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# Manifestation of the Female Character in Mohammad Hijazi Works: An Individual and Social Approach

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective**: The exploration of the woman and her societal status holds great significance within the realm of contemporary literature, serving as a focal point for numerous authors. One such writer, Mohammad Hijazi, has emerged as a prominent figure in the post-constitutional era, crafting invaluable literary pieces that revolve around women and the intricate issues they face amidst the tumultuous circumstances prevailing in society. Through his works, Hijazi effectively sheds light on the social standing of women during those particular times.

**Methods**: By means of a descriptive-analytical study that heavily relies on resources found within libraries, researchers have meticulously examined the societal position of women, exploring both the physical and psychological aspects, all within the context of Hijazi's noteworthy works.

**Results**: It is worth noting that, despite their gender, women possess a considerable amount of influence when it comes to the appointment and allocation of administrative as well as judicial roles within their respective societies.

**Conclusions**: In conclusion, Mohammad Hijazi's literary works provide a nuanced portrayal of the female character by highlighting the significant individual and societal roles women play, emphasizing their influence in administrative and judicial domains despite prevailing societal challenges.

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## Introduction

During the early years of Reza Shah's reign in Iran (1310-1300), the Persian social novel drew inspiration from Western literature, particularly French literary works (Yazdi & Mozafari, 2018). The social novel, rooted in romanticism, reflects European influences, as many writers were also translators aiming to portray social issues through storytelling. Around twenty social novels emerged during Reza Khan's era, depicting societal norms and values amidst modernization, addressing issues like poverty, superstitions, women's roles, prostitution, concubinage, polygamy, and other social concerns. With the constitutional revolution, women began to feature prominently in fiction, participating in awakening movements advocating for equality. A prevalent theme in the works of this period's authors was the exploration of women's challenges and related societal issues, with some novels even bearing women's names, such as Ziba, Parichehr, Homa, Parvaneh, Arzoo, Nasim, and Saghar, including the collection of stories penned by Mohammad Hijazi (Alam; Salehpanah Ghashti et al., 2023).

The focal point of this study lies in analyzing the portrayal and role of women, along with associated themes in Hijazi's narratives, encompassing personal and societal perspectives. This investigation delves into the depiction of femininity in Hijazi's creations and how it influences interactions with the opposite gender and society at large. Women characters often vacillate between passivity and assertiveness, grappling with asserting their rights. Typically depicted from a male viewpoint, these women range from seductresses like Ziba in Hijazi's compelling novel to compassionate figures like Homa in "Homa." The analysis of Hijazi's works suggests a predominance of superficial female characters rather than those with profound ideologies—women portrayed as marginally superior to courtly figures, possibly reflecting societal norms.

In Hijazi's women-centric works, emphasis is placed on femininity, beauty, virtue, and modesty. Female characters either prioritize upholding family honor with unwavering loyalty or envision a life devoid of familial ties, pursuing their ambitions through various means, from subtle feminine wiles to engaging in immoral or illicit activities to satisfy carnal desires.

In regard to Hijazi and his literary works, there has been a lack of noteworthy research, particularly on his stories. This may be attributed to the perception of Muhammad Hijazi primarily as a social reformer and moral instructor, with his works being viewed more as educational pieces rather than renowned literary tales (Hedari, 2023). Nevertheless, existing studies have predominantly focused

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on only a few of his works, with limited discussion on those emphasizing the role of women. Examples of such research include an examination of the challenge posed by romanticism in the narrative "Ziba" by Mohammad Hijazi, conducted by Vahidenjad (2019). Additionally, an analysis of the tone and atmosphere in the novel "Ziba" authored by Mohammad Hijazi was undertaken by Chegini (2007). Furthermore, the exploration of romanticism, realism, and naturalism in the story of Sereshk by Mohammad Hijazi was investigated by Sadeghzadeh and Abedini (2020). Based on it, In the present study, a thorough examination has been conducted on the portrayal of the female character in the literary works of Mohammad Hijazi. This investigation adopts an approach that delves into both individual and social perspectives, employing a critical analytical method to scrutinize the representation of women in his writing. Moreover, an in-depth exploration has been carried out regarding the social position occupied by women, considering both physical attributes and psychological characteristics as depicted in the narratives penned by this contemporary author.

## Material and Methods

The discourse regarding women and their femininity in a general sense, encompassing both physical and mental aspects, stands out as a significant and pivotal subject matter within the narratives crafted by Mohammad Hijazi, shedding light on the unique and esteemed position occupied by women in his literary works. This study delves into the portrayal of female characters in Hijazi's renowned pieces, including but not limited to Ziba, Homa, Parichehr, Parvaneh, and Sereshk, employing a methodological approach that is descriptive-analytical in nature. The research methodology adopted in this article entails a meticulous analysis of the aforementioned literary works utilizing library resources. Initially, a comprehensive examination of the specified books was conducted, focusing on instances where female characters played a role, followed by the extraction of pertinent information. Subsequently, conclusions were drawn based on the gathered data and thorough analysis.

## Results

Mohammad Hijazi is recognized as one of the pioneering authors in the realm of modern fiction. His literary pieces exemplify social realism by exploring the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, as well as delving into issues such as urbanization, bureaucratic challenges, corruption

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within the bureaucratic system, moral dilemmas, the clash of modern and traditional lifestyles, and women's rights. An eminent characteristic of his narratives is the vivid depiction of emotions coupled with a keen emphasis on ethical considerations. Hijazi's writing style bears the influence of French literature and the romantic school (Sadeghzadeh & Abedini, 2020). Primarily, his novels revolve around the portrayal of women characters and the ethical standards upheld by Iranian women. Noteworthy works by this esteemed writer include Homa, Ziba, Parichehr, Parvaneh, Sereshk, Ayene, Andisheh, Saghar, Ahang, Payam, as well as a compilation of various articles and writings. Transitioning from the classic era's literature, a group of writers emerged during the late Qajar period who produced invaluable literary masterpieces. These works served as mirrors reflecting the social, cultural, and political contexts of the time, shedding light on the struggles faced by different social classes and the internal conflicts experienced by characters. Amidst this turbulent period, Mohammad Hijazi distinguished himself through his imaginative prowess and adept portrayal of the psychological and emotional turmoil prevalent in his era, earning a special place among the creators of romantic literature (Sadeghzadeh & Abedini, 2020).

**Constitutional period**

The inception of the constitutional era in 1867 was triggered by widespread protests and a revolutionary movement aimed at reforming the governmental system. Under the leadership of Muzaffaruddin Shah, the constitutional movement imposed limitations on the Shah's authority, paving the way for a constitutional monarchy. The emergence of journalism and the formation of political organizations had a profound impact during this pivotal historical period, with newspapers playing a crucial role in disseminating information to the populace. While the constitutional movement did not fully achieve the aspirations of its proponents, it marked a significant advancement in reshaping the cultural, social, and political landscape of Iran. A notable development was the integration of art and literature into the fabric of society, heralding a new and essential literary movement shaped by the prevailing political and social transformations. Notably, the predominant characteristic of the art and literature of this era was realism and its subsequent popularization, leading to the gradual incorporation of vernacular language and themes such as freedom, patriotism, justice, and law in the works of writers (Pazandeh Miari et al., 2022).

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**Social stories**

"Genuine reality takes shape through language. Indeed, a writer who addresses social issues using formal language merely "reflects" reality, whereas a writer who employs the authentic language of different social classes truly "reveals" reality. Through the use of colloquial language, the author embeds the realist narrative with the essence of societal reality; by portraying characters speaking in their respective class dialects, the author immerses the reader in the core of reality (Thomas & Wareing, 2004). A novel where all characters converse uniformly in the author's refined language presents a formal and unilateral perspective on reality.

Watered-down versions of social language can be observed in Ebrahim Bey's travelogue and Haji Babai Esfahani's translations. Subsequently, a movement emerged in literary works critiquing Qajar and literary writings, implicitly urging authors to adopt authentic Persian and the language of the common people. Dehkhoda in his narrative-like rendition of an Arabic letter translation (Sour Esrafil, Vol. 16), Hassan Moghadam in "*Jafar Khan Az Farang Barghashteh"* and Jamalzadeh in the short story "*Farsi Shekar Ast*" highlighted the stark contrast between the language of religious scholars and intellectuals versus that of the masses, shedding light on a harsh reality. This paved the way for recognizing real language as a system through which reality is constructed. Traditional writers of that era regarded simple, people-centric writing as an unpardonable offense. Supporters of classical language and literature viewed straightforward realistic writing with disdain, deeming it detrimental to the Persian language and dismissing it as mere lowbrow folk literature. However, today we acknowledge such candid and resolute writing as the inception of a significant movement in Persian prose realism and social realism (Sadeghi & Fotoohi, 2014).

**Female identity**

The feminine identity, serving as the architect of her character, functions akin to a certificate of birth that acquaints her with others. In the current society, characterized by a convergence of perspectives between genders, women are increasingly inclined towards nurturing their existential aspects, showing a heightened interest in achieving parity and demonstrating their competencies relative to men. As an integral part of the global populace, a woman embodies various identities such as maternal, spousal, romantic, and communal, among others (Pourtaghimiuandoab & Aghdaie, 2021).

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**The role of women**

A woman aspires to hold an active economic and social position, engage in current political matters, and not view herself as an accessory for male provision. It is essential for a woman to partake in economic endeavors akin to men, pursue employment, generate income, manage finances, and attain genuine financial autonomy. This entails assuming an equivalent role to men, devoid of burdening them. The cessation of subjugation is imperative, emerging from the confines of female seclusion to acknowledge the significance of her role. She should have the autonomy to select her life partner, as opposed to having one imposed upon her by family and elders, disregarding her stance on this crucial decision. In essence, it is imperative for a woman to fulfill her duties adeptly, liberate herself from economic and social destitution to attain salvation, lest she succumbs to traditional values and societal inferiority.

## Discussion

Hijazi's writings primarily focus on women and their roles in both the family and society, highlighting the significant influence women have in his literary works. He delves into portraying selfless women devoted to religion, the afterlife, and family, as well as those who prioritize their desires over societal expectations, showcasing the lengths they go to in pursuit of their desires. Through his stories, Hijazi advocates for women to embrace their femininity and individuality, emphasizing their unique position and importance. Furthermore, he touches upon the idea that women should not engage in political matters, a perspective subtly woven throughout his narratives.

This study revolves around the notable literary pieces of Mohammad Hijazi, such as a captivating novel published in 1933, depicting a world rife with administrative corruption, bureaucracy, and hidden alliances. The narrative underscores how personal connections often overshadow merit in attaining high ranks, with beauty symbolizing progress in a society entrenched in superstitions and deceit. Characters like Ziba and Parichehr exemplify the concept of using beauty as a tool to manipulate situations to their advantage, exploiting societal norms and male weaknesses. In "Homa's novel," the protagonist embodies traits of beauty, family devotion, and education, reflecting Hijazi's exploration of multifaceted female characters in his early works. Hassan Ali Khan, a close acquaintance of her deceased father, provided her with care following the loss of her

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father. Their relationship evolved into a romantic one, however, she harbored affections for a businessman named Manouchehr, who ultimately revealed himself to be deceitful. The narrative concludes with Homa and Hassan Ali Khan entering matrimony, resulting in a blissful conclusion. Both Hema's and Parichehr's novels explore the feminine dilemmas faced by urban women. Parichehr, characterized as a woman driven by materialism, indulges in lavish spending and manipulates a man named Ali to fulfill her desires. In Parvaneh's novel, the female protagonist engages in an extramarital affair with a poet, disregarding her marital vows in pursuit of a romantic connection. Despite the absence of carnal desire or lust, her actions stray from societal norms expected of a married woman. Sereshk's literary piece, among others, delves into intricate themes. William's affection for Lida takes a tragic turn as his overwhelming jealousy leads to his own blindness. The varied narratives within these works provide ample material for an in-depth analysis of Hijazi's literary repertoire.

**Women and Constitution**

The constitutional revolution marks a significant milestone for Iranian women; during this era, women gradually emerged from seclusion, displaying a keen interest in education and science. The involvement and impact of women in constitutionalism and the constitutional movement have been on par with men, encompassing both women who actively participated and those who influenced and encouraged men to support and uphold the constitutional movement. In most historical texts from the pre-modern period, women were often portrayed as secondary to men, marginalized, inferior, oppressed, burdened, uneducated, passive, devoid of aspirations, superstitious, and backward. Women's rights were largely disregarded until the end of the Qajar dynasty. Throughout the Qajar era, women were primarily confined to domestic duties, focusing on serving their husbands, bearing children, and nurturing the next generation. Their activities were restricted to the domestic sphere, within the confines of their homes. However, with the advent of the constitutional movement, women began integrating into society, initiating a newfound sense of freedom, and assuming a more prominent role, despite facing challenges in achieving true equality. Presently, there is a growing inclination towards gender assimilation, where women strive to reclaim their lost identity alongside men. They reject the passive roles of the past and seek active participation in various spheres, encompassing politics, economics, education, and social issues, all while embracing their roles as women and, notably, as mothers. According to Sohrabzadeh et

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al. (2021) the intellectual landscape of Iran during this period witnessed a transformation, as women, through various forms of expression such as publications, literature, and speeches, distanced themselves from tradition, embraced Western modernity, and redefined the image of the modern Iranian woman.

An essential outcome of the constitutional movement was the establishment of schools for girls, enabling Iranian girls to pursue education and literacy. Despite facing opposition from some men who adhered to traditional gender norms, modern women persevered, leading to the establishment of girls' schools in Tehran and other cities across Iran, overcoming numerous challenges along the way. "Starting from 1959, amendments to existing laws and the founding of new higher education institutions opened up more opportunities for women's academic advancement. In 1962, women were granted the right to vote. The approval of the Family Protection Law in 1967 not only reformed the family structure to benefit women but also facilitated their increased presence in public life. Furthermore, women's active participation in public life was evident during revolutionary movements against the monarchy" (Sadeghi, 2021).

The most significant constitutional achievement for women can be seen as the provision of opportunities and access to education and literacy. "Historically, women were predominantly under the control of men, defining their identity solely in relation to men (father-husband); they were also denied fundamental rights, including education. This state of affairs persisted until the advent of the constitutional movement... Nevertheless, up to the era of the constitutional movement, a large portion of women in Iran were illiterate" .

**Women in a patriarchal society**

As noted, a crucial issue concerning women and the female sphere is patriarchy. It is an issue that at times leads to the subordination and inferiority of women, restricting their societal presence, as they find themselves under male dominance and regulations, expected to acquiesce to this authority. This authority could manifest in various forms such as rulers, masters, fathers, brothers, or husbands. "Within a patriarchal framework, the status of women is markedly inferior to that of men, positioning them as second-class individuals with diminished worth. Consequently, a woman's capabilities and significance pale in comparison to a man. The essence of a woman's identity diminishes in the face of a man's unquestioned power and control, to the extent that her very being and individuality are contingent upon his presence" (Hosseinzadeh, 2002).

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Throughout the annals of history, women have often been marginalized from pivotal developments, existing on the fringes rather than at the core. However, with the advent of the industrial revolution, women gradually emerged, asserting their identity and significance. Previously overlooked and undervalued, this neglect instilled a sense of resentment within women. "Covert aggression represents a form of violence that does not display visible signs on the victim's body. This mode of violence against women primarily encompasses emotional, cultural, and social dimensions, aiming at demeaning women from a patriarchal standpoint. Covert aggression encompasses psychological violence (such as undermining women in various scenarios, usurping decision-making from them, etc.) and economic violence (including financial deprivation, engaging in prostitution, etc.)" (Clifford, 2013).

**Women in contemporary works of fiction**

Most of the present-day narrators are individuals with a background in journalism. The reason for this is that journalism connects writers to the realities of society, leading them to focus more on addressing social matters. Stories centered around society and women represent a significant portion of literary works. Notable journalist-writers include Mohammad Hijazi, Saeed Nafisi, Mushfeq Kazemi, Seyed Jafar Pishevari, Ali Dashti, and Abbas Khalili. Initially, these novels were published as supplements in newspapers. Throughout these writings, there is a noticeable influence of journalistic prose, reflecting a sense of realism. The novel "*Tehran e Makhuf*" by Morteza Mushfeq Kazemi stands out as the first social Persian novel. Other significant works include "Black Day", "Revenge" and "Secrets of the Night" by Abbas Khalili, as well as "Tale of the Beautiful City" by Yahya Dolatabadi, "Black Day of the Worker" and "Black Day of the Servant" by Ahmad Ali Dadgar Timuri. Additionally, Rabi Ansari's "The Story of Human Crimes or Human Traffickers of the 20th Century" and Ali Asghar Sharif Razi's "Khoon Bahai Iran or Eshq wa Shakibaei" were published in a realistic style.

The primary focus of early Iranian social novels revolves around women's issues, which authors have approached with deep concern. These women often find themselves as victims of societal circumstances, facing challenges such as forced marriages, ignorance, superstitions, male dominance, and polygamy. Previously marginalized, these women now take center stage in the narrative, with their life circumstances becoming a focal point for the authors. It is apparent that these writers are advocating for women's rights, aiming to integrate marginalized women into

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society and address the societal backwardness. Traditionally, Persian stories did not prominently feature women as the central theme. A prevalent topic in the works of authors from this era is the exploration of women's issues and their various societal implications within Iran. For instance, novels like "Ziba, Parichehr and Homa" by Mohammad Hijazi shed light on traditional bureaucracy, social upheaval post-constitutional revolution, and the challenges faced by women. The majority of Hijazi's narratives unfold in urban settings, highlighting urbanization and related challenges. It could be argued that within the realm of fiction, there exists a notable juxtaposition between village women and their counterparts in the city. Starting from the 1911s, a new urban class emerged, primarily comprised of government employees and salaried workers, adopting a fresh lifestyle. Numerous novels from this era delve into the intricacies of this particular social stratum, one that grapples with the clash between tradition and modernity. These narratives, prevalent from the 1921s onward, encapsulate various concerns, notably during the transition from the Qajar to the Pahlavi era, marked by administrative and political corruption, bureaucracy, and related challenges persisting post-constitution. Set in cities like Tehran, a focal point in many of these literary works, the coexistence of modern and traditional lifestyles among diverse societal groups underscores the inherent incompatibilities between the two. Consequently, women emerge as prominent figures within this context. Initially, these narratives shied away from directly addressing social realities; for example, Mohammad Hijazi's stories adopted an aristocratic and romantic tone, demonstrating a somewhat ambivalent stance towards social issues. Tehran, as depicted in these works, is portrayed as a city marred by corruption and criminal activities. Notably, the narrative landscape gradually shifts from martial and military themes to contemporary social, political, and cultural issues such as homeland, law, freedom, and the women's rights movement, aligning with the goals of the constitutional revolution. This evolution sees women actively participating in various awakening movements, advocating for freedom, equality, and contributing to progressive publications, thereby finding their place within the realm of fiction literature (Nouri & Mosibnia Fakhbi, 2017).

It is appropriate to assert that women are portrayed as victims rather than saviors in contemporary literature. They are effectively utilized to depict themes such as ignorance, moral decay, and poverty. Within modern novels, female characters are often entangled in these issues, struggling to extricate themselves as authors subject them to various challenges in an attempt to prompt self-

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realization and resilience. This particular demographic of characters, confined within a narrative framework, frequently seeks solace in the presence of a male figure, relying heavily on external support rather than their own agency. In renowned works like "*Buf e Cor*", a prominent piece in contemporary fiction, women are delineated into two categories: earthy figures like Lecate, disliked by the male protagonist, and ethereal beings who remain elusive. Similarly, in "His Eyes" by Bozorg Alavi, the protagonist Farangis is multifaceted, navigating political intrigue while making personal sacrifices, yet the female character is unjustly portrayed as promiscuous. The novel "*Shohar e Aho Khanom Afghani*" showcases a stark contrast between Aho, a patient and devoted wife, and Homa, a rebellious and sensual character. Meanwhile, in "Shahzade Ehtejab", the characters Fakhr al-Nasa and Fakhri are embroiled in conflict stemming from their involvement with the late Shahzadeh's servant.

Overall, following societal advancements, the representation of women in narratives has evolved significantly. Women now strive to assert their presence in stories, embodying both angelic and worldly qualities. They are depicted as steadfast and evolving beings, with male authors oscillating between acknowledging their purity and emphasizing their vulnerabilities.

**The social and political status of women in the works of Mohammad Hijazi**

The Ziba novel was published in 1933. The story of this novel refers to a young student named Hossein who comes to Tehran from Muzinan to study and reach high levels of religion, but on his way, he meets a woman named Ziba, a woman who obviously diverts the path of Hossein's life so that he enters. The corrupt administrative system tends to make individuals lose sight of the teachings of asceticism and piety as they strive to attain positions of authority and leadership, effectively placing a figurative noose around their necks and compelling them to act as mere pawns, driven in any direction deemed fit. These individuals are portrayed as women who embody a lack of modesty, exemplifying a relentless pursuit of their ambitions and desires, willing to sacrifice their integrity and exploit their physical attractiveness to the fullest extent. Within the context of a captivating narrative, clandestine and intimate connections take precedence over meritocracy in the quest for power, presenting beauty as the catalyst for societal advancement. Amidst a backdrop of superstition and deceit, such behavior is portrayed as the sole path to progress. Ziba symbolizes the archetype of cunning women who clandestinely manipulate governmental affairs and bureaucrats, wielding influence from the shadows to orchestrate the

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hiring and firing of individuals. The novel provides a stark portrayal of the tumultuous state following constitutional reforms, showcasing the rapid societal transformations that ensued. Moral decay is vividly illustrated through the lens of a romantic entanglement, with Hijazi attributing the emergence of this moral decadence to the inherent nature and upbringing of women characterized by such traits. The narratives surrounding Homa, Parichher, and Ziba delve into the intertwined destinies of women and society, shedding light on societal perceptions and treatment of women, as well as delving into the intricate political maneuvers enacted by urban women within the societal framework. Hijazi endeavors to restore the esteem of women akin to the French romantic writers, aiming to counter the historical portrayal of women in fiction as either absent or relegated to secondary roles, a narrative that can be rectified by revisiting the works of that era. Both Homa and Parichher's accounts delve into the urban female experience, highlighting the challenges and aspirations of empowered urban women. The captivating novel serves as a quasi-historical account detailing the social fabric of the capital city in the year 1911, offering a vivid depiction of the ethical and administrative decay prevalent in Tehran. This socially resonant narrative functions as a critique of the moral and bureaucratic corruption within Tehran, as the author seeks to forge a novelistic reality that challenges conventions and propels characters based on their own agency rather than external circumstances. The central theme of the narrative revolves around the clash between modernity and tradition, encapsulated through the lens of the woman question, a reflection of the zeitgeist of the era.

**Woman and Love**

In the novel, Homa is portrayed as a woman of kindness, modesty, and strong family values, coupled with her remarkable beauty and selfless nature. She is depicted as a well-educated individual. Hassan Ali Khan, a close friend of her deceased father, assumes responsibility for her well-being following her father's passing, only to find himself falling in love with her, while she herself harbors affection for the son of a businessman. Within Mohammad Hijazi's inaugural work, the character of Homa is vividly described as a tall, fair-skinned girl, with an elongated face, large eyes, thin eyebrows, and thick hair neatly styled at the back of her head. The narrative of "Homa" unfolds against the backdrop of the late Qajar era. Hassan Ali Khan conveys his sentiments concerning Homa, expressing how her simple yet profound insights over the past eight years of his guardianship have aided him in solving numerous intricate problems that he had previously

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overlooked. In the tale of Parvaneh, the protagonist becomes romantically involved with a poet, engaging in secret meetings despite being married, showcasing a love devoid of mere lust, yet challenging societal norms. Parvaneh, a character embodying virtue in Hijazi's narratives, is depicted as a professional poet ensnared by a practical businessman named Sahin, who detests the world of poetry and poets, urging the poet to abandon his craft for more lucrative pursuits. Despite societal expectations, Parvaneh's heart leads her to love the poet, believing she married him at her mother's behest. The story culminates in a poignant separation, as the poet chooses to depart, leaving behind their forbidden love to live a life consumed by imagination. The novel concludes with the poet's declaration of departure to preserve his heart from the agony of unattainable love. Within the same literary universe, the character of Paricher emerges as a woman driven by carnal desires, manipulating a shopkeeper named Ali to satisfy her whims. The individual clearly demonstrates a strong affinity for material possessions, money, and extravagant spending. Regrettably, Parichehr held contrasting priorities, predominantly focusing on material wealth and possessions. His conversations consistently revolved around home decor, clothing colors, and hairstyling techniques. Interaction with him resembled playing with a toy, devoid of intellectual or non-material discussions. Sacrificing the joy of reading, the speaker struggled to connect with him on a deeper level.

She manipulates her admirer's financial status to her advantage, contemplating initiating a bond with her husband's friend Fereydoun. Eventually, her scheme unravels, leading to a revelation. The book concludes with Fereydoun's perception of Parichehr, highlighting his superficial and opportunistic tendencies. Parichehr's behavior is likened to a reckless wanderer, driven by the fear of missing out on prosperity. His insatiable desire for admiration and validation is underscored, portraying him as a whimsical character with fleeting joy.

The narrative unfolds as Parichehr and Ali embark on a journey, encountering capture by Turkmen outlaws. Parichehr's infatuation with one of the Turkmen culminates in a tragic outcome, resulting in their demise. The catastrophic events are attributed solely to the allure of a sensuous woman.

The female characters in Sereshk's novel are distinctly categorized into two groups. Despite the setting being America, the portrayal of women mirrors a dichotomy observed in Iranian narratives. They are depicted as either materialistic and aesthetically pleasing or in pursuit of spiritual depth albeit lacking physical beauty. William, the protagonist, aspires for a partner embodying both

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attributes, a quest that remains unfulfilled. His contemplation on divine creation echoes a yearning for a harmonious blend of beauty and virtue in a life partner. The search continues, driven by patience and faith in a destined union.

**Social identity of women in Hijazi's works**

With the onset of intellectualism and the dissemination of Western ideologies through numerous translations of Western literature in Iran, many intellectuals endeavored to portray European women as a justifiable and progressive archetype during that era, aiming for Iranian women to emulate them for self-betterment. The European woman symbolized a figure who enjoyed parity in freedoms with men, serving as a commendable role model for Iranian women constrained by societal norms. The conventional woman was depicted as one tied down by customs and irrational beliefs, contrasting with the modern woman who sought liberation from such constraints. She associated her identity with violated entitlements such as voting rights, financial autonomy, and various liberties. However, it is imperative to recognize that a woman's essence encompasses more than just the pursuit of these entitlements; her identity is rooted in nurturing future generations and fostering offspring, with no emphasis on fortifying the institution of family. Essentially, a woman's identity is intertwined with the realization of rights, signifying that a society progresses when women possess an identity equivalent to that of men, whereas a society regresses when women are marginalized and incapable of asserting their fundamental rights.

According to Hijazi, kindness is inherent to a woman's character, while a man is characterized as a fighter, underscoring the virtues of composure, tenderness, gentleness, and patience in women. In Mohammad Hijazi's celebrated novel, the protagonist, Lakateh, a blind owl, personifies a woman who strategically employs her femininity to manipulate and achieve her aspirations, recognizing femininity as a potent tool to influence men. Ziba adeptly exploits her innate femininity, originating from a place of beauty, to secure a lucrative job for Sheikh Hossein and ultimately elevates his status through close ties with influential individuals in the workplace. Nevertheless, a woman's essence transcends her physical form; she embodies a soul, a sublime spirit, and a profound understanding of creation. Despite the tendency in contemporary literary works by Mohammad Hijazi and other writers to portray women merely as objects of desire through erotic and sexual portrayals, it is imperative not to overlook characters like Homa in the novel "Homa," characterized by purity, devotion, and obedience. Similarly, Parvaneh in the novel

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emerges as a talented and contemplative poet who distances herself from materialism and superficiality, leveraging her intellect rather than her physicality to accomplish her objectives.

**The physical dimension of women in Hijazi's works**

One effective method for character identification involves providing a detailed description of their physical appearance, which has been a common practice in literary works. In the past, especially in historical novels, negative characters were often depicted as unattractive while positive characters were portrayed as beautiful. However, the emergence of realism in Iran brought about a significant shift in this portrayal. In contemporary literature, characters can possess internal flaws and moral defects while still being considered physically beautiful, challenging traditional stereotypes. An interesting observation can be made regarding the emphasis placed on the female body in the stories by Hijazi. The author appears to aim at highlighting the superiority of the soul over the body in various instances, yet the physical attributes of the characters are given significant prominence throughout the narratives. This inclination towards physical descriptions may be attributed to the romantic style of storytelling adopted by the author, where the influence of beauty in all its facets is emphasized. For instance, in a particular novel, the captivating beauty of a character named Sheikh Hussein is described in a way that symbolizes his entrapment by beauty, as evidenced by the following passages: "...the radiant visage of a woman amidst the darkness of the tent's interior! I found myself transfixed by the scene, utterly spellbound...". Additionally, the narrative further unfolds with descriptions such as "...as I gazed upon her, it dawned on me that this was no mere vision but a celestial being whose mere presence bewitched me, causing me to lose my senses as I succumbed to the allure emanating from her very being". In the subsequent analysis, we delve into the physical attributes of the female characters within Hijazi's literary works. When introducing Homa, the author paints a vivid picture of her physical features, describing her as a tall, fair-skinned young woman with a slender face, large eyes, and delicate eyebrows. Her luscious hair is neatly styled, cascading down from the front and tied elegantly at the nape of her neck. Moreover, the text goes on to depict the transformation of her appearance over time, influenced by various events and emotions. Her once radiant complexion now bears the marks of fatigue and sorrow, with tear-streaked eyes and flushed cheeks adding to the poignant portrayal. Notably, the enigmatic character Hasan Ali Khan remains shrouded in mystery, as his face has never been fully revealed to the audience, adding an air of intrigue to his persona.

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**Parichehr:** Parichehr's countenance exhibited the hue and vitality akin to that of a blossoming rose bud, with eyes of considerable size reminiscent of the azure shade found in the skies post a heavy downpour during the spring season, evoking a sense of joy and solace in every beholder. His facial features appeared elongated, complemented by slender eyebrows and a mane of thick, golden-hued curls. His stature stood tall and impeccably proportioned, resembling a sculpture crafted from ivory - pristine white and robust, albeit with a subtle tinge of yellow, devoid of any hint of red undertones. It has been duly noted by Hijazi in the 1970 that "His hand possessed a remarkable beauty that never failed to captivate, appearing novel with each glance. He himself was cognizant of this fact, dedicating time daily to grooming his nails." Furthermore, it was remarked in the same source (p.51) that "Her hair bore the shade of straw, a rarity in the vast desert expanse, distinguishing her as an unparalleled beauty." Lastly, as documented by Hijazi (p.95), "The radiance of her visage illuminated the surroundings, crowned by a head adorned in scarlet silk and a garment embellished with floral motifs. Her locks cascaded akin to glistening golden serpents upon her chest".

**Ayesheh:** Ayesheh, identified as the spouse of an elderly gentleman, bore no offspring in the form of Golbahar or Allahverdi, thus remaining childless at nearly fifty years of age. Her countenance was described in a rather unflattering manner, characterized by a multitude of wrinkles and blemishes, akin to a vessel of yellow wax in a state of perpetual turmoil. Her demeanor exuded a sense of coldness, compounded by the affliction of blindness in one eye, as eloquently depicted in the aforementioned source (p.72).

**Parvaneh:** Upon closer observation, the beauty of Parvaneh's visage reflected in inner mirror only grew more enchanting with each passing moment. The mere mention of her name alongside "Farkhundeh" evoked a celestial comparison akin to the brilliance of the moon, radiating a beauty that surpassed all expectations. With the declaration of affection through "I love you," her allure transcended into a realm of unparalleled perfection and goodness, akin to the idealized visions nurtured over a lifetime. Privately beholding her, it became evident that she embodied a splendor superior to the mythical nymphs of imagination and the celestial beings immortalized in poetry, as documented in the cited source (p.71).

**Lida:** Expressing incredulity, it was pondered why an individual of Lida's unparalleled beauty remained unclaimed by numerous admirers, a sentiment echoed by the narrator in the words

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penned by Hijazi in 1969 (p.98). The resplendent golden waves of her hair gleamed under the lamplight, reminiscent of undulating tentacles of an octopus, captivating the onlooker's gaze. Her brow emanated a luminosity akin to a fragment of moonlight, while her lips bore a resemblance to a crimson rose petal unfurling with every subtle movement, prompting an exclamation of admiration at the divine beauty and grace she possessed, as vividly portrayed in the same source (p.150).

**Madeline**: William to his mother about Madeline: "My head got hot and I shouted what are you saying!" I am fascinated by such an ugly girl! Everything is possible!", "... but Madeleine is not beautiful, I am afraid that one day you will regret this imperfect choice..." "... pain and hesitation that Why is Madeleine not beautiful...".

**Ellis**: "Ellis was that beautiful woman who did not leave any excuses or complaints in my heart" (ibid.: 33).

**The psychological dimension of women in Hijazi's works**

The psychological characteristics exhibited by the characters manifest themselves through their actions and behaviors. The author's ability to depict these psychological traits directly impacts the depth of characterization, leading readers to better connect with the characters. In the narratives of Hijazi, character development is often straightforward, failing to capture the true essence of the characters. This results in incomplete character portrayals. Ideally, characters should evolve throughout the story, transitioning from raw to refined personas, gradually revealing themselves to the reader. Take for instance the character Parichehr, who is initially introduced as physically attractive and captivating, ultimately winning the affection of the protagonist, Ali. However, her focus on materialism, luxury, and superficial matters paints her as a shallow and corrupt individual. As depicted in Hijazi's work (1970), the lack of depth in character development is evident, with interactions revolving solely around materialistic concerns. The characters' stagnation throughout the narrative is largely influenced by external factors rather than personal growth. Vahidenjad (2019) highlights how characters in Hijazi's stories often escape societal norms, delving into their emotional complexities. Parichehr's behavior, for example, shifts from confidence to arrogance as her beauty becomes a source of pride, shaping her interactions with others. The author's initial portrayal sets the tone for the character's trajectory, offering readers a glimpse into their future actions. Employing a more indirect approach to character analysis from the story's onset could lead

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to more dynamic and engaging characters, injecting unpredictability and suspense into the narrative.

In the narrative, three categories of women are depicted: those who possess physical beauty but lack moral integrity, such as Beautiful, Parichehr, Alice, and Lida; those who may not conform to conventional beauty standards but exhibit virtuous qualities, exemplified by Madeleine and Maryam; and those rare individuals who embody both outward attractiveness and inner goodness, like Hema, Parvaneh, and William's mother. Within the pages of the novel Sereshk, the protagonist William laments the perceived disjunction between external beauty and internal virtues, questioning the divine choice to separate these attributes. He ponders, "I beseech God, is it not a travesty that you divide numerous exquisite souls from their physical vessels? You showcase facial allure while concealing spiritual excellence! Without bestowing both, can one truly extol your magnificence within her?". Furthermore, he reflects on the paradox of Madeleine's lack of physical beauty amidst a sea of aesthetically pleasing admirers, musing, "...the anguish and perplexity of why Madeleine lacks beauty or why, among the bevy of attractive maidens who pursue me, none possess the sublime soul of Madeleine...". Throughout Hijazi's literary compositions, female characters are portrayed in extremes, oscillating between exceptional goodness and intense sensuality, leaving no room for nuances or moderation, a narrative device seemingly employed to create emotional distance for the audience. Similarly, in the context of the novel Sereshk, female personas are dichotomized into distinct archetypes. Despite the setting being America and not Iran, the narrative suggests a binary portrayal where women are either materialistic and physically appealing or seek deeper meanings while lacking conventional beauty. Madeleine emerges as a figure with an unassuming yet angelic countenance, contrasting sharply with Alice, who is conventionally stunning but devoid of spiritual depth. Meanwhile, the central character, William, yearns for a partner who embodies both aspects, a quest that remains unfulfilled. Reflecting on this, he muses, "I often conjectured that a deity capable of sculpting Alice with a visage betwixt beauty and Madeleine with a soul oscillating perfection, surely, could engender a being harmonizing both facets of beauty and virtue in unison...".

**Rebellious Women**

The women depicted in Hijazi tales exhibit a higher degree of defiance, causing the male characters in the stories to feel perplexed and unsure of how to handle these disobedient women.

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Within Sheikh Hossein's Ziba novel, he finds himself at a crossroads, uncertain about the right course of action in dealing with Ziba: "To put it concisely, I found myself in a state of deep melancholy, where life seemed unbearably bitter to my palate. The weight of the door and the wall seemed to bear down on me, creating immense pressure". He grapples with conflicting emotions, as an inner voice persistently whispers in his ear, insisting that his true purpose and connection to the divine have been revealed to him, rendering everything else false. The turmoil and agitation within his soul can only be assuaged by embracing this newfound clarity. Furthermore, he stumbles upon the realization of a new rival in his affections, feeling overwhelming love for the beautiful one while the mere thought of another individual casting covetous glances ignites a frenzy within him, causing his mind to reel and his temper to flare. The sense of losing control leads him to make dark proclamations, asserting dominance over his wife and demanding unwavering obedience, blaming her for leading him astray from a path of righteousness into a spiral of torment. He laments the loss of selfhood, perpetually consumed by a facade, with no respite to simply be himself, constantly enacting a role. In essence, the seeds of his despair and bewilderment were sown on that fateful night, as the realization of a profound and agonizing love takes root in his heart, presenting a dilemma where extracting it proves more agonizing than enduring its presence. He curses his ill fate, his lustful heart, his feeble mind, and the captivating yet enigmatic Al-Dawlah, along with all those who aided in his descent into darkness, resentful of their influence despite his past pride in their shared endeavors. In a contrasting narrative like that of Parichehr, Ali grapples with a desire to break free from the treacherous Parichehr: "I surrendered my heart, acknowledging that a few moments of suffering are a small price to pay for contemplation. Upon returning home, I will draft my final wishes, dispatch them to my brother, and choose to end my own life in that familiar setting - on the bench, within the round room behind the floral hues that once symbolized the sanctuary of our love". In the novel Sereshk, the character William is faced with uncertainty on how to handle the presence of the captivating Lydia. Throughout every inch of Lydia's being, doubt seems to have taken root and is slowly but surely causing upheaval in William's life. This turmoil leads him to spend extended periods outdoors, deliberately avoiding returning home to evade the inevitable conflicts that arise with his wife. His internal struggles are vividly depicted as he recounts his aimless walks through the bustling streets, consumed by a mix of anger, intoxication, and confusion. The fear of encountering Lydia and being drawn into a tumultuous

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emotional encounter weighs heavily on William's mind, propelling him to seek solace elsewhere, away from the chaos that threatens to engulf him. The narrative unfolds with a sense of urgency and desperation as William grapples with the turbulent emotions stirred by the enigmatic Lydia, ultimately seeking refuge in unlikely places to escape the turmoil that threatens to consume him.

Hijazi's narratives delve into the complexities of relationships, portraying a poignant tale of unrequited love between a female poet and a pragmatic businessman named Sahin. Parvaneh, the poet's ardent admirer, emerges as the central figure in this intricate web of emotions. The story unfolds with a sense of tragic inevitability, culminating in a bittersweet separation between the poet and Parvaneh, as the former chooses to retreat into a world of imagination to nurse the wounds of lost love. The poignant words penned by the poet reflect a poignant farewell to Parvaneh, encapsulating the anguish of unfulfilled love and the painful decision to part ways to preserve what remains of a shattered heart. The narrative captures the essence of unspoken longing and silent sacrifices, painting a vivid portrait of love's complexities and the emotional toll it exacts on those entangled in its intricate dance.

In Hijazi's tales, women are depicted as fierce and unyielding in their pursuit of love, often resorting to violence to assert their affections. The character of Tusan becomes a symbol of rebellion and defiance in the face of unrequited love, enduring brutal beatings at the hands of women who see him as a rival for their affections. The intricate dance of attraction and rejection unfolds against a backdrop of seduction and manipulation, with characters like Parichehr enthralling and captivating others with their charm and allure. The vivid imagery of physical prowess, subtle gestures, and tantalizing glances evokes a sense of longing and desire, underscoring the power dynamics at play in the realm of love and relationships. The narrative weaves a tapestry of emotions, portraying the intricate interplay between passion, desire, and the complexities of human connection.

The novel of Sereshk delves into the inner turmoil of its protagonist, torn between conflicting desires of self-destruction and vengeance. The character grapples with intense emotions, contemplating drastic actions in the throes of emotional turmoil. The narrative unfolds with a sense of urgency and tension, as the protagonist navigates a precarious emotional landscape fraught with uncertainty and inner conflict. The stark contrast between the character's impulses reflects a deeper struggle within, echoing the complexities of human emotions and the fragile balance between love

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and despair. The tale unfolds with a sense of foreboding and uncertainty, capturing the raw intensity of the character's emotional journey as he navigates the tumultuous waters of love and loss.

**The effect of social conditions on women**

Hijazi subscribes to the notion of the reciprocal impact between the community and the individual. Consequently, when the society exhibits corruption, the individual assimilates into this corrupt environment, and vice versa. This dynamic arises from the fact that the individuals comprising the society are corrupt, thereby perpetuating a culture of corruption. The negative portrayal of women in Hijazi's narratives exemplifies this concept, showcasing their inherent malice influenced by their upbringing. Hijazi contends that the moral integrity of an individual is closely tied to both their innate character and the environmental factors shaping them. However, the author frequently veers off course in his analysis, often displaying naivety and idealism. His works tend to overlook the impact of social and material elements, as he attributes human suffering mainly to moral decadence. He advocates for the reformation of individuals through admonishment and correction as a means to ameliorate societal issues.

## Conclusion

The primary feature of fiction post-constitution is the promotion of gender equality and liberation from traditional constraints, embracing modernity. An Iranian woman's archetype may mirror a liberated European woman, free from ignorance and traditional confines hindering progress and freedom, enabling bodily expansion and mobility.

Within Mohammad Hejazi's works, women hold a significant role, with a focus on female characters evident in the titles of his books like Ziba, Homa, Parichehr, Parvaneh, Nasim, Arzoo. He classifies women into two stark categories: either good or bad, with no in-between. Good women, as defined by Hejazi, exhibit loyalty to their partners, adhere to family values, embody kindness, compassion, and resist temptations outside their marriage. The women in his novels struggle to establish their identity, often resorting to extreme measures in pursuit of their goals, even using their bodies. Hejazi aims to depict a realistic portrayal of urban women's lives during the transition from Qajar to Pahlavi era, emphasizing a balance between external beauty and inner purity, creating a virtuous woman free from temptations. He views women's progress as

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educational, emphasizing their inherent abilities and talents, steering clear of deceit and hidden agendas to achieve spiritual growth. The exploration of women's issues underscores the importance of understanding and eliminating obstacles hindering their development.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

## Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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