

A Sociological Reading of Fariba Vafi's *The Dream of Tibet*: A Zimanian Study

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Abstract

At the beginning of the 20th century, women writers tried to alter the patriarchal structures and regain their subjectivity through writing, escaping syntax, and rupturing language. In this regard, there is a close-knit relationship between language and *Écriture féminine* in contemporary literature. In her *Dream of Tibet*, Fariba Vafi represents the patriarchal society of her time. Pierre V. Zima's sociological approach represents phenomena in light of language. The present socio-critical study investigates feminine ideology and sociolect discourse and their impact on meaning and syntax. According to Zima, the dialogue between form and content presents the literary work as a sign which contains many signifiers and signifieds. At the lexical level, the polarity of the lexemes emanating from the taxonomy of key concepts reveals the discourse of the text. These sociolects create a lexical universe in accordance with the sociolinguistic situation which functionalises the language to conjoin the text and its socio-historical context. In *The Dream of Tibet*, meaning and conceptual polarities and confrontations, which are the result of societal dichotomies, problematise the narrator's reliability which, in turn, problematises the subject.

Keywords: *The Dream of Tibet*, Sociocriticism, Fariba Vafi, Feminine Ideology, Zima, Literary Criticism

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Society and social phenomena have always influenced the literature of their time and literary works which, in turn, prompted critics to continuously

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investigate them. At the beginning of the 20th century, women writers opposed anything that prevented their inclusion in the literary canon which, back then, was an androcentric domain for male genius and talent. If many studies investigate women's social demands, then one can regard the textual implications in reaction to social issues at the linguistic level as less explored. The present study employs Zima's analytical approach, which investigates social issues in literary texts, to observe how Fariba Vafi's *The Dream of Tibet* reacts to social problems at the linguistic level in light of *Écriture féminine*.

2. Methodology

This descriptive-analytical article employs a sociological approach in accordance with Pierre V. Zima's model to examine the socio-linguistic implications of the above-mentioned novel.

3. Theoretical Framework

Pierre V. Zima, a contemporary French sociologist, describes the text as a structure that reforms itself in reaction to the social discourses, which, in turn, connects the novel to the society. His analytical method includes three fundamental steps: 1- Investigating the socio-lingual orientation of a literary work which, in turn, unveils the author's ideology. 2- Inspecting the lexical and semantic domains of the text. Since social discourse is composed of signs, specific to one or more groups, which refer to liberal, Christian, Marxist, Fascist, or Feminist groups, by "appropriating" or "rejecting" some words, the author popularises a certain point of view (Zima, 2000:110). 3- Examining the narrative structure. The social discourse, as a narrative structure, becomes a discourse. The narrative structure of a literary text imitates and reproduces reality and, often implicitly or explicitly, aligns with this reality. Through revealing the instability of social and traditional values, the narrative structure analysis discredits the patterns and forms a counter-discourse.

4. Discussion and Analysis

For centuries, literature was androcentric, and male ideology dominated language and discourse. The emergence and expansion of *Écriture féminine* significantly impacted women's status. Pierre V. Zima's analytical method investigates content and ideology in light of the semantic, lexical, and narrative domains. For him, social values and literary text are intrinsically related to language, and though its semantic, lexical, and narrative domains, they express social trends and participate in social, political, and economic struggles. In fact, sociological criticism (*Sociocritique*) incorporates a literary work's articulation and content to unveil its meaning. Fariba Vafi (1341 [1962]) is among those

authors who, while presenting a critical discourse, overturned the linguistic order created by men to construct a new social thought. In her works, Vafi describes women, their identity, and their position in the society; these qualities contribute to the significance of her *The Dream of Tibet*. In this study, we identify the author's female ideology by positioning *The Dream of Tibet* in its socio-linguistic context. The lexical domain reveals the discourse through the semantic dichotomies of words and key concepts. This discourse creates a lexical domain in accordance with socio-lingual conditions to the extent that language acts as a medium between the text and semantic dichotomies, all of which oppose the semantic classifications of the patriarchal society. *The Dream of Tibet's* semantic examination reveals a change in the concepts appropriated by masculine ideology. New concepts enrich the meaning of love, loyalty, rationalism, and motherhood. However, the point of view and behaviour of the characters cannot be limited to an individual psychological code, for they are the result of long-term social, cultural, and linguistic developments, all of which, according to Zima, result in the "loss of meaning" (Zima, 1998:113). Consequently, words no longer reflect the meaning and values predetermined by masculine ideology. Therefore, "by criticising the imposed values," Fariba Vafi "rejects the male language, its validity, accuracy, distinctions, and definitions" (Zima, 2000:122).

In *The Dream of Tibet*, the narrator shifts among three different positions/viewpoints which question the subject's positioning and integrity. By examining the narrative structure, we investigate how the subversion of social values and the creation of semantic ambiguities impact the characters' roles and, as a result, lead to the uncertainty of the position of the subject (narrator). The author balances narration and articulation and shows that as long as there is Tibet in people's minds, the dream of living and thinking freely comes boldly out with a slight push.

5. Conclusion

In the 20th century, to change the social structures, women writers proposed a new attitude which followed the rules of linguistic games. In a world of meaning where predetermined definitions are not valid, the basis of subjectivity or mentality is shaken; the subversion also questions the subject's actions and speech.

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How to cite:

Vesal, M., & Mousavi, H. 2024. "A Sociological Reading of Fariba Vafi's *The Dream of Tibet: A Zimanian Study*", *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi*, 16(2): 221-241. DOI:10.22124/naqd.2024.26493.2551

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