



Jalil Mammadguluzadeh and Gender Inequality: An Issue to be Focused on?

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Abstract

Unfortunately, gender inequality remains one of the most complicated issues of the contemporary world. Despite the major progress towards gender equality achieved in the 21st century, women are still disadvantaged compared to men in terms of access to social and economic opportunities [7]. Interestingly, most people think of Western society, when they hear about women's liberation movements that are taking place throughout the history. In contrast, extremely strict dress codes, forced and early marriages, struggle for gender equality are things coming to the mind while speaking about Eastern culture. In order to understand what was happening at that time in Eastern culture, it is important to go back to the origins of struggles for women's rights, economic, and gender justice.

Keywords: Gender Inequality; Jalil Mammadguluzadeh; Molla Nasreddin; Media; Education

Jalil Mammadguluzadeh: Biography

An outstanding master of short stories, author of extremely deep psychological dramas and realistic prose, educator, possessor of subtle humor and caustic satire Jalil Mammadguluzadeh is one of the most important figures of Azerbaijani literature and social thought, who, with his highly important and ideological works, have influenced not only Azerbaijani, but also the world culture in general [2]. He is one of the few people who were able to drop the upper visible layer of important issues and show the deep and real meaning of the events that took place at that time.

In fact, in his works, he mainly focused on several topics. Illiteracy, the hypocrisy of clergy, gender inequality were the most discussed issues in the movie "Qəm Pəncərəsi" (A window to sadness). Jalil Mammadguluzadeh defended the rights and interests of common people, mercilessly revealing backwardness, conservatism, injustice, discrimination, national isolation, and other vices of society [2]. By showing the way ordinary people lived their daily lives, he discovered the painful points of reality and pushed them to wake up and reflect on their future.

Jalil Mammadguluzadeh and gender inequality

Jalil Mammadguluzadeh was a true defender of women's freedom. He raised intriguing issues related to women's issues and harshly criticized the situations that hindered the liberation of women, as well as their escape from the kingdom of darkness and ignorance. Mammadguluzadeh questioned the future of the nation because women were responsible for raising children, in other words, the future generation and the presence of illiterate women meant more illiterate people in society [2].

He claimed that the way people are raised from a very early age will determine what they will become in the future. He argued that a woman can grow up within the four walls of a home, hide under a veil from prying eyes, but at the end become a spoiled woman [5]. On the other hand, there are those who appear in public with an open face and bare head but are distinguished by impeccable behavior. Jalil Mammadguluzadeh further questioned: "But if we have no reason to think so about our women, then why do we allow ourselves to immure the unfortunates within the walls of our own home? Why did we make our women slaves, concubines, cooks, servants, just toys for fun?" [5].

Molla Nasreddin: Problems of women

Unsurprisingly, he wondered how to fix this problem. He found a solution by creating Molla Nasreddin magazine, which described the ordinary lives of people with a little humor in it. The magazine encouraged its readers to look into the surrounding reality, which was full of delusions and fanaticism. This magazine made people turn to their own lives as well as imagine the lives of other ordinary people. It helped to fight against social injustice, backwardness, illiteracy, ignorance of masses, and gender inequality, which were present at that time in Azerbaijan [3].

Molla Nasreddin was the first magazine that used drawings in print. The editorial board was guided by the fact that there were many illiterate people in the society, therefore the editors preferred pictures to the text. This is one of the reasons why the magazine in a very satirical way criticized people that did not allow their children, especially girls, to attend schools. The magazine sarcastically asked the readers: "Why should a girl go to school? After all, the only thing that women are expected to know is how to prepare food and raise children." [3].

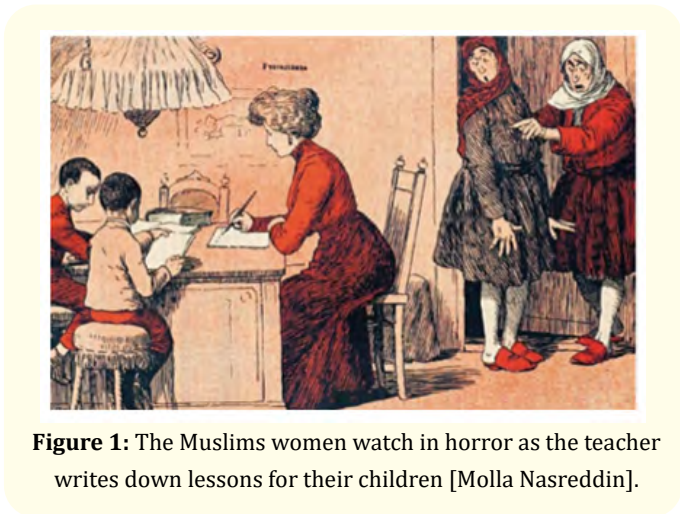


Figure 1: The Muslims women watch in horror as the teacher writes down lessons for their children [Molla Nasreddin].

One of the main concerns of the magazine was the rights of women and the problem of their emancipation. Molla Nasreddin magazine was very strict and tough regarding the liberation of women's rights and did not want to make even the slightest concessions [1]. The magazine played an important role in securing the right to vote for Azerbaijani women in 1919.

The authors of this magazine considered the behavior of many intellectuals and enlightened religious leaders to be hypocritical.

They wrote that because most of the women were fully veiled and engaged in household chores and childcare, only a few of them had a chance to receive a proper education. Hence, they realized that while there is blind obedience to religion, it is impossible to see a woman free and literate. Consequently, it is not surprising that Molla Nasreddin became the only major satirical magazine in the entire Muslim world and the Middle East [3].



Figure 2: Abdul Rashid: "Dear lady, regardless how much progress you've made, as long as your face is not covered, you cannot compare with Muslim women." [Molla Nasreddin].

Azerbaijan and gender inequality

The reason why the rights of women was an issue at that time is because the late 19th – early 20th centuries in most countries are associated with the struggle of women's liberation from exploitation, oppression, for the right to study, receive education, as well as for the acquisition of civil and political rights.

Although Azerbaijan granted women the right to vote as early as 1919, there were still some topics that clearly illustrated the existence of gender inequality. In their daily lives, women have faced domestic violence, forced and arranged marriages, child brides, unjust hierarchy in the household, and the difficulties of raising children. As a result, in Azerbaijan, the topic of family and women issue became one of the most pressing problems in the beginning of 20th century and was widely discussed among literati and educatory.

Since Azerbaijani women were isolated from social and political life, were considered illiterate, having fanatical traditions, lacking national self-awareness, this created challenges not only in the

life of woman but also in the life of the entire nation, as well as endangered its glorious future [1]. Nevertheless, Azerbaijani intelligentsia believed that progress was impossible until women were free and educated [1].

Interestingly, not only Molla Nasreddin magazine, but Azerbaijani periodical press in general played a vital role in the struggle for the freedom of women, their rights, as well as against the illiteracy and isolation of women from public life [1].

For instance, the Russian-language newspaper “Kaspi” in 1902 alone published over a hundred materials on gender issues. In 1903, the issues related to the problem of the emancipation of Azerbaijani women were first raised in the Turkic-speaking press “Shargi Rus” (Russian East) [1]. The main goal of the first-ever women’s magazine “Ishiq” (Light) was to spread the illumination among women themselves [9]. The magazine wanted to maintain the situation where Muslim girls would receive an education, and thus eliminate illiteracy.

Is gender inequality still an issue?

Apparently, it is interesting to see if Jalil Mammadguluzadeh’s ideas are outdated or correspond to today’s realities. Who can argue, a lot has changed in 115 years. Life does not stand still; time makes its own changes, and the way people live and think changes as well. Should parents send their daughters to school? Most people believe that this is no longer a controversial topic and most parents do not face this question. Nevertheless, according to UNICEF report around 132 million girls do not attend school across the world [11].

In today’s world, the media’s role in the lives of people appears inevitable. People follow the latest trends by watching both traditional and online media. Media also continue to influence people’s perceptions and ideas about the role of women in society. Since the creation of the media, it has been observed that it tends to propagate gender inequality. Compared to men, women are more often depicted in a sexual manner, fragile, innocent in the media [10]. Therefore, it is not surprising that from a very early age, children are strongly influenced by the gendered stereotypes that are presented to them through the media [6].

For instance, in 2020, Azerbaijani deputy argued that ordinary violence is described as a violation of women’s rights; however, in his opinion, it is wrong to label domestic problems as gender

inequality [13]. He then added that women are “flowers”, and it is the duty of men to protect them, and feminist movements try to break those traditions [8].

As can be seen, gender stereotypes that women are vulnerable and in need of protection still exist in Azerbaijan. It is even more devastating to see that violence is not seen as a violation of women’s rights, but only as a domestic problem, which is something very ordinary. Unfortunately, this is a big problem that takes place not only in Azerbaijan, but also in other countries. While one in five of all women between the ages of 15 and 49 report are experiencing physical or sexual violence, around 50 countries do not have laws that would protect women from sexual or physical violence. And this is statistics compiled from reported incidents of violence, thus, one could imagine how many incidents of violence go unreported [12].



Figure 3: Clear illustration of domestic violence[Molla Nasreddin].

While at some point Azerbaijani deputy is right to say that women need protection, he does not state what kind of protection is needed. It is not a protection from men because women are fragile and cannot protect themselves, it is protection from the government because it is the duty of state to enforce fair policies and laws, which will ensure that the rights of citizen are not violated, regardless of whether it is a man or a woman.

Consequently, even though great progress can be seen over the past decades, there are still a lot of issues that have remained unchanged. Compared to the past, more girls are enrolled in school, few girls are forced to marry at an early age, more women are involved in politics, and more laws are changed to improve gender equality. However, despite this progress, women still face a lot of challenges such as discriminatory laws and social laws that are still considered persistent, the underrepresentation of women at all levels of political leadership, and different forms of discrimination [12].

Unfortunately, according to the annual data of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs, women aged 15-17 gave birth to 2129 children in 2018 only [4]. In 2011, the number of children born from such women was 4,392 [4]. It means that there is progress because the number has halved, but it is not enough to claim that the problem has been completely resolved.

As a result, it is clear that the myth of the Azerbaijani man and woman has not been completely overcome and still continues to live in the heads of people and, unfortunately, can be applied to the whole world. Almost 115 years passed since Molla Nasreddin was founded, but gender inequality is still a problem, and it is not known how long it will take to change.

Gender equality is possible: Solution

Yet, one should not be pessimistic about it because by applying the right strategies and policies, gender equality can be achieved in a shorter period of time. Mr. António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, believes that to achieve “an unfinished business”, namely gender equality, right actions should be taken [12].

Conclusion

For this reason, one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in particular goal five, addresses gender inequality and aims to empower all women in the world. It offers several solutions for it. Firstly, it is important to end practices such as forced marriage at an early age, female genital mutilation, various forms of gender-based violence and discrimination in the public and private spheres [12]. States have to realize that these issues are not based on individual level, but on societal. Because in most women are economically dependent on their partners, equal access to quality education, health care, economic resources, and participation in political life both for females and males should be ensured [12]. To achieve gender equality, equal opportunities in terms of employment should be given and domestic work should be valued and recognized through the establishment of public services, social protection policies, as well as the “promotion of shared responsibility in the household and family” [12]. Most importantly, to promote gender equality states have to adopt policies and binding legislation.

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