



An Analysis on the Transformation of Women's Discourse Signs in Post-Constitutional Iran

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Abstract

What were the contexts that shaped Iranian society's understanding of women's identity in the post-constitutional era? What is the importance of these contexts for understanding the contemporary social situation, and in what ways can they be analyzed? The meanings attributed to female identity in Iran have evolved with the introduction of modern ideas and institutions, as well as the formation of the constitutional movement. It is important to narrate this evolution by analyzing the problems and explaining the status of women in contemporary Iranian society, as well as to provide an analytical model for understanding their status. The goal of achieving such knowledge is to offer both a theoretical and practical perspective for correctly understanding women's issues in contemporary Iranian society and for improving their situation. The discourse analysis method, based on the examination of power-truth relations in the representation of female identity and its consequences for the role and position of women in the social structure, is conducted with reference to reliable historical sources such as newspapers, diaries, travelogues, books, and articles related to this topic. By describing the contradictions between traditional and modern discourses about women and their importance in Iranian society during a period of transition, this article aims to problematize and explain the complex situation of women within the mental framework and social structure of Iranian society. The method of discourse analysis focuses on examining the determining mode or formative role of power in constructing knowledge and truth systems. By looking at women's issues in Iran during the constitutional era from this perspective, our attention is directed to developments related to the role and influence of power in stabilizing or weakening the systems of knowledge and truth about women—in other words, the discourses surrounding women. In analyzing the discourses surrounding women in Iran during the post-constitutional era, and with attention to Foucauldian principles regarding the relationship between power, knowledge, and truth systems, we have adopted the model of discourse analysis from the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe as the research methodology for this article.

The image and characteristics of femininity in the semantic system and culture of Iran at the end of the Qajar era and the beginning of the Pahlavi era, along with the



position and objective status of women in the social, economic, and political systems of that time, are interrelated. This relationship can be analyzed within the framework of a traditional patriarchal discourse, which, based on patriarchal values, relegated girlhood and femininity—and their associated signs or traits—to a state of exclusion, subordination, and marginalization. Women were defined by characteristics such as being weak, dependent on men, veiled, associated with the private sphere, modest, and embodying zeal. Roles such as wifedom, motherhood, and childbearing, along with practices like polygamy, concubinage, umbilical cord cutting, and concubine child-rearing, were considered the most significant markers that defined femininity and women's status. The confrontation and exposure of Iranians, particularly Iranian women, to the concepts of Western modernity and the comparison of their status with that of Western women during the constitutional and post-constitutional era led to cracks in the traditional discourse of Iranian patriarchy. Concepts such as the inherent freedom and equality of men and women, as well as the active social, economic, and political roles of women, became the basis for a transformation in the markers that described women within the traditional discourse and for the emergence of a new discourse. While women sought freedom and inherent equality, they also began playing roles beyond the private and domestic spheres, participating in public and external domains related to society, the economy, and politics. In this article, using the methodology of discourse analysis, we describe and analyze the general features and characteristics of the traditional patriarchal discourse that dominated Iranian society during the late Qajar and early Pahlavi eras and its relationship with the position of women in society. We also examine the emergence of new characteristics and the formation of a new discourse about women in Iran. This analysis focuses specifically on the speech and writings related to women's letters and publications during this period. The criticism of women's lack of independence, with an emphasis on redefining the roles of wife, mother, and child bearer, as well as the criticism of their marginalization and exclusion to the private, domestic, and veiled spheres, are central to our analysis. Additionally, we examine the critique of traditions that marginalize women, such as navel cutting, child marriage, and concubinage. The women journalists and intellectuals of this period laid the foundation for redefining women's identity and social position based on a new discourse that emphasizes the inherent freedom and equality of women and men, and the active, positive role and activism of women in the public sphere.

Keywords: Sign, discourse, woman, Iran, post- constitutionalism.

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