



## Woman in Culture and Arts

### Identity and Feminine Life in the Novel “A Secret in the Alleys”

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article type:</b> Research Article</p> <p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 20 Jan 2024 Received in revised form: 19 May 2024 Accepted: 22 June 2024 Published online: 1 October 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>A Secret in the Alleys</i>, <i>Fariba Vafi</i>, <i>Feminine Identity</i>, <i>Novel</i>, <i>Social Psychology</i>.</p>	<p><b>Introduction</b> Women's identity has recently received the attention of researchers in various fields of human sciences and is closely related to social psychology and family and gender sociology. Sociology is concerned with the personal and social identity of people. Personal identity is a combination of the social and personal identities. Social identity is an individual's definition of him/herself based on membership in various social classes and groups, and personal identity refers to a person's reconsidered definition of him/herself.</p> <p>Given the speed of changes in today's world, the definition of family and related concepts such as marriage, childbearing, divorce and family roles related to the rights, duties and responsibilities of husband and wife and children have also undergone great changes. These changes are reflected in society and consequently in literary works, especially in novels. Story writers such as Daneshvar, Taraghee, Parsipour, and Ravanipour, have dealt with the problem of Iranian women's identity and status in their works in a stage of social change and transformation combining women's efforts for self-discovery with criticism of the patriarchal society. Trying to discover one's individuality and identity as a woman finds a significant place in women's literature (Mirabedini, 2001, V. 3: 110). Fariba Vafi is one of the writers who has extensively dealt with women's issues, especially their identity and its various dimensions, in her stories including the novel <i>A Secret in the Alleys</i>.</p> <p>The present study is an attempt to investigate and analyze the components related to life and female identity in the novel <i>A Secret in the Alleys</i> based on social psychology and personality theories. Many studies have examined Vafi's works, especially <i>Dream of Tibet</i> and <i>My Bird</i>; However, the issue of women's life and identity has not been addressed in the novel <i>A Secret in the Alleys</i> from the perspective of social psychology. Considering the importance of this work in dealing with the issues of Iranian urban women, it is essential to conduct this research.</p> <p>The present article answers the question of how the components related to women's life and identity are manifested in the mentioned novel in the transition from tradition to modernity.</p> <p><b>Methodology</b> The current research is based on qualitative data analysis and was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach and reliable library sources to investigate the components of women's identity and life in the novel <i>A Secret in the Alleys</i> and analyzes and gets to the root of issues such as family and friendly relationships, marriage, employment, dreams, feelings and emotions, needs and wishes, women's reaction to different situations, types of violence against women and gender stereotypes drawing on social psychology and personality theories. In order to achieve a scientific approach, authentic books and articles in the field of literature, psychology and sociology were used in this research.</p> <p><b>Results</b> In 2006, the novel <i>A Secret in the Alleys</i> explored the inner and hidden conflicts, intellectual problems, requirements, and concerns of Iranian women in traditional society. The narrator (Homeyra) returns to her hometown after a lapse of many years to attend the final meeting with his father, who is grappling with mortality.</p>

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In the present study, the components of female identity and life in the novel *A Secret in the Alleys* are analyzed and derivations regarding social psychology and personality theories are derived. This includes issues such as family and friendship relationships, marriage, employment, dreams and dreams, feelings and emotions, needs and desires, women's reactions to situations, and violence against women. The research employs a descriptive-analytical approach. The author of this novel addresses a variety of topics, including the transition of Iranian women from traditional to modern identity, identity crisis, and the rehabilitation and revision of female identity, in addition to narrating the lives of three generations of women. The novel is characterized by the pervasive presence of various forms of violence, particularly directed at women by males. In contrast, verbal violence is the most prevalent form of violence observed in women in the narrative.. Homeyra is engulfed by an identity crisis and is influenced by harsh childhood memories, particularly the violence perpetrated by her father. Her namelessness from the point of view of herself and others is a reflection of this anonymity. Her return to her father's house after many years is a means to recover aspects of her identity.

Gender stereotypes in the novel *A Secret in the Alleys* are expressed in the guise of characterizing and describing some common beliefs about men and women. The uncle is the sole positive character in the novel who serves as a guide and savior, reminiscent of the "Wise Old Man." This distinction is particularly noteworthy from a gender perspective in a work that concentrates on the issues of women in a traditional and patriarchal society.

The novel contains only an indistinct representation of traditional customs. The author could have achieved greater success in capturing the essence of the past and illustrating the contrast between tradition and modernity, as well as the lifestyle of Iranian women thirty to forty years ago, by paying more attention to this category.

#### **Conclusion**

The novel *A Secret in the Alleys* illustrates the lives of three generations of women. Aziz is a representation of the prior generation and its customs; a generation that accepts the nature of marriage and the marital difficulties as fate. Mahrokh, Monir, Alia, and Azar's mother are the representatives of the middle generation of women. Mahrokh and Azar's mother are emblematic of women who, in their desperation to alter the situation, opt for silence, forbearance, tolerance, and the disregard of violence against domestic violence. Mahrokh and Homeyra have been subjected to the Patriarchal metamorphosis and have become estranged from their authentic selves.

As an adult, Homeyra goes from passivity to analyzing and rethinking her identity. Mastaneh attempts to establish an independent identity by alternating between traditional and contemporary identities. Although Azar struggles to gain a new and desirable identity, her family and society do not accept her presence, so her life ends in childhood. Monir is an illustration of a woman who endeavors to alter the lives and identities of herself and other women; however, superficiality and lack of understanding and awareness cause these changes to be limited in some dimensions. Vafi critiques the gender ideology that pervades society and is prevalent among both men and women in *A Secret in the Alleys* by delving beyond the superficial and identifying the psychological underpinnings of women's issues. She emphasizes the necessity of rethinking the identity of women's role and position in the family and society by consciously avoiding one-sidedness and superficiality.

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