

**Women in *One Thousand and One Nights* and Asian Novels of
Gobineau: a Comparative Study**

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Literature has long been intermingled with community; societies and literature have been in constant interaction, each having a stronger effect on the other at different time. Therefore, studying literary works contributes greatly to the clarification of the context which created them and also in clarifying the declining and growing trend of a community along with historical works mingled with literature and arts. Women as half of the community population have been a subject worthy of further research and study in literature. The primary criticism to community is that, despite women's statistical equivalence with men, there is an inexplicable nonequivalence in their presence in literature. Not choosing females as fiction characters or choosing them with least efficiency and utmost dormancy is a proof to the quality of their presence in literature. Aside from their limited presence, with a quick glance at literature we will find out that literature almost in all communities does not present a fine-looking portray of female characters and excludes women from the story despite their presence in the community. This issue has been most apparent in Oriental literature

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especially with Hindu roots. Most of these women are represented in characters as goddesses, procuresses, sorcerer or spiritual myths.

Legend of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, or Persian name of A Thousand Legends, is one of the major literary works. Its first edition was in Sanskrit with Hindu roots which was first translated into Old Persian at the time of Achaemenes and was later translated into Persian from Arabic by Abdol Latif Tasoji at the time of Mohammad Shah. In this chronicle, many characters are present with different roles, women enjoying the least degree of social freedom and rights. Women are depicted fighting for minimum rights and standing against a patriarchal society, and are consequently downgraded in literature to procuresses in many occasions. The unique characteristic of legend of the *One Thousand and One Nights* is the numerous and highlighted presence of female characters compared with other contemporary literary works or even afterwards. However, it must be confessed that their high number is not a proof of their social effect, and most of them are reflected with the same dormancy. However, there are some characters among these women who turn into critics of their society and fight for their minimum rights. Shahrzad, the daughter of the minister, is the top figure in this regard. She was also convicted of adultery with King along with other women and sentenced to death, and her husband is also disloyalty to her. She buys her own life and other girls through narrating *A Thousand and One Nights* legends. *One Thousand and One Nights* can be considered one of the best Oriental works, understanding which will resolve many complexities of social criticism of a traditional Oriental society. This work of literature which conveys many Eastern images has crossed geographical borders and entered European countries especially France, where it has attracted many readers and Orientalists. Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau, a French political representative was sent to Iran from 1855 to 1861. He was one of the Orientalists who took much interest into *One Thousand and One Nights* and, inspired by this work, wrote *Asian Novels*. It is important to note that in such an artistic creation, he used experiences of his traveling to Iran and directly studied his contemporary Iranian community. In his fictional collection consisting of six stories of *Shamakha Dancer* (Caucasus), *The Famous Witch* (Iran), *Qanbar Ali Story* (Iran), *Turkmen War* (Iran), *Kandahar Lovers* (Afghanistan) and *Travel Life* (Eastern Turkey), as well as *One Thousand and One Nights*, female characters are present. They are typically inactive, devoted women, or in other words angles in houses, whose actions had a

major influence on socially active women. The repetition of such images has inspired the present study.

This study aimed to analyze all female characters in the two works. The female characters herein, who are members of court, wealthy class, the public, bond women and witches, are categorized into active, half active and none-active based on their role. The comparative French study of these two works implies that a woman in each stage of her life in a Patriarchal Society loses a part of her activeness. They enjoy a relative freedom at early childhood. However, being treated and raised differently forces them towards dormancy and absolute submission. In other words, the ideal of a patriarchal society is to raise women with such characteristics, and normally in case any woman defying such defined limits, is addressed as a sorceress and or a procuress.

A comparative study of these two works would serve as a proof of the influence that Gobineau received from *One Thousand and One Nights*. In fact, his literary works appear to be a small version of *One Thousand and One Nights*. *Asian Novels* are less varied and there are, therefore, fewer characters in stories but they are not substantially different from other (female) characters. In addition, this story has the geographical diversity as *One Thousand and One Nights*. In both works, society is depicted as hostile to women in which women should challenge their patriarchal society or are sentenced to death without reaching their aim or dejected by their society for the minimum rights such as freedom to choose their spouses. However, it should be noted that women in *Asian Novels* live a close-to-reality life compared with women in *One Thousand and One Nights*. In this work, there are fewer witches and other fictional characters and are depicted in a more realistic form, closer to the world where the readers dwell.

Keywords: Legend of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, *Asian Novels*, Gobineau, Comparative Analysis, Patriarchy, Woman.