Chapter - IV

Sadigh Chubak’s Contribution to Persian Prose

Imaginative and creative prose writing in Iran has developed sufficiently in the years after the constitutional revolution and which clearly reflects certain salient characteristics of Modern Iranian culture and society. Modernising influences began to manifest themselves in Iranian life and letters. An increased social consciousness with a rising middle class of educated persons, resulted in drastic change in the attitude of the Iranians towards literature. Increased public consciousness towards society, culture, and polity resulted in a new type of literature which contained among other things, reflections of foreign cultures and scientific progress.

Persian literature has always been replete with purely creative writing on different themes. A particular kind of history based writing came into vogue from the beginning of 20th century. The important historical novelists; Prince Muhammad Baqar Khusravi, Shaykh Musa Nasiri, Hasan Khan, the Nusrut’l Vüza, Badi, Sanatizada Kirmani made a concerted effort to revive the fractured Iranian nationalistic spirit, by taking in their work the subject and theme of ancient Iranian history.

Sadigh Chubak added new dimension to Persian prose writing by bringing in his style what may be described as western approach, engaging
in extensive researches before committing himself to writing. His works on malaises esp-social of the country show him of being extremely penetrative. He smoothly narrates every detail of the subject, which he takes from his surrounding atmosphere and does not works as a messianic crusader for the extermination of the ailments from society, but his method is to draw its picture professionally and bring it forth to the public.

The penchant of the Iranians for savouring legendary themes - Achaemenids, Babylonian civilisation and culture, ancient religions continued but the pressure of modern culture sabotaged it to a greater degree and made them less appealing to public consciousness. On the other hand Sadigh Chubak while creating Tangsir, successfully used the modern day socio-cultural conditions with Muhammad’s actions somewhat akin to the traits of a legendary hero.

Sadigh Chubak attention to novel represents a step towards greater maturity in handling the craft of novel in Persian, for he makes the characters speak, and speak a language concommitent to their positions in society. Failure to do this was a feature of other novels of this period. Put briefly Sadigh Chubak makes his main characters speak as princes, while his commoners speak in an inarticulate, coarse and unsophisticated manner. The attachment to the naturalness of dialogue became a preoccupation of later writers and provided scope for the display of considerable skill.
Chubak concentrates in his works on the lower rungs of society. He looks at the Iranian society as being full of prostitutes, middlemen, drug addicts, swindlers, contrabandists, tricksters, pessimistic elders etc. To him bureaucracy and petty officers are full of corruption and mercilessness. He sarcastically castigates the religious system which he considers as the responsible factor for people becoming irrational and insane. His effectivity lies in his bringing into prose the blatantly repulsive and shameful aspects of Iranian life.

Nowhere we find the subtle attack on social system as critical as in, ‘Nufti’, where the main character has been shown as illogically relying on religious practice to get an answer to her sexuality. Azra’s visit to the holy shrine is the only hope of her getting married. This practice is widely prevalent where woman visits tomb for favour for a happy sexual life. Herein the writer in sarcasm opens up public consciousness to the irrationality of the woman’s behaviour. In the same way his highlighting of ‘Sigha’ in Sang-i Sabur is reflective of his concentration on archaic social customs bordering on faith.

Sadigh Chubak heavily introduced the issue of ‘woman’s sexuality in his works in obvious way Hitherto the craft of narrating it had been somewhat sketchy, but Chubak brought it out from deep waters. Most of his characters or even the plot runs towards women’s sexuality. Fall of the
Iranian women into the system which appears exploitative to the reader is
heavily addressed at. In Zir Čhiragh Qirmiz he holistically describes the
life of the prostitutes, and draws a pathetic picture out of their life and
releases their feelings to the masses.

The writer brings such groups as that of Gendarmes into description
in his works. Police system has been painted with all its ruthlessness and
sterility. Police do not come to sort out Zar Mohammad’s predicament,
whose money lies swindled in the hands of four people instead two
riflemen have been assigned by the government to arrest him, and bring
under official justice. Gendarmes dig the girl out from grave in Gorkunha.
Sadigh Chubak portrays their corrupt behaviour and mercilessness. To
him Gendarmes are a set of people out with claws and canine to quench
their personal materialistic and dehumanising thirst.

From his writings various elements of modern Iranian society come
into light. Some of these have deep roots in the society from long period.
He rarely made clergy the dominant issue of his works. It appears that to
him they were so cancerous that even portraying them meant
compromising with his creativity. He had made the conflict between
Ahreman and God, a issue in Roz Awwal Qabr where an old man is
preoccupied with ideas about evil and ethics. But Chubak shows his
sarcasm for religious life by describing digging of grave as a foolish act by the oldman. ¹

Sadigh Chubak's writings contain account of the exploitative nature of society which like a dragon is devouring everything. This dark picture of Iranian society finds no parallel in the works of other authors. Society is like a cage; made by few self conscious and materialistic people and in it chickens are the people who are killed mercilessly. The government cannot do anything. Society appears like a witch's cauldron where innocent and helpless are cooked like chickens. This stark reality is a definite colour in his works.

The element that life is full of danger and destiny plays a pivotal role in shaping one's actions is evident in his work; an interesting development in Persian prose. Sadigh Chubak is not weighing pessimism nor to him human life contains inherent darkness. But he considers nature's role in producing tragedies for people. Saiyyed Khan no reason of his own finds himself swept away by tragedies. Zar Muhammad struggles against every kind of adverse situations. Throughout his writings we can find numerous examples of struggle between good and evil. Somewhat best exemplified in the story, Roz Awwal Qabr. However the writer never

¹ Ruz Awwal Qabr.
brings to a conclusive end the dynamics of the mysterious nature of human life.

The oppressive social system nurtured and perpetuated by the dominant classes comes to picture in his works. Whether there are two women involved in squeezing away every thing from the corpse or Murad's metamorphosis after the accidental death of the creditor, or the throwing away of the child in the river in Chera Dariya Tufani Shuda Bud, all come with the clear manifestation of a darkened society. Sadigh Chubak sees them happening in the existing social milieu, and he finds to his satisfaction their description in his works, adding new themes to the existing prose.

Through his works the writer unveils two views on human behaviour after one's experimenting the sight of death and dead body. In Gulhai Goshti we see Murad falling into the whirlpool of thoughts after witnessing his creditor's fatal accident. His attitude to life’s actions and meanings take a volte face and he becomes saner. His feeling of liberation from the demands of Jewish creditor is symbolic of his materialistic conscience overtaking natural human emotions and reaction. In Pirahan Zirishki we find two women's behaviour after they are given the task of corpse cleaning which makes them more perverted. They do not change but are tailormade for the job. This interesting depiction of human materialism
runs high in Chubak’s writings and it remains as a significant introduction in modern Persian Prose.

The writer makes a vivid portrayal of the pathetic society in, “The Baboon whose Buffoon was Dead”. In this he represents two elements one from human world the other from animal world. The Baboon is overjoyed by the sight of his dead Buffoon. He takes the latter into the forest but as he returns he is caught in the after thoughts of life which he encounters after the death of his only preoccupation. His thoughts do not go far and soon he realises that Buffoon was for him the only companion, and the only element of hope and subsistence. Soon the joy over Buffoon’s death transfers into sorrow, pain and loneliness and he madly returns to the corpse and appeals for help. Here the writer describes the inadequacies of a monkey his loneliness, weakness and pathetic condition. Makhmal who falsely anticipated that the people who come to see him perform are the one’s to whom he has real relationship, is proved wrong and shown, at the end of the story as a tragic figure. Tragedies and follies come in considerable detail in his works, an aspect missed in the writings of earlier authors.

Prose before Chubak’s advent was largely based on conventional issues. But Chubak successfully tried to bring in anecdotes and events from animal kingdom to give his unique opinions. Using animals as symbols to
portray more seriously the different aspects of human psychological actions can be found in the works of some Iranian writers: classical or modern. In "The History of Ibn Najjar", we find Chosroes ordering his functionary to hunt for the worst bird, where upon he catches an owl. 2 Sadigh Hedayat before coming to Buf-i-Kur begin's with monkey. Sadigh Chubak extensively takes the animals and their behaviour in his works: dog, chickens, monkey, wildfish, crocodile, mouse, cat etc. all play a definite role in his works. His intention is to draw a common line between the animal behaviour and human instincts as in Humrah”. This was a new dimension in modern Persian prose.

Another feature which appears in his works is the complexities which he built in a plot or a scene. He brings the reader into a whirlpool of incidence where the reader finally surrenders his perceptions and feelings. We see Zar Muhammad appear in the beginning as an ordinary and fragile character but as the plot develops we find ourselves in the high grip of the scheme of events and move with the actions of the hero. Suspense and surprise, two very fundamental elements in any novel or story come into intensive use in his works. The element of surprise in the relationship of Kohzad and Zeevar is masterly enacted by the writer. Also balancing of two diametrically apart situations is a difficult craft which Chubak


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successfully puts into operation. The conflict in Haji Muatimid mind between ethics and evil is expertly developed. This remains an important development in his works and a wonderful possession of modern Persian Prose.

Sadigh Chubak describes indirectly the adversities and traumas and the sinful life of its characters. He lets the characters speak by themselves and lets through their words, their character to come out. He often uses the painful tones of the characters with finesse and at places from the dialogues of characters we find the picturization of their inadequacies and affliction. His short story, 'Pirahan Zirishki' brings the twilight emotions of the women characters, where one woman is arranging the dress of a dead person for her 'Shamsi' so that she could look attractive to others. Human inadequacies find considerable importance in his works.

In Bad Az Zuhar Akhir Paezz a widow surrenders her child to a teacher and tells that this is her child. He has no father, as the latter accidentally came under a vehicle and died. This child is lonely and I want to leave him under your guidance. Do something that he should become literate. I am ready to put under you any kind of service. I am your slave. These painful words of the woman give a sorrowful atmosphere to the reader. Sadigh carries an uncanny talent of depicting intensely the psychological underpinnings be it tragic of his characters, and this remains
a priceless contribution to the subject and art of Persian prose in modern
times.

Sadigh Chubak contribution to Persian prose lies in his efforts
which he has taken to introduce strongly newer styles and in his striving
for highly descriptive prose. While describing any event taking shape at a
particular place he brings into description the minutest details of that place.

The writer while describing any event goes into highlighting things
which shows the religious and cultural value of the context and place. In
Tangsir he describes about one place, where he introduces to the writer the
religious signifynace of a tree which for years had been a venerable spot
and whoever passed underneath had to utter, 'Bismillah.'

Powerful expression of the emotional conditions of characters is a
fundamental quality of any writer of eminence. This has been a
characteristic quality of Persian prose over the years. Jamalzadah, Sadigh
Hedayat wonderfully exercised this craft, but under Sadigh Chubak this
became more qualified. Through the emotions of the characters he makes
them dominate over other fundamentals of a work.

The concerned reader will find that Sadigh Chubak never puts
brakes on the sentiments of his characters. The characters speak in natural

Sadigh Chubak. Tangsir, p.10.
tone without any self consciousness. The writer in pursuit of realism and naturalism writes down their words however unconventional and unorthodox they appear to others. In Zir Chiragh Qirmiz, Afaq is telling to her co-worker, ‘I was working in a rich man’s house, his wife was in love with a young man. When the owner was absent, the young man would come into the house. When the wife went out, the owner would bring another woman. I have learnt the art, from them. In Pirahan Zirishki he writes, ‘Shammi wearing a red garment was arguing with two Americans over the price of the deal’. 4

Sadigh Chubak minutely details the helplessness of humans in their society. Baboon’s master comes after a long journey and sits in a forest where trees are being cut to prepare charcoal. He smokes opium and soon afterwards dies under the tree. Baboon finding him dead frees himself from captivity and roams around. Shepherd’s son approaches him, gives him bread and with a canon strikes on his head. Baboon jumps and bruises the boy’s face, leaving him in blood, he hides himself between stones. Eagles hover his head and pounce on him. At last he considers his safety in being close to his dead master. From other side two men are closing in with axes. Baboon becomes serious. He sees death encircling him with the movement of axemen. This story can be seen as one written in symbolic

4 Zahuruddin Ahmad, Irani Adab Lahore, p.273.
technique when a freeman is enslaved he acts on the directions of his master but keeps his desire for freedom burning. When he becomes free, powerful men put restrictions on him and scheme to kill him, at the end he surrenders to outwardly forces.

Chubak wrote short stories with elan and successfully used it to portray various issues (esp - social). On the other hand he took some elements of classicism while creating Tangsir. However he nowhere shows his predilection for the revival of classicism in his art. Contacts with west and process of modernisation led Iranians to cherish new art forms of writing, be it short story or novel. But more important than these forms of writing were the subjects and issues contained in novels and short stories. The Iranian society and culture provided cornucopia of issues, with Sadigh Chubak making their appearance more diverse in his writings.

The writer believes in a positive Iranian spirit. To him the Iranian character is shock absorbent and infinitely dominating over unexpected traumas and tragedies of life. Sometimes it appears that he is camouflaging his criticism of blind westernisation by showing its affect on Iranian identity. For long Iran had been under Islamic rule where some of the modern period's social ills were unlawful. But he does not comes to the conclusion as to whether it is traditionally created or has appeared due to
westernisation. However his writing unfolds to the readers some very stark social realities.

Most of the writers in the present 20th century showed a tendency to confront the political system. To them the ruling class was *bete-noire* which they considered anathema to civilized culture and society. The result was that the establishment came heavily upon them. Most of the writers were charged for sedition and distribution of revolutionary publications. Notable among those who dared the persecution of the regime was Sanatizada’s family. However Sadigh Chubak made a curve escape from it and avoided directly bringing anything political in his writings. He worked more as an on looker of social issues and put them in his own perspective, in front of the masses, with the role of political establishment rarely scripted.

The writer makes efforts towards enrichment of language. Idioms and phrases in his works make a powerful indication of his grip over language. People inhabiting certain area in Iran speak a language impressed by local words and common usages. Local terms, words, phrases found ample place in his writings.

Sadigh Hedayat lifts the field of satire in his works. *Asaye Adab* is a strong satire on the reigning ruler. A king saw from his palace that crows are flying around his statue and are striking on its crown and one uncouth
crow discharges his excreta on the statue which comes down to the mouth of it. Royal order was given for the killing of all the crows, their imprisonment and that no one has to give them shelter. When the crows learnt about the order they started crying and put on black dress and left the country. It is said that earlier crows were of green colour and their voice appreciable, but which became coarse due to wail and cry. If one reads this story keeping in context that Reza Shah is the reigning king and that nobody has the freedom to speak against his force, the story will appear more meaningful. There was no scope for criticism through speech or writing. Whosoever uttered anything unconventional was extradited from the country or put behind bars. Keeping these things the wholesome satirical element of the story appears interesting. This element remains a significant contribution to Modern Persian Prose.

Chubak brings his characters to life by what in contemporary terms might be called an accompanying sound track. Hedayat and Jamalzadah also employed the language of the streets, but with Chubak this becomes an artistic means of reproducing realistic pictures of the Iranian locale and people. Reaching down into the meanest levels of society, he utilises the phonology and grammar of the common people to confront the reader face to face with the universality of human struggle. He reproduces the

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5 Ibid., p.276.
“language of the people” with such vigour that, despite his sensitive and often poetic prose style, he seems sometimes aggressive and vulgarly obscene. However, Chubak’s exploitation of crude and explosively offensive language is an integral part of his own interpretation of the human condition.

The Hub cap Thief is a very short story. It is like a snapshot of an event, but it has a distressing emotional and intellectual impact. It proceeds single-mindedly to its climax unencumbered by compound sentences, peripheral descriptions, or in inconsequential dialogue. Chubak has exploited here certain common social stereotypes and colloquial language, triggering predetermined images and emotional reactions that render lengthy exposition unnecessary. A full range of stock characters and behavioural patterns of varying complexity are thus utilised in a matter of sentences.

Describing, he writes:

"The Hub-cap Thief"

They caught the thief while he was loosening the second hubcap. One hubcap was hidden under his arm. He was struggling to pry loose the second with a screwdriver, when a vicious blow on the head threw him to the
ground. A kick in the side sent a sharp pain through his stomach and blurred his vision; he retched and pissed on himself.

A crowd gathered around him. The hubcap fell from under his arm, rolled on the ground, and settled a few feet away. Some took him by the arms and pulled him to his feet. His hands were still clutching his stomach. He could not stand straight. Another heavy blow on the head, followed by several slaps, again flung him to the ground. His face was contorted with pain and tears. He was convulsed in agony. He was thirteen and barefoot.

A Shiny black cadillac slept like a Churchyard beetle in the midst of the crowd, not giving a damn that its hubcap had wrenched off. And the little boy, like swatted fly, encircled by the web of afflicted, sick legs around him, was writhing about. The sinister, bitter words that reached his ear increased his pain.

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"Then it must have been you who swiped our pitcher the other day!"

"Well, tell me, who the hell ever led you to this neighbourhood?"

"And a few days ago a bowl was stolen from our house."

"Nobody can remember petty thievery going on in this street."

"Now whose car is it any way?"
“The Car? Don’t you recognise it? It belongs to Mr. Haji Ahmad, the chief of the butchers union.”

“Well, let’s call the cop.”

“There’s no cop around. Let’s take him to precinct ourselves.”

“When they throw him in jail and he rots there, he won’t take a fancy to stealing anymore.”

The thief’s tongue had dried up in his mouth. He felt as though a heavy load had fallen on him and he was unable to move from under it. Again, some body grabbed hold of his shoulders, pulled him up, and spat in his face, shouting;

“Tell me, who the hell led you to this neighbourhood?”

He was a bulky man with glaring eyes and open collar and a rough unshaven beard that seem to have coagulated on his skin.

The little boy wanted to straighten up, but his legs kept giving away. Each time, the ground seemed to disappear under his feet. The pain was exasperating him. Struggling between convulsions, he finally managed to say:

“In the name of the Hidden Imam don’t hit me. I’m poor”
Again they beat him, punched him, kicked him, and covered his face with spit. He tried to protect his body with his hands, but it was impossible to cover it all. A groan died at the base of his throat, blood oozed out his mouth and nose, mixing with his tears.

“Now let’s call the Hajji himself to let the kid have just what he deserves”. This suggestion came from a passing fruit vendor who knew that Hajji well. He spat on the ground and sneered.

They knocked, and Hajji came to the door in his floppy, sweat stained undershirt and underpants. He looked like a peasant. He was bald. The bags under his eyes were like saddle bags swollen with wrinkles. His belly was bloated. His little son, dressed up as an American Cowboy, pistol in hand, appeared on the door step in front of his father. He peered at the crowd with curious eyes while leaning against his father. He was about the same age as the young boy who, clutching his stomach writhed in agony - blood and tears mixing into one.

The mob made way for the Hajji to walk up to the little boy who was clutching his belly and whose blood and urine soaked the pavement. On reaching him a kick in the crotch was dealt by the Hajji that left the boy gasping for breath, his face blue, and body in spasms.

“He’s pretending to be dead”. 
The little boy was hunched up on the ground, blood and froth oozing out of the corner of his mouth onto the pavement glistening and warm with blood and piss.

Certainly, various stylistic elements of “The Hubcap Thief,” as well as its social comment and overall artistic merit, survive well in translation. What is not translatable, and this is unfortunate, is the intricate counterplay between the lyric and the macabre, the poetic and the horrible, which is decidedly Chubak.

In Chubak, prose strives for poetic expression; like poetry, it is meant to be read about, not from the page. His control of language is strict and precise, caressing and pampering the reader only to bring him to a surprising and dissonant climax. The effect is startling, for it is the music of the pastoral and of the lover applied to the squalor of a child, beaten and reviled, dying, in a pool of blood and urine; and this is precisely this ecstatic lyricism put to the service of the terrifying that, while allowing him to remain personally uninvolved, is writer’s most effective and distinctive mark.

Although the literary content, symbolism, and setting of Chubak’s stories may be characterised as Iranian, they never lose their universal
appeal. Whether he is utilising a tightly plotted story, a story employing a specific Iranian locale, or a story with a surprise ending, one discerns, in the end, Chubak’s compulsion to rely on something significant.

Chubak lives in a revolutionary period in Iranian history, one in which traditional values are breaking down and there is a corresponding search for new ones. In his trust and hope in the ultimate victory of good over evil, he is the opposite of Hedayat. Even when he describes life at its most depressing, we sense a very strong subcurrent of optimism. When this optimism is not readily visible, the reader is at least offered a sense of human dignity, and he is invited to replace ugliness with the beautiful.

It is not only by analogy with the title that we can compare “The Hubcap Thief” with Vittorio De Sica’s film, The Bicycle Thief, and the post war neorealism of Italian cinematography. Chubak’s treatment of segments of human life has the power of observation of the zoom lens, and his short sentence technique the impact of the use of black and white film.

The author of Qissa Nawisi points that despite the general belief that Sadigh Chubak has been influenced by James Joyce through latter’s Ulysses, nowhere there is ample evidence to corroborate it, and that Chubak has not been influenced by Ulysses. The reason is that in Ulysses, James Joyce has linked up all the signs, metaphors, examples and figures to

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6 Qissa Navisi. p.706.
such a degree, that it is impossible to understand a piece of it without knowing all the above. The critic goes in to say that any reader who is not aware of the creative power of Sadigh Chubak will fail to arrive at the follies which he has committed in Sang Sabur.

In Sang-i Sabur Ahmed Aqa reads fifteen pages of verse from Firdausi’s Shahnama. This section is unrelated to the common nature of the story and is faulty application of the technique of stream of consciousness.\(^7\) If Chubak desires that through putting verses in the mouth of Ahmed Aga he will make a reference to ancient Iran and will describe the declining conditions after Arab invasion and create a field for verse in the sorry; he is without doubt a failure, because of the reason that these verses in the midst of the story, appear very heavy and come as an isolated island in the story. Therein no doubt that the writer wants to bring nationalism in his work but it would have been better if he had created a common platform for the linking of these verses with the whole field of the story.

The other lacunae is the appearance of a play\(^8\) in Sang Sabur which is non picaresque and lengthy and is highly superficial and unconnected,

\(^7\) A term coined by William James in Principles of Psychology (1890) to denote the flow of inner experiences. Another phrase for it is, interior monologue'. Something resembling it is discernible in Sterne’s Tristram Shandy (1760-67) and long self commencing passages to be found in some 19th century novels (ed. those of Dostoivesky are also akin to interior monologue. In 1901 the German playwrith and novelist Arthur Schnitzler published a novel titled levntant Gustl, in this interior monologue technique is highly developed.

\(^8\) Qissa Navisi. p.709.
and Chubak has no logic to give seventy pages from novel to the play. The appearance of the play at the end of the novel, is uninteresting and desultory.

Chubak made considerable use of the stream of consciousness technique which denotes the flow of inner expressions. At many places he has used this technique to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which pass through the minds of the characters. In west James Joyee takes this technique almost to a point ne plus ultra in Ulysses (1922).

The writer has brought the technique of interior monologue in Sang-i Sabur to full circle. In this novel, Ahmed Aqa - 9 times Kakul Zari - 6 times, Bilqis - 5 times, Jahan Sultan - 4 times and Saiful Qalm once, speak in the technique of stream of consciousness', or 'interior monologue'. The conversations of other characters e.g. Gohar, Sheikh Mahmud (Akhundi who gives Sigha to Gohar), Haji Ismail (first husband of Gohar), Ajhan, Mustantiq, Anausherwan, Buzar Jamhar, Khar, Yaqubleiss, Umruleiss, Azherkhar, Ahreman, Zarvan, Mashiya, Mashiya and Asid Maluch-spider in the corner of Ahmed Aga’s room have come in the technique of interior monologue of Ahmed Aga, Kakul Zari, Bilqis, Jahan Sultan and Saiful Qalm and in fact Sadigh Chubak has made different openings for viewing of real and artificial characters.