

The Birth of Subversive Reader: A Deconstructive Reading of *Shazdeh Ehtejab*

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ABSTRACT

Hooshang Golshiri's *Shazdeh Ehtejab*, as a very influential novel in the Iranian history of novel writing, has drawn attentions from plethora of critics with different approaches and attitudes. The present article draws on the ideas and concepts introduced by deconstructive theoreticians to investigate the nuances and delicate contradictions the novel offers about the nature of power relations. The article mainly centers around the opposition between the binary of author/reader, how it is reversed or subverted in the novel, and the way it is extended to the novels' involvement with power relations which may be representative of the general social and power structure of particular historical era in Iran. To avoid the major critique against deconstruction's abstract armchair theorizing, the present article would also draw upon some of the well-known ideas and concepts used by famous writers in power relation namely Louis Althusser and Foucault to move the analysis beyond the text to the social sphere.

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1. Introduction

Shazdeh Ehtejab narrates the degeneration of a powerful Qajar household. The novel tells the story of the last prince of the household Shazdeh Ehtejab and Fakhronnissa, his wife and cousin. The narrative records the history of three generations of Shazdeh Ehtejab's and Fakhronnissa's families from the early days of Qajar to the Pahlavi era. The history is built through a couple of family books and pictures which are read by different characters. The pivotal conflicts between main characters of the novel centre around the confrontation between writing and reading, author and reader, and more importantly reader and reader. Though it is through written journals that an important part of the story and history of some characters is recorded, reading claims a very much significant role in *Shazdeh Ehtejab*. An important part of the power relationship between the main characters in the novel relies on the way they read or avoid reading a written text. Different characters are either actively reading a text, have somebody read it for them, have the desire to gain the ability to read, or try to prevent reading or to control how other characters read. Act of reading becomes so important that it turns to a major point of conflict and struggle between characters. In fact, it becomes a leverage to gain, resist, define, maintain, construct, or reconstruct power and power structure. It is through each character's special attitude towards reading a text that the reader of the novel finds an opportunity to figure out the nuances of their mentality and outlooks.

Shazdeh Ehtejab has been widely analyzed based on various approaches and theories including structuralism, narratology, and psychology among others. Well-known as "a prominent example in the history of Persian novel in using the most advanced narrative techniques", however, most of the critiques are leaned towards focusing on its formal qualities. Yazdekhashti et al (2012) approached the novel from a Lacanian approach. They have attempted to analyze the novel's non-linear narrative strategy using Lacan's concepts of imaginary, mirror stage, and the real order. Saberpour et al (2008) have drawn on Marxist theories of power relations to analyze the way novel's main characters are related to each other in the novel. The article's applying of Althusser's concept of ideological status apparatus cannot be considered reliable. Damavandi (2012) has discussed the use of stream of consciousness in *Shazdeh Ehtejab*. Seyyedani (2008) has applied structural narratology to the novel to discover the novel's tongue in narration. Both articles are limited to the formal characteristics of the narrative. Jalali (2016) has focused on the methodology of a few articles written on Shazdeh Ehtejab. The present article, though might share some aspects of previous research, has introduced a new approach to reveal the nuances of the narrative and show the unending flow of significances in the novel. The article also attempts to show how the text resists being attached to a particular meaning/interpretation.

2. Discussion

Deconstruction is deemed as one of major poststructuralist theories in dealing with texts. It is distinguished from structuralism in its approach to binary oppositional signs. In

structuralism difference between the two signs is the ruling principle in creating meaning. Another important assumption in structuralisms' attitude towards the binary signs is the idea that signs are not separate; They are often grouped in set of oppositions where the members of each set together develop and uphold a cultural value where the signs of one side of the set are privileged as bearing positive values. Although Deconstruction agrees with structuralism in their focus on difference of signs as the basic element in developing meaning/significance, it questions the fixed position of the signs in the line or set of oppositions. Unlike Structuralism, deconstruction believes in the liquidity or slippery nature of the signs which enables them to change positions between the lines and scramble the fixed meaning assigned to them.

Among innumerable sets of binary oppositions constructed by human beings, one plays up author against reader assigning certain values to each of them. In the binary opposition of writing/reading or writer/reader, the first sign is usually associated with authority, creativity, agency, power, centre, and even masculinity while the second one is thought to be aligned with passivity, lack of originality and power, marginality, and even femininity. Deconstructive theory, however, sets to dismantle this traditional view by reshuffling the hierarchy and moving the signs to new positions whereby they assume new and sometimes completely different significances. An important critique of deconstruction is the "limitation of its linguistic frame" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 30) or its lack of interest in transcending text to the social and political sphere. However, it can be argued that applying the theory to novels where power struggle is a recurrent theme may help the textual analysis spill over to social and political sphere. The present article would firstly draw on deconstruction as its theoretical background but would move further to use some key concepts of poststructuralist theoreticians of power structure as an analytical tool to push the textual analysis beyond mere linguistic and textual study. Among others, the ideas of the French philosopher, Althusser are referred to as a theoretical basis to investigate the power structure in the narrative. Two key concepts are more specifically helpful, ideological and repressive state apparatus along with the concept of "interpellation" i.e., "addressing [and positioning the people] in certain roles" (Bertens, 2014, p. 88) and identities.

2.1. The Emergence of a New Episteme, the Birth of a Subversive Reader

Shazdeh Ehtejab, with some reservations, may be categorized as metafiction. The novel is the history of a book of history. The main line of the narrative involves the process through which a book about the main character's family history is written, kept, possessed, bequeathed, read, reread, and finally burnt to ashes. The book which instigates both material and discursive conflicts in the novel is a journal written by Jade Bozorg, the main character's grandfather. Jade Bozorg, a powerful and wealthy Qajar prince had his daily activities recorded in the book which falls into the hands of his ex-son-in-law, Motamed Mirza who in turn bequeaths it to his only child and daughter Fakhronnissa. Forcefully separated from her mother and living with her father and grandmother, Fakhronnissa later is engaged to her cousin Shazdeh

Ehtejab, an engagement seemingly arranged by her mother. The couple had lived in a common house and shared a common ancestral background up to a certain point. What separated their common living space had a significant impact on the fate and personality of the two characters. The narrative explores how the influence of the event following the genealogy of the couple. The novel focuses on the crisscrossing of two histories. The first one is the history of the whole, common family recorded in Jade Bozorg's journal and the second one involves the particular history of Fakhronnissa and Shazdeh.

What makes the lives and identities of the two characters different is Fakhronnissa's father, Mirza's falling out with the centre of power. Before that the whole family experienced a unified, tribal life under the patriarchal aegis of Jade Bozorg. He was considered the centre of power and the transcendental signified against whom all the other members of the family took over significance. The members of the household were positioned in the line of signs associated with centre, self, "the same", and power so far as they observed the norms set by the patriarchal ideology of the household. The main rule to maintain the ideology was the repressive state apparatus operating based on the rule of terror and suppression. Any little transgression of the rules of the house was suppressed by harsh, brutal, arbitrary penal measures such as imprisonment, torture, and decapitation. Besides that every member's identity is clearly defined, predetermined and authored/written in the closed sign system by the absolute authority of Jade Bozorg. The people are tolerated and given their share of wealth and power so far as they accept their written identity; otherwise, they are excluded from the structure and even reduced to the status of the inhuman.

Motamed Mirza, unlike many powerful members of the family, resists the structural signification of Jade Bozorg's patriarchal ideology and leaves it. What motivates Mirza to confront Jade Bozorg's power structure is a symbolic event. It is briefly mentioned in the novel that he quits his official duties when he accidentally observes a painful scene in which famine-stricken people drink the blood of a dead donkey. Motamed Mirza's decision infuriates his father-in-law, the patriarch, who divests him of all his official duties, takes away all his properties, divorces his wife, brutally tortures and maims him. Motamed Mirza's move scrambles and undermines the binary structure which defines the meaning of the people positioned in each set of the opposite signs. He moves from the line of the powerful "self" to the opposite line which defined the grassroots "other". Mirza's act destabilizes the signifying power structure by denying Jade Bozorg the role of the transcendental signified. This event changes the fate of Mirza and, of course, her daughter, Fakhronnissa. Both are excluded from the centre of power and pushed out to the realm of "the other". They both are banned from the patriarchal household and sent to another house to live with Fakhronnissa's grandmother. Unlike the normative women of the era, she is a powerful decision maker who resists being subdued by Jade Bozorg's threatening apparatus. As an independent woman, she defies the patriarch's wish to separate Fakhronnissa from his father. She uses all her leverages to keep Fakhronnissa with her father. She is representative of resistance against the totalitarian power. Also, she symbolizes an astute woman familiar with

the nuances of power structure and aware of the playing cards at her disposal. When the patriarch insists on taking Fakhronnissa from his father, she invokes the more powerful people especially powerful women in the court to help her keep Fakhronnissa with his father and grandmother. From this point on Fakhronnissa takes on a new and different identity from the other main character, Shazdeh, a difference which is revealed/manifested in their attitude towards the original history book of the family.

Following Foucault, it can be argued that, unlike Shazdeh, Fakhronnissa is launched into a new “episteme” a term coined by Foucault by which he means “the condition of possibility of discourse in a given period” (McNay, 1994, p. 61). Fakhronnissa’s separation from the old household provides her with a new world with new experience, new discourse, and new knowledge Whereas Shazdeh is stuck in the old episteme of Jade-Bozorg’s household. In fact, she moves from one ideological space to a new one. The previous house is symbolic of the old, traditional patriarchy in which men hold absolute power over everything including humans, both men and women, and non-humans. There is a clear-cut hierarchy where the ruling men create and control knowledge, *author* other people, animals, and even nonhuman objects. Leaving the house makes the difference for both of them. Fakhronnissa is banned from the house when his father leaves his official duties, and later his wife divorces him, and all his property is confiscated by his father-in-law. The event triggers a new period in her life. When she is prevented from the house, Fakhronnissa experiences a new life totally different from the previous one. The new era happens in a new space where she lives with people whose views on life is different from those of the old household’s patriarch. Fakhronnissa’s father does not hold to power for power per se. An important difference between Motamed Mirza and the other male members of the power circle is his interest in books. He seems to be an intellectual who does not consider power merely for his self-interest. The moment he realizes that the power structure has become not only blind to the pains of the people but adds to the deterioration of their situation deserts the corrupt structure. It is obvious that he has been aware of the repercussions, nevertheless he makes his decision in order not to be an accomplice to the crime of the ruling system. Unlike the patriarch, the Grandfather, he is neither thirsty of power, nor interested in exerting violence to keep power. He represents the sympathizer who criticizes the ruling system. Of course, he pays the price but helps prompt a new era.

Motamed Mirza is deprived of all the sources of power he enjoyed before he is expelled from the patriarch’s household. Even the most private aspect of his life does not survive the patriarch’s outrage. Motamed Mirza loses his wife to be used in a political marriage with a new husband who obediently would boost his power. His body, like other rebels is aimed at by the patriarch. The only part of his property which remains intact is his books especially the one the patriarch had it written by a script. The most likely reason why Jade-e-Bozorg had not ordered the book to be confiscated was his views about the relationship between writing and reading. To him writing and reading are set in a binary relationship in which writing is the absolute, dominant sign whereby meaning is created for the reader by the

transcendental signifier of the patriarch's speech. Reading has no role in creating the meaning. Reader is the happy, passive receiver of the divine meaning sent for him from the patriarch. Therefore, possessing a book does not signify power. The book was an authentic and authoritative history of the patriarch's daily exercising of absolute power and his subjects' obedience to the power. It was only written to disseminate and strengthen his power among the awe-stricken readers/believers in his kingdom.

Motamed Mirza, however has a different view of the relationship between the two signs and their significance. Left maimed and alienated by the brutal tortures and losing his official duties, he begins a life completely different from his previous one. Unlike the patriarch who only dictates others to write his history, Motamed Mirza focuses on reading. He teaches his daughter, Fakhronnissa, the art of reading and encourages her fledgling art. Every day after she returns home from school, he asks her to read him the books they have using the kind words, perhaps a strange practice from a normal aristocratic man, "read my dear." Going to a modern educational system i.e., a state-run school is another important event in Fakhronnissa's life after departure from the traditional life in the old, tribal household that defines and changes her identity. The novel describes her daily commuting between home and school very meaningfully. Returning from school she is described running, and wearing new, modern clothes, with her hair being moved up and down in the wind. In fact, Fakhronnissa is experiencing two new things of which the traditional girls were deprived. First, she enjoys a new mobility and experiences life outside home. Furthermore, her body seems to be set free from traditional bonds. Therefore, in the new era she is experiencing freedom of body and thought. It is after this new life that she is engaged to Shazdeh. Trained to become a skillful reader, she continues the practice after his father's death and more importantly into the new era in her life with Shazdeh Ehtejab.

A key scene in the story narrates Shazdeh Ehtejab's visit to Fakhronnissa's house after a long time of absence. Shazdeh's mother is dead and he makes his first visit to Fakhronnissa's house in his new life. Both Shazdeh and Fakhronnissa live similar lives in that both have lost their parents. Fakhronnissa lives with her family servant, Fakhri, the daughter of his father's gardener, Heidarali. The whole scene very significantly symbolizes the new circumstances in the relationship between Fakhronnissa and Shazdeh each representing the two different houses they come from. Shazdeh represents the household which was associated with the centre of absolute wealth and power, whereas Fakhronnissa's family involves people who are marginalized by the centre. Interestingly, Men and women of the latter family are also different from the normativity defined by the dominant household. Motamed Mirza, unlike the accepted masculinity of men in Jade-Bozorg's household, is a kind man who sympathizes with the sufferings of the grassroots, and socializes with members of his family and is involved in kind interactions with his daughter using intimate words. Also, Fakhronnissa's grandmother, unlike the women in the patriarch's household enjoys agency, engages with powerful people, knows politics and power structure, and resists arbitrary decisions of men. It is due to same reversal of gender norms that Shazdeh Ehtejab's visit to Fakhronnissa's

house bespeaks of a new atmosphere, even a new era. The first scene in which Fakhri, the servant, opens the House's gate, is designed to reveal important facts about Shazdeh's new situation. Seeing Fakhri at the door, he asks her in a formal language, "where are [is] Khanom [literally meaning lady]?" However, after a few seconds, he changes his words, as well as his tone, and interrogatively tells her "I told you girl where is Fakhronnissa?" (2005: 42) (translations are mine). The shift in discourse suggests significant facts about Shazdeh Ehtejab's view of his new role. Where in the first sentence he asks about Fakhronnissa's whereabouts in a respectful language both denying himself the role of the subject of the sentence and observing the servant as a mere addressee who holds no personal relationship to him, in the second sentence, however, he tries to identify himself as the landlord of the house. Fakhronnissa becomes his wife and Fakhri becomes his own servant not Fakhronnissa's. In fact, he is appropriating Fakhronnissa's role. More importantly he has set to merge the two households by cancelling Fakhronnissa's role as the lady and owner through a confiscating-like act which had been practiced by his grandfather in relation to Moatamed Mirza, Fakhronnissa's father, a few years ago.

However, this is Shazdeh's wishful thinking stemming from the discourse and ideology he had experienced in his grandparent's house. Energized and happy with his new identity as the new landlord he climbs the stairs fast to visit his fiancée. What he finds, however, does not realize his expectations.

Shazdeh did not realize how he had moved up all those stairs. He reached the terrace. Fakhronnissa was sitting with her back to him wearing the same gauze dress... Shazdeh did not move. He looked at the two soft and slippery lines on her back. Fakhronnissa was sitting on her swinging chair. Fakhronnissa was still sitting with her back to him. Shazdeh moved forward ... and saw the big book with leather cover. (2005, p. 42)

The whole scene is symbolic of the emergence of a new era. Now, Fakhronnissa is sitting at a table, not excited or frightened by the presence of the man who recognizes himself as the master/lord of the house. The roles are reversed. It is man/Shazdeh who has to wait to be allowed by woman/ Fakhronnissa to act. It is Fakhronnissa who controls everything in the scene. Of course, Shazdeh has begun his attempts to gain control of Fakhronnissa by gazing at her body. Looking at her body under the gauze dress, he tries to investigate the characteristics of the object of his desire to find the best way to control it/Fakhronnissa. He is following his ancestors' model of controlling people through their bodies. However, there are two obstacles. First of all, Fakhronnissa is aware of the strategy and is able to counter it. Even if Shazdeh is gazing at her from behind her, she realizes it and warns Shazdeh, "Please, Take a seat, There will be time" (2005, p. 45). Next, when Shazdeh continues looking at Fakhronnissa's body, he misses some part of the body which is very significantly hidden behind a book. It seems that the novel suggests that unlike other women who are controlled by men like Shazdeh, Fakhronnissa has gained some kind of power which makes her partly unreachable to men. Knowledge, symbolized by the book and the glasses she wears create a

strong obstacle against the arbitrary, masculine wish to gain control of the feminine body and being. Of course, Fakhronnissa's clothes suggest that she is under the influence of the male ideology which requires women to expose their body in order to be attractive for men. However, reading and the knowledge obtained through it decreases her vulnerability. In an ironic way, where the body of mythological men like Rustam and Achilles is deemed invulnerable except for a small part of it, here a woman's body is wholly vulnerable unless the very little part which gains invulnerability through knowledge.

Therefore, the whole scene turns to a scene of struggle where a man and a woman clash over knowledge and the ensuing power. Fakhronnissa who is aware of the struggle tries her best to change the scene of battle from her body to knowledge/book. It is due to the same fact in the next scene she convinces Shazdeh to look away from her body and listen to her reading from the book written by their common grandfather. In a metaphorical way, whereas Shazdeh is determined to focus on Fakhronnissa's body as a text and control its meaning for his own interest, Fakhronnissa counteracts his strategy by diverting his focus from her body to a text which is under her own control. She seems to be successful in her plan. Shazdeh who has failed to claim full control of her body, focuses on the impediment asks Fakhronnissa about the book. In fact, before starting reading, Fakhronnissa exercises a warm-up strategy through treating Shazdeh with wine. Shazdeh, inexperienced and unwilling, accepts treatment only as a deal on taking over Fakhronnissa's body. Fakhronnissa's double plot of hiding her hand behind the book convincing him to drink manages to reverse the game of power. Fakhronnissa who has realized Shazdeh's desire for her body as well as his curiosity about the book tells Shazdeh to drink from the wine because "it is good for your hemorrhoids" linking him to his ancestors who have been obsessed with the ailment.

Shazdeh who is not actually affected by the ailment, is caught in Fakhronnissa's interpellation strategy whereby he is positioned as the true progeny of his ailing grandfathers, both physically and spiritually. Fakhronnissa is successful in detecting/identifying the common vices of the line of men from the grandparents to the grandson. Shazdeh has tried his best to distance himself from his predecessors showing a different character. He claims that he dislikes hunting, is unwilling to practice polygamy, and is not interested in drinking wine. He seems to be, at least on the surface, the man of modern bearings. Expressing love to Fakhronnissa is in real contrast to his grandparents' practice of traditional marriage based on conventions and masculine whim. In spite of all these signs, Fakhronnissa seems to have insight into Shazdeh's true identity. In order to expose what lays behind the modern mask, she has chosen reading the old manuscripts/text to discover the concealed identity. Shazdeh, for a long time had founded his identity on difference from his ancestors especially from his grandparent, Jade-Bozorg who had been infamous for his violence and brutality towards men, women, and animals. Fakhronnissa whose life had been affected by the same grandfather is motivated enough to expose him. Therefore, she is determined to expose the roots and the history of the brutality of the line of men who had oppressed her and her father. She has defined for herself the responsibility of exposing the vices of those men as a means to create

her own identity. She knows it as a mission for herself to eradicate the roots of depression and violence against the oppressed people. She is aware that Shazdeh can be very likely an accomplice to the crimes of his ancestors who is prone to continue their actions. Fakhronnissa appropriates the old texts as a mirror to make Shazdeh see himself in them, to see his own history, to realize the ideology in which he has been brought up. Whereas Shazdeh had attempted to formulate his identity based on difference from his ancestors, Fakhronnissa upends his strategy and exposes the brutal power structure in which he had been a privileged sign.

Reading the texts authored by Shazdeh's ancestors becomes in the hand of Fakhronnissa a means of resistance, subversion, and deconstruction. Fakhronnissa's mother who as a traditional woman succumbs to the masculine power structure controlled by her father had tried to marry her daughter to Shazdeh in order to take her back to the old lifestyle and reconstruct the traditional structure. Nayyereh Khatoon's aim is to lead Fakhronnissa back to the old signifying order whereby a man is the dominant sign in the binary of man/woman. In fact, Fakhronnissa's reading of the journal of the grandfather is fulfilling two purposes: one at the personal level the other at the historical/symbolic way. First of all, her reading stands in opposition to the act of writing. Whereas in the traditional signification, writing is privileged as the central sign against which reading is assumed as the marginal sign, Fakhronnissa turns it to an active practice, and takes it to the centre. In the new structure the authored text by an autocrat is pushed out to the margin, and reading by a female character is brought to the centre. The hierarchy of power is reversed where the male, authorial, patriarchal ancestor is pulled down and the female, young reader is hoisted to the top of the hierarchy. It is through active reading that the history is deconstructed by subverting the meaning of the actions of the autocrats. Whereas the author of the book had intended to introduce his violent actions as the sign of masculine heroism, the young female reader interprets them as the contagious, hereditary ailment of Shazdeh's ancestors which had affected even Shazdeh. Reading has given Fakhronnissa agency. It is Fakhronnissa, the female reader who designates the meaning of the text. The most important of this signifying power of reading by Fakhronnissa is her success in expanding the oppression of the ancestors to the new male generation. Fakhronnissa first interpellates Shazdeh as a true inheritor of his ancestor's violent history, and then reads the book to him to expose his latent masculine character. Fakhronnissa dexterously manages to suggest that in spite of Shazdeh's claim to modernity and distancing himself from his ancestors, the long history of autocracy has deeply infiltrated into his personality. Fakhronnissa's reading exposes both the failings of the powerful patriarch of the past and the continuation of the patriarchal ideology under the mask of modernity and the modern masculinity.

As the narrative progresses this aspect of the novel becomes more serious. Gradually, the novel shifts its focus from the old aristocracy to the new modern dictatorship of Shazdeh. Feeling belittled by Fakhronnissa's demeanor towards him both in daily meetings and especially in her reading of the texts, Shazdeh is determined to change the structure of

power by controlling Fakhronnissa. To accomplish this intention, he sets Fakhronnissa's maid, Fakhri, against her to control every little act of Fakhronnissa. In fact, Shazdeh creates an atmosphere very like the surveillance structure used by modern states. Fakhri who has been both a maid and a confidant for Fakhronnissa for a long time is hired by Shazdeh as a spy to control every aspect of Fakhronnissa's life. Interestingly enough, Shazdeh applies the surveillance system imitating from his ancestral method of using spies in prisons to interrogate prisoners in prisons. Of course, Shazdeh's method is much more sophisticated than that of her ancestors'. To make everything normal he has bought a large house with long walls and moves Fakhronnissa and Fakhri to the new house. This is a direct reaction by Shazdeh to Fakhronnissa's power over him through the texts she had inherited from his father. Shazdeh responds to this process by disrupting Fakhronnissa's relationship to world by imprisoning her in a civil atmosphere. The most important aspect of this surveillance practice is the way Shazdeh controls Fakhronnissa's access to the books. In the new house whenever Fakhronnissa intends to read, texts are first of all handed to her by Fakhri to oversee what she reads. Fakhri is even ordered by Shazdeh to inspect Fakhronnissa's reactions and feelings after reading. Not only the act of reading itself but the reader's response is controlled by Shazdeh, the modern autocrat. Fakhronnissa's reaction to Fakhri's pleas to read to her is very significant. Fakhri is very interested to listen to the stories from the book written by Jade-Bozorg. However, Fakhronnissa denies her the opportunity. Instead of Jade-Bozorg's stories, she reads Fakhri from a fairytale book called *Ghaleye Sangbaran* literally meaning the stonefall castle. In Fact, Fakhronnissa prevents Fakhri from having access to the knowledge of the authorial power structure. Fakhronnissa as a member of aristocracy collaborates with her oppressor, Shazdeh, to stop Fakhri from infiltrating the layers of power. The scene reveals the fact that the nature of power struggle manifested in clash over reading a text is very complex and contentious. Although Fakhronnissa is symbol of the marginal discourse's determination to undermine the male author's dominant discourse, she is simultaneously conscious of preventing the lower class or the subaltern to enter the power circle. She is involved in a double struggle over power in which she uses and abuses reading. On the one hand she uses it as a means to dismantle the traditional hierarchy of power, while on the other hand abuses it to maintain and reconstruct the same hierarchy. Otherwise put she plays simultaneously the two contradictory and oppositional roles of the self and the other.

The history of controlling reading continues even after Fakhronnissa's death. Shazdeh who had not been satisfied with Fakhronnissa's refusal of yielding him her whole soul and body plans to metamorphose Fakhri to the role of Fakhronnissa. Fakhri is ordered by Shazdeh to recreate Fakhronnissa using her make-up, clothes, and even imitating her laughs. He even promises Fakhri to teach her how to read books. Shazdeh uses this strategy to create a new Fakhronnissa whose body is under his control and whose reading power is channeled to his own interest. Shazdeh is trying to reconstruct the old power structure in the new space. However, Fakhri's "mimicry", to borrow Homi Bhabha's terminology, becomes counterproductive and subverts Shazdeh's intentions. In a significant scene where Fakhri is

trying her best to make her face exactly like Fakhronnissa, she wears Fakhronnissa's glasses. Infuriated and frightened by the act, Shazdeh slaps Fakhri, throws the glasses out, and tells her: "I told you to be Fakhronnissa, I didn't tell you to imitate her every and each action" (61). Feeling threatened by rebirth of Fakhronnissa's reading power, Shazdeh makes his final decision. In a meaningful scene he is shown to force Fakhri throw all the books, especially Jade Bozorg's journal, into the fireplace. It suggests that reading has become so authentic and powerful that cannot be subdued by the male authority. Reading overtakes writing, the hierarchy is partly overturned. However, Fakhri, the representative of the subaltern in the power structure, is not given permission to take part in the dismantling mission of new readers.

3. Conclusion

It can be argued that two main characters of the novel, Shazdeh Ehtejab and his wife Fakhronnissa, represent two different and opposing reading practices in the novel. Fakhronnissa stands for reading which aims destabilizing the authoritative text or the authority of the text, while Shazdeh Ehtejab partly represents the conservative authority which tries to maintain the monoglossia of the text. While Fakhronnissa's new knowledge provides him with an insight that challenges the authority of the text and the author's intention, Shazdeh's conservative ideology pushes him to revive the author's original sign system of the text, and, in turn, to reconstruct the power hierarchy upheld by it. The novel as a sophisticated reflection of the complexity of power structure and power struggle, does not offer a simple solution and conclusion of the struggle of the two competing discourses. Although it is suggested that Shazdeh manages to re-possess the text after his wife's death, his act of burning the novel implies that he had not been successful to control the way it is read and interpreted by new generation of readers. Another aspect of the complexity of the novel's sign system is that the two opposing reading forces in the novel agree on their containment of the subaltern's rise in the power structure. Although they are positioned as opposing signs to each other, they become united to set the member of the subaltern as their "other". The subaltern is not allowed to be heard, read, let alone to speak.

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