MODERNIZATION OF PERSIAN POETRY

The present century is significant for bringing about a national revival throughout Asia. The process has been swift and often revolutionary. Nations, long subjugated have been stirred to a new sense of freedom. Not only has this awakening produced vast social and political changes but it has also affected the intellectual life of these nations whose contemporary poetry provides a most vivid expression of this development. When talking of modern Persian poetry the mind invariably turns first to the richness of its past.¹

Though poetry was certainly written and sung in Persia long before that country was invaded and converted to Islam by the Arabs during the seventh century A.D. The term “Persian Poetry” is customarily used to indicate the practice of the poetic art since the Muslim conquest. It is in this sense that the term is interpreted herein. It must also be marked by way of commentary that poetry has been written in post conquest Persia not only in Persia itself, but also in Turkey, Afganistan, India and now Pakistan and some central Asian republic of the Soviet Union. It look two to three centuries for Persian, an Indo-Ariyan language, to shed most of

its ancient inflections and to assimilate those semitic elements of Arabic origin which enriched its vocabulary and modified its rhetoric. A considerable quantity of fragments from the verse of this transitional period has survived. However, the first major poet of Persian literature, incidentally the greatest of this kind was Firdausi (d. 1020) author of the epic *Shah Nama* (Book of kings). This immense work in some 60,000 couplets rehearses the legendary history of the ancient king of Persia, and was based upon material that goes back to the pre-Muslim period. It is a true masterpiece for the great breadth of its canvas is matched by brilliant portraiture of individual incident of which the best known recounts the tragic story of Sohrab and Rustam, a theme familiar to readers of English poetry through its treatment by Mathew Arnold. All Persian meters with a single exception were derived from Arabic prosody and are quantitative.

*Chu – nuh māh: bigzasht: bar dukht – I – Shah*

*Yaki Kudak āmad chu Tābanda mah*

*Chu Khandan shud ā chihra; Kard*

*Ura Nam: Tahmina Suhrab: Kard*

(When nine slow-circling months had roll’d away, Sweet-smiling pleasure hailed the brightening day,
A wonderous boy Tuhmina’s tears supprest and lull’d the sorrow of her heart to rests to him,
Predestined to be great and brave the name of Sohrab his tender mother gave).
The rhyming couplet (Mathnva'i) had been used in Arabic poetry, but was not very popular with a people who greatly preferred to write in monorhyme. The epic though attempted by a few Arab poets proved alien to the literary genius of the Arabs. The Persians made these two distinctive contributions to poetic form – the perfecting of the rhyming couplet and its exploitation in extensive compositions.²

Persian poetry, which adopted the Arabic system of prosody, (Aruz) began sporadically in East Persia in ninth century. The earliest extant Persian verse belongs to the Samanid period (A.D. 874-999). In scattered works of some early poets such as Vasif and Shahid-e- Balkhi a mixture of Arabic and Persian is found. With few exception the earliest poems are lacking in literary merit in comparison with the poetry of later ages. Their significance lies only in their antiquity. The longest poem belonging to this period is the Daneshname of a certain physician called Maysari, a unique copy of which is preserved in the Bibliotheque National in Paris. The best author of the late ninth century was Shahid – e – Balkhi, who is looked upon as a poet and a philosopher. By the tenth century A.D. Persian had become a polished and melodies medium, proof of this statement is to be found in the extant poems of Rudaqi (d – 940). He is known as the “father of Persian poetry”. He was a Versatile and

² Alex Priminger, editor Frank J. Warnke, O.B. Hardison Junior Associate editors: Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics
apparently prolific poet. He is said to have written poems in the form of the *Qasida* (purposes poem), *Qita* (fragment), *Masnavi* (long Narrative poem) and *Ghazal* (lyric). He was the first known poet to have used the latter form. Some seven thousand couplets only, comprising eulogies, wine songs and love poems are extant. In his eulogies Rudaqi, unlike later poets, seldom indulges in exaggerations but he does, his poetical conceits are not lacking in beauty. His wine songs are simple and contain some attractive similes. The following is an example in praise of wine:

*Be pâki ândar jam manand – e – golâbasti;*

*Be khushi, gui ândar dide-ye-bi-khab khabasti,*

*Agar may Nisti yeksar hameh alam kharasasti,*

*Agâr dar kalbad jan ta nadidasti sharabasti.*

(With regard to purity one would say that it is like rose water in the goblet,
With regard to happiness one would say that it is like sleep to the sleepless eye.
If there is no wine, all hearts are utterly broken,
If thou hast not sun the soul in the body (behold) it is wine.)

In this love poem Rudaqi reflects on the shortness of life and deceitful nature of the world.

*In jehan pak khab kerdar ast;*

*An shenasad ke delsh bidar ast.*
Rudaki’s major work was a Masnavi version of the *Kalila u Dimna*, of which only a few fragments remain. The chief characteristics of Ruduki’s poetry are its lucidity and clarity; and more than a thousand year after his death, he is still read and appreciated.\(^3\)

Persian literature is a multi-dimensional in its scope, and there is a vast treasure of Persian poetry.\(^4\) The development of classical poetry is marked by two most outstanding trends, the panegyric and the mystics. The former emerges in neo-Persian poetry with the beginning of its known history. In fact, it appears that Persian verse was already familiar with its trend. According to Shamsuddin Qays the songs of Barbad were also devoted to the eulogy of Khusru Parviz.\(^5\) The excessive abundance of the panegyric verse can be explained by the fact that right up to the beginning of the present century, the poetry like all other professional people, was drawn to the royal court where he hoped to find recognition of his talent in terms of silver and gold. In return, he showed his gratitude by singing the praise of his royal master. The period extending roughly from the beginning of the tenth up to the twelfth century represents the highest development of panegyric verse in Persian poetry, and it is

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\(^3\) Guide to Eastern Literature, pp. 113-114.
\(^4\) Manu, Malik: *Persian Poetry from Classic to Modern*, p.3.
\(^5\) Al – Mujam, p. 170.
precisely in this period that the greatest court patronage was accorded to the poets. The centuries which followed mark the decline of panegyric verse and although it continued to occupy a prominent place in literature for quite a time, it never succeeded in reaching the height of its former grandeur. The decline might have been the result of corresponding decline in court patronage which is suggested by different sources.6

The mystic and the didactic trend in Persian poetry was initiated and developed generally by those who did not have any affiliation with the court in their capacity as poets. It represented a reaction against the insincerity of court poetry which is borne out by Dawalatsah’s accounts regarding the conversion of Sanai from a panegyrist to a mystic. After the panegyric, the mystic and didactic trend occupies the second important place in Persian poetry. The few eminent names it produced have perhaps contributed more to the enrichment of Persian poetry than the vast number of poets who have flooded it with their unconvincing and highly artificial eulogia verse.

None since Firdausi has successfully composed a long and discursive epic on the scale of the Shahnama though he has had not a few imitators. Epic of lesser magnitude and with more restricted range have been written by many author, some of great brilliance. Firdausi, himself is

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6 T.S., p. 80.
doubtfully credited with one such idyll on the theme of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife; several later writers attempted the same subject, but the most admired treatment is that of Jami (d-1492). The best esteemed of the idyllists is Nizami (d. ca. 1203) who composed five minor epics, the longest being upon the legend of Alexander the great; he also retold the Arab desert romance of Majnun and Laila, while ancient Persia provided him with the heroic themes of two other poems. His writings like Firdausi’s Shahnama inspired Persian artists to paint their finest miniatures. Jami composed in all seven idylls, interpreting as mystical allegories such familiar stories as the tragic of love of Salaman and Absal. His Nephew Hatifi (d-1521) wrote an epic on the conquest of Tamerlane and his idyll Laila u Majmun also enjoys a certain popularity.

The romantic idyll, like the epic was composed in rhyming couplets, but the poet had a variety of meters from which to choose though only one meter might be used in a given poem. Didactic verse also followed the epic form and indeed sometime reached truly epic proportion, notably in the mystic Mathnavi of Jalal Uddin Rumi (d. 1273). This famous poem, venerated almost equally with the Quran describes in a wealth of anecdotes the Sout’s Quest after union with God. It runs to about 25,000 couplets and is composed in the ramal meter.
Hear, how you read in Sadly, pleasing tales
Departed bliss and present woe be waits!
With me from natives banks untimely torn
Love warbling youths and soft eyed mourn).

Rumi’s chief predecessor in applying the epic form to mystical purpose were Sanai (d. 1150) who wrote among other things a remarkable, ‘piligrim’s progress’ and Farid-al-din Attar (d-1230), a voluminous author whose most celebrated idyll is the “Bird-Parliament” translated in epitome by Edward Fitzgerald. A more commonplace and popular note was struck by Sa’adi (d-1292) in his Bustan which makes a pair with his prose and verse miscellany, The Gulistan. Both books are admired in simple yet elegant language. The Bustan contains the virtues of ethics and morals, principle of politics and administrations, code of conduct for life tinged with scientific, mystical and divine thought in simple and impressive style. Whereas the Gulistan is the poet’s ripe experience and matured wisdom which he gathered during the thirty years travel in Asia and Africa. It also deals with ethics, politics state
administration and sociology. The tradition was continued in modern times by Sir Muhammad Iqbal (d.1938) of Lahore, whose *secrets of the self* and *mysteries of selflessness* express attractively their author’s religio-political philosophy, he also composed many graceful lyrics which proclaim his indebtedness to *Rumi*.

The formal *Panegyric* (Qasida), copied from its Arabic model, has been popular throughout Persian literary history chiefly as an instrument for courting the favour or appeasing the displeasure of kings and princes. Poets have also employed this form canvass religious, mystical or ethical, ideals to describe the beauties of nature or to commemorate an interesting event to congratulate a patron or a friend upon some good fortune or to console with him in bereavement. The *Panegyric* (Qasida) may extend to as many as hundred couplets or more. The opening verse of the Qasida is called *Matalee* while the concluding verse in which the poet mentions his *nom de plume* (Takhallus) is called *Maktee*, all having the same rhyme. It is thus taken as a chance to display craftsmanship and virtuosity, qualities which appeal greatly to the primary audience but largely Vanish in translation. Hyperboles, rhetorical embellishments and verbal conceits are the accepted stock in trade of the skillful *ode-maker*. The meters

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employed very considerably and there is a preference for the long swinging line.

The court poets who have won greatest fame by their Panegyrics including al-Rudugi (d. 940) "the father of Neo-Persian Poetry" Farrukhi (d. 1038) Anvari (d. 1190) and Khaqani (d. 1200) Nasir Khosru (d. 1061) is esteemed for his religious and moralizing odes, while Sanai, Attar and Rumi used the form in their mystical poetry. In modern time the best known Panegyric (Qasida) writer include Qaani (d. 1854), Adib – e – peshavari (d. 1931) Parvin – Itsami (d. 1941) and Bahar (d. 1951); the convention is now found appropriate to political and social broadsides. Parvin revived charmingly the old moralizing themes made famous by Sadi; Bahar's most splendid poem is a formal panegyric composed in honour of Firdusi at his millenary.

The lyric (Ghazal) is composed on a single rhyme and may be written in one or other of a great variety of metres. It looks at first sight to be simply a short ode, its length averaging between five and fifteen couplets all mono-rhymed. The same range of metres is employed, though the line is often apt to be somewhat briefer. As an art form it appears to have evolve out of the so-called Nasib (erotic prelude) with which the old Arab poets began their Odes. Its central theme is love to

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9 Guide to Eastern Literature, p. 118.
which wine drinking is an almost inevitable accompaniment. The beloved may be either male or female. Sometimes the persons intended is the royal patron; by the mystical poets he is identified with God: and wine is taken as a symbol of lyric is Hafiz (d. 1391) to whom some five hundred Ghazals are attributed; the following is a brief specimen:

When my beloved the cup in hand taketh
The market of lovely one slack demand taketh
I like a fish in the Ocean am fallen
Till me with the hook yonder friend to land taketh
Everyone saith who her tipsy eye seeth
Where is a shrieve, that this fair firebrand taketh?
Lo, at her feet in lament am I fallen
Till the beloved my by the hand taketh
Happy his heart who like Hafiz, a goblet
Of wine of the prime fore eternal’s brand taketh

The aforesaid version ingeniously imitates both the rhythm and the rhyming scheme of the original. Other famous lyrical poets are Sanai, Rumi, Iraqi (d. 1289), Sadi, Amir Khusru (d. 1325) and Jami. Many are writing lyrics at the present day; some under the influence of European literature. It is worth mentioning that the Soviet poet Lahuti took Stalin for his beloved. Khanlori reflects Wordsworth and Tennyson; the genius
of Valery and the imagists has fired the imagination of such writers as Gulchin, Shahiyar and Tavallali.

It is to be seen that the only original contribution made by the Persians to poetic form and prosody consists in the Quatrain (rubai); and it is just therefore that this should be happen to be form best known to the general public, thanks to the great and continuing popularity of its adaptation by an English translator Edward Fitzgerald Rubayat (first edition-1859) give a true picture of the rhyme pattern of the Persian original, though not of its subtle rhyme. Tradition make out that the invention of the Quatrain metre was quite accidental - the gleeful shout of a child at play, overheard and adopted by a passing poet. Most Persian poets have composed Quatrains which have generally retained the authentic flavour of spontaneity, succinctness, and wit; the Rubai is essentially an occasional poem and the impression of continuous compositions conveyed by Fitzgerald's paraphrase is wholly misleading. The most illustrious practioner of this literary form was Umar Khayyam (d. 1132) who may have composed as many as 750 couplets. It is also to be said that the origin of Rubai is purely Iranian and cannot be said to be imitated from the Arabic verses of the pre-Islamic era on the same pattern Quatrain was invented later on.10 The following quotations illustrate the

pattern of the *Rubai* and the venial infidelity of *Fitzerald* to his Persian model:

*Khursid; Kamand—I—subh; bar bam afgrab*

*Kaikhusru — E — ruz muhra dar sam afgrab*

*Mai khur ki nida yi ishq hangam I — sahar*

*Avaza — yi — ishrabu dar aiyam afgrab*

(Wake! For the sun who scattered into flight
The stars before him from the field of night
Drive night along with them from heaven and strikes.
The Sultan’s Turret with a shoft of light).

The *Quatrain* is today to be the ideal form in which to compose a political squib. This brief review of Persian poetic forms is not complete without a mention of certain rare varities. The *Quatrain* has a pair in the *du-baiti* a folk convention having the same rhyming pattern but a different and simple metre. The only poet who has given semi-classical shape to this rustic doggerel is the wild mystic *Baba Tahir* (flourished 11th C). The *Qita* is a brief occasional poem in monorhyme. It contains five verses to twenty verses of the same metre and rhyming with one another like the *Qasida*. In *Qita* the poet can deal with any subject philosophical, ethical, moral and admonition description of an extra-
ordinary incident, the day-to-day happenings, praise, satire, elegy etc.\textsuperscript{11} its most accomplished exponent was Ibn Yamin (d. 1342). The Tarjiband is a device for linking together a succession of lyric like stanzas, a couplet in the form of a refrain beings interposed between each component. The Tarjiband is still as current form in Persian poetry. Among the prominent contemporary poets Shurida Shirazi, Waheed Dastgirdi, Md. Taqi Bahar and others have made valuable contributions to this form.\textsuperscript{12} The spirit of emulation which encourages the Persian poet to pay tribute to pay seeking to outrival the work of his predecessors has engendered the Mukhammas and Musaddas, a given lyric is expanded by inserting four and five lines between each line of the original.

Out of obscure and humble beginnings, the Persian poetic genius suddenly broke into full flower in Firduasi's masterpiece. Other poetic forms the ode, the lyric, the quatrain, the idyll didactive verse quickly matured thereafter and a classical tradition was firmly established by the end of the 12\textsuperscript{th} century. Towards the year 1500 this translation reached its climax to be succeeded by a slow decline.\textsuperscript{13} Persian poetry produced in India has always been looked upon by the modern scholars with mild contempt. They consider it to be a counterfeit, a spurious imitation of the

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid. p. 35.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid. p. 54.
\textsuperscript{13} Alex Priminger, editor Frank J. Warnke, O.B. Hardison Junior associate editors: 
genuine products of *Shiraz* and *Isfahan* and consequently it has never received the attention so lavishly bestowed upon the poetry of Persia, yet it is a fact that India has produced almost as large a number of Persian poets as Persia herself and that some of them have left as deep an impress upon Persian literature in general as any poet of the sister country.  

Though Persian poetry enjoyed a long Indian Summer under the Mughal Empire Royal and princely patronage had throughout these centuries encouraged the poet to give his best and so much of Persian poetry is courtly in theme and tone; yet the portrayed of mystical ideas liberated the individual writer from too strict bondage to earthly rulers and gave him scope to express his personal experiences and his relationship with the divine beloved. It is only in this county that the poets of Persia have discovered a new the creative impulse of a most gifted people. This rise of democratic institutions and intellectuals and cultural contacts with Western countries have set up new ferment in the Persian mind, the full effects of which all yet to be seen.

In the wake of the nineteenth century, Iran underwent a great political change known in the history as constitutional movement, which demanded a healthy parliamentary system, curtailing endless power of the monarchs. As Europe had already gone through this phases earlier at

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different places and at different times, the revolutionary literature of Europe, especially that of French Revolution, American Revolution and English Industrial Revolution provided different model to Iran to its threshold of awakening.\textsuperscript{16} The last part of the nineteenth century is significant for bringing about a National revival throughout Asia.\textsuperscript{17} The literary development of the twentieth century was the outcome of the national awakening in Persia. The knowledge of European languages and literature Western education is modern technology, natural science and the social sciences and its reflection on everyday life deeply influenced the Iranian way of thinking and brought a drastic turn in the political, social and economic development of the people of Iran. Apart from this the journalism and intelligentsia also exercised an importance influence. It can be realized by the fact that in 1907 A.D. alone about eighty four newspapers and periodicals were found. These newspaper and periodicals were often representatives of different democratic and political ideals and some of them widely read by the educated and political minded people. The journals \textit{Bahar} (1910) \textit{Daniskhada} (1918) and \textit{Sukhan} (1943) published articles on poetry and translations from European and other foreign poets which helped in moulding literary opinion. The Persian newspapers and journals thus provided the most effective means for the

\textsuperscript{16} Hasan, Dr. S.A.: \textit{Pillars of new Persian poetry}, Lal Kuan, Delhi, 1996, p.1

\textsuperscript{17} Ahmed. Dr. Rekibuddin: \textit{Indo-Iranica}, 2005, Vol. 58.
propagation of political ideas and quickening the tempo of modernization.\textsuperscript{18} The process of modernization as interpreted or encouraged by the West contained many erroneous, democracy and justice have often become a more means of exploitation.\textsuperscript{19} With a growing interest in Western education European literatures began to assert its influence directly and to as lesser extent through translations. In the early stages these translations were confined exclusively to French poets such as \textit{La Fontaine}, \textit{Victor Hugo}, \textit{Lamartine}, \textit{Alfred de Lisle} and \textit{Sully Pradhomme}. Nevertheless, during the last decade, translation have appeared of the works of Russian poets, chiefly \textit{Pushkin}, \textit{Lermontov} and \textit{Nekrassov}. Prominent amongst these is \textit{Lahuti's} translation of some \textit{Pushkin's} poetic and dramatic works published in 1947 by the Foreign languages Publishing House, Moscow. The first poem showed distinct signs of European literary influences was perhaps the elegy composed by \textit{Dehkhuda} on Mirza \textit{Jahangir Khan}, editor of the \textit{Sure-i-Israfil}. This poem appeared on March 8, 1909 in the third issue of the \textit{Sure-E-Israfil} which \textit{Dehkhuda} had revived at \textit{Yverdon} after his flight from Persia. It not only introduced a new and popular verse form in Persian poetry, but was also remarkable for its deep symbolism and strong personal tone:

(O the morning bird, when this gloomy night put aside its dark deeds,
And, at the life-giving breath of the dawn, besotted slumber departs from
the heads of those who sleep;
And the loved one enthroned on the dark blue litter loosens the knots
from her golden – threaded locks;
And God is manifested in perfection, while Ahriman of evil nature
withdrawals to his citadel,
Remember, O remember, that extinguished Lamp.)

Abul Qasim Lahuti who is considered as the most revolutionary
writer of modern Iran was assimilated by European Influences. He was
very sincere and active. Since his youth he had observed the situation of
the country and took part along with many other revolutionaries in the
fighting against the royalist troops. In December 1909 Lahuti wrote a
poem entitled “Vafid bi-Ahd (keeping the pledge) which provides a most

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Ahmed, Tanwir: A short history of Persian literature, Naaz Publishing Centre, 2nd
notable example in realistic expression. Later he employed this style in poems such as “Vahdal – u- Tashkilat (unions and organizations). Zinda-
ast- Lenin (Lenin is alive) and Yatiman – I – Jang – I – Jahangiri (Orphans of the world war). Here is a quotation from the poem Zendeh –
ast – Lenin. The poem begins with the following stanza:

Rah-haie su she aaj dehkudeh ha ta dil sehār
Porid āaj bar ze guan

Weak at first, the impact of European literature has finally succeeded in learning a strong impress upon contemporary verses and may well determine the course of its future development the tendencies which has emerged from the impact evoke certain parallelism with the romantic and symbolistic trends in French poetry. Whereas under classicism the poetic experience tends to be generalized, there is now a demand for a personal note in poetry and a desire to expresses the sentiments and emotions of the individual. For instance, Khanalari observes, “In order to introduce variety and novelty in poetry there is no other way but that we should enlarge the circle of ideas. That is why we should look for more personal and private moods and feelings and appropriate mental images to express them. These new moods and ideas should be sought in life. This attitude has resulted in the tendency to
report nature and life from direct observation. Thus, Bahar writes in *Afkar – I – Parishan* (Distracted thoughts):

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\text{Ruh mon gar ze Niakaan mon ast}
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\[
Aai Khoda pos mon bad bakht keh aam
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\[
O gar een ruh o khord ze aan mon ast
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\[
Basteh vebad o rast ze beh aam.
\]
\[
Ek nia o aarif me surb
\]
\[
Ek nia laskaree o dewanee
\]
\[
Pedaram saire o mon ze en she nesab
\]
\[
Saire o laskaree o ruhanee\textsuperscript{21}
\]

(If my soul come from my ancestors then O God, who am I unfortunate that I am?
And if their soul and intellect come from myself, why am I tied by the bond of heredity.
One of my ancestors was a devout and mystic disposition, another was a soldier and civil servant;
My father was a poet and I due to their threefold lineage, am a poet a soldier and an ecclesiastic.)

National awakening and Western influences have been the most active factors in shaping this poetic literature. Under these circumstances the poets accepted fresh demands which Paved way for modern poetry.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid pp. 169-170.
The well known contemporary poet, Arif Qazwini stated that the sentiments of those who belonged to an early period were limited and restricted which could not be the same as those of Persians born in the eighteenth and nineteenth century which is the time for national awakening and emergence of arts, science and political revolutions. The advent of press in Iran had simplified the language turning it into a useful medium for people instead of the classical poetical rhyming narrations full of ambiguity. The Iranian press took a leading part in the social political and intellectual awakening of the country. The scholars and thinkers of Iran freely contributed to the journals paying more attention to the translation of the poetical works of the European poets. This awakening also demanded books and articles on the socio-political problems of the common man and it was ‘Bahar’ who along with some of his comrades started the paper ‘Khurasan’ which published his early nationalist verses during the period known as the “Istibdad – I – Saghir” (Lesser Autocracy). Bahar also started the paper ‘Nau Bahar’ which voiced the policy of the new Democratic Party against the Russian aggressions in A.D. 1910-11. At last the poet descended from the cloud-cuckoo towers of idealism to the region of realism and began to grapple

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with the problems of life. Modern Persian poetry, which essentially continues the *Qazar* style, may conveniently be dated from the beginning of this century until the World War II. Whereas the poets of the *Qazar* period produced sturdy and well composed but unoriginal poems, the twentieth century poets proved more receptive to fresh ideas, new forms and original imagery. Three poets of this period are worthy of particular note in terms of originality and attractiveness. One of the Indian subcontinent and the two in Iran. *Iraj Mirza* soon abandoned his earlier *Khorasani* style for a more intimate and idiomatic language, in intimate and idiomatic language, in which he wrote mostly casual and satirical poems, but also delectable lyrics. *Parvin Itesami* (1910-41), who remains with *Iraj*, one of the two most popular of the period, is an eloquent writer of passionate humane feelings and ethical outlook. She is best known for her tender, fable like *moqatta'ats* (pieces) written in moving tones with moralizing intent. *Iqbal*24 of *Lahore* (1877-1938), an admirer of *Rumi*, who sought in a series of impassioned poems to expound his vision of Islam as a dynamic faith and a panacea for the social and political ills of the Muslim world. An intellectually endowed poet of fertile mind and reformist ambitions, his lively imagination is matched by his emotive intensity and mastery of expression. *Iqbal* may well be considered the

24 Iqbal Dr. Sir Muhammad: THE SECRETES OF THE SELF (Asrar-I-Khudi)
Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Kashmiri Bazar, Lahore-1944. p. III.
most significant poet in the classical Persian tradition since Hafiz. The present century saw the last of the poets of note to write in the grand style of the Khorasani School is Mohammad Taqi Bahar. During recent years there has appeared a new school of poets whose works reflects strong traces of symbolism. He struck a new path for modernism in Persian poetry. He wrote critical formulations and principles to justify his conduct. His literary movement for free verse and dislike for rhyming schemes and complete indifference to metrical order strictly adhered to all by classical writers gained as momentum enough to attract the young writers like P.N. Khanlari and Nadir Nadirpur.

It was Nimayushij who continued the experiments towards a radical modernization of Persian poetry, who took revolutionary measures to establish a new perspective in Persian poetry. The poems Qissa — e — Rang Parida, Chashma-e-Kuchak and Khorus — o — Robah are the best example of his classical form of poetry. But owing to his inclination of the romantic school of European poetry, Nimayuhij became a resolute opponent of the classicism and endeavoured to introduce a new political form in Persian poetry. The poem ‘Ay Sub’ and ‘Afsana’ written in early twenties were his first attempt of this kind, which reflects the influence of


\begin{verse}
Yad dāram shabi mahtabi
Bar sar kavh navin nassat
\textit{Dedāh āj shu ze dil khoab rofieh}
\textit{Dil ze gugaie du dedah rosteh}
\textit{Sard Badi Ruied Āj bor kuiah}
\end{verse}

\textit{Nima’s} influence on Persian poetry was notable as he changed the diction, metrical fashions and the elemental subject matter. Daring spirit, novelty and obscurity of images and fertility of similes and metaphors are the strong points of his poetry. He has exercised an amazing influence on the younger generation as he is a sensitive poet of rare subtlety and enterprising vigour. He is the first to popularize blank ands free verse in Persian. His poem may be said to have really laid the foundation of the whole modern school of Persian verse.

Nevertheless, the credit for popularizing the new literary form within a country and culture solidly based on a thousand years of classical poetry goes to his few disciples such as Ahmad Shamloo, who adopted \textit{Nima’s} methods and tried new techniques of modern poetry. The transformation brought about by \textit{Nima Youshij}, who freed Persian poetry
from the fetters of prosodic measures, was a turning point in a long literary tradition. *Nima* offered a different understanding of the principles of classical poetry. His artistry was not confined to removing the need for a fixed – length hemistich and dispensing with the tradition of rhyming but focused on a broader structure and function based on contemporary understanding of human and social existence. His aim in renovating poetry was to commit it to a ‘Natural Identity’ and to achieve a modern discipline in the mind and the linguistic performance of the poet. He held that the formal technique dominating classical poetry interfered with its vitality, vigour and progress. Although he accepted some of its aesthetic properties and extended them in this poetry, he never ceased to widen his poetic experience by emphasizing the natural order of this art.

*Ahmad Shamloo*, who began his poetic career by writing sentiment, lyrical and patriotic prose poems. Having some knowledge of the French language and literature, he abandoned the Persian classics and searched for inspiration in the world of modern French poetry as well as in the works of some other European poets in French translation. He is deeply influenced by Paul Eluard, Garcia Lorca, Luis Aragon and great Turkish poet, Nazim Hekmat. This influence produced a new point of view and created a new poetical culture in which *Shamloo’s* poetry was appreciated and understood by many who were keen to read modern poetry but could
not understand and enjoy the poems of Nima Youshij and many others. Shamloo completely abandoned rhythm and gave to his work the natural music of the Persian language using soft and harmonious words to make his poems different from ordinary prose. The “Fresh Air” and “The Garden of Mirror” are two collections of his poems from this experimental period. He created some compound words as well as new images. These attempts gave his poetry a relatively independent character, but failed to make it more expressive and powerful. It was more his earlier poems, with their politico – lyrical images, that justified his reputation among his admirers.

*My bird of Golden song*

*Nests in the foliage of your abode;*

*Sweetheart, put on your best dress,*

*Love is fond of us,*

*With you I follow my dreams in wakefulness,*

*I find my poetry in the truth of your brow*

*You talk with me of light and of man,*

*Who has kinship with all the God*

In the 1960, a new generation of poets appeared, who like Ahmad shamloo, wrote prose poems, but tried hard to be modern by experimenting with *Dadaism, automatism, formalism, futurism, surrealism* and other known and unknown trends. *Ahmad – Reza Ahmadi*
who belonged to those categories, was not even twenty when his poems, because of their unusual, sometimes amazing, unyielding and wild imagery caused controversy.

I went up blue all the stairs;
The sky of our house was not the same as our neighbours,
I went down hungry all the stairs
To the depth of wheat
Searching or the whiteness of the horse,
All over the wheat field I could see only one path,
Which my father, with his grey hair, trod.

Forough Farrokhzad, a poetess who published three books of poems, influenced by Tavallali, was the first woman to be bold, even brave enough to write about the hidden feelings of Iranian women. Her more remarkable achievement was the power and the subtlety of the images. She used to portray the predicament of women as well as sexual feelings and the states of love which were considered obscene:

The crowd of my shady eyelashes
Like the fringes of a silk curtain.
Began to flow from the bottom of darkness
Along the stretched groin of desire,
Along that quiver, that deadly quiver
Down that lost end of mine.
I felt I was being freed
I felt I was being freed.

However, it is clear from the above discussion that the contribution of Persian poets for promoting the new trends especially in the field of poetry is remarkable. This new trend was totally a reaction against traditional themes. The new movement has liberated Persian poetry from the fetters of conventionalism and artificiality. The new poetic literature of this period reflects certain marked tendencies and distinguishes it from the classical poetry. The modern development opened new fields of thoughts and widened the sphere of poetry by introducing political (i.e. nation, native, land, human rights) social (i.e. sentimental sympathy for the suffering and oppressed for hardship and poverty, for inferior position of women, polygamous marriages, veil, education, backwardness and expression of moral indignation and a call for remedy) and economics themes into it. Besides political and social themes, the modern poets have given expression to their personal moods and experiences. They sing of their own hopes and human loves and express their individual sorrows, frustrations and isolation. There is now a clear departure from the beaten track of classical poetry and no returns

28 Ask. Wikipedia.
30 Ibid p. 5
to the previous condition is imaginable. The main characteristics of modern Persian poetry may conveniently be summed up as follows:

- The Ornate and artificial style has given place to a simple and natural diction; words are made to follow thoughts and thoughts to follow words.\(^{31}\)

- As striking feature of the modern Persian poetry is that a great number of Russian and English words and expressions, especially French were used by the poets in their compositions.

\[
\text{Besiaeree āaj wajgan O Kalmart ārupae keh hamrāh khud mufahim}
\]
\[
\text{judidee ordond āaurd zaban sair farsi sud}
\]

Poets like Ashraf Amiri, Iraj Mirza, Bahar, Arif Ishqi, Lahuti, Nishat, Nima and others made use of European words and expressions in their poems. The words Kalub (club) and hotl (hotel) used by Iraj may be noticed in the following verse:

\[
\text{Dar Kalubha netuan kard hameh oogt nesat}
\]
\[
\text{Dar hotel ha netuan burd hameh amur besar}
\]

Similarly the words Kabineh (cabinet) and partee (party) used by Ishqi may be illustrated thus:

Bae eetna bahet kabineh falk
Gar dedah aam ke partee aam ek sitareh neest.

(Without care of destiny cabinet can’t be bright. If I had seen that there is a party (but) not avail a single star.)

- There is a personal note in the poetry and a desire to express the sentiments and emotions of the individual. Parviz Natal Khanlori observes, “In order to introduce variety and novelty there is no other way, but that we should enlarge the circles of ideas that we should for mere personal and private moods and feelings and appropriate mental images to express them.

- On for expressing suitable Persian words difficult words either any language, ornate and artificial styles were discarded. The work of Farhangistan (established in 1935 A.D.) for the compilation of a standard lexicon of Persian encourage to a considerable extent.

- In classical poetry, the description of nature served only as background of human interest. In modern poetry, we find many poems which are devoted to the description of nature such as Shab – I – mehtab, (A moonlit night)32 Banfash (The Violet)33, Sehab (shooting star), Shab wa Zehār etc. These poems employ only those details which enhance the effect as a whole.

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32 Ibid p. 180
33 Ibid p. 180
In modern poetry, the *Ghazal* has retained its former prestige (i.e. the description of love themes, ethical and philosophical ideas) but its scope has been enlarged to include social and political themes. In this regard, the efforts of *Arif, Farrukhi, Bahar* and *Lahuti* are noteworthy.

The growing interest in politics during the period is manifested in the abundance of patriotic themes. *Arif, Ishqi, Farukhi, Lahuti, Amiri* and *Bahar* wrote poems which express their patriotic sentiments. *Arif* has produced many poems and songs (*tasnifs*) which echo his strong patriotic sentiment. The poems *Ishqi Azarbayan* (love for *Azarbaizan*), *Yad-i-vatan* (Thoughts of motherland) may be considered to be his master pieces impregnated with the fervour of patriotism. In the poem *Love for Azarbaizan* he declares:

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ze aastkhowan neagaan pak ma een khak
āaj en sudeh aast wa maqadus tar āaj hameh siz aast. 34
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(With the bones of our sacred ancestors, this soil has been kneaded and so 'tis holier than everything else.)

*Akhgar*, the soldier poet of modern Iran has composed five beautiful poems. One of them "*Mihir – I – Vatan*" (Love of the mother

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34 Ibid. p. 157.
country) is remarkable. In this poem “Love of the mother country” he reveals his patriotism in a martial spirit thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
Mu\ hafiz\ sar\ hast\ o\ Kasun\ hafiz\ kasur \\
Dil\ ra\ be\ qasun\ vatan\ wakhteh\ darom.\end{align*}
\]

(The hair is the protector of the head and the army the protector of the country; I keep my heart clinging to the army of the country.)

Modern poetry has a vast topical theme dealing with the events in national life. Various new themes such as political, social, economical, educational, ethical and historical engaged the poets of modern Iran to take interest and participants in such events. This tendency was further strengthened by the fact that some important poets like Amiri, Bahar, Farrukhi, Ishqi and Kamali were themselves newspaper editors. As a result their poems frequently formed part of their journalistic activity. In a Qasida Amiri welcomes the granting of the constitution in 1906 which begins:

\[
\begin{align*}
Sad\ bass\ aai\ majlis\ mali\ keh\ benam\ aanqareeb \\
Aaj\ tu\ aaed\ dard\ milot\ ra\ dor\ in\ dur\-\an\ tabib
\end{align*}
\]

Besides politics, the social consciousness of the poets was also reflected in the emancipation of women Ishqi, Arifi, Lahuti and Kamali

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35 Ibid p. 158
raised their voice against the veil and stressed the need for female education. *Ishqi* strongly opposed the veil and concluded his famous poem *Kafan – I – Siyah* (The black shroud) with the following stirring lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ba\ mon\ aar\ ek\ do\ seh\ guind\ ham\ awaj\ swad \\
Kom\ kom\ in\ jamjameh\ dor\ jameh\ ajaj\ swad \\
Ba\ hamin\ jamjameh\ ha\ ruee\ zanan\ baaj\ swad \\
Zan\ kund\ jameh\ saram\ ar\ o\ sarfaraz\ swad
\end{align*}
\]

(If some one, two or three patriots raise their voices in unison with me, gradually, this movement will be set afoot in the country, By their demand the faces of women will be unveiled, Women will take off the disgraceful dress and will become exalted).

Another modern poet *pizhman* vehemently raised his voice against the veil and said that it was sanctioned neither by religion nor by law or wisdom. He says:

\[
\begin{align*}
Qanun\ o\ din\ o\ aqal\ o\ tamadun\ batafaq \\
Qa'il\ b'dafi\ peseh\ o\ pur\ dafi\ sadrond
\end{align*}
\]

(Law, religion, wisdom and civilization with one accord justify the removal of picha\(^{36}\) and mantle.)

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\(^{36}\) A substitute for the veil made of black horsehair about nine inches square in size, worn by Iranian women over the forehead to hide or expose their faces at will.
Modern poets of Iran were fully aware that the practice of polygamy has degraded the condition of the country and it is a great hindrance to the general progress of civilized society and culture. Pur-I-Daud condemns polygamy a “the most grievous sin”.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{center}
\textit{Aank du zon ra ze behar khuish rua deed} \\
\textit{Tarbeet Qiron rast Qatil o dusman} \\
\textit{Bis aaj ek zon ze behor mord dor in ruj} \\
\textit{Ruh vatan rast rang o dard o jelifon}\textsuperscript{38}
\end{center}

(He who permitted himself to take two wives, is a subverter of and an enemy to the culture of age; More than one wife for a man in these days bring harm, grief and woe to the spirit of the country).

\textit{Sayyeed Ashrafuddin}, an orthodox shiite, express his opinion against the veil through the following couplet:

\begin{center}
\textit{Du zon dor khaneh ordon khilaf ast} \\
\textit{Zanan ra aaj khud azardon khilaf ast}\textsuperscript{39}
\end{center}

(To bring in two wives is wrong; unwise is to displease women with oneself).

\textsuperscript{39} Bagh-i-Bihist, p. 286.
The contemporary poets showed their keen interest in this workers and peasants and their bad conditions. For the betterment and welfare of the Persian cultivators and workers, they gave pathetic description in their poem. Ali Afrashta and Abu Turab Jali have composed poems which express their sentiments of sympathy for the workers and the peasants. In the words of Habib –I– yaghmai:

The landlord and the peasant, the rich
And the poor, the king and the beggar,
These names should be erased out
From the face of the earth.

There exist a large number of poems, which have voiced the general sentiment for peace and prosperity to the whole world. The poem “Gauhor shab Serag” written by Sharang expresses the theme of love and happiness successfully. The best poem on peace is Bahar’s ‘jughd-i-jung’ in which the poet expresses his resentment of war. A few line of the poem runs as follows:

Why do the world eaters of the west and its guardians tread upon the soil of the East?
I agree that the cooking pot is wide open but where is the shame and modesty of the cat?

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40 Sukhan, p. 67.
The literary and cultural relations established the European powers especially with the U.S.S.R. helped in the development of socialistic ideas in Iranian literature. It was however, after the October Revolution of 1917 that Persian poets also began to express certain distinct communistic views in their poems. Lahuti of Kirman Shah was perhaps the most enthusiastic having communistic tendencies. His socialistic poem “Kirimil” (Kremlin)\textsuperscript{41} is a vehement attack on capitalism and imperialism. It begins with:

\begin{quote}
Ta chand Koni Garieh bar mosond Nushiran?
Dar Qasr ‘kirmil’ edil asrar nehan bar khowan!
\end{quote}

(How long shalt thou shed tears over the throne of Noushirvan? O Heart! Read the secrets hidden in the Kremlin.)

Several other poets like Mirza Mohammad Farrukhi, Sayyed Abul Qasim Zarra, Abul Hussain Hisabi and Afrashta propagated strong socialistic views in their poetic composition.

Western poetic literature’s influence evoked the romantic and symbolistic trends in Persian poetry. The works of Iranian poets of the present days reflect strong traces of symbolism and

\textsuperscript{41} Namuna – I – Adabiyyat – I – Tajik, Samarqand, 1925, pp. 587-93.
romanticism. This romantic theme may be noticed in the concluding stanza of the poem *Qissa* composed by *Hoshing Ibtehaj Saya*:

*Bar Saram dost Kasid*

*Dar Kenaram be Nassast*

*Nimyushiji*, who is regarded as the pioneer and leading exponent of symbolic poetry, adopted it for the expression of political and social themes.

The best example of the influence of the Western poetic literature on Iranian of the present day is the emergence of a new form called free-verse. It is indeed an innovation of a revolutionary character and more subtle art than the conventional poetic composition in metre, rhyme and fixed verses. “If rhyme is a shelter of mediocrity” as P.B. Shelly writes, “Free – Verse is a real test of the best that the poet has in him.” In the words of Milton, “True poetic diction consists only in apt members fit quantity of syllables and the sense variously drawn out from one verses to another, not in the jiggling sound of like endings.”

*Nima Yushij* was the first to break new ground and introduced free verse in Persian poetry. While freeing the Persian verse from the rigid

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shackles of 'aruz' he evolved new rhythms in each poem according to its inner requirements. Of course, his early poem "Qissa - i- Rang-i- Parida" written in 1921, is a romantic narrative in the traditional form of masnavi. Although in the old mould, the poem reveals the original thinking of the poet, in so far he does not idealize the romantic situation, simply saying:

\[ Een \text{ sunin hor sadi o gom begujard } \]
\[ Jumleh be kodsatand een hom begujard \]

\[ \text{\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots} \]

\[ 43 \text{ Bayaz, Quarterly, Vol. I, ANJUMAN - E- Farsi, Delhi 110006, p. 64.} \]

- 72 -