



## The Concept of Shahrnush Parsipour's "*Touba and the Meaning of the Night*"; An Approach to Erving Goffman's Theory of Stigma

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### Abstract

This paper aims to study Shahrnush Parsipour's novel *Touba and the Meaning of the Night* (1368) in the framework of Erving Goffman's theory of Stigma: Management of Spoiled Identity (1963). This theory examines the relationship between people in daily life. This novel narrates the life of Touba from the late Qajar to the Pahlavi period. While using an anthropological approach, the present descriptive-analytical research tries to answer which themes of Goffman's Stigma are more prominent in the novel regarding Touba, who narrates the story. The results indicate that the novel's most important stigmas and labelings are feelings of anonymity or loss of identity, disgust, rejection, anti-currentism, social dissent, and doubts about Touba's character, which often has a psychological and cultural basis. The disrespect, hesitation, ominous feeling of destiny, insecurity, obsession, and inferiority complex, and consequently, the arousal of hatred and revenge surrounded Touba more than anything else.

**Keywords:** *Shahrnush Parsipour, Touba and The Meaning of the Night, Erving Goffman, Persian contemporary novel, Analysis Goffman's theory of Stigma,*

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### *Extended Abstract*

#### **1. Introduction**

One of the fields of interdisciplinary criticism is the use of an integrated sociological-anthropological approach in the analysis of literary texts, which shows the position of the angry and fearful person in society through fiction works, including novels. However, the story is the most prolific and common art form and a serious competitor to our other activities - work, eating, and exercise - during waking hours. We are the tellers and listeners of stories as much as we sleep - and we fall into dreams while sleeping; why? Why is such a big part of our life spent in stories? According to critic Kenneth Burke, stories are tools of life (McKay, 2018: 9). On the other hand, literature, anthropology, sociology, and psychology, while being independent, have an inseparable connection with each other. Anthropology aids in clarifying the literary text's concealed angles by analyzing the characters and events of the story. Therefore, anthropological critique is considered a new critique among interdisciplinary critiques. In this review, the researcher or critic explores the concealed angles, behavioral conflicts, and behavioral signs in the target character in a literary work so the target character in the text will likely be prepared for analysis. Literature and society are both moving and evolving and mutually influence each other.

The writer is also influenced by the environment and time in which he lives, and according to those conditions, he starts literary creation; without a doubt, society is directly involved in creating that work, affecting the writer's thinking and feelings. Moreover, in "*Touba and the Meaning of Night*," Parsipour examines Iranian society throughout the novel. The story of Touba is the story of the entanglement of social ethics and culture with social psychology. Every writer reflects their thoughts in their works according to external areas such as the socio-political environment, geographical conditions, and economic situation, and the internal regions such as beliefs, feelings, desires, words, and actions. The totality of what appears in the inner sphere, formed based on assumptions, feelings, words, and actions, is called the

psychological sphere. In fictional works, however, the field is mostly manifested in fictional characters.

### **Research Question(s)**

What are the main concepts and themes of the identity crisis in Touba based on the stigma theory?

## **2. Literature Review**

Numerous papers are published on Stigma, most of which include the topics of social sciences, sociology, and psychology. Some of the works published that show a relationship with literary themes are as follows in the order of the year of publication: The book "Stigma" or "Remedy for Lost Identity" was written by Erving Goffman and was translated into Persian by Masoud Kianpour in 2017 in 245 pages. However, the third edition of the book is re-published in 192 pages. In 2008, Erfani published an article titled "Introduction and Review of the Book: Stigma, a Solution to the Lost Identity" in the book of the Month of Social Sciences. This paper states that in the first type, the people of the society know that a person has such a stigma, or they will easily find out, and the person suffers from the disgrace. However, if this person feels that he is a normal human being, despite being stigmatized, and is not affected by the Stigma and does not accept it, such a person carries a stigma with him but does not feel sorry for it.

Some stigmas, such as impotence, may be concealed so that strangers don't know about them and only affect close relatives. Goffman believes that today, many people want to change their identity, and in this way, they benefit most from changing their name. In 2013, Hosseini and Salarkia published an article titled "Analysis of the Novel Dream of Tibet Based on the Dramatic Metaphor of Goffman's Theory" in the literary text research magazine.

In this paper, while expressing Goffman's theories, the Tibetan Dream is studied based on Goffman's theories. Moreover, based on Goffman's model in analyzing the novel Tibetan Dream, the female characters try to hide the heat of forbidden love but cannot perform it on stage. In 2013, Qasimzadeh published an article entitled "Sociology of Behavior in the Novel Tug of War Based on the Theory of Stigma" in the Literary Criticism Quarterly. From the results of the novel Tug of War, the text holds a concealed intertextual connection with the three pre-texts of the Holy Quran, Hawthorne's novel Stigma, and Maulana's Masnavi. The alignment of cultural and social Stigma with the ethnic-

religious Stigma that also involves other family members is a symptom of the intellectual-cultural disease of the autocratic society.

One of the consequences of such shame for family members is despair of being accepted in society, feelings of fate and insecurity, and being caught in dangerous mental complexes such as the feeling of inferiority. These factors are mostly created in the character of Fars (the novel's narrator) and have led him to a defensive and forced reaction and, as a result, cynicism.

In 2015, Qasimzadeh and Salarkia published "Psychological-- Sociological Rereading of the Shahnameh's Pahlavi Section Based on Goffman's Stigma Theory" in Kavosh Nameh Journal of Persian Language and Literature. The paper indicates that one of the objectionable intellectual-behavioral characteristics of the people addressed in the epic is the psychological reactions caused by the complexes of "jealousy" as a result of the adjective "stigma," which Ferdowsi believes that the root of many obstacles to the growth and advancement of humans is its demonic control.

Considering the background of this unethical behavior, the present essay, in a descriptive-analytical manner, relying on Erving Goffman's "stigma" theory, has tried to reflect how this nameless attribute is reflected in the characters of the Shahnameh, its types and reasons, in the heroic-mythological period of the Shahnameh; It means to pay Rostam from the time of Zahhak until his death.

In 2016, Khadem al-Faqraei and Kianpour published an article entitled "Discourse analysis of the film Married Life of Mr. Mahmoodi and His Wife with a focus on Stigma caused by the contrast between tradition and modernity" in the magazine "Women in Culture and Art." The study examines how the movie is represented concerning the process of stigmatizing women during their modernization. The results indicate that the three components of "destructuring the modern woman," "non-acceptance of the modern woman by the tradition," and "labeling the modern woman by the tradition" are the stages of stigmatizing the modern woman in this film. Therefore, the discursive strategy of the film shows that the presence of contemporary characteristics in a woman provides the conditions for her to be stigmatized.

In 2015, Rawdrad and Aghaei published "Discourse Analysis of AIDS Representation in Iranian Cinema, a Case Study of the film Barefoot in Heaven" in the Journal of Cultural Studies and Communication. This article analyzes the discourse of AIDS representation in the movie "Barefoot in Heaven" by Bahram Tavakoli.

Raisi, Naqashzadeh, and Yousufian Kanari published an article in 2016 titled "Analysis of the psycho-sociological impact of shame on the characters of Ajax and Medea" in the theater magazine. In this study, the two tragedies of Ajax by Sophocles and Medea written by Euripides, are selected from ancient Greece, considering the origin of Stigma. To highlight the role of shame in the reading of these works and at the same time to answer the question of what kind of psychological--sociological impact the shame has had on the characters of Ajax and Medea.

In 2017, Zini-Vand and Solati published an article entitled "Sociological Analysis of Shame in My Short Story Behind the Hijab and Al-Saqatah (Oring Goffman's Dramatic Approach)" in the Journal of Arabic Literature of the University of Tehran. The findings show that the Stigma caused in both stories is falling in love with a forbidden love. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous tale, Stigma, which was written in 1850, he discussed the strong symbols of Stigma, from the red-letter A as a sign of sin to Goffman's Stigma (Hawthorne, 1369: 12). In this book, sin is the basis of the story and the spiritual struggle of the heroes is its main background. This sentence from the book is the extract of his whole story: The gap that sin creates in a person's soul cannot be filled by any means in this mortal world" (Ibid.: 14).

### 3. Methodology

This paper is descriptive-analytical, and the data acquisition method is based on library documents. Moreover, the data mining method is content analysis, and the data-mining unit is "Touba and the Meaning of the Night," based on Erving Goffman's Theory of Stigma."

### Results

Based on the topics discussed in the paper, out of all the Stigma in the novel Touba and the meaning of the night, the cultural, psychological, and social Stigma is more pronounced, and such labeling is a sign of patriarchal power in the society of the Qajar era. Moreover, the origin of all Toba's disgrace happened after the death of her father and after her marriage to Haji Mahmoud.

Touba marries an older adult named Haji Mahmoud. Haji, however, harasses Touba, and she tries to take revenge on Haji due to her infidelity and inferiority complex. Touba takes revenge by insulting, blaming, accusing, and grumbling. Furthermore, neurotic complexes, such as feelings of inferiority and jealousy and projective tendencies, increase the presence and intensity of stigma tactics in Touba's novel.

Accordingly, in this story, we are mostly faced with the second type of Stigma: character stigma and the deficiencies related to the person's character. Touba is suffering from an identity crisis; she is a prisoner of her sealed destiny. According to the research results, Touba suffers from the Stigma that discredits the identity. Moreover, the identity crisis leads Touba to despair and vulnerability.

Ultimately, in an aura of silence wrapped around her, she sinks into the depths of the earth with a person who is another aspect of Touba and Touba's shadow and manifested in the form of Leila. Stigma dominates her actions and relationships throughout the novel. Furthermore, psychological disintegration and actions such as suicide attempts and the murder of a star are likely to be seen under the shadow of Stigma and distance from the role created in his identity and society. Stigma's manifestations are obvious throughout Touba's novel's side story.

The second type of Goffman's triple Stigma includes defects and deficiencies related to a person's personality, such as being weak-minded and domineering. These traits are related to those who suffer from mental disorders and commit suicide. The manifestation of Goffman's vision is likely to be found in the character of the Star: Star got pregnant as the result of rape. Having learned, her uncle stabbed the girl in the heart, so Star died on the spot. One of Goffman's explanations is related to the anger and disgust of the rejection situation, which can be seen in the novel Touba and the meaning of the night in the section after Touba's marriage to Haji Mahmoud. It was inspired by the superstitious Haji that the presence of a woman in his house is related to drought. Therefore, he considers Touba a bad omen, and with his blind logic, he believes Touba to be the cause of all the calamities.

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