

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale

Since ancient time, roles have been assigned to men and women in different ways. Vipa Chulachart (1980) of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, described in *Aspects of Thai Women Today* that in the past, the status of Thai women was not equal to men. The male roles were the breadwinner, the head of the family, and the ruler or the protector of the country while women looked after the home, children and menfolk and managed the family budget. In the same way, Boonyong Katethate (1989) described the traditional roles of Thai women in the past in *The Status of Thai Women* that women were not completely independent since they had to observe the traditional value that when they were young, they would be brought up and guarded by parents. Later, when they got married, they had to obey and follow their husbands. When they were old, they would be looked after by sons or daughters. As a result, Thai women did not have an opportunity to play the leading roles. This makes them accept the inferior status of a follower in accordance with the Thai proverb that “Man is the front leg of an elephant while woman is the hind leg.”

The traditional concept about gender had been embedded in Thai society for a long time. In the same way, the traditional roles of Thai women had been emphasized and accepted in the society as good performances for women. In the book *Women in Thai Literature* by the National Identity Board Office of the Prime Minister (1992), the traditional roles of Thai women are described through the female characters in Thai literatures of the three important periods - Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, and the first three reigns of the Rattanakosin period.

Firstly, in the Sukhothai period there is the written evidence presenting the traditional roles of women in *Three Planes of Existence (Traibhumikatha)* composed by King Thammaracha Lithai around A.D. 1345. He characterized ‘the perfect woman’ through the queen of Cakravarti King as being a model of traditional woman.

“When the Great Cakravarti King comes to see her, she never waits for him to approach her but moves forward to greet him. Seated on

a golden pillow below him, she will fan him and pleasingly massage his feet and his hands. She never lies on the royal bed before the Emperor does, nor does she ever leave it after him. Before she does anything, she will inform her husband first and when given permission, she will then proceed. Never has she ever disobeyed her husband. Whatever she does or says, it is intended to please her husband. Only a Cakravarti King, and no other man, can be the husband of the Perfect Woman. She never acts disloyally to the Emperor.” (p.29)

From the excerpt, it is like the social guide and rule to frame women that if they want to be perfect and good, they have to be obedient and loyal like the women in the Ayutthaya period. The traditional roles of women are described as being inferior, dependent, and obedient as follows:

“...women were relegated to the group of the ruled. This very same arrangement applied also to their family way of life: when they were young, they were under the care of parents; when married, they were cared for by their husbands and in old age, they were looked after by their children.

Consequently, Thai women or ladies projected an image of those who served. They were not required to make decision in love and marriage. They followed their men’s wishes like “the hind legs of an elephant”. They had to get up before and go to bed after their husbands. They kept their houses clean and orderly. They had to be stoic, patient, and tolerant, never complaining under the severest hardship. Their obedience and loyalty to husbands were unshakable.” (pp.51 - 52)

Next, in the early Rattanakosin period, the image of women was the same as in Ayutthaya period that *“Women are men’s property. They are followers, not leaders. Wives are obedient, loyal and dutiful (p.97).”* This indicates the women’s traditional image presented in *Words of Wisdom for Young Women (Supasit Son Ying)*, around 1837 – 1840 in the reign of Rama III, by Sunthon Phu, the famous poet in classical

literature of that period. This poem followed the same pattern of women's roles in the former time:

“Ladies of nobility should keep well within the good traditions and avoid gossip.

A woman will be good or bad depending on her husband.

Obey your relatives.

Do not mistake evil for good.

Be grateful to your parents and take good care of them in their old age.

Tend to your domestic responsibilities and serve your husband well.

Wake up before him, prepare his toilet articles and his food.

Pay respect to your husband at his feet before going to bed.

Do not argue with your husband and provoke his anger, but try to advise him calmly.

Be feminine, not half masculine.

Take good care of your health and appearance.

Do not commit adultery or pay attention to other men.

If your husband is in the royal service, tend to his clothing and groom him well.

Do not gossip about your husband or blaspheme him.

Men who allow their wives to dominate them are unmanly.” (Cited in Mattani, 1988)

From the above excerpts, the traditional women can be portrayed as being inferior, obedient, and dutiful since they have to obey, respect, and be under power of their parents, relatives, and, particularly, husbands. They are dependent and passive as followers as they cannot live by their own. This makes them lack of freedom and identity. They have no opportunity to argue, express opinion, and even choose their marriage partners. Furthermore, women have many responsibilities. In family, they work like slaves to serve parents and husbands, to take care of family members, to do housework, and so on. Additionally, for the role of wife, women are like the object or men's property. They are ruled while men are the rulers. They have to follow men's

order and be loyal to men. They have to serve and take care of everything for their husbands. Thus, men are like the kings or Gods while women are slaves or servants. They cannot behave badly or dominate their husbands but they have to obey, respect, and make them pleased.

These traditional roles reflect the attitudes regarding males and females in Thai society that were prevalent for centuries. However, in the last seven decades, the economic factor had influenced Thai women to play many significant roles in the society. In the article “Women and Economy,” Sukhum Uttawawutichai (1992) of Thammasat University stated that the change of women’s roles in Thai society was influenced by three major factors: agricultural, industrial, and educational development of the country. As a result, women have become one of the key family income earners, part of labor force, and even human resources for national development. In “The Economic Role of Thai Women,” Kanitta Meesook (1980) of the Department of Economic Research, Bank of Thailand, reported that from the Labor Force Participation in 1978 by the National Statistics Office, women represented forty seven percent of the total labor force. That year, Thailand’s rate of female labor force participation was very high and higher than that of any other Asian countries.

The roles of women have appeared differently in many literary works, especially in the novels. Ruenruthai Sajaphan (1983) stated that literature is like the mirror that can reflect the society in every period. However, for the origin of Thai novels, M.L. Manich Jumsai described in *History of Thai Literature* that at the start of the 1900s, Thai novels became different from the classical literatures owing to the influence of the translation of English novels such as Rider Haggard’s *She*, *King Solomon’s Mine*, the work of Sherlock Holmes and many other detective stories as appeared in the magazine of K.S.R. Kularb. Furthermore, the greatest translation work of the time was *The Vengeance (Khwam Phayabat)* translated from Marie Corelli’s *Vendetta* in 1902 by Mae Wan, Phya Surindraraja’s pseudonym. It was very well accepted by the public. These translated novels influenced and inspired Thai novelists to write the novels that remained in the shadow of Western novels in their plots, characters, concepts, and language structure by having Thai characters and settings. Additionally, Mattani Moj dara Rutnin (1988) of Thammasat University also

described that English novels had a strong influence on Thai novelists who create their heroes and heroines after those of the popular English novelists, particularly, by having the romantic love theme between the rich and the poor such as the novels *Her Enemy (Satru Khong Chao Lon)* (1929) and *Nij* (1929) by Dok Mai Sod. The style of these novels is called 'romanticism' which refers to the novel that emphasizes on emotion, sentiment, and intuition by having the aim to emotionally impress the readers without concerning about the intellectual values, philosophy, morality, and logic. The plot focuses on the way and outcome of emotion regarding love, greediness, anger, passion, jealousy, and so on (Tawat, 1984). However, such novels were very popular among the readers, especially the teenage and middle age women.

However, at the end of the 1920s and in the early thirties, the subjects of social values and cultural change were brought into the novels such as *The Circus of Life (Lakhon Haeng Chiwit)* (1929) and *The Yellow Skin, White Skin (Phiu Luang Phiu Khao)* (1930) by M.C. Akatdamkoeng. Later, after the revolution in 1932, the change of women's roles was supported and also portrayed through the novels. Son Khochasan (1978) stated that the portrayal of Thai women in several novels was obviously divided into two categories. First, women were portrayed as being inferior, dependent, and obedient in order to emphasize the traditional and patriarchal concept whereas in some literary works, women were portrayed as being equal to men. Women had participated and played the roles in family and society as well as men such as in the novels *Victory of The Loser (Chai Chana Khong Khon Phae)* (1943), *The Love of Walaya (Khwam Rak Khong Walaya)* (1952), and *Ghosts (Pisat)* (1953) by Seni Saowaphong, and *Until We Meet Again (Jon Kwa Rao Ja Phob Khan Eek)* (1950) by Sriburapa (cited in Weerawat, 1998).

Likewise, Mattani (1988) described that after the revolution in 1932, which is called 'the post-revolution period', women novelists and some liberal-minded male novelists increasingly supported the social equality and freedom for Thai women by portraying liberated women as being different from the framework of tradition. Many Thai novels reflect the changing roles of women by setting a contrast to the characters who represent traditional women. For example, the female character in the novel *The Accident (Ubattihet)* (1934) by Dok Mai Sod in which a new generation of independent women in modern society after the revolution is represented by a well-

educated woman from a western country who is confident to communicate freely with intellectual men. Her independent thinking and practical reasons in choosing her husband represent the freedom of modern Thai women in leading their own lives.

It is noticeable that the changing roles of women tend to be portrayed against the image of traditional women through the modern female characters by having the characteristic as being confident, independent, liberal, and strong-minded. Women are equal to men in many aspects such as education, occupation, politics, and so on. They have freedom to express their opinion, choose a marriage partner, and live their own lives. They are independent since they do not have to be under power of men and can earn their living. Some women are portrayed as being the leader or key earner of family.

Besides, the trend of Thai novel became more realistic. This type of novel is 'realism', referring to the novel that presents the social reality by having the plot adapted from the real life of people in the society. The novel realistically presents people's lives in general by having the characters with different characteristics, occupations, and social status (Tawat, 1984). The real life of people and social reality were portrayed and narrated through novels. However, later, the novelists were more concerned about the social themes than the romantic themes. As a result, the social criticism and the social change of women, which really existed in the society, were also strongly expressed through Thai novels such as the novel *The Prostitute (Ying Khon Chua)* (1937) by Ko Surangkhanang, which was considered as one of the best realistic novels of the period because it shows a strong resemblance to the real life of people in society. This novel reflects the life of a woman who worked as a prostitute that is considered as being degrading and immoral. This reflects the change that the main character has to struggle to earn a living although she has to work against morality. Therefore, she is not accepted in the society, and people insult her as being a bad woman since she cannot follow the traditional value.

The later period that had much influence on the social realism in Thai novels is the time of the uprising of the university students on October 14, 1973 when they protested against the military dictatorship. Many students and people who joined the uprising were arrested, and the censorship and suppression were strongly imposed on all publications of newspapers and books (Mattani, 1988). As a result, literary works

after this period strongly expressed the agony of the uprising and introduced more political, economic, and social criticism and reality. That was the time of ‘neo-realism’ which refers to the novel that presents the point of view about social development and solutions alongside the social reality. The theme of social development is inserted in the novel, including idealism and faith. Thus, the idealism and reality are combined together by absolutely accepting the cause and effect of the ongoing things and also the happening, role, and triumph of the new things (Tawat, 1984). Besides, many novelists and poets seriously represent women as being part of the society, and stimulate women to realize their self-value and social existence as individual such as in the poem “The Audacity of Flowers” (Ahangkan Khong Dokmai) by Chiranan Phitpricha. In addition, after this period, there are many novels that reflect women’s equality and participation in family and society such as the novel *A Woman Minister (Ratamontri Ying)* (1976) by Duangjai, *That Woman’s Name is Boonrawd (Phuying Khon Nun Chue Boonrawd)* (1981), *To Build the World with These Two Hands of Mother (Duay Song Mue Mae Ni Thi Sang Lok)* (1987), and *Fire in the Eyes (Fai Nai Duang Ta)* (1992) also by Botan, and so on.

The selected two novels portraying the change of women’s roles that will be studied in this research are *Ghosts* (1953) by Seni Saowaphong and *That Woman’s Name is Boonrawd* (1981) by Botan. These two novels are selected because they can reflect the changing roles of Thai women that are different from the traditional roles. For instance, the female characters of both novels have different lifestyles and attitudes from the traditional women. For the novel *Ghosts*, the change of women’s roles occurs in the time after the Constitutional Revolution in 1932 which is considered as the early period of the changing roles of Thai women. Therefore, Rachanee, the female character, is like a pioneer who starts the change in the society acting as the model for Thai women in which she chooses to live her own life by rejecting the traditional society. For the novel *That Woman’s Name is Boonrawd*, the change of women’s roles is presented very interestingly. Boonrawd, the female character, is very independent and hardworking. She is the result of the country development. She has a chance to play the main role in family, economy, and business. Additionally, she is the head of the family who can take care of the family members. Thus, she is like a woman of the new generation that can be actually found

in the current society. As a result, these two novels are very interesting and worthy of portraying the change of women's roles in the two different periods.

Firstly, the novel *Ghosts* (1953) by Seni Saowaphong, the rising novelist of the 1930s, represents the change of roles of women in the time after the revolution in 1932. Rachanee, the leading female character, is portrayed as a strong woman who renounces her aristocratic family and chooses to live a free life with a revolutionary young man of a common social background instead of marrying a rich man. Rachanee comes from a rich and high-class family with high level of education. She is a university graduate who liberates herself from her family to work for the progress of the country. She is very confident and dares to deny the traditional society. She is considered to be the model or example for many university students in the later period who participate in social work such as assisting in rural development projects. It is noticeable that this novel expresses the type of 'neo-realism' in which the social problems are inserted in the novel, for example the problems of different classes, capitalism, poverty and exploitation of farmers, and also the lack of agricultural and educational development. However, this novel was written before the time that 'neo-realism' was introduced. Thus, this shows that the writer went forward much more than his time. This novel was not very popular when it was first published since it was too serious and unacceptable for most people at that time when people were obsessed by the romantic and translated novels. However, it was valuable in the late time when the neo-realism had much influence and became the inspiration of the intellectuals and university students of the 1970s who were attracted to socialism. This novel was republished many times and also translated into English language.

Next, the novel *That Woman's Name is Boonrawd* (1981) by Botan, who is considered as one of the most socially conscious woman novelists after the Uprising in 1973, won a consolation prize from the Board of National Book Development in 1981. This novel is outstanding in portraying a woman who chooses to adopt different non-traditional roles during the time when social changes are taking place. The main character is Boonrawd who comes from a working class family and has low education, but she struggles against poverty and social discrimination, and finally succeeds in establishing a successful business career. Boonrawd is strong-minded and confident. She believes that men and women are equal in the society. Moreover, she

also believes that the smart person is not only able to stand on one's own, but also can be counted on if others need help. That is why in the novel, she plays the role of family leader and earner who takes care of nearly all of the family members. Although her marriage to a foreigner meets with strong criticism and accusation of prostitution, she is finally accepted. This novel expresses the type of realism. According to the study "Realism in Botan's Novels," Kitiyawadee Kasemsan (1992) found that in Botan's novels during 1968 – 1983, including the novel *That Woman's Name is Boonrawd*, the author presented the realism about the struggle to lift up the standard of the under privilege people and the fight against oppression of all kinds in her novels. It is relevant to this novel in which Boonrawd, who is from a poor family, is usually insulted and exploited and has inferior status to other people. For this reason, she has a strong desire to enhance her social status, to have her own business, and to be admired by others. She has to fight against the hardship and difficulty. At the same time, she also has to fight against the accusation of being a poor rented-wife. Therefore, this novel is valuable because it impressively encourages women to be strong, confident, and able to stand on their own. It became a film in 1985 and was made into a television drama many times.

1.2 Purposes of the Study

- 1) To examine the changing roles of the leading female characters in two novels *Ghosts* by Seni Saowaphong and *That Woman's Name is Boonrawd* by Botan.
- 2) To illustrate and compare the factors that lead to the changing roles and attitudes of Thai women as portrayed in these two novels.
- 3) To illustrate the significance of the two novels in reflecting the change that is occurring in our society.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) What are the changing roles of the leading female characters in two novels *Ghosts* by Seni Saowaphong and *That Woman's Name is Boonrawd* by Botan?
- 2) What are the differences and the similarities of the factors that influence their changing roles and attitudes?

- 3) How significant are these two novels in reflecting the change that is occurring in our society?

1.4 Scope, Methods, and Definitions

1.4.1 Scope and Methods of the Study

This study is a content and descriptive analysis that will be carried out through a detailed study of the female characters in two novels: *Ghosts* by Seni Saowaphong and *That Woman's Name is Boonrawd* by Botan. Additional documentary research will be conducted to obtain relevant information necessary to determine the factors that underlie the background situation in the novels.

1.4.2 Definitions

Attitude refers to the presupposition to react favorably or unfavorably toward someone or something. (Hahn, 1962)

Aristocracy refers to group of people in the highest social class; the nobility. (Hornby, 1989)

Class refers to the system that divides people into groups. (Hornby, 1989)

Equality refers to the state of being equal with no difference in status or rank. (Hornby, 1989)

Feminism can be described as all those ideas and movements that have as their fundamental aim the realization of women's liberation or a profound improvement in women's condition. (Voet, 1998)

Gender refers to the differentiation between masculinity and femininity as constructed through socialization and education, among other factors. The word 'gender' is used by the feminists to get away from the biologicistic reference of the word 'sex'. (Reddock, 2000)

Modernity refers to the widespread perception of living in a new, modern form of society dates from seventeenth-century early modern Europe. Modernity carries connotations of scientific rationality, progress, freedom of the individual, and the political institutions of emergent nation states. Above all, modernity designates a state of mind, a commitment to the new: Its pull is constantly towards the future. (Andermahr et al., 1997)

Patriarchy refers to society, country, and so on with system ruled or controlled by men. (Hornby, 1989)

Role refers to a set of expectations that members have about how a particular person in a particular position should behave. (Wright, 1971)

Sex refers to the biological differentiation between male and female. (Reddock, 2000)

Sexism refers to anything that creates, constitutes, promotes, sustains, or exploits an unjustifiable distinction between the sexes. (Cudd and Jones, 2005)

Stereotype refers to a set of beliefs about characteristics thought to be shared by most members of a particular group. (Hahn, 1962)

1.5 Education / Application Advantages

It is hoped that this study will provide a better understanding of how external forces have led to the changing roles and attitudes of Thai women, especially in the times that these two novels represent. Therefore, this study can be the fundamental background of the changing roles of Thai women as portrayed in the current novels. It is also hoped that the study will create more awareness and appreciation of Thai literary works as a way to understand the changes that have been going on in our society. Moreover, the readers will realize that Thai literature is not meant only to express feelings but also important ideas or issues that help shape our society.