



## Woman in Culture and Arts

### Discourse Semiotics of Gender in Two Novels *This Street Has no Speed Bumps* and *Rahesh*

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article type:</b> Research Article</p> <p><b>Article history:</b> Received: 18 March 2022 Received in revised: form 10 June 2022 Accepted: 16 June 2022 Published online: 30 December 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Discourse Analysis,</i> <i>Gender,</i> <i>Laclau And Mouffe,</i> <i>This Street Has No Speed Bumps,</i> <i>Rahesh.</i></p>	<p><b>Introduction</b> Gender-based social structures have long influenced societal hierarchies, determining roles, rights, and expectations. Feminist movements challenge these structures by advocating for the equality and autonomy of women. Although feminism originated in the 19th century, its influence grew in Iran after the Constitutional Revolution, gaining momentum in the 1990s, particularly in literature. Two notable novels from this period, <i>This Street Has No Speed Bumps</i> by Maryam Jahani and <i>Rahesh</i> by Reza Amirkhani, offer insights into the discourse around gender roles in Iranian society. Jahani's novel explores women's struggles in a patriarchal culture, while mirkhani's <i>Rahesh</i> critiques societal norms through a gendered lens. This study applies Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (1985) and Soltani's semiotic analysis (2013) to examine these novels within the socio-political landscape of 1990s Iran.</p> <p><b>Methodology</b> This analysis combines discourse and semiotic approaches to investigate the novels' symbolic and thematic elements, providing insights into each author's view on gender roles. A comprehensive three-step analysis is critical to thoroughly dissect and understand the novels: 1) Textual Analysis: This phase examines symbolic systems, focusing on character development, language, and structure. Through this analysis, we aim to understand how each novel frames gender identities and critiques societal norms. 2) Intertextual Comparison: This step involves comparing each novel to the authors' other works to identify stylistic trends, thematic evolution, and perspectives on gender. By examining these works, we can situate <i>This Street Has No Speed Bumps</i> and <i>Rahesh</i> within a broader literary context. 3) Contextual Evaluation: Here, the novels are analyzed within the socio-political climate of 1990s Iran, a period marked by aspirations for reform. This step links literary themes to broader cultural and political movements, highlighting the impact of public discourse on the portrayal of gender roles. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory frames societal structures as products of discourse, while Soltani's semiotic approach decodes symbolic language, uncovering deeper meanings about gender and power.</p> <p><b>Results</b> According to the three-phase of discourse analysis mentioned above, the results of the study can be presented in three levels.</p> <p><b>3.1. Textual Analysis</b> '<i>This Street Has No Speed Bumps</i>' by Maryam Jahani employs symbolic language to explore women's experiences within a patriarchal society. The protagonist, Shohreh, embodies the struggle for self-expression in a conservative culture, challenging societal norms and traditional female roles. Through her interactions and inner conflict, Jahani highlights the psychological and social barriers women face, portraying Shohreh as a symbol of resilience within restrictive boundaries. '<i>Rahesh</i>', written by Reza Amirkhani, presents a predominantly male-centered narrative with female characters who subtly defy conventional roles.</p>

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### 3.2. Intertextual Comparison

Jahani's earlier works, such as *Lights Off*, frequently explore the struggles faced by women under patriarchal constraints. *This Street Has No Speed Bumps* intensifies these themes, presenting a deeper examination of the pursuit of autonomy. The shift from *Lights Off* to this work highlights Jahani's commitment to feminist discourse, as each novel builds upon her exploration of gender, power, and identity within Iranian society. In contrast, Amirkhani's earlier works often revolve around nationalism, religion, and identity. *Rahesh* represents a significant shift, emphasizing social and gender issues. This departure aligns with the socio-political atmosphere of 1990s Iran, a period of reformist aspirations. Comparing *Rahesh* to contemporary works, such as Nasim Marashi's *Autumn is the Last Season of the Year*, reveals a thematic trend in Iranian literature: the focus on women's search for identity within restrictive environments.

### 3.3. Contextual Evaluation

Both novels reflect the socio-political context of 1990s Iran, marked by cultural shifts, reformist leadership, and discussions around gender rights. This decade saw the election of a reformist president, bringing hope for social progress. Although limitations on women's political participation remained, public discourse increasingly addressed issues of gender equality. Both *This Street Has No Speed Bumps* and *Rahesh* capture this era's atmosphere, with their female characters navigating societal expectations and seeking autonomy. The portrayal of female characters as agents of change reflects the subtle shifts in public attitudes toward gender during this period. Shohreh, in *This Street Has No Speed Bumps*, personifies the reformist spirit, challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for autonomy. Similarly, in *Rahesh*, female characters represent a new generation of women who assert their independence despite societal constraints. These novels document the complexities of gender relations and reflect the spirit of resistance that characterized 1990s Iran, contributing to a feminist discourse within Iranian literature.

### Conclusion

*This Street Has No Speed Bumps* and *Rahesh* highlight the dual forces of tradition and modernity that define Iranian society. Shohreh's journey in *This Street Has No Speed Bumps* represents a feminist ideal, as she confronts patriarchal structures and challenges gender-based limitations. Although she encounters resistance, Shohreh's persistence symbolizes the growing desire for change. In *Rahesh*, the female characters subtly defy societal expectations, carving spaces for self-expression within a male-centered narrative. Both novels underscore the tension between progressive ideals and conservative frameworks, reflecting the broader societal efforts to reconcile these forces. By presenting female characters who challenge conventional norms, Jahani and Amirkhani contribute to a feminist dialogue within Iranian literature, capturing the complexities of gender relations in the reformist era. Their protagonists' journeys toward self-empowerment underscore the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the enduring relevance of feminist discourse in Iranian culture.

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