



Woman in Culture and Arts

An Examination of the Cultural Basis of the Cognitive Metaphor of Femininity in the Fictional Works of Fariba Vafi Based on Zoltan Kovecses's Theory

Fatemeh Zamani¹ 

1. Corresponding Author, Assistant Professor, Department of Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Kosar University of Bojnord, Bojnord, Iran. Email: f.zamani@kub.ac.ir

Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article type: Research Article</p> <p>Article history: Received: 24 September 2024 Received in revised form: 7 January 2025 Accepted: 17 February 2025 Published online: 30 March 2026</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>One of the significant themes in the literary works of women is the recovery of their identity and the expression of their thoughts, feelings, and emotions in the history of contemporary Iranian literature. Contemporary writers endeavor to depict women in their human form, irrespective of their gender perspective, and to illustrate their presence in a variety of social and cultural contexts. This issue is further highlighted when the metaphors that writers employ to illustrate the concept of femininity are examined, as metaphors are rooted in the human mind and reflect the worldview, ideology, and power that underpin discourses. The mentality and perspective of the speaker on the world and life are the determining factors in the creation of metaphors. The majority of Fariba Vafi's works feature women as the primary characters, and the author provides a comprehensive depiction of their behavior, emotions, limitations, problems, and appearance.</p> <p>This article has extracted conceptual metaphors of "femininity" from the fictional works of Fariba Vafi. Then, it endeavors to address the question of which of the dominant ideologies in the sociocultural history of Iran the conceptual metaphors of "femininity" have a semiotic and conceptual link, drawing on the theories of conceptual metaphor, particularly the cultural metaphor of migration. In other words, which of the cultural, social, and historical foundations of Iranian society do these metaphors originate from, and how do they elucidate the author's attitude and lifeworld?</p> <p>Methodology</p> <p>This research is conducted using the descriptive-analytical method and library resources and is based on the theory of conceptual metaphor from Kovecses' perspective. In cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor typically targets more abstract concepts and originates from more objective or physical concepts (Kovecses, 2017: 20-21). Kovecses posits that individuals from particular cultures employ their own processes for generating meaning and generate a unique set of meanings that are derived from their unique conceptual framework. Consequently, the first step is to extricate the various types of conceptual metaphors of femininity in Fariba Vafi's fictional works. Subsequently, the metaphors are categorized according to the cultural system and foundation from which they arise, and their implications for meaning are analyzed.</p> <p>Findings</p> <p>Upon initial examination, the contrast of three distinct cultural foundations in Iranian society is apparent through the extraction of conceptual analogies of femininity in the works of Fariba Vafi. Initially, metaphors that are derived from ancient beliefs and mythical beliefs regarding women. Despite the fact that these types of metaphors are not frequently encountered in the text structure of Vafi's stories, they are indicative of the author's attempt to revitalize feminine authority and identity. The cultural system of ancient matriarchal societies is characterized by a high level of respect and intimacy for women. In this manner, women in the mythical and prehistoric era of the Iranians were associated with light, life, worship, and guarding, and deities such as Anahita occupied a prominent position. Metaphors such as "woman is fire," "woman is life," "woman is an altar," and "woman is a guardian" are indicative of the existence of such a perspective on women.</p> <p>Second, the author critiques the epistemology that has emerged from patriarchal cultural</p>
<p>Keywords: <i>Conceptual Metaphor, Cultural System, Fariba Vafi, Story, The Concept of Femininity.</i></p>	

systems in relation to women. Metaphors have originated from these systems. These metaphors have developed from a variety of macro-metaphors or mental schemas, including “woman is an animal,” “woman is a servant,” “woman is magic,” “woman is a worthless creature,” “woman is an object,” and “woman is inferior.”

Third, despite the fact that contemporary discourse emphasizes the inherent equality of women and men and their right to civil rights, justice, and participation in public forums, the ideology of consumption is primarily promoted and dominated by women. Women are essentially employed as intermediaries for consumer advertising and as tools for the dissemination of advertising ideology. Vafi’s works have been influenced by the metaphors “woman is a doll,” “woman is a lover,” “woman is a sexual commodity,” and “woman is an object” that were developed as a consequence of this cultural system.

Conclusion

The study of Fariba Vafi’s fictional works in terms of conceptual analogies of femininity indicates that the author has tried to present a realistic picture of the situation and status of women in her time and throughout the history of Iranian society. The study of the cultural foundation of these metaphors indicates three cultural systems: “women in Ancient Iran,” “women in Patriarchal Society,” and “women in Modernism.” In other words, conceptual metaphors of femininity symbolize the progression of women’s status throughout the mythological, historical, and contemporary periods to the present day. The examination of conceptual metaphors that are derived from the cultural system of the mythological era demonstrates that the structure and organization of prehistoric societies, which were founded on matriarchy and the worship of goddesses and goddesses, are still partially reflected in the metaphors of femininity in the modern Persian language. In this system, women were held in high regard and were associated with light, life, worship, and protection. Goddesses such as Anahita held a prominent position. Metaphors such as “woman is fire,” “woman is life,” “woman is the altar,” and “woman is the guardian” are indicative of this perspective on women. In Fariba Vafi’s narrative, the female protagonists endeavor to reclaim their mythological identity and its life-giving properties. The frequency of many metaphors of femininity in Vafi’s works stems from the patriarchal environment and culture of Iranian society. Macrometaphors such as “woman is an animal,” “woman is a servant,” “woman is magic,” “woman is a worthless creature,” “woman is an object” and “woman is inferior” are the result of a patriarchal cultural system that implies men’s hidden verbal violence toward women and considering women as the second and other sex in relation to men. Female characters and heroines of the story generally object to these metaphors and seek to eliminate them through their narrative actions. Vafi’s fictional works also demonstrate the influence of modern and advertising culture in the creation of metaphors of femininity such as “woman is a doll,” “woman is a lover,” “woman is a sex object,” and “woman is an object,” in addition to patriarchal culture. These types of metaphors are also unappealing to the female heroines of the stories under review, as they diminish the value and identity of women to the level of sensual desires.

Conflict of Interest

This research has been supported by Kosar University of Bojnord under contract number 0201161916.

Cite this article: Zamani, F. (2026). An Examination of the Cultural Basis of the Cognitive Metaphor of Femininity in the Fictional Works of Fariba Vafi Based on Zoltan Kovecses’s Theory. *Woman in Culture and Art*, 18(4), 41-61.
DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jwica.2026.381997.2076>



© The Author(s).

Publisher: The University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jwica.2026.381997.2076>
