

Deconstructing Phallogocentrism in Shahrnush Parsipur's *Touba and the Meaning of Night*: A Psycho-Feminist Study

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ABSTRACT

Shahrnush Parsipur (1946) is a celebrated and courageous Iranian novelist. This study deals with her controversial, epic novel *Touba and the Meaning of Night* (1989). The novel is analyzed based on Lacanian theory of subject formation and Cixousian concept of 'écriture feminine'. In this essay a psychoanalytic-feminist discourse is used to intervene between a phallogocentric discourse and a feminist discourse. The pivotal aims of the study are to deconstruct Lacan's concept of phallogocentrism, to redefine the concept of womanhood and to reconstruct feminine identity. According to the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, it is language that ultimately structures our conscious and unconscious mind and our identity. He introduced a tripartite scheme of psychic development: imaginary, symbolic and real. The symbolic order and its accompanying concept of phallogocentrism is the main focus of this study. By deconstructing symbolic phallus as the transcendental signified which signifies everything including female identity, the researcher's aim is to focus on the need for a female framework and a feminine discourse free from male assumptions in order to reconstruct feminine identity. Helene Cixous, in her essay *The Laugh of Medusa* (1975), introduces a particular kind of female writing and tries to reconstruct the women's shattered, colonized and marginalized identities in order to deconstruct the dominant symbolic order and phallogocentric discourse. The task of this study is to deal with and to follow the trace of masculine ideology and discourse in women's identity in the novel *Touba and the Meaning of Night*. The study also, inspired by Helene Cixous' prophecy of women's experience of writing in a male dominated atmosphere claims that through deconstruction and break down of phallogocentrism, female subjects are constructed and a new discourse for women is established based on which they can reconstruct and forge their new identities.

Keywords: Shahrnush Parsipur; *Touba and the Meaning of Night*; Lacan; Cixous; Phallogocentrism

INTRODUCTION

This study, using Lacan's theory of subject formation and Helen Cixous' ideas, focuses on a novel by Shahrnush Parsipur, a pioneer and preeminent female writer of feminist works. Shahrnush Parsipur is an Iranian novelist, born in Tehran, Iran in 1946.

The novel, *Touba and the Meaning of Night*, published in 1989, narrates the story of "a young girl who comes of age and matures over a period of several decades in Iran's tumultuous nineteenth- and twentieth-century history. Parsipur portrays Touba as a woman coming to consciousness about her own oppression as a woman" (Parsipur, 2008, pp. 364-365). In this novel strong images of women are seen. This epic novel is the story of the lives and experiences of women -specifically of a woman named Touba, her illusive efforts to find truth, and her struggle for survival in a patriarchal society - in 20th century Iran from colonialism era to Islamic Republic. The study of this novel with a psycho-feminist view