CHAPTER-III
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WESTERN INFLUENCES ON PERSIAN POETRY

Persian poetry has a rich past. The readers can find satisfaction, which one seeks in a greater classical literature. The main characteristics of Persian poetries are grandeur of form, the vigour and freshness of ideas, the substitute artistic narrations, and the exquisite grace of style and manner attention. One may take delight in the noble mysticism of Jalaluddin Rumi or find enjoyment in the delicate and colourful passion of Hafiz or lose oneself in the sweet and cynical pessimism of Omar Khayyam, known to the western world through the translation of Edward Fitzgerald.

The Qajar rulers particularly during the reign of Nasiru'd Din Shah and Muzaffaru'd Din Shah maintained a good relationship with the European countries. When political and cultural contact was established between Iran and other countries like Russia, Germany, England etc. the result was not creative literature but translation and interpretation of the literary excellence of that country into one's own. A large number of young Iranian scholars went to abroad for higher studies.

With the growing interest in Western education European literature began to assert its influence directly and to a lesser extent, through translations. In the early stages these translations were confined exclusively to French poets such as La Fortune,
Victor Hugo Lamartine, Alfred de Lisle and Sully Prudhomme. Nevertheless, during the last century translations have appeared of the works of Russian poets, chiefly Pushkin, Lermontov and Nekrassov. Prominent amongst them was Lahuti’s translation of some of Pushkin’s poetic and dramatic works published in 1947 by the Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow.

The first poem which showed distinct signs of European literary influences was perhaps the elegy composed by Dehkhuda on Mirza Jahangir Khan, edited of the Sur-i-Israfil, who was executed on June 24, 1908 by the order of Muhammad Ali Shah. This poem appeared on March 8, 1909 in the third issue of the Sur-i-Israfil, which Dehkuda had revived at Yverdon after his flight from Persia. It was not only introduced a new and popular verse-form in Persian poetry, but was also remarkable for its deep symbolism and strong personal tone. Its first stanza may be quoted:

(O bird of the morning, when this gloomy night puts 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.)

ای مرغ سحر چو این شب ناز گذشت ز سر سیاکری
وز نفاذ روح بخش اسحار رفتد سر خفگان خاری
گوشد کره ز زلف زرنار مجروحی نگاگون عماری
يزدان پکنال شد بمورداد و اهرم زشت خوحاژی
پاد آر ز شمع مرده پاد آر

And at the life giving breath of the Dawn, besotted slumber departs from the heads of those who sleep.
And God is manifested in perfection while Ahriman of evil nature withdraws to his citadel,
Remember, O remember that extinguished Lamp)

A poet who was early in assimilating European influences was Lahuti. He wrote a poem entitled *Vafa bi-Ahd* (Keeping the Pledge) in Dec. 1909 which provides a most notable example in realistic expression. Later he employed this style in poems such as *Vahdat-u-Tashkitat* (Unions and Organizations) *Zinda-asl Linin* (Lenin is Alive) and *Yatiman-i-Jang-i-Jahangiri* (Orphan of the World War). Weak at first, the impact of European literature has finally succeed in leaving a strong impress than past upon contemporary verses and may well determine the course of its future development. The tendencies which have emerged from this impact evoked certain parallelisms with the romantic and simplistic 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 express the sentiments and emotions of the individual. For instance, Khanlari 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 we should look for more personal and private moods and feelings, and appropriate mental image to express them. These new moods and ideas should be sought in life. While the poet acquires the material for his work from the collections of the older poets it should not be expected that he would say anything new or produce any original work.”
This attitude has resulted in the tendency to report nature and life from direct observation. Thus Bahar writes in *Afkari-Parisan* (Distracted Thoughts):  

روح من کر ز پایگان من است
ای خدا پس من بپنج کرماً
و کر این روی و خرد زان من است
بسته ند وراثت ز حیان

*(If my soul comes from my ancestors, then)*

*O God who am I, unfortunate that I am?*

*And if this soul and intellect come from myself,*

*Why am I tired by the bonds of heredity?)*

Many poems are devoted to the description of nature. Whereas in classical verse the description of the latter resembles a miniature painting, these poems employ only those details which enhance the effect as a whole. For example, in the poem Zuhr (Noon) Khanlari portrays the scene at noontime in the following words:  

بگر ان کوه دیو بیمار است
تن ز دردی نان برخ و کدار
پشت بر آسان درمان عش
پای در رودخانه کرده دراز
سیر می‌شان دره از دم صبح
دام باد را کرفه دست
یک هر یک از سوئی
همچنون پایگان سرخوش و مست
(See, the mountain is a sick demon, its body hidden in affliction and agony caused by pain, with its back to the healing sun, and its feet stretched out in the river.

Since morning the trees of the vally, holding the skirt of the wind in their hands were each pulling in their direction like children merry and gay.)

In the poem Ay Shab (O Night) Nimayushij presents an aspect of nature in relation to his own mood and feelings. The poem provides one of the earliest examples of this tendency and begins thus:

هان ای شب شوم وحشت آگرز تا چند زنی بمانم آتش
یا چشم مرا ز جای بگرک یا پرده ز روی خورد فروکش
یا باز کاذبار تا بیمزم گر دیدن روزگار سیرم

O night inauspicious and dreadful,

How long will thou strike fire into my soul?

Either plucks out my eyes from their sockets,

Or take the veil from thy face,

During recent years there has appeared a new school of poets whose work reflects strong traces of symbolism. Nimayushij may be regarded as its pioneer and leading exponent. He was born in A.H. 1315 (A.D.1897-8) in the village of Yush in Mazandaran and was educated in a Catholic school. His first important achievement was the poem Fasana (Fable) which still remain his most popular work. Towards the end of A.H.1301 (1922-3) he published the poem Ay Shab (O Night) in the weekly Naw Bahar.
Both *Fasana* and *Ay Shab* reflect the influence of French romanticists especially Lamartine and Musset. In A.H.1326 solar the Society for Cultural Relations between Persia and the then U.S.S.R. published a collection which includes three poems by Nimayushij one of which entitled *Shab-i-Quruq* (The Prohibited Night) may be quoted to illustrate the symbolistic style of the poet.8

(Keep your hands off the wall (entry to) the hospital is prohibited at night)

*If the seek man wakes up from his sleep, something strange happen.*

*Talk less, for delirium has taken him far from everyone to the valley of dreams.*

*Walk softly for the place trembles and stone rain from its walls*

*Do not ask anyone about his condition lest the noise should trouble him.*

*The hospital is prohibited at night. The watchman goes by slowly,*
From her window the moon too has fixed her soft glance upon his innocent face)

Ahmad Shamlu who writes under the pen-name of A. Subh, is conspicuous for his independence from the rules of verse writing. His poems are probably never rhymed and in some cases they are even without rhythm. An illustration of his style is provided by the following poem entitled Sarguzasht (Adventure):

(I became the shadow of a cloud and I crossed the fields.
The thorn picker, with his load of throne started to walk
On the dusty road a silent passer by said to him.
Oh! What is the use of being the shadow of a cloud?
I became a wild gazelle and I ran from the mountains down to the plains.
The children in the plain gave a cry of happiness.
A small cart passed, the old cart driver said to himself)

With these literary tendencies a new form has found currency in Persian poetry. This form may be called "free-verse" owing to the freedom which it affords as regards poetic
composition. Since free-verse in Persian has not yet evolved its own rules, its specific technique is a matter of conjecture. However, certain general observations will not be out of place.

Leaving aside poems which have no rhythm at all, free-verse present two types wherein a definite system can be observed, the others must be regarded as spontaneous. The first type of free-verse shows certain natural sequences from the mustazad. Like all classical forms, consistency is an essential feature of the musatzad who’s long and short hemistiches must follow in a regular order.

In addition, a vast stock of new imagery has been introduced. Some poets such as Nimayushij, Travallaji, Gulchin and Nadir Nadir-pur, reveal a marked feeling for light colour and sound. In their poems one notices a certain deliberate attempt to avoid eliches.

The literary tendencies discussed here represent a revolutionary development in Persian verse. They are still comparatively young and their full possibilities remain to be seen. It is true that a great deal of this poetic output is devoid of any conspicuous merit. Indifference to the traditional rules of verse-writing and a lack of restraint are leading towards anarchy. A monotonous gloom to be groaning under the heavy burden of life, everything is dark and sad, even the poet’s expression takes on a dim and somber note and his vocabulary loses its clarity. Thus obscurity of style is becoming more and more common which is apparently a device to conceal the poverty of ideas. One fact
however, emerges clearly namely that today Persian poetry is no longer static, it shows a constant sense of movement which at any rate augurs well for its future development.

The credit of revolutionizing the spirit of Persian literature must largely be assigned to journalism. It is the Iranian press that deserves the honour of having awakened among the masses an interest in matters political. It was through the press that the Iranians came to know that they were a dumb driven lot, exploited by their rulers and on the top of it by two European nations. Men of letters and poets freely contributed to these journals, translations from European works were also published serially in them, and valuable and well informed articles on social reform and literary criticism also began to appear in these papers. In short the Iranian press took a leading part in the social, political and intellectual awakening of the country. At last the poets descended from the cloud cuckoo towns of idealism to the religions of realism and began to grapple with the problems of life. This naturally influenced their expression, and the stilted and turgid style, which had been so intimately associated with Persian literature as to appear inseparable, at last become simple, natural and fluent; the crushing burden of Arabic words was now relieved; the wearisome monotony in subject and vividly artificiality and exaggeration now yielded ground to naturalness and sanity; the paucity of new thought was remedied by originality of ideas; poetry released at last from the clutches of the erotic sentiment, was brought into contact with practical life, forsaking
romance for realism, Sufism for secular matters, and even spirituality for occasional excursion into the realm of materialism. Now thought were no longer dominated by the tyranny of words: in fact thoughts no pursued words, but rather words were made to correspond with thought which were finally emancipated from the bondage to beautiful but frothy and ineffective expression.

Another landmark of Western influence was the establishment of women educational institutions in Persia. However until 1910 there were only two girl’s schools worth the name and they too were American and French owned establishments managed respectively by the nations of these countries.

With the growth of social consciousness the emancipation of women became an important issue which found a number of sympathizers among contemporary poets. It is true that Islam in theory given certain status to women but in actual practice she is much inferior to man and economically a virtual slave of the latter. Religious taboos and social restrictions do not permit her to go beyond the limits prescribed for in this man-made society, and she has little opportunity to assert herself in life outside her home.

The sentiment for the emancipation of women in Persia found its strongest expression in the opposition to the veil. Thus Ishqi composed a poem entitled Kafan-i-Siyah which is regarded as one of his best poems.
Arif was another poet who ardently championed the cause of women. On several occasion he came out in support of their freedom and raised his voice against the veil.

The agitation against the veil was not in vain. In 1936 an Imperial Edict was passed by which the veil was officially abolished. By raising their voice in favour of female education the poet showed their understanding of a factor vital to the demand of social progress. They were often struck by the example of those countries where education among women was considerably advanced.
BACK NOTE:-

   p-201
2. Lahuti, Abul Qasim : Diwan-i-Lahuti, pp-239-240
3. Ibid-p-42
   p-166-7
5. Ibid-p-169
7. Ibid-pp-87-88
   pp-62-63
9. Iran and its Culture. p-77
    p-166-7