



## Representation of Femininity Patterns in the Novel

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to reflect the patterns of femininity in Iranian women's literature through the study of the novels written by them. A significant event that shows a fundamental change in the lives of women is the internal dialogues of the main characters. Based on this feature, this article aims to study the ways through which women are depicted in these novels. The basis for the analysis is the three patterns of femininity that is traditional woman, masculine woman and the type of woman that according to pioneer women movement is the most desirable patterns of femininity. To this aim, *Postcard*, *Who Does Believe Rostam*, *Tarlan*, and *Tibet Dream* are analysed. The results of the study indicate that the main characters of these novels depict the three patterns of femininity. Some of these characters escape their own womanhood and choose masculine behaviours. Others follow traditional patterns at the beginning and act according to traditions and structures of the society; however, they later re-think their world as the result of encountering external factors and the changes inside them, consequently managing to create a new pattern of femininity through these reflections.

**Key words:** Femininity Patterns, Iranian Women's Literature, Novel

### INTRODUCTION

Femininity applies to the series of feminine characteristics, states and behaviors that women show in different private and public spheres. On the whole, three types of patterns of femininity could be found in contemporary literature.

The first pattern is that of a traditional woman, this ideal woman needs to show self-denial, self-sacrifice, decent and should be in control of the housework. "At this stage the woman has not gained her natural position and behaves and acts like a pre-planned cultural creature according to the plan set by a man in order to turn the woman into a talkative slave that entertains her master and devotes her body and self to ensure his youth and juvenility" [1].

The second pattern attempts to contrast the woman with the man and to equal her with the man. This pattern measures the woman with masculine principles and behaviors. "Most female authors never accepted that there are some male values of which they are deprived. They believed that men have turned these values masculine and in the same line, the society has considered female values as belonging to women; thus making all these conceptions subject to change. As a result, they have tried to change them" [2]. In fact, it could be stated "this pattern attempts to show the transfer of the woman from the traditional world that encompasses the house to a world in which the woman can adopt a behavior that is not similar to the traditions and feminine behaviors" [1].

Based on the third pattern, the woman gains awareness of her differences from the men and does not want to play her role with masculine principles and rules. "This pattern is in fact the transformation of woman's body from a sexual value to a cultural value and it results to the manifestation of a unique feminine pattern that is considered an influential innovation in the female gender and in the female culture" [1].

The fundamental issue in this article is the study of the depiction of these patterns and categories and their analysis in line with feminist criticism. In other words, this study aims to show the images that female authors have depicted of their femininity and mental patterns.

### **Postcard: Narrative of Freedom**

Parva, the main character of this novel, is a middle-aged woman who lives with her husband and children in London. She was sent off to London when she was sixteen years old because she resisted to get married to her cousin.

Parva's character could be divided into two parts: before the age of sixteen when she lived in Iran and after the age of sixteen when she was sent off to London.

Prior to the age of sixteen, Parva had unconsciously a traditional character, just like her mother and sisters. However, after the age of sixteen and being sent to London and marrying Arsalan, her personality changes. Living in London and studying child psychology give her financial independency as well as a particular ideology, changing her perspective towards living by what is in a traditional woman. The repetitive daily routines of life, with which women always struggle, are absent in Parva's life. She has an independent and strong character and thus she creates for herself one opportunity for freedom after another. Describing her character, it could be said that Parva "has created a new personality and identity for herself, which is based on real femininity and is rooted in her feminine nature" [3]. She has got rid of all the traditions and misconceptions existing with regards to women and her definition of her own femininity matches with feminism's definition of women. Parva has proved that she is "a strong and self-dependent women, helps others, brings herself to attention in critical situations, defends herself and her identity, and possesses a strong self-esteem" [4].

One of the traditional functions that Parva has get herself rid of is the image of a woman in the kitchen. "The kitchen teaches women tolerance and passivity on a daily basis; this is a sort of alchemy, water and fire need to be listened to; one needs to wait until sugar is melted and the dough is puffed and until the washing is dried and the fruits are ripe. Housework are close to technical activities, but they are too basic and routine to convince women of cause and effect principles" [5]. Meanwhile, the kitchen is a place for Parva where she can do the things she is interested in. It is in the kitchen that Parva starts making her favorite postcards and she makes the best of them in the kitchen.

Making postcards is part of the peace that she has internalized. Her postcards have subjects that are rooted in her own thoughts and internal feelings. Postcards in Parva's life is the symbol of the freedom of thought of which women have always been deprived of. Re-thinking such issues and Parva's internal dialogues with herself, freedom and ideas that she possesses as well as the financial independence she has obtained through working in the kindergarten have all shaped an acceptable personality for her as a woman. This is a pattern of femininity that has neither given up to the traditions, nor has denied or forgotten her own womanhood.

### **Who does believe, Rostam: The narrative of Perplexity**

Shora, the main character of this story, is an educated middle-aged woman from the high social class. She goes to the US through her marriage and starts her new life in the modern environment of her new country.

Deep inside, Shora suffers from a personality crisis, resulting from the different names that people in her life have called her with. Her mother calls her Shirin and her father calls her Shora, but her birth certificate is issued under the name of Partov according to the suggestion of her aunt's husband, Gholam Khan, and thus she was only called with this name at school. When marrying Jahan, her name changes to Shoorideh Jahandar. This multiplicity of names, all out of Shora's control, is even complicating for herself.

Another crisis that Shora faced in her life in Iran was the issue of beauty. In her family, beauty was a criterion for the value of women. It could be said that this belief is rooted in the stereotypical objectification of women that was prevalent in families. "Objectification is the basic form of women's submission and is the issue of masculine epistemology" [6]. In order to provide more explanation about this cliché that has always existed in women's lives, it could be said that according to traditional beliefs there are two reasons that men accept women: either a woman needs to be beautiful to be considered valuable, or must have a good fertility power and a strong womb. In other words, a woman's use depends on these two roles.

At first, Shora might not have a passive and stereotypical character due to her level of education and the fact that she works in the society as a pharmacist. However, the more closely we look into her life; we can see that she is treated like a traditional woman from the beginning of her marriage with Jahan. Having Jahan's last name is the start of her dependency on her husband. In addition, Jahan continues treating her like an object or an instrument for reaching success. Setare's behavior and her indifference towards the culture in which her parents grew up is another issue.

What Shora requires is sympathy, which is regarded as too banal by Jahan and Setareh in the modern western world. Hyde considers sympathy a cliché to which only women are dependent. Sympathy is part of the general cliché which shows there is emotional expression in women and there is no emotional expression in men" [7]. It could be said that the strong dependence of Shora on sympathy and independency of Jahan to it have made this couple miles away from one another. As a result, in order to make up for the indifference and lack of attention on the part of her husband, Shora resorts to her memories of Rostam as well as making love to her friend Jack.

After this, Shora finds her position with regard to her husband and daughter in a way that at the end of the story those two are no longer important for her as she has gained self-awareness. After this stage, ideas are formed in her; she leaves her husband and daughter and resists the strong dependency she has on them. She also makes a serious decision to enter the social life again and go to work, all indicating her dynamic character, a character that, more than anything else is admired by the feminist equality-seeking movement.

### **Tibet Dream: Narrative of Self-Esteem**

Shiva, the main character of the story, is a middle-aged woman with a husband and two children. At the beginning of the story, she is a perfect example of someone who uses masculine traits and behaviors, a feature that distinguishes her from other women from the very beginning. Living with her husband Javid, who mocks feminine behaviors; make her insist even more on her masculine behavior. Citing Simon, Roodegar states that: "men's historical and comprehensive humiliation of the holy feminine attributes, it is not surprising that the modern woman tried to stay away of her femininity, although this distance will result in the misery of herself and the society" [8].

From the perspective of her mother and sister, Shiva lacks feminine attributes. In fact, the root of Shiva's masculine behaviors goes back to her childhood. Her father used to look at her as a boy. Therefore, based on Abbot and Wallace's belief that "in a patriarchal system, it is the appearance of the woman that gives her an identity; in other words, the body of the woman is her destiny" [3]. Shiva's attitudes for escaping her femininity could be justified by saying that "such a way to treat women causes them not to feel secure about their own existence, in a way that they deny their own body and try to find solutions to satisfy of their need of being accepted" [9].

At home and under the dominance of Javid's thoughts, Shiva is so used to masculine behaviors that she tried to hide whatever femininity she has in herself and she sometimes mocks the existence of such attributes in other women. Javid sees her to be a very different woman comparing to all women around them. Javid's behavior towards those women who adopt masculine behaviors is the reminder of the belief that "the best women are the most masculine of them and masculinity is a feature in honourable women" [10].

However, this trend in Shiva's behavior changes as soon as Sadegh enters her life and establishes a relationship with her. Shiva experiences an internal battle from this point, on one hand, she is involved with a marriage and the regulations in which she believes and, on the other hand, she is sick of her life as filled with slogans and mottos. This internal battle is manifested in different ways in her and forces her to think about the reality of her femininity .

Shiva gradually comes to the realization that she also needs to pay attention to her femininity, in the same way her mother-in-law does, and this change of behavior is absolutely evident in her. The reality of Shiva's life is that she now stays away from whatever that is known to be masculine and she pulls away all masculinity veils that had hid her femininity up to now. Reflecting upon what is happening around her get her closer to her femininity step by step. At the end of the story, she displays a dynamic character in a way that surprises all those around her. At the end of the story, when Sadegh talks about travelling, Shiva feels a strong need in her to have a fundamental change and live with someone who recognizes her femininity.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study is in line with feminist criticism, trying to show the patterns of femininity in contemporary novels. It reviews the novels that have been written between 1991 and 2011 by female author and which have received awards. It attempts to show these patterns of femininity in these novels .

This study is based on three patterns of femininity: traditional woman, masculine woman (a woman who attempts to fight men by eliminating her own femininity) and a woman that is considered the best type of feminine role model by equality-seeking movements. It could be said that all three patterns mentioned above could be observed in the novels studied here. In Tarlan, written by Vafi, Tarlan the main character of the story escapes her own femininity and tried to imitate masculine behaviors in order to achieve her goals. Her character does not undergo any changes by the end of the story. However, in other novels, first a traditional pattern of femininity could be observed, meaning that they are passive, independent, sacrificing women who listen to their husbands and even children. These women are usually seen by their husbands as "others", thus are never taken seriously and are not allowed to show their existence. The characters are first unfamiliar with their wishes, interests, and even needs; however, the external circumstances and the changes inside them, breaks all the internalized traditional beliefs, which consider oppressing women natural. As a result, they change to people who cannot help questioning, a process through which they eventually achieve self-awareness and choose a new way for being at home and society. This new approach relies, more than anything else, on the individuality. The women, who have the third pattern of femininity, after this stage, start to fight the dominant system through their internal self-awareness. They use their new individuality to demand the things they used to ignore. Valuing one alongside others and forcing others to follow the same approach forms a new pattern of femininity, which was once unacceptable from the perspective of traditional culture .

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