

CHAPTER III

THE STRUGGLE OF A WOMAN IN FINDING SELF-IDENTITY
 IN SAADAWI'S MEMOIRS OF A WOMAN DOCTOR

In this chapter the writer will try to do his best to make the analysis systematical and understandable. Before coming to the main point, analyzing the subject matter, he will give slight informations to the readers about the novel. Further, he exposes the minor characters of the work to direct to the analysis of the major one. Finally, he begins to analyze the psychological conflicts of the major character and expresses his own ideas, opinions and views concerning the subject being discussed.

III.1 The Characters of the Work : Major and Minor

As previously mentioned, a round or major character is usually one of the major figures in the work, and he or she profits from experience and undergoes a change of some sort. (Roberts 1989, 145) In Saadawi's Memoirs of A Woman Doctor, this character is played by the woman doctor herself. She is an intelligent, ambitious woman with very various wishes and ideas. She is a daughter of a family whose members are parents (her father and mother), her brother and she herself. This

character is very dominating in the story meaning that she always appears in all parts of the novel and the appearance of the other characters seem to just to clarify what and how this woman doctor does. The writer, after reading the story carefully and critically, does not find other major characters but this only.

There are several minor characters in Saadawi's Memoirs of A Woman Doctor. The writer will only analyze some of them who may give help to the writer to support the analysis of the major one. Those characters are the major character (the woman doctor)'s mother, her brother, her cousin, her husband, and her new close friend, an artist.

1. The Woman Doctor's Mother

She is a mother who pays very much attention to her daughter in almost every part of her daughter's life and wants her daughter to be a real woman, not to be like her son, the daughter's brother. She gets angry seeing her daughter's hair cut short.

My mother gave a shrill cry and slapped my face hard. she hit me again and again while I stood where I was as if rooted to the spot.

(Saadawi 1988 , 18)

Her mother is one of the persons whom she hates because she controls her life,

But it was my mother who controlled my life, my future and my body right down to every strand of my hair. Why? Because she has given birth to me? But why did that give her some special merit? She went about her normal life like any other woman and conceived me involuntarily in a random moment of pleasure. (Saadawi 1988, 16)

2. Her Brother

His hair is cut short. He eats more than her, can play with his friends more freely than his sister. In short, he has more freedom than her that makes her envy,

My brother's hair was cut short but otherwise left free and uncombed, while mine was allowed to grow longer and longer.... (Saadawi 1988, 9)

My brother went out into the street to play without asking my parents' permission and came back whenever he like, while I could only go out if and when they let me. (Saadawi 1988 , 10)

3. Her Cousin

This one has been so close to the girl since their childhood. Once, when they have grown up, he comes to her to play together remembering their past time. They have a race like what they used to do. In this occasion, he gives a new experience to the girl, kissing the girl

so that she becomes confused of this,

I was convulsed by a strange and violent trembling. For a moment which passed like lightning through my feelings I wished he would stretch out his arm further and hold me tight, but then this odd secret desire was transformed into a wild fury. (Saadawi 1988 , 21)

She likes this and hates it in the same time.

4. Her Husband

He is an engineer. (Saadawi 1988 . 53) This man is the one who first marries the woman doctor. Being left by his beloved mother he finds his life is empty but it becomes full again after meeting the woman doctor,

'Did you love your mother?'

His eyes filled with tears for a moment. 'Very much,' he said. I was unmoved by his tears. He went on, 'After she died, the world seemed empty... but I found you and it was full again.'

(Saadawi 1988, 58)

From the dialogue it is seen that the man is not a strong one. Nonetheless, after he becomes a husband he controls and dominates his wife too much,

'I'm the man.'

'So what?'

'I'm in charge.'

'In charge of what?'

'Of this house and all that's in it, including you.' (Saadawi 1988 , 63)

5. An Artist

He is an artist (Saadawi 1988, 89) who has tried to love a woman but always fails,

'An artist isn't content unless he himself is satisfied with what he's done. (Saadawi 1988, 89)

He is a kind of man with good respects towards woman. He likes honest and open woman,

I like a woman who's honest and open. (Saadawi, 1988, 96)

These minor characters are mentioned because they may give much help to the writer to describe more clearly the major one.

III.2 The Struggle of A Woman In Finding Self-Identity

In this part, the writer will make the analysis of the major character, the woman doctor in finding her self-identity. Since the life of this character inhibits all parts of the novel and is told more or less respectively, the writer divides the analysis into some headings. Those are the major character as a young girl, as a student, as a student of the faculty of medicine, as

a daughter, as a doctor, as a wife, and she is as a widow. Through this way of analysis, the writer hopes he may describe her struggle to find her self-identity and in the same time reveal the the psychological conflicts she undergoes by which she becomes an extraordinary woman.

III.3.1 As A Young Girl

The author portrays the major character as a young girl who really does not know herself. First of all, she is a girl who has been in conflict with her own femininity since the very beginning of her life.

The conflict between me and my femininity began very early on, before my female characteristics had become pronounced and before I knew anything about myself, my sex and my origins, indeed before I knew the nature of the cavity which had housed me before I was expelled into the wide world." (Saadawi 1988 , 9)

This quotation shows that the girl hates her own nature and that she does not know anything about many things in relation to herself. She often asks why she is different from her brother in the way of eating, behaving, playing and so on while she wants to be equal with him. Because of this she protests God why He Created her a girl not a

bird or a boy. (Saadawi 1988, 11)

She often compares, in the childhood, herself to her brother, as a man, on physical matters such as the hair style, dress, and the way of playing. She always questions why there must be so many differences between them.

The girl becomes more confused when one of the female maturity characteristics, menstruation, comes to her for the first time.

My head spun and I saw something red. I didn't know what had happened to me.... (Saadawi 1988, 11). Was this unclean procedure the only way for girls to get maturity? Could a human being really live for several days at the mercy of the involuntary masculine activity? God must really hate girls to have tarnished them with this curse. I felt that God had favoured boys in everything. (Saadawi 1988 , 12)

The quoted expression shows that the girl really does not recognize what has just happened to her is actually natural. Moreover, she does not feel regretful to protest God who Has Created her. It is probably because she has not understood about this either.

In the next part of the novel, the author describes that the girl, in the end of her childhood, begins to

know her condition. (Saadawi 1988, 13) She is now aware of herself that physically she is mature though still a very young girl. She understands that her childhood is not pleasant.

Approaching psychologically, the writer finds that in the period, childhood, the child's id is very dominant so that she behaves very freely regardless ethics or values, neglecting good or evil, and encompasses no morality. According to Freud, small children who are not imbued with the restraints of society operate pure id impulses. They are egocentric, selfish, and solely interested in their own pleasure. (Guches 1980 , 115)

This kind of attitude of a child, in the beginning, can be tolerated because usually and normally a child is not aware what he or she is saying. Children in general do not care if what they are doing is good or bad. This does not mean that they are led freely do what they want.

It is commonly understood that a new borne child is like a white paper. Everybody may write down anything on it. In this case the parents play very important role in filling the white blank paper since they are the ones who are very close to the child. They are people whom the child meets, sees and listens to most of the time. The mother especially, has more responsibility in educating her child as well as the father but naturally a mother

has more delicate sense by which she may understand what and how her child is. So that she almost fully understand how to bring the child up.

The mentioned assumption seems to be different from what is found in the case of the major character described as a young girl. Her parents educates her to be normal woman, to behave as a normal woman with special nature and characteristics, but she does very differently from what is hoped by her parents. Unfortunately, the author does not show clearly how the parents educate their daughter. The author only describes the daughter's protests towards her parents and the responds of them to her protests.

What the young girl does towards her parents, especially the mother is not good. It is natural that a child, a son or daughter, respects his or her parents. A child is indebted to the parents.

III.3.2 As A Student

This girl is the clever one and her achievement at school is good by which her father is proud of. However there is a subject she dislikes very much : home economics,

I love school except for the home economics.
(Saadawi 1988, 19)

This proves that she does not like to be busy with home matters.

On the other hand, she is very active in the organizational activities provided in the school. She joins drama society, the debating society, the athletics club, and the music and art clubs. (Saadawi 1988 , 19)

In real life it is not difficult to find this kind of girl. Young man and young woman, a girl as well as a boy should be active in various activities. They must be well prepared to face their future. They need to be trained with many kinds of skill. Besides studying the school materials they should try to know the world outside school to prepare themselves to live in the coming time which needs more knowledge, skill and experience. Organizational activities and sports are good for this.

Organizational activities and sports are good for both young man and young woman for developing their potency. Through these activities they try to understand their talent and to interact with many different kinds of people. On the other hand, these activities can make them against their own nature. This is clearer seen in the modern age. It is rather difficult to differentiate the kinds of sport programed for men and women. What is done by man is also done by woman. There is football for

men and for women, there is wrestling for men and for women, and so forth. This is not good for educating the young generation.

The young generation are the ones who are responsible for the continuation of the nation and state. They must be well educated to make their own identities, the identity of their country, their culture. If they are educated in the way which gradually eliminates the difference between man and woman and so to treat them absolutely equal, the coming generation will regard no division or description of job between jobs for men and for women.

III.3.3 As A Student of the Faculty of Medicine

The author for many times shows the hatred of the girl to be female,

I hated my femininity, resented my nature and knew nothing about my body. All that left for me was to reject, to challenge my nature, resist all the desires of my body; prove to my mother and grandmother that I was not a woman like them, that I would'n spend my life in the kitchen peeling onions and garlic, wasting all my days so that my husband could eat and eat. "

(Saadawi 1988, 22)

It is clear that the girl does not like her femininity and will refuse everything connected to femininity. In addition, she wants to be different from the other women, in this case her mother and grandmother who still perform duties which are usually done by women. Unfortunately, the author does not give explanations or descriptions why the girl chooses this way.

To achieve this goal she chooses the faculty of medicine,

Yes, medicine...The word had a terrifying effect on me....It inspired respect, even veneration, in my mother and brother and father. I'd make my mother tremble with fright and look at me reverently; I'd make my brother terrified and my father beg me for help. (Saadawi 1988, 23)

Considering this point, the writer sees that this woman has rather strange motivation in choosing a specialty. Medicine is greatly needed by everyone and so that the man or woman of medicine must make their profession to be helpful. Nevertheless, this young woman by medicine wants to show that she is powerful and everybody should respect her and ask for her help..

The behaviour of this young woman may represents her need of power. According to D.G Winter, a psychologist, one of motivations is the need for power. It is a

tendency to seek impact, control, or influence over others, and to be seen as a powerful individual. People with the strong need for power, he argues, are more apt to belong to organizations and seek office than those low in the need for power. They are also apt to be in professions in which their power need may be fulfilled. In addition, they try to show the trappings of power. (Feldman 1994, 318). The previous quotation proves the truth of the theory. In addition, it is seen that someone willing to be powerful has great ambition to succeed.

As a student of medicine the young woman ofcourse always deals with the parts or organs of body and the way how those parts work. Because of this activity she often becomes uncertain and her curiosity encourages her to reveal the mysteries of the human body. Therefore she always consult her textbooks and finds that science can reveal everything, science is the solution for her questioning mind. (Saadawi 1988, 32) However, in other occasions she finds that science is merciless, mighty, knows no shame, and harsh. (Saadawi 1988, 34) This indicates that the young woman's mind easily changes which may be influenced by her wish or ambition to do everything quickly.

Looking into the life of a doctor to describe one's struggle to find self-identity is appropriate. A doctor

has more knowledge about human being than other people because he or she studies how the body organs work, what their functions are, how to treat those parts and so on. Besides, a doctor is close to his or herself both physically and mentally. Therefore, he or she can describe more clearly why someone is behaving such and such. It will be different if the object of analysis is a driver or merchant who generally do not know much about the human body organs, their functions, and how they influence one's behaviour.

III.3.4 As A Woman Doctor

After working for years dealing with death, illness, sickman, laboratories and professors she finds her life very boring. So she decides to leave those things and she then moves to a remote village. In this new place she lives in a little house. (Saadawi 1988, 41) There she tries again and again to recognize herself and her life. She finds this place peaceful and very friendly so that she may relaxingly thinks herself and her life. She is pleased of this. In this peaceful resort, in a poor village, she is able to ask herself more and more. She can she the world more freely,

I'd wasted my childhood and adolescence and the dawn of my young womanhood in a fierce battle:

against whom? Against myself, my humanity and my natural impulses... (Saadawi 1988, 43)

All these prove that happiness, peace and success do not depend merely on material riches. This one is important in the human life but not everything. A human being has mind and feeling. They need consumptions which can not be fulfilled by material aspects. They need spirituality because the inner of a human being confesses there is a power which masters this universe including his or herself and which regulates their life.

It is not too difficult to find people who are faced with hard life or misfortunes who ask for help to no one but to spiritual power. It is very often in such condition people say, "Oh God!". This is one of the proofs of the human nature, admitting that there is a strong power to which they can ask for everything. This nature may bring the owner to be a pious person but it also can make them misled if they can not control this nature.

During her life in the village she gets some meaningful experiences which make her more and more understand what life is. One of those experiences is when she was examining a patient. At that time her mind was rather disturbed for psychological disorder she was undergoing,

I heard him saying, Don't cry doctor. I'm all right." I felt that he he was the doctor and I the patient." (Saadawi 1988, 46,47)

This shows that the woman doctor feels that she is very weak, weaker than the sickman. She seems to feel as if she had no power at all. She admits her weakness.

In society such case is not difficult to be found. When a person is powerful or has influential means toward others he or she sometimes feels that they can do everything without the help of others. But when the misfortune comes to them they just realize that life can not be done individually.

Viewed from Freud's psychoanalytical point of view This woman's ego is starting to appear and plays its role. Ego is usually thought of as the conscious mind; however a portion of it resides in the unconscious. It is also called the *reality principle*. Its function is to govern the id and channel the id's drives into socially acceptable outlets. (Guches 1981, 115) The woman in this phase is conscious that she is not a strong human being who does not need the help of others. She can think really and logically. Indeed, society can accept this confession. The writer finds it as a praiseworthy step to start a better life. This is much better than she holds tightly her opposing principle. This is a proof that a

person can not live merely relying on his or her mind.

III.3.5 As A Daughter

Her parents love her very much. Her mother educates her to be a good woman. Her father is so proud of her good achievement at school shows this to his friends visiting his house. Nevertheless, she is opposite of this. She wants to be like her brother physically and mentally. She does not like to have long hair; she does not like to wear woman dress. (Saadawi 1988, 15) She really hates marriage. She wants to be free as free as her brother, a man, in everything. (Saadawi 1988, 10)

This daughter once for the first time left the flat in which her family is living without her mother's permission and went to a Ladies Hairdresser to have her hair cut short. Finding this her mother got very angry on her, gave her a shrill cry and slapped her face hard. (Saadawi 1988, 18) The girl does not feel regretful nor cries even she regards this as a victory.

For the first time in my life I understood the meaning of victory ; fear led only to defeat, and victory demanded courage. My fear of my mother had vanished; that great aura which had made me terrified had fallen away. I really know that she was just a ordinary woman. The

slaps she delivered were the strongest thing about her but they no longer scared me--because they didn't any more. (Saadawi 1988, 18-19)

This shows that her id is very dominant and controlling over her. She does not care of ethics nor morality. She takes very easy something which must be regarded wholeheartedly.

The writer finds this happening as a serious misfortune: a daughter does not respect her own mother who has borne her in a very hard and tiring condition. It is a very untolerable deed of a normal human being. If this really happens in real life the parents must be extra-careful in overcoming this problem. They should make serious effort to educate this kind of girl. This is not impossible happens in human real life moreover in this age, modern age in which people give less attention toward morality and religion. Unfortunately, the author does not tell how the mother of the girl, then, solves this problem.

As a matter of fact the girl after becoming a adult woman realizes that what she has done, challenging her mother, makes her unpeaceful. It is mentioned in the last part of the novel,

I didn't understand anything. I was blind. All I could see was myself. The battles I was fighting

hid the truth from me... Battles against everybody, starting with my mother." (Saadawi 1988, 99)

The development of one's mentality is influenced by the environment in which he or she is living , people surrounding and time. It is clearly seen in real life the differences between people living in a remote village and those who are living in a big city. People living in modern time have more needs than those who lived in the past time.

III.3.6 As A Wife

She admits, after her long way in answering who actually she is, that she can not live alone.

She always imagines a man who will accompany her, will help her in solving her problems, a man who loves her and she loves him but she does not know who will be that imagined man which makes her not able to sleep soundly. (Saadawi 1988, 49)

Fortunately, she meets a man who may probably someone she has been searching for a long time. He is the son of one of her patients, an old mother whom she fails to save her life. He is an engineer. The woman doctor sees that this man is of her type though she had a doubt in her mind before deciding to choose him,

I stared into his face: there was a look in his eyes which caught my attention, but his expression didn't convince me; the only death he had seen was his mother's, and he was unfamiliar with illness and pain. Would he be able to satisfy this old experienced mind or excite the interest of this greedy and totally unrestrained child?

But he was the first man my eyes had rested on
..... (Saadawi, 1988, 54)

After getting married she feels as if she had been deceived by this basically a sacred moment. By marriage she loses her name, the first word she ever heard and which has linked her conscious and subconscious mind with her existence because her husband attaches his name to the outside of her. People call her by her new name. She feels as if she'd died and her spirit had passed into the body of another woman who looks like her but has a strange new name. (Saadawi 1988, 62)

This tragedy should not happen if the woman is very careful in choosing a man to be her husband because marriage should be planned for long life of both the wife and husband. She should not have been in hurry to do it before getting ready. This does not mean it should be postponed for a long time and is done very late. The

quotation shows that the woman doctor is actually not fully ready yet specifically in deciding to choose the engineer as her partner.

On the other hand, the engineer seems not to have been ready to be a good husband. He can not appreciate well the rights of his wife and is so dominating over her. He wants his wife to do all of what he wishes. He wants her wife, a doctor, to close the practice. He states that he can finance their needs. The wife argues that she does not merely wants money by opening the practice but to help others. (Saadawi 1988, 63) Finally, divorce is the last choice for them.

The writer views this catastrophe happens because they can not well manage their rights and obligations as a wife, a woman, and a husband, a man. The husband seems to neglect the rights of his wife. He (the writer), finds that this kind of family relation (between husband and wife) often happens in real life. It will not take place if both of the two persons understand their rights and obligations, and apply them in their life.

A man and woman must really realize that they have certain virtues and weaknesses. It is impossible for a man to do all of his duties without the help from a woman and vice versa. A Pakistani thinker, Dr. Muhammad Hamidullah, argues that to avoid redundance, Nature has

not willed a perfect equality among the two sexes, but a complementary distribution of avocations and functions. For instance, it will not be possible for man to conceive a baby; similarly the natural attributes of men cannot be exercised by women. She has more delicate physical constitution, effecting even the weight of her brain and bones, and she will have a taste more in conformity with the need of the conservation of delicacy. More robust, man will have greater strength and therefore more endowed to engage in the more painful parts of life. To each will be according to his (or her) requirements, both natural and reasonable. Further, he states that if there is a certain natural inequality between the two sexes, in many other aspects of life they resemble each other. Therefore their rights and obligations in these domains will also be similar. For example both of them must worship God, must perform social duties, love each other and so on (Hamidullah 1979, 153-154)

III.3.7 As A Widow

After a while, after divorce, the woman doctor feels free. She is the manager. No one may command or force her to do something,

For the first time in my life a heavy burden was lifted from my heart, the burden of living in

a house shared by others." (Saadawi, 1988, 69)

This indicates that she finds an absolute freedom after living for several times with her husband, living in a house with almost no right for her.

However, she can not tolerate loneliness for long time. (Saadawi, 1988, 70) She wants to find a man who really understands her as a woman who loves her and whom she loves.

I decided to search for him everywhere; in palaces and caves, in night clubs and monasteries, in the factories of science and the temples of art, in bright light and in pitch dark, on lofty summits and down deep chasms, in bustling cities and in wild deserted forests.

(Saadawi, 1988, 71)

This shows her serious effort to find a partner, a husband, whom she has been imagining for a long time. Moreover, it shows that human being can not live alone. Aristoteles termed human being as *zoon politicon* meaning that they must live together, living in cooperation among one another.

Fortunately, after a serious struggle, she meets the imagined man. He is an artist. To her this man really understands and appreciates the woman rights, potencies and so on, as he respects man. (Saadawi 1988, 94) She is

so delighted and in deep happiness. In the last of her struggle it told that she fully realizes what she has been doing so far. (Saadawi 1988, 99)

Psychoanalytically, in this phase the woman's superego is playing its function. If the id is the source of the drive for pleasure, and the ego is reality, then the superego is the source of ethics. As a moral censoring agency, the superego is the home of the conscience and of pride. (Guches 1980, 116). The woman doctor finally understands that much of her steps oppose morality and ethics.

The description above shows that the woman doctor has fallen from her throne. She can not imagine anymore that she wants to defeat men because really she needs a man. In the other hand, her former husband has also proved that he can not live alone without a woman. He finds his life is empty but becomes full again after a woman comes to him. All these indicate that human being can not live individually. They are naturally different and each has his and her own virtues and weaknesses. The differences between them can be well united if everyone has mutual understanding. This is one of the most important factors to make this world peaceful.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION