

# Ghada Samman

- The first Arab woman who created a publishing house to publish her own works.
- Her books, which represent a loud claim for liberal thought, are best sellers in the Arab world.

Ghada Samman declares in one of her last works that since 1960 she has taken writing as a career, that she practices writing about ten hours a day, passing most of those hours in reading, exploring and preparing material for her absorbing task.

Born in Syria, educated in Damascus and Beirut universities, she established herself in Lebanon at an early age, hoping to benefit, as many other Arab writers do, from the freedom of the press which has been in this country a confirmed tradition, in spite of the fact that a number of Lebanese journalists and writers have suffered martyrdom and paid with their blood the price of their freedom.

During the war years which destroyed Lebanon, Ghada lost many of her unpublished manuscripts, together with her house, precious documents, souvenirs and valuable paintings. Yet she responded to her loss by saying: "Blessed be the fire which swallowed my house and its contents, if it has been a factor in fighting injustice and selfishness... I shall immediately buy a new package of blank paper and resume my loud call for equality, justice, freedom and joy."

Her writings before 1978 were regularly published in weekly magazines, then collected into books. Within a period not exceeding 20 years she published 16 books and has four more ready for publication. Her works, which consist of fiction, reportages, satire, comments, prose-poems, social and literary criticism, are among the best sellers in the Arab world.

What does she write about?

Her early stories are brief accounts of real or imaginary experiences, where her lively, fantastic style and her interest in tragic, fateful, occult plots, reveal a blossoming but sure talent for fiction. Later stories represent a romantic revolt against pseudo-modernism, puritan attitude toward love, traditional marriage and social hypocrisy. They also present paradoxical situations, eccentric or unusual characters, women in revolt against authoritarian parents or against despotic husbands who treat them as slaves or as sexual objects.

A large part of her writings between 1967 and 1975 uphold the Arab national struggle against Zionism and imperialism, coupled with a vehement attack on common Lebanese or Arab social diseases: apathy and fanaticism, social inequality, unjust treatment of women, political corruption and absence of social consciousness. Most of her social satire is contained in a large book entitled: "Ar-Ragheef Yanbudh Kal-Qalb" (The Loaf Beats like a Heart), written between 1969 and 1975.

Her revolt against enslavement to tradition is illustrated by her book entitled: "Hübb" (Love), where she says in the introduction that she decided to write that book and to use that title after questioning several people on the meaning of love and receiving from them frustrated or absurd answers. Her book tries to enlighten people about the true meaning of love.



Her other non-fiction works contain vivid descriptions of her travels in Lebanon and other Arab countries, in various capitals of Europe, particularly London, Berlin and Rome. Her travels must have contributed to develop her cosmopolitan, open-minded outlook; her detailed reports gave her an opportunity for ample criticism of people and places.

Her style matches her ideas in its rebellious tone. Vivid, factual, rich in allusions and quotations which show her wide reading and her extensive literary culture, it is distinguished by both originality and mobility. Following the author's mood, adapting itself to the literary genre she is handling, it may change from a direct and rational approach to a surrealist trend or a touch on the irrational.

In spite of her loyalty to Arabism, Ghada tries to keep an independent stand, free from political attachments. One of her last books is entitled: "Non-Committed Writings". In another one, carrying the title: "Al-Jassad Haqeebat Safar" (The Body, a Traveling Bag), she attacks the so-called "committed writers" who are involved in paid political propaganda. She mentions Gogol, the Russian writer, who lived 65 years before the Russian Revolution and produced authentic revolutionary works, free from the clichés of contemporary leftist parties which invade Arab countries and other parts of the world.

Probably because of the popularity of her writings, Ghada has been a target for critics who denounced her ultra-liberal ideas, her emotional style and her caustic satire. However, no one can deny that she is an unusually dynamic woman who tried to popularize liberal ideas and succeeded in creating her own publishing house to publish her own works in the Arab countries.