

A GLIMPSE TO THE FEMALE- ORIENTED CRITICISM IN PERSIAN LITERARY RESEARCHES

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ABSTRACT: *Feminist critical view points and their related concepts have entered into the fields of different brunches of knowledge in recent decades. During this time, literary studies have been too fruitful in feminist theories. Since these subjects are studied in universities too, it seems to be necessary to review critically the works produced based on applying the feminist theories. To have any kind of critical approach towards the application of these theories in literary researches, first of all, we need a precise standpoint. In this article, we have a look at those literary researches done between 1932 to 2012¹ in which woman in any way is pivotal. We also study the kind and frequency of the concepts related to woman, repetitions and the areas not considered or neglected in the literary researches of the period. Moreover we have made use of diagrams and tables to provide a clearer picture of our analysis. Investigations of researches did reveal a clear pattern of growth for them. Female researchers have been more eager than their male counterparts to study the position of woman in Iranian literature. Statistics also reveals that in the field of Persian Classical literature most of the works done are related to Shahname. It also seems to be room for academic female- oriented researches on the Persian classical poets as Rabia Balkhi and Mahasti Ganjavi. Among the prose texts, HEZAR- O- YEK- SHAB sands at the peak for the number of researches have been done. In addition, female- oriented researches have received its most attention in novels and short stories. Simin Daneshvar, as the first Iranian female writer has done the largest number of researches of the field in question. In contemporary poem, it does not seem to be any especial scarcity of research since most of the poems of Iranian contemporary famous female poets are reviewed critically, with the poems of Parvin Etesami as the bridge between classical and contemporary poem stands at the peak.*

KEYWORDS: Literary Researches, Feminism, Literary Criticism, Women.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxford Dictionary has given two definitions for the word feminist: as an adjective it means "related to feminism or women", and as a noun it means defender of feminism. This dictionary has also given the following meanings in defining feminism: "in harmony or related to a woman or women, composed of women, accepted by women", and "specific or appropriate features for women, effeminate, woman- like. According to Robins the oldest meanings of feminism recorded in English texts define it as "the state of being a woman" and "female or the word or face of a woman". For him, this word is related to biology and language, transfer from nature into the culture, and from bodies into the behavioral codes, including linguistic behavior (Robins, 1389: 23). The first signs of feminist viewpoints go back to the mid of seventeenth century and the beginning of eighteenth century (Khosravi Shakib, 1389: 82). The history of forming the waves of feminism can be explained as

follows: from 1630 to 1780, the sporadically and regular protests of women to their situation, and to the society as whole; from 1780 to 1790, the era of demanding liberty for women in history of the women in the west; from 1790 to 1840, the period of more organized attempts of the women for improving their social, political and economical situation; from 1840 to 1920, professional movements of the women for fulfilling their rights, particularly right to vote; from 1920 to 1960, the climax of feminist protests in the framework of theory of **parazi**, from 1960 to today, the period of posing feminist questions by the female activists and scientists and attempts to provide solutions and suggestions (Pishgahifard, Zahra And Amir Ghodsi, 1389: 116). "Today feminism has changed into one of the most active social and cultural movements of the world that has challenged seriously the religious, psychological, literary and artistic foundations of the societies, and has been successful in changing so many false ideas of the men about the women" (Sabzian and Kazazi, 1388: 216).

Feminism like all of the other broad philosophical way of thinking includes different varieties in itself. None of the short lists provided can be comprehensive, but it is possible to find a link between the attitudes of a great number (and surely not all) of feminist thinkers to liberalism, Marxism, psycho- analysis school, socialism, existentialism or postmodernism. Each of these attitudes can be considered as a temporary answer to the "problem of woman" which provide a unique perspective with its weak and strong points in its methodology" (Tang, 1387: 16). In fact, this is exactly this pivotal role of the woman that brings all these school together. Robins considers the description of Showalter of feminist approaches to be correct which introduce feminism as female- oriented or female- centered, and specifies his definition of feminism as one in which there is a must for giving a pivotal role to women in literary critical discourses. For him, the thing common between all of the feminist theories, literary and the others, is their focus on women (Robins, 1389: 35).

In Iran, feminist thoughts- of course not under the same title- were introduced in the form of need for reforms in laws, for example, in limiting polygamy, education for women, and so forth (Modaresin, 1388: 63). Moreover some of the theoretical viewpoints, and a number of feminist concepts has been paid attention to in recent decades. "In various symposiums and conferences about gender and sex held in Iran, researchers discuss the influence of gender on different areas of life of women. Also a great number of books and articles about women are published in Iran. However not only there is no mention of the prominent theorist of this academic field in these published works but also, because of the general lack of knowledge in theoretical viewpoints, there are senseless assumptions about these theorists too" (E?zazi, 1386: 8). Today because of the female identity becoming more prominent than before, and its manifestation in different social, cultural and artistic sections of the society, female- oriented researches are too important. And literary studies consider being too fruitful in feminist theory. As a result, the impact of this movement on the Iranian literature has lead the researchers to not only try to find the traces of this attitude in contemporary works, but also in old texts; and consequently the female- oriented researches (researches specially considered about women) have focused on classical and contemporary texts from different standpoints. One of the requirements of a precise critical view, based on the theoretical viewpoints and scientific orientations in academic studies, is having access to the results of researches done in the field. This is also true about the works and selected subjects suitable to be used in feminist criticism, which makes statistic studies about the female- oriented researches necessary. To answer this need, till now, books like "a bibliography of the works of Iranian women/ female writers and translators (1349), "list of books and articles about women" (1366), and "bibliography of women" (1381) are published in Iran. But after more than a

decade of the publication of the last book there is not any other source of the female- oriented works in Iran. In addition, these books only include a short introduction and categorization of the general works of the field, and there is not any work at hand devoted to the literary female- oriented studies. One of the positive effects of having a statistic- analytical work about the literary female- oriented researches at hand is avoiding repetition of the studies done before. It also provides the researches of the field with a broader perspective where the works done and the works remain to be done in the field are enough clear to be seen. In this article we are going to provide the reader statistics of all of the books, articles and dissertations written in the field of female- oriented literary studies from 1932 to 2012, to be able to analyze the subject by using different diagrams. The resources we have referred to, to shape the list of books, articles, and dissertations, include the bibliography of the female-oriented books, the official site of the Iranian national library, official site of the JAHAD DANESHGAHI scientific data base, official site of NOORMAGZ, official site of the Iranian bank for the publications information, the official site of the Iranian institute for the technology and sciences, and the official sites Iranian universities. However it can never be claimed that the list we have provided is a comprehensive one.

A glimpse to the female- oriented researches from 1932 to 2012

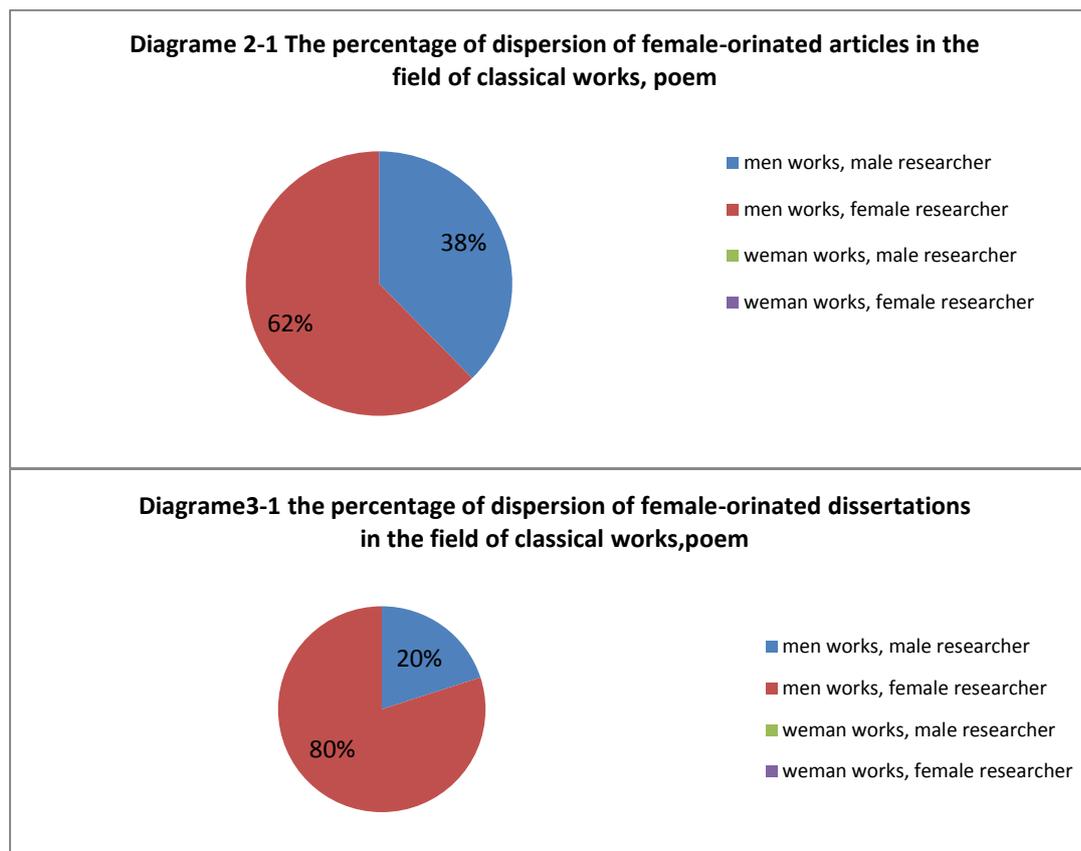
In this section we review the female- oriented researches from 1932- the year of the writing of the first literary research article about women- to 2012. These researches are books, articles and dissertations gathered by referring to the official sites and the bibliography of the female- oriented books using key words such as woman, feminism and feminist criticism. In this article, circle diagrams indicate the distribution percentage of the books, articles and dissertations; and the works are categorized as female and male works. In these two categories we have two more categorizations regarding the researcher being female or male. Bar diagrams of 4- 1, 4- 2, 4- 3 and 4-4 show the number of researches done on the works of each poet. Diagrams 1- 6, 2- 6, and 3- 6 show the number of researches done each year, and diagram 4- 6 shows the average number of the researches done in different decades, and diagrams 1- 5, 2- 5, and 3- 5 show the number of researches done with general approach (and not being about the works of a specific writer) in the different field.

Researches done on the classical works

1-1-2 Classic, poem

Diagram1-1 The percentage of dispersion of female-ordinated books in the field of classical works, poem

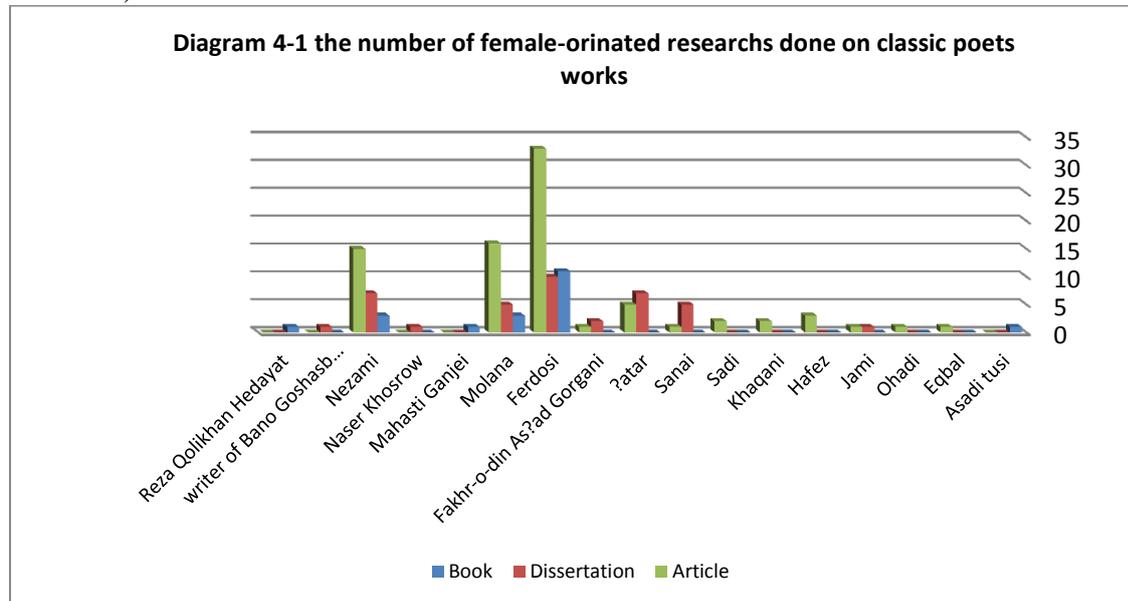




As can be seen in diagrams 1- 1, 2-1, and 3- 1, most of the researches done in the field of classical poem works are related to those written by men, and this is really significant because of the remarkable number of the male writers in comparison to the female writers in Persian classical literature. The only work done on the works done by women, in this area, is related to the poems of Mahasti Ganjei that can be seen in diagram 3- 1. The next important point in these studies is the high percentage of female writers in comparison to the male ones. Regarding the dissertations, books and articles, these percentages are 80%, 65%, and 62% respectively. These high percentages indicate the Iranian female researchers attention to the past, to be able to show the face of women in classical poem clearly, and as it is a fact that in classical poem, woman most of the times has pictured in a cliché, it can be said that the female researchers like to picture the real face of woman.

This kind of attempt can also be seen in the short history of feminist criticism in the west. "In feminist literary criticism, female critics, at the first stages, make use of the powerful force behind the second uprising of the women movement in the west, and at these stages they are more hostile towards the things they fight against. The most remarkable works written in this period indicate that at this stage, on the one hand, female critics attack the man- made clichés of women severely, by studying the literary works of men, and on the other hand, they want to prove the untruthfulness of the strict conclusions of the patrimonial culture about the women's works At the same time, another critical movement flourished that considers paying attention only the existence of patrimony in the male writer works insufficient. This movement attempted to trace the women impacts in literary creativeness, and to reveal the

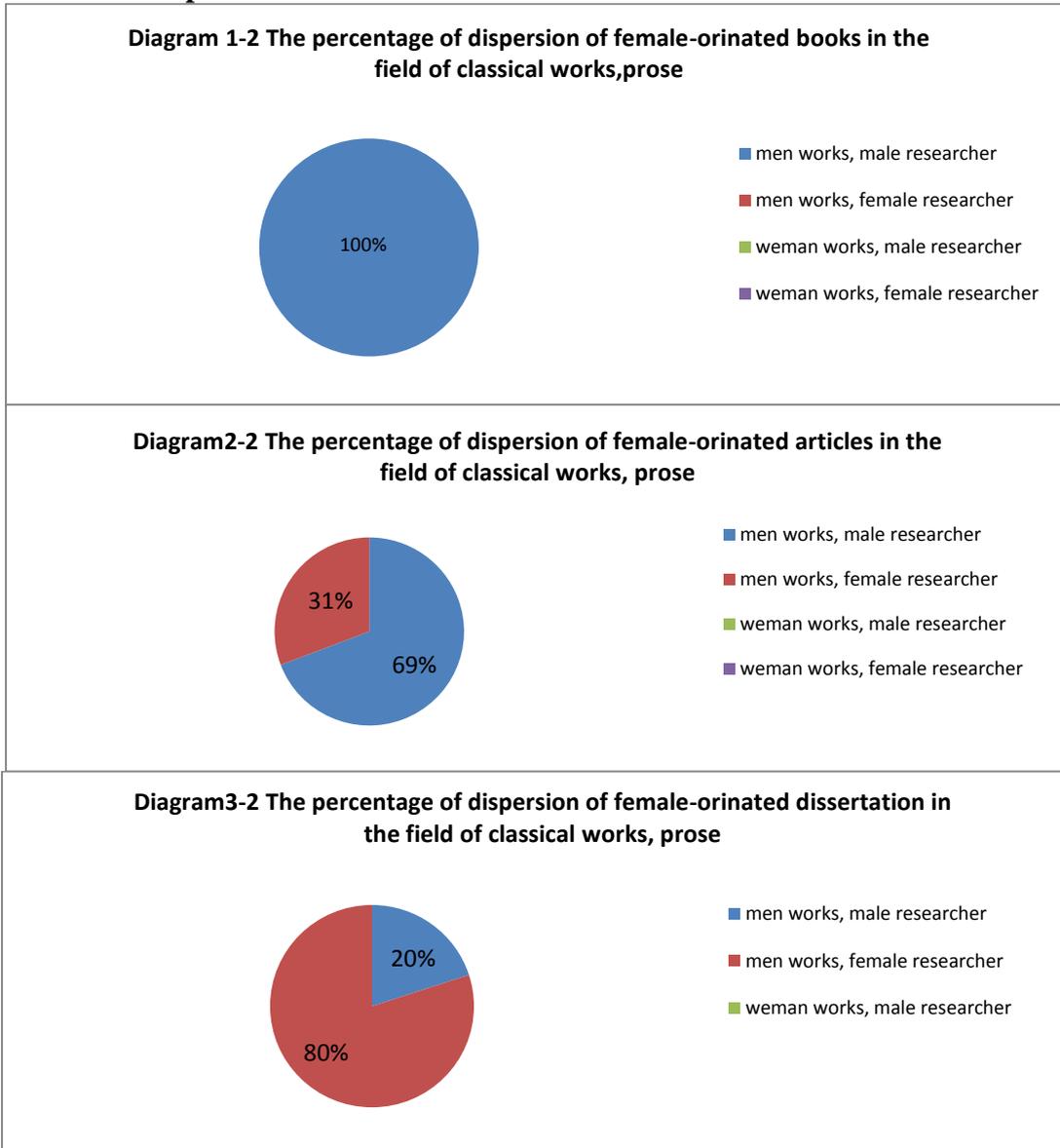
quantity and quality of the writing tradition among the women (Najm- e- Eraqi and et al, 1385: 10).



Shahname, as one of the greatest collections of poems, is well-known among most of the strata of the Iranian society. And also because of the fact that Shahname is a mirror of Iranian culture before the advent of Islam, investigating the presence of woman and the way she is portrayed in Shahname is too important in being able to see the picture of woman in that era, and also in understanding her position in the Iranian society of the time. In fact studying Shahname is important from this point of view, and the large number of female- oriented researches done on Shahname is because of its importance and popularity. After Shahname, most of the researches done are about Molavi's Masnavi- e Ma?navi and Nezami lyrical collections. It is possible to argue that, in addition of being famous, the next criterion for these works to be chosen by the researchers for doing female- oriented researches is their structures, since these works include anecdotes and stories in which the presence of women as the characters, inevitably is more than the other genres of literature. Actually this is why these works has been more attractive for the researchers than the others.

The remarkable point about these researches is the lack of attention to the poems of Rabe?e, since she is a women, and therefore, paying attention to her poems is of high importance to introduce the female look to the presence of women in poem. Moreover, the works done on Mahasti Ganjavi poems are not academic (in the form of dissertations or articles), and as the poems of Rabe?e, there seems clearly to be space for doing researches on Mahasti Ganjavi poems from a feminist female- oriented view point. These lacks of attentions also reveals that female researchers are more eager to study the works done by the men and understanding their points of view than studying the works of women. In addition, the dominant reading of the classical women works is under the influence of the male reading. Accepting this dominant reading, put them aside out of the circle of female criticism, but today by female language and mind receiving more attention, female writers and poets are more obliged to be the story- tellers of their own sex.

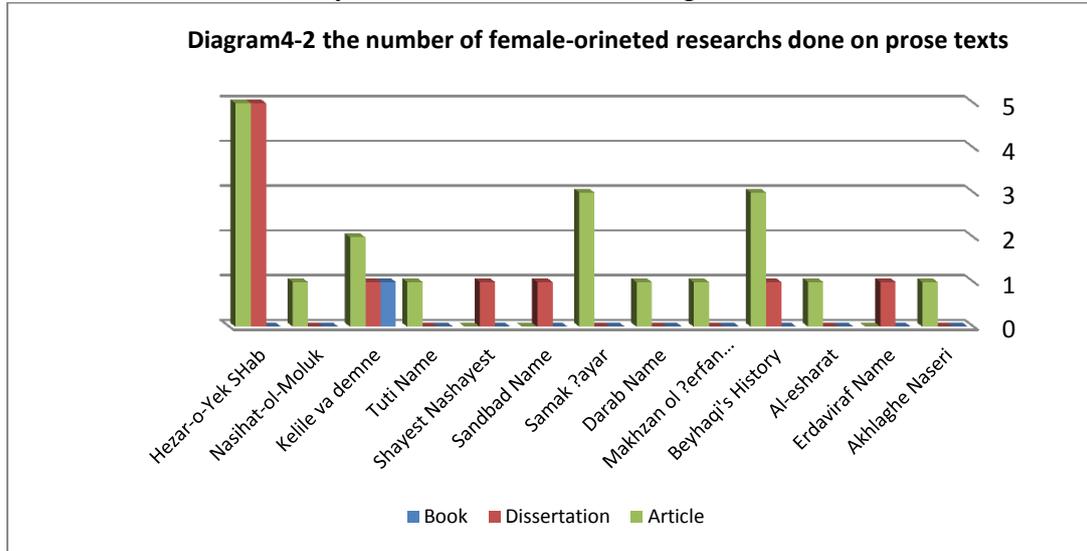
1- 1- 2 Classical prose



In the field of classical prose, since all of the works are written by men, there is no discussion about the works of women, and about the works of man too only men have produced works to study the picture of woman in classical prose. The only book we have in the field of classical prose is "picture of women in KELILE VA DEMNE: with articles about impoliteness" shown in diagram 1- 2. Because of the look being completely male- centered, the absence of female element in works like Beyhaqi's History, and KELILE VA DEMNE, female writers are less eager to study the picture of women in this group of Persian classical prose.

But regarding dissertations, in clear contrast to books and articles, most researchers are women. In fact, 80% of the dissertations are written by women. This can be a sign of the female students to have more attention to these subjects, because of the expansion of theories and the discussions becoming more delicate in academic fields, and as a result researches are considered from different points of views. In addition whether or not it is necessary to do a

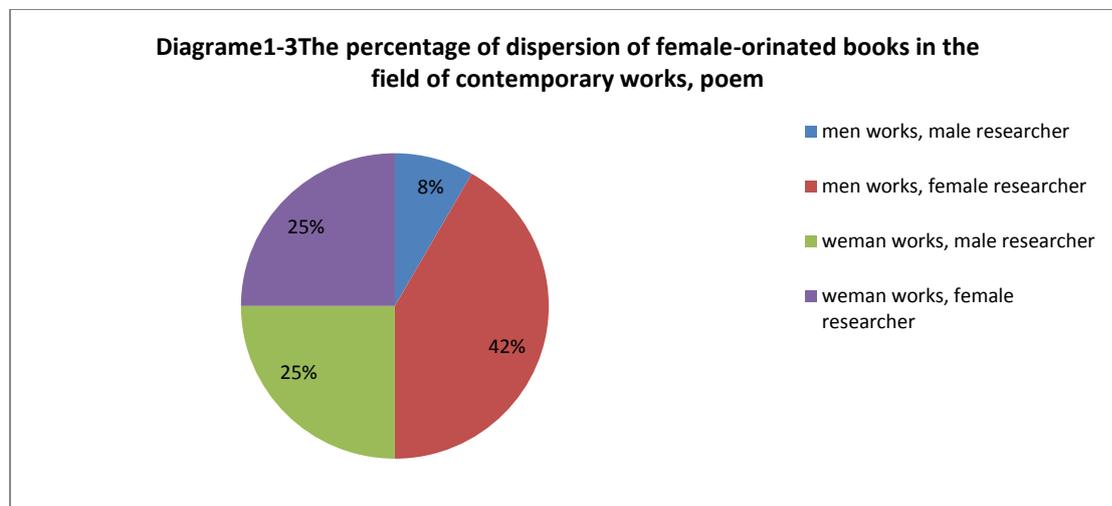
research on a work has not been the crucial point; and discovering the hidden layers of a text, and its dominant discourse, may lead to remarkable findings.

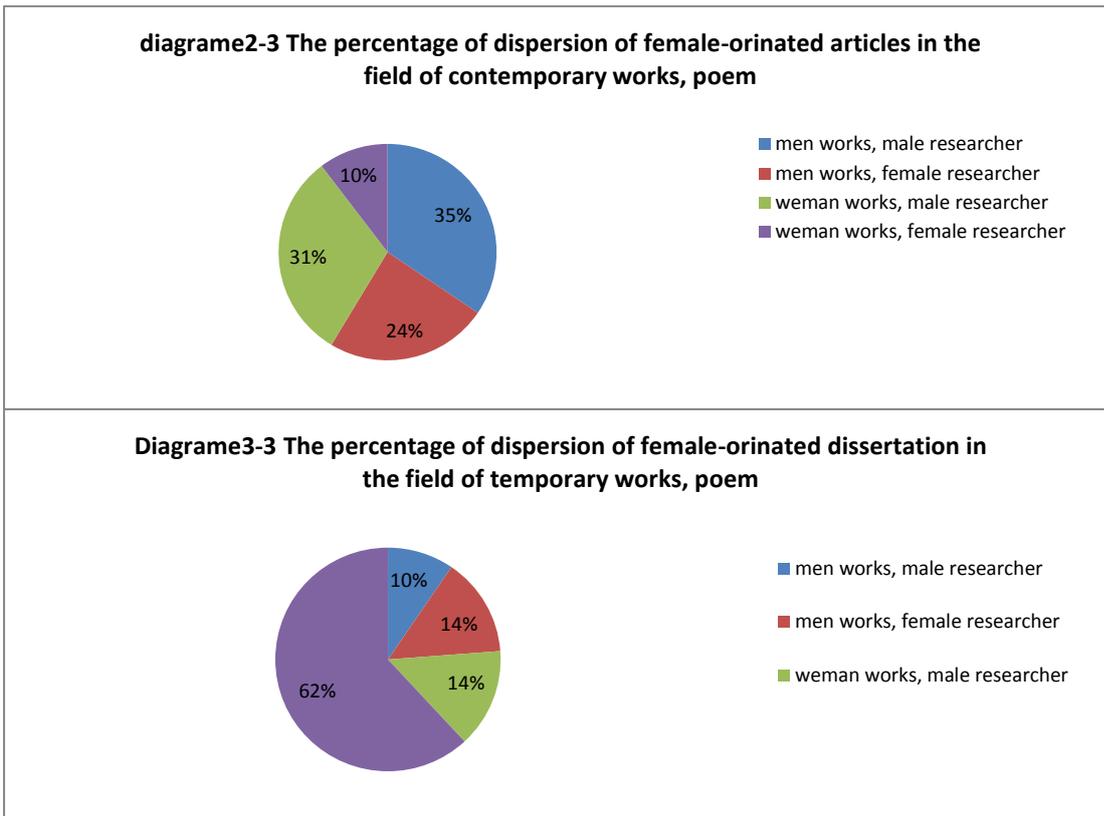


Among the old prose texts, as can be seen in the diagram, HEZAR- O- YEK SHAB is the work about which the largest number of the researches is done. This book is the oldest work its narrator is a woman. "The clearest picture we have of a woman of the period before the time in which women start to write is the picture of "Shahzad", the heroin of HEZAR- O- YEK SHAB. In these stories, not only Shahzad tells the story, but also accompany men with whom, on the one hand, confront death, and the other hand, defends her moral and spiritual values. Therefore it can be argued that studying the picture of woman via Shahzad in fact is the study of a whole cultural period and civilization. It also is the reunderstanding of a history that shows the picture of women as a pattern, and also as an action and language, as a result of which the cultural mentality of the society, and the position of woman in it can be seen clearly (Qozami, 1386: 61). We can say it is because of this that the greatest numbers of researches are done about this work.

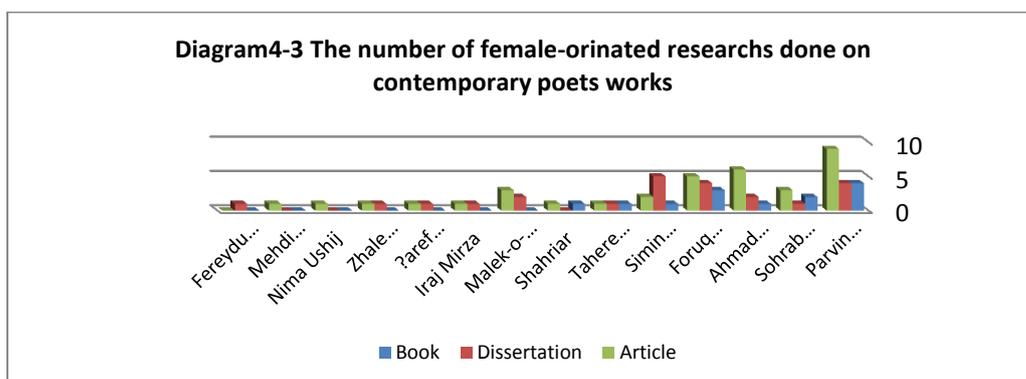
Researches on Contemporary Works

1-2-2 contemporary, poem



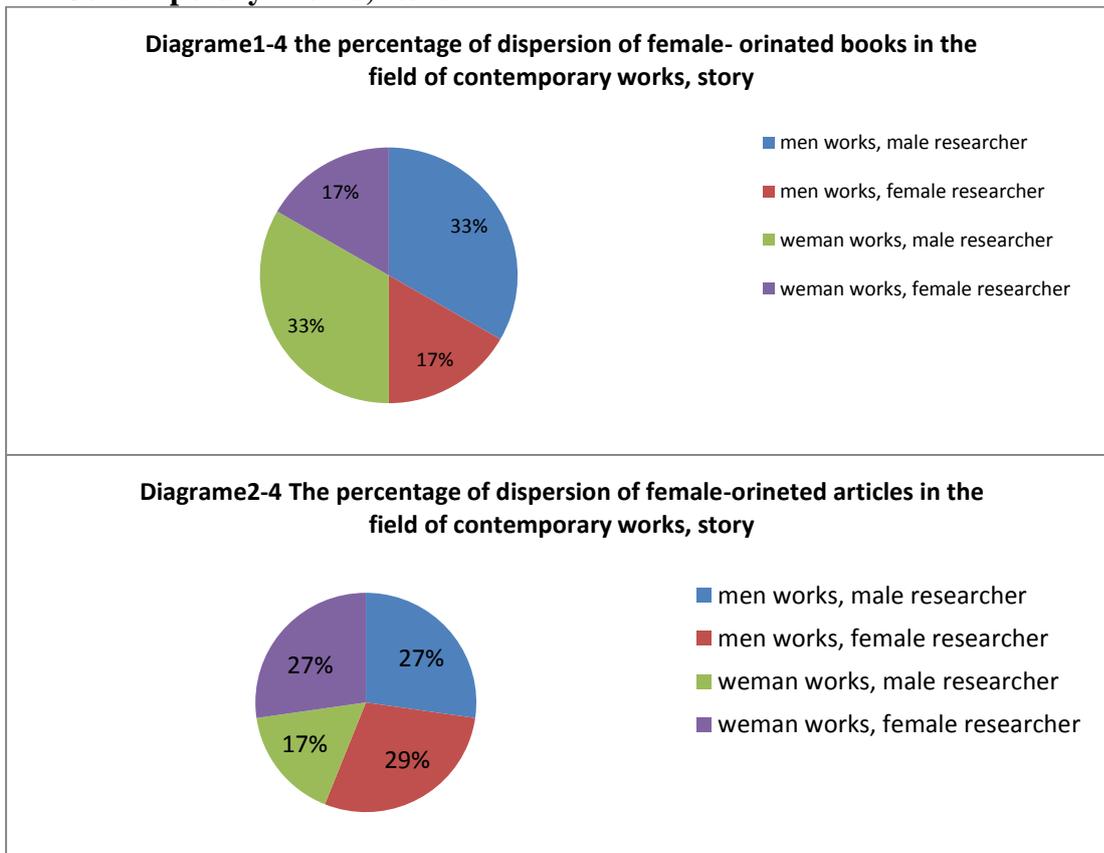


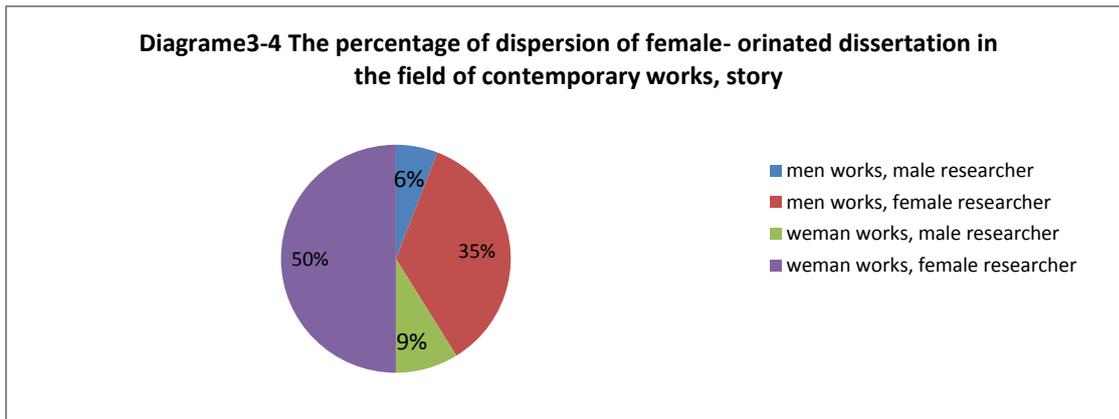
In the category of contemporary poem, the number of female- oriented researches on the works of women and men are equal. The numbers of female and male researchers who have researched on the works of women are also equal. But in the researches done on the works of men, a remarkable percentage of the works, about 42%, are done by the women. In the category of articles, the greatest numbers of researches on the contemporary poems, are about the works of men, 35% by men, and 24% by women. In the category of dissertations, 76% of researches are on the works of women of which 62% are by women themselves. Because of the more prominent presence of the women in the contemporary poems of men, and them being under the influence of the wave of feminism, and also the picture of woman become different and much closer to that in real world, women are often eager to express their identity via investigating the men contemporary poem. By the way of revealing shortcomings, errors and wrong attitudes towards women seen and reflected in these poems, they try to criticize the society in which these poems are produced; and these poems are representations of the mentality of some of its sectors.



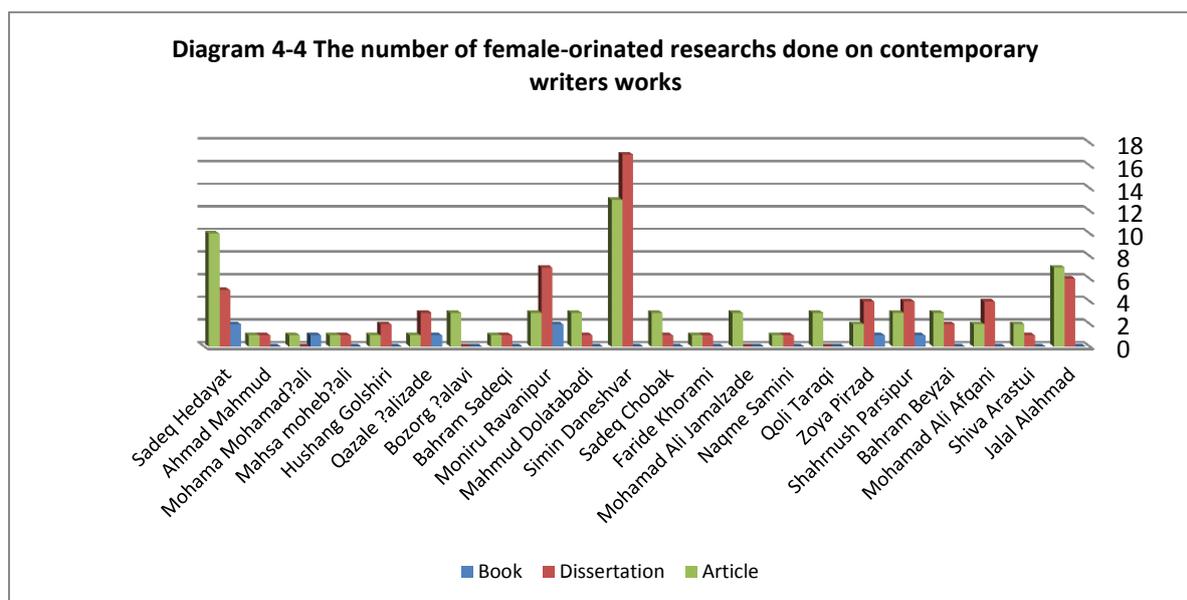
In the field of contemporary poem, it can be said that there are researches about almost all of the contemporary female poets. In addition the poets their names can be seen in the diagram, there are researches done on the works of other poets. The names of this group of poets are not in the diagram since there is just one dissertation² or article³ done about their poems. The kind of space we have for doing researches in the field of classical poem doesn't exist in the case of contemporary poem. This indicates that in doing researches, first the fame of the poets, and then his/ her position are the important criteria. In doing research about the classical poem, the main concern of the researcher is the presence of women in the poem, but in contemporary poem the woman herself is present in the poem as the narrator of femaleness and her sex, and this is why a greater number of researches about contemporary poem are devoted to the poems of women, and the works of almost all of the famous female poets are chosen as the subjects of researches. Among the mentioned poets, the greatest numbers of researches are done about the poems of Parvin Etesami. After Parvin, Ahmad Shamlu, Foruq Farozzad, and Simin Behbahani stand on the next positions respectively. Moreover, in spite of the fact that Parvin Etesami is a contemporary poet, as a matter of fact she is a bridge between the classical and contemporary poem. There are a lot of discussions about femaleness in her poems, for instance, Abdolhossein Zarinkub describes her as "a man- like woman", and Reza Baraheni considers her to be "a female Lafonte, a female Naser Khosrow, and ... " (Ahmadi, 1389: 21). Consequently, finding female dimensions in Parvin's poems are a matter of arguments, and need more researches to be done.

2- 2- 2 Contemporary Works, Novel





The whole numbers of books written about novels are equal from the view point of the writer being man or woman. In addition, the numbers of female and male researchers in this field are the same. In the category of articles, 56% of the articles are about the men's works and 44% about the women works; and also 56% of all of these researches are done by women. In the category of dissertations, the percentages of the researches done on the works of men and women are close to each other, in a way that 41% of the dissertations are on the works of men, and 59% on the works of women; and also 35% of the researches done on the works of men, and 50% of the researches done on the works of women are by women. Many consider novel as a really remarkable form of literature. "In the west, women's increasing demand for right to vote, right of ownership, being recognized as human, and being accepted as independent and free, gave a fresh life to this literary genre. The limitless and permanent expansion of the literary form of novel by female writers to encompass all of these problems completely, pave a way special to themselves to pay attention to these problems. By itself, this is also an indication of the form of novel to be considered as a simple one and suitable for expressing their creative and cultural requirements, in a way that they introduced the female tradition of novel writing" (Maylz, 1380: 92). "Whenever a female writer starts writing, so many times the traditional relations between the writer/ poet and the audience are inverted", and whenever women instead of being as objects about whom something is expressed or written, themselves start to speak and write, all thing would be reversed (Allen, 1389: 206). The creation of new relationships by female writers changes the old ones. If in the days before, male writers have had their own powerful and dominant narration of the world, and if the woman of our time, study their works to see their own pictures, today as a result of the fact that women write as much as the men, we see a new attitude in male writers and researchers to study the works of women, to understand female mentality and language. In Iran, in the field of novel, since not only women at the same time has started writing but also has had a remarkable presence in this field, and also since unlike the classical prose works, in novels written by men, women have more prominent rules, and as the main or peripheral characters of these novels play more realistic parts, studying the presence of women in these group of works is not an easy task. The number of research books about the works of men and women also are equal, and this is so also about the percentage of male and female researchers for the both groups. This sameness in number indicates the importance of female- oriented view points and works of women for men, and reveals that not only in novels women persuade their female identity, but also it is important for men to find the traces of femaleness in contemporary novels.

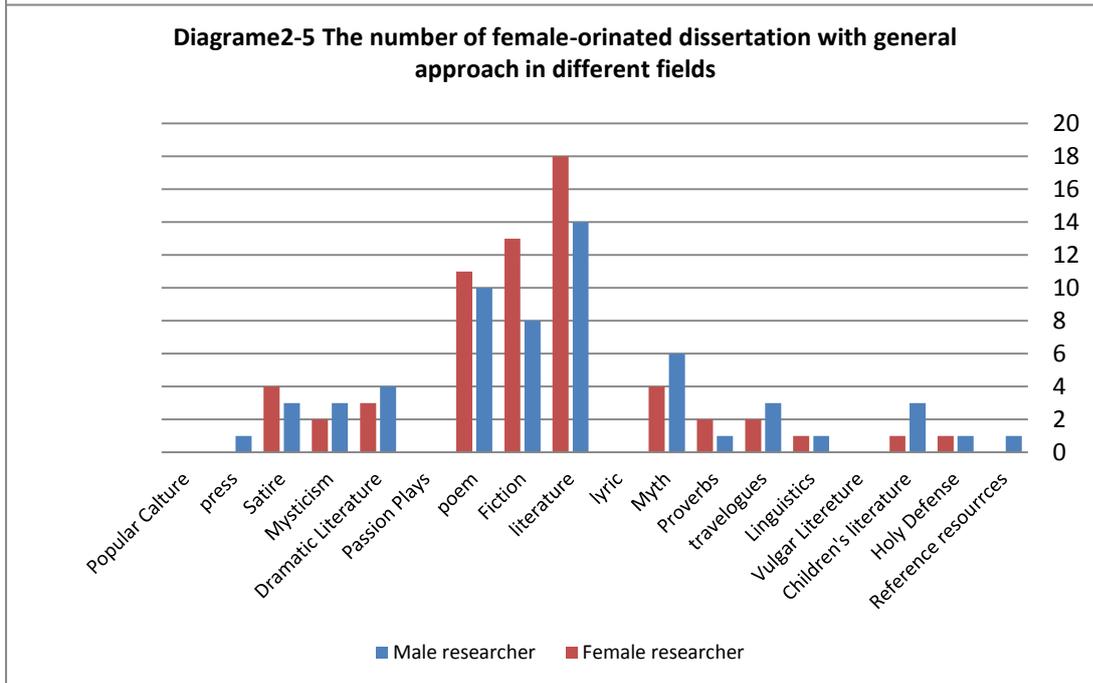
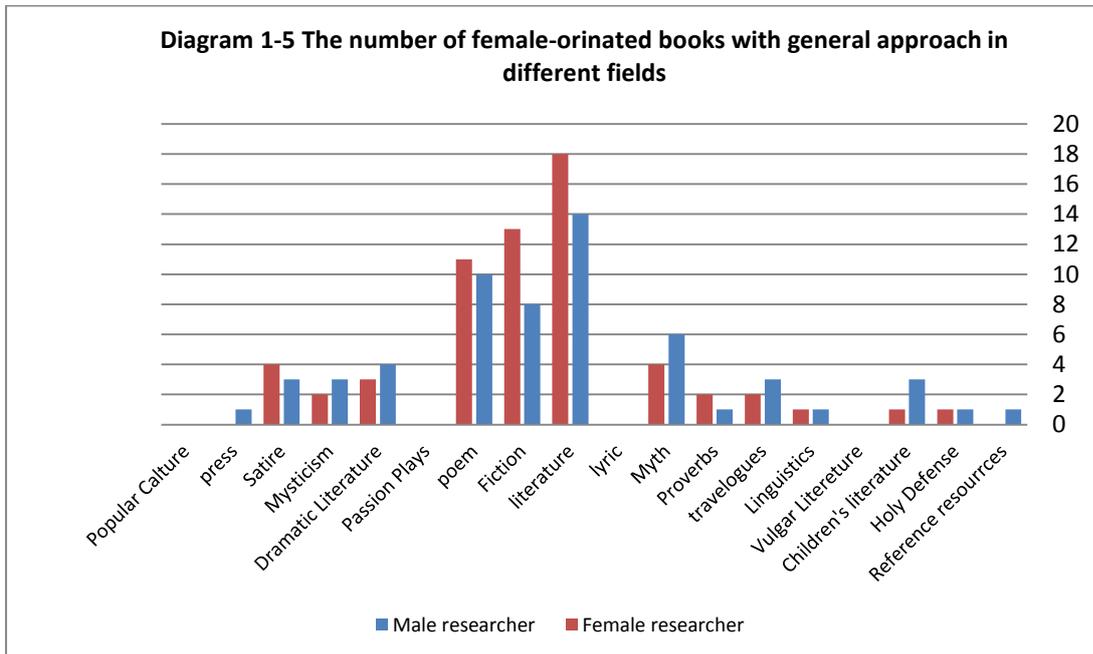


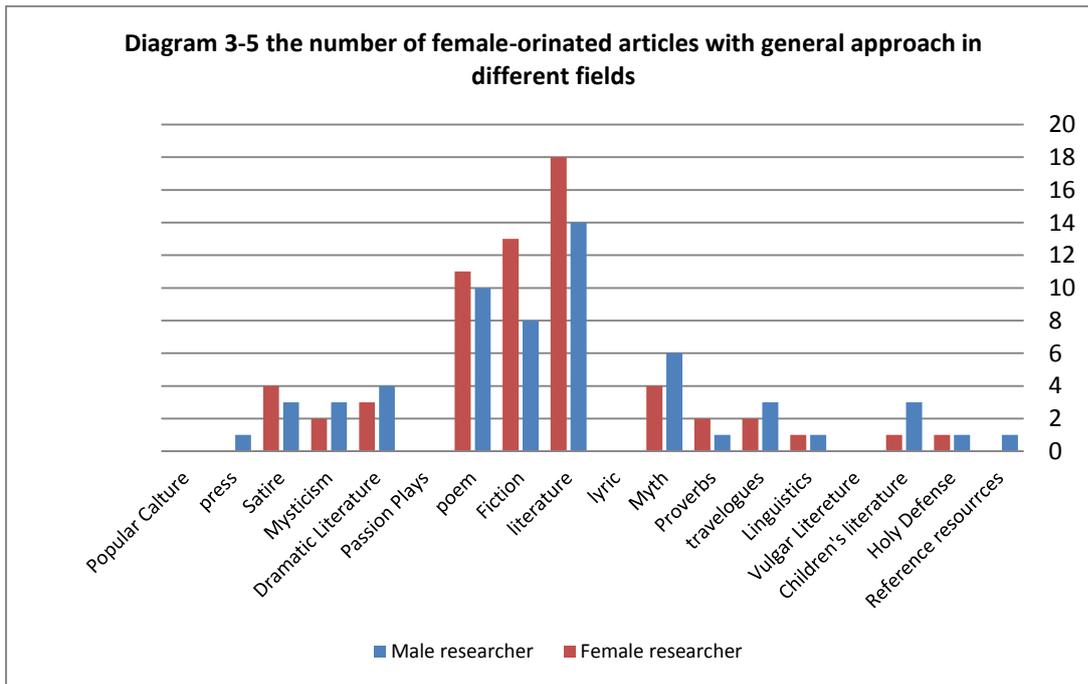
On most of the works of contemporary writers, there are a number of researches done. In addition to the writers their names can be seen in the diagram, there are other researches that only one dissertation⁴ or article⁵ is written about their works. Because of the number of these researches being vast their names are not shown on the diagram. Works of Simin Daneshvar, Sadeq Hedayat, and Jalal- e Aleahmad are the ones about which the largest numbers of researches are done. Simin Daneshvar, as the first Iranian writer, has a particular reputation among the writers. In addition of her reputation, the fact that Daneshvar is a woman, the fact that the main characters of her novels are women, her concerns for paying attention to the mentality of Iranian woman, and also the fact that first examples of feminist ideas can be found in her works are good reasons to select her works for doing female- oriented researches. Moreover her marriage to Jalale Aleahmad, and experiencing the same situation and space in the family and the society, bring about suitable foundations for comparison. In the works of Sadeq Hedayat the prominent picture of women, especially in figures like "Athiri" and "Lakate", and the possibility of applying a critical view, from different dimensions- for example, archetypical and psychological ones- to his works- creates enough willingness in most of the researchers to analyze and study works of this writer. One of the other remarkable points about female writers is that those famous in literary circles are also among the writers their works being selected as the subjects of researches. The next point is the large numbers of writers on their works female- oriented researches are done, but some are not as famous as others. Since on the works of this group of writers most often only academic researches (dissertations or articles) are done, it seems reasonable to say that to have newer views about women in contemporary novel, particularly in less famous works, is a good reason to do female- oriented researches on these works academically, and based on the literary theories.

Research works having a general approach

Diagrams 1- 5, 2-5, and 3-5 show the number of works that have a general approach (and not being about the works of a specific writer) towards the female- oriented research in literary works. These works are not included in the previous categorizations because of having a general approach.

1- 3- 2 research works having a general approach



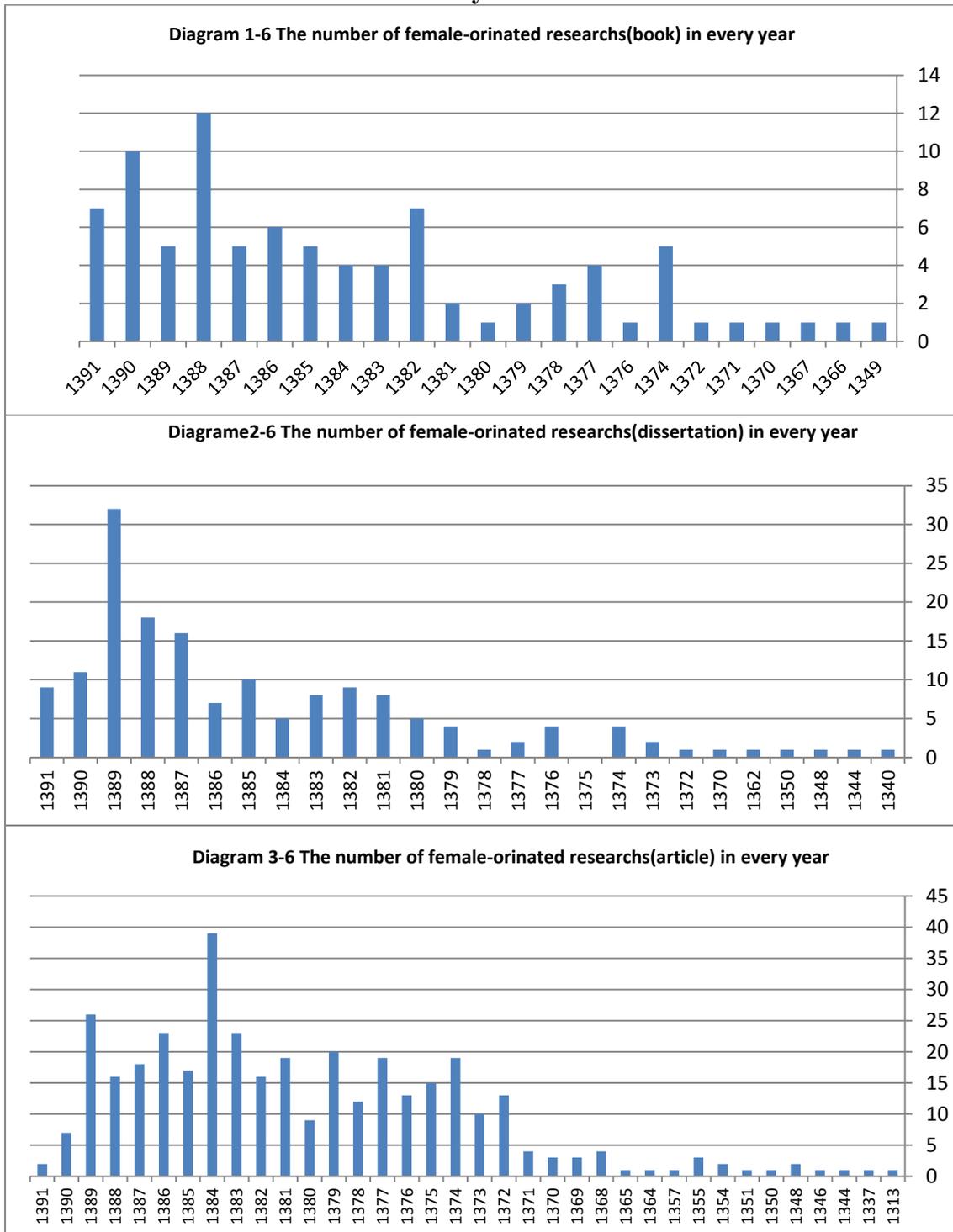


As is clear in diagrams, the largest numbers of female- oriented researches in different fields of literature (with a general approach) are in novel, poem and plays. And concerning the books, a high percentage of female- oriented books are about women in proverbs and anecdotes (*AMSAL- O HEKAM*). The remarkable point about these researches is the lack of researches about the reference sources in dissertations, and also the low percentage of these kinds of researches in articles (1%). In clear contrast to the lack of academic researches on reference resources in Iran, in the west, research on the reference resources is of high importance, for example, Robins starts the book "Literary Feminists" by searching words as woman, femaleness, ... in dictionaries and tries to have a critical look at them, and also has tried to trace women in lexicons (Robins, 1389: 21- 28). So this part seems to provide a good foundation for research and analysis. Also it seems to be a good space for doing research in fields of satires, songs, folklore,

Categorization based on the publication date

In the diagrams provided in this section (1- 6, 2- 6, 3- 6), the number of books, dissertations, and articles written in each year is specified; and in diagram 4- 6, the average of all of the research works done in different decades is shown.

1- 4- 2 the number of researches done each year

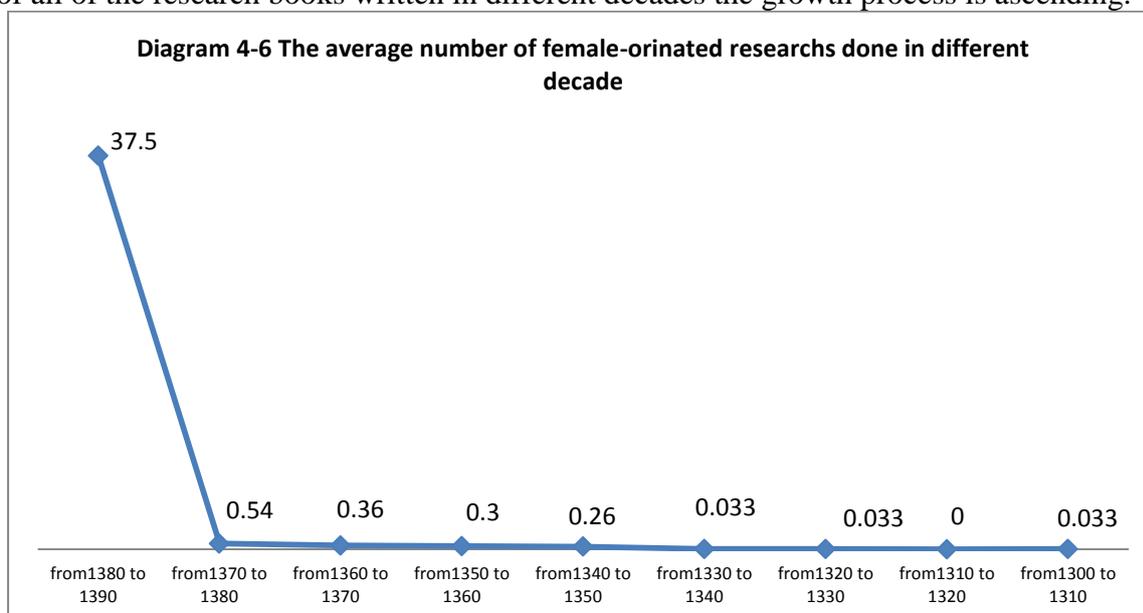


Diagrams drawn based on the number of works written each year, as a whole, indicate an increasing growth in the number of books, articles, and dissertations. Statistics also indicate that till 1970⁶ there has not been any female- oriented books written in Iran. Therefore this year is the beginning of a period in which we feel the change of attitudes towards women in the Iranian society of the time, a change so clear in that time that persuaded researchers to provide their studies and analyses about the presence of women in literature in a written form

to the society. This change which by itself has roots in the change of thoughts in Iranian society, little by little developed, and in spite of having a descending growth in female-oriented books in 1370s, comparing to the previous decades their numbers is larger. In 1380s the maximum number is that related to the year 1388 in which the number of published books is remarkable comparing both to the published books of the years before and after this year. In the category of dissertations, the overall picture of the diagram is similar to that of the books. In decades 1340s, 1350s, and 1360s, we have a rare number of dissertations written about the female-oriented subjects, but in first years of 1370s we have a small growth in this field, although in years 1377 and 1378 this growth is descending. But again in 1380s we see an ascending growth as a whole, with the maximum of the diagram in this decade. This also can be seen about the articles; an almost similar process before 1370s and the beginning of a growth in the number of articles at the first years of the decades, repeated ups and downs, and the climax number of articles in 1380s.

Decade

As we can see in the following diagram, generally speaking, considering the average number of all of the research books written in different decades the growth process is ascending.



CONCLUSION

Previous studies show that the beginning and development of feminist waves in Iran, and its impacts on different aspects of thoughts in Iranian society has increased the number of researches related to these fields. Iranian researchers have studied different dimensions of the presence of woman in literature, and in this arena, female researchers have a larger contribution; since they try to find the woman identity in contemporary literature. Statistics tell us that in the category of classical poem, the largest number of researches done are on Ferdowsi's Shahname, Mowlavi's Masnavi- e Ma'navi, and lyrical poems of Nezami respectively; and the lack of research on poems of classical female poets (as Rabe'e and Mahasti Ganjavi) can be seen clearly. Among the prose works, the largest numbers of researches are done on HEZAR- O YEK SHAB. This is not something unexpected, since the trace of female narration goes back to this book. In the category of contemporary poem, researches have been done on poems of almost all of the famous contemporary poets. In this

category, the poems of Parvin E?tesami stands at the peak, from the view point of the number of researches done about them. In the category of novels, researches are done on the works of most of the female writers. In this category, the largest numbers of works are done on the works of Simin Danneshvar. It is also interesting that a high percentage of these researches are also on the works of Jalal- e Al- e Ahmad (Smin's husband). Although Statistics related to the research works done during different years indicate repeated ups and downs, the overall perspective shows a remarkable growth in the number of works written in this field. This can be seen also clearly in the average number of researches done in different decades. The average numbers of works done in 1380s indicate a remarkable increase in the number of these researches. These statistics indicate the importance of doing statistical studies on these researches to show repetitions, neglected fields of study or works, and rooms for further studies.

¹ In Iranian solar calendar between 1313 to 1391

² On the works of each of the following poets a female- oriented dissertation is written: Sepide Kashani, Hossein Monzavi, Afsane Sha?ban- nezhad, Asadolah Sha?bani, Mirzade Eshqi, Seyed Ashrafodin Gorgani, Parvin Dpwlatsbadi, Zhale Esfahani.

³ On the works of each of the following writers an article is written: Ahmad Nazerzade Kermani, Abolqasem Halat, Azar Bigdeli, Maftun Hamedani, Ahmad Kasravi, Rashid Yasemi, Hamidi Shirazi, Amiri Firuzkuhi, Pezhman Bakhtiyari, Vahid Dastgerdi, Honarmandi, Kasebi, Habibolahi, Sahba, Nezamvafa, Bozorgvafa, Naderpur , and Tavalili.

⁴ On the works of each of the following writers a dissertation is written: Farxobde Aqayi, Shiva Moqanlu, Sara Salar, Abolfazl Sobhi, Morteza Moshfeq Kazemi, Amin Faqiri, Chista Yasrebi, Marjan Shirmohamadi, Azardox Bahrami, and Parinush Sani?i.

⁵ On the works of each of the following writers an article is written: Nahid Kabiri, Sepide Shamlu, Fereshte Ahmadi, Paksima Mojavezi, Mahbube Mirghadiri, Samad Behrangi, Mohsen Maxmalbaf, Mohamad Golabdare?i, Majid Sharif, Mohamad Baharlu, Ruhangiz Sharifian, Mahshid Amirshahi, and Bizhan Najdi.

⁶ 1349 in Iranian solar calendar

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