

Life, As I See It

A Typology of the Post-Revolutionary Persian Novel Written by Women*

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Abstract

Since the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the number of women novelists has increased explosively. One remarkable feature of most post-Revolutionary novels by Iranian women is their great sensitivity towards women's issues and gender relations, but not all of these novels are of this nature. Novels that focus on social discourses have also been written by women in post-Revolutionary Iran. Nor do all of the novels written by women challenge the traditional institutions or reflect a protest against the situation of Iranian women in post-Revolutionary Iran. The purpose of this paper is to present a typology of the Persian post-Revolutionary novels written by women and the different paths they have taken.

Keywords: The Post-Revolutionary Persian Novel, Women Novelists, Social Novels, Popular Novels, Feminist Novels

Introduction

Since the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the number of women establishing themselves in different fields of artistic endeavour such as film, theatre, music, art, and short story and novel writing has increased explosively.¹ This increase in the number of women novelists has been striking. It is all the more striking when we look at the history of the Persian novel. Compared to Europe, the novel, as a literary genre, came very late to the Middle East and Iran. It does not go back any farther than the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,² when the modernization of this part of the world began.

Although the construction of modern Iranian society, at least in the beginning, was limited to the establishment of economic and military institutions, one could not prevent the intrusion of other aspects of Western civilization. The introduction of printing and journalism, and the translation of Western literary works were among the crucial factors that influenced the rise of the Persian novel in the early decades of the twentieth century. Among the other factors that led to the rise of the Persian novel, one can mention Iranian students who had been sent to the West to study, and other Iranians who lived in exile in neighbouring countries, e.g. Russia and Turkey, where they contributed to the rise of the new literary genre.³

Obviously, Iranian women did not play any role in this process. The traditional structure of Iranian society was too strong to let women take part in the construction

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¹ According to Abedini (2004), in the 1990s for example there were 370 women novelists and short story writers in Iran.

² See Ahmadzadeh (2003); Balaÿ (1998).

³ For more information on the process of modernization in Iran see Keddie (2003); Abrahamian (1982); and Fazlhashemi (1999).

of a modern Iran. When the process of modernization accelerated at the time of Reza Shah, who founded the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, the novelistic genre became more and more popular.

Despite the fact that the Persian novel was growing rapidly, there were almost no signs of the presence of Iranian women among the Persian novelists during the whole period of Reza Shah's reign (1925–1941). During this period, the presence of women was limited to the world of the novels, which was created by the male novelists. Women were mostly presented as creatures deceived and deprived by the modern way of life and as prostitutes in the heart of the big cities.⁴ *Tehrān-e makhuf* (The Horrible Tehran) by Morteza Moshfeq Kazemi (1925) and *Zibā* (Ziba) by Mohammad Hejazi (1933) are two such novels in which the women characters are pictured as morally corrupted. The only two women novelists of this period were Irandokht Teymourtash (1916–1991) with her novel *Dokhtar-e tirebakht va javān-e bolhavas* (The Ill-fated Girl and the Whimsical Young Man) from 1930, and Zahra Khanlari (1915–1991) with her two novels *Parvin va Parviz* (Parvin and Parviz) from 1933, and *Rahbar-e dushizegān* (The Leader of the Girls) from 1936. Neither Irandokht Teymurtash nor Zahra Khanlari continued their careers as novelists.

By the time of the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the Persian novel had developed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Nevertheless, it is again impossible to name more than a few female novelists during this period. Two examples are Simin Daneshvar (1921–2012) and Shahnush Parsipur (1946–). Simin Daneshvar published her novel *Sauvushun* (Mourners of Siavash) in 1969 and later became the most famous Persian woman novelist in Iran. Shahnush Parsipur published her novel *Sag va zemeštān-e boland* (The Dog and the Long Winter) in 1974. *Sauvushun* and *Sag va zemeštān-e boland* were both social novels. Apart from these two novels, one can hardly find any novel written by women under Mohammad Reza Shah's reign (1941–1978) and before the 1979 Revolution. It is only since the Revolution that the women have taken a prominent position in the field of Persian fiction in general and the Persian novel in particular.⁵ What makes this development especially interesting is that it has taken place in total contrast to the attitudes of the Islamic leadership towards women and the systematic attempts to limit their public presence.

Since the 1979 Revolution in Iran, the idea of constructing an Islamic society has been the main agenda of the Iranian authorities. The enmity of the Islamic doctrine promulgated by Ayatollah Khomeini to the idea of free women enjoying equal rights with men, had shown itself since the early 1960s when Khomeini opposed the Shah's programme for the emancipation of Iranian women. Thus, it was not strange that women were one of the major obstacles to the establishment of Khomeini's desired theocratic system. One of the main aims of the Islamic doctrine imposed by the Iranian theocracy was to compel Iranian women to follow Islamic law. However,

⁴ Gheissari (1998: 60); Meskub (1994: 134).

⁵ There are novels written by women that have been reprinted more than forty times, for example, *Bāmdād-e khomār* (Drunkard Morning) (1995) by Fattane Haj Seyyed Javadi, and several women novelists have won highly prestigious literary prizes in Iran, for example, Fariba Vafi, Shiva Arastuyi, and Sepide Shamlu.

experiences from the last thirty-three years show that this has not been an easy task for the Islamic regime. The aftermath of the Islamic Revolution witnesses to nothing but the long-standing struggle of Iranian women for their basic rights. Challenging the restrictive fundamentalist Islamic laws, establishing themselves in different social organizations, and most of all, searching for their identity have been the main objectives of Iranian women in post-Revolutionary Iran. The 1979 Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the political turbulence, the great wave of repression in the 1980s, and the mass emigration of several million Iranians all affected Iranian women strongly. Having been cast into these great crises, Iranian women felt more than ever the need to express themselves and to redefine their identities. They found the novel to be the most appropriate genre for them to express themselves. This is not surprising as the novel has usually been described as the best literary genre for reflecting the different aspects of human life in detail. The purpose of this paper is to present a typology of the Persian post-Revolutionary novels written by women and the different paths they have taken.⁶

Talattof maintains that one remarkable feature of post-Revolutionary literary works by Iranian women is their great sensitivity towards women's issues and gender relations.⁷ Women's personal and private experiences become public and they use the literary text to express their protest against sexual oppression and their struggle for identity. Comparing pre-Revolutionary works by women with post-Revolutionary works, Talattof identifies a shift from social discourses to feminism in Iranian women's literature. He considers the Iranian Revolution of 1979 to be the major historical event that separates these two discourses and the main reason behind this shift.⁸

This is very much true, but it must be noted that not all of the post-Revolutionary novels written by women are of this nature. Novels that focus on social discourses have also been written by women in post-Revolutionary Iran. Nor do all of the novels written by women challenge the traditional institutions or reflect a protest against the situation of Iranian women in post-Revolutionary Iran. The construction of womanhood, the demands and aspirations of the women presented in Persian post-Revolutionary novels are not all the same, due to the authors' different cultural and class-based experiences. While one group of women novelists challenges the traditional cultural structures, as mentioned by Talattof, another group is more interested in preserving these structures with some modifications. The novels written by this latter group have usually been classified as popular novels, and the novels written by the former group as feminist novels. The womanhood constructed in popular novels differs markedly from the womanhood constructed in the feminist novels.

⁶ This includes Persian novels written by women both in Iran and in the Diaspora. The literary production of Iranian emigrants since the late 1980s has expanded to such a degree, both quantitatively and qualitatively, that it is now impossible to discuss Persian literature, and thus the Persian novel, without taking into consideration the Persian literature and the Persian novel of the Iranian Diaspora (Sheyda, Forthcoming 2012; Sheyda 2009). However, it must be noted that the number of women novelists in the Diaspora is very limited.

⁷ Talattof (1996, 1997).

⁸ Talattof (1997: 531).

To summarize, the novels written by Iranian women during the last three decades can be divided into three categories: social novels, popular novels, and feminist novels. However, of the three, the feminist novel has occupied the largest space within the Persian literary world in the last three decades.

Social Novels

Social novels are usually written by the pre-Revolutionary generation of woman novelists or short story writers both in Iran and in the Diaspora, and are limited in number. Although, these novels are written by women, usually from the point of view of a female character or narrator, the focus is on socio-political issues rather than on gender issues or the situation of Iranian women. Social novels usually depict the differences and conflicts between different groups and individuals in a certain society, with each other or with the political establishment in a certain historical context. Socio-political tensions are the main focus of social novels, and it is the social milieu and historical context that shape the characters. In other word, the characters can be understood in relation to a specific social, political, and historical context.

Among the post-Revolutionary social novelists one can mention Simin Daneshvar with her *Jazire-ye sargardāni* (Wandering Island) (1993). Simin Daneshvar (1921–2012) was born in Shiraz and died in Tehran. In 1950, she married Jalal Al Ahmad, one of the most influential writers and social critics before the Revolution. This marriage came to influence her writing career deeply.

Daneshvar has published several short story collections and novels: *Ātash khāmush* (The Quenched Fire) (Short story collection, 1948); *Shahri chon behesht* (A City Like Paradise) (Short story collection, 1961); *Sauvushun* (Mourners of Siavash)⁹ (Novel, 1969); *Jazire-ye sargardāni* (Wandering Island) (Novel, 1993); and *Sārbān sargardān* (The Wandering Cameleer) (Novel, 2001). She has published several translations of modern world literature into Persian and a book about Jalal Al Ahmad titled *Ghorub-e Jalāl* (Jalal's Sunset) (1981).

Jazire-ye sargardāni follows Hasti, a twenty-six year old graduate of the College of Art in Tehran in the 1970s. Her Father, an old member of the opposition, is dead. Her mother is remarried to a dealer in economic contracts with Americans. Hasti is living with her grandmother. Although she does not approve of her mother's lifestyle, she cannot ignore her wishes; hence she agrees to meet the young man her mother introduces to her. This young man's name is Salim. He lives a Sufi-like life and is a member of an Islamic movement. Before meeting him, Hasti was in love with another young man, Morad, an atheist and a member of a non-religious guerilla organization. The entire novel is about Hasti's uncertainty regarding her two loves, and ends with Hasti finally choosing Salim.

The novel can be interpreted as an allegory of the pre-Revolutionary Iranian society and the conflicting political discourses within it, which finally resulted in the victory of the Islamic discourse in the 1979 Revolution. In one scene, Salim's

⁹ Translated into English as *A Persian Requiem*.

friend, Farhad, tells him that the Left has no chance in the Revolution as the people only trust the Islamic clergy:¹⁰

- ببین سلیم جان. دیگر حزب‌بازی فایده ندارد. چقدر به کارگرا و دهقانها بگویم بدبختند؟ مگر خودشان نمی‌دانند؟ چقدر بگویم ما خوشبختان می‌کنیم؟ به ما اعتماد ندارند، تنها به آخوند اعتماد دارند. یکبار آقا شیخ سعید منبر رفت، نمی‌دانی چه اشکی از مردم گرفت. حتی بکتاش و مرا به گریه انداخت.
- چی گفت؟

- از جنگ در راه خدا یعنی جهاد و شهادت حرف زد.¹¹

- Dear Salim, there is no point to political parties. How many times can we tell the workers and peasants that they have a miserable life? They know that! How many times can we tell them that we are going to change their lives and make them happy? They do not trust us, they only trust the *mullas*. Once Sheykh Saeed was preaching. You cannot even imagine how he got the people to cry. Even Baktash and I burst into tears.
- What did he say?
- He talked about fighting for God, about *jihad* and martyrdom.

Salim tells his friend about his love for Hasti, and promises to convince Hasti that religion is the only alternative:¹³

- اما من متأسفانه عاشق شده‌ام.

- چرا متأسفانه؟

- دختری که عاشقش شده‌ام هزار و یک عیب شرعی و عرفی دارد. از نظر عقیدتی هم درست نقطه مقابل من است.¹²

[...]

- می‌توانم او را رام کنم. مثل موم...

- اگر او تو را رام کرد چی؟

[...]

- نه، او را متقاعد می‌کنم که غیر از راه دین راهی نیست.¹³

- Unfortunately, I am in love!
- Why unfortunately?
- The girl I am in love with has a thousand and one religious and non-religious weaknesses. Her ideological orientation is also totally different from mine.
- [...]
- [but] I can domesticate her. She is like wax...
- But what will happen if she manages to domesticate you?

¹⁰ All translations in the paper are mine.

¹¹ Daneshvar (1993: 165).

¹² Daneshvar (1993: 160).

¹³ Daneshvar (1993: 166).

- [...]
- No, I will convince her that there is no other alternative than relying on religion.

Among other post-Revolutionary social novels one can mention *Bar bāl-e bād ne-shastan* (On the Wings of Wind) (Stockholm, 2002) by Shahrnush Parsipur; *Khāne-ye Edrisihā* (The House of Edrisis) (Tehran, 1991) by Ghazale Alizade, *Dar hazar* (At Home) (Los Angeles, 1987) by Mahshid Amirshahi; and *Bigāne-i dar man* (A Stranger Within Me) (Uppsala, 1993) by Shokuh Mirzadegi.

As mentioned earlier, Simin Daneshvar and Shahrnush Parsipur had already established themselves as novelists before the Islamic Revolution. Mahshid Amirshahi and Ghazale Alizade, on the other hand, were known as short story writers before the Revolution, and Shokuh Mirzadegi became established as novelist and short story writer only after the Revolution.

Popular Novels

Popular novels are mostly written by the post-Revolutionary generation of woman novelists in Iran. Before the Revolution, romantic popular novels written by men or women used to be published in women magazines. Sheyda summarizes some main features of the Persian post-Revolutionary popular novels: putting emphasis on Islamic morality, encouraging women to be chaste, depicting the life of the lower classes as enviable, justifying the predetermined social order, and espousing a strong belief in predetermined fate.¹⁴ In popular novels, the time and the socio-political context are not important. What is essential is the moral message of the novel, which is considered to be justified beyond time and space. A very typical novel of this category is *Panjere* (The Window) (1992) by Fahime Rahimi.

Fahime Rahimi was born in 1952. Her first novel, *Bāzgasht be khoshbakhti* (A Return to Happiness), was published in 1990. Since then, she has published more than twenty-five popular novels, some of which are: *Otobus* (The Bus) (1993); *Sālhāyi ke bi to gozasht* (The Years Without You) (1994); *Eblis-e kuchak* (The Little Devil) (1995); *Pāyiz rā farāmush kon* (Forget the Autumn) (1995); *Yād-e to* (The Memory of You) (1998); *'Eshq va khorāfāt* (Love and Superstition) (2001); *Marā yād ār* (Remember Me!) (2006); *Borji dar meh* (A Tower in the Fog) (2007); and *Roz-e kabud* (The Blue Rose) (2009). Most of Rahimi's novels have been reprinted several times and they are mostly read by women.

Panjere (The Window) is a love story. It begins with a middle-class family moving into a new house. They have two daughters, Mina and Mersedeh. In the new house, the window in the room of younger daughter, Mina, faces onto a window where a young man is living. Mina falls in love with the young man at first sight. It soon emerges that the young man is her literature teacher at her new school. The young man comes from a wealthy, but kind and humble family. After a while their families begin to socialize with each other. The young man also develops feelings for the girl, but none of them speak of their feelings for each other, as they are both very committed to the traditional moral norms. However, this silence ends when the

¹⁴ Sheyda (2001: 86).

young man marries his morally lax cousin. Having failed in love, the young girl, who is now working as a teacher, marries the father of one of her students just to be a mother to her student. Her husband dies after a couple of years. At last, the young teacher's wife commits suicide by jumping out of a window. With her death, there is no longer any obstacle to their union. They get married and it turns out that the young man had only married his cousin to save her from further moral decay.

The entire novel emphasizes women's chastity, the importance of only expressing feelings and sexuality within controlled frames, the major role of a woman as being mother not a lover, the duty of human beings on the Earth, and despising the earthly world.

In the beginning of the novel, Mina's sister, Mersede, warns her to control her curiosity about the young man, to behave morally correct and stay away from the window. On one of those occasions, when she is looking for the young man through the window, she suddenly realizes that there is only one short step between chastity and a bad reputation:

با خودم گفتم [...] مگر تو به مرسته قول ندادی که به پنجره نزدیک نشوی. مواظب باش از عفت تا بدنامی بیش از یک قدم فاصله نیست. مراقب باش تا به این پرتگاه سقوط نکنی از اندیشه بدنامی و بدنام شدن بر خود لرزیدم و با عجله اتاق را ترک کردم.¹⁵

I told myself [...] didn't you promise Mersede to stay away from the window? Be careful, there is only one step between chastity and a bad reputation. Be careful, so that you do not fall into this abyss. At the bare thought of a bad reputation, I began to shudder and left the room hastily.

In one of the long moral lectures that the young teacher delivers for Mina, we read:

ما همه برای آزمونی بزرگ خلق شده‌ایم [...] تو انسان خلق شده‌ای و در وجودت مثل تمام انسانها عواطف و احساسات به ودیعه گذاشته شده است و باید از آنها استفاده کنی و انسان باشی؛ انسان سازنده و مثمر ثمر. تو خلق شده‌ای تا که مادر گردی و گردونه زندگی را با نسلی که از خود برجای می‌گذاری بگردانی آیا هدف داری این جهان را قبول داری؟¹⁶

We are all created for a great final test [...]. You have been created as human being, and like other human beings, you have been given feelings and affections that you have to use to be a better human being; a constructive and fruitful human being. You have been created to become a mother and stand for the continuity of the cycle of life by leaving behind a new generation. Do you believe in a higher goal behind the creation of this world?

Among the other post-Revolutionary popular novels written by women one can mention *Hekāyat-e ruzegār* (The Story of Our Time) (1994) by Faride Golbu; *Diānā ke bud* (Who Was Diana?) (1994) by Zahra Zavvarian; *Bāmadād-e khomār* (Drunkard Morning) (1995) by Fattane Haj Seyyed Javadi; *Chenār-e Dālbeti* (Dalbeti Plane Tree) (1992) by Mansure Sharifzade; *Khushehā-ye ranj* (The Grapes of Suf-

¹⁵ Rahimi (1992:12–13).

¹⁶ Rahimi (1992:100).

fering) (1999) by Nasrin Sameni; *Yaldā va rahāyi* (Yalda and Liberation) (2000) by Mahkame Rahimzade; *Qesse-ye zendegi* (The Life Story) (2001) by Setare Nasirian; and *Taqdir-e shum* (The Wretched Fate) (2007) by Maryam Jafari.

Feminist Novels

Feminist novels are mostly written by the post-Revolutionary generation of woman novelists and short story writers both in Iran and in the Diaspora. The number of feminist novelist in the Diaspora is limited. As a matter of fact, the Iranian women in the Diaspora have mostly been involved in writing poetry or feminist studies. It is hardly necessary to say that the feminist novels show great sensitivity towards gender issues. They are almost always written from the point of view of a female character or narrator.

The main feature separating the feminist novels from the social novels is that in the feminist novels, the historical and socio-political context is either absent or a secondary issue. The feminist novels focus on the differences between men and women, their two separate worlds, and on women's feelings. The feminist novels are dependent on the opposition between the two sexes. In these novels, men are usually present just as a means to highlight the differences between the two sexes. Most of these novels could have simply been written by any women living in any big city in the Middle East. As in the popular novels, time and space are not decisive for shaping the characters or plotting the novel. A typical Persian post-Revolutionary feminist novel is *Parande-ye man* (My Bird) (2002) by Fariba Vafi.

Fariba Vafi was born in 1962. Her first published book was the short story collection, *Dar ʿomq-e sahne* (In Depth of the Stage) (1996). *Parande-ye man* (My Bird) (2002), her first novel, won two highly prestigious Persian literary awards, the Golshiri Award and the Yalda Literary Award, for best novel 2002. She has published several other novels and short story collections: *Hattā vaqti mikhandim* (Even When We Are Laughing) (Short story collection, 1999); *Tarlān* (Tarlān) (Novel, 2003); *Royā-ye tabbat* (Dream of Tibet) (Novel, 2005); *Dar rāh-e Vilā* (On the Way to Vila Avenue) (Short story collection, 2007); *Rāzi dar kuchehā* (A Mystery in Alleys) (Novel, 2008); *Hame-ye ofōq* (The Entire Horizon) (Short story collection, 2010); and *Māh kāmēl mishavad* (When It Becomes a Full Moon) (Novel, 2010).

Parande-ye man (My Bird) follows the life of a young woman living in a poor neighbourhood in Tehran, together with her husband, Amir, and her two children. Amir believes that there is no future for him and his family in Iran. To work in Baku, Amir leaves his wife and their two children alone in Tehran for a time, but he dreams of emigrating to Canada. The narrator, Amir's wife, is a simple everyday woman who is occupied with her family, her little home, and her relationship with Amir. She is not interested in moving to another country.

The narrator feels lonely having a husband obsessed by his dream of leaving Iran for Canada. Physically, he is at home, but mentally he is away, neglecting his wife's feelings and needs. He neither sees nor hears her. He is living in his own world.

This life in loneliness and silence reminds the woman of her childhood in silence with a strict father and a bitter mother. She is not particularly in love with her hus-

band, but she is not strong enough to leave him either. So she continues to live with him, while keeping silent about her true feelings about Amir. She betrays him in her dreams:

امیر خبر ندارد که روزی صد بار به او خیانت می‌کنم؛ وقتی که زیر شلواری‌اش به همان حالتی که درآورده وسط اتاق است. وقتی توی جمع آنقدر سرش گرم است که متوجه من نیست [...] . وقتی مرا علت ناکامی‌هایش به حساب می‌آورد [...] . خبر ندارد که روزی صد بار [...] از این زندگی بیرون می‌روم [...] به جاهایی می‌روم که امیر خیالش را هم نمی‌کند. آن وقت با پیشمانی زنی توبه‌کار، در تاریکی شبی مثل امشب دوباره به خانه پیش امیر باز می‌گردم.¹⁷

Amir doesn't know that I betray him one hundred times a day; when I pick up his pyjamas left on the floor, precisely as he has taken them off; when at our parties, he is so busy with other people that he doesn't even think of me [...]; when he looks at me as the reason behind all his failures. He doesn't know that I leave this marriage one hundred times a day [...] for places that he cannot even imagine. Then, in the darkness of a night like this, I return to this house and to Amir like a penitent woman.

In another scene, having put her head on Amir's chest, she lets him caress her hair while thinking that she is really tired of him:

به امیر نزدیک می‌شوم و سرم را روی سینه‌اش می‌گذارم. زیادی سفت است. سرم را کمی پایین‌تر می‌آورم. امیر موهایم را نوازش می‌کند [...] . امیر به خیالش هم نمی‌رسد که اینقدر از او سیر شده باشم.¹⁸

I come closer to Amir and put my head on his chest. His chest is too hard. I put my head a bit lower. Amir caresses my hair [...]. He cannot even imagine how tired I am of him.

As a typical feminist novel, *Parande-ye man* (My Bird), is indifferent to the historical and socio-political context. The characters can be understood through their daily actions. The world of the novel is limited to the narrator's home and family.

The list of Persian post-Revolutionary feminist novels written by women is long. Among these novels one can mention: *Jensiat-e gomshode* (The Lost Gender) (Tehran, 2000) By Farkhonde Aqayi; *Āsmān khāli nist* (The Sky Is Not Empty) (Tehran, 2003) by Shiva Arastuyi; *Engār gofte budī Leyli* (As if You Had Said Leyli) (Tehran, 2000) by Sepide Shamlu; *Man va Vis* (Me and Vis) (Tehran, 1998) by Faride Razi; *Cherāgh-hā rā man khāmush mikonam* (I will Turn off the Lights) (Tehran, 2001) by Zoya Pirzad; *Che kasi bāvar mikonad Rostam?* (Who Believes that Rostam?) (Tehran, 2003) by *Ruhangiz sharifian*; and *Shāli be derāzā-ye jāde-ye abrisham* (A Shawl as Long as the Silk Road) by Mahasti Shahrokhi (Stockholm 1999).¹⁹

It must be mentioned that there are a few novels, like *Negarān nabāsh* (Don't Worry!) (Tehran, 2009) by Mahsa Mohebali and *Ehtemālan gom shode-am* (I Am Probably Lost) (Tehran, 2009) by Sara Salar, that represent a new approach towards

¹⁷ Vafi (2002: 41–42).

¹⁸ Vafi (2002: 59).

¹⁹ Republished in Iran in 2005.

gender questions and the socio-political context. Although they depict the crisis in the relationship between the two sexes within a chaotic socio-political context, these novels are not dependent on the opposition between the two sexes. The female characters in these two novels are no longer depicted only as victims of men and a patriarchal society. They are not solely shaped in relation to the other sex. This new category demands a study of its own.

Conclusion

To summarize, the Persian post-Revolutionary novels written by women reflect different reactions to the Islamic Revolution, the aftermath of the Revolution, and its consequences, and include different themes and subjects. In the social novels, men and women are equally engaged in the challenges and conflicts of their time. Popular novels have been used as a medium to justify the limited role of women in a male dominated world. Feminist novels have been used as a tool for expressing dissatisfaction with the patriarchal and traditional structures and institutions. Showalter identifies three phases in the writing of British women novelists: 1) the first phase of “*imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles”; 2) the second phase of “*protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy”; and 3) the third phase of “*self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity”. Showalter suggests *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and *Female* as appropriate terms for these three phases.²⁰ With the exception of social novels, Showalter’s *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and *Female* novels more or less correspond to the categories of novels written by Iranian women as presented in this paper.

As for the aesthetics of the novel, Iranian women authors have also tested different forms of novel writing. All of these novels, however, have been nothing but the voice of women authors who had found a suitable and possible way to demonstrate their active presence in a stormy period and to announce how they see life.

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²⁰ Showalter (1977: 13).

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