Chapter- V

Socio-Cultural Problems as Reflected in the Works of Contemporary Writers with Specific Reference to the Writings of Sadigh Chubak

Comment on the Iranian life by the native writers generally start with typical dark observation of the blackest pessimism, and misanthropy, chiefly concerned with the decline of morals. People are shown as fundamentally vicious debased, and wretched, deserving every kind of misery, and to whom altruistic concepts such as love, friendship, humanity, public spiritedness appear as illusion. Writers generally show an improperly organised society which has for its functioning no fixed rules or regulations. Contemporary writers in their works make the Iranian socio-cultural problems as emanating from a horrible charnel house with the visage of a dirty maiden.

Characters which make up in Tafrihat Shab (Night Diversions’s 1932), Dartaalash Maash (In the Quest of a Living, 1932) and Ashraful-makh-Lukat (The Noblest of Creatures, 1934) of Masud Dehati are a number of school friends who for reason more than one, have failed to continue their studies and are struggling to live. They waste their precious times, idling their time in offices, schools, factories etc. and spend their nights wondering from one bar to another, getting drunk, looking for
women, and ending up in brothels. They have no hope, no ambition, and no moral values. They are the products of their social environment a spiteful society. Similar to their plight is the condition of the country. People from every walk of life lie, cheat and try to rob each other. Money controls every detail of life and it is like Hegel’s animal kingdom where, ‘dog eats dog’.

Controversial handling of social virtues in Fitna (1949), Jadu (1952) and Hindu (1955) constitutes a new trend in writing. Here the writer depicts the caprices of certain promiscuous women, who move in high society are immensely popular in certain upper class circles and teenage school girls. To the former they serve as a mirror reflecting aspects of their own lives; to the latter as an outlet through which they see glimpses of the forbidden world. Sex is predominant theme as a social norm. The writer has vividly portrayed the conditions inside the close circles of high class Iranian society.

Hijazi’s novels; Huma (1927), Parichahar (1929) and Zeba\(^1\) (1931) describe the fate and characteristic trait of Iranian women. In Huma two virtuous persons are the chief players. Huma an educated girl comes from middle class, respects her tutor Hasan Alikhan who secretly loves her but hides his emotions for her due to old age. Huma falls in love with a young

\(^1\) In early fifties almost twenty years after the appearance of his last novel, Zeba Hijazi published two new novels, Parvana and Sirishk (“Tears”). The latter goes into psychopathological analysis of characters.
man, but Hasan Ali Khan's implicit objection makes the girl realise his suppressed feelings for her, whereupon, with extraordinary self sacrifice she decides to side with the tutor. However the young man refuses to leave her and with the help of wretched Akhund, (Divine) starts intriguing against his rival. The rest of the story which follows, describes the treachery and magnanimity of the two characters. A surprising end comes when Hasan Ali Khan is captured by Russian officers.

The writer strives hard to present Huma as a paragon of virtue, the symbol of modern, emancipated and progressive Iranian womanhood, with Hasan Ali Khan as a modest and honest tutor. Neither character comes closer to real life image, nor their saintly virtues makes any sense. They both appear weak and unprepared for the surprising difficulties, suffering henceforth because of their timidity and irresoluteness. An exception among the minor characters is the colourful Shaykh Hasan, a deceitful, cunning, rascal prepared under the cloak of religion to commit any crime for interest of his own.

The second work Parichahar depicts a spoiled and capricious woman. However the writer commits a kind of Harakiri in this novel, acknowledging that, Parichahar was really vicious and wayward "I was wondering what caused all this calamity! Inevitably I came to the
conclusion that the answer to these puzzles and problems should be sought in the next world”.

Hijazi’s Zeba is rich and eventful. The two main characters are; Zeba, a young attractive, whimsical, wanton, with wide connections in official circles and Shaykh Hasan, a poor provincial student of divinity who becomes prey to Zeba’s charms and ends up a formidable rascal shuttling through life as parasite in high society. In the course of a well plotted story, while watching the Shaykh’s rise to fame and high position by means of deception, charlatanism and the unstinting blandishments of his mistress, the reader is skilfully introduced to the alarming corruption of the country’s administration. The writer vividly describes the machiavellian schemes, machinations of senior government officials and other notables to achieve their personal ends.

Several short stories and essay of the writer generally revolve around the negative aspects of human nature. The majority of characters in short stories belong to urban middle class. In the story Majmai-Zindaniyan (Company of Prisoners) the ugliness and horror of a prison cell has been described, making evident that the downtrodden innocents are prey to the vices of the officials.

In Mahmud Aqa ra Wakil Kunid Hijazi exposes the rogues who try to enter the Majlis with selfish opportunistic aims. He tries to expose the
symptoms which has taken roots in Iranian society and culture due to the contacts with the west but his treatment is insufficient and at times his tension appears disoriented. He has failed to take a definite interpretation of the social and cultural traits appearing due to western influences.

Serious dealing of socio-cultural issues is available in Jamalzadeh's works. Some of the individuals of the society are specially brought into picture through his works. In Dostiyi Khala Kharsa (The Friendship of Aunt Bear) he describes the tragic story of a kind hearted, gallant cafe waiter who despite the advice of travelling companions, saves the life of a Russian Cossack lying wounded in the snow in the road to kermanshah. The wounded soldier finds that the rescuer is carrying some money, and when the latter joins his other Russian troopers he incites them to arrest the waiter and have him shot by a firing squad.

In another story, Darda-i Dil Mulla Qurban Ali (The Grievances of Mulla Qurban Ali) an infatuated Mullah tells the readers about his reckless love for the daughter of a neighbouring merchant. The girl dies and the unfortunate Qurban Ali of whose love the girls's family knows nothing, is invited to spend the night behind the coffin praying for her soul. During the night he fails to withhold the temptation to see the beautiful face of his

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2 An English Translation of this story appeared in the magazine Ahang (Delhi, April 1944).
beloved once more. He is caught kissing the lips of the dead girl and ends up in prison.

In his next work Darul Majanin (Lunatic Asylum, 1942), an engaging story describes a mad house in which some interesting characters, each with his own philosophy, habits and idiosyncracies are in custody. While throwing light on the abnormality of his characters, the writer criticises the conditions of a society in which sensitive men prefer taking refuge in an asylum rather than being in public.

Qultashan Diwan, the second novel of Jamalzadeh - opens with the description of a little street in Tehran where Haji Sheykh, a wholesale dealer in tea and sugar, who had been sometime a deputy in the first Majlis, carries his profession. The other a villain, Qultashan Diwan, is a cunning and ruthless opportunist who would design any means to achieve his interests. The villain fails to marry off his daughter on the good name of Haji Sheykh. During World War-I Haji’s trade and financial strength are badly disrupted. At that moment the villain appears asking for a huge consignment of sugar to be bought and kept for him. In the following months the acute shortage of the provisions brings the people to the doorstep of Hajji who they knew has stacked sugar. But he cannot sell the

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3 M. Borecky gives an analysis of this story in, 'Persian Prose since 1946' M.E.J., Vol.2 (1953), 237.
stuff and the real owner refuses to show up. Cursed and despised by everybody, defamed as a vicious hoarder, Hajji dies in grief and misery, without being able to defined his innocence. The villain on the other hand, having made his fortune in this bargain builds an orphanage and throws a lavish party for ministers and notables in his newly constructed, sumptuous house. At the height of his career Qultashan Divan dies peacefully. The newspapers devote their front pages to the glorification of his benevolence and service to culture; his name is whispered by everyman and all the dignitaries mourn his death as a great national loss.

In Ra-ab Nama (The Drainage Controversy, 1948) another novel by the author the hero is a European educated Persian student spending his summer vacation at home. Having learned about the defect in the drainage he arranges a meeting of the neighbours, who unanimously authorise him to make arrangements for the necessary repairs. He thanks them for their confidence in him and promptly sets to work. After endless troubles with the architect, the mason and other workmen, with all expenses having been paid from his own pocket, the job is completed and he sends the neighbours the bill. But they unfamiliar with the principle of, “business is business” find it hard to lend themselves to such extravagance. They start dilly-dallying, each making various excuses and all refusing to pay their share. With his meagre allowance floating down the drain, the kind hearted
civilised student is unable to return to Europe to resume his studies. He leaves his ancestral home and finds shelter in a cosy little room in the courtyard of a holy shrine, away from neighbourly relations and cursing his compatriots for their moral degradation. 

In *Saruta-i Yak Karbas* (All of a pattern, 1956), Javed Aqa is the son of a merchant, and after the death of his father he becomes interested in mysticism and ascetic teachings. After divorcing his wife and abandoning his home, he join's a Sufi Murshid (Guide) whose daily life is full of spiritual sublimities. What follows is an account of the adventurous life of these two, the guide and pupil experience. Their tireless wayfaring their experiences with people of different creeds and social standing, all imbued with the recollections, beliefs and instructions of the dervesh, form the content of the book.

Often in the writings of Jamalzadah there recurr the dilemma of western educated Iranians who return to their country. "Numerous characters of (writes H. Kamshad) this' type appear in his work, all in different situations and in different potentialities, but none is made to tolerate the prevailing conditions, accommodate himself to the requirement of the milieu, or even to feel at home when he returns to his native country.

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5 Raab Nama (Writes H.Kamshad) is concise coherent, and very much to the point.
Not only in their social environment but often in their own family circle they seem like outsiders. All of them even if endowed with exceptional learning fail in whatever they take up and generally end as morbid and useless members of society". The hero of Ra-ab Nama wants to be civil and helpful to his neighbour but is easily swindled by them, or Rahmatulla, in Atash-zir-i Khakistar" (The Fire under Ashes): trained as a skilled carpenter in Germany, he opens a factory in Tehran after his return home. As he is a mastercraftsmen, his trade flourishes rapidly. But rival firms cannot tolerate the success of their young colleague and their plotting loses Rahmatulla both the factory and his profession. Later he becomes an interpreter to a Persian Military Mission in Germany, but once again his honesty brings him to grief. Upon the instigation of the officers, of whose embezzlement he disapproves, Rahmatulla is forced to return to Persia, where he is immediately put under arrest and charged with communist activities. In the end he and other members of his family are reduced to misery and complete destitution. In contrast to this theme of an Iranian finding an atmosphere hostile to him after his return from outside in Sadigh Chubak works we find strong Iranian traits and habits which never changes. In Asb Chubi the hero returns with a French wife but the former

6 Ibid., p.107.
readily adjusts to his original milieu, even marrying an Iranian girl while it is the latter which suffers due to her not getting a comfortable adjustment.

The hero of Darveshi Mumuyai is another outcast. Though a learned and conscientious student, he has locked himself up in his room in Geneva, and without proper food or sleep is brooding on abstract ideas, such as the existence of God, the secret of creation and free will and predestination. In contrast to this bookworm living like a hermit, we have the son of a wealthy merchant in Darul Majanin who is sent to Paris to study commerce, but after three years stay in the city, he fails to simply identify the building of his school.

A somewhat different situation is illustrated in Khana Bi-dush (Vagabond). The hero Ahmad Aga returns to Iran from Europe with a Ph.D. degree. The job which he gets is below his calibre. He is asked to put labels on bars of opium! In this menial employment he takes the pain of pin pointing the prevailing bribery and corruption. His complaints are ridiculed by his friends and even his father. He find himself stranger in the world around, finally giving up the attempt to settle down with his own people. At the end he finds a teaching job among the wandering tribes. He completely identifies with the nomads, living and moving with them and winning their love and gratitude. When he dies his tomb becomes the venerated place of worship and pilgrimage spot to the vagabonds. This
theme of detachment from the surroundings is mostly dealt in by Sadigh Chubak at numerous places. In *Tangsir* circumstances coordinate themselves in such a way as to leave the hero with the inevitable choice of reacting and leaving the homeland.

The author has often chosen the tragic issue of the plight of returned students as a major sociological problem in Iran. The state of transition marks the sordity of their existence. Moreover the theme of the unhappy westernised idealistic and ambitious young student returning to a country where prejudice and the predominance of selfish, influential classes with no sense of civil responsibility still exist, is one that Jamalzadah is most suited to handle; for he is role model of that Iranian student who can never adapt himself to the prevailing conditions in his own country. In this regard Jamalzadah speaks for his time and a growing number of young Iranian intellectuals.\(^7\) This theme is not evident in Sadigh Chubak works. To him the Iranian society is malleable and it can assimilate any element however foreign it happens to be Iranians returning from west with the foreign culture find Iran the same as evident in his short story *Ash I chubi*.

In the works of Jamalzadah the criticism of Muslim divines and religious institutions is fundamental. But unlike Sadigh Headayat, who abhors the religious institutions as something alien, as part of the evil

\(^7\) Ibid., p.108.
resulting from the Arab conquest which undermined the pure-Iranian ideals. Jamalzada is in B. Nikitine's viewpoint slightly more sympathetic or urbane towards the clergy. For he does not portray the institutions as debased but to him the role of the clergy falls short of the ideals and requirements. At the end, he takes the course of ruthlessly exposing the menial character of the clergy. He demolishes the 'Akhund' (Divine) with the Akhund's own actions, as in the argument with the Mullah in Jahanami-Ta'asub. Jamalzadah is perfect because of his knowledge of the attitudes of the cleric class as he himself came from clerical professional element of the middle class. The majority of recent writers cannot do anything significant for they do not know about the clerical mind and terminology. They limit themselves to bare statement that the clergy are a vile collection of reactionary hypocrites who interrupt progress; while Jamalzadah rather than denigrate them, makes them appear in words and deeds as reactionary, ignorant, prejudiced, selfish and a scar on the society. With the skill of a dextrous painter he makes them appear as villains of the society. Sadigh Chubak also makes an attack on the clergy class. To him they have been responsible for the spread of immorality and perversion in the society but he did not take them seriously as an issue in his works. Two of his novels Sang-i Sabur and Tangsir and even his short stories give very insignificant references of this class and their habits. In his social criticism, he targets the middle class elements. Again it is not the wholesome and orthodox
section of middle class as an evil monster living and existing in Iran. Instead he grapples with the issues which have made the class a despised part of the society. He brings to the altar the young middle class students for their serious lack of aptitude towards the betterment of themselves. He warn them of following power and influence, and running for vain fancies. In this he is speaking as the Iranian middle class person who has stayed abroad for many years, he is in the solid position of the onlooker and observer who knows the most and who, moreover knew the game before the players took the field. He is also concerned about the outmoded institutions of marriage, rights of women etc. and is bordering on the question of the reactionary aspects of the religions institutions. His attitude is well clear in his story Namak-i Gandida (Rotten Salt), where he outlines the reasons for corruption: “An essential reason for corrupt morals is, on one hand indigence, poverty and deprivation; on the other hand, the absence of security of person and property. So long as people’s stomach’s remain empty, and they fear the horror of oppression and injustice and lack a refuge or protection, fearing the shepherd as much as they do the wolf, having no assurance about next day in lives, and not being the masters of their own life or property, fighting against corruption will be to measure water in a sieve and to collect air in a weaker basket.”
Sadigh Chubak targets the lower sections of the society—prostitutes, middlemen, washer of dead bodies, petty creditors etc. and shows their behaviour in the society. In this he indirectly tries to make evident the crass system which has made this class appear on the social surface.

The new generation of writers followed the trend set up by their predecessors in outlining the various socio-cultural traits of Iranians. One is Buzurg Alavi. His work, *Chamadan* (Portmanteau, 1934) contains stories which are psychological studies of different characters who show extreme sensibilities and various psychological abnormalities. In *Arus-I Hazar Damad* (The Bride of a Thousand Grooms), the scene opens with a modern European style night club. The central element is a wondering violinist who fascinated by a song sung by a girl named Susan, has taken to music. After mastering the art in Europe, he returns home and marries the girl who once was force behind his efforts. But Susan’s songs do not touch the artist’s heart any longer, and they part. Years later the two come across again as entertainers in a disreputable night club. Susan now moving as Suski, sings the old song. The song stirs the violinist and the couple start dancing to a mad tune. The memory of the past revived in their ecstasy, enrages the girls who in a frenzy, smashes the musician’s violin. Commenting on it professor Wickens says; “This is a type of phantasmagoria rarely attempted in the west outside drama or poetry.”
Obsession towards opium and women has been a cultural trait of Iranians and most of the writers including Sadigh Chubak have openly made it a subject in their writings. Sometimes Sadigh Chubak surpasses the conventional barrier and portrays women as hyper element where their sexuality often comes as uncontrollable element as seen in the senses of Azra, but which should be taken as a reality.

Other pieces in the collection are the eponymous Chamadan, the story of the love of a father and his son for a white Russian girl, and Qurbani (Sacrifice) in which a sensitive and talented but cynical young man dying of tuberculosis, marries a girl who is found of him and then commit suicide while they are on their honeymoon. Tarikhcha-yi-Utaq-i Man (The History of My Room) has a psychosomatic husband, an attractive wife, a young lover, and a murder scene as the climax. And finally there is Mardi- ka-Paltu-yi-Shik Tanash Bud (The Man who wore a Smart Overcoat), which criticizes the modern, Frenchified, pseudo intellectuals, in old classical style of panegyrical poetry. The story is somewhat akin to Sadigh Hedayat and Masud Farzad's celebrated Vagh Vagh Shahab.

The first story Padang (Pestle) of Alavi's second collection Varaq parahayi-Zindan narrates the tragedy of an unsuccessful marriage and a resultant murder. It also connects the readers with the toil and hardship, suffered by the peasants in northern provinces of Iran. The story basically
carries a criticism and innuendo directed against the conditions during the later years of Riza Shah’s reign. The author makes a defiant outcry against the ruling circles, who have been shown responsible for the plight of their fellow countrymen.

Sitayara - YiDunbala-dar (Comet) is a gripping and emotional story of a young political prisoner who has been arrested on his wedding day. In Intezar (Expectation) the tragedy of another fellow prisoner, who eventually becomes insane in his prison cell, is portrayed with exceptional compassion and great expertise. In this story and in the other story after it, Afv-i-Umumi (Amnesty) where a political prisoner writes to his wife about his sufferings, and his feelings of nostalgia as he recollects past memories. The agonies of their solitude in a prison cell is described in passionate way.

Alavi’s Raqs-i-Marg (Dance Macabre) has an ordinary plot: a love story and a murder at the end, interwoven with a piece of music. the “Dance macabre”. which the girl plays on her piano. The writer’s imagination runs like this. The clock strikes twelve. From this hour till dawn the dead are free. free. Free.

It is midnight!

What a night of horror.

Every night is thus terrible: because our life is terrible and heart rending. But they no longer have hearts to be rent. The dead have no hearts.
For we are not alike; but dead men are alike.

From midnight till cock-crow the dead hold their revels, celebrating freedom and freedom from afflictions of mortal life.

All are equal.

There is neither king nor beggar, neither old nor young, girl nor boy. man nor woman-all are dead. All are skeletons.

No head bears a plume: no back wears rags: hand in hand they dance.

Death, common to all, a part of their being, indeed their whole being - death makes the skeleton dance.

Death, with a shinbone that was once the leg of a tall young girl, drums for them on a thick boned skull.

When it is twelve, the skeletons come up the steps out of the grave and dance.

Death which is they themselves - for here these is no commander and no commanded - plays a gentle melody.

The throng of the dead move their hands and feet in dance.

He whose facial bones till retain a grin was in life a judge and used to sneer at the afflictions and plaints of the condemned. But his is newly dead. This vestige will soon vanish from his skull; between jaw and cheeks no trace of it will remain. For he is dead and free.
He whose back bones are bent used to incline his back in life and bow his head. Here he has so need; that which separated him from others, the needs of everyday life, no longer exist.

Here is no laughter and no weeping, no joy and grief, no anxiety and no hope. There is no pride no humiliation, no oppression and no helplessness or supplication, no hunger and no satiety.

These is nothing. Only death. Only freedom.

Is not death better than a judge miscuing at the misery of the condemned?

Is not death better than a pauper bending his back?

Is not death better than humanity in chains?

That is why they are revelling.

They dance, because they are free.

Death with a girl’s shin bone, plays for them on a broad - pated skull the Dance of the Dead.

Alas, even this freedom is limited.

The cock heralds the approach of dawn.

All the dead, the skeletons, disperse.

Alavi’s *Punjah-u-Sa Nafar* (1942) is real account of what happened to the author and his comrades from the day they were put under arrest uptil the general amnesty. The maltreatment they suffered from the wardens, their struggle for survival, the oppression of various government agents, their trial etc., are candidly portrayed. The book had a strong impact on the general.
while allowing him to remain personally uninvolved, is writer's most effective and distinctive mark.

Alavi's *Punjah-u-Sa Nafar* (1942) is a real account of what happened to the author and his comrades from the day they were put under arrest until the general amnesty. The maltreatment they suffered from the wardens, their struggle for survival, the oppression of various government agents, their trial etc., are candidly portrayed. The book had a strong impact on the general readers and particularly the younger generation. The inspiration which the younger generation needed to get some relaxation from the absolutism of the Shah was inherent in the book.

His third collection, of short stories, *Namaha* was published in 1952. In it there is one piece, Gila-Mard (The man from Gilan) in which two armed gendarmes are escorting a Gilanian farmer, accused of taking part in anti feudal disturbances to their headquarters. Walking barefooted in the rain, through the mud and swamp of the northern forests, with wind and thunder roaring overhead, the culprit remains quiet and improbable by the malicious accusation and abuse of one of the gendarmes who unwittingly reveals that he has murdered Gila-Mard's wife. On the way they rest at a tea house. The other gendarme (who himself had formerly been a highway robber), after receiving fifty tumans from Gila Mard, returns his pistol and creeps quietly away. Gila Mard disarms the abusive gendarme, but hearing
his plea for his wife and children, takes pity and spares his life. Then he makes for the jungle. But hardly he had stopped out in the open he is shot in the back by the first gendarme.

In *Nama ha*, the first story of this collection, Shirin, a judge’s daughter who has joined a progressive revolutionary group, discloses the crimes, and judicial machinations of her father by sending him anonymous letters. The guilt-conscious father, having tried and condemned scores of alleged criminals during his life time, is now trying to judge his own past actions. The interest of the piece lies in the psychoanalytic self-trail.

Ijara-i-Khana (House Rent) is a grim but telling tableau of the life of a poor family who are killed when the roof of the house falls on them. In “Diz-Ashub” he depicts the grief of a father who spends his last penny on the education of his only daughter in the hope of producing a midwife for their village. But on completing her training, the girl forgets all about the little village and chooses the more attractive life of the city in Yak Zani Khushbakht (A lucky Woman) and Rusvai (Scandal) the consequences of compulsory marriages, dictated by parents, and the scandals of high society are exposed; while the last story, Panj Daqiqa pas az Duvaazda (Five Minutes after Twelve) satirizes the Persian bureaucracy.

Buzurg Alavi’s novel *Chashmahayash* moves around a portrait of an unknown woman painted by a famous artist, Makan, who is also the
organiser and key figure of the underground movement in Persia during Reza Shah’s reign. The artist ends up in exile, and it is in the last days of his life that he paints his masterpiece and calls it Chashmahayash (Her Eyes). What is noteworthy is not the extraordinary beauty of the face, but the malice, mystery and virulence that emanate from the eyes of the woman, and the one instantly takes the idea that these eyes have been a source of torment to the painter.

Farangis, the woman in the portrait, belongs to a wealthy aristocratic family. In her early youth she has the desire to become a painter, and with this passion burning in her heart she goes to Paris to study in the Ecole des Beaux Arts. But to achieve distinction or to do anything worthwhile in this field is a laborious ordeal. Besides talent it requires painstaking care and devotion. Born and bred in the luxury of a rich household, Farangis was obviously not made for the task.

“They never taught me how to work. I didn’t need to work for a living. There were always others who willingly did my work for me. My father had a maxim; never bother yourself with work that others can do for you”.

Having been unsuccessful in art, she turns to the frivolities of Persian life, her intelligence makes her cynical and she uses her bewitching mind to tease and torment the young men around her: “I had conceived a
spite against these stupid lovers. I gained pleasure from tormenting them and enjoyed teaching them. The crazier they got about me, the more harshly I handled them”.

It is in this phase of her life that she meets a young, ailing painter who is devoting all his time and energy to political activities. Khudadad is a passionate revolutionary full of spite and pugnacity against his country’s despotism. His heart is filled with hope, love, and an unshakeable faith in the destiny of his people and the ultimate victory of his cause. He is moreover engaged and does not show the slightest interest in Farangis’s physical attractions. The charm and warmth of his life overpower the empty heart of the young girl, and at his inducement she decides to return home:

“Go to Iran; The people of our country are so wretched and in need of help that you can be useful to them in a thousand different ways. To be an artist you must be human. You have no idea under what conditions your fellow countrymen are living. Go to Iran and become human. Perhaps you will find the way to success. Now that you have failed to depict on canvas the dragon which is devouring you, go and slay the dragon which is ravaging the social life of the people of Iran. There a number of young people who have studied in Europe, have underground movements. So far they haven’t achieved anything. But one day they will render a grand service to their country. They need the help of people like you. This beauty of yours, which has become a burden to you may be helpful to them in carrying out their difficult tasks.
Back at home Farangis meets Makan, the distinguished artist, and under his direction she takes part in the clandestine activities of the revolutionary group. But her political fervour soon melts away ("I had no interest in the fate of the people of this country. Their affliction's did not move me. I didn't share in their suffering and misfortune. Whatever happened my position was secure. What had I in the miserable wretches of whom this country was full?") and instead passionate love for the artist seizes her. The rest of the story is taken up, on the one hand by the Farangis wiles to win the affections of the artist and on the other by Makan's restrained and repressed response. Finally when the artist is arrested, Farangis accepts the long standing proposal of the head of the police though she hates him as a man, and marries him. Her motive she claim's, is to save the life of the artist.

In relating the story of her life and her relations with Makan, Farangis tries to convince the narrator that those malicious eyes on the canvas are not hers and that the artist had misunderstood her. In the author's statement of her case there is not only abundant sympathy but every sign of his having 'understood' her, and this is what gave rise to the violent criticism from the apostles of the left. To them, Farangis represented a mere adventurous bourgeois girl who tired of the trivialties and pleasures of her class and environment, turned to the revolutionary
movement for the thrill and excitement it gave her. By her own confession, she had no interest in the fate of the people nor any faith in the cause. The eyes given to her in the portrait were therefore very much hers. The artist was exact and realistic in his portrayal. However there lies some fundamental shortfalls in the subject of the story. The main hero, who is the epitome of democratic movement is portrayed in tragic and underprivileged way. The attention of the authors concentrated on the light minded aristocrat, Farangis. The author considers the love of the girl for the artist as a sufficient basis for the justification of the girl’s foolish and absurd actions. The eccentric figure of Farangis is unduly put at forefront while the noble progressive painter is depicted as unjustifiably timid and inessential. An excess of details about the girl has made her portrayal look like blurred and inconcentric.

A powerful insight of the existing socio-cultural conditions in Iran has been portrayed in the works of Jalal-Ale-Ahmed. Brought up in 'clerical atmosphere he interestingly chooses the same class of people to make his comments. In the collection of stories, Did wa Bazdid (The Exchange of visits) he carries out a criticism of superstition and hypocrisy of the clerical order, denunciation of the urban life then flows in his stories. His sympathies goes for the masses who suffer social and political disabilities. Jalal Ale Ahmed’s Mudir-i Madarse (The Headmaster. 1958) -
a fictional work-portrays the life and preoccupations of a provincial school master and his teaching staff. Besides getting a vivid portrayal of the humiliations and privations suffered by this group of minor officials, the reader also gets a picture of the defects and shortcomings of the country’s educational system.

Almost every modern Persian writer has seriously taken the issue of safeguarding the genuine Iranian identity from foreign influences. Directly or indirectly they have made Iranian character a valuable asset not to lose. As Sadigh Chubak came at a time when Iran had been developing on his own way, to him the internal confusion and incoherence among the various social groups were more crucial issues.

Ali Mohammad Afghani’s voluminous novel *Shuhr-i Ahu Khanum* (Mrs Ahu’s Husband, 1961) opens in the nostalgic atmosphere of a Persian provincial town, the writer taking us to the drowsy life of Kermanshah as it was three decades ago. After a short tour of the town, the reader pauses in front of a baker’s shop and comes across the two main characters: Sayyid Miran, the compassionate, elderly baker whose lifetime of honesty and moral rectitude have won him the affection of the townsfolk; and the other Huma, a young and seductive wanton prepared to use any conceivable stratagem to capture the Sayyid’s heart and so secure herself a shelter for life. The third and in many ways the principal
character of the book, introduced to us when we later visit the baker's house, is his wife, Ahu Khanum. The interest of the story lies in the conflicts and interrelationships of the members of this triangle. The credulous baker, seduced by the lascivious young woman, slights all his moral and social obligations, brings her into the household under the guise of concubine, and turns a blind eye to his devoted wife and children. The peaceful and happy atmosphere of the baker's home soon becomes one of jealous rivalry, bitter quarrel and vindictiveness in a word, catastrophe. In this cat and dog life and throughout its incessant, scandalous bickerings, Ahu Khanum suffers a great many insults and humiliations, but she remains unshaken in her determination to defend her rights and win back her wayward husband. In the end she emerges victorious from the whole tragic embroilment.

From the brief sketch, the theme which is apparent from Shuhar-i Ahu Khanum is the unfortunate plight of the Iranian woman. Readers will easily recapitulate that Persian novel writing in the twenties and thirties was exclusively concerned with women and their predicament. However the core issues remained sidelined from the agenda of the writers. Perhaps it was the situation of the time, especially religious considerations, that discouraged the writers from laying bare the truth about women in twentieth century Iranian society. The religions establishment did not want
the writers to take the critical issues of the Iranian women. Afghani; on the contrary, exposes the slavery of the Iranian wife to her husband's caprices, the cruelty of the laws and customs imposed on women by men to bring about their submission, and the humiliation the women has suffered in this patriarchal society, as well as their amazing forbearance, throughout history, in face of such injustices - all with great mastery and technicality unequalled in Modern Persian Prose. The seriousness with which A.M. Afghani details the plight of the Iranian women is not typical of this author alone. A more powerful portrayal of women even foreign is dealt by Sadigh chubak. The conditions of the Prostitutes, the women washers of dead bodies, the unmarried women, the marriage laws for women which makes them an instrument to be used by numerous people, the uneducated women the divorced women, have all been candidly picturised by Sadigh Chubak.

The multitude of people making their appearance in the book are real to the core and true to life. As one Persian critic put it, "Mrs Ahu can be found in every house of this land (Iran). Her husband, Sayyid Miran, meets us in every street and Bazaar. Their neighbours are just like our own". In other words, each of the characters has an individual as well as universal appeal. By the same token, while the events of the story centre on every day happenings in an ordinary, middle class Persian household
they retain their intrinsic truth of the meaning of life to all men. In the words of Kam Shad who writes that, "Everything is taken from life and portrayed with clarity of vision and daring".  

The author has gone a little further in building up the characters. Poor old Sayyid who cannot even sign his name is made to quote Aristophanes, Pascal and Balzac, and to discourse on art, philosophy, and music, even on Rimsky Korsakov's opera 'The Golden Cockerel'! Huma the illiterate village girl, cites Othello and Don Quixote in her arguments and is even knowledgeable about Cleopatra and Indian Sutteeism. Husayn Khan, the brothel keeper enters into earnest discussion of Confucius, Buddha, and the saintly Asita, who predicted the latter's destiny. And towards the end of the book, the unfortunate Ahu Khanum suddenly turns into an eloquent lecturer analysing the most complex problems of society and human nature. However the book apart from its all shortcoming is a social history, belonging to a certain time and place, it opens up the vast panorama of Persian life and society.

Farmers, workers, tradesmen, the common man and their petty aspirations, anxieties, and sorrows is revealed with amazing insight in Sadigh Hedayat's works. The unfortunate beggar, hypocritical preacher, and greedy bazaar trader who are the characters of his stories are true to

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8 Ibid., p.133.
life to such an extent that their identical reflections can be seen in any Persian town. He wrote many short stories in which he describes the Persian life.

His Abji Khanum is the story of a girl who in contrast to her younger sister Mahrukh, is repulsive. From her childhood she was always beaten and battered by her mother. The harsh remarks of her mother made her depressed. She forgot everything, even an idea of her marriage and started doing worship and prayers. Abji’s mother tells her that she finally has to settle with a servant in the house, which stirs Abji Khanum to rage and anger. Her despair was further heightened when she saw her sister Mahrukh enjoying her time with the groom. Finding herself cornered, Abji in a fit throws herself in the water storage tank, leaving to rest the miseries that were encircling and suffocating her life.

In Dash Akal⁹ a famed wrestler, gets involved in a series of clashes with another champion, Kaka Rustum. He outsmarts his rival in every game until he falls in love with a girl who is his trainee. Dash Akal lives in anguish because of his ugly appearance. For seven years he lives in self assessing his physical appearance for marrying her. At the end a suitor comes for the girl, ‘older and uglier than Dash Akal. Dash Akal drinks

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⁹ This and six other stories by Hedayat were translated into French by F. Razavi and published in a collection called *Trois Gouttes de Sang et Six Autres Novellas* (Tehran, 1959).
heavily, on wedding night. On way back to his house he encounters Kaka Rustum, but Kaka Rustum delivers a fatal injury to Dash Akul, resulting in his death.

The story, Zani-ka Mardash ra Gum Kard is a description of country life, a rustic love affair, and the excitements of a simple country girl who has innate masochistic tendencies. Neitzche’s famous saying, ‘Thou goes to women? Do not forget thy whip. Thus spake Zarathustra’ is quoted as the epigraph, and the story ends after the ruthless husband deserts Zarinkula and she follows another donkey driver, hoping; “Perhaps this lad is also used to using the whip and his body smells of donkeys and stables?.....”

The old fashioned, long and exhausting pilgrimages on camels and mules to holy shrines has been described in Talab-i Amuzish. The character of the pilgrims and their appalling conditions has also been shown. But most of all, the sinister confession of a woman who, out of jealousy, murdered the rival wife and her children and then goes to Karbala to ask forgiveness and absolution from the Imam. Aziz Agha had been happily married but turned out to be barren. So with her consent the husband brought a second wife, a Sigha (a wife by temporary marriage), into the house. But as soon as she becomes pregnant, life of the former wife became hell. Ultimately she murders the two child and then the
mother. When she confides the secret to other pilgrims they break in laughter, making her aware of their own first degree crimes of loot and murder. Aziz Agha rejoices and mingles with the pilgrims to absolve herself of the scars of crime.

Murda Khurha (The Ghouls or literally Eaters of the Dead) is another dark story. It is an account of the false sympathy and mourning shown by the relatives of a dead man. It describes how the rival wives and relatives mourn upon a man they suppose to be dead, while they are in fact engaged in a bitter conflict over the inheritance. In the midst of this the corpse recovers from what was only a stroke and suddenly appears in his shroud. The women all scream. One of the wives hurriedly removes a purse from around her neck and throws it, together with a bunch of keys and a bracelet, before Mashadi: “No, No, do not come near me! Take your bunch of keys, the hundred tumans I took from your chest are in the purse.” This and similar other acts are done by others. The story ends with the first wife’s complaint of the negligence and delay of the Shaykh who left the body unburied for three hours so that Mashadi managed to regain consciousness, “And this ... well done!” This is how Ashaykh Ali works! He left the body on the ground for three hours!

Mardi Ka Nafsash ra Kusht (The Man who killed his passion) is a psychological study of the life and character of a studious young school
teacher, Mirza Hussain Ali, who wanted to live an ascetic life like a Sufi. To attain his spiritual aspirations, all he needed was a guide whose example he could follow: this he found in the person of Shaykh Abulfazl, an older colleague of his, and the advice the guide gave him was, ‘kill your passion!’. For several years Mirza Hussain Ali shut himself in seclusion, studied the classical texts of well known Sufis, and subjected himself to rigorous self discipline. But the more he tortured his body and denied himself physical pleasures, the more his frustrated passions became inflamed. Once again he decided to go and seek his guide’s advice. When he arrived at Shaykh Abul Fazl’s place he saw an angry man standing outside and shouting, “You brought my daughter here as a maid servant and did all kind of mischief to her”. Mirza’s mind got a jolt. Bitterly disappointed he went to a tavern, got drunk, and then stepped out staggering, his arm around the neck of a prostitute. Two days later it was reported in the newspapers: “A serious young teacher called Aqa-yi Mirza Hussain Ali for unknown reasons committed suicide”.

The hypocritical ways of the sufi guide has been the object for the writer for detailing Sufism had been a refuge of the Iranian people when they had found the formalism of the established Muslim religion unsatisfactory, or when Muslims had betrayed the democratic and egalitarian preaching of Islam. The tragedy evident in the story is that
solace in Sufism is not available in modern Iran. He is describing
debasement of the formal religion as well as the satisfactory substitute of it.

In another short story, Muhallil (The legalizer)\(^{10}\) a complex and interesting
situation takes shape from the application of an antiquated and medieval
religions law concerning matrimony. ‘And if hath divorced her (the third
time), then she is not lawful unto him thereafter until she hath wedded
another husband. Then if he the other husband divorce her it is no sin for
both of them that they come together again .......’. (Koran Sura 11, verse
230).

After thrice announcing the divorce call to his wife. Mirza Yadulla
cannot remarry her unless he finds a man, a ‘legaliser’, who will marry and
then divorce her. He succeeds in finding a husband for his ex wife, but
after the marriage takes place the man in question refuses to divorce his
new wife. The second marriage is not successful either. The story opens
years later, when the two rivals, without recognising each other, meet in a
coffee house and complain to one another about their ill luck and wicked
‘wives’.

Hedayat picked characters from lower strata of society. Later on,
one he picks is important type of character: the eccentric. Usually
belonging to the middle class, the petite bourgeoisie, he is very often trying

\(^{10}\) Translated into French by F.Razavi.
to imitate the European way of life, but as usually happens in a changing society, he can neither hold on to his own cultural heritage nor grasp European ideas properly. It is the confusion, desperation and pessimism of these people that forms the subject matter of short stories such as Zinda Bigur (Buried Alive), Sa Qatra Khun (Three drops of Blood), Girdab (The Whirlpool), Suratakha (The Masks), Arusak I Pusht I Parda (The Puppet behind the Curtain) and Shabhayi Varamin (The Nights of Varamin). In all these stories the abnormalities of the characters are exiting and striking. They are the deformities produced by a defamed society, and it is therefore natural that the writer ends their life violently either through suicide or by putting them in lunatic asylum (a marked difference from the works of Sadigh Chubak where suicide is not experimented with as an end to the miseries and afflictions). The hero of Zinda Be Gur for instance is a suicidal maniac who tries a variety of methods for self-destruction, but none comes to his rescue, “yes, I have become invulnerable ......Nothing effects me. Took cyanide did not affect me. Tried opium but I am still alive. If a dragon bites me it is the dragon that will die.” And the eccentric man in ‘Se Qatra Khun ‘ who is detained in the mental asylum wants the authority of the asylum doctor, for : “If I were in his place (the doctor’s) I would poison the food one night and feed them all with it. Then in the morning I will stand in the garden, hands on my waist and watch the dead bodies being carried away”.

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The nature of this kind of writing can be seen as reflections of social conditions in modern Iran where traditional patterns of life have been completely disrupted and the superficial level of alien pattern been adopted. Hidayat has provided us with a clear commentary on the mental conditions of the sensitive people in a period of rapid transformation. It is the role of commentator on the tragedy of twentieth century Iranian society, notably its urban society, that Hedayat excels in his art.

Sadigh Hedayat published a collection of short stories *Sag-i-Vilgard* (The Stray Dog 1942). *Sag-i-Vilgard* is the story of a dog who loses his master and becomes the victim of brutality. The description of the dog is in metempsychosis class, “Two clever eyes like those of a man, were sparkling in his woolly snout. There was a human soul in the depth of his eyes.....There was a kind of equivalence between his eyes and those of a human being what tortured Pat more than anything else was his need for affection. He was like a child who has always been beaten and abused, but his tender feelings had not yet been extinguished .... he was prepared to give his life if only a man would show interest in him-- he looked in every eye but saw nothing except spite and wickedness in them, and every move he made to attract the attention of these people merely seemed to excite their rage and bitterness”. One of the critic and commentator B. Bertels

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11 Inspired by A. Chekov’s story ‘Kashtanka’.

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however conveys the meaning that the Dog is Hidayat in disguise. Because of cruel censorship and political repression of the time he took the mask of a dog. Like the author the dog is finally driven to take his own life.

Depression, nostalgia and a pathetic end forms the substance of another story. In Bun Bast Sharif returns to his native town after more than two decades of vagrant existence. Old and broken, with his opium brazier and his bottle of arrack, without any zest and enthusiasm he wants the rest of his life to pass in peace and quiet. He had to contend with his honest ways in contrast to the shrewd and unscrupulous ways of his fellow workers. During the story Sadigh Hedayat brings the town life in detail, “After his return everything looked petty to Sharif, narrow, cramped and superficial. Everybody looked worn out. They seemed to have lost their youth to have lost their glamour. But they had managed to dig their claws more deeply into life, they were most fearful, more superstitious, more selfish than before. Some of them had more or less succeeded in achieving their petty desires - their bellies now prominent, their lust transferred from the lower part of their bodies to their jaws; and in the rough and tumble of their life they had applied their wits to swindling, robbing their tenants, collecting cotton, opium, wheat and to the linen of their babies or their own chronic gout.”
The last story of this volume, Mihan Parast (The Patriot) shows in the background the social and political changes that took place in Persia during the post war years. The regime changed in the years after 1945, and a new democratic era was heralded. In these years - i.e. post war phase - there was a good deal of demonstration oratory and political manoeuvring everywhere in the country; and on the surface it looked as though the history of Iran had been given an abrupt twist.

The masterpiece, Hajii Aqa (1945), a one character novelette, was the culmination of his blossoming optimism and perfection in both theme and style. Keeping aside depth, pathos and different kind of mysticism, he takes to sarcasm and denunciation. Hajji Aga himself is a monstrous phenomenon whose prototype might be found nowhere except in the Persian society of the time. The son of the tobacconist, with little education and no solid background, Hajji Aga has accumulated through fraud, pretension and political charlatanism, a vast fortune as well as considerable social position. A prominent figure in the country, he now owns estates, factories and houses, has a business in the bazaar, trades in opium, hoards medicine and food stuffs and contrives various kinds of smuggling through his connections with ambassadors abroad.

Hajji enters the higher society and gains influence in various ministries and the civil administration. He spies for the police, extorts land
from helpless people, has underhand dealings with high officials, and even facilitates the appointment of ministers and Majlis deputies. Hajji Aga’s audience chamber, is the vestibule of the town, where he receives all his clients from the prime minister down to the notorious procurer of the town. Hajji Aga keeps a flourishing Harem. Hajji Aga’s eldest son has been spoiled by European education, and so he has disinherited him. Resolving to make a “man of the world” out of his younger son, he lecturers him on the kernel of his life-philosophy, which is the print of his own experiences:

There are two classes of people in the world: the exploiters and the exploited. If you do not want to be exploited try to exploit others. You do not need much education, it is a handicap in life makes you soft in the head.... Be impudent, do not let yourself be forgotten. Boast and show off as much as you can.... Do not be afraid of abuse, humiliation or slander... when kicked out from one door enter with smile from the other.... Be impudent, insolent and stupid, for it is sometimes necessary to pretend stupidity it helps. This is the type of man our country requires today.... Faith, morals religion and rest are mere hypocrisy, though faith is essential for the common man: it serves as a muzzle, and without it the society turns into a nest of vipers; everywhere you put your hands and it stings... Be an opportunist. Try to establish connections with holders of high offices. Agree with everybody, no matter what his opinion is, so that you may
attract his utmost favour. I want you to grow up as a man of the world independent of people. Books, lectures, and things of this sort are not worth a penny. Imagine you are living in a den of thieves, turn your eyes and you are robbed. All you need to learn is a few foreign words, a few pompous expressions and you can sit back and take it easy! I give lessons to all these ministers and deputies. What is important is to show them that you are a smart crook, that you cannot be caught easily and that you are one of them, willing to negotiate... But most important of all is money. If you happen to have money in this world then you will also have pride, credit, honesty, virtue and everything else. People adore you, you will be considered patriotic and intelligent, they will flatter you, they will do everything for you.

Hajji himself follows these instructions sincerely when he is with the younger generation, he puts forth progressive ideas, endorses all their fervent aspirations and ideals. When with the Bahais he sounds most unbiased, speaks of his quarrels with Mullahs. When among the constitutionalists he becomes the vanguard of the liberation forces, makes up stories about his participation in the revolution. And when he meets the supporters of the autocracy he starts dreaming of the good old days, proclaims that the constitution was imposed by foreigners and that the
secret police and the iron heel are indispensable to tame the people and keep them down.

A strong admirer of Riza Shah and Hitler, Hajji has a stocking knowledge of international politics. He believes for example that the second world war broke out because Russians were covetous of his fortune, whereas the Germans were out to support him. In his view Hitler was a Muslim and had tattooed on his arm the Muslim slogan, La illiaha-il lallah (There is no God except Him).

When the Allied forces occupy Iran, Aga flees to Iran but after sometimes he returns to Tehran. He becomes an opponent of Rizashah, “this morose leader who extorted whatever the country owned, stole the crown jewels and took away the antiques with him.....”. The man from Mazendran, whose lands Riza Shah had seized becomes bravely outspoken. “In those days there was no security for people’s lives and property. They exchanged my land in Mazendran for nothing and compelled me to go and lay the purchase deed at Riza Khan’s feet. Nobody dared to utter a word!”

Under the auspices of the new government, Hajji declares his candidacy for the Majlis and decides to “compose” a poem for his campaign: that is he asks a modest young poet to write the poem for him. But the poet refuses and the argument that follows is the climax of the
book. It is the conflict between the new and old, between good and evil, between the vindicator of right and the wrongdoer. The poet is in fact Hidayat in disguise, voicing the spirit of the new generation: the spirit of anger and abhorrence of the reactionary rulers and their corrupt oppressive rule: “You are right (says the young poet). In this despicable environment where fools, vermin and the dregs of society are cherished, and you are its prominent public figure, busy building up life in accordance with your avarice, ignominy and imbecility in such society, supported and made for the life of your type, I cannot be of any consequence. My existence is fruitless”. Writing on this interesting work. H. Kamshad brings the gist, “Hedayat. never intended Hajji Aga to be a work of art; his aim, like that of most young writers of the period, was to appeal to the taste of the time, and to open his fellow countrymen’s eyes to the blemishes and scandals in their society.”

Adding the question of type versus individual is, in fact, the old argument in literature: whether the character should be the photographic reflection of an ordinary man in everyday life, with all his average qualities; or an artistically magnified creation, with all his human impulses there, but presented in extreme.

“What makes a type a type (says G. Lukacs) is not its average quality, nor its mere individual being, however profoundly conceived; what
makes it a type is that in it all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present on their highest level of development in the ultimate unfolding of the possibilities latent in them, in extreme presentation of their extremes, rendering concrete the peaks and limits of men and epochs.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} G. Lukacs, Studies in European Realism, p.6.