

## Post Revolution Sociological Causes of Women's Tendency to Read Persian Novel in a District of Tehran in 2010

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### ABSTRACT

This widespread tendency toward reading literary works, especially novels can reveals lots of sociological issues that responding to them seems to be a must in our current society. Perhaps one of the important aspects that have led to this tendency is characterization of women in the Persian novels in such a way that we recently have witnessed evolution and growth of female characters' importance. Post-revolution social changes, egression of women from the family boundaries and joining to social activities are among the important factors in this transformation. The main purpose of this paper is to review sociological causes of women's tendency toward reading Persian novels in post-revolution period. We took the advantages of questionnaires to collect data for this survey. In order to facilitate and accelerate research process, we forced to randomly select 150 women as the representative sample. The formal credit and Cronbach's Alpha tests were respectively used to confirm validity and reliability of the research instrument and a non-parametric statistical test such as X<sup>2</sup> was utilized for the measurement of Kendall's tau ( $\tau$ ) coefficient. The results revealed that there are significant relations between variables such as amount of demand for equality opportunities, tendency to be familiar with daily issues, paying attention to heroines in novels, gaining social skills and filling the leisure time reading Persian novels. This significance can be confirmed in at least 95% of study hypothesis.

**KEYWORDS:** Heroines, Social skill, Daily issues, Women

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### INTRODUCTION

Persian novel is relatively new kind of literature that in the beginning was used to express problems of society subalterns and also in many cases to promote sociopolitical thoughts. Therefore, promotional aspects of the novel have been usually considered more important than its artistic and technical aspects and progresses that were made in the art of novel writing and paying attention to its technical characteristics is just revealed in recent decades.

In post-Revolution period, especially in recent years, we have witnessed a growing market boom of publishing popular novels that their circulation and reprint times provide evidence to this claim. During years 1992 to 2004, a total of 3334 fiction books were written by Iranian authors that total circulation of all published titles was 20137750. In the other word, it can be said that a total of 1549075 fiction books were published each year. Obviously, these amounts of popular novels will certainly be used by interested readers because nowadays, the taste of readers for literary works is considered as a priority for publications. Experts have outlined the characteristics of popular novels as follows:

Responding children's need that is human interest in stories and fictions from childhood, that may led to desiring a constant and same story and getting relief using them.

Reflecting the needs and aspirations of middle class which followed by dragging them into passivity and eventually these popular novels could produce and restrain needs and wishes of consumers who are incapable of defining their own.

Women constitute the half population of a society and for some reasons, have already found more trends toward such literary. By visiting bookstores in Tehran, it can be seen that women and young ladies regularly attend the shelves related to novels and stories and purchase them. In post-revolution literature of Iran, especially in recent years, not only novels has had a prominent presence, but also lots of the new Persian novels from the perspectives of author gender and also gender of their heroines were considered as female novel. The evolution of women in novels is relevant to complexity of her role in society and her relations with other community members.

This research is trying to have a sociological approach toward the causes of women tendency to read novel in Tehran in the years following to Islamic revolution. It seems that many social factors such as filling leisure times, recreation, frustration from unequal reality of society against women, looking for desired character in the novels and other factors can be involved in this issue. Recognizing attitudes, moods, desires and abilities of women in any society is desirable, because women make up a half population of society and as a mother provide training for both portions of community. Women are obviously a part of active and employed force and are

considered as economic, political, social and cultural capital of a community. In this research, it is important to understand why women desire to focus their reading interest on fiction genre and why this motivation is very pale and insignificant in other fields. It is important to explore how women's interests and motivations and readings may influence them as a wife, mother and a member of the society.

### **Previous studies**

In a project conducted by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on reading culture in Tehran in 1999, the following results were obtained. In this study, 88 percent of respondents believed that reading and study is not age-specific and should be continued throughout the life. Fifty five percent of respondents considered reading as an absolutely essential factor for the general public, 43 % called it somewhat important and just 2% recognized it as unnecessary. The ratio of reading habits among men and women were 64 and 61 % of all gender, respectively. The average time of reading was 7.7 hours a week. Women were more interested in religious topics, novels and stories than men.

In a study by Asgari Hasanklou (2008), entitled "evolution of Sociological literature critique theories", the author took the history of literary criticism into account and investigated ideas of thinkers in this field. In the field of sociological studies of literature we can name researchers such as Madame de Stael and Hippolyte Taine who first tried to consider community and literature interactions. The researchers were seeking for representation of society in the literature and the state quality of this representation. Later, thinkers like Lukács and Goldmann leaning on their philosophical and historical background, had tried to show mutual coherences between social and literary structures. Topics such as sociology of literary content, sociology of literary types and sociology of book production, distribution and consumption has also been mentioned in this article.

### **Review of Theoretical Topics**

Hippolyte Taine emphasized on three concepts of race, environment and time and believed that social phenomena are influenced by these three factors (Wellek, 1950). He believed in immediate connection between society and literature and from his viewpoint, the literature reflects customs, behaviors and moods of the author's era. Literary works are the result of interaction among biological, cultural and historical factors. Biological, cultural and historical factors occur in race, environment, and time, respectively. The concept of race in Taine opinion was almost the same as to ethnical spirit of Schlegel and of course this has nothing to do with racism. The difference between nations in terms of geography, language and customs had led Taine to the concept of race and then to the emergence of literary works due to this feature. He in studying literature of European nations mentioned their mental, moral, and social characteristics and specified a particular ethnic for every nation and from this perspective, had dealt with manifestation of ethnical spirit in literary works.

His remarks about the racial characteristics of the major European nations seem to be a total generalization and when this statement deals with the analysis of literary works, it to some extent goes astray. The concept of environment consists of climatically elements and prevailing political and social situation in a nation. In addition, environment gives special characteristics to all human beings inside it that these features in terms of both content and form have influence on creation of literary works. Literary works in each period may be influenced by tastes and talents of people in that era. Undoubtedly no author could create his works out of nothing and this being in a particular time and community would consciously or unconsciously, shape the content and form of his work (Gordon, 1992).

Distribution of literary works among the audience is the second stage of the process of economic attitude toward literature. Nowadays, publishers are in fact the link between creators and the readers and before considering spiritual value of the work they inevitably gave priority to the economic aspects. In such process, a literature sociologist uses statistics and figures of various issues related to distribution of a work and its acceptance among readers to give the publisher and creator of the literary work information about tastes of the audience and their expectations about the text. Here, cultural and literary critics and sociologists do not judge about the value of specific works in the first place but their effort is primarily focused on describing how the cultural atmosphere in a period can affect emergence and the value of a literary work (Daiche, 1956).

In his opinion, artistic manners and tastes are influenced by a literary field; in the other words, artistic and literary talents and perceptions of people are influenced by literary institutions. These institutions include museums, exhibitions, academies, art circles, items related to the reproduction of producers and consumers such as art schools, agents and specialist brokers including critics, art historians, art collectors, etc. Thus, a work of art itself is not considered as the artwork, but forms in the society and through communication with others. Different types and forms of artistic works are created through a literary field and then they may reproduce as an artistic and literary identity.

In relation with similar structure and taste of individuals toward classical music, film, etc. In this structure, different levels of a field may be associated with the other due to their similarity. Thus, a relation can be established between education, good taste and knowledge of the high dignity arts (Bourdieu, 1984).

According to Weber, sociology accepts that beauty has meaning for human beings and sociology is not allowed to comment about probable evolution of art as the art. In fact, it is not true to consider an art superior to another one just due to use of modern technical equipment by the first one. Thus, a work of art neither gets more complete, nor get older. No practice in art sociology can confirm that a complete work of art is more complete than the other one.

Marxists had look to literature as a weapon and believed that the working class must utilize it as a weapon to retain its lost rights. Marxists believe that there are reciprocal relationships between the literary phenomenon and social reality that described this phenomenon. In Marxist point of view, literature is explicit reporter of social reality. This fatalist view ignores the aesthetic aspect of a literary work and limits its mission just to transmission of social knowledge. Moreover, it did not accept differences of views due to class differences, and even did not allow different classes to enter into literary works and their world of fiction (Marx, 1998).

Weber also tries to prove uniqueness of western civilization rationalism about art. However, he avoided to announce inherent superiority of western civilization over other ones and said that differentiation means the promise of being progressive and not necessarily implies such a meaning. West has been successful to improve its artistic life conditions thanks to its more advanced intellectual techniques but it cannot be said that it could improve its major art groups in a more satisfactory manner. The subject of Weber's art sociology is to explain the possible relationship between of modern techniques and sociological or religious motives that have been inspiring artists in different historical periods (Weber, 1958).

Indulgence in the Marxist theory of literature may lead to discontinuation of the real link between the community and the original literature. Hicks (1933), the most prominent Marxist critic enumerates the characteristics of a work of art accepted by Marxism as follows: it should guide the reader of the proletarian class to recognize his role in the struggle for the class. It should show the effects of class struggle. It should persuade the readers to have a deep understanding of their participation in that period of life which has been depicted in an artwork. Author must rely on the view that the proletarian class is the pioneer community and the author himself must be a proletarian or extend his obligation to be a member of the labor class (Goldmann, 2008).

Goldmann (2008) was in search of a hypothesis to establish a meaningful bond between literary form of novel and the most important aspect of social life that reflects this literary form. He believes that creation of novel as a literary genre it is not amazing. Extremely complex form that a novel provides in appearance, is the same form that people live within it every day; people who are forced to search any quality and consumption value in a vain manner due to interference and intervene of the quantity and exchange value in a society in which any attempt toward consumption value will merely create people who are vain as a problematic person in different ways.

Another important theory of Goldmann is the doer of cultural creations. Goldman has clearly knows the doer of artistic and cultural creation a public ideology (not an individual) that eventually will be supplied by a person as an integrated and special form of art. Responding to the question concerning the real creator of an artwork, he proposed the issue of social classes and social structures and considers the author as the representative of the same social standing from which he has risen or has tendency for any reason. In this case, the artwork indicates the ideology of that social class.

According to Löwenthal, literature is the only reliable source for self-awareness and human consciousness and is considers as an experience for the individual's relationship with the world. The Artist brought socialization process into awareness not only for his era but also for ours and thus can continuously improve our false awareness. Being alerted to this aspect of art, only during the past fifty years that West totalitarianism have emerged and has caused a severe crisis, has become a matter of importance and have been set as the agenda for intellectuals. Indeed, the sociology of art is a kind of Minerva's owls.

Sociology of literature, in its true meaning must interpret something that seems to have the most distance with the community and is the main key for society understanding and especially its shortcomings. Meanwhile, psychoanalysis that reveals social dimensions of the most private aspects of human body and soul is a good model for what I am attempting to say in this research. The role of literature critical sociology in analysis of society and personal privacy and uncovering the sociological determinism of phenomena such as love, friendship and human relationships with nature and self-image, etc. was important to me. However, this approach does not mean reductionism. I totally disagree with those who struggle to utilize literature as a means to achieve their goals in government institutions such as economy and legal system. Literature teaches us how to measure success or failure of people socialization in tangible historical moments and situations (Löwenthal, 1989).

### **Hypotheses**

There is a significant relationship between leisure times, demands for equal opportunities with men, tendency to be familiar with social issues, acquisition of social skills, importance of novel heroine, and background variables (such as age, education, occupation) and reading the novel.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was accomplished using quantitative survey method. Data were collected through questionnaires. The study population included all women who buy novels from bookshops of a district of Tehran. Since there were no exact documented statistics in this study, in order to estimate the statistical community in the first half of 2009 based on the list of sales by bookstores and then assigning one third of this shopping to women, it was found that approximately 1874 books were purchased by women in that district of Tehran. Cochran formula was utilized in this study for sample size determination. This formula estimates sample size based on the total population, confidence level (95%) and error (5%) (Rafipour, 1991).

Therefore, the study sample size based on the Cochran formula was 150.

$$n = \frac{\frac{t^2 pq}{d^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{N} \left( \frac{t^2 pq}{d^2} - 1 \right)} = \frac{\frac{(1/96)^2 (0/5)(0/5)}{(0/05)^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{1874} \left( \frac{(1/96)^2 (0/5)(0/5)}{(0/05)^2} - 1 \right)} = 150$$

Cluster sampling was used in this paper in such ways that at first, from among all bookstores in that district, five stores were randomly chosen and from each bookstore 15 individuals and a total of 150 respondents weather educated, employed or housewife were given questionnaires.

### The main variables are defined as follows:

**Leisure times:** the hours and times in which the person is free from work and everyday issues and has free time to engage in recreation.

**Equality:** seeking equality with men in issues such as equality in choosing their field of education, child custody right, employment, divorce and love that each of them are evaluated using Likert scale questions.

**Recognition:** The purpose of this variable are problems and issues that women want to get familiar with through reading novels including political issues, economic issues, social, career, social disorder, living problems of alone women, problems of divorce children, gender inequality, and barriers to marriage that each of these issues were asked from respondent using Likert type questionnaire.

**Novel function:** Here is what women expect to help resolve issues after reading a novel. Issues such as emotional relationship with a spouse, child, parent, partner relationships, choosing friends, managing finances, planning for the future, resolving family crises, relieving from an unsuccessful emotional experience. Each of these cases is measured using a Likert type questionnaire.

The face validity and Cronbach's alpha were respectively used to test validity and reliability of the research. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for seeking equality with men, familiarity with social issues, and the novel function is 0.74, 0.76, and 0.92, respectively. In order to estimate face validity following to designing corresponding items spectrum (based on research and theoretical perspectives), they were given to scholars and university experts. Comment on these items in order to evaluate each spectrum, has eventually led to the selection of appropriate items for each spectrum.

### Findings

The obtained data were processed using SPSS software. In the present study due to failure in achieving the assumptions of parametric tests, nonparametric tests such as X2 test and Kendall's tau coefficient were used to evaluate the relationships.

### Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

The average age of respondents was 32.8 years this is almost high. Average weekly leisure time of respondents is about 28.4 hours. The results show that education level of majority of those who read novel, are associate degree and BA or BS (56.7%). 27.3 percent are diploma and 16% are MA or MS or above. Also the results revealed that the majority of novel readers are employees (59.3%) and the rest are housewives (28%), unemployed (8%), high school students (2%) and university students (2.8%). However, significant presence of employees among novel readers is ponderable.

Marital status is another descriptive indicator. The results show that singles and married ones are almost equal in reading novel. However, the singles (50.7) are slightly more than married ones (49.3).

Another descriptive indicator is the age of respondent that in this study the average age to start reading novel was 13.7 years. The results also show that most respondents got familiar with the novel through their friends so that 22.7% through bookshops, 17.3% through relatives, 10% from families and only 9.3% have got familiar with the novel through advertisements. Most respondents (63.3%) have stated that they like novels with

love and romance themes, 20% like social, 14% spiritual, and 2.4 percent prefer political novels. Results show that respondents have been engaged in activities other than reading novels including: sport (16.7%), cinema (24%), going out with friends (19.3%), busy with shopping (17.3%), being in party (15.3%), and traveling (5.3%). In response to the question that what is attractive in novel for you? Fifty percent of respondents stated that the characters are their favorite in novels, and other items such as author and ... are next.

Another question is that what issues other than novels they are interested in? The results show that most respondents (66%) are interested in psychology, 22% prefer historical books and other items are the next. However, the low contribution of political books proves that novel readers are not basically well with the policy and political issues. Another important issue is the heroines of story. Results indicate that 78% of respondents said that heroine of the story is very important for them, 19.3% found this to somehow important, and only 2.7% percent said that this issue has the least importance.

Another question is that whether gender of the author writer is important? The result show that 51% of female respondents believe that gender of author have no importance, 33.3% said it is to somehow important, and only 14.6% said that gender of fiction is very important for them; 2% have not answered this question.

Considering seeking equality in details, the results shows that more than 90 percent of female respondents are highly demand for equality with men in right of divorce, child custody and choosing career

Also, 76.6% are demanding for equality with men in choosing field of study and 68 percent are demanding for equal rights with men in love. The results indicate the fact that women who read novel tend to be very sensitive about equality and having equal rights with men.

In response to the question: what makes you more familiar with social issues through reading the novels? According to results, respondents believe that reading novel would lead to familiarity with the issues such as barriers to marriage, divorce children, social anomalies and gender inequalities and also problems of choosing spouse. On the other hand, they believe that reading novel would lead to minimum familiarity with issues such as economy, choice of occupation, problems of lonely women and political issues. So that about 63% of respondents believe that reading novel would be helpful in relieving from unsuccessful emotional experience and this is the function of novel for them. In this case, reading novel will help finding friends, managing emotional relationship with spouse, solving family crises and planning for the future. Most respondents (52.7%) stated that reading novel has generally a positive function in solving their problems.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Results show that there is a significant positive relationship between leisure time and reading novel, so that the more time the respondents have, the more they will read novel. Also, there is relatively weak but significant positive relationship between gender equality and reading novel. However, the more women read novel, the more they want equal opportunities and rights with men. Of course this relationship is not necessarily a unilateral one. However, it can be bilateral and reading novels can be considered as cause and effect.

When women got frustrated due to their unequal status in society and prefer to read a novel to realize their wishes and desires through it, here novel can be considered as the effect; And when women get aware of new excerpts of their rights through reading novel, or find sympathy with the characters of the novels, here reading novel by women can be considered as a cause of seeking equality. Using a functional approach, however, reading novel by women can be explained as a safe haven for this class of society to fulfill their social aspirations and expectations including rights of divorce, child custody, choosing career and academic disciplines, and many others or to find some relief from obsession and frustration.

Also there is a relatively negative and weak relationship between amount of reading novel and its influences on getting familiar with different issues so that the more people read novel, the less they would believe that this would help them with those issues. This means that women are looking for something else via reading novel. Perhaps some sort of relief, comfort and recreation, because reading novel is not actually a social pathology class for women to deal with complex issues such as social abnormalities, problems of lonely women, children of divorce or political issues. However, recreational aspects of reading novel are more preferable for women.

The results show that there is a positive relationship between reading novel and having faith in positive effects of novel in acquiring social skills. So that the more novels woman read, the more they will believe that the novel can help them in some issues of life such as emotional relationship with spouse, children and parents, relationship with colleagues, and choosing friends. This result can be explained in such a way that reading novel in addition to entertaining functions for women, can be helpful in learning social skills such as emotional relationship with spouse, children and parents, relationship with colleagues, choosing friends, solving family crises and relieving from unsuccessful emotional experience.

The results also indicate that there is a direct relationship between reading novel and accentuating the heroines, so that from among 88 individual who read novel a lot, 92% said that heroine in the novel is very important for them. In the other word, the more women read novel, the more important novel's heroines would

be for them. The observed correlation based on chi-square test is at less than 1% of significance. This is perhaps one of the most interesting findings of this research which indicates the importance of heroine in the novel. This result can be explained with a critical approach that women in unequal society are seeking for a kind of a projection and finding sympathy with the novel's main character or heroine of the story.

Around the current world that is all conquered by men, reading novel and having mental and emotional involvement with its characters, especially if the protagonist is female, would be considered as a base for women to reassure more in the facing with social reality and maybe learn and practice how to face with these realities.

The results show that there is a negatively inverse relationship between level of education and amount of reading novel so that the lower educated individuals are more likely to read novels. Perhaps this result can be explained this way that women with higher level of education and skills obtained whatever they want using their education and lower educated women are seeking these skills through reading novel and in facing with reality and everyday problems, the educated people would be more successful.

There is a positive but relatively weak relationship between age and reading novels so it seems that elderly people are more interested in reading novel. Youth energy and freshness in dealing with everyday issues and problems can explain this eagerness to read novel among elderly women and reading novel seems to be fun and entertaining for them. Since there is a positive relationship between leisure time and reading novel, providing more leisure time for women to read novel and improving the story books and novels can be a useful means to convey experience for women.

Another issues intended to address are consideration of equality rights for women and providing more resources for this class. Persuading their demand on the legal status about the many social rights through various ways seems to be necessary. Since women look for gaining social skills, recreation and entertainment through reading novel, book publishing market should be organized for this group and through these kinds of artworks we could provide a basis for such growth and development for them in the society.

In this study, there was a relatively strong relationship (0.4) between importance of the heroine and amount of reading novel. Therefore, if the subject of Persian stories and novels be such that female characters become the protagonist of novel, this could be assumed as a source of power and reassuring to women to find sympathy with the main characters of these stories and this will ease their struggle to achieve their rights. In the other word, if women become the protagonist in different fields of stories, this will lead to ever-increasing self-confidence and self-improvement of women in the society.

Since there is negative inverse relation between education level and reading novel, publishing some works for women with higher educational class seems to be necessary.

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