

Feminist Perspectives and Gender Identity in Contemporary Iranian Literature:

A Case Study of Firoozeh Dumas' *Funny in Farsi*

Introduction:

This research project explores how gender, identity, and womanhood intersect within contemporary Iranian literature through a feminist perspective. It seeks to understand how Iranian women writers, both inside Iran and in the diaspora, convey their personal experiences, challenge patriarchal traditions, and redefine the roles of women in society. At the heart of this study is the work of Iranian-American author Firoozeh Dumas, whose memoir *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America* offers a thoughtful and often humorous reflection on issues of gender, cultural displacement, and identity negotiation.

Research Context and Significance:

Iranian literature, spanning both classical and contemporary works, has historically served as a space where social conventions, cultural identities, and political issues are examined and negotiated. Yet, women's voices in this literary tradition have frequently been limited or overshadowed by patriarchal controls and censorship, restricting how women can represent themselves. Over the past few decades, however, an increasing number of Iranian women writers—particularly those living in the diaspora—have begun to share their stories more openly, using literature to express feminist perspectives and challenge societal norms.

This study is important because it examines how these female authors incorporate feminist ideas, question traditional gender expectations, and portray the complex realities of female identity amidst social change and migration. By focusing on Firoozeh Dumas, a well-known writer whose work has achieved international recognition, the research seeks to enrich feminist discourse within Iranian Studies and underscore the vital role that diasporic voices play in transforming the Iranian literary scene.

The main goals of this research are:

- To examine how feminist ideas and concepts of gender identity are portrayed in modern Iranian literature.
- To highlight influential Iranian women writers who have shaped feminist conversations within this literary field.
- To explore the ways these writers, challenge traditional gender norms and promote women's independence.
- To conduct a detailed case study of Firoozeh Dumas's *Funny in Farsi*, with special attention to its feminist themes surrounding gender, cultural blending, and the immigrant experience.
- To investigate how stories from the diaspora reflect women's navigation of identity, family relationships, and cultural pressures.
- To add to global feminist debates by placing Iranian women's literature in the wider context of gender and diaspora studies.

This study is framed around several key questions:

- How are issues of gender and feminist ideas portrayed in modern Iranian literature?
- Which Iranian women writers have been instrumental in promoting feminist discussions, and through what means?
- How does Firoozeh Dumas's *Funny in Farsi* illustrate the specific challenges faced by women in the Iranian-American diaspora?
- In what ways does Dumas's memoir challenge traditional Iranian gender expectations and emphasize themes of independence and personal identity?
- How is humor used in Dumas's storytelling to explore the intersections of gender experiences and cultural identity?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology:

This study employs a feminist literary framework, incorporating insights from gender studies, diaspora theory, and postcolonial feminist thought. Feminist theory offers tools to examine the dynamics of power, the construction of gender, and forms of resistance within literary texts. Meanwhile, diaspora theory provides a valuable context for understanding themes of displacement, cultural blending, and identity negotiation that are central to the works of Dumas and other authors from the diaspora.

In terms of methodology, the research will involve a detailed close reading of *Funny in Farsi*, paying special attention to its narrative techniques, character development, recurring themes, and language use that highlight feminist issues. Additionally, semiotic analysis and translation studies will be applied to explore how cultural and gender-related meanings are shaped and conveyed across different linguistic and cultural frameworks. Archival work on Iranian women's literary contributions and feminist movements will also inform the broader contextual background of the study.

A comparative approach will further position Dumas's memoir within the larger landscape of Iranian diaspora literature, identifying both shared themes and unique stylistic features among female writers. This interdisciplinary method aims to offer a thorough understanding of how gender identity is depicted, questioned, and redefined in Iranian literary works.

Case Study: Firoozeh Dumas and *Funny in Farsi*

Firoozeh Dumas was born in Iran in 1965 and moved to the United States as a child due to her father's job. Her life bridges Iranian and American cultures, a duality that deeply shapes her writing. *Funny in Farsi* is a memoir that humorously recounts her family's immigrant journey, cultural clashes, and the struggles surrounding identity.

What sets Dumas's work apart is the way she combines humor with thoughtful reflections on gender, culture, and belonging. Viewed through a feminist lens, her memoir highlights the pressures Iranian women face to conform to traditional gender roles, while also showcasing the protagonist's resilience and agency. The narrative reveals how immigrant women must navigate conflicting expectations from both their Iranian heritage and the American society, challenging patriarchal norms in both contexts.

The memoir touches on themes such as cultural negotiation, generational differences, and the immigrant experience, with a particular focus on women's quests for autonomy, visibility, and self-definition. Dumas emphasizes that women deserve not only to be seen but also to tell their own stories, embodying feminist ideals of equality and freedom.

Research Focus and Contribution:

This study places *Funny in Farsi* within the wider context of Iranian women's literature, both inside Iran and across the diaspora. It investigates how gender identity is constructed and contested in narratives shaped by diverse sociopolitical and cultural realities.

By concentrating on feminist perspectives within Iranian literature, the research contributes to ongoing academic discussions about gender, identity, and power in Middle Eastern literary traditions. It also underscores the vital role of diasporic women's voices, which provide important insights into cultural hybridity and the politics of belonging.

Using Dumas's work as a case study, the project will demonstrate how literature can challenge dominant gender ideologies and express women's experiences across borders. Furthermore, it will offer an interdisciplinary analysis that integrates translation studies, semiotics, and diaspora theory to enrich feminist literary criticism.

Conclusion:

This research aims to deepen understanding of gender and feminist representation in contemporary Iranian literature, with a special focus on diaspora narratives. Through a close reading of Firoozeh Dumas's *Funny in Farsi*, the study will explore how themes of womanhood, identity, cultural negotiation, and autonomy are portrayed in the works of Iranian women writers. Ultimately, the project seeks to enhance feminist scholarship in Iranian Studies by highlighting the literary contributions of Iranian women and broadening the global discourse on gender and diaspora in literature.