

POWER RELATIONS IN PARINOUSH SANI'EE'S *SAHM-E MAN (THE BOOK OF FATE)*: A NEW-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to critically analyze Parinoush Sani'ee's *Sahm-e Man* (translated into English as *The Book of Fate*) from a New-historical perspective. Beginning from before the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and going forward through the reign of the Islamic Republic to the current years, the time-line of the story shows five decades of changing fortunes of Sani'ee's main character. Reading her book in the light of New-historicism, this paper tries to show how the story reflects Foucauldian notions of resistance, power relations, normalization, and self-formation in the five phases of Massoumeh's life. Considering Foucault's arguments on how power imposes ideology on the citizens, the paper also tries to reflect how it changes in each phase of Massoumeh's life and how it normalizes her to make her into a docile subject whom it can best control. Added to that, the paper tries to demonstrate her success in resisting the power and acquiring an ethical self through practicing a care for her 'self'. However, in spite of all her resistances to power and normalization, in the last phase of the story when the novel's discourse is more emotional, Massoumeh gives up resistance and accepts normalization, and for the sake of her children's satisfaction, rejects Saiid's proposal, and like most of the widows in her age, decides to live alone to the end of her life.

Keywords: *Sahm-e Man*; *New-historicism*; *Normalization*; *Foucault and Power Relations*.

Introduction

In "Historicism" (2006) Simon Malpas writes "Historicist criticism of literature and culture explores how the meaning of a text, idea or artifact is produced by the way of its relation to the wider historical context in which it is created or experienced" (p. 50). Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, new historicism has provided some of the most up-to-date issues of the modern life and the most applicable techniques of reading in literature and culture. Most of the advocates of this intellectual movement have themselves been the leading authorities in disciplines as different as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and therefore have had a variety of theoretical and political affiliations. However, about apparently similar texts they have often thought much differently. In addition, although Stephen Greenblatt, one of the most well-known exponents of New historicism, claims that it is "no doctrine at all" (Greenblatt, 1989:1), it has principles to which many of its proponents often appeal.

Its first principle is that it looks upon change not only as basic but inevitable also. It is liable to impinge upon a society's most fundamental beliefs about itself and always capable of transforming whatever appears fixed and stable in life. New historicists are interested in examining the processes of change and the construction of power systems in particular periods or cultures, and they attempt to analyze the structures of meaning on the basis of which they come to self-recognition. Therefore, a New-historical reader of a literary text assumes that its meaning is rooted from the historical context in which it is located, and that with the moving forward of history the text changes also. For a historicist critic a text is typically related to a wide range of social, cultural, political, and economic realities and so an isolated text has little meaning. Even the most natural issues like truth and justice along with the most obvious ideas like differences between man and woman can acquire different cultural meanings, and are likely to change in the future.

The approach of a New-historical critic to a text is not based upon the truth or falsity of its meaning. His approach is also not based upon if its mode of representation is more or less genuine than the contemporary modes. Rather, he sets out to determine how and to which degree the text has historically changed, to certify if its meanings are central to contemporary debates, and to examine the assumptions that lie behind what today are the established "frames of intelligibility"; that is, the natural way of thinking about the world and experiencing it. Therefore, the two-fold focus of a new-historical approach to literature lies in the heart of a criticism of history, literature, art, politics and identity.

The great aim for New-historical critics is not to discover universal truth or eternal verities, but rather to open such ideas up to critique by exploring the way in which they are products of specific historical circumstances and sources of political power and the means of control. New-historical critics have drawn three key premises from the work of Michel Foucault: (a) history is discontinuous, (b) a given period is better understood as a site of conflict between competing interests, and (c) a discourse is a unified whole and function of power. In this regard, they usually refer to Foucault's assertion when he says,

History is made up of different series of facts or dated events, which are juxtaposed to one another, follow one another, overlap and intersect, without one being able to reduce them to a linear schema, so that discontinuity has now become one of the basic elements of history (Foucault, 2002: 8).

He also argues that "power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds on or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations" (Foucault, 1984: 94). A best reflection of this argument can be observed in the societies with revolutionary experiences, where after the actual overthrow of a central power, the social relations of individuals and institutions determining the shape and structure of power still remain active to impose their own ideologies on each other and shape a new central power. In line with this, Foucault claims that "Power is everywhere not because it comes from everywhere ... it is the name that one attributes to complex strategically situations in a particular society" (1984:93). While the history of a nation may overlook these centers of power, its great literatures can detect and analyze them. According to Greenblatt, "The work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or a class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of connections and institutions and practices of society" (1989:12). New-historicism tends to equip scholars with a fair view to reflect the hidden angles of relations in societies under discussion. Brook Thomas writes, "At this specific historical moment, the specific quality of literature may well be its historicity, a historicity that gives it the potential to develop the socio-historical awareness lacking in some of our students"(1987: 520). In "New Historicism" Hoover writes:

Robinson advocated in *The New History* of influencing the present, but with literature: A product of the past, forever capable of reproduction in the present, literature can help create a historical consciousness that reflects upon and judges our present situation, a reflection and judgment necessary if our students are to help determine what sort of future they will have (1992:358).

Tracing the New-historical concepts like experience and resistance in Sani'ee's novel, the present paper is to zoom on the analysis of her main character's resistance to the power. In other words, the central question of the present research is if Massoumeh, who in her patriarchal family is a daughter and a sister, and after her marriage, the wife of a Marxist activist and a prisoner, and also the mother of three inconsiderate children, can resist the established power in any phase of her life. If she can, how does she achieve this accomplishment, and what is the outcome of her resistance?

Massoumeh before Marriage

Foucault encourages us to practice liberty and provide ourselves with new forms of subjectivity through the application in our life the techniques of self-care. He urges us to think, act, and relate to ourselves differently from when we had no liberty and therefore were submissively programmed or managed. He maintains that "We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of (the) kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries.Liberty is a practice ... Liberty is what must be exercised" (1984: 239-56).

At the outset of the novel we realize that only the males have the right to make decisions, the right which is often at the expense of the females' freedom and individuality, for they have only to submit and be faithful to the males. And the tragedy becomes even more acute when a female thinks or behaves differently from a male authority. Foucault believes that self-caring is an outcome of freedom while freedom is itself reciprocally the result of our engagement in self-caring. Freedom is also both the ground for and the result of acting ethically. Foucault suggests that 'care of the self' is a possibility of resisting to anything that threatens our identities like normalization, for in freedom we can practice 'care for the self' through which we have a say in the formation of our selves. If the subjects are not involved in the construction of their own selves, they will be annihilated.

In Massoumeh's family, who moves from Qum to Tehran at the outset of the novel, the dominant discourse originates outstandingly from Qum, and so it is fundamentally religious. It is strongly patriarchal also. Under the influence of it, young females in family are more than often discouraged of going to school but to get married, early in their teens, to men whom they neither love nor even know. However, to neutralize this double-faced power that wants to normalize Massoumeh, she has her own policies and techniques of resistance. For example, she takes care for her 'self' by acts of meditation, by praying to God, and by crying before her father. These she does to beseech her father to allow her to continue her schooling.

And her techniques work well enough, for before long she is allowed to continue going to school. Therefore, the job Massoumeh does radically goes counter to the conventions of her society. Her progress at school is so rapid and encouraging that it excites her to solve her social and familial problems through a policy of resistance. In the novel we read,

Ahmad was so angry that he wanted to strangle me and used every excuse to beat me up. But I knew what was really eating away at him and so I kept quiet. My school was not that far from home, a fifteen-to twenty-minute walk. In the beginning Ahmad would secretly follow me, but I would wrap my chador¹ tightly around me and took care not to give him any excuse. Meanwhile, Mahmoud stopped talking to me altogether and completely ignored me (Sani'ee, 2013:5).

During the two years of her schooling, there is a constant display of power on the part of her family, her brothers in particular, to stop her doing it. Foucault claims that power is “the name for conditions of possibility for an action upon action” (1992: 131-2). This is what we see in the relation between Massoumeh and her family members during these years in the way her brothers and even her mother more than often discourage her from going to school and belittle her progress there. Massoumeh says,

I received excellent grades in my end-of-term exams, and the teachers praised me a lot. But at home no one would show any positive reaction to my grades. Mother didn't quite understand what I was telling her. Moahmood snapped, ‘So, what? What do you think you have achieved?’ and Father said, ‘Well, why didn't you become the top student in your class?’ (Sani'ee, 2013:13)

In “Foucault and the Study of Literature” Freundlieb asserts that Foucault has “treated discourses as the primary sites for the social production of knowledge and truth” (1995:319). Massoumeh is smart enough to soften her father's heart through her policy of kind and polite conduct. She makes him come to school, negotiate with her teachers, and register her name for a higher class in the next year. This is an ideal condition for her because of which she is so excited. However, this ideal condition is too short in time, because a short while afterwards Ali, her younger brother, detects her romantic relationship with Saiidand reports it to their family.

¹ An outer garment or open cloak worn by many Iranian women and female teenagers in public spaces or outdoors

This is the beginning of really tragic stages of her life. When they discover Saiid's love letters in her bag, they get sharply angry with her, imprison her at home and even punish her physically, and finally decide that she must get married before long. Through a neighbor, a young man proposes marriage to her. But up to now neither this young man has ever seen Massoumeh nor has Massoumeh met with or talked to him. However, her family hastily arranges her marriage to him. In this way, she is made into a docile subject who finds no possibility of resistance. More than one time she even tries to commit suicide to free herself from the pressure of these conditions. But all her attempts for taking suicide are futile. As it turns out, before long she finds herself the lawful wife of this man whom she neither loves nor even knows. Now she observes that all the ways of resistance are closed to her, and so she decides she must yield to her fate.

In his doctoral dissertation Taghizadeh claims that "Nietzsche and Foucault see experience as constructed by costumes, practices and institutions in which one lives and grows" (2008:350). He argues that these costumes and institutions historicize the self and experience, for "Self is not a given or a metaphysical essence that should be discovered, but is an identity that should be constructed" (2008: 350). Accordingly, and in the new conditions which are imposed on Massoumeh's life, she decides to construct a new self, to change herself to a new person. But for this purpose she firstly surrenders herself to her fate. In Sani'ee's novel we read,

I threw away the razor, I couldn't do that (suicide), like Ms. Parvin, I, too, should yield to my fate ... I buried Saeed's memory in the deepest nook of my heart and cried at his grave for hours, for I had to leave him and let the course of time make me cold and negligent and clear his memory from my mind. Will such a day come a day? (Sani'ee, 2000: 110)

Massoumeh's Married Life before Revolution

Massoumeh's husband is with a background of Marxist ideology. So, at the beginning of her married life she realizes that she has to cope with a life condition that is hugely different from her life before marriage. Primarily she feels both happy and secure. But soon afterwards she finds out that the new life contract is finally not to her good. In chapter two Hamid says,

Everyone should be free to do whatever s/he would like and thinks is due, marriage does not mean that you should interfere with your partner's activities, but spouses should support each other, shouldn't they? I nodded wholeheartedly and admitted the truth of his talks. As well, I had understood

him quite well: I also was not to interfere with his activities. So, this mutual understanding came to be the non-written agreement (law) of our married life. According to this agreement, I would enjoy a part of my human rights however finally it was not to my good (Sani'ee, 2000: 131).

Freundlieb affirms that Foucault “took the relativist view that discourses develop their own specific standards and criteria for acceptability of statements” (1995: 328). Hamid, her husband, is a Marxist intellectual and a political activist. Both in knowledge and experience he is superior to her. So in her new life too she finds herself bounded to a different authority that wants to normalize her, a kind of authority which firstly does not seem harmful or frightening. Massoumeh says,

Beside him I was walking comfortably, we talked with each other. He talked more than me. Sometimes he talked so formally. He talked to me like a teacher teaching a stupid pupil, but it was not unpleasant to me at all, for he was really knowledgeable (Sani'ee, 2000: 131).

Mephram and others claim that “we can learn a great deal about the power relations between characters by analyzing who is in control of a conversation, who speaks most, and for the longest amount of time” (2006: 10). Massoumeh is a born Moslem, whom we know as an advocate of the Islamic ideology of her time, because she never wholly accepts Hamid's ideas completely but tries to resist them while she also defends her own outlooks. Yet, the fact that after a passionate ideological debate with Hamid's friends, she miscarries the fetus in her womb can be taken as a symbolic step for rejecting many of her previous outlooks. She says, “My sadness was accompanied with the feeling of a painful sin, the bases of my beliefs had shaken, I was sad and hated those who had shaken them” (Sani'ee, 2000: 159).

In an online interview with the website “Navadhashtia”², Saniee, says “Hamid and his friends represent the young intellectuals who, at that period of time, were devoting their lives to Marxist activities against Shah's government” Coming to live with Hamid and Massoumeh, Shahrzad gives an opportunity to the latter to learn more about the Marxists' ideologies and the life style of Iranian Marxists; that is, how seriously they had to fight against Shah's regime, and how pitiful and painful the life condition was for an intellectual woman like Shahrzad as a political activist. In chapter 3 of the novel we read,

(Shahrzad): I feel jealous of you, you are a happy woman.

² Navadhashtia is an online Persian website for downloading books.

(Massoumeh): Who?! Me? Do you feel jealous of me?

(Shahrzad): Yes, maybe it's the first time I feel like this.

(Massoumeh): Surely you are joking, it is I who should feel jealous of you, I have always wished to be like you, for you are an extraordinary woman who is so knowledgeable, powerful, and able to make good decisions, I always think Hamid has always wished to have a wife like you, but you say ... Oh, no! Surely you are joking, the reality is that it is I who should feel jealous of you, but I do not find myself deserving even for jealousy to you, for it is like an ordinary guy should feel jealous to the Queen of England.

(Shahrzad): What stuff you say, I am nobody, you are much better and more perfect than me, too much a lady, a good and lovely wife, a kind and understanding mother, with such a great love for reading, learning, and self-sacrificing for your family (Saniee, 200: 237).

Freundlieb (1995) writes,

Literary criticism, particularly within a pedagogical context, could be regarded as working on the soul instead of on the body, and as part of an apparatus of ethical surveillance and normalization, including self-surveillance and self-fashioning, similar to that which operates in religious practices (330).

Bewildering for Sani'ee's main character are also the facts of Shahrzad's married life. Shahrzad often cares more diligently for herself than Massoumeh. But when the latter realizes that Shahrzad is, like herself, the victim of a cruel politico-ideological power structure, she becomes terribly shocked. When she finds more about Shahrzad's terrible life, about her strange love and marriage, and about her and her husband's horrible death, Massoumeh gains a stronger identity which makes her capable of facing the great problems of her future life.

The impact of Massoumeh's new identity can be observed in the style of her conduct when she advises her father that Mahmoud should not be allowed to make her sister Fati marry a man whom she does not love. Also, her kinsfolk suggest that instead of working for the expenses of her life she has to stay at home and receive them from themselves or even from her father-in-law. But when she decisively opposes with their suggestion, the impact of her new identity becomes even clearer.

Massoumeh's present life conditions are again critically bad, because she feels not only lonely but, due to her husband's anti-regime secret activities, embarrassed also. However, to alleviate the impact of these bad conditions, she uses other means

as well. A means which she uses is that in spite of the fact that her husband is primarily reluctant to become a father, she makes him become the father of two babies. In these conditions, her husband's long and repeated absences from home make her take the responsibilities of a married life alone to fulfill them without any complaint. Added to that, her maternal love and the care she takes for her children give her more energy and excitement to continue living. In chapter 2 we read,

Finally on one beautiful day in May I felt strong enough to make up my mind. So I told myself, 'I should get up, I am a mother and have responsibility toward my child. I should be strong and stand on my feet and help my son grow in a happy, healthy environment.' This decision changed everything and activated my inner joy (Sani'ee, 2000: 178).

This is another vindication of Foucault's theory that "Power is everywhere," and that power originates from within the subject. As is the case with Sani'ee's character in her maternal position, while her love for her children gives her the energy to tolerate her difficult life conditions and fight against depression and disappointment, it too controls her in her own way of pleasure and progress.

Sani'ee's main character uses still more policies to change herself to a stronger personality while she also attempts to vanish her fear of disappointment and loneliness. She continues her studies at the university to get a B.A. But it seems that life makes her really exhausted, because now she is the mother of two young children, she has the responsibilities of the wife of a political activist in prison, and she is a secretary in an organization where she has a full-time job. However, her husband's warm and encouraging words make her motivated enough to register at the university for the winter semester. In chapter 3 her husband tells her

You can do it, you are no longer the clumsy girl of ten or eleven years ago, but are a competent and hardworking woman who can change anything which is seemingly impossible into a possibility. I am really proud of you' (Sani'ee, 2000: 271-2).

Another crucial event in this period of Massoumeh's life is her father's death. When he was living, and after the imprisonment of her husband in particular, her father was so kind and supportive to her and her children. So, after his death she feels quite hopeless and frustrated. However, it is because of her children that she once again comes to make a proper decision. Returning home from the graveyard, Massoumeh asks her two sons; that is, Siamak and Mas'ud:

What you think we should do for the grandeur and respect of his memory? What does he expect us to do? And how should we live to make him satisfied with us? And so I understood myself that I should try to turn to the usual conditions of my life and to continue my habitual life while I will have his dear memory with myself until Doomsday (Sani'ee, 2000: 282).

At this stage of Sani'ee's story, the role of death as a controlling device in the hand of power is easily observable, for it is by death also that it controls and normalizes the subjects. Believing in the life after death, and to show respect to their newly died grandfather, Massoumeh and her children decide to continue their usual life that is the life of a normalized subject. So Foucault's idea in the positive role of power is confirmed once again.

The physical torture inflicted on Hamid in prison, his great will and strong belief in the Marxist ideology which excites him not to surrender to those tortures, in addition to Massoumeh's hard life and the hard lives of her children during their father's imprisonment all translate how intellectuals could resist the political regime of Pahlavi's corrupted power in that period.

In the Times of Revolution

In "Iran: The Spirit of A World without Spirit" (1988), Foucault focuses on the 1974 Iranian revolution in the times of the great upheaval. In the 1960s and 1970s there was a tendency in Iran to cast off all the rules and trappings of the bourgeois capitalist society. So, one can claim that there was a considerable sensibility against those oppressive regimes. In much earlier Marxist thinking, the overthrow of the state and the liberation of the working classes through (something like) a revolution were among the basic aims of many political activists. However, in "Truth and Power" Foucault maintains that "Revolution is not necessarily a simple freedom from oppression, a complete challenge to bourgeois power, and an overturning of power relations, since the State consists in the codification of a whole number of power relations" (1984:115). Yet, it seems that for Foucault revolution is not necessarily a practical challenge to the power and a way to freedom, because later in the same article he writes "the State consists in the condition of a whole number of power relations which render its functioning possible, and . . . revolution is a different type of codification of the same relations" (Foucault, 1984:122).

The changes happening in the social discourse around Massoumeh ground

the formation of new powers. The role of these powers in her life makes her resist in new ways, because to make herself and her children into ethical selves, she is to care not only for herself but for them also. In this process, the first and foremost event is the radical change in conduct of her brother Mahmoud's behavior to her. Now it is four years that Massoumeh's husband is in prison with Mahmoud having had almost no connection to her. But it is strange that he has newly sent some boxes of foodstuff like rice and oil to her. However, Massoumeh firstly considers them for charity and so firmly rejects them. In chapter 4 she tells Mahmoud on the phone: "Thank you, Brother, I mean, I surely can afford my life, and I do not like my children to grow on charity. Please send somebody to take these back" (Sani'ee, 2000: 287).

It is already four years that Massoumeh's husband is in prison, and the people around her, her colleagues at work for example, have often refused even to greet her warmly. However, soon she realizes the reason why recently they should be renewing their connections with her and her children. It is likely, more than ever before, that the political prisoners get free, because Iran is at the threshold of a (political) revolution. So, by renewing their connections with Massoumeh and her children, the people around her often imagine they can take advantage of Hamid's reputation to integrate themselves with the new revolutionary structure coming to power, because as an anti-Pahlavi regime activist in prison, Hamid, when freed from there, will be considered both a political pioneer and a social leader.

Then, her colleagues at work often show more respect to her. In a party meeting, one of them gives a formal exaggerated speech about her courage in political activities, and then asks her to be the representative of the party. But she rejects this offer also, claiming that what has been said about her is not true. In this phase of her life, honesty, moderation, and righteousness are surely her most practical policies for constructing her ethical self, while in the dominant discourse of the revolution it is likely that the people change the mode of their oral communication and their behavior to get better (social) positions.

But Massoumeh cannot cope with the present conditions, because on the one hand the effect of the Pahlavi Power structure is so huge upon her that she cannot resist. On the other hand, in its political and cultural discourse, the upcoming revolution shows very promising. Therefore, she decides to close her eyes upon her up-to-now continuous contest with her brothers, and instead to cooperate with them in their activities against the Pahlavi regime and so help pave the way for the revolution. Massoumeh says,

Mahmoud used to bring cassettes and manifestos, Ali to duplicate them, I to distribute them in the university and at

work; together with his classmates, Siamak used to attend the anti-regime street strikes, and Mas'ud to draw the picture of striking people in the streets" (Sani'ee, 2000: 291).

In another article: "What Are the Iranians Dreaming About?" Foucault writes, The situation in Iran can be understood as a great joust under traditional emblems, those of the king and the saint, the armed ruler and the destitute exile, the despot faced with the man who stands up bare-handed and is acclaimed by a people. This image has its own power, but it also speaks to a reality to which millions of dead have just subscribed (1979: 150).

However, even in such a clearly unequal field of rivalry, Massoumeh soon distinguishes the traces of a hidden power structure which is trying to impose its superiority upon the people and make them into tame subjects. Yet in a due time she decisively goes out of the reach of this power. She says,

I looked at Mahmoud with hatred, I wanted to say many things to him, but suddenly they started reciting elegies, and the crowd stood up mourning; I found a way through the mourning crowd, and while I was taking Siamak's hand with anger, I went out of the house. Mas'ud was running after me while he was holding the bottom edge of my chador, I wished to hit Siamak so much as to have made him dark and blue (Sani'ee, 2000: 296).

Therefore, the novel represents a thorough and rapid process of change in Iran. A feature of this process is that power is no longer the outcome of interaction between the subject on the one side and the situation (of the power) on the other side, but is the situation that one-sidedly imposes its discourse upon the subjects. Reading Massoumeh, this means the formation of new experiences in her mind due to which she often renews herself for integration to the new society. Her progress in renovation through gaining new knowledge well embodies Scott's idea about changes in the meaning of experience in the course of history. In an attempt to describe the historical changes of experience, Scott examines its meanings in the 18th and 19th centuries. Then he argues that in the 20th century its meaning considerably changed. He affirms that

....in the twentieth century experience was a "subjective witness" spontaneous, truthful, and trustworthy as it was, that the individuals consciously developed in themselves.

But later on, when it came to mean “influences external to individuals,” it was the influence of the social, political, and cultural realities over the people (Scott, 1991: 781).

Such realities included the prevailing conditions, institutions, and ideologies in which the people would pass their lives. At the threshold of the revolution in Iran, the life of Sani'ee's character is hugely influenced by such realities. On the other hand, these realities are out of her control. Thus, as she does her best to come to terms with them, the meaning of the experience changes for her, and so she starts to think in new modes. In this way, the course of Sani'ee's novel is the course of her character's renovation also, because her reader often finds her character in the business of renewing her conscious, and by doing this, integrating herself with the new conditions. In chapter Five Massoumeh says,

In our discussions he [Hamid] occasionally looked at me with amazement and said, ‘How vastly you have changed! How fully experienced and knowledgeable you look! You speak like a philosopher, a psychologist. Has the few years of university education changed you so much?’ With a kind of pride which I didn't want to hide, I answered, ‘No, life's obligation has made me so. I needed it, to find new and correct ways of life. I had the responsibility of my children also. There was no place for a mistake (Sani'ee, 2000: 319).

Social problems are often taken to have negative effects on the subjects; but in Foucauldian definitions they can be considered with positive effects of power on them. Foucault believes in power as productive; that is, in happy and fortunate outcomes of power which testifies, among other things, the production of “pleasure and freedom.” In “Truth and power” he says,

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good what makes it accepted is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (qtd. in Rabinow, 1984: 61).

Massoumeh's prosperity in managing her life in the time of hardship, her

non-stop attempt to continue her education, as well as her success in helping her three children grow up well-educated as she always wished are evidences indicating the positive effects of power in the development of people's personalities.

The Aftermath of Revolution and Iran-Iraq War

In the post-revolution era, Massoumeh, with her husband in prison for the second time, is fired from her job. So, once again she has to earn her family's life with strenuous efforts. In order to retain her independence from 'others', she has to fight with poverty. Hamid's imprisonment and execution reminds the reader of Foucault's argument when he says "revolution is a different type of codification of the same relations" (1980:122).

Events in this period of Massoumeh's life signify that although under the impact of the revolution her society has positively changed, challenges of different kinds are still there in which she and other people who want to resist the power structure are simulated to engage. Hamid dies before his own father. After his father's death, his aunts and uncles sell the house in which his wife and children were living, which leaves them homeless. For Sani'ee's character, this is another field of struggle against the power which adds more to her independence. Still another great shock which Massoumeh receives is when she finds out that it is her own brother, Mahmoud, who reported about Siamak's political activities which led to his imprisonment. This can be inferred from Fluck's notion of "the circulation of a faceless power through the literary text in order to reverse existing hierarchies" (1994:42). To reflect on such hidden aspects of people's lives with huge impacts in shaping social and cultural history of a nation is something which can only be done in great literary works.

Mahoumd's abuse of Hamid's reputation as a political activist, added to Massoumeh's and Siamak's hard lives at the threshold of the revolution, and Mahmoud's betraying conduct toward them provide us with knowledge about the circulation of historical experience in literary texts, and historical experience makes it possible for us to recognize how such categories and subject-positions are constructed. This reconstructive status of experience in literature implies the potential rebirth of the individual, society, and history. But in the experience of literature, the agency of the history-making subjects (actors) is situational and positional rather than autonomous. In other words, these subjects are not self-sufficient but take their power through undertaking situational roles and by the relations they develop with others in that situation.

The hard work Massoumeh does to provide the expenses of Siamak's life and education in Germany, and the high risk she takes in illegally sending him there should be analyzed as a further field of resistance for her which is in need of still new policies. However, when she decides to say 'No' to Mr. Zargar's marriage proposal can be considered as another field of resistance against the power structure which indicates that her number one priority is her children's peaceful life. Historical experience also helps us better understand why the people around Massoumeh suddenly change their behavior towards her and why she should be angry with them while she faces their respectful behavior because she is the mother of a war captive. In chapter Eight the novel reads,

It was a long time I hadn't been to any military office. Although this time they highly respected me as the mother of a soldier lost in the war, but these respects too, like all the insulting talks I heard at the prison gates as the mother of a Mojahed or the wife of a Marxist, were so painful to me. None of them I couldn't tolerate (Sani'ee, 2000: 431).

Final Decision

As Foucault maintains, disciplinary power creates certain types of individuals: people who are ready to act according to the demands of power relations. The central technique of disciplinary power is constant surveillance. It takes hold of the mind by creating a psychological state of "conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1984:201). Hence disciplinary power creates a type of individual who controls his/her own action to be in line with the very expectations of power relations; that is, a sort of self-awareness is developed by individuals that makes them act according to what power demands of them. Once again Massoumeh and her friend, Parvaneh, are placed on the 'same' side. But what they do this time supports an Iranian traditional subculture a dimension of which is an opposition between Iranian and European marriage traditions. Siamak and Lili, who have lived and studied in Germany, represent the European culture. An interesting point here is that the circulation of power has caused a change in their positions, while primarily they [Massoumeh and Parvaneh] used to oppose traditional ways of life and support new ways, this time they take side with the Western life styles to stand with their native cultural traditions. But this time, she acts like an educated middle-aged lady with a well-constructed personality. Thus, instead of the physical tortures applied by Massoumeh's family in the past times, now she partakes in calm and goal-oriented negotiations which slightly help her succeed in motivating Siamak and Lili establish their marriage according to traditional Iranian conventions which make them register their marriage before starting their marital life.

Her second son's marriage is still a further battlefield where she resists the powers of material life in the dominant discourse of time. The techniques she carefully uses to make Mas'ud postpone his marriage with Ladan, and her strong disagreement with him when he wants her to wear chador as Mr. Maghsoudi would like are examples of how skillfully this well-constructed experienced woman acts in resisting the normalizing discourse. The image of a perfect mother is seen in the way she helps her daughter, Shirin, find her ideal man with whom to marry. In the binary opposition of old generation/young generation, which is an aspect of the dominant discourse, and the knowledge she has gained through suffering in different stages of her life help her manage the struggle successfully and guide her children marry their ideal pairs. In the last paragraph of chapter Nine Massoumeh says,

I felt I had well done the whole of my duties in spite of all obstacles in my way, my children were all grown up, well-educated, and successful. I had put down a burden, but like on the after-exam days, I was empty and aimless. What had I to do now? Apparently, I had nothing else to do in the world (Sani'ee, 2000: 478).

The last chapter of the novel shows three decades after the time of the first one, but the argument of the story is again about the marriage of Saeed and Massoumeh, with them both and Parvaneh on the same side of the opposition. But in the circulation of power, it is her children who, on the other side of the opposition as they are, have the upper hand in controlling the power. Saeed and Massoumeh talk as in the following:

(Saiid): But Massoum, in this way we will be lost again.

(Massoumeh): I know, I'm sure about myself that will be lost, for me it's like a form of suicide, and it's not the first time I am taking suicide, but you know what is the most painful and killing for me?

(Saiid): No!

(Massoumeh): That in both periods of my life, my dearest kins, those who had the closest relations with me cause my death like this (Sani'ee, 2000: 527).

And finally, after a life-long struggle, she has to make an ultimate decision about her own life. However, this time she puts her weapon down, takes her hands up, and gives priority to the happiness of her children, for by saying a 'No' to Saiid who has proposed marriage to her, she, like most normalized widows in her age, selects to live alone for the rest of her life. Towards the end of the story, when Parvaneh tells Massoumeh she should take side with her children and go her own way, she says,

You know, I don't want it anymore, not because I can't do it, I can, but it is no longer interesting for me. I feel vanquished; it is as if nothing has changed in the past thirty years. In spite of my sufferings in all these years, I couldn't change anything even at my home (Sani'ee, 2000: 525).

The words which Sani'ee uses symbolically best reflect the fact that Massoumeh's decision is the result of her long-life experiences. Quite aware of the consequences of her decision, and looking up at the sky, she walks through the coming cold autumn. In the last page of the novel we hear her saying:

When I finally parted with Sa'iid, I came home walking. An autumn cold wind started blowing. I was very much tired. Loneliness was now a heavier load on me while my steps were weaker and less stable. I wrapped myself up in my black jacket, looked at the frowning sky and said 'Wow...! What a cold winter is waiting for us'. (Sani'ee, 2000:528)

Reading *Sahm-e Man (Book of Fate)* from a Foucauldian perspective, we better understand the hidden dimensions of the Iranian history in the past five decades. The life story of Massoumeh, Sani'ee's main character, reflects the life story of most common people in those decades. Another conspicuous feature of *Sahm-e Manis* that it opens to the readers a space of opposition like that which Lyotard calls "differend". *Differend* is, for Lyotard, "the unstable state of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be" (qtd. in Malpes, 2003:61). In a case of *differend*, the opposing parties cannot agree on a base or logic to settle their disputes. Ms. Parvin's life is perhaps a good case of *differend*. She is a lawfully married woman. Yet, unlawfully also she has some affairs with men. So she violates the ethical principles of her society. However, based on her own ethical principles she remains a kind and helpful friend to Massoumeh and her children. This leads us to believe that sometimes it is unfair to judge people's characters based on social norms.

Another example for a case of *differend* is the way Sani'ee's novel compares Massoumeh's life conditions before and after the revolution. As the wife of a political activist, before the revolution she is allowed to have a job and go to the university. However, although many times after the revolution she acknowledges that she has never believed in her husband's Marxist ideologies, she is fired both from her job and the university.

Conclusion

As the findings of the study show, brought up in a society which does not encourage her to practice self-creation, Massoumeh does her best to practice her ethics, which needs her great effort to resist many blocks of powers in different phases of her life, each block reflecting the dominant discourse of that phase. In most of her life struggles she may be seen as the underdog, but through the knowledge and experience which she gains in these struggles, she not only successfully cares for her 'self' but also sticks to her ethics and brings up her children as she wishes.

In the first phase of the story, despite the fact that her opportunist brothers do all those tortures and cruelties towards her in the name of Islam, she does not lose her faith in God and Islamic beliefs. In the second phase, when she has more freedom, although her husband's general knowledge, and his knowledge in the Marxist ideology in particular, is much superior to hers, instead of being absorbed to his ideology and becoming his deactivated follower, she works hard, according to an extensive reading program, to find out about his previous mistakes and remake her own outlook anew.

This process of self-caring (self-remaking) is true about her in the third phase of the novel also. When many social opportunities are likely to fall to her lot, and the simple-hearted people behave toward her really respectfully and with appreciation, instead of taking advantage from them like her brothers, she tries to help them understand the reality in which she believes. In the next phase, through her experiences and well-constructed self, and in spite of all her emotional and financial problems, she tries to make life at home warm and happy for her children. However, in the last phase of the novel we realize that she succumbs to the power structure, which is represented, this time, in her children's radically selfish requests; for she ultimately accepts to put their selfish requests into effect, which means to reject Saiid's marriage proposal and to live alone to the end of her life. So, she accepts to become a normalized subject and be the symbol of a perfectly-devoted mother of her age.

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