



## **Persian Classical Poetry at the Service of Social Justice, Freedom-seeking, and a Better Life**

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### **Abstract**

Traditional Iranian poetry has a history of more than a thousand years. This kind of completely melodious and rhythmic poetry has always taught us moral, divine, mystical and social themes, correct lifestyle and the way to reach evolution and happiness, which can be a sign of Persian rich culture and civilization. The mission and commitment of poetry and poets is to serve people and guide them to happiness. The contemporary classical poetry of Iran is the continuation of the thousand-year-old Persian classical poetry that despite preserving its principles and appearance or form, it has been completely dynamic in terms of content and has adapted itself to the times so as not to neglect its mission, i.e., to raise human awareness. A number of miscellaneous factors have had an impact on Iranian classical poetry, and this article, while examining the mentioned factors tries to introduce some important and prominent poets of the contemporary classical poetry of Iran and refers to their thoughts and sociopolitical activities in brief, so that, the pave will be grounded for new helpful similar further researches. As such, the study presents a brief overview of Persian classical poetry in the past one hundred and fifty years and investigates the thoughts and sociopolitical effectiveness of the most prominent contemporary Iranian poets.

**Keywords:** Classical Poetry of Iran, Qajar era, constitutional era, Pahlavi era, social factors

## Introduction

Research and investigation in contemporary Iranian literature is faced with many problems, such as the immaturity and underdevelopment of some aspects of today's literature, the difficulty of being impartial towards the religio-political orientations of contemporary writers and poets, and the numerous branches of today's literature. However, one cannot deprive oneself of the little information and knowledge available. In general, through reviewing the related Literature (Arianpour, 2008; Chehabi, 1998; Tahbaz, et al., 2013, Kiani, et al., 2022) the researcher divides the contemporary Iranian literature, especially contemporary poetry as the main subject of this article into three important historical periods: the period of Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar's sovereignty/ Qajar era, the constitutional/ Iraj era, and the reign of Reza Shah as the First Pahlavi, and that of his son Mohammad Reza Shah as the Second Pahlavi of Reza Shah called Pahlavi era. Although contemporary literature includes classical poetry, new poetry, story writing, playwriting, translation, literary research and historical research, this article examines the thoughts and sociopolitical effectiveness of the most prominent contemporary poets and presents a brief overview of Iranian classical poetry in the three aforementioned periods. Moreover, the study explores and suggests some factors that have affected the contemporary classical poetry of Iran.

## Qajar Era: The Reign of Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar

Classical Iranian poetry during the 50-year reign of Nasser al-Din Shah was whether a continuation of the ancient literature or the product of the royal court's encouragement towards poets. This period until before constitutional era can be regarded as Qajar era. Some of the most prominent poets of this era are as follows:

### Shahab Isfahani

Nasrullah bin Muhammad Shihab Isfahani (deceased in 1291/1912) was an Iranian poet. He went to Tehran [capital of Iran] in 1254/1875 and received the attention and support of the chancellor Haji Mirza Aghasi and received the title of Taj al-Sho'ara (Crown of Poets). When Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar ascended to the royal throne, Shihab came to him and congratulated him. By the order of Amir Kabir, he was assigned to organize several events of Karbala in the mourning of Imam Hussein (AS). He is one of the revivalists of Khorasani style during the period of literary return (Owhadi, 1968).

### Foroughi Bastami

Foroughi Bastami (1213/1834-1274/1895) was one of the poets of the Qajar period. He was a contemporary poet of three Qajar kings: he became famous from the time of Fath Ali Shah, and continued his work during the periods of Muhammad Shah and Nasser al-Din Shah. His most prominent poems are in the form of sonnets. Foroughi Bastami was one of Sufi poets. In his best mystic sonnets, he combines tenderness and sweetness with expressiveness and simplicity of words. Although it is said that Foroughi Bastami had about 20,000 verses of poetry, what remained of him and was published in his time as an appendix to Diwan Qa'ani, is about 5,000 verses (Dehkhoda, 1931).

### Sorush Isfahani

Mirza Mohammad Ali Sadhi Isfahani (1813-1868) with the surname Sorush and nickname Shams al-Sho'ara (the King of Poets) of the Qajar court, also known as Sorush Isfahani is considered one of the poets of Iran's literary revival period. Most of all, he was capable in writing odes in the style of Hafez and Saadi and other Iraqi style poets. He wrote some poems

on the virtues of Ali Ibn-e Abi Talib and other Shia Imams, which are worthy of attention in terms of style and context (Nazmi Tabrizi, 1976).

### **Qaani**

Mirza Habibollah Shirazi, acknowledged as Qaani or Qa'ani (1808–1854) was born in Shiraz, Iran. He was one of the most celebrated lyricists and a great unknown philosopher in the Qajar era. He gained enough skill in Arabic and Persian literature and had a great interest in Hikmah (Theosophy) and Philosophy, and it can be said that his reputation as a poet has damaged his reputation as a scholar. In Philosophy, he is considered equal to Haj Mullahadi Sabzevari, in Hikmah, some know him as knowledgeable as Mulla Sadra, and in Theology as knowledgeable as Sheikh Morteza Ansari. He was titled as 'Mujtahd-al-Sho'ara'; i.e., 'Mujtahid of the Poets'. Moreover, Mohammad Shah called him 'Hassan al-Ajam'<sup>1</sup>. He knew French and English, and was expert in mathematics and rhetoric and a master in logic. Qaani's Diwan (poetry collection) consisted of over 20,000 verses. His famous book 'Parishaan' (Bewildered), is written in the style of Sa'di's Golestan (Gabbay, 2016; Shaki, 1978). His language style, specially the words he used in his odes became a role model for many poets after his time.

### **Yaghma Jandaqi**

Mirza Rahim Yaghmai Jandaqi (1781-1859), known as Yaghma, is one of the lyric poets of the 13th century of Iran during the reign of Mohammad Shah Qajar. His satirical poems are very famous (Nazari& Parsa, 2018) and he is mentioned as one of the initiators of contemporary social and critical literature in Iran (Al-e Dawood, 1986; Nabavi, 2007). Yaghma was a pious poet who never praised the king or the courtiers. His beautiful sonnets are among the best sonnets of the Qajar era. As one of the poets of this period, he sought to refine the Persian language from foreign words, using original Persian words in most of his poems. His poems are in various poetic forms, such as ghazal, ode, quatrain, and stanza, as well as satires. Notably, his satires are a reflection of the poet's anger towards the chaotic social situation of his society. There are some critical poems left by him, which are mainly a satire of the oppressors of the time. His works mixed with sharp and reckless jokes expose the oppression of the powerful bullies of the era. He shows the corruption of that time in his rude words and insults. In addition to satires, which are the most interesting part of his poems, he has some beautiful sonnets in the usual style of the time. There are also letters from him to friends, relatives and scholars of the era. He was not familiar with or interested in the Arabic language. He hated writing in Arabic and was fond of writing in pure Persian. Yaghma also wrote religious poems, including elegies in the description of the Karbala event, which are read in the ceremony of mourning and ritual chest-beating during the Ashura decade (Arianpour, 2008).

### **Shibani**

Fathullah Khan Shibani (1204/1825-1269/1890), known as Bunasr Shibani, is a writer and poet of Khorasani and Iraqi style of the 13th century, who at first praised Muhammad Shah and Nasser al-Din Shah Qajar. But in the last two decades of his life, when his property was looted, he came to Tehran to sue, and when no one heard his cry, he started criticizing the situation of the Qajar court. He can be considered the first critical poet of the Qajar period. He was one of the eloquent speakers who had a strong character and wrote poetry like the poets of the Khorasani style. As a master in both prose and poetry, he has masterfully expressed

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<sup>1</sup> This title was given to him for the reason that he had composed many ghazals in praise of the Prophet (PBUH) like the famous Arab poet 'Hassan ibn-e Thabit'.

words. At the end of his life, he lived in Tehran in a beautiful garden house on Shibani Street (now, Zhian-panah) in Amirieh, Tehran, which was built in the style of a monastery. He died due to a stroke at the age of 65 in Tehran and was buried in the same house. Prince Arfa al-Daulah, one of the Iranian diplomats of the late Qajar era and early Pahlavi era, built a tomb for him in the same place and published a selection of his works in Istanbul (Nikouhemmat, 1967).

### **Mahmoud Khan Malek al-Sho'ara**

Mahmud Khan Malek al-Sho'ara (1813–1894) well-known as Mahmoud Khan-e Saba<sup>2</sup> (Faza'ili, 1983) was an Iranian poet laureate, court painter and statesman in the Qajar era (Floor, 1999). In addition to writing poetry, he was a talented painter and master of calligraphy. He was also skilled in painting on ornamental boxes such as calligraphy pen cases, sculpting and some other fields of handicrafts, but he is more famous for his watercolor and oil paintings (Pakbaz, 2014). Mahmoud Khan made detailed and documented pictures of the buildings of his time. The delicate and bright quality of some of these works was new, and his dot painting style was also unprecedented but the peak of his creativity can be seen in the oil painting known as Stensakh (around 1272/1893). This work was not only a new and unique work at that time, it can even be considered a prototype for contemporary modernist painting. Among his other works are the Badgir Mansion (1278/1899), the View of Almasiye Street (1288/1909), the Golestan Palace (1297/1918), and the Court of the Threshold of Imam Reza Holy Shrine (1303/1924) (Pakbaz, 2014). Most of these works can be seen in the Golestan Palace Museum.

There existed some other poets whose roles were not as significant as the mentioned poets, and thus they were not mentioned in the present study. All together, the poetry in the Qajar era passed without any significant change or development, or distinct features. Only in this era, something which is most brilliant is the fluency and sweetness of "Qaani" poems and the simplicity of his language in describing and simulating in most of his poems that greatly influenced the language and words of the poets after him.

### **Constitutional Era: The Reign of Muzaffaruddin Shah**

The era of Muzaffaruddin Shah (1874-1926) is the time when new political thoughts and patriotic and national sentiments spread in the country. In terms of style and method, poets followed those of the old poets, that is, classical poetry, but in meaning, gradually, principles of patriotism, promotion and praise of science, and mention of new industries and advanced tools were included in the scope of poetry. In reality, this time can be considered as a turning point wherein Iran was fast moving from traditionalism to modernism. During this time, newspapers and magazines were established, new schools and elementary schools were opened, and commuting to Islamabad, Petersburg, and Western Europe became common. With the introduction of railways, telegraphs, telephones, automobiles and many new industries, a sense of wonder regarding European science and industry was formed in the minds of people. Consequently, the same feeling was also found later towards western literature and art.

After getting to know the European nations and comparing their situation with them, the people and the educated classes got fed up with dictatorship and authoritarian government and demanded a democratic and law-based government. All the issues mentioned above directly or indirectly affected the poetry and its content in this period. In the era of

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<sup>2</sup> Saba was his grandfather's nickname, given wrongly to him. According to the documents, specifically, a signature and a handwriting of his under one of his paintings 'Stensakh', his nickname has been probably 'Sharif'.

Constitutional Revolution of Iran, which lasted from the beginning of its announcement in 1905 until the coup of Reza Khan (the First Pahlavi) in around 1921, the foundations of tyranny were shaken and the constitutional government was apparently established. Organizations and ministries were established in the country in the European style or at least in imitation of the Ottomans. The number and volume of publishing daily, weekly and monthly periodicals increased, and also, the number of school students increased, and the translation of French<sup>3</sup>, Turkish, and sometimes English and Arabic books became common.

With the direct involvement of the people in the affairs of the government, the poets started to criticize the governments and protested against the government offices, and in their poems spoke about the social conditions of different classes, the good old customs and habits and the need to preserve them and change the improper ones. As a matter of fact, the poets tried to establish freedom and help the formation of the constitutional system. The content analysis of the poems clearly proves that the poets have taken a critical approach to the status quo of the time. Notably, the contemporary developments of literature, particularly, the poetry in Iran has had many factors, many of which have been created in the constitutional era. In short, the social factors that have influenced the contemporary literary changes can be considered as follows:

- 1- The wide spread of literacy or the ability to read and write compared to previous centuries
- 2- The emergence of the printing industry and the growth of the books of the predecessors and those of the contemporaries, along with a large number of newspapers and magazines.
- 3- The translation of the works of other nations of the world, which were abundantly available to scholars
- 4- The increasing communication between the intellectuals of Iran and those of the developed countries, making these people familiar with some sciences around the world
- 5- The apparent transformation of the governance, although for a short period of time, under the title of the constitutional system as the greatest manifestation of the new European civilization caused a transformation in public thoughts and attitudes, which ultimately affected the Persian literature and art as well.
- 6- The emergence of new arts and industries that required a new mind and language, and naturally, with the entry of this new language into the field of literature, it left a noticeable impact.
- 7- the last but not the least, political and social developments such as the change of government systems, the occurrence of the first and second world wars and the entrance of foreign military forces in Iran, each of which, in turn, has affected the thoughts and spirits of the men of literature and art.

In a period that can be called Persian Constitutional Revolution from the viewpoint of history and the Era of Iraj from the viewpoint of literature, perhaps many poems are not very valuable by the standards we have known so far; but, instead, these poems express exactly the same mission that a poet has in the society. The most famous poets of the Era of Iraj are Adib al-Mamalek Farahani, Iraj Mirza, Aref Qazvini, Mirzadeh, Malek al-Sho'ara Bahar, Nasim Shomal, and Abulqasem Lahouti. To understand the situation of this era in the best way, it seems essential to get to know the selected and distinguished poets. Therefore, some of the most important poets of the time are mentioned as follows.

### **Adib al-Mamalek Farahani**

As cited in Encyclopædia Iranica "Adib al-Mamalek Farahani (1860-1917) may be regarded as a major link between late Qajar and constitutional period poets. His verse deals both with

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<sup>3</sup> At the time, French was the lingua franca of the world.



traditional subjects and with many new themes indicative of the political and intellectual awakening in Iran during the late 19th and early 20th century. He was perhaps one of the first Iranian poets to voice patriotic sentiments; his many poems with political themes feature such topical events as the inauguration of the National Assembly in 1906, the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, the bombardment of the National Assembly in 1908, and the restoration of the constitution the next year. His concern went beyond the cause of national freedom and extended to the welfare of Islam and the goal of Islamic unity. Adīb-al-mamālek's work adheres in form to classical models, the qaṣīda and qeṭ'a being the most common. He shows a predilection for Arabic borrowings and often makes allusions to persons and events of classical Islamic history" (Encyclopædia Iranica, 2014, p. 459).

In brief, Farahani started his work with eulogies, but with the emergence of the wave of freedom, he served the community and produced some of the best poems of this period. He tried to awaken national feelings, freedom and patriotism in Iranians. Of course, his language is literary and similar to the poets of the past centuries and is not familiar to the ears of ordinary people. Some of his verses, yet, were popular with the people of the time.

### **Iraj Mirza**

Prince Iraj Mirza<sup>4</sup> nicknamed 'Saadi of the Time'<sup>5</sup> was a descendant of Fath Ali Shah Qajar who was born in Tabriz in 1253/1874 and died in Tehran in 1304/1926. He had been given the title of Fakhr-al-Sho'ara (The Honor of the Poets), which he does not seem to have cared for or ever used, although he did serve for some time as the official poet of the crown prince Mozaffar-al-Din Mirza [Mozaffar ad-Din Shah] (Encyclopædia Iranica, 2012). Iraj cannot be considered as part of any literary group. He gained an astonishing success in every type of poetry he entered. He always tried to show the daily life of contemporary Iran as it is. In his poems, there are no ambiguous and dark points nor abstract and mystical thoughts. His thoughts originate from the existing facts in their various forms. He is not a man of action and presence in various social scenes, but he is a patriotic poet who loves his nation from the bottom of his heart and is fascinated by social justice. In his poems, democratic thoughts have been raised and deception and hypocrisy, poverty and ignorance of people, ugly habits, superstitions and religious prejudices have been discussed and criticized. From an artistic and literary point of view, Iraj is the most eloquent Persian poet and satirist of our time and the secret of his success is his simple language. His tendency towards simplicity and closeness to the colloquial language of the people, in the poetry of this period, which is a kind of reaction against the demanding language of the previous poets and in fact a bold uprising against the principles and literary regulations of the predecessors, opens a new chapter in Iranian poetry literature whose beginning is associated with the name of Iraj, and he should be considered one of the main leaders of this revolution in poetry, and that is why the constitutional period is called the Era of Iraj in literary terms.

Linguistic innovations and coining the terms and new words and "verbs of his own" and his "application of Arabic morphological rules to Persian words is one of his favorite ploys, creating a scope for satire" (Encyclopædia Iranica, 2012, pp. 202-204).

### **Aref Qazvini**

Abul Qasim Aref born in Qazvin in 1259/1882 known as 'Arif Qazvini' was a great poet, singer, lyricist, musician, tasnif (ballad) composer and revolutionary. He is the first Iranian who consciously and vigilantly used tasnif to serve the revolution and the awakening of the

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<sup>4</sup> also known as Prince Iraj, Iraj Mirza Yazdi, and Iraj mirza

<sup>5</sup> also titled Jalal-ol-Mamalek

nation and turned it into a weapon to crush tyranny and reactionary. His compositions were simple, but at the same time strong, poetic and very rhythmic. His *tasnifs* were popular until the period of Reza Shah, and Mirzadeh Eshghi and Malek-al-Sho'ara Bahar also followed them. His *ghazals*, which followed the style of old poets', are also full of revolutionary enthusiasm. He died in exile in Hamadan in 1312/1934 in poverty.

### **Mirzadeh Eshqi**

Sayyid Muhammad Reza Kurdistani, a political poet, journalist, and a playwright of the constitutional era, who used Mirzadeh Eshqi as his pen name, was born in Hamedan in 1273/1894 and was assassinated during the prime ministership of Reza Shah in Tehran in 1303/1924 while he was the director of the Twentieth Century Newspaper. In his works, he always shouted for liberty and freedom-seeking.

He had a complete mastery of French language, and for a while lived in Istanbul where he created some of his famous works. After his return to Iran, he aggressively criticized the Iranian political system of the time. Reflecting his nationalistic spirit, he wrote the opera 'Rastakhiz-e Shahryaran' (Resurrection of the Monarchs) (Arianpour, 2008).

Despite his lack of complete familiarity with ancient Persian literature, he shows his emotions and impressions of love and natural scenery with passion, creativity, simplicity, sincerity and mastery. His poems are full of protest and rebellion against social injustice. This is why he showed interest and compassion for the poor and strong hatred for the rich in his poems. He is considered one of the most important poets of the constitutional era who used the element of "national identity" to create motivation and awareness among the masses (Qa'id, 2011, p.9).

### **Other Poets of Constitutional Era**

Mohammad Taqi Bahar (1265 /1886 -1330 /1951) known as Malek-al-Sho'ara Bahar, or Malek osh-Sho'ara Bahar / *mælikɔːʃɔː'æraː bæhaːr* / whom the present study will introduce in detail later) is one of the great poets of this period, who can be counted as the last great classical poet of Iran and the last poet of the Persian language. He is the poet of two periods of Iranian history, namely constitutional era and Pahlavi era. In the constitutional era, although in his twentieth, he was a clergyman preaching, he continued as a literarian, and he should be considered a liberal politician, and a revolutionary, philanthropist, freedom-seeking journalist, and literary scholar.

Sayyid Ashrafeddin Hosseini, also known as "Gilani" (Afacan, 2021, p.123), with a pen name of Nasim-e Shomal (Northern Breeze), was the most famous and the most popular poet of the constitutional revolution era. He was famous among people as Mr. Nasim-e Shomal, a nickname that was actually derived from a weekly newspaper with the same name that was established by him. He was a lover of Iran's freedom and progress, a supporter of the working classes and an enemy of ignorance and oppression. His poems are very simple and sometimes in a slang style. He has translated or adapted many of these poems from the works of Mirza Ali Akbar Taherzadeh known as Saber, a Caucasian modernist writer and poet. However, his mastery in these translations and compilations, and his sincere struggles to awaken and stimulate the people, are worthy of praise.

Abulqasem Lahouti was another poet of this era and a native of Kermanshah. He was one of the pioneers and campaigners of modernity in Persian poetry who used simple wording and tried to create new layouts for Persian poetry.

### **Pahlavi Era: The Reign of Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah**

From Isfand 1299/ March 1921 to Shahrivar 1320/ September 1941, when Reza Shah (Reza Khan) was on the political stage, was called the dictatorship period. This period is labeled Pahlavi Era in classical poetry of Iran. It is the time when the principles of Nazism and fascism and in general the principles of totalitarian governments were established throughout the world and a few dictators ruled over millions of people. In Iran, the movement towards freedom, democracy and national sovereignty was stopped and destroyed as well. The central authoritarian government monitored the country's borders to the farthest point and imprisoned or killed freedom seekers. The reflection of such a situation in the literary works was that there was little criticism and if there was a poem, it was praise of the dictator as it has been and it is the case with all dictatorial governments. Due to these factors that existed inside Iran, the publication of poems in Persian-language magazines and newspapers abroad spread and made many people of the overseas familiar with the culture of Iran, the pioneers of which are called orientologists, such as Theodor Nöldeke and Fritz Wolff in Germany, Edward FitzGerald, Edward Granville Browne and Reynold Alleyne Nicholson in England, Clément Huart and Henri Massé in France, and Evgenii Eduardovich Bertels and Daniel Komissarov in Russia. They have been effective in the spread of research and attention to Persian literature by both Iranians and Westerners.

As mentioned, in the Qajar era, with the efforts of poets such as Iraj Mirza in bringing the language of poetry closer to simple and everyday language, a significant change in the language of poetry began, whose reflection can be observed in the poems of poets such as Mirzadeh Eshqi and Aref Qazvini in the constitutional era, and Mohammad Farrokhi Yazdi and Iqbal Lahori (Muhammad Iqbal) in Pahlavi era, and in the poems of a large number of the poets in the following decades.

In addition to language, the poets of this period drew freedom and general social concepts into their poetry in order to get to know the West and observe social developments in that system and took steps in this field. Poets such as Gholamreza Rashid-Yasemi, Seyed Karim Amiri Firuzkuhi, Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda, Jalaleddin Homa'i, Habib Yaghma'i and Ahmad Golchin-Ma'ani are often not famous for their poetry, although sometimes they also have social and beautiful poems. Other poets of this era such as Mehdi Hamidi Shirazi, Hossein Pezhman Bakhtiari, Ahmad Soheili Khansari, Rahi Mo'ayyeri, Emad Khorasani and Mahmoud Farrokh-Khorasani, etc. also often experimented in the field of ghazals, in a way that their ghazals were just bound to their own literary circles and associations, not releasing their literature, and thus their ghazals were not beyond the scope of the works of the great Persian lyric poets. It is also noteworthy that, apart from a few such as Hamidi Shirazi, Rahi Mo'ayyeri, Pezhman Bakhtiari and Soheili Khansari, it can be said that the others have not displayed very distinct poems. Even, these few mentioned poets have not found a place for maneuvering compared to prominent poets such as Malek-al-Sho'ara Bahar, Parvin E'tesami and Shahryar. In this part of the article, some of the most important recent characters mentioned above are introduced, each separately.

### **Malek-al-Sho'ara Bahar**

Mirza Mohammad Taqi, nicknamed Malek-al-Sho'ara; i.e., 'King of Poets' (Poet Laureate) with the pen name of 'Bahar' (spring) was born in Mashhad in 1265/1886. His ancestors migrated from Kashan to Khorasan at the beginning of Qajar rule. In addition to studying in Mashhad theological (Seminary) schools, he also acquired figures of speech and some knowledge and techniques in prose and poetry from his father. He was given the title of Malek-al-Sho'ara by Mozaffar ad-Din Shah Qajar and received allowance from him. From the



beginning of the formation of the constitutional movement, he was one of the first rank fighters in Khorasan and then in Tehran. He first published Nobahar newspaper in Mashhad and then continued publishing it in Tehran and served four terms as a representative of the National Assembly. During the period of the First Pahlavi, he was disrespected and exiled to Isfahan, but during the period of the Second Pahlavi, Mohammed Reza Shah, he received some attention and finally died in 1330/1951.

In the field of poetry and prose, he is a prominent professor. In fact, ode writing is one of his most projecting arts in poetry, and among his contemporaries, no one has such power and style in composing odes. Sometimes the verses of his poetry are to a great extent powerful in terms of theme, imagery, similes, metaphors, and the tone of speech. He had learned a lot about Iran's history and loved it because of his patriotism. In his works, a lot has been said about the ups and downs of the Iranian nation. He cooperated some of his friends including Saeed Nafisi, the writer and poet, Gholamreza Rashid-Yasemi, the poet and historian, Abbas Iqbal Ashtiani, and Abdolhossein Teymourtash in founding The Literary Association of the academy (Anjoman-e Adabi-ye Daneshkadeh). The mentioned figures and some of his contemporaries were consciously interested in their homeland and understood the talents and needs of their nation and country very well. This interest can be seen in most of Bahar's poems as well. The qasida 'Damavandiyeh' which displays pessimism about the social environment of Tehran, is considered one of the beautiful patriotic poems of Persian literature. The name is taken from Damavand, the highest mountain in Iran, wherein he introduces and admires it as a symbol of nationalism. The poem is also famous by the name 'The Chained White Beast'.

'Owl of War' is his last ode and in fact the last important Persian ode, wherein he presents the owl's cry as a bad news of the beginning of every war and he wishes then all wars everywhere be stopped and people live in peace for good. In addition to qasida, he has many pleasant poems in other poetic formats, like 'Dalal and Zalal'<sup>6</sup>, 'Fountain and Stone', 'Four Sermons', and beautiful ballads one of which is 'Bird of Dawn'.

### **Parvin E'tesami**

Rakhshandeh E'tesami known as Parvin E'tesami was born in March 1285/1907 in Tabriz and came to Tehran with her father as a child. In addition to studying at the American School for Girls, she learned Persian and Arabic literary knowledge from her father. In 1313/1934, she married her cousin and went to Kermanshah, but this relationship did not last more than two months. She died in Tehran in 1320/1941 when she was only 34 after suffering from typhoid fever for 12 days.

E'tesami started composing at the age of seven. Her poetic power, extraordinary talent and rich eloquence have surprised others and caused some people to have misplaced doubts in attributing the poems to her. Her diwan has qasidas, mathnawis, allegories, moqatta'at<sup>7</sup>, mofradat<sup>8</sup> and some ghazals. Quoting from Dehkhoda Dictionary, Mohammad Taqi Bahar wrote about E'tesami's poems that her diwan is a combination of the two styles, verbal and spiritual, mixed with an independent style and one of them is the style of Khorasan poets, especially Nasser Khosrow (also spelled Nasir Khusraw) and the other is the style of Iraqi and Persian poets, especially Saadi Shirazi, and in terms of meanings, it is very similar to and a

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<sup>6</sup> Translated as 'Seduction and Deviation'

<sup>7</sup> fragments; short poems with light rhythm

<sup>8</sup> plural of fard or mofrad (also called takbayt); an old Persian poetry style that consists of one verse (equivalent to two stanzas). In some cases, it may reach two verses, each verse having a separate rhyme. Most takbayts/mofradat have become proverbial.

mixture of the thoughts and imaginations of sage people and mystics. In her qit'as<sup>9</sup>, she uses the method of debate through which she spreads advice and admonitions, shows the virtues of morality, mentions the truth of the world, sympathizes the poor, expresses the necessity of acquiring knowledge and encourages hope. She has used all these topics, sermons and wisdom in her poems. In her poems, motherly soul, tenderness, and affection prevails, which distinguishes her poems from those of other poets. As an example, her mathnawi 'Lotf-e Haq' (The Favor of God) is very famous which is about the throwing of Prophet Moses into the water by his mother. Among her ghazals, the ghazal 'Pakdelan' (God Seekers; Seekers of Truth) is one of the most distinguished and worthy of praise. Regarding her poems, it can be said that they are all so beautiful that it is very difficult to choose the best one. Some of her more famous qit'as are The Journey of Tears, The Kaaba of the Heart, The Gem of Tears, The Eyes and the Heart, The Free Spirit, The Sea of the Light, The Gem and the Stone, and Drunk and Sober.

Since the allegorical stories, debates and in other words fables are the important field of E'tesami's poetic art and despite the long history of this style<sup>10</sup> in Persian literature, it can be said that she was also influenced by western literature due to her mastery of English language. For instance, the qit'a 'The Gem's Value' is similar to 'The Cock and the Jewel' by Aesop, or 'The Cock and the Pearl' by la Fontaine, and the qit'a 'The Nightingale and the Ant' is similar to 'Cicada and Ant, by Jean de la Fontaine, and the qit'as 'God's Weaver' and 'The Sea of the Light' are similar to Walt Whitman's 'A Noiseless Patient Spider' and Arthur Brisbane's 'The Spider's Determination and Vivacity'. In all these and similar works, however, her poetry is not an imitation, but a kind of impression and good adaptation is reflected in it, displaying the independence of her thought and the creativity of her mind.

### Shahriar

Seyyed Mohammad-Hossein Behjat Tabrizi known as Shahriar, a patriotic poet, a talented calligrapher and a dexterous setar player, was born in Tabriz in 1285/1906. He came to Tehran in 1300/1921 and completed his secondary education in this city and then entered the medical school. But shortly before the end of the course, he left it and found a job as a notary public and then as clerk in Keshavarzi Bank. After staying in Khorasan for four years, he lived in Tehran until 1332/1953 and then in Tabriz.

Indubitably, Shahriar had a brilliant talent in poetry. A sensitive and poetic spirit is seen throughout his poems. His poetry, in any ground, benefits from a dynamic and creative imagination and has a noticeable tendency towards modernity and innovation. Poems written in commemoration of Nima Yooshij<sup>11</sup> such as 'Legendary Poet', 'Flight of the Heavenly Bird' and 'Two Heavenly Birds' and the transformations that he made in some of his poems, in the structure, style, interpretation and language of the poem, such as the poems 'Message to Einstein', 'Oh my mother' and 'Mummy', the difference between his imagination and perceptions in traditional layouts and styles such as the qasidas 'The Legend of the Night', and 'Symphony of the Sea' and many other aspects of his poems, all and all, indicate his talent and courage in experimenting different poetry styles. Shahriar has included various themes in

<sup>9</sup> plural of qit'a; a form of monorhyme poetry in Persian about a sweet story, a moral issue, congratulation, condolence, praise, satire, and the like. The number of verses in a qit'a is at least 2 and the maximum is usually 15, but sometimes it reaches 50 verses or more. It is mostly used in the expression of moral and educational content, debate and letter writing.

<sup>10</sup> This style is seen in some poems of Unsuri Balkhi, Asadi Tusi, Mu'izzi Nishapuri, Anvari Abivardi, Nizami Ganjavi, Saadi Shirazi, and Salman Savaji.

<sup>11</sup> the father of modern Persian poetry (i.e., New Poetry; She'r-e Now)

his poetry and as a result, sometimes trivial words, combinations, and themes have also been penetrated in his poetry, creating inconsistency in the context of the speech, which has been objected and criticized by some men of poetry.

Most of his poems are ghazals, and since he was frustrated in love, his fiery love and his failure in love became the prelude to the manifestation of mystical and divine love in his mind, which provided the basis for his fame in this regard. Although among his contemporaries, he is the most skilled in ghazal and is close to Saadi and Hafez; the beauty and harmony of the language of Saadi's ghazals or the comprehensive, multi-dimensional and evocative language of Hafez's ghazals are not seen in his ghazals, and compared to them, he has a simple and common language. Some of his famous and beautiful ghazals are 'Why so late?', 'Sooz va Saaz'<sup>12</sup>, 'Sorrowful Flute', 'I beg you', 'A flower is beautiful from all sides', 'Frustration Moan', 'Awaiting', 'Gazelle and Ghazal', 'Prison of Life', 'One Night with the Moon', 'My Setar' and 'Ali Ey Homay-e-Rahmat'<sup>13</sup>.

Shahriar has not shown much power and skill in the field of qasidas, but has some beautiful masnavis such as 'Sunset of Nishapur', 'The Legend of the Night', 'Symphony of the Sea' and 'Persepolis'<sup>14</sup>. His local and very famous poem in Azerbaijani language mixed with Persian 'Haydar Baba-ye Salam'<sup>15</sup> is also worthy of consideration. Shariar died in Tabriz in 1367/1988. The day of his death is named National Poetry Day in Iran.

### Other Poets of Pahlavi Era

Mohammed Farrokhi Yazdi (1268/1889-1318/1939) was a freedom-loving and democrat poet and journalist of the early constitutional era, the editor in chief of the periodicals of Iran's Communist Party, including Toofan [Storm] newspaper, and also a representative of the people of Yazd in the seventh term of the National Assembly. He came to Tehran in 1295/1916 and after some time published Toofan newspaper. He was a social poet and a supporter of the working classes of the society and sought the development of the nation, but during the first Pahlavi, that is, Reza Shah's period, he was imprisoned for the crime of seeking freedom and repeated protests and was killed in prison.

Hossein Pezhman Bakhtiari's poetry is almost coherent and strongly structured, but in terms of subject and content, it often indicates despair.

Mohammed Hossein Mo'ayyeri nicknamed 'Rahi Mo'ayyeri' also found good acceptance and public attention due to his ghazals, which mostly have the style, language and meanings of the poets of the past.

Mehdi Hamidi and Sohaili Khansari also left behind many works that show their powerful poetic art.

After the Iranian Revolution in 1357/1979, traditional poetry has continued its life and many poets have continued the path of previous poets until today. Of course, among them, some poets such as Muhammad Ali Mo'allem-e Damghani, Hamid Sabzevari, Hushang Ebtehaj, Sepideh Kashani, Ali Mousavi Garmarodi and Mushfiq Kashani have presented more mature and elegant poems.

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<sup>12</sup> Translated as 'Pricking Pain and Musical Instrument'

<sup>13</sup> O Ali! The bird of bliss, what a portent of God thou art. ( Referring to Ali (a), the first Imam of the Shiites)

<sup>14</sup> Persepolis (also called Takht-e Jamshid or Throne of Jamshid) is the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (c. 550–330 BC) situated in Fars province of Iran, and it is one of the key Iranian Cultural heritages. The ruins of Persepolis is declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1979.

<sup>15</sup> Translated as 'Greetings to Heydarbaba'; In this poem, Shahriar addresses Heydarbaba [ a small mountain in his village] and gives a wonderful description of nature and its people, and sometimes expresses his feelings about the past and present situation in a simple and unpretentious language that is close to the popular language of the common people.

## Conclusion

The study and reflection in the contemporary classical poetry of Iran can be seen in three historical periods namely Qajar era, constitutional era (Iraj era), and Pahlavi era with three literary approaches, which indicates changes and developments in this type of poetry and moving from a totally classical poetry to a sort of neoclassical poetry as the combination of classical poetry with new poetry and moving from a rather neutral or even praising style towards the kings to a social style in favor of people. According to the present study, many factors such as the autocracy and dictatorship of the rulers, literacy, communication and interaction with other countries, especially with the Western world and especially with the scientists of other countries, constitutional revolution, world wars, the emergence and growth of translation, and the growth of industries in the last two centuries have left their effects on the contemporary classical poetry of Iran. It should not be neglected that the role of poets as the bearers of such changes through their poems is crucial. As a matter of fact, as it is inferred from the study, Persian classical poets have left a deep effect on the society through their influential poems. Notably, classical poetry, while maintaining stability and adherence to its formal principles, has always shown its dynamic content and has never abandoned its mission and commitment to educate people. In fact, committed poets, as creators of classical poetry, have never given up their mission and commitment in guiding mankind towards a better and healthier life and worldly and hereafter happiness.

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