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A Glimpse of Modern Persian Fictions

The modern Persian short story is almost a century old and arrived to Persia via the translation of writers such as Chekhov, Poe, Kafka, and Gogol. When in 20's and 30's the Iranian government aimed at modernizing the country it allowed university students to travel to foreign countries and, among other skills, to acquire new skills in language and translation. Therefore, as with other fictional forms of writing, the Persian short story has been strongly influenced by the techniques and styles of Western Literature and adapted them into its own socio-political cultural demands. As we have seen, the anecdote and short tale was not new to Persian literature. In fact this particular genre has been available in Persian Classics starting from KalilawaDimneh to Qani's 'Pareshan' and even after that. But in the reign of Qajars Iran was exposed to western ideas, education, culture, language and literature. In the beginning of 20th century, when Iran came in contact with the west it was the short story that was reigning over the

literary scene of the world. The Iranian writers were excited and impressed by the interesting literary genre and quickly responded to it.

The present article tries to analytically look at the trends of Modern Persian Short Stories and also attempt a thematic study of the stories which proved to be milestones in the journey of Persian short story writing in the early 20th century A.D

Muhammad Ali Jamal Zadeh that very unusual, extremely perceptive writer of Iran was the first to bring this literary form to Iran with his 'Yaki Bud Yaki Nabud' and then the flood gates opened and short story became the most important medium to express their feeling and concerns for Iranian writers. Because this is his first collection of short stories he had to add a glossary of colloquial and dialect words and slangs for the benefit of the common reader since, those had been usually overlooked by lexicographers and shunned by writers. He emphasized new themes and trends in short stories like simplicity of language use of proverbs and colloquialism. He referred to it as the new school of thought in language. He is a trend setter. Also he has dropped in a word of caution for modern writers against an exaggerated use of colloquialism, to which he seems to be, tempted himself at times. His stories became a subtle

medium to express the feelings of common man and down trodden people.

He is considered as the father of modern short story in Iran and has strongly stressed the significance of literature as a reflection of social and cultural reality. He showed the Iranian writers of his age that the popular Persian tradition of storytelling and anecdotal literature could be perfected and transformed into the modern day short story. Jamal Zadeh lead in short story writing was followed by such celebrated and talented writers as Sadiq Hedayat, Buzurg Alvi, Mohammad Hejazi, Sadiq Chubak, Jalal Ale Ahmed, Mahmood Daulatabadi and Simin Daneshwar etc.

Early 20th Century was the time of political upheaval in Iran and the wish to change the socio-political system of the country went in hand with changes in literature and style. At that time the writers and the poets both were not only men of letters but also social activists who wished to bring change in their society and system. The Times Literary supplement has described modern Persian Literature as a:
"Literature of Revolt" 1

The intellectuals and writers wrote for the people

and also they wrote for their rights.....and the short story became their most important vehicle of expression. A closer look at the distinct features clearly shows how close and pertinent these themes are to the changing political scenario of Iran. We also see committed writers who challenged foreign domination and exploitation of Iranian masses by the western powers like Russia and Great Britain. As the poet Bahar Mashhadi describes them as usurpers.

After the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 these feelings took the shape of a strong movement in which all Iranians were united. Also the short stories and their themes are focused on the socio-political issues and problems of day to day life, be it religion, regional customs or obsolete ideas, these writers were bold enough to examine, to criticize and to reject that which was not relevant to modern age. They wished to discard the heavy yoke of the despotic regime and for this they wanted to take their countrymen with them. The stories produced during this time clearly show the tendencies of the writers to break free from old rituals and adapt a more scientific way of living. Be it Jamal Zadeh, Sadiq Hedayat, Sadiq Chubak, Hejazi, Ale Ahmed, BozorgAlvi or others, they all promoted

the establishment of a democratic system, giving men and women their rightful place in the society.

Years of sporadic freedom of speech and freedom of the press, which started in the early 20th century, helped the Persian short story genre adopt a modern style of writing, as translation of modern literature from western culture had a great effect on middle class educated Iranians who couldn't see the possibility of publishing a full length novel. This was also an era when creative writing workshops flourished and as a result small print runs of anthologies became popular with the educated classes.

The writers of short stories of this period wrote about gender issues, exposed the miserable life of the Iranian women of that time and strove to give legitimacy to the demands of the down trodden. Women became central character to the plot of many stories and suddenly they left their private and veiled space to demand their rightful place in the public sphere. Many short story writers of that time openly criticized the oppression of women in a male-oriented society.

Foremost among them are JamalZadeh, Sadeq Hedayat, Sadiq Chubak and Muhammed Hejazi. Some of the short stories of Jamal Zadeh like Dard-e-dil-e-Mulla

Qorban Ali, and Wailan-ud Daulah throw light on women's changing status in society and their demand for participation in public education and the right to choice in private life. But the true champion for the cause of women is of course Sadeq Hedayat. Hedayat had spent some time in Europe, mainly in France. He read writers such as Rilke, Poe, Kafka, Chekhov and Maupassant. He also spent a few years in India and studied Persian folklore and Middle Persian languages. All this exposure to Western literature, as well as his deep understanding and knowledge of Persian literature influenced his writing. His style of writing grew from the linear and developed a fragmented, branched narrative line. The influence of psychological and psychoanalytical theories on narrative techniques gained momentum. As translations of texts by writers such as Freud, Jung and Lucan also appeared in Iran: F Kafka became popular reading amongst intellectual book readers as Hedayat was especially interested in Kafka's writing.

This style is most evident in his famous short story collection *Se Gatreh Khoon*; "Three Drops of Blood" (1932). His narrative style and sub textual concerns had a long lasting effect on other Iranian writers. One can hear traces of his work in writers such as BahramSadegi, Hoshang

Golshiri, Simin Daneshvar, Mahshid Amirshahi and Golam Hausain Saedii, each an important name of their own in the list of Iranian modern writers.

Through his short stories he displayed the true face of the Iranian masses of late 19th century and early 20th century, specially the women, advocated their rights, sometimes openly at others symbolically. His short stories like AbjiKhanum, Madlin, MordeKhorha, Girdab, Dash Akul, Ayina-e Shikasta, ZanikeMardashra Gum Kard, Arusak-e Pusht e Pardaand many more show cased the injustice done to women in particular society:

"Other authors who wrote about women and their plight are Bozorg Alvi and Jala-Ale-Ahmed. Bozorg Alvi's Chamadan, Qurbani, Urus-e-Hazar Damad, Sarbaz Surbi and Raqs-e Marg are very sentimental and romantic short stories. His mind was reform oriented and he demanded emancipation of women, education for all, equal rights and opportunities for women through his short stories. Sadeq Chubak is also considered to be the most consciously analytical amongst the Persian writers of short fiction. Some of the short stories of his collection Ruz-e Awwal -e Qabrand Cheragh - e Akher analyze the status of women in Iran. He chose the low-life characters of women

and pointed out that women are not just a piece of pleasure but their place in society is that of a responsible human being. The above mentioned writers are very popular even in these days in Persian world. Their characters are drawn from all strata of the society and some of the writers have specially focused on the poor and lower middle classes. The men and women that inhabit these stories are of real flesh and blood without any kind of artificialities about them. Their short stories have always been considered by literary critics as a medium to capture the ambiance and atmosphere of the place where these writers have based their story upon. It has been alluded to as a school for obtaining information about different regions, countries, their people, culture, life, belief and customs.

We can say that the modern short story writers of Iran displayed a great insight into the affairs of Iran and depicted the characters from all walks of life. Through their character and stories we can get a clear glimpse of Iran of 20th Century. They have written stories which are full of vivid details of its socio-political conditions, its culture, language, history, religious institution etc. Jamal Zadeh was the first short story writer whose short stories are like a school for young fiction writers. His stories like 'Farsi

Shakar Ast, Rajl-e Seyasi, Dard -e Dil-e Mulla Qurban Ali, Bila Digh Bila Chuqandar etc. are replete with information regarding Iran's social, political and religious life, language, rituals and customs. In Farsi Shekar Ast, we can get a glimpse of Iranian prisons, an ordinary provincial boy and his innocence, ports of Anzali and their cut - throats, pompous Akhunds, a representative of the so-called western gentlemen with his hybrid language, the government officers of Iran and their inability, their greed for bribery, the local peoples dialects', their slangs etc. In just one story can get information about one thousand aspects of Iranian culture and life.

In another story 'Dusti-e-Khala Khirsa one gets acquainted with a café waiter a Russian soldier, the tragedy faced by people in world war II, the ill effects of war etc. Another story Dard-e Dil -e Mulla Qurban Ali shows the character of a cleric, his wickedness and hypocrisy. BilaDegBilaChuqandar shows the reader the despotic order, way of life of ruling clerics, class distinction of the late Qajar period etc.

The stories of SadeqHedayat encompass the full spectrum of the Iranian society. Through his stories he cast a spell on the readers mind as if it is not a story but a film.

The audio visual effect of his writings are discovered in almost all of his stories be it Sag-e-Vilgard, Seh Qatra Khun, Abji Khanum, Dash Akul, Zan-e-Ke Mardash-ra Gum Kard, Talb-e Amurzish, Murda Khurha, Muhallil, Akhrin Lab Khand, Bun Bast or MihanParast. He was a genius par excellence and the short stories produced by him are although a darker side of human life but the art of modern short story writing is visible in true colors.

These stories show the true face of Iran of early and mid-20th century A.D., its socio-political condition, religion, religious short comings, culture, different ills of the society, people's life and their plight, plight of women in particular, Iranian customs etc.

These stories also display a fierce desire of their writers to get rid of their foreign masters and of their stupid rulers. Their characters, their themes, their plots, their treatment of the story paved the way to welcome a new world. We may say that the most prominent of the trends and themes of these short stories originated from the desire to put Iran and also its literature on the map of the newly emerging world order.

We may conclude by saying that starting from the Qajar period to the modern times and even after the Islamic

Revolution of Iran, the short story remains the most important and popular medium of expression in Iran. The mission started so long ago by Muhammaed Jamal Zadeh is being carried forward with the same commitment, enthusiasm and zest by today's short story writers like Farkhunde Aqai, Reza Julai, Guli Tarraqi, Hoshang Azurzadeh, Sharnush Parsipur, Moniru Ravanipur and others, The short story had started journey in Iran almost hundred years ago and today it is flourishing as a vibrant, meaningful and most popular literary form.

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