

An Analysis of the Discourse of Gender in Literary Texts of the Seventh Century AH. Case Study: The Manuscripts of Mohammad Aufi's *Javame Al HeKayat va Lavame Al Revayat*

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Abstract

The representation of sexual and gender identities is an issue that can be seen in various literary and cultural texts in one way or another. In this regard, the study of classical texts is of prime importance. These texts are historically significant and their analysis can show us the genealogy of present-day sexual and gender beliefs. One such classical historical text is Sadid Al-Din or Nour Al-Din Mohammad Aufi's *Javame Al Hekayat va Lavame Al Revayat* (7th century AH). Concentrating on its manuscript, the present paper aims to examine the ways in which gender has been represented in this work. Using discourse analysis as its method, the paper deals with the last four parts of the work's section three which is on women. The theoretical framework of the paper is informed by the approach of the French thinker, Michel Foucault. The findings show that in these chapters Aufi tries to construct what he thinks to be ethical gender subjects by deploying a kind of ethical discourse. By his discursive construction of the "chaste woman" and the "unchaste woman", Aufi attempts to create a kind of gender archive based on sensitivity to women's "sexual desire".

Keywords: Representation, Sexuality, Discourse Analysis, Chaste Woman, Patriarchy, Aufi.

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Extended abstract

1. Introduction

The seventh century AH is coincident with the attack of the Mongols and their dominance over Iran. As a consequence of this situation, social solidarity collapses and a highly anomic cultural condition dominates Iran. The situation is well represented in the books of that period. In many of the poetic and prose works of this period, such as the manuscripts of Mohammad Auffi's *Javame Al Hekayat va Lavame Al Revayat*, we witness the redefinition of social identities such as "sexual and gender identities" in the form of ethical and mystical recommendations and critiques. The purpose of this article is to examine the representation of gender in seventh-century literature, with the manuscript of Mohammad Auffi's work as its case study.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach in this study is Michel Foucault's theories on sexuality and historical discourses. According to this approach, through sexual discourses in literary and historical texts, individuals identify themselves as sexual subjects. In Foucault's point of view, discourses are focused on constructing the subject, and within them individuals find their identity and being, such as sexual identities. Foucault uses the concept of "subjectivity" to explain the process of the formation of discourse subjects. In this regard, Auffi's work is a book devoted to the construction of sexual subjects through its narrative discourse.

3. Methodology

The method adopted in the present study is the discourse analysis method. This article examines the four chapters of the third part of Auffi's work, which are on women, through discourse analysis. In these chapters, Auffi has narrated many stories about women and their sexual desires and their relationships with men and husbands.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study show that in these chapters Auffi attempts to use ethical discourse to construct what he thinks to be ethical sexed and gendered subjects. By formulating a discourse on the subjects of “faithful women” and “unfaithful women”, he creates a gendered archive based on the sensitivity to women’s sexual desire. According to this archive, faithful women are those who control their sexual desires and generally repress them. On the contrary, unfaithful women follow their erotic desires and never repress them. The key signifiers of Auffi’s discourse on women and their gender identity are two elements of “trickery” and “disloyalty”, which are regarded by Auffi as women’s “inherent nature”. The subjects exposed to the practice of this trickery and disloyalty are men and husbands, and Auffi thinks it his duty to prevent men from these intrinsic and, to him, destructive, qualities of women. So here we are faced with the use of a kind of “essentialist discourse” on gender and gender issues. In this discourse, the element of “trickery” acts as a form of “strategic power” for women. Through the use of this strategic force, women are able to achieve their desires and wishes. For Auffi, this force is not considered to be evil, but a force that could be a kind of “life-preserving power” that entangles life with feminine tricky and pushes it forward; it is a power that can also guarantee the survival of the family, and, at the same time, act as a tool for resistance in a male-dominated environment. Interestingly, Auffi speaks of the subject of “the lustful man” and considers the pursuit of “sexual desire” to be natural to men and does not criticize him for this. Instead, he expects women to resist this desire. “Faithful women” are subjects who fulfill this duty, but “unfaithful women” are men’s accomplices in following their desires. In this discourse, women are to blame for men’s “sexual deviation”, and thus it is women who are required to be the subjects of the ethical code of “sexual virtue”.

Therefore, the discourse that Auffi formulates in his work contributes to the genesis of a “sexual and desiring subject”, based on which the behavioral pattern and moral value of “sexual virtue” are dependent on a female image rather than a male one – an image in which it is women, not men, who are asked to “stop following sexual desire”. However, this “desiring subject” is a subject in the service of men and “male desire”,

because the addressees of this moral discourse are men, not women. On different occasions, Auffi points out that the purpose of writing such a text is to warn men against the moral problems of women and how to manage those issues. Thus, we see the formation of a kind of moral discourse geared towards the genesis of the “desiring subject” based on gender and gender differences, a discourse that attempts to naturalize these differences and eternalize them within moral themes and propositions.

5. Conclusion

Nevertheless, the significance of Auffi’s work lies in the fact that the concepts and assumptions of the discourse that he formulated in his narratives about women and gender-based ethical issues existed (and may still exist) up to about a century ago as a real discourse in both the public sphere and the texts of Iranian society. Although their truthfulness has been long questioned, discourses still reproduce their effects in the form of contemporary practices.

Keywords: Representation, Sexuality, Discourse Analysis, Chaste Woman, Patriarchy, Aufi.

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