

Ecological Identity and The Discourse of Power: An Ecocritical Reading of *Kelidar*

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Abstract

Ecocriticism studies the relation between literature and the physical environment and analyzes ecological concerns in socio-political contexts. In order to represent the effects of the discourse of power on the ecological identity of the characters in Dowlatabadi's *Kelidar*, this article employs the descriptive-analytical method to study the characters' ecological concerns in relation to nature. Subjectification of each of *Kelidar's* characters manifests through their reactions when they are in authoritative positions of the discourse of power. In Kalmiši's surrender to sedentism, his ecologic fear, and his displacement of desert identity; in Belqays's mental breakdown and loss of identity; in Gol-Mohammad's blasphemy, ecologic fear, unadaptability to the harsh climate where he was banished, and guardslaughter; in Beg-Mohammad's migration and ecologic fear; in Khan-Mohammad's ruminations and dialogues with the elements of nature and reflections on his existence. Through character analysis in relation to the environment and the discourse of power, we concluded that the authoritative discourse of power leads to the characters' fabrication of a persona, and their objectification, distancing them from their ecologic identity and inner truth built in relation to the nature and seizing their freedom and rationality. In other words, the change in their ecology changes their nature and creates a powerful anti-discourse.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, *Kelidar*, Ecologic Identity, Discourse of Power.

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The term 'Ecocriticism,' first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert, addresses and studies issues on environmental concerns (Dreese, 2002: 4). Cheryll Glotfelty is

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regarded as the founder of ecocriticism in America. Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996: 18). It has a vast scope of function and is a diverse biosphere in itself (Parsapoor, 1392 [2013]: 36). Also, the characters in Dowlatabadi's *Kelidar* portray the rural life of the people who are born in villages (Dastqeib, 1383 [2004]: 111) and their fate is tied to nature.

2. Theoretical Framework

In his *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault categorizes Human sciences into three categories: rebirth, classic, and modernity. In each of these stages, the human understanding and view of nature are different. *Kelidar* belongs to modernity. In modernity, it is the absolute power of the discourse that manifests in special mental and behavioral patterns. In other words, Foucault believes that discourse and its true consequences play an important role in authority. Discourse limits the domain of authority and true consequences manifest in the shadow of authority (Foucault, 1387 [2008]: 158). Foucault emphasizes the focus on the origins of power and its consequences (ibid: 160). Because Foucault's analysis aims to regain and save the imprisoned knowledge (Smart, 1385 [2006]: 19). This study also aims to analyze such consequences by studying the ecologic identity of *Kelidar's* characters because discourse acts manifested certain behavioral patterns in the characters and changed their ecologic identity, which included a relation with the earth, an understanding of the ecosystem, and a direct experience of nature (Thomashow, 1995:3).

3. Methodology

This analytical-descriptive study will discuss Dowlatabadi's ten-volume *Kelidar*, extract samples from the literature review, analyze the data, and categorize the results.

4. Discussion and Analysis

In Dowlatabadi's *Kelidar*, the ecologic identity, or the ecologic self, represents the characters' relation, cognition, and behavior in society and in relation to the environment. The discourse of power distorts their ecological identity and prevents the realization of the ecologic self. For example, Kalmiši's surrender to sedentism becomes a subject of submitting to outside forces because his ecologic identity changes to a constructed identity influenced by the discourse of power. Or Belqays, Kalmiši's wife, is an object and an 'oratorial' truth, but her mental breakdown and loss of identity, under the influence of the discourse of power, transform her into a 'silent' subject with a constructed truth. Or by positioning in the discourse of power, Gol-Mohammad turns into an anti-power subject. In line with Foucauldian opposition of power,

Dowlatabadi presents a character who is not a passive submitter to power. Or the objectification of Beg-Mohammad and his decision to leave in the rain manifests under the influence of the discourse of power. Lastly, Khan-Amoo becomes a bandit because he regards the current condition as influenced by the discourse of power and blames God for his misfortune. Thus, one can claim that the natural environment is a sensory experience that might be beneficial or harmful to health, exciting, terrifying, or irritating (Sutton, 1393 [2014]: 74). However, Khan-Mohammad is still hopeful, does not believe the sky to be closed, and views the elements of nature, such as wind, desert, and sun, to be altruists.

5. Conclusion

Studying the characters' ecological concerns in Dowlatabadi's *Kelidar* reveals the influence of the authoritative discourse of power. Discourse plays an important role in the lives of the characters and their dialogue with nature. Although nature is an essential, vital fact that affects the compatibility and tolerance of humans in relation to their environment, there is a lack of compatibility and tolerance in the novel due to the influence of the authoritative discourse of power. When *Kelidar's* characters such as Kalmiši, Belqays, Gol-Mohammad, Beg-Mohammad, Khan-Mohammad, and Khan-Amoo are in positions of the authoritative discourse of power, not only their ecologic identity manifests in relation to the environment, but also they become an anti-discourse subject with a constructed identity that has no inner motive. Their motives are in accordance with, and rooted in, Reza-Shah's authoritative discourse of power. As a result, governments and organizations must pay close attention to people's ecological selves, as well as their personal, political, social, and cultural selves, to prevent the reoccurrence of the crises presented in *Kelidar*.

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