



Universidad Nacional de Catamarca - Facultad de Humanidades
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The Image of Woman in Al-Rafi'i's Literature

Hafida Becharef, Ph.D.

University of Saida Moulay Tahar

hafidabecharef169@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines the image of woman in the literature of Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i by investigating her presence in the book *Wahy al-Qalam*. It explores the status of women between religious conceptions and the social and intellectual transformations that characterized the modern era, and reveals al-Rafi'i's position toward calls for women's liberation and Westernization, as well as his insistence on maintaining her connection to religious and moral values.

The study identifies multiple representations of women, including the poor and oppressed woman, the foreign woman, the rebellious dancer, and the lost mother. Al-Rafi'i highlights women's suffering resulting from materialism, traditions, and harsh social circumstances. He also presents the dancer from a humanistic perspective, going beyond judging her on the basis of her outward appearance and social circumstances. In his literature, the mother emerges as a symbol of sacrifice, compassion, faith, and giving. The study concludes that al-Rafi'i's image of woman combines human, social, and moral dimensions and calls for the preservation of her dignity and virtue.

Keywords: Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i; image of woman; Wahy al-Qalam; Arab woman; poor and oppressed woman; foreign woman; dancer; mother; religious and moral values.

1. Introduction

Anyone following the critical movement in Arab culture will notice the relative decline in studies and analyses of al-Rafi'i's literature when compared with those of his contemporaries, such as al-'Aqqad, Taha Hussein, Salama Musa, Tawfiq al-Hakim, and others. This is so despite the intellectual and linguistic richness of his work and the diversity of his writings across the various fields of literature, including poetry, prose, essays, stories, and countless studies. This may be attributed to the Islamic orientation and authentic Arab heritage that al-Rafi'i chose for himself. From this standpoint, I have attempted to read part of this literary achievement within the modest abilities I possess in the field of literature and criticism. All I possess is my appreciation of this writer's style, my intellectual affinity with his ideas, and my regret at the marginalization of his work. The study proceeds as follows: first, it provides a general overview of woman in the modern era and the contradictions, fluctuations, and tensions accompanying her position; then it examines her image through some of the stories included in *Wahy al-Qalam*; finally, it arrives



at a conception of what woman should be in order to contribute to the advancement of the Arab nation.

2. Woman between Religion and Modernity

2.1. The Image of Woman in Religions

There is no doubt that all revealed religions sanctified woman and placed her in a position worthy of her. However, the distortion and fabrication that affected religious teachings relegated her to the lowest levels of society until Islam came and restored her dignity, liberating her from men's oppression and domination. Before that, she had suffered under male desire and selfishness, occupying a position somewhere between humanity and animality. Man regarded her as property to be seized or an object passed from one hand to another, reducing her to an instrument for reproduction or a vehicle for his desires and whims.

Islam drew attention to her status, honored her existence, and granted her rights commensurate with her intellectual and physical capacities. It placed her on an equal footing with man in religious obligations, while taking her physical vulnerability into account by relieving her of financial responsibility and assigning it to the man, whether she was his daughter, wife, or mother, as stated in the Qur'an: "And We have enjoined upon man, concerning his parents: his mother bore him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Give thanks to Me and to your parents; to Me is the final return" (The Holy Qur'an, Luqman 31:14).

2.2. The Image of Woman in the Modern Era

With the beginnings of the nineteenth century, calls for women's liberation and unveiling began to emerge. This followed the contact that took place between East and West through the secular colonialism of Muslim countries, missionary movements, Orientalism, and the journeys of writers and scholars to Western countries. They absorbed this civilization with fascination for its deceptive brilliance and rampant materialism, returning to their homelands either resentful or stripped of their identity, sometimes in the name of renewal and at other times in the name of freedom. The beginnings may be traced to Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, who advocated women's legitimate rights while being influenced by the nature of French life in 1873 (Al-Rummani, n.d., p. 56).

After Britain's occupation of Egypt in 1882, Western-style feminist liberal ideas began to be promoted. Princess Nazli's salon became one of their principal venues (Raghib, 1986, pp. 216–217). Qasim Amin emerged prominently through his two books *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (The Liberation of Women) and *Al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The New Woman), published in 1899 and 1900 respectively. He was supported in this by Muhammad Abduh and Sa'd Zaghlul. Mansur Fahmi followed the same path in his thesis entitled *The Status of Women in Islamic Traditions and Its Developments*, published in 1913. Among the earliest followers were Safiyya, the wife of Sa'd Zaghlul, Huda Sha'rawi, Nabawiyya Musa, and Ciza Nabarawi (Raghib, 1986, p. 218). The first steps included removing the veil after the Rome Conference. With the beginning of the twentieth century, the golden age of liberal feminist movements began, and their calls spread throughout Muslim countries through the establishment of associations, the organization of seminars, and the preparation of conferences.

Gradually, Arab society witnessed increasing numbers of Muslims imitating the West, from clothing to the expansion of interaction between women and men, unveiling, dance parties, entertainment venues, gambling houses, adoption of foreign languages, and encouragement of everything that nourished manifestations of deviation from Islam.

In response, figures emerged to confront these predatory waves, refuting the views of missionaries and Orientalists and addressing the issue of women and their liberation. Among them was al-Rafi'i, who brought his knowledge and intellectual resources into an arena filled with the ideas of Salama Musa (al-Rafi'i, 2004, pp. 20–25), who advocated colloquialism, openly exposed literature, and Pharaonism; and those of Taha Hussein, author of *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jahili* (On Pre-Islamic Poetry) (al-Rafi'i, 2004, p. 26), alongside various literary and political schools. He encountered the intense conflict that filled seminars, the press, and the media, in which everyone engaged without fully recognizing the destruction and ruin being prepared for the nation.

Many battles therefore took place between al-Rafi'i and advocates of renewal and Westernization, and he produced several works in response, including *Wahy al-Qalam*, *Rasa'il al-Ahzan*, and others.

3. Manifestations of Woman in al-Rafi'i's Literature

Al-Rafi'i addressed woman from numerous perspectives: as wife, mother, daughter, beloved, foreign woman, dancer, and in other forms. When reading *Wahy al-Qalam*, the primary work adopted in this study, one finds that he approaches woman from a humanistic perspective that in some respects surpasses the humaneness with which he portrays man. His description is precise, luminous, and profound, proceeding from the image of the ideal woman who rises through her femininity by means of education in virtuous morals and higher values, cultivating goodness within the human soul and revealing her concerns and suffering. Through his love of woman, his admiration for her beauty, and his celebration of her, he wrote some of the finest prose in modern Arabic literature on the philosophy of beauty, love, and woman. We have selected the following representations:

3.1. The Poor and Oppressed Woman (the Pasha's Daughter)

She is a young woman, the daughter of a pasha (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 68), and the wife of so-and-so Bey, the daughter of a wealthy and prominent man in that city. He describes her: "This woman had a radiant face and a flower-like complexion, like the rising moon; because of her beauty, you would think that the angels had nourished her with daylight and watered her with the light of the stars" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 71).

A polite, generous, noble, and well-off young man proposed to her. He loved the girl and she loved him, but in the pasha's eyes he was merely a fool. The pasha did not realize that the young man's approach to such a great man was, in its first implication, an open insult whereby the word "effendi" dared to approach the rank of "pasha." He therefore turned away from him in a manner signifying expulsion. Then the Bey came to propose to the girl solely because of a dowry amounting to one hundred feddans. He married her and took her to his palace, where she became miserable, sick at heart, and troubled after being forced into marriage and sold for the lowest price to someone she did not love.

Among the manifestations of her pain and intense grief, the writer describes her: "Grief entered the pasha's daughter, and she came to see nothing but the grave and wish for nothing but the grave. Fate then placed within her soul the meaning of clay and dust... Worry sickened the pasha's daughter and consumed her, transferring into her flesh what clay does to bodies, dissolving them beneath decay" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 68).

What increased the burning of her heart and the intensity of her suffering was that behind the palace she found a group of dilapidated houses known as shacks. A garbage collector lived there with his three children, whom he regarded as his greatest pride and finest achievements. He continued to praise them loudly and enumerate their virtues so that his neighbors could hear him every night boasting about them, including the pasha's daughter.

What can be inferred from this story is that al-Rafi'i issues a social appeal to fathers to free themselves from the grip of traditions in matters of marriage. It also contains a reference to the idea of consent: "Woman is for man a soul for a soul, not property for a buyer" (Prophetic hadith, source not specified).

This is what attracted the writer's attention in Arab society: the dominance of materialism in marriage, the spread of false bourgeois values, deceptive appearances, and excessive materialism immersed in desires and pleasures. These forces made this woman miserable until her palace was transformed into a grave after she lost her love, "the love that is the history of woman and nothing but a passing event in the life of man" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 69). The man here is the father, who valued his daughter in terms of money without realizing that it was the price of her disappointment, not her happiness. To convey and clarify this idea, al-Rafi'i resorts to philosophy to explain his thoughts, giving his text beauty and wonder: "The proper dowry is not what a woman receives before marriage, but what she finds after her husband takes her to his home... Her dowry is the way she is treated, which makes her a bride whose radiance and giving never fade" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 15).

This becomes clearer through his precise humanistic conception of love and his analysis and description of her beauty: "Her sorrowful heart cuts and tears her apart every moment; a poor woman suffers and twists beneath deadly blows from her own heart" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 68).

He is therefore quick to attend to the meanings of woman, and his emotions respond intensely to her story. Of her he says: "Nothing touches her soul without sprouting, greening, and flowering, as though the nature of beauty had hidden within her heart the secret of spring" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 71).

Woman becomes poor and deprived of the spirit of life only when she loses her heart in the name of a freedom that shackles her emotions and turns her into a commodity to be bought and sold, as though she were a slave in a slave market. This, in his view, is one of the consequences of the difficult paths through which women's liberation was pursued.

3.2. The Foreign Woman

In this article, al-Rafi'i addresses a direct message warning against marrying a foreign woman, in light of what he witnessed—and what the Arab world witnesses today—of the rush toward and fascination with Western women, whether for material purposes or for fleeting sexual love. He

says: "Do not, my educator brothers, marry a foreign woman. A foreign woman whom an Egyptian marries is a weapon of crime containing six rounds..." He then enumerates these crimes:

- National crime: represented by the decline in the prospects of the Egyptian woman.
- Moral crime: introducing foreign dispositions into our own dispositions and virtues.
- Social crime: injecting deviant elements into our blood and offspring.
- Political crime: enabling the foreigner to enter one of our homes.
- Religious crime: reducing the Egyptian man to a secondary or even tertiary position within his own household, after the lover.
- Humanitarian crime: the most serious of all, namely preferring desire to reason (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 182).

Marriage to a foreign woman thus involves both individual and social conflict. Its initial motivation may be an emotional relationship, but "woman exists in every woman, while reason does not exist in every woman" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 189), or it may be economic interests or an escape from reality. Its end is often conflict or separation. Marriage is built on multiple foundations, foremost among them trust, mutual respect, understanding, and a set of compromises offered by both parties. Yet the foreign woman, in many cases as presented by the author, views the Easterner with contempt. Cultural and civilizational heritage may also place the two parties in continual conflict, negatively affecting the children's psychology, as each seeks to impose his or her customs and traditions upon them. Possessiveness and control, spending more time with friends, failure to manage household affairs, neglect of domestic responsibilities, and marital infidelity may further intensify marital disputes.

After reviewing the defects of such a marriage, the writer points to the Eastern woman, whom the man imagined to be ignorant, coarse, and dry. Yet "he realized that she was like a mine: her soil contains its gold, her coal its diamond, and her ore its jewel; that her difficulty came from the difficulty of restrained chastity, that her roughness came from the roughness of proud love, and that her reserve came from the reserve of a religion transcending materiality; she was patient and faithful, and possessed selflessness unspoiled by greed" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 186).

Despite these virtues that al-Rafi'i sees in her, the Egyptian—or the Arab generally—rejected marrying her because of her ignorance and lack of education, which led him to prefer the Western woman. Al-Bashir al-Ibrahimi alluded to this in the following verses:

*They say when they gathered the enemy, they brought together their ranks:
You are the mother to us in the homeland and the father.
A girl safe from harm, and know that our offspring, when grown,
will abandon her tomorrow, as those who abandoned her did.
For in his view she is like a stone,
and he chooses a foreign bride from the Gypsies,
because she reads like a human being.
Take her to you, a pearl among pearls.*
(al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 65)

What further disturbed and troubled al-Rafi'i is expressed in this statement: "I learned, my brothers, only later that the Western wife may be with her Eastern husband like a tourist with her guide; far, far from it! He will neither be able to hold her to him nor compel her to remain faithful unless she is the dregs of society, whom even the people's flies disdain..." (Murtada, 1982, p. 84).

This is reinforced by the Philosopher Donkey, who says that he has never seen an Eastern donkey marry a Western she-donkey, yet knows many Eastern men who married foreign women and never saw among them anyone able to Arabize his Western wife; and very few were not Westernized by their wives (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 218).

The Philosopher Donkey further develops the philosophy supporting al-Rafi'i's position: "...In addition, regarding the foreign woman, she sees herself as the ruler's daughter while he is the son of a subject—a lady while he is subjugated. She sees her marriage to him as a concession from her to his class. Thus, she boasts and indulges herself, while he has no choice but to accept and humble himself; otherwise disagreement occurs, discord prevails, and after marriage comes divorce" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 40).

Thus, several writers and critics converge in their views concerning marriage to a foreign woman because of the individual and social harms they associate with it. These are emphatic calls to rally around the Arab woman despite her many shortcomings. We may conclude this discussion with the proposition that when the Eastern man brings a foreign woman into his life in order to color it with feminine hues, he may in fact choose the brightest colors only to color the misfortunes of his life; there may be exceptions, but this is presented as the general rule.

3.3. The Image of the Rebellious Dancer

Al-Rafi'i refers to the dancer's story under the title "The Flame, Yet It Does Not Burn" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 136). It concerns a beautiful, playful dancer whom he met in one of the summer seaside entertainment venues in Alexandria. He was impressed by her and loved her to the point of fascination. He describes her: "She would entertain and amuse, enlivening her night as a dancing singer; when midnight passed and dawn awoke to arrive, she would return to her home, look at her face, remove her adornment, shed one spirit and put on another, and say, 'O God, to You I turn, O God, here I am.' Then she would perform ablution, pour light over herself, and stand before her Lord in prayer" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 136).

She chose dancing under compulsion, not willingly. This becomes clear from the dialogue between her and the writer: she had been destined to become one of three things—a dancer, a domestic servant, or a market worker. Because of her beauty and delicacy, she chose the first, yet remained chaste and pure. In her words: "As you see, I move through forms of agitation in attracting people and repelling them at once; and if a woman is safe from greed overcoming her thought, she is safe from a man overcoming her virtue... Therefore I resolved not to covet anything belonging to people and became content with everything in their hands; they show me generosity only through my destruction..." (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 137).

She suffocated in dancing and revived in prayer. Al-Rafi'i was astonished: could this be possible? Could she combine, in religious terms, dancing and prayer? In answering this question, the

writer loved an image of the courtesan that he had created in his imagination and shaped according to his own ideal. He did not love her as she was, but loved a part of his own soul that God had placed in her. He adds: "She was created from your rib, the place nearest to your heart; therefore the culmination of love is to call her 'I'. She did not love you; she loved the homeland from which she had been torn. When she returns to you, she feels that you are her homeland. It is the longing of the stranger, like the longing of a boat for the shore's embrace, like the longing of a traveler for the scent of home" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 140).

He saw her differently from the way people saw a morally fallen woman. Because of the intensity of his love for her, he supplied excuses and explanations for the circumstances that had brought her to this condition, enabling her to combine contradictions and play multiple roles in life. The secret, he suggests, lies in her heart, which she can never do without.

Through this story, the writer's position becomes clear: woman should not be judged by her outward appearance. How many chaste and pure women have been defeated by their social circumstances and consequently turned to dancing or singing, compelled by the need to feed themselves?

If we consider dancing as a cultural issue, we find that it occupied an important place in the writings of ancient and modern Arabs, who differed between those who prohibited it and those who permitted it. It also occupied a place among the subjects of many Arabic writers. Al-Tahtawi mentioned it in *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Bariz*, al-Shidyaaq addressed it in *Al-Saq 'ala al-Saq*, and al-Muwaylihi discussed it at length in *Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham* (Qaduh, n.d., p. 52; see also al-Muwaylihi, n.d., p. 169).

He described her as being morally disreputable and, when describing her dancing, wrote: "When the ants of wine crept through her veins, she intensified her play and turning, grew more vigorous in her jumps and movements, twisted like a snake in her dance, and played like a turtle in her manner... This prostitute became famous for mastering dancing and distinguishing herself in it..." (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 138).

Yet al-Rafi'i refused to acknowledge the licentiousness that appeared in his beloved dancer. He regarded these states as spiritual conditions translated into bodily expression. He wanted to give us an ideal image of woman who had risen through her femininity. He viewed her humanely above all else, sympathizing with her and providing justifications and excuses—not for any reason except that he loved her sincerely. At times he described her in terms of supreme humanity and at others as suffering beauty. Among his expressions of love for this girl are: "Poor woman! If only I could reach what is in her soul, so that I might know what she complains of in her fate and what she rejects. Is this not her place? Yet it is fate" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 236).

To everyone else she was a dancer who sang; in his eyes she was a worshipper who glorified God and prayed. People looked at the dancer as she excelled in seducing men through enchanting melody and movement, while al-Rafi'i looked into the depths of his own soul at another image that he had drawn in his imagination and that appeared before him to show him what others could not see.

This is another aspect of al-Rafi'i as a man in love, one whose love overwhelmed him and clouded his sight. He attempted to analyze the dancer's psychology and the conflict she

experienced, a conflict not governed by logic. Feelings prevailed in his vision of woman, so his discourse was not rational but emotional, making the reader sense his pain through the intensity of some expressions: "In her dancing she interprets, through the movements of her limbs, the longings of life, its joys and sorrows, and adds to the language of nature the language of the woman's body... on her face is the light of beauty together with the light of ablution, guarded and restrained" (al-Rafi'i, n.d., p. 102).

Nothing better describes him than the comparison of a man who allows himself to steal in order to become rich—he is a thief; like the merchant who satisfies his greed—he is a deceiver; like the soldier who satisfies his cowardice—he is a traitor; like the young man who satisfies his vice—he is immoral, and so forth. What philosophy is this that makes the mad lover empty of reason, forgetting his philosophy of life and embodying another image of woman? He adds, announcing his confusion and affliction:

*How many lovers have been bewildered, but none like my bewilderment,
when one day I wished to hurt my beloved.
Would that I had a heart other than my heart to hurt her,
and take my share of pride for me.
Would that I had two hearts: one sick with love for her,
and another that could then be my physician.
By God, love is the best of my virtues,
and by God, love is the worst of my faults.*
(al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 184)

The final line alone is sufficient to approach what has been stated above.

3.4. The Image of the Lost Mother

When discussing al-Rafi'i's social outlook, we must pause at the intimate relationship between al-Rafi'i and woman in her most exalted form: the mother. It is remarkable that the author of *Al-Balagha* al-Nabawiyya, *I'jaz al-Qur'an*, and *Asrar al-I'jaz*, whose spirit was connected with al-Hasan al-Basri and al-Ghazali, possessed such an intense sensitivity and awareness of the other. It is as though here he becomes this woman and she becomes part of his being, while he is a piece of her heart. This is the secret of the mother, who alone can combine contradictions and play multiple roles in life.

The writer devoted several essays and stories to her, including "The Death of a Mother" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 184), a text situated between essay and story, a form referred to as hybrid narration (al-Samarati, 2010, pp. 23–25), which does not adhere to the conventional artistic structure of the short story. The writer gave it special attention in analysis and description. The mother is the origin of everything and the point to which everything else converges. Motherhood is an emotion and instinct planted in the female being, carrying an immense capacity for mercy and compassion. Islamic religion recommended honoring the mother and placed her before the man in status with regard to pregnancy, breastfeeding, and care. Nevertheless, the image of the compassionate mother was present even before Islam in pre-Islamic poetry. Tufayl al-Ghanawi says:

They say, when they gathered their enemy and united their ranks:
 You are our mother in the homeland and our father.
 And Jalila said:
 The eye bears as the mother bears,
 what she twists and turns.
 And 'Urwa ibn al-Ward said:
 Indeed, you and I are like the one whose mother pledged to him,
 her tears offered in sacrifice, bearing and enduring.
 (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 101)

Her image was preserved throughout the subsequent Islamic periods in both poetry and prose. Yet no human being, however eloquent, can fully describe this creature endowed with selflessness and sacrifice. He says: "The most complete of women, in my view, is the one who looks at the world with an eye illuminated by the light of faith, recognizing in everything its heavenly meaning; she believes in both its sorrows and joys and receives what it gives from the hand of its Creator as known mercy or unknown mercy... Her meaning is the sacred sanctuary, and she becomes the mother, whose meaning is the divine completion for her children, her husband, and herself" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 103).

She is a human being who gives constantly; her beauty is ideal, radiating from the spirit and adorned by an inexhaustible source of grace. The mother possesses an alert beauty that neither fades nor sleeps, except when the grave embraces her. Then she plants in the souls of those around her a terrible pain whose memory days cannot erase. This painful memory awakened in al-Rafi'i's soul after the death of his mother and the grief of her son. His individuality could not but appear in the personality of this broken child, defeated by his mother's death: "He felt, without doubt, that he had been lost in existence because existence had been his mother" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 104).

Her sanctity is such that she sacrifices her health and body so that her children may grow safely. When she departs: "O poor child, your days with your mother have ended—those happy days in which you knew tomorrow before it came, as you knew yesterday that had passed... Mother, O my God, what child on earth finds sufficiency of spirit except through the mother?" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 101). Nothing conveys more powerfully the suffering of a child who has lost his mother—and of a man who has lost his mother as well. Despite the passage of years and ages, a void remained in al-Rafi'i's heart that no one ever filled after his mother's death. His expression is therefore profoundly authentic because he lived the experience himself. She was a source of strength, faith, tranquility, and serenity: "She was created only to be for man the substance of virtue, patience, and faith" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 103).

Everything above the dust became dust; her house became a grave and her grave became a house. She was a tree planted in a fragile trunk through which the seasons passed, yet her traces remained rooted in its roots and branches, extending until the tree became complete after her allotted days and nights had passed: "That poor woman was twenty-five years old, but her heart was eighty or older; she was young in age, yet it was devastated at the age of death" (al-Rafi'i, 2014, p. 103).

It is as though al-Rafi'i describes a woman beside whom he suffered her pain, growing with her and becoming younger with her. These feelings could only emanate from a man who experienced loss at a young age and understood its meaning, and whose sense of loss was renewed with every funeral procession in which a mother was carried.

Although he did not discuss the mother's role in his own life except through the pain left by her loss, he was nevertheless able to give expression to the immense sanctity of the image of the mother by portraying the emotions of her young child, who "was clothed in misery because he became alone in place just as he was alone in time."

These are some of the manifestations of woman in al-Rafi'i: from the poor daughter subjected to social materialism, to the oppressed woman driven by society into becoming a dancer; from the foreign woman inserted into our worlds, to the mother in the fullness of her meanings. These are some of the forms woman has assumed; but how should she be?

4. Conclusion

From the foregoing, we arrive at the following points:

- Many critics and writers believed that before the Renaissance woman was not regarded as a fully human being; rather, she was treated as a framework for other subjects. Her status did not improve until after the Renaissance, yet in reality it became worse, more diminished, and more oppressive.
- The call for women's liberation, as its advocates presented it, meant distancing her from her religion and stripping her of her virtue. Al-Rafi'i regarded this as one of the effects of Westernization and foreign colonialism, against which he responded with words that shocked advocates of immorality and dissolution, causing him to suffer marginalization and to be described as reactionary and hostile to women.
- The representations examined here are sufficient to respond to such claims. Woman appears either as a poor daughter subjected to enslavement under patriarchal authority that recognizes no meaning for woman except as a commodity to be sold at the highest price, which amounts to killing her and violating the human meanings within her.
- Al-Rafi'i represented these images to demonstrate women's suffering under ideas that undermine her identity, especially through the dancer compelled into her profession by poverty and circumstance, and the pasha's daughter whose society had been overtaken by materialism and false appearances that destroy her humanity. His pen also took a reformist stance on marriage to foreign women and, through the image of the mother, articulated what woman should be in one of her social roles.
- All of this was conveyed through story-like essays in an elevated narrative style. The Islamic story has long been a means of education and moral elevation through the diverse images it presents of woman—as wife, mother, and daughter—in both their positive and negative dimensions, through events and dialogue that leave a psychological impact on readers.

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