close to Abbasid caliphs, particularly Caliph Al-Mahdi and Harun al-Rashid (Osti, 2022). Despite his close relationship with these leaders, he never used his poetry for financial gain, unlike other poets such as Basyar bin Burd. Abbas bin Ahnaf was known for his admirable character and his gentle, refined poetry. He never used his verses to praise rulers, attack opponents, or respond to criticism. Instead, he remained focused on the art and purity of love poetry (As-Sa'adi, 2013).

Abbas bin Ahnaf's love poetry reflects a rich emotional life filled with the turmoil of love, the pain of rejection, and the joy of togetherness. He skillfully depicted scenes of love that were both painful and beautiful, with an honest and profound touch. His poetry differed from other love poems because he upheld purity and morality in portraying women. Abbas bin Ahnaf avoided vulgar or immoral descriptions and instead highlighted respect for women in every poem (Doyif, 1986).

The uniqueness of Abbas bin Ahnaf's language style lies in his ability to use a rich vocabulary and elaborate expressions to convey the emotions of love. He also excelled in portraying women morally, without sensual or sexual elements, which distinguished him from other love poets of his time. In his poems, he mentioned several women's names, such as Dzalfa, Diya', Nisrin, Narjis, Sahar, Khunsa, Dzalum, and Fauz. However, the frequent recurrence of the names Dzalum and Fauz sparked speculation that they might be the same person (Al Khafaji & Najm, 2023). Research on Abbas bin Ahnaf's *diwan* revealed that they were, in fact, different individuals (As-Sa'adi, 2013).

Abbas bin Ahnaf's works are a testament to his appreciation of art and genuine love. He wrote his poetry to bring joy to lovers without expecting any reward. His life, which was simple yet meaningful, solidified his position as one of the greatest poets remembered throughout history (Osti, 2022). His poetry resonates like a melodious tune, touching the hearts of readers and remaining relevant to this day.

The Representation of Women in the Poem *Quluubu An-Nisaai Sakhurun* by Abbas bin Ahnaf

In this study, the researchers selected specific verses from the poem *Quluubu An-Nisaai Sakhurun* and concluded that two verses explicitly address women. These two verses were analyzed as follows:

قلوب النساء صخور

أظن وما جربت مثلك	أنما قلوب نساء العالمين صخور
ذريني أنم إن لم أنل منك زورة	لعل خيالاً في المنام يزور
بكيت إلى سرب القطا حين مر	بي فقلت ومثل بالبكاء جدير
أسرب القطا هل من معير	جناحه لعلى إلى من قد هويت أطير
وإلا فمن هذا يؤدي تحية فأشكره؟	إن المحب شكور
فجاوبنني من فوق غصن	أراكة ألا كلنا يا مستعير معير
وأي قطة لم تساعد أبا هوى	فعاثت بضر والجناح كسير

Verse 1:

أظن وما جربت مثلك	أنما قلوب نساء العالمين صخور
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"I only assume, and I will not test someone like you because the hearts of women are indeed as hard as stone."

Verse 2:

ذريني أنم إن لم أنل منك زورة	لعل خيالاً في المنام يزور
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"Let me sleep peacefully if you refuse to visit me, and perhaps you will become a vision in my dreams later."

In the first verse, the poet compares the hearts of women to "large and solid stones" (Ahnaf, 1990). This symbol reflects the patriarchal stereotype that portrays women as emotionally unyielding or difficult to approach. This representation highlights how dominant patriarchal norms during the Abbasid era positioned women in a subordinate role. The depiction of women's hearts as hard reflects how men rationalize the challenges they face in understanding or approaching women. Furthermore, this imagery suggests that society often expected women to conform to men's expectations, disregarding their perspectives and choices.

Feminist scholars can critique this symbolism through the lens of gender equality. In her book, *The Second Sex* (2014), Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes that society often reduces women to the status of the "other," defining their existence by their roles in men's lives. The use of the symbol "stone" reflects this notion but can also be interpreted as a representation of women's resilience in facing social pressures. Women have the right to define themselves, including in emotional relationships such as love. Therefore, this portrayal requires reevaluation to respect women's autonomy in determining their identities and relationships.

In the second verse, the poet reveals a contrasting emotional perspective. The poem depicts women as cherished and respected figures (Ahnaf, 1990). Although there is a tone of disappointment due to the woman's absence, the hope of meeting her in a dream indicates a recognition of her emotions and autonomy as a subject. Readers can interpret this as an acknowledgment of the value and position of women in emotional relationships.

In the socio-cultural context of the Abbasid era, women began to gain broader access to education and politics, although the struggle for gender equality remained far from complete (Al Rudainy, 2014). Feminist values are evident in how this poem portrays women not only as objects of love but also as subjects who are respected and longed for. For example, Fatima Mernissi, in her works such as *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1999), highlights how Islamic culture possesses a rich tradition of respecting women's roles, even though patriarchal norms often distort these values.

Furthermore, the representation of women in Abbasid poetry reflects a shift in social values during that time. Abbas bin Ahnaf, known for his *ghazal* themes, demonstrated that women were not merely passive objects but also played active roles in social life (As-Sa'adi, 2013). This aligns with Leila Ahmed's views in *Women and Gender in Islam* (2021), which assert that literature can serve as a mirror of gender dynamics within a particular society.

Through his poetry, Abbas bin Ahnaf not only conveyed the beauty of love but also implicitly expressed respect for women as individuals with intrinsic value and influence.

On the other hand, the first and second verses also contain contradictory elements that reflect the complexities of gender relations during the Abbasid era. On the one hand, the portrayal presents women as hard and difficult to approach, while on the other hand, it shows them as respected and cherished. This contradiction reflects the social and cultural struggles of that time as emerging, more inclusive ideas that valued gender equality began challenging patriarchal norms.

Ultimately, the analysis of these verses demonstrates that feminist values were beginning to emerge in the representation of women during the Abbasid era, even though they remained framed within dominant patriarchal norms. This poem is not only a work of art but also a historical document that illustrates the social and cultural dynamics of that period. By understanding this context, readers can better appreciate the complexities of gender relations in Islamic history and the importance of striving for more inclusive gender equality in the present.

The Social and Cultural Influence of the Abbasid Era on the Works of Abbas bin Ahnaf

The Abbasid Dynasty was one of the most prominent eras in the history of Islamic civilization, marked by significant advancements in science, literature, and the arts. The culture of the Abbasid era, centered in Baghdad, had a profound impact on literary works, including the poetry of Abbas bin Ahnaf. Various social and cultural factors, such as scientific progress, cross-cultural interactions, educational advancements, and the patronage of caliphs, directly and indirectly influenced his works (Gordon, 2017). However, despite the Abbasid era's cultural achievements, the prevailing patriarchal culture also shaped the depiction of women in literary works (Ahmed, 2021), including those of Abbas bin Ahnaf.

One major influence stemmed from Baghdad's status as the center of global civilization. As a cosmopolitan city, Baghdad became a melting pot for diverse cultural traditions from Persia, Greece, India, and the Arab world. This interaction created a vibrant intellectual environment where people highly esteemed literature as a form of artistic expression (Al-Bahlal, 2023). Abbas bin Ahnaf, who lived and wrote in Baghdad, thrived in this environment, which greatly supported literary development. The presence of literary salons and forums enabled poets like Abbas to explore new themes and refine their writing styles. This influence is evident in his poetry, which blends the classical beauty of the Arabic language with a refined aesthetic sensibility (Ali, 2023).

Another influential factor was the patronage provided by Abbasid caliphs, particularly Harun al-Rashid and Al-Mahdi, who were known for their support of the arts and literature (Cheikh, 2015). Poets, including Abbas bin Ahnaf, often received protection and recognition from the court, encouraging them to produce high-quality works. However, unlike many other poets who used their poetry to praise caliphs or seek financial gain, Abbas remained focused on the *ghazal* (love poetry) genre. This choice reflects the creative freedom that the cultural atmosphere of the time afforded while also showing how patriarchy indirectly shaped portrayals of women as objects of longing and admiration.

The educational advancements of the Abbasid era also had a significant impact on Abbas bin Ahnaf's works. Education during this time extended beyond the elite, gradually reaching broader segments of society (Ali, 1922). Abbas bin Ahnaf, known for his refined language and rich vocabulary, benefited from this era's emphasis on education. His ability to express profound and moral emotions of love without vulgar or sensual elements reflects the influence of his educational background (Ahnaf, 1990). However, it is important to note that while his poetry highlighted the beauty of love, his portrayal of women remained framed within patriarchal norms that often relegated women to subordinate roles relative to men.

Cultural assimilation during the Abbasid era also played a crucial role. The integration of Arab values with Persian, Greek, and Indian traditions fostered a more inclusive and universal mindset (Al-Muqaddam, 2019). In Abbas bin Ahnaf's poetry, this influence is evident in themes that reflect respect for women and an acknowledgment of emotional values. However, authors often expressed ambiguous respect for women by portraying them in roles tied to physical and emotional beauty without equally recognizing their autonomy or capabilities beyond romantic relationships.

Additionally, the intellectual and philosophical progress of the Abbasid era indirectly influenced literary works. Poets often drew inspiration from emerging ideas in philosophy, astronomy, and medicine. Although Abbas bin Ahnaf focused on themes of love, his choice of words and metaphors reflects the nuanced thinking cultivated by the intellectually rich environment of the time. However, his works also show how writers frequently reduced women to symbols or metaphors without fully acknowledging their individuality.

Thus, the works of Abbas bin Ahnaf represent a reflection of the social and cultural dynamics of the Abbasid era. The patronage system, educational advancements, cross-cultural interactions, and assimilation of intellectual values all significantly contributed to the development of his poetic style and themes. However, the dominant

patriarchal culture of the time also had a substantial impact, shaping an ambiguous representation of women—on the one hand, praised as objects of love and longing, but on the other hand, confined within a socially subordinate framework. Through his works, Abbas bin Ahnaf not only conveyed the beauty of love but also reflected the complexities of gender relations and social dynamics of his era. Understanding these influences enables a deeper appreciation of Abbas's poetry as a rich cultural heritage while prompting reflection on the challenges of achieving more inclusive gender equality in the present.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Abbas bin Ahnaf's poem, *Quluubu An-Nisaai Sakhurun*, reflects the socio-cultural influences of the Abbasid Dynasty, which combined the progress of civilization with the persistence of strong patriarchal norms. The poem does not merely portray women aesthetically but also represents them as complex individuals with various emotional and symbolic dimensions. Unlike previous research, these findings reveal how Abbas bin Ahnaf's work mirrors the social dynamics that placed women in an ambiguous position—on the one hand, respected and longed for, but on the other, still constrained by patriarchal norms that limited their autonomy. Additionally, the poem demonstrates Abbas bin Ahnaf's efforts to integrate literary aesthetics with implicit critiques of social inequalities during his time.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its application of feminist approaches to the analysis of classical literature, offering new insights into the relationship between patriarchal culture and the representation of women in Islamic literary works. This research also highlights the importance of understanding literature as both a reflection of socio-cultural dynamics and a means of critiquing existing norms.

However, this study has limitations in its scope, as it focuses solely on one work and one poet. Future research could analyze the works of other poets from the Abbasid era to provide a broader perspective on the representation of women in classical Islamic literature. Furthermore, interdisciplinary approaches involving historical, social, and linguistic studies could offer deeper dimensions to this topic.

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