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## **Persian Short story: A literary renaissance**

### **Introduction**

Literature, a good piece of literature, no matter in which language and in what form it is produced, reflects some aspects of the society in which it is produced. It embodies the society. In other words literature is the expression of life and mirror of society.

### **Historical back ground**

Fatah Ali Shah, the 2nd king of Qajar dynasty, opened the door to European people which was multiplied by Nasiruddin Shah Qajar who himself was very much fond of travelling abroad. He himself made a lot of trip to European countries and got acquainted with modern culture and society. It is only he who established theater in Tehran for the first time in the history of Iran. He sent a number of scholars and teachers to foreign countries through cultural exchange programme. They got enlightened themselves with current thoughts and ideas and modern conception of patriotism and nationalism etc. They

acquired knowledge in various fields of study such as science and technology, history, polity, economy, society, culture and above all modern genres of language and literature, including short story. Hence they formed a good intelligentsia in Iran. On their return they brought those modern ideas and conceptions as a gift to Iran.

The rivalry of British and Russian imperialism throughout the 19th century accelerated the process. During this period only with arrival of technical advantages of European civilization and western thoughts the first signs of modernization of Iranian society made their appearance.

### **Measures of various reforms**

Measures of various reforms adopted by the kings of Qajar dynasty specially Fatah Ali Shah Qajar and Nasiruddin Shah Qajar played an important role in modernization of Iranian society as well as Modern Persian prose literature. It has already been explained in preceding section that later Nasiruddin Shah, Qajar King, advocated the idea strongly and supported the trend and by introducing various reforms such as publication of Newspapers, modern educational institutions, travel grant for studies in foreign countries through cultural exchange programme, establishment of Darul funun<sup>1</sup> and so on.

### **Darul funun**

Darul funun brought up a new intelligentsia, acquainted with modern science and technology, with European economic and



political system. As mentioned above now they were well equipped with sufficient requisite knowledge for a critical view of the situation of its own country which was in great need of political change, socio-cultural revolution and a literary renaissance. Now the intelligentsia began to think of revolution to change the age old system through constitutional movement 2. Modern thoughts such as native country, nation, freedom, equality, freedom of speech, human rights, rights of women, etc. echoed in their mind. Against the despotic system of governance revolt broke out and Persian patriots came out with a demand of constitution 3 and setting up of a parliament. The constitution was proclaimed and opened the inaugural session of parliament 4 (Majlis) on 19th August, 1906.

Jan Rypka says, "Economic and cultural contact with occident, which since the middle of the 19th century has increased in width and intensity, was one of the main factors in initiating the transformation of many countries of the orient, among them Iran, from the traditional to the modern way of life. Literature was also affected by this trend" 5. Further he adds, the knowledge of European languages and literatures is for Iranian literature a discovery in the light of which modern genres appeared in the scene which addressed to the broad masses of the nation with the aim of educating, instructing, enlightening and awakening the fellow citizens from their backwardness and passivity"6.

## **Yaki bud Yaki na bud : an advent or dawn of Persian short story:**

Syed Mohammad Ali Jamal Zadah, a western educated historian, trained sociologist, and above all a great litterateur of 20th century modern Iran, published a slim book of short stories entitled "Yaki bud Yaki na bud" in 1920 in Berlin. With the publication of his first book "Yaki bud Yaki na bud" comprising of six stories entitled "Farsi sakar ast", "Dusti-e-Khala-e-Kharsah", "Dard-e-dil e Mulla Qurban Ali", "Bile Deg Bile Chuqandr", "Rajule Siyasi" and "Wailanuddaulah" he laid the foundation of Persian short story in Iran. Undoubtedly this literary event was of historical importance for the development of modern Persian prose literature as a new genre called Persian Short story was added to it. This is worth mentioning here that when "Yaki bud Yaki na bud" reached Iran it was not favourably received by people. Instead it was publicly burned<sup>7</sup>. The above noted unfortunate incident of burning the book of Syed Mohammad Ali Jamal Zadah serves as proof that stories were a literary revolution. In it attention is focussed on various aspects of contemporary life in Iran, with a strongly critical bias against bureaucracy, bribery and social injustice.

### **Galaxy of short story writers and their stories**

From the Nineteen hundred twenties onward a galaxy of short story writers namely; Syed Mohammad Ali Jamal Zadah , Sadiq

Hadayat, Saeed Nafisi, Mirza Yusuf Etesamul mulk, Saad Behrangi, Sadiq Chubak, Buzurg Alavi, Jalal Aale Ahmad, Mutiuddaulah Mohammad Hejazi and Simin Danishwar etc. appeared on the horizon of Modern Persian Prose Literature. They wrote many stories on various subjects of the modern society. These include "Farsi sakar ast", "Dusti-e-Khala-e-Kharsah", "Dard-e-dil e Mulla Qurban Ali", "Bile Deg Bile Chuqandr", "Rajule Siyasi", "Wailanuddaulah", "Aain-e-Shikashta" (broken mirror), Zinda be gur (buried alive), "Aabji Khanum" (elder sister), Arusak pushte pardeh (puppet behind the curtain), "Mohallil" (the legaliser), seh qatra khun (three drops of blood), Suratakha (the musks), Murda khurha (ghouls or literally, eaters of the corpses), Zani keh mardash ra gum kard (the woman who lost her husband), Talab e amurzhish (asking absolution), Girdab (whirl pool), Dash Aakul (Dash Aakul, a proper noun) Sage welgard (stray dog), Khanah e pedari (one's birth place), Nairang e siyasi (political trickery), Kabutar wo Kalagh (pigeon and crow), Do gurbah row e diwar (two cats at the narrow passage), Yahya (Yahya, proper noun), Chamedan (luggage, suit case), Qurbani (sacrifice), Arus e hazar damad (wife of many husbands), Sarbaz e sarbi (a sarbian soldier), Shik push (stylish/well-dressed person), Raqse marg (dance at death), Seh tar (sitar/guitar, name of a three stringed musical instrument), Bachchah e mardum, (deprived child), Shireen Kela (Shireen Kela, a proper noun), Khud kushi (suicide), Majma'a



zidaniyan (gathering of prisoners), Sha'ar e Belzhiki, (a poet of Belzek), Naqqash (painter), and Koshish (try) etc.

## **Theme**

In a short story important and valuable thoughts and ideas like love and affection, patriotism, nationalism, humanity, morality, freedom, liberty, freedom of speech, human rights, women rights, equality, socio-political and cultural problems faced by women are accommodated and conveyed to readers. In modern age Persian short story has been playing an important role in awakening the society in general and women in particular. Jan Rypka is of the opinion that a favourite theme among these authors, brought up with knowledge of western views of society, was the problem of Persian woman and her social status, practically still untouched by modern emancipation. The first work of this type appeared under the title "Tehra e makhuf", Dreadful Tehran. The novel attempts to describe in realistic fashion the unhappy situation of Persian women, the rottenness of society and the social circumstances which forced women to descend to the very lowest of social levels-the brothel. Its particular importance lies in the fact that in this form it drew the attention of contemporary Iranian society to the pressing need for finding a solution to the problem of women 9. Among these short stories Aabji Khanum, Arusak pushte pardeh, Mohallil, Dard-e-dil e Mulla Qurban Ali, Chamedan, Talabe Amurzish, Dash Aakul, Qurbani, Aruse hazar damad, Raqse marg, Sheerin kela and Naqqash



particularly deal with socio-cultural and psychological problems faced by women in the society.

### **Critical appreciation:**

#### **Syed Mohammad Ali Jamal Zadah**

"Farsi sakar ast" is one of the important stories of this book in which he has raised finger not only at corrupt politicians, shameless career-hunters, hypocritical priest hood, but also the social system which allowed such people to survive in the world. Albert Einstein rightly says, "The world is dangerous to live in not because those who do evil but because of those who look on and let them do so" 8. Here the author demonstrates outstanding mastery over using local dialects and simple language.

Syed Mohammad Ali Jamal Zadah in Rajle siyasi, 'statesman', has put emphasis on deteriorating character of politicians who are greedy and over ambitious and are desirous of obtaining wealth and political positions in a very short span of time at any cost.

#### **Sadiq Hedayat**

Among short story writers first place must be accorded to Sadiq Hedayat. Moreover he may be ranked among the leading figures of world literature. He has very sincerely described the problems tragedies and misery of women in his short stories which have been favourably received and well read by literary people. These issues are causing harm and agony to women. He throws light on



complex psychology of modern people, specially modern and stylish women. In a story entitled Dash Aakul a forty year old ugly man, champion of wrestler by profession and the central character of the story, named Dash Aakul falls in love with a fourteen year old beautiful girl who is under his guardian ship. Being ugly he doubts that she would marry another handsome man. At last there comes a suitor for the girl, older and uglier than Dash Aakul. After his return from Europe Hedayat lived in Tehran and devoted himself mainly to cultural activities and literary works. In the beginning his stories appeared in two volumes under the titles Zinda Bah gur, "Buried alive", and She Qatra Khun, "three drops of blood". He has advocated modern concept of patriotism. His works are treasury of expressions, idioms and phrases, colloquial language, simple vocabulary and above all socio cultural issues such as modern conception of patriotism, nationalism, freedom of speech, human rights, equality, right of women, morality and humanity etc. For the enrichment of modern Persian short story this trait is of outstanding importance. Among the most untutored people of the society such as casual workers and mule drivers etc. also form characters of his short stories. His attraction is towards people's inner life, psychological stimuli, human conduct, and mutual relations. He finally committed suicide in a hotel room in Paris. He is buried in the cemetery in Paris.

Sadiq Hedayat in his writings has covered almost every sphere of

the society. "Mohallil" (the legaliser) is one of the best short stories of Sadiq Hadayat in which he has described a very sensitive issue of divorce which does destroy the conjugal life of women. In this story he has depicted the agony and pain of a woman caused by separation from her husband. Ultimately divorcee is the victim of cruelty of both the husbands. In other words it can be said that her agony was multiplied by the second husband. She had to suffer from both acute physical and mental torcher and agony caused by unhappy married life.

### **Saeed Nafisi**

Saeed Nafisi (1897/1966), university professor of language and literature, too in his stories depicted socio cultural and psychological issues of 20th century modern Iranian society. In the domain of belles-lettres he figures as a poet, as a translator and as a very popular writer of short story. The most important collection of prose entitle Mah-e-Nakhshab, "moon from Nakhshab", contains historical tales, the life stories of historical personalities living in the 1st century after the Arab conquest.

### **Mirza Yusuf Etesamul mulk**

In Nairang e siyasi, 'political trickery' of Mirza Yusuf 'atesamul mulk the hero disguised as a patient represents the sick and dishevelled world in general and twentieth century modern Iranian society in particular.



### **Samad Behrangi,**

Samad Behrangi in *Do gurbah ruye diwar*, 'two cats on the wall', has propagated the importance of reconciliation, cooperation, compromising nature and peaceful co-existence.

### **Sadiq Chubak,**

Sadiq Chubak was born in 1918 in Bushahar, Iran. Undoubtedly he is one of the great writers, intellectuals and social reformers of 20th century modern Iran. His contribution to prose literature is of great importance. His first collection of short stories under the title *Khema e shab bazi*, 'puppet Theatre', was favourably received and well-read in the literary world. In the first collection itself he proved himself to be an intelligent short story writer with an excellent feeling of a sharp insight into the inner motives of human behaviour which is somewhat rare in modern Persian prose literature. The story entitled *Qafas*, 'the cage', reveals the author understands of the world of animal and of their special psychology.

### **Buzurg Alavi,**

Buzurg Alavi (b. Feb. 2nd, 1904) has described the rivalry of father and son in their love for the same girl in a story entitled *Chamadan*. In *Sarbaze Surbi* (tin soldier) he describes about psychology and typical features of Iranian people. In it he has made a psychoanalytical study of the tragic relationship between a common servant and a sexually abnormal intellectual. He

worked untiringly for improvement of society and for the establishment of international cooperation and world peace.

In some of his short stories attention is focused on various aspects of contemporary Iran, with the strong criticism against corrupt bureaucracy bribery and social injustice. Exceptional people, often acentric in character used to be characters of his stories. In worq paraha -e-Zindan, "notes from prison", hardship, mental agony and bitter experiences of several of Alvi's fellow prisoners have been narrated. Another collection of stories under the title Namaha wa Dastanha e digar, "letters and other stories", refelects his mastery over writing stories in this field. For this collection he was awarded Gold Medal of the world peace Council in 1953. In it special attention is focussed on description of 20th century contemporary Iran, eradication of social evils such as poverty, bribery, and inequality.

### **Jalal Aale Ahmad,**

Jalal Aale Ahmad started his literary career as short story writer with the publication of Az ranji keh mibarim, 'our sufferings', which is all about the victims of political persecution.

### **Mutiuddaulah Mohammad Hejazi**

In Khudkushi, 'suicide', Hejazi appears to be optimist and advocates for looking at the bright side of light. Suicide is not solution of any problem.



## 'Ali Dashti

'Ali Dashti in his widely read and favourably well accepted short story under the title of 'Fitna' deals chiefly with psychological state of mind of 20th century Persian women. In it he further adds that modern education has created inner contradictions in them. Another story named Ayyam e Mahbas, 'Days of jail', basically is an account of his own experiences of jail. Another collection named Sayah, 'The shadow' ranks among the foremost works of contemporary prose literature.

Persian short story like others reflects the socio-political and cultural life of the people. In conclusion it may be said that some aspects of the 20th century Iranian society have been brought to light which otherwise skip or remain hidden from the readers.

## Notes & References

1. "Darul funun" may be termed as polytechnic in today's terminology. It was basically the center of modern education. Apart from Iranian teachers European teachers were also employed to impart modern technology and foreign languages such as French, German etc. For further information please refer to 'Az Sba ta Nima', Yahya Aryan pur, vol1., Intesharate Zawwar, Thran, Iran, ed.4, 1372 AH, P.252
2. 'Az Sba ta Nima', Yahya Aryan pur, voll., Intesharate Zawwar, Thran, Iran, ed.4, 1372 AH, P.2
3. Tulsiram, Persia to Iran (one step forward two step back), Mahajan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1985, p.11.
4. Jan Rypka, History of Iranian Literature, D. Reidel publishing company, 1956, P.357.
5. Jan Rypka, History of Iranian Literature, D. Reidel publishing company, 1956, P.362.
6. ibid
7. ibid. p.389d
8. Personal Diary, p.1.2.1997
9. Jan Rypka, History of Iranian Literature, D. Reidel publishing company, 1956, P.391.
10. Jan Rypka, History of Iranian Literature, D. Reidel publishing company, 1956, P.412.

